

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

University of Arkansas
1 East Center Street
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-6829

Arkansas Memories Project

Beatrice Shelby

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

July 21, 2011

Marvell, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds that interrupt speech;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

See the Citation Guide at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu/about.php>.

Scott Lunsford interviewed Beatrice Shelby on July 21, 2011, in Marvell, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay, so I'm gonna take care of some business first.

Beatrice Shelby: Okay.

SL: Today's date—is today's date the twenty-first?

BS: Twenty-first.

Joy Endicott: Yes.

SL: Wow. July 21. Uh—the year is 2011. We are at the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church outside of Marvell—um—over here in the Delta in Arkansas. And my name is Scott Lunsford. I'm with the Pryor Center. And today we're interviewing Beatrice . . .

BS: Clark.

SL: . . . Shelby. And—um—uh—we—uh—Miss Shelby, what we do is we record in high-definition video and audio. Uh—it's—um—your interview. I want you to take possession of it. We'll talk about just the—the things that you want to talk about. If there is something you don't wanna talk about, I'm not gonna try and drag it out of you. Uh—this is your story, and—uh—we'll start at the very beginning of your earliest memories and bring you up to your—uh—present day. Um—you will get all the raw footage of

this interview on some DVDs, and we'll ask you to look at that. Uh—a little later, you'll get a transcript—a full transcript of the interview—and we'll ask you to read that carefully. And in those two mediums, if there's anything in this interview that you're uncomfortable with sharing with the rest of the world for—for any reason, uh—we'll work with you, and we'll—we'll take it out. Uh—we're not here to make people unhappy, and we're gonna—I hope we have a wonderful conversation. Uh—the moment that it's no longer any fun, we'll stop.

BS: Okay.

[00:01:37] SL: There are no wrong answers. There are no real rules here. We can take a break anytime you need to take a break. Uh—we'll pick back up when—when—uh—uh—where we left off. Um—now, once we agree on—and—and once you've had a chance to look at what we've done and decide that it's okay, then we'll process it further. And we will—um—take some highlights from the interview—video highlights—and those will be posted on our website. We will post all of the audio—uh—that's—that you like of the interview and all of the transcript. And we will encourage people to come and look at that and use that material for educational purposes. Uh—we hope that—uh—it'll—uh—be in the public schools—uh—used by teachers

teaching Arkansas history—uh—documentarians making documentary films, researchers at the college level—uh—researching Arkansas history, people across the United States and the world interested in Arkansas history. And we want the—we want these stories out there because we feel like that it's the real stories of Arkansas. So if you are comfortable with all of that, we'll keep going, and we'll keep rolling tape and recording. But if for any reason you're not comfortable, we'll stop, and we'll just have a—we'll go have some lunch.

BS: Okay, that's good enough.

[00:03:02] SL: All right. Well, thank you very much. I can't tell you what an honor it is—uh—to be here—uh—sitting across from you. I've—I've never met you, but I've been reading quite a bit about you. And—uh—uh—you are—uh—an inspiration. And what we usually do is we start with the earliest memories, but I've got to, first of all, get your full real name. What—what is your full name?

BS: Beatrice Vernice Clark Shelby.

SL: Vernice?

BS: *V-E-R-N-I-S-E* [BS edit: *V-E-R-N-I-C-E*]. Mh-hmm.

SL: Okay. Good. Uh—now, some of these spellings that I miss [*BS laughs*] along the way, Joy will ask you about a little later.

BS: Okay.

SL: She's really good at taking notes.

BS: Okay.

[00:03:40] SL: Um—and when and where were you born?

BS: I was born in Marvell, Arkansas, on June the twenty-sixth, 1948.

SL: Okay. And—um—I like to start with your mom and dad. What were their names?

BS: My father name was Roosevelt Clark, and my mother name was Pearlle Clark Greer [BS edit: Pearlle Greer Clark].

SL: Pearlle Clark Greer [BS edit: Pearlle Greer Clark]. So her maiden name was . . .

BS: Greer.

SL: . . . was Greer. Uh-huh.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And did you have—uh—grandparents that you knew? Did you ever know them?

BS: I knew only my father mother, and I knew my step-grandfather. I didn't know my mother father or her mother.

SL: Uh-huh. And what—what were their names?

BS: Uh—my mother—uh—mother name was Sally Haliburton Greer and my grandfather, who I did not know either one of these, was named Oliver Greer, but they told me that when I was a child.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And my mother—my father mother was named Nancy Whitaker, and my stepfather was named Jim Whitaker.

[00:04:45] SL: All right. And were—uh—did you—so you did know one—your grandmother on your . . .

BS: Father's side . . .

SL: . . . father's side.

BS: . . . side. Yes—uh—I was—I knew her. She was a very kind person, and the one thing that I remember most about my grandmother on my father's side was when I was about twelve years old, I got sick. And they was carryin' me to doctors down here, and one of the doctors felt like that it just wasn't anything wrong with me, that I just needed to go to work. But my grandmother came down from St. Louis—I alway think she came down to make sure that I got to a doctor—but she carried me to a doctor, and he found out what was wrong with me, and I got well. So I remember that about my grandmother. And I have a lotsa memory about my father's side of the folks and my mother's side of the folks.

SL: Well—um—so this—your grandmother was from St. Louis? She was living in St. . . .

BS: No. My grandmother, when I was a child, lived here. She lived

in Gumbottom when I first remember my grandmother, and then I remember she moved to Ratio or Lake View—one of—at that area down there where my younger uncles completed high school. So she was around me quite a bit when we was little. So I remember that my grandfather used to raise what you call popcorn, so we alway had popcorn because he raised popcorn.

SL: Now, what's the difference between popcorn and just regular corn?

BS: [*Laughs*] Popcorn is smaller grains.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And then you can pop it on the stove, and that's what we eat.

And the regular corn is corn that we would either boil and eat or that we would cut off the cob . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: . . . and make it and put it in the stove and fry it—or put it on the top of the stove and fry some corn.

[00:06:35] SL: So—um—do you remember any—uh—of your earliest conversations with your grandmother? I'm always looking for the oldest story.

BS: Not really. My—most of my conversation was probably held with my mother. I—I remember when I was—uh—the early memories I have of my grand—my grandmother or her brother

and things—I guess I was about five or six years old—those early memory—but I don't know what the conversation was. When we was small—when, I guess, about six or seven—we started to move. And the earliest I have of rememberin' is when used to live on people's place, and then we would move to another place, so I remember my grandmother never being around. But in 1955 or [19]56, we finally moved to the Trenton area about three miles from here—from this church. And then, like, about a year later, we moved—uh—on—back over at the Kesl Place [BS edit: Kesl farm], where we stayed—where we stayed until 1969. So we had a lotsa conversations with older folks, but—uh . . .

[00:07:51] SL: So—um—were your grandparents and—and your parents—what were the occupations?

BS: My father, he farmed.

SL: Okay.

BS: And—and my—well, all of—my grandfather probably farmed before he left, but he—they left and went to St. Louis probably when I was about ten or eleven or somewhere like that. But I remember they used to pick cotton and chop cotton and—so that was the occupation of both. We had chickens, hog, cows, and all those things.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:08:21] BS: We had a garden, so I remember that young. We had a peach orchard, grapevines, and so those are things I remember when I was little. Remember my brother and sisters always tryin' to help me out because I was not good at pickin' cotton or choppin' cotton. So I had this one brother—my baby brother, now—his name is J. C.—and he would always help me keep my row up. And I had other sisters and brothers that would help with pickin' cotton. So I wasn't good at stuff like that.

SL: Well, cotton was the—uh—predominant crop at that time.

BS: At that time, right. And it—that was . . .

SL: It's kind of changed. It's—is it more soybeans now or . . .

BS: Soybeans, uh-huh.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Um—so really—and you were moving around—uh—y'all moved around . . .

BS: Until I was about . . .

SL: . . . because of the sharecropping—uh . . .

BS: Well, whatever the—you know, you would stay on somebody farm, and you would work and you would pick cotton. So bout

the time I was about seven or eight or somewhere like that—
about [19]55 or [19]56 . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: . . . I remember us movin' to the Kesl Place [BS edit: Kesl
farm], and after that, we didn't—we picked cotton for other
peoples, but we didn't do any moving after that.

SL: Good.

BS: Mh-hmm.

[00:09:32] SL: Well—um—I guess the house—uh—the—uh—first
house that you were in—uh—can you describe that? Do you
remember—do you remember that?

BS: I don't remember the first house I was in because I know from—
no, I cannot. The house that I remember most is the one on
Kesi Place [BS edit: Kesl farm] and the one that—uh—I was
raised up in.

SL: Okay. Well, let's—let's talk about that. Did it have—uh—
electricity?

BS: It had electricity. We had an outdoor pump. Uh—it had a long
porch that had two doors on the porch, and—um—we had
several bedrooms at that particular time. I think it was, like,
three bedrooms. And we had a nice kitchen. And then on—at
that particular site where we was livin' on the Kesl farm—Kesi

farm—farm, it was another little house on that farm, and it was a barn on that farm. And—um—it was just really nice. This guy had built this. He was—a older guy had built this house and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: . . . and so we had the opportunity to move out there. So—and some . . .

SL: Well . . .

BS: And we—we lived—the—the house was real close to what we called the Big Creek.

SL: Okay.

BS: So we could go fishin' at Big Creek. And it—the Big Creek is the same place that I was baptized. This church used the Big Creek down there by where we lived to baptize. And then we had these neighbors that was within walkin' distance from—uh—us, so it was really nice. And we walked up here to church. Uh—so I guess it was about two—two or three miles from where we lived to this church.

[00:11:24] SL: The—um—um—so y'all had your—uh—your own garden and . . .



BS: We had our own garden, and we had hogs, chickens. I remember my mother used to order chickens, so when the little biddies come in, sometime some of 'em'd be dead. But I also

remember that she would put the eggs under the hen so they can hatch, so we had chickens also. And one thing about garden—I remember that peoples do not do this anymore—she used to put her tomatoes—plants under a fruit jar because I guess it was too cold for 'em at a certain time, and she would do that. And—and she would always can a lotta fruit. She would can everything, my mother. And I remember as a child we would try to milk the cow. Well, we didn't try. We did, because we would milk the cow, and then we would churn, and then the butter, so we would do that. And then later on in life, my father bought this great, big, deep freezer. It was a flat—uh—deep freezer.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:12:31] BS: So we was able to stop doin' so much cannin' at that point. And then we started puttin' things in the deep freezer. Now, I have five—I have four sisters, and I have four brothers. Uh—it was ten children in all, so I have—I had one sister to die early, but—uh—my mama had ten children.

SL: That's a lotta—lot of folk.

BS: And we had a lotta fun, and I learned love from my family. They always seemed to love each other so. And even when we didn't have a lots, we learned how to share. And try to make sure that

I—if we had something, our neighbors—we would share with them, and they would share with us, so . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: . . . uh—we learned early how to share.

[00:13:17] SL: Do you remember—uh—the hog days when you'd slaughter the hog?

BS: Remember that days. And mens would come help my father with the hogs and my brothers and things, yeah. Remember that.

SL: Used ev—every part of—of that hog.

BS: Hog.

SL: Now, did—did your dad have a—a smokehouse or . . .

BS: We had a smokehouse. And then later on in life, he would take the meat to—oh, I guess that was the beef that he would take to Elaine—get cut up.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: So I remember that.

SL: Well, so—um—uh—the—uh—kitchen was—um—um—inside the house but . . .

BS: Oh yes.

SL: . . . separate.

BS: The kitchen was inside the house.

SL: And—um—uh—and your mom did most all the cookin', or did the girls . . .

BS: Oh no. My mom taught everybody how to cook. When you was twelve years old, you could cook a full meal. But my mama would always cook sweets all the time. We cooked tea cakes, so she cooked all the time and showed us how to cook. She made her bread and everything with those big old nice rolls. Then she could do 'em in loafs, so she learned how to—and she used to raise geeses and ducks—turkeys. She just—she tried to raise everything.

[00:14:34] SL: So—um—did your mom and dad meet here, or—or how—how did they get together? Do you know?

BS: You know, we really talked about my mother and father—how they got together [*laughs*] 'cause I was so far down [*laughs*] the line when it—and so they had been together for years when I was born. I have older sisters and brothers. So . . .

SL: Were—were—you weren't the youngest, though. You had a . . .

BS: I'm next to the youngest.

SL: Next to—you had a younger brother.

BS: I had a younger sister. I have a . . .

SL: No.

BS: . . . sister eleven months—no, she was born—about eleven

months younger than I am.

SL: Okay.

BS: Thelma. Yeah, Thelma. Twelve months younger. She was born in July, and I was born in June, so she twelve, yeah. And I had one other sister that did not live—was younger than I am. Yeah.

[00:15:18] SL: So—um—and describe the stove to me. What was the stove like that your mom cooked on?

BS: Oh my . . .

SL: Was it an . . .

BS: . . . gosh.

SL: . . . electric stove or . . .

BS: No. It definitely was not . . .

SL: It was a wood—woodstove?

BS: . . . an electric stove. It was a woodstove. The first stove I remember was a wood—woodstove that you would put wood into.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And it was—I think it had white and had somethin' up at the top that you could store stuff in, I believe.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And it's been probably so many stoves. I don't remember exactly the fir—first one, but I remember that we would put

wood in the stove.

SL: And that's the way the house was heated as well?

BS: Oh yeah, we would put in wood in the heaters when we got home first. Yeah, when I first came [*laughs*] along, we even had the smoothin' irons that we would put on the fire. Now, you have to remember I was born in the [19]40s, so I was raised in the [19]50s and—yeah, so most of the things was done at that time with—uh—we had this big washpot outside that we would wash in.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:16:19] BS: So eventually, over the years, we got, you know, a washing machine and things like that. But at first—we did not even have a television when I was really young. I'm—well, I guess we got a television in the [19]50s—late [19]50s—somewhere . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . like that because we did not . . .

SL: Well, that's when most folks did . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . anyway. I mean, they were . . .

BS: So yeah.

SL: It was pretty new technology.

BS: Yeah, and so . . .

SL: What about radio? Did you have a radio?

BS: We had a radio. As things came along, we pretty well got those things because my father really worked hard to help see that we got things.

SL: So all the—all of the kids were expected to work too, though. Is that . . .

BS: All the kids did work. It wasn't [BS edit: was] expected. You worked. [*Laughs*] Yeah, that just what you did. And you looked after your little sisters and brothers. Mh-hmm.

[00:17:05] SL: Um—and—uh—you divided chores at the house as well, right?

BS: My mother assigned chores at the house as well. And the boys usually worked in the field—uh—like, driving the tractor and stuff like that. The girls didn't do too much of that. I remember my brothers used to hunt rabbits and squirrels and things like that. So—and we would pick greens and peas and okras and all that stuff. So the chores was like that.

SL: Um—I'm tryin' to think—if—um—you had—you said you had a pump—a hand—it was, I would guess, a . . .

BS: It was a big creek. It's still down there. It's called Big Creek.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: It's right back up the house.

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And so—um—there wasn't really running water in the house. It was . . .

BS: Oh no, we did not have running water in the house. Huh-uh. We never—that particular house—when we left in nineteen six—when I left in 1969, did not have running water in it. You had—it still had a pump outside.

SL: Um—the—uh—uh—creek—uh—was close enough to where—that's where y'all would usually bathe, or did you heat . . .

BS: Oh no.

SL: . . . heat up . . .

BS: We had to . . .

SL: . . . water in the tub?

BS: . . . we had—we could use the pump, and—uh—we would bathe in the house.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah, we—we had a pump. Yeah.

[00:18:23] SL: And—um—uh—heat the water on the stove and . . .

BS: We'd heat the water on the stove. And then my mama bought this little electric thing that you could put in the tub and plug up,

and you could heat water. Yeah, she—she was always orderin' something out of a catalog. Yeah.

SL: Sears catalog?

BS: Sears or what—I—I know Sears and Roebuck, but I think it was another little somethin' she would order somethin' . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: . . . from. And I remember that she would order—uh—these gas—uh—it's a little gas stove, like, where—kerosene. And you had—it had two little burners on it, and that's what she used to press our hair. So she always would press our hair. She was an excellent mother, I tell you.

[00:19:09] SL: Now, how—uh—um—I guess—um—do you—uh—remember how old she was when you were born?

BS: Oh, my mama was born in 1917, and I was born in 1948, so nine from seven is—she was about thirty-six.

SL: That's pretty good. That's a . . .

BS: Yeah, she—yeah, she was born nineteen . . .

SL: You know, after forty it gets kind of risky and—and stuff to be havin' kids. So—um—your parents—uh—survived the Depression. Did they ever talk to you at all about the Depression or . . .



BS: My—no, they didn't talk that much about it. My mama was one

of these people—she kept on tryin'—even though—if stuff was hard for her, she just kept on pushin' and tryin' to make sure—she believed that you need to learn how to read, you need to think, you could count, and she just believed that if you studied hard enough that you could make it. She always said that no matter how hard life was, that if you could read and study and think, you can make it through with the help of the good Lord. And she believed that, that her children should have a better education than she had, so she would always talk about that. If she—"If I had a high school diploma, then my children should have a college degree."

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: So she believed that each generations had to really push and educate themselves.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:45] SL: Well now, did your folks have much education? Did they get through grade school or . . .

BS: My father did not have very much education. My mother had about a sixth-grade education. Oh, but she was—she knew more than most twelfth graders because she constantly read and did things like that.

SL: So homework was a big deal at home.

BS: Homework was a must at the Clark household. And I remember when we was little we would have these papers—you know, the brown paper bags?

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: And then you could get the charcoal, and then you had to do things with the charcoal because we didn't have a lotsa pencils and paper and stuff. But I feel—yeah, as I look back, we did real well for the children in that generation, and my mama was always creatin' some ways for us to learn. Yeah.

[00:21:36] SL: Well, I know—I've heard—I've read that you've said that you used to read a lot. [*BS laughs*] Voracious reader. And so that was an ongoing effort in the home, was to . . .

BS: Mom—yeah.

SL: The kids read books and . . .

BS: Yeah, well, she believed in an education. Right. Yeah.

SL: Well now, what about church and . . .

BS: My mother and father—neither one was churchgoers, but you had to go to church. They made sure that they children was here at Pleasant Grove. Mh-hmm. So that was a must.

SL: And what about the—was there a Bible in the house? Were there . . .

BS: Oh, we had Bibles in the house. We had sayins in the house,

like "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things will be added." "For God so loved the world, He gave His"—so we had all those upside of the wall. They used to be blue like little glittered on. And you could buy 'em. Yeah. And she made sure that each one of her children would learn the Lord's Prayer. And then we had to learn the twenty-third psalm. Now, some of 'em didn't learn, but she tried to make sure that those things—that we learn and understood the Ten Commandments and things like that.

[00:22:52] SL: Were the dinner times—were you expected to be at the dinner table on time, or was it kind of a revolving . . .

BS: When I was young, we always expect to be at the dinner table at a certain time. My mama always had dinner at a certain time. Then she had breakfast at a certain time. But as we got older, we had to go to the field, and sometime it wasn't—it did not happen like that. But basic, she cooked. You had food there at a certain time. She didn't cook different meals for everybody. She cooked, and you ate. And if you wanted something different, then most of the time you didn't get it. So . . .

SL: When—whenever y'all sat down to eat, was grace always said?

BS: Oh, grace was always said with my mother. And as we grow—grew older, we stopped doin' it so much, but when we was little,

yes, you always had to say grace. You learned your verse. And you always had to say your prayer when you go to bed at night. And you get on your knees, and you say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." So yeah, we did that.

SL: And I bet y'all were responsible for making your own bed and . . .

BS: Yes. When I was a child, I think that's the worst whuppin' I got. I could not figure out why my mama wanted me to make that bed up every day after I got up out of it. [*SL laughs*] Now, I'm sixty-three years old, and sometime I just look. [*Laughter*] Yeah. So yeah, you had to make your bed. You had . . .

[00:24:18] SL: So you talked about gettin' disciplined. Was your mom kind of the enforcer at that house or . . .

BS: She was, but my mama wasn't a person that believed in all that whuppin', either. She did not.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yeah, she just did not. She'd get you when she really had to.

SL: When you really probably had it comin'.

BS: Had to comin'. Yeah. [*SL laughs*] And we just knew you did not talk back to my mama. You did not talk back to other grown folks. There's just certain things you just did not do. I didn't get very many whuppins when I was a child, and so I really don't

believe in whuppin' for certain—you have to really, really do somethin' that—you know, somethin' that I feel like you have to be whapped about. So basic, I guess I got that from my mother. Yeah.

SL: You know, I've also read that you've all—that growin' up, you always thought you were kind of a dreamer, and you always thought . . .

BS: Still am. [*Laughs*]

SL: Still are. And you always were tryin' to figure out how to make things better.

BS: Right.

