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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Sadie Gilmore Booker

Interviewed by Kris Katrosh

January 27, 2009

El Dorado, 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 https://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, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Kris Katrosh interviewed Sadie Gilmore Booker on January 27, 2009, in El Dorado, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: Okay, Sadie. We're gonna get started.

Sadie Booker: Oh.

Trey Marley: We're ready.

KK: Rollin'?

TM: Mh-hmm.

KK: Uh—first, we need to do a little business up front here. If you would, please give us your full name and spell it for us.

SB: My name is Sadie—*S-A-D-I-E*—Gilmore—*G-I-L-M-O-R-E*—Booker—*B-O-O-K-E-R*.

[00:00:24] KK: Okay. And now I'm just gonna ask you for permission for us to conduct this interview and to place it in the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, so that we can share it with others. Is that okay with you?

SB: You have my permission.

KK: Thank you very much. That's the big business part. We are at the John Newton House in El Dorado, Arkansas, January 27, 2009. Uh—we're here with Sadie Gilmore Booker, and we're gonna talk about some history of south Arkansas. All righty.

That's the hardest thing you'll have to do. Rest of it's easy. Um—what we like to do is kind of go through your life—uh—more or less chronologically, and then anything you think of along the way, feel free to just add on. Um—you know there's—there's nothin' off-limits. You can't make a mistake. You can restate things. You know, it's not live television. We'll be able to edit this, so any way you wanna say somethin'. Uh—so what is your very first, earliest childhood memory?

[00:01:32] SB: My very first childhood memory would be at a sawmill my father worked at down in—in north Louisiana. It was—we called it Cherry Ridge, and I remember that I—my fifth birthday party was there, and my mother and grandmother, who lived—my grandmother lived with us—and my mother and grandmother had baked a cake for me, and we invited some neighbors in. And I had a new little baby brother, whose name was Jack, and I—uh—remember that the people who came to my birthday party—a lady—a Mrs. Webb, who owned the land that this sawmill was on—her hus—she and her husband owned the land, and she came and brought me a—uh—carnival glass—a footed glass. I still have that glass from my—that I got. So I've—I started collecting, and I have been collecting everything I came across since.

[00:02:29] KK: Is that a particular kinda glass?

SB: It is. It's a special glass. It's a carnival glass that's a—I—at the—in those days, I think it was prevalent. A l—they took up money and would order—people would come around, and you looked at a catalog, and you ordered stuff, and then it would come in a barrel packed in straw. And then people—you know, they deliver f—your order. And this lady had this goblet, and she was invited to come to my birthday and she brought it to me. That, I remember. And my grandmother gave me a little dish—a footed dish that—a little berry dish that she—one of her—her sisters-in-law, I think, had given her. They—just something they had because, you see, this was 1929 . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:03:12] SB: . . . and the very beginning of the Depression, which absolutely made an impression on all of our lives and still does. I think it had an effect on those of us who grew up during the Depression . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

SB: . . . to always be saving and—and careful. My—I remember that my daughter, [Mary Lou] who now is sixty years old and who lives in Mobile, Alabama, and has six children of her own—one son and six—five daughters—and once she said to her father, my

husband, George Booker, who grew up in Jonesboro, Arkansas—and she wanted us to join the country club here in El Dorado—whatever. And he said—began to say, "No, y'know, we don't have that type of money to—to associate with those people." And she said, "Daddy, you're just a victim of the Depression." [*KK laughs*] And he said, "Honey, you are so right. I certainly am." [*Laughter*] So, you know, he was born in 1921, and he—he said his father owned a men's clothing store in Jonesboro so—and he had to wear knickers until he was in junior high and was six feet tall because he said [*KK laughs*] they couldn't sell 'em [them] in the store, so he had—he—he—but I told him, well, he was lucky to have knickers. My dad couldn't sell—sell his lumber, and we could neither eat it or wear it. [*KK laughs*] But—but we did stay warm. We always—we never had a—an electric range or a gas range until after I married . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:04:38] SB: . . . because—uh—those trees—those pine trees that my dad bought and hauled—had hauled to his sawmill had strips, and they also had the cut-offs, we called it, from the plained lumber and the s—s—?lighter? we would use for splinters. So he—he had paid for that material, and so we always had a wood cook stove and a—and a wood stove to stay

warm by. So those were lessons that we learned as—in—young in life, I think.

KK: Right, so . . .

SB: But we don't have that type thing today. But we may go back to some of that. [*Laughter*]

[00:05:13] KK: The way things are right now—this is 2009—so—uh—those people who hear this thirty or forty years from now will probably have a better view of the depression we're havin' now than we do.