SL: But—and I guess folks oughta know, you know, the way it was back then when you were growing up. I mean, segregation was in full force. You know, even after *Brown v. Board* . . .

BS: Well . . .

[00:25:46] SL: . . . this part of the country was really, really slow to move on that. And so you attended an all-black school.

BS: I attended an all-black school.

SL: And was the school a one-room school, two-room school, or . . .



BS: Now, the first school that I attended was Marvell High, so—
Marvell Elementary School—and it was a pretty good-size school.
That was my first year in school. The second—my second year

in school, I attended a two-story—a two-room building right over there across the road—across the highway. And it was two rooms, and we had a teacher—we had a Professor Morris, who was the head teacher, and then we had another teacher at that time, Miss Gilcrest. So things was really nice for us. We—you know, we came to school. We did what we told. Our parents participated in PTA, so it was really good. Now, we did not get—I feel like we did not get the kind of education we probably should have gotten based on the fact that we didn't have all the modern material and stuff, and we had used books, and everybody'd talk about that. But basic, goin' to school was not bad for me, and it was because I was a dreamer. And some of the things that other folks remember havin', I was probably always at home most of the time. I was not one of those peoples that liked to go out, so therefore, I was at home probably readin' *Jive* or some other book, dreamin' about what life was [*unclear words*]. So it did not have the impact on me that it probably had on other folks because we was in Trenton, Arkansas, in—at that time. So it just—and maybe, you know, I just don't look at things like other folks look at it. And life is hard, so you just have to keep on strugglin'.

[00:27:42] SL: Yeah. Did you ever see any activities that were, you

know, meant to repress African Americans? Was there any violence touch your-all's lives at all or the community in any way when you were growin' up?

BS: Hmm, I'm tryin' to think. No, I can't think of right now what touched our life. We was just right here in this community, and I'm tryin' to think of anything that happened in Trenton durin' that time that I can remember. And I'm quite sure a lots of [laughs] things happened. Right now I can't remember.

SL: Do you think that maybe you were kinda shielded from it 'cause it's . . .

BS: I don't think we was intended shield, but we lived three miles from here, so therefore, then you would have to go quite a—if you—we didn't go—I didn't go to Marvell very much. I—it was probably 1962 before I really went to the back of Marvell for anything. 'Cause now, as I listen to my husband, other peoples—they talk about they had movie theaters in Marvell and things like that, and I didn't go to any of those. So I was not one of those children that would go outside and do things.

[00:29:14] SL: The—there was something charmed about your life, then, really—how, you know, y'all were pretty much self-sufficient. How—so as far as the groceries go and stuff, did . . .

BS: We had two grocery stores up here. One was the McGuthrie [BS

edit: Guthrie] grocery store, and then we had Arnold store, so basic, that's what I can remember. Now, I know that my mother ?never? went to Helena to Kroger's and Safeway and stuff like that. But I really don't remember those stores until after I came back from Little Rock in 1967. So I guess I just really wasn't paying that much attention. And I always think about my older sister and brothers just probably protected me from things like that. Yeah.

[00:30:00] SL: Now, the two-room school across the road here—that was for the elementary grades?

BS: Elementary through eighth grade.

SL: Okay.

BS: So when we got to the eighth grade, we would go to—and some—we would go to Marvell High School—yeah, when we would go to the Marvell High School when you got to the elementary. When you got to the eighth grade, you'd go to the eighth grade, and when you pass on to the ninth grade, then you would go to Marvell High School or Marvell. [*Coughs*] Mh-hmm. So—but, now, this particular school here—you had the children that lived in the Trenton and the—Trenton and Batchalor store area and Jonestown [BS edit: Jones Ridge]. So at that time you had all these separate little school. Each community that had a

church durin' that time just about had a school close to their church. Like, Gumbottom had their school, and Gumbottom's, like, seven or eight miles down the road. And Trenton had their school, Coffee Creek had their school, and Turner, so life was pretty—I really enjoyed growin' up. I had the opportunity to grow up—I didn't grow up too fast, and I had—and we had the womens in the community that helped to look out for you, like those times, so I didn't see all that violence that people saw. And I remember people sayin' when they went to Helena, you know, that certain things was there. But I didn't go to Helena or Marvell much either, until I was—till I had graduated from high school in [19]66.

[00:31:50] SL: Were your folks—you know, there was a horrible—well, eighty, eighty-five years ago, there was a horrible thing that happened in this area. I guess it—was it in Elaine?

BS: Oh, I read the Elaine riot story. Yeah, I've read that several times.

SL: Did—was there anyone in your family that was affected by that, or did they ever talk . . .

BS: My folks never talked about the Elaine riot. Years ago, when I went to a NAACP meetin', peoples talked about it. Several folks I met talked about it. That was years ago. But my folks did not

talk about it. Yeah.

SL: So you never knew anybody's family that was affected by all that?

BS: No, I didn't. And I'm quite sure—yeah, peoples—that's somethin' right now folks do not talk much about the Elaine riot.

SL: I know. I know.

BS: I read the book, but they don't talk about it.

[00:32:48] SL: So I just get this sense that it—even eighty years later, it's still a difficult thing to talk about or acknowledge or—and I've just—it's just remarkable to me. I would think that there would be families whose grandparents or great-grandparents, you know, suffered from that in some way.



BS: Well, also we raised up—like I say, I was raised up in this church, and the thing about—we always talk about that we need to forgive folks, and we need to move on and live for the next day. So sometime in our church, we just [BS edit: forgive], and I think that's in the black community as a whole—we are not as—what the word I wanna use? I mean, we know that things happen, and sometime because of what we believe religious, we don't hold existin' generations responsible for somethin' their peoples did in the past because we do not wanna be—to be blamed for somethin' someone did. But I think it's still some

fear about talkin' about things that—you do not know what will happen, or you alienate peoples that are close to you. So sometime you just have to be careful of what you have. Do you want to continue to hold onto it? Do you have the courage to make those statements and things, you know? So that's the thing that you have to look at. What is the price you wanna pay for that, or do you wanna continue to live in the past, or you—and he who does not know his past is bound to repeat it, so we know that. I don't know. Peoples do not talk about the Elaine riot that much. I have read about it, but they just do not talk about it that much. Hm-mm.

[00:34:55] SL: Well, okay. I just thought you might have heard some stories passed down or had actually known someone that was personally . . .

BS: Person—by that . . .

SL: . . . affected by it and . . .

BS: But I do read about it every once in a while. I go back and review the book *Blood in Their Eyes* and, you know, that stuff like that, so I go back and read about it.

SL: Well, it just kinda—it just seems like it's still—I mean, because we can't talk about it or feel comfortable talkin' about it or—you don't really want to dredge [BS laughs] old stuff up, and you

don't wanna put that up in front of anyone's face or . . .

BS: That . . .

SL: . . . come across as being still angry about it . . .

BS: ?Hangin' bout it?.

SL: . . . or somethin'. You know, I—it just seems like it was such a real event.

BS: Event that . . .

SL: And it's a . . .

[00:35:50] BS: Well, I think in the last years peoples have really talk—they have read about it, so I don't know whether they have talked about it. But I know that peoples read about it, so yeah.

SL: You know, I've interviewed some folks that can remember having conversations with, you know, Confederate soldiers.

BS: Soldiers.

SL: So you know, these old stories and these old conversations . . .

BS: . . . sations.

SL: . . . can go back a long way.

BS: Long way.

SL: And so I . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I just don't think it would be doing this area justice if I didn't bring it up at some point.

BS: Point. Yeah.

SL: So anyway, I . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I just wanted to give you an opportunity . . .

BS: . . . tunity.

SL: . . . if you knew anything about it or . . .

BS: Bout it.

SL: . . . had ever heard anything about it other than what's in the book.

BS: What's in—now, that's—yeah . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . in the book. Yeah.

[00:36:37] SL: Okay. So [*clears throat*] what was Marvell High School like then when you started going there?

BS: Oh, Marvell High School was quite different than the elementary school because we did—goin' to Marvell High School, we had different classrooms. Like, in the elementary school, we would stay in one class if you—one classroom all day. When we went to the high school, we would go to, like, science class, English class, and on like that and that. And the children at Marvell High School was—like, when I first went to high school at Marvell, we had to wait till after pickin'-cotton time or choppin'-cotton time

to go because my family picked and chopped cotton durin' the season. So you had split school system when we first started goin'. But they had real good teachers at there. The interestin' thing—the gentleman that taught me in the seventh—in the eighth grade here at Trenton was Ulicious Reed. Well, when I went to Marvell in the ninth grade, he had moved to the ninth grade, so he taught me. And Ulicious Reed went on to be the principal of the high school durin' the time my oldest daughter was in high school to being the superintendent of the high school when my baby daughter graduated. So high school was—I still did not—let's be honest—I still did not interact with folks like other folks did at high school. I didn't try to go to the dances at the high school. I did go to my prom. I just didn't go to activities that much. I had a baby sister that went to all the activities and did the dancin' and all of that, but that was not me. So I was—I still have my little book, and I'm tryin' to figure out what I wanted to do. [00:38:49] And I think by readin' my books and things like that, that in nineteen—probably [19]70 or [19]71, which—I had good civic teacher in high school. I learned lots about civic. So the interestin' thing—the things that I learned in high school, to a certain extent, helped me at one point when I moved to the Poplar Grove housin' project in 1969.



And then in bout [19]70 [BS edit: 1973], they built this nice housin' complex, and then the sewer system messed up. And I remember goin' tellin' the lady that worked for Van Meter Lumber Company that the sewer system was messed up. And her—and she was named Alma Norton—later became the mayor of Marvell and was one of the better peoples for me when I needed help. That's so strange. But [*SL laughs*] at that time, Alma Norton said to me, "Well, you know, you—they messed the whole sewer system up, so you can't expect for us to correct 'em." And at that time, I do not know if govern—Dale Bumpers was governor of Arkansas, or was he a senator? I think he was governor of Arkansas durin' that time. [00:40:05] And I remember contactin' him and explainin' to him what had happened, and he sent a young man named Olly Neal to Poplar Grove to talk with us about that project. So when you was talkin' about high school, I think about when I was in high school, I read American history. I read about the—how the government operated, so that brought back to mind that now, as we tackle things and feel like folks are doin' somethin' to us, that we go back to what we learn sometime as a child. And it wasn't the fact that I felt they was doin' somethin' to me, but we had these older folks that had moved up in that Poplar Grove housin'

project, and my mama was so glad to get to a place where she had indoor bathrooms and stuff.

SL: Sure.

[00:40:56] BS: And most of the older folks in that project was glad to be up there in indoor bath. So to say that they had tore these—the sewer system up, I guess I was so angry at that time—and I remember [*laughs*] when Alma Norton—I was so angry I was cryin'. So when I went back and started to talkin' 'cause folks had said, "It is nothin' you can do about it. They just built those housin' complex, and so"—but I remember talkin' to a older lady named Glover Stone, who was workin' with me, and I believe she was the treasurer of the Poplar Grove housin' project that time. She said, "Baby, stop cryin'. Why are you cryin' so?" [*SL laughs*] [00:41:38] So I went—talked to a guy named John Hamilton. Now, this is—John Hamilton said, "Beatrice, just get a petition. Ask all the folks in the Poplar Grove housin' project to sign it and see what you got"—so when I started my little petition—and you were gonna ask me this—but I started my little petition [*laughs*], and folks was sayin', "You are not gon' get peoples to sign it." So I'm one of these peoples that alway prayin', and I was sayin', "Lord, help me." So we kept on, and everybody in the Poplar Grove housin'

project—all fifteen houses—signed that petition. And that's the result of that petition. I met a guy named Olly Neal. Olly Neal later became Judge Olly Neal, and so—but the experience of goin' to school at the high school was a real good experience 'cause it bought me out of my comfort zone, and I learned at a early age that folks could really—children can be mean. They do not intend to be mean, but they can. And it's basic what they are taught at home sometime. Yeah. Now you can get back to your question 'cause I took you all the way around.

SL: Oh no, no. This is great, so . . .

BS: Yeah.

[00:42:50] SL: Well you know, I get the impression that, growin' up, you—and you mentioned high school put you out of your comfort zone.

BS: Yeah.

SL: So I guess you were havin' to deal—when you—once you got to high school, you were having to deal with the broader community . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . more . . .

BS: That I did not dress like they thought children should dress. And I have never been—you know, I just did not fit in what they call

that upper echelon group of children. Most—child probably most likely not to do anything would probably be Beatrice Shelby, you know, so yeah, I was [SL laughs] out of my comfort zone. And I learned—after I went to Southern Business College in North Little Rock, and definitely I was out of my comfort zone there. My sisters—and my sisters and brothers have always come to my aid. So when I got ready to go to business school, I did not have enough money to go. My baby brother gave me some money so I could go to business school. [Laughs] When I got up there, I was staying with someone [unclear words], and somethin' happened, so in order for me to finish, my two sisters—the one right under me and the one—yeah, the next two to me—they older than I am—Minnie Bell and Nancy—moved to Little Rock—took jobs in order for me to complete school. So all of us worked in order—so yeah, it took me out of my comfort zone. From high school to the Southern Business College really took me out of my comfort zone. [00:44:22] But one of the things I learned by being in Little Rock at the Southern Business School, which was a real good school—it was three black children there, myself and two others. So I just—I learned to do a lots of more readin'. And one time they had this—down here in Phillips County it was called, I believe, *Jackson v. the Marvell School*

District. It was somethin' about the—freedom of choice or somethin', but Earlis Jackson was the gentleman name. And he took whatever suit he was to the Superior Court in St. Louis. Yeah, it was called Superior Court in St. Louis. So after that, I really learned to just listen and read a little more and look a little more. So I'm sixty-three now, so I don't mind being a little uncomfortable or disturbed, so over the years I've learned that. Sometime the best way to learn is just get out there and do it, and if you make a mistake, you have made a mistake and you just get up and dust yourself off. So we study—try to learn.

[00:45:37] SL: So did you have a favorite teacher in—I guess the teacher [*BS laughs*] that follow—or kind of moved to the high school at the same time that you did . . .

BS: Ulicious Reed remained to be my favorite teacher. And even now, if I get to a problem or somethin' that I cannot figure out, I will actually call Mr. Reed at his house and say, "I need some help," and he always help me. Yeah, he does. He's my favorite teacher.

SL: So you were obviously a very good student.

BS: I don't think so. I just—I'm one of these peoples have to read stuff several time. Sometime I think if I had not had the mother that I had and the sisters and brothers, I may not would have

even finished high school, probably. So I just had a lotsa support and love. And in this church we have peoples like Annie Ruth Pike. Have you ever heard talk of Annie Ruth Pike?

SL: Hm-mm.

BS: Oh, she would be good.

SL: Okay.

[00:46:34] BS: She's about seventy-eight years old. And I—the thing I remember about Miss Pike—she was my youth adviser. And she would say, "Everybody could sing but a buzzard?," so I can't sing. [Laughter] But the other thing I remember her—in 1967 or [19]68 or somethin' like that, when—was—Rockefeller was running for governor?

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: She was a Republican. [Laughs] Was he a Republican? Yeah, I think so. But whatever he was—I think he was a Republican.

SL: Yeah, he was.

BS: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Absolutely.

BS: So we didn't have Republicans too much . . .

SL: That's correct.

BS: . . . down here in Trenton. So Miss Pike was a Republican. She was ?work?—but she still is my favorite youth adviser. She been

there, and she's still in church with me. So we had this church here that we had peoples, like Miss Fannie Mae Turner, who we—I consider a civil rights worker—and she worked real close with the NAACP durin' that time. And so—yeah, we—I had a lotsa support. If we—if I had not had the family that I have now and a church like Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church, I may not would have made it. But I have a lovin' family. My mother is the strongest woman I know, and my four sisters are somethin' else. They are. They are what every little girl needs, and I had brothers that made sure—even if we made mistakes, my family did not just throw you out to the door—dogs. They was there for you. And I think that what really have made a major difference in my life is the fact that my family was there for me. And we tried that with the next generation of our children. I have three birth children, and I have a nephew that I raised as my child. And then I have another niece and three nephews that I consider a part of my immediate family because it was eight children, and it was three sisters. And we wrapped around to make sure those eight children that we were—and I have a husband, and we have chi—you know, they have my—I have a husband. I've been married for years. [00:48:48] But we made sure—and I see those things—eight children still

support each other now, so I'm hoping we passin' that along to my mama great-grandchildren. We did a good job passin' that along to her grandchildren, so I'm hopin' we passin' that to her great-grandchildren also, that we are not perfect. We have to love each other. We have to work. And for every action, there is a consequence. And when you give birth to a baby, that's your baby. You need to do everything you can to rock that baby. I even think of that in—when my do my job or when I come up with a brainstorm and do a program—"This is my program. I need to get folks to help me. I can't do it by myself." So—and I don't know what all that was said for. Okay.

SL: [*Laughter*] It's okay to get on the high horse.

BS: And I do that a lots.

SL: Let me tell you, it's fine.

BS: I do that a lots.

SL: It's valuable.

BS: I do that a lots.

SL: Well, it's good.

BS: Yeah.

SL: Someone needs to. And I think folks count on you to do that.

[00:49:55] BS: And another thing—years ago there was a NAACP president by the name of Jack Bryant. I guess most folks don't

talk about Jack Bryant. But Jack Bryant was another person that had a major impact on me.

SL: Okay.

BS: He worked with the NAACP, so I would go to the—these meetings. And we had this gentleman that was—been in this church all my life—his name was Ellis McKissic. We have a board back there on it. And he always wanted to go to meetings like that, so he had got a little older. But my mother would say to me, "It is your responsibility, if you can, when he wants to go to a meetin', to take him." And that's how I started goin' to NAACP meetins because my mother wanted me to support someone else. And I have found out in life that sometime when we do somethin' to support another person, we can learn so much from that. Yeah, and so . . .

[00:51:04] SL: The rewards are that you gain something from helping others, I guess. You just . . .

BS: You do, yeah, you do. You do.

SL: The wealth . . .

BS: I—we do. We do.

SL: . . . is . . .

BS: We do.

SL: . . . is there . . .

BS: We do.

SL: . . . just a . . .

BS: Yeah, we do.

SL: You know, I guess—I don't know, the—you know, one of the sayings would be what goes around comes around, I guess. If you [*BS laughs*] try to do right, why, the right thing will come back around.

[00:51:34] BS: And good things—and bad things happen to good peoples. Now, when I was little, folks used to try to make me believe that you reaped everything you sowed. Now, I guess you do, but some bad things happen to you do not have anything to do with something you have done, so I don't believe that. I just believe, actually, a good person can have bad things to happen to them . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . and they haven't done anything bad.

SL: I wanna—you know, course, I think I told you that I like to spend as much time as we can on . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . on childhood stuff.

BS: Okay.

SL: And you were talkin' about your grandmother comin' down when

you were sick, and first doctor you went to said, "Naw, there's nothin' wrong with her," and—let's talk about goin' to a doctor.

BS: Okay.

SL: So was it a white doctor that you would go to, or was it an African American doctor?

BS: Oh, it—the first do—the doctor that felt it was not anything wrong with [*laughs*] me was an African American doctor. Yeah. Yeah. The doctor that she took to me was a white doctor. But basic, I guess, as I think back, is I looked healthy and everything, so you know, they was—so it was just a minor problem that the other doctor called—that the doctor did not—yeah.

SL: Well you know, some of the African Americans I've interviewed—they talk about having to wait to see a doctor—that all the . . .

BS: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . white folks would be seen first and . . .

[00:53:10] BS: And I—that happened durin' our childhood, I'm sure, 'cause when—'cause, now, I can remember havin' a black and white waitin' room, and so I didn't go to the doctor very much. That was probably when I was a child. Those was the onliest two time. At the black doctor office it was no, you know, but at the white doctor office at that particular time, it was a black and

white waiting room, so I can remember those things. Yeah. So that—yeah, I didn't bypass those. I remember the few times [laughs] I went to the doctor, they did have black and white waitin'. Yeah.

[00:53:44] SL: Yeah. Dr. Elders talked about her younger brother had an appendix rupture, and he—they actually, you know, put him on a wagon and took him to a veterinarian.

BS: Oh!

SL: 'Cause, you know, that was . . .

BS: You couldn't get him . . .

SL: . . . that was the closest doctor . . .

BS: And . . .

SL: . . . and he did the right thing . . .

BS: Thing.

SL: . . . but . . .

BS: Yeah.

[00:54:14] SL: You know, the whole health-care thing—it—you know, y'all—the African American community was basically a second-class community. It just . . .

BS: And when peoples talk about that, that's true, that—and that is a true statement. But sometime when we talk about that—it's no gettin' around that. That was just a fact. That was a way of life.

Yeah, and so that—they had black and white waiting rooms. They waited on white peoples first. So that [*laughs*] was a way of life. I don't think any of us ever fooled ourselves on that issue. So that was a way of life. But as a child, I did not go to the doctor very much. I think that was about the first one or two times that I had to go to the doctor. And so I was—we was—I was blessed. I didn't have a lotsa experience with the doctor.

[00:55:10] SL: It does sound like that you had a wonderful family that looked after . . .

BS: I did.

SL: . . . each other.

BS: I had a wonderful family.

SL: And you know, that's gotta be a credit to your mom and dad.

BS: Definitely a credit to my mother and father. I think about when I was younger, I used to thought that we did not get some of the things we did. But as I grew older and started travelin' to different states and listenin' at other folks, we was blessed. We was blessed to have a community that cared. Just not only my parents—we had a community. I remember we had a lady named Ethel Martin. She really—peoples just cared about folks durin' that time. So we had some hard times, now, because we

had to chop cotton [*laughs*] and we had to pick cotton and things like that. But basic, everything was . . .

SL: Did y'all ever do that at night?

BS: Pick—well, you pick late at night—it's not all night. Not—you know, sometime it would be dark when you finish. Yeah. But we didn't have to just go out there in the night and just chop.

SL: Moonlight.

BS: [*Unclear words*]. Yeah. And if it did, it was . . .

SL: Rodney Slater . . .

BS: . . . probably my older sisters and brothers 'cause, like, when I came along, we did not. Yeah.

[00:56:22] SL: Well, let's talk a little bit about your father. I don't—I feel like we haven't really talked much about your father. What was he like?

BS: Oh gosh. My father was a tall, slim guy. He always did huntin'. He liked to do sorghum and stuff. And I remember one time they talked about he had a sorghum mill. I don't know if I remember it, but I remember them talkin' about it. My father made sure that we had plenty of food to eat. He would teach his children certain things. He always tell us to save money. He always want to own somethin'. And I remember he—now, my father used to do construction work. And I remember he worked

on the Helena bridge. But I guess the thing that I remember most about my father is that he really was a businessperson. He used to run what we called the Missouri Café in Helena. And when we was young, we would go down there and work in that café—well, let's see, bout [19]63 or somewhere like that—we would go down there and work with him. He just had a good business head on him. He could make money even though he wasn't well educated. He knowed how to greet and talk with people, and he loved his children, so that basic—that's—that was my father.

[00:57:46] SL: Now, Helena was pretty happenin' place in the early [19]50s, right?

BS: Well, I didn't go to Helena probably till [19]62 or [19]63 is when I really went down there.

SL: And even—but then it was . . .

BS: It was. It was a pretty happenin' place, yeah. So . . .

SL: Were they still—did they still have the slot machines everywhere in the [19]60s or . . .

BS: I don't remember slot . . .

SL: You don't?

BS: . . . machines.

SL: You don't?

BS: No, I don't remember those.

SL: We had someone say yesterday in one of the interviews that there were slot machines on nearly every corner.

BS: See, and I didn't get a chance to go to Helena until [19]62 or [19]63.

SL: Right.

BS: Yeah, that's what I'm sayin', so that was my first experience. And I was a child, so therefore, I was probably at the café with my father. I always remember we could not sell beer because it was against the law to do things like that if you was a certain age. But I remember all the hamburgers. We had the best hamburgers and the best chili in there. [*SL laughs*] And so . . .

Bruce Perry: Three minutes.

SL: Okay.

[00:58:47] BS: So my father liked to hunt, and he was always tryin' to keep a car or a tractor or somethin' like that even durin' those times. He was a visionary, my father was, come to think of it. He was a businessperson.

SL: And you know, he was able to do that with very little education.

BS: But—and we talk about that. My sister and I always talk about when our father died, that he was able to leave each one of his

children a little money, and he did not have a lots of education, so he learned how to really save. And before he died, he gave me instructions to what I needed to do with everything. [*SL laughs*] And I have always been so impressed with that—about that.

SL: So he could read and write.

BS: No, he did not read and write.

SL: Oh!

BS: But he—yeah—but no, he did not. But he could give you instruction as what you needed to be doin'. Yeah.

[00:59:40] SL: Do you remember those instructions? Can you share those, or are they too personal or . . .

BS: Oh no! He told me if you don't take care of business, business will take care of you. And that's one of those things him and my baby brother always would say that. He believed in workin' for your family, and he always believe you kept some money. You need to keep money. So those are the things that he believed. And he believed that his children need an education, so yeah—so I can share those things. And we have passed those things on to the next generation, you know, so yeah.

SL: So anything else about your father that you want us to preserve? I mean, I . . .

BS: Well, my father provided for his children. You know, I—and with the black community, sometime peoples will say black men did not provide for their families, but my father really provided for his children—made sure they had food and clothes. So that's the one thing that I remember about him. He helped with his family—his children. Yeah.

[01:00:50] SL: What about—you said you had a radio in the house. What about musical instruments? Were there ever any musical instruments in your home—a piano or . . .

BS: I don't remember a piano in our home. But we had a radio, and you know, at the times we used to take pans and sticks and stuff like that, so we always do stuff musical-like. And we were like all little children. We played "Little Sally Walker sittin' in a saucer" and all those kind of things, and we danced. We always danced. My older brother could really dance. His name was L. C., and he could dance. So we did a lot of things like that. We had a lot of fun. Pop popcorn and sit around and talk about things. We played checkers all the time. My mother loved to play checkers. So we did a lot of games during that time, so . . .

SL: Did y'all ever . . .

BP: Ten seconds.

SL: Ten seconds. Okay. We're gonna stop.

BS: Okay.

SL: We're about to run out of our first tape. You've . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . survived the first hour with me. [*Laughter*]

[Tape stopped]

[01:01:59] SL: So we're on tape two now.

BS: Okay.

SL: We got an hour under our belt and a wonderful lunch. So I think we had left off talkin' about your father's entrepreneurial skills, really.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: Had a little café in Helena that you would help at some, and by all accounts, it was the best place to get a burger.

BS: Mh-hmm. Right. Good fish. Good chili.

SL: The best fish, yeah.

BS: Right.

SL: Good chili. Is there anything else you wanna—you know, what—I could ask you this about that. What—how was Helena? What do you remember about Helena when you went in there to the restaurant or to the café and helped out?

BS: I remember Helena was so different from Marvell to me. And at that point, I was not ex—had not been exposed to all the loud

noise, and I wasn't used to folks—I just wasn't used to being in a café, as we called 'em at that time. So between Helena and Marvell, to me it was different as day and night. And probably still is to me. Helena and Marvell as different as day and night. I remember about Helena they had the Miller Theater down there at that time, and they had the Buford Café. So Helena was just really to me sort of like a large city at that time, and Marvell was just small. It was a different atmosphere altogether, Marvell and Helena, to me at that time. So—I also remember about Helena at that time, we had this lady that my father would get to fix our hair, so it was just different. Helena was different from Marvell. People was—peoples in Marvell at that time to me was more homelike and homebody, and Helena was just the opposite because where I was located in Helena, I was loc—we—the café was located on Missouri Street downtown where everything is goin'—was goin' on downtown. So when I was in Helena, I was in an entire different environment than I was when I was in Marvell.

SL: Were you comfortable with it or out—put you . . .

BS: Oh, I felt . . .

SL: . . . out of your comfort zone?

BS: . . . very comfortable.

SL: Yeah.

BS: My sisters was there, and my father was there, so I guess at first you'd sort of be out of your comfort zone when it's something you're not used to. It was just new. Yeah.

[01:04:32] SL: Any street musicians? Did you hear much music whenever you went into Helena?

BS: Oh, well, they had the juke—the jur—music box into—they call 'em vint . . .

SL: Jukebox?

BS: Jukebox. You can put a quarter in, and you hear music, so peoples always doing that. So yeah.

SL: So were you there just mostly during the day?

BS: We went there on weekends, mostly.

SL: On weekends? Uh-huh.

BS: Yeah, mostly on weekends. Yeah, so . . .

SL: And then you'd . . .

BS: Come back home.

SL: . . . come back home at the end of each day?

BS: Mh-hmm. Yeah, come back home.

SL: Well, what kind of vehicle did y'all have? Do you remember?

BS: I remember we had a red-and-white truck, so I remember that. We have always had some kind of little cars, but I don't

remember 'em that much now. But I do remember we had a red-and-white truck at one time. So yeah.

[01:05:30] SL: Well, let's get back to other members of the family.

You had—now, how many brothers and sisters?

BS: I have four brothers and four sisters that I was raised with. My oldest brother was named L. C., and we called him L. C., but his name was Lloyd Clarence Greer. And L. C. was the person that did things for us. Like, for Christmas he would make sure that we had a Christmas tree cut and that the house was decorated. So he did things to really add to our childhood. He was the oldest brother. And I remember he would always—he could pick more cotton than anybody in the family. But he was really a what you call the ideal big brother for me. He could sing. He could dance. And he was real smart in school. And I remember he went away to Mary Holmes Junior College, like, in probably 1954—somewhere like—[19]53. I remember that. Then I remember him comin' back home. So he was the big brother, in my opinion, that every girl would need. [01:06:46] And then I—my next-oldest brother, which name was Herbert, and Herbert was—he was real kind to people. [*Laughs*] And the thing I remember most about Herbert—you could easily make him angry. That—yeah, he was sorta easy to get mad if you did

[*SL laughs*] somethin' to him out of the ordinary. But he was a good brother also. And then my next brother was named Frank—Frank Albert Clark. Well, Frank wasn't around me that much because he left early—in probably bout [19]62 or somewhere—[19]63—that F. A. left home. But he was always what I considered the boss. If—with the other two boys, he was probably the boss. What he said, he expect for it to go. [*SL laughs*] And he still—at his age now, seventy, whatever he say—I'd say he's seventy-two—yeah, he'd be seventy-two. So whatever he said now, he still expect for it to go.

[01:07:52] SL: Even for the older brothers—he . . .

BS: Yeah, he . . .

SL: . . . kinda bossed 'em around.

BS: . . . he really was sort of the boss around and [*SL laughs*]*—yeah, he was. He was alway the one just—with my father tryin' to take care of business and stuff like that until he left. And then my baby brother. J. C. is my baby brother. And J. C. have always tried to take care of me financially. Like I say, when I got ready to go off to school and needed money to go to school . . .*

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . he was the person provided that money. And he is still

supportive of me, even though he's married and have four or five—he have five children. He is still very supportive. For anything I need, he gonna try, even if I don't ask him for it. If he think I need it, J. C. gonna be there and try to make sure we get it. He's that way bout all of us. And my oldest sister that favor me so much—sometime peoples that see us—if you see her tomorrow and walk by you . . .

SL: I'd know.

[01:08:56] BS: . . . you might—you would probably think that was me. No, you would probably say, "Miss Shelby?" But we really favors that much—my oldest sister. And she is—she was the first one in our family to get married, and my brother-in-law is—his name is Homer Johnson Sr., and he's a real gem too. But Mertis is the person that I—we have—I have always been religious, you know, but—and that may not be the right word. I have al—since 1982—since 1986—nineteen—no, that's not true—since 1962 that I have always really tried to study the Bible and everything. But Mertis has been my—the person that has guided me most in biblical things—my sister Mertis—except for my pastor. I have the same pastor for forty-one years, so definitely he has been there for me. But my oldest sister—and she is so kindhearted. And she is more—peoples always say, "I

wanna help folks or let folks come in and do thing." But my sister Mertis will let folks come stay with her. She just that mother-type person. She is really kind. And then my sister Minnie—and I think Minnie and I are different—we are real different, but she's the person I probably talk to—I have two sisters I probably talk to every day. So Minnie Bell [*laughs*]—Minnie have this thing that she believe that if it call a—she say, "You call a spade a spade." And she say, "If it's not the truth, it's a lie." So she is a person that—really, she work hard. She believe your word should mean somethin'. And she believe you definitely got to have integrity. And she think that it's your responsibility as children's parents to teach 'em how to clean up, how to read, how to write. She feel like a parent have those responsibility. And when you get into the debate with Minnie about who's supposed to do somethin', the school or parents . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:11:06] BS: . . . most of the time she gonna come down on the side that they are in your house first, you are their parent, and you need to do what you need to do to be their mother. So—and she's one of the sisters that came to Little Rock when I was goin' to school so I could continue to go to school. And then my sister Nancy—Nancy's two years older than I am. And far as the

girls, she's a mother type for the girls. She makes sure everything is in place. If we have a family reunion, she is gonna work on that. If we have a family get-together, she gonna work on it. She love to cook. And she can cook. [SL laughs] She used to run a restaurant years ago in St. Louis. And she's retired now. She does—so—but she's another person gonna see—like I had told you earlier, we had eight children together between Minnie Bell and Nancy and myself, and so Sis gonna always be the one to really be there like the mother type over all of us. And Nancy and Minnie to me—sometime I tell peoples they practically raised me. My mother was there, and my mother did everything a mother's supposed to do. But seemed like Minnie Bell and Sis was just always there to correct me and make sure that I did things that was correct. And they always wanted me to get up and do somethin' instead of read, but they wasn't able to get me to do all those other things. But I would read. And then my baby sister, Earlene. And she is a year younger'n I am. And Earlene was the academic in our family—her and L. C. But she went to Mary Holmes Junior College early. She was the child that everybody would wanna be like. She could sing, she could dance, she was smart—she had it all—she has it all. So that was the baby girl. And so that's—and that's

all of my sisters and brother. [01:13:10] Now, on my mother's side, I have a aunt. Her name is Willie Beatrice Murray, and she died in 1997. But she helped to raise us. She the onliest one of our aunts that was livin' in Phillips County, so she practically helped—well, she helped to raise my mother children 'cause we was alway around her. And then I had another auntie—my mother family was pretty close—and she lived in Noxapater, Mississippi. Her name was Mabel Hoskins, and we would all—she—they would come over from Noxapater and come to see us sometimes. And we would go to visit them in Noxapater, Mississippi. Noxapater, Mississippi, yeah. And she alway would have a garden, and she was a churchgoer. She was a mother in her church, and she had four boys and two girls—she had [unclear words]. She had five boys and two girls, yeah. So she was one of my mother sister. [01:14:21] And my mother had another sister that we really didn't get a chance to be around much. She stayed in Detroit, and her name was Aunt Mary. And I don't remember ever seeing Aunt Mary, but I remember them talkin' a lots about her. That was my mother's sister. And my mother had three brothers. G. W. Greer, which was—so he really—he lived in Chicago, but he would come visit us all the time. And we got a chance to share stories and things with him,

and he would tell us what life was about in Chicago and places like that. And he would—and then we had [*laughs*—my mama baby brother was named Oliver Greer. And Oliver—they called him "Big Man." And he—we—peoples would tell me real funny stories about Big Man, but I don't wanna repeat any stories they would tell me about Big Man. So when I first came back to start workin' at the center in 1967 or [19]68 and folk would say, "You can't be Oliver Greer niece. Boy, I remember when Big Man"—so they would tell all these stories that I don't even think was true, but they would tell it all—Uncle Big Man. [*SL laughs*] So that was my mama baby brother. And my mama has one livin' brother now, and his name is Frank Greer. And I went to see Uncle Frank yesterday. He is eighty-six years old. [01:15:52] And he alway talk about fishin', and he work for a long time—oh, I forgot the name of the mill he worked at—but I only really met Uncle Frank to know him in eighty—probably the early part of the [19]80s. My mama got sick, and my mama died in [19]81 of August, so Uncle Frank and his wife, Aunt Joy [BS edit: Joyce], was there at the hospital a lots durin' that time, so that's when I really got to know him and have tried to keep up with him since then because he was so supportive of us durin' her—my mother's sickness. Now, my father—mmm, let's see—my

father had—I think it was nine boys and three girls. I know it was three girls 'cause it was Aunt Sweetie, and we called her Aunt Sweetie. She was Aunt Oliver [BS edit: Ollie]. And you're like—in your family, you always have these aunties that one of your sisters favor or act like 'em—and Aunt Ollie was the one that my sister Minnie—the one stayin' in Helena that I always talk about, you know—so Aunt Oliver [BS edit: Ollie]—she's deceased now. Her name was Ollie Pierce, and she was the second sister from my father. And then my father older sister—she's still livin'—we talk to her now—her name is Aunt Venice. And Aunt Venice is about eighty-six or eighty-seven, I believe. When I was a child—and I always remember this about Aunt Venice—she had someone to make my baby sister and I some little orchid dresses—they was made out of orchid material—the little soft material that you can see through 'em?

SL: Okay.

[01:17:35] BS: She made one of us a pink dress, and she made one of us a blue dress, and I always think about that because she wanted us—I don't know what kind of occasion it was, but she wanted us to look nice, so she had this lady to make us these two little dresses. So that's my oldest auntie on my daddy's side. And then Aunt Velma—it's *V-E-L-M-A*—Velma Miller. She

is my baby aunt. And she the one we probably knew better than the rest of 'em [*unclear word*] Aunt Velma when she was younger 'cause she's the youngest one. And we have always talked with her and my sister in St. Louis—spent a lotsa time with her, so we spent a lotsa time with her. But in the late years, my Aunt Vernice, the one I'm named after—I'm named after my mama sister and my daddy sister. So now we talk to Aunt Vernice probably more than we talk to any of the rest of 'em. And we just had a family get-together the fourth of June, so my Aunt Vernice came down, and my Uncle Leroy, which is next to the baby boy, and my Uncle Troy, who was next to Uncle Leroy, came down. These are my daddy brothers. So—and then he have another brother that's livin', which is the baby boy, and his name is Little Willie, and Little Willie live in California. So we have Uncle Dump, and Uncle Dump name is—well, I call him Uncle Dump, and I can't remember what his name is right now. But Uncle Dump live in St. Louis also. And he—Uncle Dump has children along with me, so—and let's see who else—so we have—my oldest uncle—my mama oldest—my Grandmother Nancy oldest son was named R. V. Frazier, and he is deceased. Then I had another uncle named J. C. His name was J. C. Whitaker, and he got killed durin' the war, probably in the

[19]40s—like, 1943, [19]44—somewhere durin' that time.

[01:19:51] And then I had an uncle named Charlie—Charlie Whitaker—and Uncle Charlie was the uncle that—well, we were—he had children along with me. I had a first cousin that was a grade below me, so he had two children who was raised in Marvell with us, so that was my daddy brother, and he is deceased. And Uncle Nuci is deceased, so that's our—'cause he—they had—she had three and nine is twelve—so she had twelve children, I think.

SL: Gosh!

[01:20:26] BS: So we have four left now. We have—no, we have five. We have two girls and three boys. No, we have two girls [*laughs*] left and four boys. We have Uncle Leroy, Uncle Troy, Uncle Dump and Uncle Willie, Aunt Vernice and Aunt Velma. So there's six left.

SL: That was a [*laughter*] magnificent job. How many names did we just go through, twenty-five or so?

BS: Probably so.

SL: Couple of dozen names.

BS: Yeah.

SL: And so all those folks—aunts, uncles, and of course, brothers and sisters—they all played a role in your-all's family and . . .

BS: Yeah, we kept up with 'em.

SL: . . . helpin' y'all get along.

BS: Well, yeah. Even the one, Aunt Mabel, that we never did see—Mama would always talked about her. My oldest sister would always go to see her, so—and that's another thing. Where one family member may not go see about someone, the other one will. And my mama had this thing with us, that if one of your sisters and brothers get in trouble, you need to band together financially and send somebody to see about 'em. Her other thing was to her children, always keep enough money to get back home to your original home, and that was Marvell. So she always taught us that.

SL: That's good advice.

BS: Yeah, to get back to Marvell. Yeah.

[01:21:51] SL: Hmm. Did—now, you mentioned one uncle died in World War II.

BS: Yeah, I was young, but they always talk about that Uncle J. C. got killed in the war, and that was my daddy's brother.

SL: Did any of your family have to go to war anywhere—Vietnam or . . .

BS: No, we was blessed. Not a brother or—no, I didn't have any brothers to go. Now, I had nephews to go to the army, but it

wasn't Vietnam. I've had two nephews to—but they didn't go to Vietnam. They wasn't old enough 'cause my oldest nephew was born in [19]60, so they wasn't old enough. Mh-hmm.

SL: Well you know, when you're graduating high school, civil rights stuff is happenin' pretty big time . . .

BS: Time.

SL: . . . around then.

BS: When I did, but when they—my nephews—I mean, not any of my brothers went at that time 'cause they are older than I am. So they could have gone, but—yeah, they—'cause my baby brother would be sixty-eight now, so he graduated [BS edit: my brother did not graduate]. But I had a lotsa classmates to go to war to Vietnam and stuff like that, but I didn't have any brothers to go.

SL: That's lucky.

BS: Yeah, blessed. We just blessed. Mh-hmm. And not either one of my sons had to go to service. So yeah.

[01:23:32] SL: Well, was there anybody in your family that was active in the civil rights movement?



BS: The—not in my immediate family. I knew peoples that was active in the civil rights movement. The lady I was tellin' you about that's close to me, Mrs. Gertrude Jackson, was active in

the civil rights movement. And John Hamilton—I'm always talkin' about him. We have at our organization what we call the John Hamilton Scholarship. During the—probably from probably 1966 to probably 1970—in that time period, John Hamilton did a lots of marchin' down—you know, when peoples had marches, he did that. I marched once or twice durin' that time and [*unclear words*] civil rights. Someone had got killed in the jail here in Helena. And John Hamilton and Fannie Mae Turner—Fannie Mae Turner was like a second mothers to me—they wanted to march, so therefore, you being young, and you respect peoples, and you support them, so we—they—we marched on that. Mr. Hamilton at one time was doin' things with civil rights, and they burned a cross in his yard. [*SL sighs*] [01:24:55] And I remember [*laughs*] that the FBI—somebody came to the center. It was—Mid-Delta was there then, and they was talkin' about protectin' John Hamilton. And he told 'em no, that he didn't need them to protect him. So I remember that. And the interestin' thing—the first—when I came here in [19]67 and started workin' at the center in November, they would talk about that John Hamilton used to do a—build houses for folks and do carpentry work and stuff like that. But because of his participation in the civil rights movement, he got to the point that he could not get a job. And

then Mid-Delta hired him durin' that time. So—Gertrude Jackson, John Hamilton, and Fannie Mae Turner—Sam Bennett— Sam Bennett was president of NAACP durin' the time I used to serve as secretary of NAACP. He was off into civil rights. And that's about as close as I know of folks gettin' into civil rights.

[01:26:11] SL: So you had a—was that a "job" job with . . .

BS: What, the secretary of NAACP?

SL: Uh-huh.

BS: Oh no. I just wanted to do somethin' to help out. I've never had any money, so if I had a little talent and somebody could use it—no, it was not a job. So—you get a chance to go to the NAACP national convention, the state convention, and the regional convention and all that. So yeah. And I believed in what NAACP was doin', and I still believe in what they are doin'.

SL: You bet.

BS: Yeah. Yeah. So it was not a job.

SL: Well, what should we talk about next? I mean, I'm always hesitant to leave family because, you know, I . . .

BS: Well . . .

SL: . . . I just have great belief that—and it sounds like in your case there were lots of players that . . .

BS: A lots of players. My family—and even with the raisin' of my

mother next generation—I'm my—from mother first generation. But the raisin' of my mother second generation—the community played a major part in that. The school system played a major part in that. So I think that when it come to—and we had eight children between us. My three sisters and I had eight children between us—and then my brother in Memphis had children. So basic, the children that came together the most was the eight down here and the children in Memphis. My older sister—her children—they was in the army. Her and her husband was in army [BS edit: my sister was not in the army]. And they children are a little older than some of our children. [01:28:03]

And so—but the thing about family to me was that it really started in the home with how my mama taught us how to raise our children, and then we—she passed it on down to us, and we try to pass it to the next generation. But the church and the school and the community just played a major part in raisin'—in helpin' me to raise my children. We had this lady in this church—her name is Lizzie Davis—and [*laughs*] when you're a child, sometime you see someone, and you think they just smilin' at you. Well, when I would come to church, I used to actually believe that she reserved that smile for me until I got to be a big girl and realized she smiled at everybody. [*Laughter*]

So we [*unclear words*]*—so family is very important to me—and community. I believe in havin' a conversation with communities. I think that we as peoples do not take the time to talk to each other. And that's the thing about being raised in the Trenton community all of those years, because each family in this community—we knew each other, we'd come to church on Sunday, and we talked to each other, and we went to school. So it was just like—Trenton community was just like a family, and this church has really contributed to that, so . . .*

[01:29:30] SL: You mentioned—I think you mentioned a year when the church really started having a major influence on you. Is that . . .

BS: Oh, well yeah, it was part—in 1962, yeah. That—well, most of the time you come in—well, that's the time that I really began to understand what the Lord was all about was in 1962. I was, like, fourteen years of age. And I learned to really think about what I wanted to do, and I wanted to obey. My—like I said, my mother had these things upside the wall, and you'd say—you know, they were sayins from the Bible. So durin' that time I really started thinkin' about what I wanted to do. But really, in 1978 of July is when my whole life—I have just sort of changed and revolved—that I knew that I wanted to do those things that

was pleasin' in the eyesight of the Lord from then on. I remember just as good in 1978, askin' the Lord to not let me do anything that would hurt a person a day younger'n I am, and I said it just like this: "If they are a day younger'n I am, do not let me do anything or say anything that was mislead them. Just help me to be a good example, a good example for the peoples comin' behind me to follow." So the church has a very—especially this church. It's just—we have the same pastor for the last forty-one years, and [*SL laughs*] his name is Reverend W. R. Parks, and he's just a blessin' for me.

[01:31:05] SL: Well . . .

BS: So . . .

SL: . . . was there a particular event that made 1982 pivotal for you or . . .

BS: Nineteen seventy-eight.

SL: . . . or whenever the church became—to play bigger role in your life.

BS: In July of 1978, yes. Becau—I guess because at that point I was getting ready to get married, and it was just things that I just wanted to do with my life. So—and I wanted to just be a good example for my children. And my mother had also—let's see, [19]78—and I think at that time my mother was being sick a lot.

So you just start to prayin' and driving around sometime when you realize that—at that time, look like the doctor had also said to us one time that our mother—you know how you bring children in to see your mother sometime . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . because they're—so it was a lots goin' on at that time, and I just really learned to pray. Well, my mother didn't die until 1981, so you know, it's—so . . .

SL: Prayers were answered.

BS: Yeah, so we did a lots of prayin' and stuff. But it really changed my life durin' that time period. Yeah.

[01:32:14] SL: Did you have any extracurricular activities—you know, sports or choir or . . .

BS: Oh, I could not sing a lick. [*SL laughs*] I cannot play. I like to sew. I do that. No, I didn't have any extracurricular activities. I did things with the children, like with 4-H, and I used to love to work with children in 4-H. You know what 4-H is? It's a county extension office, and they run a program called 4-H. And then you have peoples that come out—you can get chance to take the children to Ferndale. You can teach the children how to cook. They have a county extension agent.

SL: Okay.

BS: And at that time, we had Beverly Henderson and Delaney Alexander that was workin' with us. So it was a real good experience durin' that time. So that was my extracurricular activities, doin' things with children and sewin' and [*unclear words*]*—*and the NAACP and stuff like that. I just like to do stuff like that. So I didn't have a lots of extracurricular activity.

SL: It's interesting—you know, you were kind of a stay-at-home, read, do-things-around-the-house young person. Didn't really venture out much and felt a little uncomfortable when you got to high school.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: But then again, it seems like you started—I mean, once you got to high school, it seems like you started to kinda blossom into this engagement. You know, you were engaging things and causes and efforts by different people. Is that—am I readin' that right? Is that . . .

[01:34:11] BS: Oh yeah, I'm one of these peoples that will support and help other people. So if someone asks me somethin', and if I look at and don't see nothin' illegal wrong with it or morally or anything, I mostly go help you. And most of the stuff I do is probably because I went somewhere to help somebody and then—and I just—I learned how to drive in order to take my

mother where she wanted to go. I used to say I would never learn how to drive. I didn't wanna drive. My mama always like to go, so she was sayin' one day, "We need to get a car so that I can go places." So my oldest brother, F. A. . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . came down, bought a car, left, and then I learned how to drive so I could take my mother where I wanted to go. So most of the time when I do somethin', it's somethin' to help somebody. Even goin' to the center, Mrs. Gertrude Jackson came and asked me to go to the center. So I think most of the time when I do somethin', it's because somebody wants some help. And when I do somethin', I'm gon' give it my best if I tell you I'm gon' give you my best. So that's what it is.

[01:35:20] SL: Well, you talked about not goin' to any of the dances or any of that stuff in high school except for your senior prom.

BS: I went to the prom, yeah. In the eleventh grade, we went to the prom.

SL: And did you have a date for the prom, or did you just go? I mean . . .

BS: Oh gosh, that's been so long! We—it was my sister and my sister-in-law, now. We probably had dates [BS edit: we did not have dates], but we went to the prom. I remember we made

these dresses—long—we made 'em ourselves, my sister and I. They had a black top and a long, white bottom. And yeah, I did not take a date to the prom, come to think of it. No, I did not. [SL laughs] I did not.

SL: Well, that was—that became more common . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I think, you know. Back, you know, durin' my older brothers and sister days, you know, a date to the prom was—you just didn't go if you didn't have a date.

BS: If you didn't have a date. [Laughs]

SL: Yeah, but now, you know, that's just not the case.

BS: That's not the case, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Oh gosh, that's been forty—[19]64, [19]65—that's been many years.

SL: Yes, ma'am. [Laughter]

BS: Yeah.

SL: Well now, what about church activities?

BS: Oh, we was alway here at the church. But I did not sing in the choir. But we used to have Easter speech, children's day speeches, and things like that. And then when we was goin' to elementary school, over here at this school, we would have little

plays, box suppers, and things like that. So we had a good time. But at the church—yeah, we—you could sing in the choir. Like I say, I couldn't sing a lick, so I didn't do that. But I did do Easter speeches and things like that. Yeah, so . . .

[01:37:13] SL: So say that again—Easter . . .

BS: Speeches.

SL: . . . speeches?

BS: Speech.

SL: You'd have to get up and talk in front of folks?

BS: Well, you would memorize the speech, and you . . .

SL: Oh, I see.

BS: You just memorize it.

SL: I see.

BS: Yeah. And we can memorize it. And I still memorize things, and I still try to do speeches. So yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, what about your husband? How did you-all meet?

BS: Yeah. Now, my husband and I actually went to school together. He was a grade behind me in school. But how I met my husband was one night—I lived in the Poplar Grove housin' complex. My next-door neighbor asked me to go uptown with her, and we did not drive my car. So I just went uptown with

her. And after we got up there, we realized we did not have a way back home. So she asked my husband to bring us home.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And after that, it was history, so [*SL laughs*] yeah.

[01:38:20] SL: So [*laughs*] he had a car and . . .

BS: He had a truck.

SL: He had a truck.

BS: He had a truck.

SL: And so all three of you were in the . . .

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And you were sittin' in the middle.

BS: Well, I don't remember, but after that [*laughter*]*—*yeah. So that was, like, in 1973, probably, of November. Yeah. And then we got married in December 1978. Mh-hmm. So yeah.

SL: Nineteen seventy- . . .

BS: Eight.

SL: . . . eight.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: So y'all . . .

BS: We dated bout five years.

SL: You looked at each other for quite a while fore . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you tied the knot.

BS: Tied the knot, yeah. [*SL laughs*] So yeah. But I remember my husband—he—when he was in school a little bit. Yeah.

[01:39:07] SL: What was he like in school?

BS: Oh, I say I remember him a little bit. I just remember folks talkin' about him. He was datin' another girl that I knew. Yeah. But—yeah. But he is very—he's—my husband is very interestin'. He can do so many things. So he's a—my husband is one of these peoples, when he want to, he can cook. He can just do all those kind of things. He is an excellent father. He helped me with the kids and—yeah. And when I first started datin' my husband, he ran a service station. It was outside of town, and he ran this service station for a long time. Yeah—so—and he helped us—I talk about eight kids—so he helped us to raise—we—my husband and I have three biological children.

SL: Yes.

BS: And we have—and then my nephew that I—we helped to raise that was in the house with us. So he taught the kids how to drive. And one thing about him—I alway remember he taught the boys how to drive a standard—a stick-shift truck.

SL: You bet.

BS: He taught me how to drive a stick shift, too.

SL: Well, if you can drive that, you can drive anything. [*BS laughs*]
Right?

[01:40:34] BS: Yeah. And then—and my mother-in-law—well, she really was not my mother-in-law; she was my husband grandmother. She raised my husband. And so she was a real nice person. She helped us to raise our—my oldest son—my oldest birth son, who was Charles Jr. He stayed with her most of the time when he was little, so he talks about his grandmother lots. And so that family was really close. She's one of those grandmothers that really take care of children. You did not have to worry about your grandkids if they was there with Alene when we got—so she took real good care of the children. My husband have a real close family also, with the ones that—together [*unclear word*]. So that's ?down?. He have a uncle that's real close to us, and he used to live in Little Rock. His name was Robert Shelby. And Uncle Robert—if—he is a real father figure also to me. So he lives in Little Rock, and he—no, wait a minute. He lived in Little Rock, then he moved to Texas and built a house. So Uncle Robert come backs periodic to spend the night with us, so we can maintain that family contact with our children and stuff. So—and he's a real family person also, so he played a large part in our life also. And Uncle Robert's a person

believe that you really work to earn dollars. He believe in money. Robert Shelby believe that you'd figure out a way [*laughter*] to earn money.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So I have all these different folks that impact my life. The listenin'—you know, sitting here talkin' to you, I think about how they impact my life, and then I try to take that information and give it to the next generation. But they have some real good sayins that—yeah.

[01:42:40] SL: Okay, so you graduate from Marvell High School. Now, when did Marvell desegregate?

BS: They—in 1967 was the first graduating class from the high school from the white school. Yeah, my baby sister was a part of that 1967 graduatin' class. So freedom of choice came around probably in nineteen—I graduated in May of 1966, and then the next year they gave peoples the choice that they could—this is my understanding—that they could either go to the high school or stay at the—go to the white school or stay at the black school. And not a lots of folks went to the white school, but some did. Yeah, 'cause my baby sister went there and several other children. Yeah.

SL: You know, were the kids—the students—okay with

desegregation?

BS: Some of 'em wanted to, and some of 'em parents wanted to. And it was hard durin' that time because peoples did not want 'em over there, so they had to band together and try to study so they could make it. And at that time, they built a private school, so peoples was not okay with the integration of the schools. Let's just be—you had white folks did not want it, and then you had black folks wanted to stay at they own school. So it was—and basic, the more we look at it—here we are, probably forty years later—[19]67—so we talkin' bout—yeah, some forty years—forty—forty-five, forty-seven, forty—bout forty-four or forty-five years later, how much progress have we really made in educatin' our children? And I don't think nobody know the answer to these things. Every—you do what you think best at that time.

SL: Yeah.

[01:44:48] BS: And the folks that was pushin' for it did what they thought what was best. The peoples that didn't want it based on their experience did what they thought was best. Hindsight is twenty-twenty—yeah, you know. So things just change. And basic, I felt that they needed to go to the white school. You know, a lotsa folks did not [*laughs*] feel that way because I felt

that they would get a better education because they had better books and all that.

SL: Better facilities.

BS: Better facilities and things.

SL: Yeah.

BS: But still, I think if you look back now, some of the young folks that graduated from M. M. Tate in 1967 is probably doin' as well as some of the black kids that graduated from Marvell High School. So it just . . .

SL: Well you know, you—it's interesting—you mentioned how they started a private school in . . .

BS: And Marvell does have a private school.

SL: Yeah, and that was specifically to keep the white folks that wanted to stay together to . . .

BS: Together.

SL: . . . to stay together . . .

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . wasn't it? I think they did the same thing in Helena. I'm not sure, but I think they did.

[01:46:06] BS: And basic, we are afraid of the unknown. Basic, peoples are. In my later years, like I told you, I don't mind being disturbed or uncomfortable. But sometime it's—you know,

it's just depend on your environment.

SL: Yeah.



BS: And I don't really like to—I don't like to judge people because I don't have all the pieces to their pie—to that pie.

SL: Right.

BS: And some folks do things because they wanna do it, and some folks do things so they can fit in and belong, so we just can't lump—I used to try to lump everybody into a same [*laughs*—I did. I used to say, "Well, they did this because they—they're—they don't"—but that may not be true. That person could be there and be very uncomfortable with the situation.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So yeah, we had to . . .

SL: And there were probably a multitude of different reasons . . .

BS: Reasons that . . .

SL: . . . for whatever . . .

BS: Whatever.

SL: . . . was goin' on at . . .

[01:47:03] BS: But I still feel that it—we needed to make that move in order to try to help educate our children. But I also think that in making that move, we needed to be sure that we had black teachers there on-site to help with the education of the black

children so that they wouldn't feel so isolated over there.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So yeah.

SL: Did that happen?

BS: I don't know. I'm not really—I was sorta young then, and I—durin' that time—'cause I was—they did that—I was just eighteen when—or nineteen . . .

SL: And you had already gone to Little Rock.

BS: I had went to—but I came back the next year. I didn't stayed in Little Rock very long.

SL: Oh, you didn't?

BS: Hm-mm. I went to Little Rock in [19]66, and I came back in November of [19]67, so I did not stay in Little Rock very long at all. Hm-mm.

SL: Well, was it the way the school was being run in Little Rock, or what brought you back?

BS: Oh no, I—it was just a business school. It was just a college.

SL: Oh, okay.

BS: Yeah, it wasn't a four-year college.

SL: I see. Okay.

BS: And I wanted to be back home with my mama. [*Laughter*]

Yeah.

[01:48:19] SL: Hmm. Okay, so you go to business school, and I think at lunch you mentioned shorthand?

BS: Oh, well, I learned a little shorthand in . . .

SL: High school.

BS: . . . high school. But when we went to business school, I learned shorthand and typing too, at that point. We learned a lot of stuff in Little Rock when there—in there. We—I learned to read the newspaper more than I used to. And so—yeah. Little Rock was not that great an experience for me. When I was over there, one night somebody tried to rape me, so I was not—I was comin' home from the bus stop. So Little Rock wasn't that great an experience. So after that, I was definitely ready to come home, yeah, being from a small town. Yeah.

SL: Wow.

[01:49:13] BS: And when I came back, that was probably the best thing that happened. When I came back, I went to work for Mid-Delta Community Services in Helena. They—it was a Community Action Agency, and I got a lot of experience there. They ran an emergency food program. And the thing about it during that time period, they—people—we had the center out there, and people who had to go to [laughs] Helena to the food-stamp office—and I never could understand why people in

Helena—but I—now I know they had they reason—would have a person that had no transportation to come to Helena day and then ask 'em to come back in another couple days. To me, it looked like they would just do all of it while they was down there so that they would not have to try to come back. But like I said, we don't never have all the pieces to the pie, but I have never figured that one out. It just looked like they would put forth a lotsa effort so these womens would not have to try to come back to Helena. So Mid-Delta did a lotsa work, and they had a site out here that helped with a lotsa things. They did emergency food and medical. They did clothing. So it was—do you remember the Community Action Agencies?

SL: I kinda do.

[01:50:42] BS: Yeah. That was that program that came under Johnson—the War on Poverty.

SL: Yes. Uh-huh. Sure.

BS: And they did those equal opportunities programs. And durin' that time, they would put a community center in neighborhoods like Elaine, Lexa, Marvell, and on like that. So—Mid-Delta—the director's still there after all these years. Her name is Margaret Staub, and she have three counties now. And the thing about Margaret Staub that helped to fit so well with me was that she

believed in education also. She always encouraged people to go back to college and do some things, and she's still doing that.

[*SL laughs*] Yeah.

SL: That's strong to stick with it that long.

BS: Yep, she's still there.

[01:51:35] SL: Well, so you get back from Little Rock, and you start working at the agency.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And was it secretarial stuff or . . .

BS: I started as a secretary in that building out on the highway where you—at the BGACDC Center. Mh-hmm. I started as a secretary. And they operated a Head Start program in that building, and then they operated what I call the emergency food and medical program, where you give people a voucher, and they could get food and medicine. It was a voucher program. Mh-hmm.

SL: So you get back from Little Rock, and you are—you dive headlong into Community Action stuff. I mean—you know, I mean, the agency was there to . . .

BS: There.

SL: So you got a big dose of the nuts and bolts of that program.

BS: Right, we did.

SL: How long were you there?

BS: I stayed there fourteen years.

SL: Wow.

BS: I went—I first worked with the food—the center. And then in nineteen—probably bout [19]74 or [19]75, I took over what they called the alcoholism component of Mid-Delta, and we had a halfway house in Helena for men, and we had a halfway house in Brinkley for womens. And you really tried to help peoples that had a problem. And one of the things that I learned—they had this program called AA and . . .

SL: Sure.

BS: . . . and you remember hearin' about that?

SL: Sure.

BS: So . . .

SL: Well, Alcoholics Anonymous.

BS: . . . nonymous.

SL: Yes. Uh-huh.

[01:53:27] BS: Yeah. So it was a secret program, but if you had—so we had clients to go to that program. But it's—I'm readin' that book called *So Help Me* [*unclear words*], and then they had this place up in Little Rock called the Serenity House, and I got a chance to visit that house. And it was another one called Gyst

House. And so I really learned a lots durin' that time, and I studied a lots. And we went around into the neighborhood, and we talked to peoples. And the thing about Mid-Delta—they gave you the opportunity to interact in your community. We had neighborhood councils that we organized so that peoples could have a say about what was goin' on in their life. It was—the program was somethin' else, basic.

SL: Well, fourteen years—that's a lot—that's a body of work.

BS: It was, durin' that time.

SL: Let's see, that was from—when did that start?

BS: From 1967 . . .

SL: Gosh.

BS: . . . and I left in January 1982. Mh-hmm. Yeah. Left in January 1982. And durin' the period [*clears throat*]*—*from the time I came here in 1967 to—and the housin' complex that I was talkin' about was built, like, in 1969, and that was volunteer—you know, we worked with Farmers Home Administration to build the Poplar Grove housin' complex. And I remember this gentleman tellin' me that the Poplar Grove housin' complex would not last three years because we, as black peoples, would tear it up. [*SL laughs*] [01:55:17] Well, that's been forty-one years ago, and it's still—the Poplar Grove housin' project is still there, and it still

look pretty good. But I got a lotsa experience by working with the Poplar Grove housin' project. And I had told you earlier about the lady at the time when I was talkin' about the Poplar Grove housin' project—she became mayor of Marvell. Well, I probably learned much from—more from that lady than I probably—anybody. She really taught me somethin' once she got to be mayor of Marvell. It's strange at a time in your life someone that seemed to be entirely against you, that shift five or ten or fifteen years later, when you really need her, that she is really there for you. And that's what happened with Alma Norton in my life—Mrs. Norton. I'd rather call her Mrs. Norton. In 1985, we wanted to do a summer feedin' program at BGACDC. But at that time, they was only lettin' the cities and some other group do it. We couldn't do it as a nonprofit. And Alma Norton was the person—when I went to tell her what we was tryin' to do, she decided that she would do that for us through the city. And I'm always grateful for her for that. I sometime think that Alma Norton lost the election for mayor after BGACDC got into tryin' to build the manor out there on Highway 49. We have a large housin' complex out there. And at the time we was tryin' to build that, it was some peoples against us buildin' the manor in the front of the center. And so at that



time, she had did what was necessary to make sure that we get the amount of bills. She had signed on whatever papers that needed to be signed to do that. And I always think about sometime when we are talking about people, we do not have all the pieces to the pies. We don't know what these peoples has done for us. So some peoples was angry at Alma Norton on our side because they did not feel she had helped us enough, and the peoples on the other side was angry because they thought that she had helped us too much.

SL: Too much.

[01:57:43] BS: So Mrs. Norton ended up—and this is my belief—losin' the election for mayor because of that. But she said to me when we—and she's a little older'n I was—we was talkin', and I was sayin'—she said, "Beatrice, I have signed the necessary papers. I've done all I can do." She said, "Just be still." You know, sometime peoples need to tell us, "Just be still." Sometime we just up over everything. Just be still. And I always think about that. Sometime when I get ready to get upset, I think about what she said. We need to know when to be still, and that is hard to do. But those are lessons that we gon' have to learn how to pass on to this eighteen to thirty-nine as they struggle to raise they children and do things. So life have—I've

had a lots of experience, and I've had a lots of peoples to help me. And if I had to do some things over, like most peoples, I would do some things over different.

SL: Sure.

BS: Yeah—so . . .

SL: So after fourteen years with Community Action . . .

BS: Mid-Delta [*unclear words*].

SL: . . . what happened next?

BS: Well, that's when Gertrude Jackson came to me in probably October or November of [19]81 and asked me to come to work at BGACDC. Well, I really thought she was—you know, was being funny. Basic, she said they didn't have any money. And I had already told her all the time. [*Laughter*] I asked Mrs. Jackson—I actually thought, "What is she talkin' [BS edit: about]"—but I really decided I was not gonna go work for 'em. So I went to talk to Margaret Staub, who was my executive director at the time, and she told me whatever decision I make, that she will support me—and she did. So I was just determined not to go 'cause . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . I liked what I was doin' with the alcoholism program. So in December I found myself sendin' Mrs. Staub a resignation, and I

went to work for BGACDC. And . . .

[01:59:50] SL: Well, what turned the tide there on that? What . . .

BS: I just think it was—I don't—the good Lord just intercede, I truly believe. I think that what's He meant for me to do, because I prayed over it—and nothin' particular—just—I just believed that was what the Lord intend for me to do on that one. So I went to work for BGACDC, and it was not easy, but we had a lotsa dedicated peoples at the table that was really workin' hard, as I look back. BGACDC was founded by a high school teacher named Gale Thrower and his wife, Gertrude Jackson—not his wife. His wife name was Delores Thrower—his wife, Delores Thrower, and Mrs. Gertrude Jackson. Well, when we—when I came to the center, I think that a gentleman named Floyd Morrow—I'm just about positive that Floyd Morrow was president of BGACDC at that time, and he was a large farmer—real hard worker—had a business head on him. And then we had Mr. Clausey Myton—had you ever heard talk of Clausey Myton?

SL: Hm-mm.

BS: Clausey Myton is now a quorum court member for our district—on the Phillips County Quorum Court.

SL: M'kay.

BS: And he was on that board, and we had Mrs. Jackson. Well, we

had board members there that was really committed to buyin' that buildin' because they felt that our children needed somewhere for recreation. And so we came there, and we started workin'. And we—they didn't have any money. But it was a guy in Forrest City named Clarence Wright.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Clarence—you remember Clarence Wright?

SL: No, I've heard that name.

BS: And he worked for a organization called Save the Children.

SL: Okay.

BS: And Clarence Wright told Mrs. Gertrude Jackson—and Gertrude Jackson is the founder, and she worked—that if they get x number of children, that Save the Children would give them some funds to—for each child, you get so many dollars. So it's a sponsorship-like program.

SL: Yeah.

[02:02:08] BS: So Mrs. Jackson got out there and went to work. A lady named Ellen Ford, Sophie Bennett—so we had a lots of folks just pushin' and helpin' us to work. And so we got enough children where that we would get some money from Save the Children. When we first start to payin' the note on that building that we purchased—it was, like, \$277.78, I think it was [SL

laughs]—but we got that money through our sponsorship program to make that note. And folks actually help. People—we did memberships. We used to go work at the fair and have a booth at the fair, and peoples would meet and do that—do fish fries, so we did all those things. And we still do some of those things in order to try to raise money to help with BGACDC. And so the first—we had a group—we had some young folks who said what the—let me see—this young lady had said to me one day that her children could not go to school—that the school would not let her children come to school. And I wanted to know why, so I went to the school to talk to 'em to find out why her children could not go to school. Well, they had not had they shots, and you had to have shots in—you know, in order to go to school. So we talked to the lady at the health department, and we figured out a way to get the children—but Mrs. Shirley Hicks from the health department came out later on—asked did we have any space that we could renovate some of the building to put a health department there. And Gregory Davis and I and a few more peoples—we talked to the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, and they renovated a portion of that building where that we could have . . .

SL: Have a clinic.

BS: . . . the health department. Mh-hmm.

[02:04:02] SL: And so you got the children immunized.

BS: Yeah.

SL: You know, immunized.

BS: Right.

SL: And they got in.

BS: Right. And I can't remember who that family was, but I always remember I was thinkin' that they was doin' somethin' to the family. And to let her tell it, if you was listenin' at 'em, the school was doin' somethin', but it was a state law that required that or whatever. So back to we sometime don't have all the pieces to the pie. So she got—they got in. Yeah.

BP: One minute.

SL: The deal was they couldn't afford to be immunized. Is that . . .

BS: Well, all you had to do was get the children to Helena, and you could get the shots and stuff free.

SL: Right.

BS: So that was the issue. But they didn't have the transportation to get to Helena.

SL: Oh, I see.

BS: But they got there. We—they got there. And sometime it's just simple as—at that time was gettin' a child to Helena to get 'em

to the health department. But then Mrs. Hicks worked with us, and we had the health department inside the center now, where we could get our—they could get they shots. Mh-hmm. Yeah.

SL: Good move. Okay, we've gotta change tapes.

BS: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:05:12] SL: All right. Now, really quick—we've mentioned BGACDC a couple times. We—and the people watching this video don't even know what we're talkin' about. So we . . .

BS: Oh!

SL: . . . we have to spell it out. I mean, we have to tell 'em what it is we're talkin' about.

BS: Okay. We're talkin' about Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center. It's a thirty-two-year-old parenting organization, and the mission is to provide social, recreation, education, health, housing, and economic development opportunities to low- to moderate-income residents of the Marvell School District. That's it.

SL: All right. Now, is this the only one of those facilities in the Delta or . . .

BS: It's the onliest one of those facilities in the Delta. Mh-hmm.

[02:06:08] SL: And, now, did this come out of the Community

Action Assoc . . .

BS: No, it was founded by three peoples: Gertrude Jackson, Gale Thrower, and Delores Thrower, in January of 1978. So the—a group of committed parents came together, and they formed BGACDC.

SL: And how did you end up there?

 BS: Well, I was on the original board of directors for BGACDC, so they was established in 1978, and I worked on the board and real hard until December of 1978, and I got married. And after that, I just sort of phased in and out—maybe payin' a few dues or doin' somethin'. But in round October 1981, Gertrude Jackson contacted me and asked me could I come and take the helm of BGACDC. And so that's how I got back into BGACDC. In 1982 of January, I talked to my husband and decided to go. And my thing with BGACDC for the—I was gon' stay there for the first three years if I had to drink water and eat bread because the statement was made that black peoples could not stay together for any time, so I really was determined to stay [*laughs*] at BGACDC for three years. You know, it's strange to think about it. Sometime people say somethin' to me, and I just pray and try to make sure. Another thing was said—I had been with BGACDC probably about three or four years—I think it was, like,

in [19]85. I was somewhere talkin' to someone, and we was talkin' about this organization gonna last a long time. And the person said to me, "I ain't never knowed a black group to stay together twenty-five years." I don't remember who said that, but I went back to BGACDC, and I told 'em—I said, "Now, I just got to pray." And I believe in prayin' on everything. But I just prayed and asked God to let us see our twenty-fifth birthday. [SL laughs] So some things, to me, you just have to pray and ask God [*unclear words*] because to me, to be there for twenty-five years would give our children and grandchildren some hope that we could work together for twenty-five years. And I'm one of these peoples believes there's power in the tongue, so sometime I think peoples do not need to say things because when children hear us say things sometime, they begin to believe it.

SL: Yeah.

[02:08:51] BS: So I think we need to say positive things around our children. Yeah.

SL: Hmm. Well you know, in some ways I feel like we've kinda jumped—we've kind of leapfrogged a little bit . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . to get to where you are. I mean, you're still there.

BS: [*Laughter*] Yes, I am.

SL: And so, you know, we're talk—and we kinda—I just want us to be able to go back and forth if we need to, so . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . if you think of something that we have neglected—and I have this feeling that we have neglected stuff in your early life and in your high school years and all that. So I just want us . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: You got somethin'? Do you . . .

BS: No, I'm . . .

SL: Okay.

BS: No. [*Laughs*]

[02:09:46] SL: Okay. Well, maybe it'll come up because, you know, I can't help but think that the—it was more than your—I just have this feeling that it was more than your hard work on the board—on the BGACDC board—that earned you this—or brought this offer to you. I just have a feeling that it was your . . .

BS: Oh, it wasn't my hard work; it was the hard work of other peoples that supported me that bought me here to this. In 1985, it was a gentleman that worked for—and this is one of the things—it was a gentleman that worked for ACTION named Bob Torvestad.

SL: Okay.

BS: It called—so it was called a VISTA project.

SL: Yeah. Okay.

BS: [*Laughs*] So I kept writin' this proposal to Bob Torvestad and Freeman McKindra because I wanted to hire six young ladies to work at the center, and they kept rejectin' it. So Bob Torvestad said one day—he decided, "I'm just gonna give her these six workers and this project," and he did. And that project helped to turn BGACDC around because at that point—at first we had Rosie Woods, who came from a JPTA program but had a college degree. She came to work with me on the JPTA program. Are you familiar with that? It was a trainin' program by the federal government that they would let you have some workers for three months. You know what I'm—Job Partnership Training . . .

SL: Hm-mm. Go ahead.

[02:11:27] BS: Well, it was JPTA. So she came to work for BGACDC, and then we got another worker through that program. Her name was Anna Huff [BS edit: Davis]. And after that, we got Natalie Carr, who came to work for us. So that was three young ladies. And we decided that we really wanted to build this organization and provide for our children. But we needed some peoples to help us provide that service. So that's what the

VISTA program was going to do: help us to organize the community. They wasn't doin' direct service, but they was organizin' the community to do somethin'. So Bob Torvestad from ACTION gave us six [BS edit: five] young ladies. That's what turned us around. Right now, Anna Huff—she runs Mid-Delta Community Consortium, and I think her program probably has seventeen counties that she serve. The other young lady, Natalie Carr, still works with Anna. The other young lady, Rosie Woods—she's a city clerk, and she serves on the school board as secretary of the school board. Some of the other young ladies has gone on to do things that came through BGACDC, like Denetra Williams went on to—got her master's degree. So things just really—those the kind of things that happened to make BGACDC what it is. When we got ready to buy eighteen houses in nineteen—let's see, I think it was about [19]88 [BS edit: 1998]—we got this money from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. [02:13:11] Dr. Thomas Bruce came in there to support us. And in—I think it was [19]92—around 1992 or [19]93 [*laughs*], Dr. Thomas Bruce came to visit us at the center. And he asked us what did we want, and I told Dr. Bruce that what we wanted—because I was thinkin' everything they did was helped—that, you know, Kellogg could not fund it. He told

me to just tell 'em what he—what we wanted. So we told 'em what we wanted. Dr. Bruce gave us enough money for Anna Huff to write up this program, and it was called the holistic approach to providing human service, and we had DAD—it was a program for boys and a program for teenage girls that was pregnant. So those the things that change. It's not so much that I have done—it's so—that the peoples that came in to help us realize our dream. And the fact that I think that we worked with the young folks between 1982 and probably 1986, [19]87—we really got in there to try to help them find a way. And those peoples now in they—bout from forty to fifty-four. They are really leaders in they own right, so that has made the difference. So . . .

[02:14:34] SL: Well now, you mentioned the eighteen homes.

Wasn't there a smaller real estate thing that y'all did before that? Was there not a—seems like there was a program that . . .

BS: Did three houses outta . . .

SL: Yeah, three houses. And wasn't it . . .

BS: Let's see, which ones did first . . .

SL: . . . you were going to renovate or fix up the houses so they were livable, and you used unskilled labor. But by the time they got through with the project, it was . . .

BS: Oh yeah, that was the buildin' trade project. Now, the buildin' trade project was a part of those eighteen houses . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

BS: . . . that W. K. Kellogg funded.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah. That was the buildin' trade program. We brought in young folks and taught 'em—the college worked with us and other groups. So that was called the buildin' trade program. That was one of our best programs, so we renovated some houses out of there. But those houses was a part of the original eighteen houses that we purchased from—in the community. And right now we still have twenty houses in the community. We done tore some of those down. But we purchased nine more houses since that time with help from LISC. You know what LISC is? Local Support Initiative. We purchased nine houses. And then Delta Bridge—you familiar with Delta Bridge?

SL: I've heard of that.

BS: That's . . .

SL: Well, I've read about it, but . . .

BS: That's with the Walton . . .

[02:15:55] SL: . . . you should go ahead and tell [*BS laughs*]*—we have to pretend like I know nothing. [Laughter]* So that—so the

people that are watching this that don't know these things . . .

BS: Oh.

SL: . . . will know them.

BS: Well, the Delta Bridge Project helped us to do three houses and a duplex, which is five units of housin'. So we have those, and so—but—so that's fifteen. And then we did some houses with the HOME Project. HOME Project is a federal program operated out of Arkansas Financial Authority. So in nineteen—probably [19]93 or [19]94—I believe it's about that time—we built two, three houses, and we sold those houses. Now we operate a home ownership rehab program, and that program—we should have all those houses completed in the next thirty days. But we have eight homeowners, and seven of the houses we rehabbed, and one of 'em we built from scratch, and so it's a brand-new construction.

[02:17:05] SL: Now, it's my understanding that—is this the home ownership program, and it was designed for low-income, first-home buyers, maybe, or . . .

BS: Well, this program—I don't think you have to be a first-time homebuyer.

SL: Okay.

BS: I'm not—and I just got HOME certified, so I should know the

answer to that. [*Laughter*] But I don't think you have to be a first-time homebuyer.

SL: Okay.

BS: But it's a homeowner rehab program. It is a very good program. You get—you—if you buildin' a house from new—it's a new construction—you get forgivable loan for half of it, and then the other half you pay 1 percent interest. So it is really good. So if you had a house for forty—built a \$90,000 brand-new house, you only have to pay 45,000 for it, and they will forgive the loan over a period of time—so forth.

SL: Now, there—someone wrote something about you actually going to—taking the loan applicant to the bank and meeting with the loan officer with the applicant—first-time applicants.

BS: Oh, we do that if we have somebody—yes, we do that.

SL: Because the—they're intimidated, or they're [*BS laughs*] nervous, or they don't know what—they don't know how to go about . . .

[02:18:32] BS: Well, we—sometime we talk to a person—you feel more comfortable havin' somebody there with you that understand it. And we used to do that—make sure that if we was goin' to the bank, or we was goin' to Farmers Home or to the title company to close, we made sure we was there with 'em.



Now see, that's one of the things that I've always said. When you find a person in the community that is uncomfortable goin' to the school to see about their child, you need to be ready to go with that person. Sometime we just need to know that somebody's there that care, and so we have to take that time. And what I find out is sometime we wanna deal with peoples where we think they are. We don't need to do that. We really need to deal with peoples where they are. If they tell us that they need help or they don't understand—so we don't need to keep tellin' 'em, "Baby, you can do this by yourself." Let's take peoples at they word sometime and just help. Yeah.

[02:19:34] SL: I—you know, just hearing that and reading about all of your-all's activities, it seems to me this one-on-one attention—this listening to who's in front of you and responding to them instead of responding—giving a pat response that you try to blanket and pigeonhole everyone into—it seems like this one-on-one stuff is the way that you guys have been able to succeed and make a difference in the community. Am I wrong on that, or is . . .

BS: I think that's . . .

SL: . . . it unusual . . .

BS: . . . I think that's the only way we can succeed. It's that

one-on-one and havin' a conversation and actually hearin' what somebody's sayin'. I have really worked hard in the last year to try not to start talkin' to folks when they are talkin'—wait till they finish and listen. I'm really workin' on that, because sometime we miss somethin' because we are in such a hurry to say somethin' that we miss somethin' someone else wanna say. So I'm tryin' to work on that. And I'm one of these peoples that have listened all my life. If folks was said that they are prayin' and they don't go do somethin' for somebody—stuff like that. I'm a prayin' person. But the older I get, I know that we need to make sure that when we go tell somebody somethin', that it's not somethin' we wanna tell 'em and lay it on, that the Spirit or somethin' have told us to tell folks. So I'm gettin' very careful about what I say to peoples. Make sure that if I said the Spirit told me to go tell you [*laughs*] somethin', that the Spirit has told me and not because Beatrice Shelby feel that you're not livin' the way I want you to live, and I need to go tell you to straighten up your life and all that. So I began to listen more the older I get. Just listen. To me, we are havin' too many of our children that are angry, and we as they parents and aunties needs to find out, "Why are they so angry?" you know. Regardless if we don't understand. Just ask and listen. And if

we don't agree with it, we don't agree with it. But at least give them the right to tell us why they so angry because we not raised like them. We not inside of them. And I'm not makin' excuses for children to just act up, but you need to be able to try to hear your children. And that's where we are right—that's where I am right now. Yeah.

[02:22:05] SL: Hmm. [*Sighs*] Let's talk a little bit about the community here. The—you know, I guess the Delta. You know, back in the early 2000s, maybe the rest of the country, you know, was booming. Populations were increasing. Jobs were increasing. But here in this part of the country, you guys were losing population. You were losing jobs. The income level was going backwards instead of increasing.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: What was going on with that? How did that—I mean, what was the—what do you think the core causes were for that?

BS: That we was losin' jobs?

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: In—and we're talkin' about in Phillips County, right?

SL: Uh-huh. Mh-hmm.

BS: [*Laughs*] You know, I really don't know, 'cause you hear everybody come up with the reason we are not doin' well in

Phillips County. They say we can't get along. We can't agree on anything. You know, I really don't know why in Phillips County because I can't believe that we get along as bad as—I believe there's other folks that get along as bad as folks get along in Phillips County, so I don't have any idea, you know, to why. I know that—I just don't know the answer to that, and I don't—I'm one of these peoples don't mind sayin', "I don't know [*laughs*] the answer to that one." I just don't, because I know that we really try to work with our children. And even though they talk about how bad the education system is down here in Phillips County, I know from experience that the Marvell school system have tried to educate their children. So—and I have no idea, and I guess that's why that I know that, for me—myself, personally, and for BGACDC, we are going to continue to try to do things that we think gon' have a positive impact on that. But I really . . .

[02:24:32] SL: But I mean, don't you see success in the projects that you guys are involved in? I mean, doesn't—isn't it making a difference?

BS: Oh, definitely do, but when the statistics and stuff come out, they always come out showin' how bad Phillips County is. That's what I'm sayin'.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So I don't know why that is. And when they talk about children not educated or they can't read or all that, I don't know what it is. Now, I have—personally have—four children, okay? They all finished the Marvell public school system. My oldest child now is in St. Louis. My daughter, who went to Fayetteville to school lives in Little Rock, and she does well. She can read, and she can write. My son that's in Fayetteville now—excellent reader and writer. My daughter, the one you met today, LaPearl . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: She just spent—finished Conway—up there in Conway at UCL . . .

SL: UCA.

[02:25:44] BS: UCA. She's—she does well. And most of the time, when children come back home, they seem like they are doin' pretty good. But if you let folks tell it, our school system is in such bad shape our children cannot read or write. So I don't know what it is. So I just . . .

SL: You know, I was thinking when we were comin' back from lunch and having met your daughter and you were talkin' about how she had gone to UCA and had chosen to stay in Conway for a while. But this job . . .

BS: Yeah, I'm surprised . . .

SL: . . . became available here, and you were surprised.

BS: I was really surprised [*laughs*] of her comin' back home.

SL: Well, I know, but you know, that's the kind of stuff that needs to happen, isn't it? I mean, some of these folks that have learned that they can get the skills . . .

BS: Skill.

SL: . . . where they're raised.

BS: Right.

SL: And if they can—if the opportunities are here in this area . . .

BS: This area.

SL: . . . it's—you know . . .

BS: They need some . . .

[02:26:48] SL: . . . course, I'm a guy that never—essentially never left where he was raised. But it seems to me that that would—that this kind of stuff is what strengthens a community—that it remains attractive to come home or . . .

BS: To come back.

SL: . . . attractive to give back or . . .

BS: Well, I agree there, but I just never expected for any of my children [*laughter*] to come back to Marvell. So yeah—and we have several young peoples that have come back. Denetra

Williams is someone that I think of. She worked with us before she got her degree, then she got her master's degree, and now she works for the Marvell public school system. LaChandra Johnson, who also came back—and she works for the school system. So we have folks that have been associated with BGACDC is doin' well, and some of 'em's in the school system and other place. And that's the one thing that I can always point to is the leadership development of folks that came to BGACDC and continue to go to school. So we have a lots of those right now that—but where is the job—where are the jobs that's gonna keep 'em here? Someone have to become creative and do some things that are going to keep 'em here. So . . .

[02:28:10] SL: Yeah. I'm just wondering what—I mean, at one point, Helena was just, you know, rockin' and rollin'—just vibrant.

BS: Years ago. Now, that's . . .

SL: Years ago.

BS: . . . been a while. Yeah.

SL: I know, but it—you know, it would seem like—it's just unusual that it's struggling so hard now after—you know, the river's still there. The . . .

BS: Well you know, peoples have always said they never could

understand why Helena couldn't take the river and use it to its advantage. But I have no idea. Yeah.

SL: Well, okay. So we got you over to the BGACDC.

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: And we've kinda did a really quick litany of programs and what they . . .

BS: Do.

SL: . . . have done or are doing. What do you wanna talk about as far as the programs? You know, it looks like to me—it sounds like to me that you were able to gather many entities—many program—and kind of center them around your-all's organization, somehow or another. I . . .

[02:29:34] BS: Well, it—we had a board of directors years ago that—the first time, when I came to BGACDC, Clarence Wright then had a gentleman named Earl Anthes, a independent consultant—I don't know what was the name of Earl Anthes organization at that time. But Earl Anthes live in Forrest City, and he was the person that was going to evaluate me to see how—you know, did he feel like I could do the job, and he did. But Clarence Wright helped to pay for a ten-year plan for us, and that was around March of 1983. Well, since that time, every year we will go in and look at a plan, even now. So we had a

board of directors durin' that time that stayed focused. Our board now is focused on they plan. So each time we got ready to do somethin', we would go to the community and ask them what they wanted. And I'll never forget—it was around 1983 that I—we went to the community to ask them what they wanted. Now, I wanted a community center, and we have not built a community [*laughs*] center yet. But the community said they wanted housin', so that's how we got started on housin' in 1984. So here came—so then around 1984 or [19]85, we went back to the community again. So they wanted some economic development, so that's how the restaurant came in being. So we have really concentrated on askin' the community what they see as a major problem what they need help. [02:31:15] Well, around 2002, when I started to talkin' to folks, they kept talkin' about, "Our children is comin' back home at a certain age," and I guess that's at the time the children started comin' back home after goin' away in Marvell. Well, that same year, my son went to a school called DeVry. Yeah. Mh-hmm. And they came back home around that time. So then we decided, "We need to really look at how we can help the young folks that's outta school"—some of 'em would go to school, but they would not stay. So we had to look at that. So ever since 2002, we been lookin' at,

"How do we make sure that we are lookin' at the entire human being?" And a part of that is how they relate to they younger sisters and brothers and support them. I believe that's a major part of that, and I think [*clears throat*]*—*as I talk*—*we did the housin' piece, so we have the manor and twenty units of housin'. We went into youth and family services, so we operate what we call a summer day camp program, and the summer day camp program was a six- to eight-week program*—*so it's six*—*no, it was a five- to six-week program*—*and we deal with readin', and that's come from the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School Program. Have you ever heard talk of Freedom School?

SL: Hm-mm.

[02:32:45] BS: Freedom School [*clears throat*] is sort of based on the civil rights movement*—*Ella Baker and them durin' that time. But they believed that children need to learn to read and*—*to read. So we have what we call "stop everything and read" on Freedom School. Every mornin' at eight thirty, we stop everything we doin' in summer day camp and read. Then we also do another part that's called physical education and SPARK. So at a certain time of the day, they have to take exercise and do around. Then another part of the day, we teach them about nutrition and how to be healthy. So the summer day camp

program has three parts to it. Also, we have a parenting program, and we've been workin' on this, and we haven't got this where we want it. This is the eighteen to thirty-nine piece.



Well, the eighteen to thirty-nine piece deal with parental involvement. We actually believe that we just gon' have to talk to each other—not fuss at 'em, but we gonna have to engage parents so they can understand that it is important for your child to have a education. And so that's the first thing we got to get in people, that this is important, this is serious business. My mother believed that a education was the only way that we could get our children out of poverty. We gon' have to go back and thinkin', education is tied to poverty, at a certain extent.

SL: Sure.

[02:34:04] BS: A large extent. Yeah, so we doin' that. And then the other piece is the civic-engagement piece. The eighteen and thirty-nine group can no longer stay at home. Somebody gon' have to understand how policy impact the rest of your life. So we learned that in civic when I was in school. We gon' have to reteach those lessons or pass 'em on down to our children. That's a responsibility we have. Now, personally, I feel that I did my part to pass down to my children. But everybody have to become your children if you're in a small community, so we gon'

have to continue to tell them that whatever impact the government or anybody make, it's eventually gon' reach you. You may—you know how peoples said, "Do whatever you wanna do; it's not gon' bother me." Eventually, it gon' bother you. [*SL laughs*] I began to think about how water used to not really have that much of a impact on us until I moved to the Poplar Grove housin' project in 1969. Ever since then, I think about water—how important it is. [*SL laughs*] Peoples make—I was pumpin' a pump when I was three miles down the road. But now, don't pay your water bill, you don't get water. And if you don't have your water bill and sewer, that's a health problem. We don't even think about those things sometime, so we gon' have to engage our children. And that's what the eighteen to thirty-nine project about—put 'em in the thinkin' process. We got to learn our children how to *T-H-I-N-K*—to think. We just gon' have to learn. And they gon' have to know what impact you and how it impact you. Now, everybody ain't gon' learn that, but if we could get ten folks in the Marvell school district—the age of eighteen to thirty-nine—and they concentrate on that, and then they have conversation with other folks . . .

SL: Yeah.

[02:36:02] BS: . . . it would make a—it'd make a difference. We

goin' to educate our children 'cause we gon' keep tryin'. Yeah, we gon' keep tryin'. And we have a superintendent. The superintendent that I was tellin' you about, Ulicious Reed . . .

SL: Yes.

BS: . . . that started with me when I was over here at this buildin' . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . in the eighth grade—he really left a impression on me that how important education was. My mother had already left that impression on me. He enforced it—Miss Turner and folks around me. So it was someone always enforcin' how important education is. Well, Mr. Reed is gone, and we have a new superintendent. She believe in education too. So I think we gon' make it in the Marvell area, so we just have to keep tryin'. Yeah. So—now, what was I talkin' about? I got [*SL laughs*]*—*what was I talkin' about?

SL: [*Papers shuffle*] Joy's left me a note here. She wants your children's names.

BS: Oh, okay, I do—let me tell you about the restaurant and the . . .

SL: Okay.

BS: . . . economic development piece.

SL: Okay.

[02:37:11] BS: In 1986—I talked about how Alma Norton helped me durin' that time—in 1986 we developed a summer day camp program, and we developed the restaurant. Okay. And the restaurant hired three or four people durin'—we're open from eleven to one. But the restaurant also serve as a gatherin' place for us, and then it allow us to—when peoples have ?repasses? or some other—birthdays—that we can bring those peoples in, and we charge a little rent for the buildin'. But we get a chance to talk to people and have conversation, so that's another way of puttin' information out there, tellin' peoples about they need their mammogram, tellin' peoples they need to check their cholesterol. We had this year what we call Obesity Prevention Week at the center. So we get the opportunity to do all of those things and talk to each other. Peoples come to the center that may not go anywhere else, so when they are there, we take advantage of tellin' them about these things. So that's what we do. My children. [*SL laughs*] Okay. Well, let me talk about all eight of my children a little bit.

SL: Okay.

BS: In 1966 of January, DeWayne Boyd was born to my oldest [BS edit: older] sister, Minnie, and that was goin' to be the first baby that I had the opportunity to really feel like he was mines.

So I have always—when DeWayne was little, he was mean.

[*Laughter*] And so I had this older lady—she was there—'cause one day he got real mad, and he did somethin', and she wanted me to whip him. And I was uptown, and here's a scale—it used to be up there—if you put some money in it, it'd tell you your fortune and tell your weight.

SL: Yeah.

[02:39:09] BS: Well, whatever it was, it made him mad, and he did not understand, so she told me he was gon' whup her [BS edit: he was going to whip me one day]. She been dead about thirty years, and he [*laughs*—she never did see him whup her. But [SL *laughs*] DeWayne is a—he is a caring person, so—he's the oldest child that I considered like my own. And when I had my last child in 1985, he had just dropped out of college, and he always said he was goin' back—go back. Well, he stayed there and helped with the baby, and then when the baby was two years old, I believe, he went back to college—he finished college. He finished college in Pine Bluff, and now he lives in Greenwood, Mississippi. He—DeWayne has a degree from Pine Bluff, and I don't know what the degree is in—him and his wife both. He married a young lady from here. Her name is Michelle Williams Boyd now. They have two children, Chantell and Dee Dee. And

I don't know what Dee Dee name is. We just call her [BS edit: them] Chantell and Dee Dee. [*SL laughs*] And Chantell and Dee Dee has—each one have a child, so he has two children and two grandchildren. So that's DeWayne. That's the oldest of 'em. And the next child is Lisa. Lisa live in Helena with her mother, and Lisa works for a organization called—I think it's Arkansas Counseling Service. And she has two children, and they are doin' fine. She has a daughter that I am just so pleased with her. She really study hard, and she's workin' on the ACT test, so I consider those like grandchildren to me. [02:40:54] And the next child in that bunch was Drako, which is the nephew that I raised at my house. His mother is my sister Nancy. And Nancy try to take care of everybody. So Drako work for Chrysler in Kokomo, Indiana. I think that's where he is. He moved from St. Louis because they closed the Chrysler plant down there. So—and then my next child is Earnest. And Earnest and his wife lives in Fayetteville, and they have three daughters and a son. And the next child after Earnest would be Holly. Holly is my oldest child, and she is married to Reverend Larry Johnson. She is an attorney for the—she works for the state. I don't know what—yeah, she works for the state. And they have one daughter, Karington, and there's nothin' like a grandchild.

[Laughs]

SL: All right, now wait a minute. Are they in Little Rock?

BS: They in Little Rock.

SL: And you are—your mission now is to spoil that grandchild?

BS: To spoil my grandchildren. And then after Holly is Derrick, and Derrick is with his mother in Helena. And let's see, after Derrick is my birth child, little Charles—Charles Jr. Charles Jr. is in Fayetteville, and he has a son that is six months old, and his name is Kingston, and he's a doll. [Laughter] Yes. And then the last is Miss Pearl, and Pearl finished in Conway. She has a degree, I think, in social work. Now, it's terrible that I don't remember what my children's degree's in. Not like . . .

SL: That's all right. You've got a lot of kids [laughter] that you're talkin' about.

[02:42:53] BS: And so that's it. Those the eight that I claim.

SL: Now, LaPearl is the child that's moved back and is gonna be teaching here. Is that right?

BS: No, she's a social worker.

SL: Oh, social worker.

BS: The Marvell Public School has this thing that they gon' contact families and everything, so yeah, that's why she came backs.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah. She live next door to me. She doesn't live in the house with me. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well you know, that's a literal version of the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. [*Laughter*]

BS: Yeah, I was really surprised when someone had said that they had contacted Pearl because they thought she could do this job. And then when they told me she actually applied for it, I said, "Oh my goodness!" [*SL laughs*] So Pearl is back home. So did I get eight children?

SL: I think that—I think so. [*Papers shuffle*]

BS: Yes.

SL: I think that's right.

JE: Yes.

[02:43:47] SL: Son, daughter, son, LaPearl, and then the four that—now—so how did that work? You just kind of adopted four other children? I . . .

BS: No, there's three sisters in between us. We—I have three birth children. Nancy has one birth child, and Minnie has four birth children.

SL: Oh okay.

BS: So that give us eight.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah, and they was the ones that was raised in Phillips County. Everybody else left Phillips County, so they was raised in Phillips County. So they just like my children, so if anything go wrong with any of those, it's just like something gone wrong . . .

SL: You're on the case. [*Laughs*]

BS: They are mines. [*Laughter*] And Pearl is the youngest, and she is twenty-six, and DeWayne is the oldest, and he is forty-four. Yes. Yeah.

SL: Well, that's just an extension of what you were saying—the way that you were brought up—that everybody . . .

BS: Right.

SL: . . . had a hand . . .

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . in bringin' the children up.

BS: Yes.

SL: Aunts, uncles . . .

BS: Yeah, we was—yeah.

SL: . . . brothers, sisters.

BS: And then my other nieces and nephews—the ones in Memphis—we're real close to them. Yeah. So my mother had twenty-three grandchildren when she died. Yeah.

[02:45:05] SL: That's a lot of kids to spoil. [*Laughter*] Well okay,

so we got back to—into some family stuff. I'm tryin' to think what we should talk about next. The—it sounds like to me that your organization is really—is gonna be okay. It's . . .

BS: I think we are. The thing that's—another thing that hold us together—we have had this what we call the Rural Senior Employment Program since 1982. That—those peoples in that program have to be over fifty-five years of age. And I used to have this gentleman—his name was Allie B. Taylor—and he was just a lifesaver for me. So one day we was—Allie B. was our first Rural Senior employee. So one day a lady said to me, "Mrs. Shelby, Mr. Taylor gossip as much as a woman." Gossip, you know. But the thing about Allie B. Taylor—he always told me what people said about me, but then he would always tell me how to react to what they said about me. [*SL laughs*] So I always think about that. Rural Senior employees have always been there to help me, you know. And they would just come to me, even though I was they boss, and tell me, "I would not do this if I was you." So havin' that wisdom there—and I—and yeah, it just make a difference of havin' the Rural Senior employees there. They have been there for me. So that program has served as a backbone for me.

[02:46:48] SL: So are they volunteers?

BS: No, they get paid . . .

SL: In . . .

BS: . . . through a program called Black Caucus. Mh-hmm. Yeah. It used to be called Black Caucus. I don't know what it called since the gov—called now since the government went through all these changes.

SL: Right.

BS: I—but his—it's a Rural Senior Employment Program. It's under the Title V, I believe, that money comes under. But they pay 'em at least minimum wages, and they work, like, four hours a day.

SL: So how did you guys tie into that program? Do you—these are grants that you write up and ask for and . . .

BS: Well, we heard about this program, and we went—asked the peoples in 1982, "Could we have some workers?" And they gave us one worker, and then the next year, we'd get a worker. So we ended up one time and havin', like, six or seven workers. And right now we got a Rural Senior person on the front desk, and then we have one that work in the kitchen. And so, yeah, we have two right now.

SL: So are—these are congressional programs, or they're government programs.

BS: They—that was—that's a government program. And the VISTA program is a government program. But you really have to keep up with what you're doin', and they don't—these particular programs don't give you anybody to supervise. You have to volunteer and supervise.

[02:48:09] SL: And all this current wrangling going on in Washington, DC—is that threatening . . .

BS: It has definitely had a negative impact on our program. We did—last year, we—now, for the program endin' June the thirtieth of 2012, we did not get very much money for our USDA program, and we usually get money for that. And we didn't get very much money for our FDA program. But let me be honest—I am so thankful for the fact that they gave it to us in [*laughs*] the past and helped to give us a foundation, and our children really benefited for the—from those programs. And we hopin' that maybe next year or year after next, we'll get some money back. So I'm not that angry at not havin' the money, but I just believe that we keep workin', there's goin' to be a way that we can maintain our programs. We have not lost a program yet. We just had to downsize and bring in folks to volunteer. We just tryin' to make sure . . .

SL: Adjust.

BS: . . . we stay there.

SL: You just have to . . .

[02:49:16] BS: 'Cause we lost about \$165,000 this year from federal programming.

SL: Man, that's gotta hurt.

BS: It hurt real bad. [*Laughs*] Yeah, probably—yeah, pretty close to that much, I believe. I know we lost a hundred, so let's say about a hundred thousand. Yeah, it hurt real bad. [*Laughs*] Yeah, it does. Yeah.

SL: Well you know, what's sad about that is that it's—it affects people.

BS: Mh-hmm. It does.

SL: It's a—it's an area that—man, if you lose—if you keep losing that kind of support, you know, it really—that really, really hurts.

BS: Yeah, but—and that's true.

SL: It's a personal thing.

BS: I agree with that. It does. But I think about if we hadn't had it the year before, then that person wouldn't've got that service. And each year we can hold on, then maybe we can think of a way to—yeah, it's hurtin'. It's really hurtin' to lose that kind of money. Yeah, we are really—and I—you know, whether we make up for that kind of money, we gon' keep writin' small

grants—keep tryin' to do stuff, but that's a lots of small grants to make up for.

SL: So do all the grant writing and applications—is that all in-house?

[02:50:35] BS: We have a part-time grant writer, Bruce Locket, that's—help write grants. And Reverend Turner help write grants, so we do most of it in-house with part-time grant writers. But the thing that BGACDC have that most peoples probably do not have—we have a lots of relationships that over the years has came in and helped us and supported us. We do receive some help from the Frueauff Foundation. Are you familiar with that foundation?

SL: I'm—yes, I know about that.

BS: Yeah. And like I told you, Delta Bridge came in and helped us—did some houses. USDA—the project out there on Highway 49—we—you know, so we have a lots of folks of helpin' us a little bit. But the A-Team—it's a group of four mens that work with us. There's one called Glenn Nishimura. He's a consultant. He used to work for Local Support Initiative—LISC.

SL: Okay.

BS: And it was called Rural LISC. He used to be over that program out of Greenville, Mississippi.

SL: Okay.

BS: And then Michael Jackson, who years ago—when he was real young—worked for Senator Dale Bumpers, works with us on that team. And Earl Anthes in Forrest City, and then Freeman McKindra, which is with McKindra Institute—he works with us on that team. So they volunteer and help us. If we get money, we'll pay 'em, but they gon' help us anyway. And then we have Carla Sparks, who work with the College of Public Health. So the College of Public Health—we are a community partner of the College of Public Health. And we still got other folks that we can go to for help. Now, they don't have no money right now. Most peoples don't have any money right now. So we just pushin' a lots of volunteer things around.

[02:52:28] SL: Now, didn't you get some help from the Walton Foundation too—Walton Family . . .

BS: The Delta Bridge is the only—yeah, the Delta Bridge—I don't—they are funded by the Walton Foundation—Delta Bridge is funded by 'em.

SL: Now, what is Delta Bridge?

BS: It was a—hmm—Delta Bridge was a strategic plan—the Walton Foundation gave x number of dollars to the Southern Bank Partners to work in certain communities or counties. Two counties, I think. So the Delta Bridge is the project that they

designed to help meet the needs of Phillips County.

SL: Okay.

BS: So they have a full strategic plan for—to work with Phillips County. And we get money from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. That has been a blessin' that they gave us some money. They fund a collaborative called the Freedom School Collaborative that I was talkin' about. They also fund another project that we work with, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. They have been there. And then these foundation has this technical assistance that you take advantage of, so it's a lotsa work, but we have some dedicated peoples to help us. Carrie Johnson, who have worked with the restaurant for years—she continue to work there and do what she needs to do. And we have Reverend Turner—just came on about four or five years ago. He's workin' with the Youth & Family Service Program. He's doin' a wonderful job. So we have staff that work a lot.

[02:54:09] SL: Have you ever counted up the number of partners and . . .

BS: We do that every once in a while. We have it on somethin'—yeah, how many peoples we have worked with.

SL: Man.

BS: And how many different little pieces of money that we have. I

tell Reverend Turner sometime he have to work with six of 'em, I have to work with seven of 'em, Bruce work—so we do that. And really, we spend a lotsa hours at that center. Now, Reverend Turner—now, I go home at five o'clock. Reverend Turner is the one stay to eight or nine o'clock to make sure stuff gettin' out, and he's doin' a good job at that.

SL: That's a big help for you.

BS: A big help. Big help. [SL laughs] Mh-hmm. Yeah, so . . .

SL: Well, they're not gonna be upset with you for takin' so much time with us today, are they?

BS: Well, this is a part of our job.

SL: [Laughter] There you go. That's correct. It is.

BS: Yeah, this is a part. Yeah.

SL: Well you know, I think it's part of our job, too.

BS: Yeah. And see, we have this relationship that we have with the Clinton School that helped us last year, or was it year before last? Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[02:55:15] BS: The Clinton School worked with us two or three years, so they had some peoples—and we have this project called the Shepherd Project that they send us a intern out every year. And I'll tell you, those interns that come from the

Shepherd Project—they are seasoned interns. They know how to write. They know how to do it all. And the same thing about the Clinton School. So we get blessed when we have those workers. So we have some—yeah, havin' a Shepherd intern and a Clinton intern—that's like havin' money.

SL: Well, I can tell you that—I've heard talk about how much this project over here means to those Clinton interns. They come back, and they are just . . .

BS: Well, they did a good job.

SL: They're just—you know, it's really hard to get into the Clinton School.

BS: Yeah, that's what they tell me.

SL: It's a very select group.

BS: Well, Jake got in this year. We . . .

SL: Is that right?

[02:56:12] BS: Mh-hmm. We doin' a green project with LISC, and so therefore, I'm gon' be workin' with Jake also. We are really concentratin' on green this year too. That's somethin' we need to do. Just actually goin' out and have conversation with peoples about [*belches*—excuse me—how you can do things that will help you on your light bill. When you buy a new washer or stuff like that and all of that. When you buy a new air

conditioner, what to look for and stuff. So we are workin' on that. Yeah.

SL: There's no end to it, is there?

BS: It is not.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's what makes it a good thing, though.

BS: It—and I think the thing that really keep me goin' is the fact that I know that Rose and Annie and Diane now is gon' continue to try to do somethin'. And as long as they live, some of the things that we wanted to do will live on. And I think about that as long as I live, my mama values and morals and her energy will live through me and then through Pearl and Holly and their children. So that's why we have to try to do it right, to me. Yeah.

[02:57:33] SL: That's great that you bring your mom back into this [*BS laughs*] conversation. No, it is, because you know, that goes right along with what I was talkin' about on the way to lunch, that . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . I really do think it starts very early.

BS: Does. Yeah.

SL: Maybe before you know it.

BS: I think so, the more I talk to peoples now, it is before we know it. I think so. Yeah. I think about my mama sometime, how

she used to go on the fish bank, and she fished all the time.

SL: Yeah.

BS: And then she had other folks that would come down and fish with her. And when I was a child, I did not like dressin', and I would not eat dressin'. But my mother had a friend that made some dressin'. It was one of my church member mother, Leroy Cook mother. And I don't know what we called her, but we called her Miss Cook. But she cooked this dressin', and it was so good. Until after that, I have always eat dressin'. So I think about stuff like that sometime. Yeah. I think about that when we was little—and we would walk three miles around the road. We had neighbors on each road. We would—this road over here was the long—was the shortest way from our house, so we had neighbors over there. We had one lady was a retired schoolteacher. Her name was Miss Mary Bean. And she would talk to us as we come, and we had a lady that was Mrs. Eliza Townsell, and sometime she would just sit down and talk to me and tell me things that she felt I needed to know. I think about that a whole lots now. And on this side of this road—which they—these houses are still there—was the Ivory family. And Jell Ivory was superintendent of our Sunday school class, and so when you got to Sunday school, he would always tell you thing.



That's when I thought about Jell Ivory—now, this is real funny. When I started drivin', every time it rained, I would run in the ditch 'cause I couldn't drive that well. So Mr. Jell Ivory decided that every time it rained, he would be right there where I usually run in the ditch [*SL laughs*] so he could pull me over the thing before I got [*laughs*] in the ditch with the tractor. And I think about that now. So that was the kind of neighbor folks [*laughs*] was, so he knowed I was gon' run in the ditch, so he would just be there, and he'd just pull me through before I run in the ditch. So that was interestin'.

SL: What a wonderful [*BS laughs*] neighborhood. What a wonderful place to live. It's no wonder that you didn't really . . .

BS: Oh . . .

SL: . . . venture far from where you were living because you had these folks around you that took the time . . .

BS: I tell you!

SL: . . . to talk and . . .

[03:00:36] BS: They actually did. I had this lady—and like I say, my mother and father did not come to church. Her name was Jane—Janie Cook—Jane Anna [*BS edit: Janie*—Jane Anna [*BS edit: Janie*] Cook. And she's been dead a long time, but she would always like for me to participate in stuff. So one time we

was gettin' ready to have some new ushers, and I think I wanted to be a usher. Well, they only had two slots, so my baby sister also wanted to be a usher. So they explained that my baby sister—Miss Jane Anna [BS edit: Janie] Cook wanted me to be a usher. But somehow they explained to her that my baby sister would be better suited as a usher. So I always think about stuff like that. But she was advocatin' on my behalf years ago. And see, now we think about somebody advocatin' on someone behalf—peoples have always advocated on other people's behalf. We may not have called it that, but that's what they did—try to help someone get somewhere. So I think about that. I think about those little things a lots. Since I done got in my sixties, I think about it because most of these folks when they died was only in they sixties. So . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . my mother died at sixty-two. So . . .

SL: Well, health . . .

BS: Mh-hmm. So . . .

SL: . . . nutrition and all that stuff wasn't as . . .

BS: Yeah, so . . .

[03:02:04] SL: . . . prevalent back then. Also what—have you ever—I've always found it really—what takes me back

sometimes is when I find out about someone advocating for someone without those folks knowing about it. [*BS laughs*] You know what I mean?

BS: Now, what you mean by that?

SL: Kind of sneaky, tryin' to—helpin' people, but they don't even know where the help is coming from.

BS: Comin' from. And I think we do that. We do that. We—sometime we try to help folks without them knowin' because sometime we'll know because of somebody personality that they may not accept help from certain peoples. And that's the strangest thing to me. If you need help, just accept it from anybody. But you got some peoples just will not accept help from certain people. They'd rather get sick and die [*laughter*] just about to—yeah, that's strange to me. Yeah, but . . .

SL: You know, we haven't ever talked about any kind of trouble that you ever got into. Did—surely—didn't you ever get in trouble at all?

BS: All the time. [*Laughter*] All the time. All the time.

[03:03:16] SL: Well you know, your grandchildren might wanna know a little bit about that, so . . .

BS: You . . .

SL: . . . you know . . .

BS: . . . you know, my brother said that about me one day when I—in 1978 [*laughs*], when I told him that I had went to God and rededicated my life and everything and I was going to be a better person, he said to me, "You were never a bad person. What are you talkin' about?" [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, yeah, there's that.

BS: I really did not. I think I was too scared to get into [*laughter*] trouble. And you can't get in too much trouble readin' a book, you know. I never got into trouble. About one—I don't know when this happened—we had these folks that write a note and had signed that they was Ku Klux Klans and all that stuff. And my baby daughter—and I didn't get into any trouble, so I got on—somewhere some meteor came down or somethin', and I said somethin', and my oldest daughter just felt like I should get somewhere and shut up, you know. So I don't remember—never remember gettin' into any trouble. I just sometime respond to things that my family may feel somebody else need to respond to. No, I'm too coward to get in trouble.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well okay, let's talk about these books . . .

BP: Five.

SL: . . . that you were readin' all the time. You wanna—we're at five minutes? Why don't we go ahead and break here?

[Tape stopped]

[03:04:43] SL: Why don't you—I kind of enjoyed hearing about your typical day, how your day starts, and [*BS laughs*] you know, now that you've got the reverend that can kinda take over for you in the evening shift and all that.

BS: Okay.

SL: So give us a typical day . . .

BS: Typical day.

SL: . . . for . . .

BS: A typical day is that I get up about four thirty. Then about six o'clock or five thirty—between fifteen to six, Charles and I—that's my husband—we go up to Fast Break for him to get his cappuccino. Then we come back. I go to the center, and I try to get to the center no later than six thirty. Sometime I get there at six. And then some mornings I will park the car at the center, and then I will walk the track and then come back. Then—whenever I go in to work, the first thing I do is I check the computer to see—check my email. About seven o'clock, I have written down everything I am goin' to do that day. And I have a list of things that I'ma do every day, so I do that. And then after that, I start makin' telephone calls. And most of the time, I ?begin? to talk to most staff folks probably from ten thirty to

eleven—I make my rounds talkin' to staff. I leave goin' home at lunch. I take my husband's lunch home most days around twelve or twelve thirty. Then I come back, and at that time I do a little more emailin', and I'm gon' call friends on the telephone and talk to them 'cause I like to talk to people. A typical day is I'm alway gon' call somebody and ask 'em about somethin' that I'm doin', because I like to have other folks' opinion. And then I write. So the most—the last thing I do fore I leave goin' home about four thirty, five o'clock is I actually sit down and write somethin'. So that's a typical day for me. And then when I get home, if I feel well—and most time I do—I take a thirty-minute walk or a hour walk down the track. I like to walk every day when I can if it's not too hot. And I really like talkin' to folks on the phone about stuff. So—but that's a typical day. [03:07:18] Now let me tell you the stuff I do in a typical day when I say I'm callin' folks on the phone. Most of the time we talk about bills that need to be paid. We do this on Monday and Thursday. On Tuesday and Wednesday, we talk about housin'. When I'm callin' folks, it's about the housin' projects. We have the rehab project, which is housin', and then we have the twenty community houses we do. Most of the time, our air conditioner in the summertime broke down with someone. Either somethin'

is wrong with the electricity, so we—so it's always somethin' happenin' with housin'. Then we go through the process that we make sure that we go through the thing of makin' sure rent is collected and all those things. So when I'm talkin' to folks, that's a typical day—makin' sure that—and Mrs. Turner, who now work with me on housin'—she make sure that the yard's been cut, so we talk about all this stuff. I don't have to do all this stuff anymore, but we have to talk about it. So—and then we talk about what need to be ordered in the kitchen, and Reverend Turner and I talk about what regulation and compliance we need to make sure that he know about. Then in the evenin' time, when I get back home, Bruce Locket allow me to call him after six or seven o'clock at night. So I usually call Bruce Locket and explain to him what proposal we need to be workin' on at night. And like I said, I try to be in the bed bout eight thirty or nine o'clock. But . . .

SL: That's a full day.

BS: I do a full day. Yeah.

[03:08:56] SL: So you say you walk the track. Is that a . . .

BS: It's a walkin' trail in the front of my house. Yeah. And that was one of the projects that Marvell NIRI and the city of Marvell and USDA did. It's about 1.2 miles, I guess.

SL: That's good.

BS: It's a nice track for walkin'.

SL: Yeah.

BS: Yes. So that's a typical day. And most of the time, before I go to bed, I always read. Now, I read most of the time. So I was gonna tell you about some of the books I read when . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . I was younger.

SL: Okay.

BS: I use to—*Jive*—that was a romantic book like. And then there was one called *True Confessions*. [SL laughs] And I read that one. And then *Ebony* and *Jet* . . .

SL: Yep.

BS: . . . came along durin' that time. And as—after I came out of Little Rock, I read *Red Badge of Courage*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Pandora's Box*. And those were some interestin' books. Have you ever read *The Scarlet Letter*?

SL: Yeah. [BS laughs] Sure. Yeah, it was . . .

BS: It was . . .

SL: . . . required reading. It . . .

[03:10:01] BS: Well, it wasn't required reading for me, but somehow I heard about it [laughs], and I decided to read it. Yeah. So—

and *Pandora's Box* was really one—I tell folks, "Now don't open Pandora's box." [SL laughs] And *How to Win Friends and Influence People* . . .

SL: Influence people.

BS: . . . by Dale Carnegie was a book that I really like. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*—I use that book to train staff on some staff stuff, so I like that book. *Who Moved My Cheese?*—I like that one. And what—and I read a lotsa books. I can't exactly remember the name of 'em. But one of my favorite books was a book written by a lady that worked for W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and I always think about that book, and I can't find it. [Laughs] So I'm lookin' for it now, and I cannot find it. It was [unclear word] about leadership and followership. 'Cause I always think about that everybody place all of the emphasis on the leaders, and [clears throat] as leaders, we cannot get anything done if we don't have peoples followin' us or folks that will do what we tell them to. And sometime I wonder when we place all this emphasis on the leader, do we think about the person that—like, at my office right now, Mrs. Turner is probably answerin' phone calls or Marissa [BS edit: messing around] doin' things or—so we talk about leadership, but followership is just as important to me as leadership. If I can't

get anybody to follow me, I cannot lead. So she wrote the book about [*unclear word*] called followership, and I can't remember the name of it. But she worked for W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and it was a good book. So—and another thing I used to do a lots with my mother—my mother always like to watch TV.

SL: Kay.

BS: But she had certain shows that she would watch, and the shows she would watch would be shows that she thinks should give you a message. So *Perry Mason* . . .

SL: Oh.

BS: . . . was one of her favorite TV shows. So now when I go back and look at *Perry Mason*, I try to think of "What is the message this story is tryin' to tell?" Because my mama always said that, that most stories like that had a message. Like, sometime you can't get away with crime or somethin'. So I watch *Perry Mason* a lots now to just—yeah.

[03:12:48] SL: That was a great show.

BS: It was. So . . .

SL: You know, what a hero he always was, even if you weren't sure [*BS laughs*] he was goin' down the right path. He somehow or another . . .

BS: You knowed he was . . .

SL: . . . would always . . .

BS: . . . gon' win.

SL: Yeah, and of course, everyone loved Della . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . you know, and what was the detective's name?

BS: Paul Drake.

SL: Paul Drake. [*Laughter*] My gosh, what a great cast.

[03:13:12] BS: You know, I used to actually believe when I used to watch TV—and this is somethin' I tell my children—that the movie star could not get killed. You know, they used to wouldn't kill 'em.

SL: That's right.

BS: And so I—so now when I watch some of 'em they get killed, [*laughs*] and I say, "Boy, they have really changed."

SL: Oh yeah. Yeah, they're—you know—yeah, it's a different world out there in . . .

BS: It's definitely a different world.

SL: . . . TV land now. You know, it used to be when someone got shot in those westerns, they just fell off their horse. They didn't suffer.

BS: Right.

SL: And just fell over . . .

BS: Over.

SL: . . . and it was over with. And now it's all so excruciating and painful. But—well, can you not remember the very first book or two that . . .

BS: Jerry . . .

SL: . . . got . . .

BS: When I was in school?

SL: Yeah, or at home. I mean, were you reading before you went to school?

BS: Hmm, no.

SL: No.

BS: *Alice and Jerry*. Yeah, I remember *Alice and Jerry*. That's about the first—yeah, that probably the first book, *Alice and Jerry*. And somethin' bout Jip or [*laughs*]*—yeah, I remember Alice and Jerry*. But I don't remember the first book . . .

SL: Yeah.

BS: . . . that I read. Yeah. But I remember that we read a lotsa books.

[03:14:36] SL: Were all the kids reading most all the time?

BS: No.

SL: No?

BS: No. I think I read more than anybody. I don't know was that a

way of tunin' folks out that—when I didn't wanna do somethin' they wanted me to do or what. I began to think about stuff like that. Since I have time now—since I done got in my [*laughs*] sixties, I have a little more time.

SL: Yeah.

BS: So I sometimes sit down and think about why did peoples do certain things. Yeah. And sometime we do things as our way of coping with stuff, you know. And I just did not like pickin' and choppin' cotton, and I didn't like okras and—woo, gosh—and I really hated to get down and pick butter beans. So I guess I would get in those books and dream that this is the way it's gon' be for me. And I really don't like for folks to dictate how things are gonna be for me. I really figure out they can be better, so how do we figure out a way to make them better?

[03:15:38] SL: Well, that's a valuable asset. I mean, that—that's a great value to have someone step back and—"Now wait a minute."

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: "You know, just because this is the way it's always been done" . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . "is it necessarily mean it's the best way" . . .

BS: Best way to do it.

SL: . . . "or it's the right way."

BS: Mh-hmm.

SL: It's funny.

BS: Yeah.

SL: It's funny how people . . .

BS: People do that to . . .

SL: . . . hold onto . . .

[03:16:00] BS: . . . things. 'Cause I remember one time—I remember—and I don't know who it was—they told me they had—it was—they got a whuppin' because they broke a glass, and I never could understand that. And I said, "Did you intend to break the glass?" And they said—well, they said if [*laughs*] somethin'—that they wouldn't—you wouldn't do it next time. And I was sayin' to myself, "If a grown person [*laughs*] had broke that glass, would they have whupped that grown person?" I'm always askin' myself stuff like that when—and some folks say, "Well, the reason I do things because I'm grown." Well, that's fine, but because you grown, it does not necessarily make it right. And I think children remember things like that sometime. So—and I know peoples feel like that I respect children's feelings probably so—too much. But sometime we have to understand

that children just do not think like we think. They—and peoples will ask me sometime, "Mrs. Shelby, why didn't you do so-and-so?" "The reason Mrs. Shelby didn't do it, she did not think of it. If you had called and told me, then I would have done it." You know, because sometime people be thinkin', "You just bein' mean and don't do somethin'." You just don't think of it sometime. And that's the way I think about children. Before I spank a child—and I don't whup children, you know. Before you whup a child—and I'm on this all the time—please try to understand what happened before, you know, that you do that. But I don't know. We have so angry children that I don't know why they so angry about stuff. Yeah.

[03:17:43] SL: [*Sighs*] Well you know, what was it they say? Out of the mouths of children, you know. It—you know, if you listen to them, they kind of give you what they've heard.

BS: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: You know? And what—and they do what they've seen.

BS: And you tell some folks that, they will get so angry. You tell 'em little children three and four years old be markin' somebody. You know, I know they smart, but sometime I just don't think they come up with all this stuff. Yeah. So we just have to realize that we are the best example for our children. What we

do is the best example—make sure it's positive examples.

SL: Yeah, you know, when I was—I got to be Mr. Mom for a while.

BS: Oh, how many children?

SL: Hmm?

BS: How many children?

SL: I have three.

BS: Three. Okay.

SL: Three. And I was Mr. Mom for two of 'em.

BS: Okay.

SL: And I always pretended like they were little recorders . . .

BS: Oh.

SL: . . . on all the time. [*BS laughs*] You know, no matter . . .

BS: They gon' hear it. That's right.

SL: They're gonna hear it. They're gonna see it. The—they're gonna feel it. They're gonna experience it. And it's—and it could be that they—it may—they may not ever remember it.

BS: Right. Mh-hmm.

SL: But it's in there . . .

BS: In there.

SL: . . . you know. And so that—I always pretended they were little recorders all the time, and I tried to give 'em the best stuff.



[03:19:11] BS: When my oldest son was small, there was a ?federal

coordinator? at the Marvell Public School named Mr. Rasp. I don't know—William Rasp. *R-A-S-P*. And he told me—he said, "Read to him every day for fifteen minutes." And you know, I used to think, "That's not very long." But actually, I started doin' stuff like that. If you read every day for fifteen minutes . . .

SL: That's a lot of minutes.

BS: Minutes. And then we have this thing with parents that some of 'em feel like they children do not need to be enrolled in any summer camp. Okay, so your child is out for two months. Well, if they could come somewhere to read every day for thirty minutes, it won't hurt 'em, because they lose that time when they are not studyin' or doin' somethin'. So even when your child is out of school, I think you should let 'em read ten or fifteen minutes a day or do somethin' to improve their readin'. So now we are really havin' a problem in the Delta 'cause, you know, they are sayin' children not readin' on grade level and things like that. So that's one of the reason we work so hard with our summer day camp program. We want children to come so they can read. Our school system is havin' summer day—summer classes for the kids. And this community library in Marvell have places, you know. So I think we just need to make

sure that our children see us do what we want them to do. And that's what—that's it. And right now at my age, I'm about education for our children. So—to just educate our children.

[03:21:02] SL: My mom always used to say, "Your best friends are the books."

BS: I like that one. Best friend—books. Mh-hmm. And you know, when you think about it, that they eventually probably gonna try to take cursive writin' outta school because someone has said that. I don't know if there's any truth to that. I just can't see them not teachin' you how to write. But I don't know. I hope not. [*Laughs*] Yeah, that's . . .

SL: Yeah, my cursive writing would probably look about like it did in first grade now.

BS: Yeah.

SL: I can't . . .

BS: But you know one thing, if you did something about like that—and the computers and all went out and folks can't read, what would you do?

SL: It's a—yeah. I guess you guys have to keep up with technology.

BS: We do.

SL: 'Cause it's the way things are now.

BS: [*Unclear words*]. Yeah, but my thing about technology—

somebody have to control technology, and it get haywire, or it break down, and you . . .

SL: It's a different . . .

BS: God forbid anything like that happen. But tornadoes and storms and stuff come around, so you probably need to be able to write or send a message or do somethin'.

SL: Yeah, that's true.

BS: It's a . . .

SL: It is a different skill set, though, to maintain that stuff.

BS: Yeah.

SL: I mean, it's . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: And there's a big market there. There's a big job market in that area.

BS: For technology?

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: Oh yeah. That area. Nobody wants to do anything. It's . . .

SL: But I think you're right. I don't think you have—you can't put all your chips on it.

BS: I tell you, I wouldn't. Hm-mm. Yeah.

SL: I guess they say that's—you know, some folks are still holding on to the analog world and not the digital world, you know.

[03:22:55] BS: Well, we gonna have to try to, I think, maintain both of 'em to a certain extent. And what people saying, you know, now—if you are not up with Facebook and Twitter, and those the kind of things—tools you're gon' need to raise money and do around. I agree with that. You're gon' have to do Facebook and Twitter and all those thing.

SL: Yeah, we've had to do that.

BS: You on both of 'em?

SL: Oh yeah. [*BS laughs*] Absolutely. Yeah. Well, let's talk about the future of—your future and the future of the program that you've been—dedicated your life to. What's ahead for Beatrice?

BS: Let me be very honest with you. I would like to retire from the executive director of BGACDC, and I would like find enough money—probably \$50,000 a year—to operate some kind of project that deal with this parental empowerment piece, the civic engagement piece, and the lifetime learnin' piece, with emphasis on peoples that's comin' out of high school that did not go to college in the Marvell area. So that's what I would like to look at, doin' somethin' like that. But I would like to—yeah, and so . . .

SL: That's kind of a continuing education thing or . . .

[03:24:35] BS: Yeah, be—yeah, I think peoples need to continue to

learn to read, continue to learn the Internet—our young folks—so when they come out, they just can't quit. They just have to continue to educate themselves. Read books. Go to seminars. Do whatever it take so you can continue to educate yourself.

Everybody's not gon' go to college. I know that already. But go to a trade school or do somethin', and if you can't do that, just read books and stuff. Just try to educate yourself and keep your mind active in—on things like that. So that's what I would like to do—somethin' to just entertain havin' conversation. Peoples just talkin' and listenin'. Sometime I think we may wanna do it with too many people, but maybe you do it with ten folks at a time and, you know, just talkin' and listenin' and tryin' to understand. Because truly, we are definitely havin' major problems with children because—well, I don't know. I know why we are havin' problems, but I don't know the solution. I don't think nobody else [BS edit: knows] right now, because if we knowed the solution, we would do what it take. So my solution—the part that I can contribute would be to try to work with parents in those three areas—parental involvement, civic engagement, and lifetime learnin'. And let folks enjoy life sometime. Sometime we are so stressful, you know. And [clears throat] I don't buy this thing from parents that say that

they don't have time to do certain things with their children. I think some of it is a matter of priority because sometime instead of goin' places when you get off from work, just come home and spend that time with your children, you know. So we need to find time to spend with 'em. But now I'm sixty-somethin' years old, and as my nephew said, "You ain't got nothing else to do." [Laughter] So we can talk that way when we get that old and we don't have nothing else to do.

[03:26:37] SL: Well, two things about your being honest with me about what you wanna do. Number one, I would be willing to bet that you will get to do exactly what you want to do—that you will find the money and you will start the program, and it will work. And you'll lay the foundation for it to continue.

BS: That's right.

SL: The second thing I would say—it sounds like to me, you are not ever gonna retire, and if you do, you'll probably gonna flunk retirement.

BS: Oh well, no, I wanna ret—I want someone else to take BGACDC and take it to the next level. So I'm not talkin' bout me retirin', I'm talkin' bout leavin'—let somebody else take BGACDC to the next level. I think that twenty-nine years of one—of vision—and I've had a lots of peoples to help me with this vision—I just think

it needs someone else to take it to the next level. If I really—
this is my belief about nonprofits.

SL: M'kay.

[03:27:36] BS: I believe that if you in the right market, that you probably need to change executive directors every ten years. And nobody [*laughs*] wanna hear me say this. That if you could actually find a new version of someone that can look at your plan and take it to the next level every ten years, I believe you could really do some things with a nonprofit. And we have done well, and I thank God for that. We had a lotsa—and the reason that we have made it—because even though I was at the helm, we had peoples like Anna Huff, Rosie Woods, Denetra, Carrie, Gregory Davis, and folks who—they vision was there too. Like, the manor was Gregory Davis vision. It was not mines. I went to the manor—that housin' project we built—that was to support Gregory Davis. And when we got ready to do the BGA—the BFT, we talked about it and talked about it, and Carrie Johnson wanted a restaurant. So I went to the table—went with her so we can find a way to give her the restaurant, and she's been there workin' with it. So you know, my thing has always been to support those young folks younger'n I am. So that was my goal. So how I supported peoples like Annie, Rose [BS edit: Rosie],

and then was that when they came up with a project, I worked as hard for that project as they did. And that's—that was the support I gave them. But I did allow them to talk about some of the things they wanted, and we tried to find money for that. And so right now with Reverend Turner with the youth and family service program, even though we been operatin' that program since 1978, whatever Reverend Turner come up with for that pro—for BGACDC, we gon' really support him. I'm gon' work as hard as Reverend Turner to make sure his vision is carried out on that program. So that's where we are. So that's BGACDC in a nutshell.

[03:29:44] SL: You know, I think in an ideal world, this changing directorship every ten years is a good, healthy renewal [*BS laughs*] sort of thing, but there's also something to be said against what I would consider term limits.

BS: Okay.

SL: [*Laughs*] You know, you can't—it's hard to replace the experience that . . .

BS: Yes.

SL: . . . you have gotten. And I—what I'm thinkin' about is that manor project—that you poured your heart and soul into it, and you had to overcome many disappointments to get that thing to

go, didn't you? I mean, there was . . .

BS: We did.

SL: People did not want it in their backyard.

BS: We did.

SL: You had to find another place, and you . . .

BS: We did.

SL: . . . got a place. And then somehow or another, there was some kind of utility thing or—I'm not exactly sure . . .

BS: Not sure. Yeah, we—it was . . .

SL: . . . of all the problems. And I think I remember reading something you had written about what—how you—how disappointed you were at different stages in that and what you learned from it, that . . .

[03:30:43] BS: Oh, I learned a lots [*laughs*] from that project. Yes, I did. But I still think that if you give something your best for ten years, try to find someone that can have the passion—now, you've got to have a person that have passion. Now, if you don't bring nobody in that don't have any passion for it and don't understand where you're goin'. But I mean, if you can find somewhere—the main catch is can you find the money to pay 'em? 'Cause for nonprofit, sometime you just can't find that money. You just can't find that money to pay 'em. So if you

can find the money to pay 'em, and they have a passion for what you're doin', then I think ten years would be good. But now, you just don't wanna bring somebody in that don't understand what your vision is or anything like that. Yeah, you need that money to pay 'em. Yeah, you need that money.

SL: Okay. Now, that—my second point on your honesty was that it sounded like you would—retirement's not in your picture. I mean, you're talkin' about findin' some money to do the continuing education idea, you know. And so now you're goin' down a new project . . .

BS: Yeah, but that to me is goin' to be somethin' smaller, and it's gon' be more on engagement and just talkin' to people. I just think we need to have some honest, open conversations. And I don't think that would be that expensive. Yeah.

SL: Or what about expensive for your time? I mean, you've—I bet you're headed for more grandchildren [*BS laughs*] at some point here.

BS: Well, I hope . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] You're gonna have to dedicate some more time in the day.

BS: What, about my time?

SL: Mh-hmm.

BS: Oh, I will definitely want—I'm definitely gonna spend a lots of time with my grandchildren.

SL: Okay.

BS: I want to. And I wanna spend a lots of time with my husband. So yeah, I'm not talkin' about workin' those fourteen, fifteen, sixteen hours I liked to used to work. I'm talkin' bout part time, four hours a day, twenty hours a week, or somethin' like that.

SL: Okay, that's . . .

[03:32:40] BS: Yeah. No, I'm not talkin' about that kind of time.

SL: Okay.

BS: Yeah. I'm talkin' about . . .

SL: Now, you gotta remember [*laughs*] . . .

BS: . . . helpin' and supportin' someone else at this point.

SL: Okay. All right.

BS: Yeah. No, I'm not talkin' . . .

SL: Well, you gotta remember you were only gonna stay about three years with [*laughs*]*—*when you first started this journey and . . .

BS: Yeah, I did, and I've been there twenty-nine. [*Laughter*] Been there twenty-nine. Twenty-nine years. Yeah.

[03:33:04] SL: Well, here's somethin' that is not uncommon with these Pryor Center interviews.

BS: Okay.

SL: We spend all day with somebody.

BS: Okay.

SL: We talk about a lot of stuff. And inevitably, you're gonna get home tonight, and you're gonna—you may be layin' in bed, and you may be goin' over some of the stuff that we've talked about, and you'll go, "I forgot to talk about this," or "I didn't mention [*BS laughs*] this person," or "Oh my gosh! How could I forget that?" [*Laughter*] So you know, I want you to just take a little time here, and I'm gonna let you think. If there's anything else—any other area—and for whatever reason, either you didn't think—you hadn't thought of it or you weren't really comfortable talking about it or—I just want you to take a few moments now and just think about . . .

BS: Think about . . .

SL: . . . if—you know, you're giving us something that we're gonna preserve forever. So this is a chance to kind of add to what we've done.

[03:34:29] BS: Hmm, let's see. I talked about all of my brothers and sisters. I have two sister-in-laws. I think I've mentioned them. Well, let me mention my two sister-in-laws if I have not. My—Doris Clark—and Doris is deceased. She died in 1997. And then I have my sister-in-law that has been with me all my life.

She was with us when we went to the prom—when I was talkin' about the three peoples that went to the prom. And she is Thressa Mae Clark, and she's married to my baby brother, James Clark. I have a lots of nephews, but I have two nephews that lately have come back to spend some time with me—Marvin Johnson, who is my sister Mertis—my oldest sister son—and he's been at the house with me for two or three years. He came down as a VISTA volunteer to help me with a project. And I have a nephew, Melvia Clark, who moved back down about two, three years ago, and he comes when I call him. The other day I was somewhere and the car broke down, so I had to call him to come. So those the nephews that I have here. And when I was, like, about fifteen, sixteen, my brothers had children that was older than my child. So Frank Jr. was my oldest nephew, and I was a happy little aunt. But yeah, he was born in [19]61. And then Melvia was born in August of [19]61, and then Timmy [BS edit: Timothy] was born in [19]62. So my mama had all these grandsons before she had any granddaughters. Then Chuck, and we called—that Chuck was—we always said Chuck was our nephew. So then we had our first grand—my mother first granddaughter, which was named Denita Jo Johnson, and so after that we started havin' both boys and girls. But I'm tryin' to

think of somethin' that I really wanted to share. No.

SL: Any . . .

[03:36:54] BS: I talked about my husband, so I . . .

SL: Any more you wanna say about your husband? You were kind of mysterious about . . .

BS: Bout my husband?

SL: A little bit. I mean, you know, you met, and you dated for five or six years . . .

BS: Yeah.

SL: . . . before you got married . . .

BS: Married.

SL: . . . and . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: What kinds of things did y'all like to do?

BS: Oh gosh! Char—hmm. We watch television together. We play dominos together sometime. We just do things a husband and wife—I like to cook for him every—I don't like to cook, but every once in a while, I like to cook something for him. Yeah, well—and so I'm sorry I'm mysterious about . . .

[03:37:44] SL: Basically you're just comfortable.

BS: I am real comfortable [*laughs*] with my husband. Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Well, that's important.

BS: Yeah, I'm just . . .

SL: And that's not always the case.

BS: Yeah, I'm real comfortable with my husband. I don't know nothin' I won't tell my husband. I'll share with him, and I—he just seem like he'd—he is a part of me, you know. He the first somebody I see in the mornin' time [*laughs*] when I wake up and the last somebody I speak to fore I go to—you know, when I get—and so yeah, he just—he's there all—there. And I call him all through the day, probably. So we work together on lots of stuff. Yeah, he will remind me of stuff I need to do. I am very, very comfortable with my husband. Yeah, very comfortable with my husband. I'm very happy with my husband. I don't—I—and I guess that's what's comfortable. I can be myself with my husband. I don't have to pretend. If I don't feel like somethin', I don't feel like it. If I don't want to go to work or somethin', I tell him that. If—so he's just the person that I feel comfortable talkin' to. And if I wanna talk to him about the children, I call him. If I wanna talk about the grandkids—so he's the person that I talk to. So yeah, peoples always thought whenever I retire if it was gonna be hard, but I have never considered BGACDC as the main part of my life. It was my children and husband and my sisters and brothers, and then it was Pleasant Grove Church,

and then it was BGACDC. And most folks just could not see that. It has always been that way with me. God, my family, my church, and BGACDC—in that order. I just—but I know it does not appear that way. When folks look at me, they always think about BGACDC rather than Mrs. Charles Shelby. Yeah, yeah.

SL: Well, that's kind of the problem with getting branded [*BS laughs*], you know? You get out there, and you're in the public, and that's the way folks see you.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

[03:39:53] SL: Well, is there anything else that you wanna talk about before we wrap up? I feel like we've done . . .

BS: Missed some.

SL: Hmm?

BS: You feel like we've missed some?

SL: I always feel like [*BS laughs*—I'm always—I always just kick myself for not remembering to bring up something that I'd thought of . . .

BS: Oh!

SL: . . . earlier . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . but I mainly just wanna make sure you've given—I've given you every opportunity to say what you wanna say.

BS: Well, I have really enjoyed the interview, and I had—I've thought about things that I had not thought about in a long time. Yeah. Raised—being raised in this community, really—and I stayed in this community most of my life, so yeah.

SL: Well, thank you.

BS: And thank you.

JE: Scott?

SL: Yes?

JE: Can we get the "proud to be from Arkansas"?

SL: Oh, you wanna do a little thing we—every once in a while, we'll ask people to say their name . . .

BS: Okay.

SL: . . . and then say, "And I'm proud to be from Arkansas."

BS: I am Beatrice Shelby, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas.

SL: Okay. Here's the trick. Here's the hook. You gotta look at this guy—at this lens right here.

BS: Yeah, I do have somethin' I need to say because . . .

SL: Okay, let's talk.

BS: Okay. The first leadership program that I attended after starting workin' for BGACDC was the Arkansas LeadAR program. Are you familiar with that program?

SL: I've heard of that.

BS: Okay. And so I need to thank them for that.

SL: Well, talk about the program.

[03:41:30] BS: Oh, the Arkansas LeadAR program? Well, it was a trainin' pro—the Arkansas LeadAR program—let's see, I went to that program in 1985, and it's under u—wait a minute. [*Unclear words*] University of Arkansas program, and you go to a meetin'—now, they'll kill me that I can't remember LeadAR. I remember LeadAR 'cause it came back—LeadAR. Beatrice Shelby! Okay, let me try to remember how that the LeadAR—now, I done got the LeadAR program confused with the Robert Wood Johnson Leadership Program. Let's not talk about it any 'cause I'm startin' to gettin' these different programs confused. LeadAR. But LeadAR was the first leadership program that I went to, and it was operated out of the University of Arkansas, and you would go to different meetins—and I think—I'm tryin' to think it was every other month. But one of the highlight of the program would be to go to Washington, and then we went abroad. And let's see, what places did—we went to the Dominican Republic at—with the LeadAR program. And the LeadAR program is still around. It's—'cause—you get selected for the program—to be in the leadership program, and someone have to pay the registration fee. No, it's not a registration fee.

Boy, that's been twenty-six years ago. But now, I have kept up with LeadAR all these years. I read about it. It's a leadership program, and they teach you about government and all those things in the LeadAR program. And the . . .

SL: And you got to go . . .

BS: . . . director was J. B. Williams. Uh-huh.

SL: Oh, J. B. Williams. I've known that name.

BS: You remember J. B. Williams?

SL: I do remember that name.

[03:43:47] BS: And you would meet every—I think it's every other month that we would meet. But I remember the first time I went in 1985, and we had peoples like Betty Cole. You ever heard talk of a lady named Betty Cole?

SL: Hm-mm.

BS: She's Robert Cole wife.

SL: Hm-mm.

BS: She was in that program, and Alice Rufus over—she—she's over HUD—at the state HUD office now [BS edit: Alice Rufus is not with the state HUD office], I think—was in that program . It was a—I think you had about twelve or fifteen people in the LeadAR program. And I wish I had thought about that. But it was the first real leadership [*coughs*] program that I had the opportunity

to participate in. And then after that, we had the Health Leadership Program. I'm familiar with that. It was the Robert Wood Johnson Leadership Program, and you got a chance to visit different place and talk to peoples about health. And we got \$100,000 when we did the Robert Wood Johnson Leadership Program to help us do activities at our center. And my friend Sue Bumagin—and we still friends after all that time with the Robert Wood Johnson Leadership Program. She introduced me to the Internet. So that was interestin'. [03:45:16] And then since that time, we got—BGACDC got the opportunity to participate in the program called Leadership for a Changing World.

SL: Okay.

BS: And with that program, we got the opportunity to go to different states and talk to different peoples, and we would interact and tell about things we would do to actually make a positive difference in our community. We did a—what we could do call a fund-raisin' plan. We did a fund-raisin' plan. We did that. And we did strategies to help us keep our organization goin'. And as a result of that one—after we did the Robert Wood Johnson—we did Robert Wood Johnson, which was a leadership program and helped—gave us the money and we—it helped things. And then

Leadership for a Changing World. And the last one—and all these connect—was called Rural People, Rural Policy. They was funded by different peoples. Rural People, Rural Policy was funded by W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and it was a group of peoples from the mid-South, and we came together, so we are tryin' to figure out how to impact policies that direct impact people. And that program lasted for five years, so our last year was this year. The program ended March the thirtieth, 2011. But we are continuing to work together so we can still try to figure out how to impact policy. [03:47:05] And one of the things about that is that we identified obesity as somethin' that we wanna work with. And so it—that was a good program that we worked with. And we also—with the Dragon Slayer Award. Do you remember Brownie Ledbetter? Have you ever heard . . .

SL: Yeah, I've . . .

BS: . . . talk of her?

SL: Yeah.

BS: Well, last year I received the Brownie Ledbetter Dragon Slayer Award. And it was so interestin', that program. And all the things—and since I'm talkin' now, I think about the things that Brownie and them tried to work on and did work on, and that organization continue to work on policies and issues that impact

low-income people. So yeah, I've had a lots of experiences that—because I worked with BGACDC. And talkin' to you right now, I think about what BGA—what people feel I have done for BGACDC. But BGACDC has done so much for me. It has given me those opportunities that I would not have had if I had not been workin' with BGACDC. Even startin' with the LeadAR award and then the Robert Wood Johnson; Leadership for a Changing World; Rural People, Rural Policy; Dragon Slayer Award—all of those awards came as a result of my involvement with BGACDC. So I hope that I will continue to give back to these organizations and the community and myself and my family because whatever I do, my family benefit first. And that's not being selfish; it's just automatic benefit because I'm there in the heart of it. And I'm just thankful for Kellogg and Robert Wood Johnson—W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, VISTA—all these programs. And as we work hard to keep 'em—and if we lose 'em, we are thankful that we had 'em, because they truly have left somethin' here for us.

[03:49:21] SL: I just don't know—I—it's hard for me to imagine anybody having the passion that you have because, you know, you say that you had all these opportunities because of the organization, but you fit. They made the right choice, and . . .

BS: And I thank 'em.

SL: . . . you fit, and you had the passion, and it meant something to you—all those leadership programs.

BS: Yeah.

SL: You took that stuff, and you made it better.

BS: Thank you. Thank you.

SL: So—what a gal! [*Laughter*] What a gal!

BS: Thank you.

SL: Thank you.

[03:49:56 End of interview]

[Transcribed and reviewed by Pryor Center staff]