SB: They may. They may. We—you know, we'll—we'll just have to see what history brings, won't we?

KK: We will.

[00:05:28] SB: But these—uh—memories—the—that was one of my very first memories. And then we moved, I remember, from that place to a place called Calion, and it's out on the Ouachita River near here. We were just there a little while, but I started to school—the first grade—at what we called Old Union. I went the first grade there, and then we moved to Farmerville, Louisiana, where my father worked at a sawmill. Then in 1932, when I was in the second grade, and—and before November of ni—of 1932, I know we moved south of El Dorado. It was in a—a—a place where the Standard Oil Comp—Company camp had

been during the—during the boom of 1921, but the company had moved and left this sawmill. And a—a sawmill was there owned by a Mr. Hudson, and this man was a—operated the sawmill and owned it and was doing quite well. And during the Depression, some—he—he had gone to the bank in—here at First National Bank in El Dorado—and picked up the money for his—to pay his hands with—his sawmill hands. And on his way to the car, he was highjacked and carried to Calion and tie—tied to a tree and murdered, so that—his—he left a wife and a little girl. She was just four or five years old. And—and this Miss—Mrs. Hudson and her little girl—uh—Bobbie—Bobbie—and she later married March [SB Edit: Russell Marks]—but Bobbie were—were left. And they had a sawmill they didn't know how to operate, so they got in touch. They heard about my father, and somehow he got—they got in touch with him in Farmerville, and we moved to—uh—here to lease that sawmill and to operate it. So it was just south. It's where the—our chicken factory is located right now.

KK: Hmm.

[00:07:28] SB: It was on the railroad just south of Lion Oil Company in El Dorado. So in the second grade, my sister and I went to Southside School on the south side of El Dorado, and my brother started in the first grade there. So we walked to school, but if it

was a rainy day, my—my mother would let my daddy know that he had to come from the sawmill and drive us to school, so we—we—so we wouldn't get wet. But she prepared us good school lunches, and we lived at that sawmill, oh, until I was in the seventh grade. [00:08:08] And while we were there—uh—a Mr. Rowland, who was president or had a high office at the First National Bank in El—here in El Dorado, was—became the good friend of my father's because he had lots of land. Mr. Rowland owned land, and they had become very wealthy in 1921 during the boom, when El Dorado had their first oil boom. And many people did. A lot of people had ca—in El Dorado—anybody who owned land in Union County were quite wealthy overnight. So Mr. Rowland loved different types of lumber, and he got to be a friend with my father because my father had to go to the bank to borrow money to operate his sawmill on. Well, he—by this time my father had moved into the house next door to us—uh—the Standard Oil camp. My mother's younger brother [Ted Norris] and his wife [Birdie Lee Harrison] and his younger brother [Miles Gilmore] and his wife [Mamie Torrence] were in the back three rooms. My mother's brother and his wife were in the front three rooms. And each—both of them had new babies. Uh—we had a little boy born in the front rooms and a girl in the back one.

They're both—one was named Bob and the other one Barbara. But, anyway, every—he gave everybody he could in his family jobs to help—uh—stack the lumber or—uh—run the planer or do—drive a truck. My younger uncle drove a truck, so they could make us have some type of job during the Depression.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:09:38] SB: So we were happy living at this mill and goin' to school, and this—we had Mr. Rowland, who was the—the officer in the First National Bank—he and his wife owned a house on Champagnolle Street. It's just a few blocks down the street from here. And Miss Rowland would—was a milliner. She had made hats and she was tall, tall lady, and he was a little bitty, short man. [*KK laughs*] She musta been at least a foot taller than he. He drove their car out every afternoon and would look through the steering wheel of the car [*KK laughs*], and she was sitting beside him with her hat on her head and a pet—large hat pin stuck through it. And my younger brother and I would go out and visit with her as she sat in the car, because Mr. Rowland was talkin' to my dad about different types of lumber he wanted him to saw for him. So he asked my dad to—he wanted to—he found some black walnut trees that were on some land down in the—on the—off the Strong Highway, and he wanted to know if

he had those trees dug up by roots and all and hauled to his mill, if he would saw them through those roots. [00:10:50] Well, of course, during the Depression when my father didn't ma—have much money to do anything with, he gladly took that job. And he sawed that black walnut lumber. Through those—those trees, he said he never filed so many sawteeth before or after in his life. [*KK laughs*] But he sawed those trees, and he told Mr. Rowland—every afternoon Mrs. Rowland would come out, and I talked for—listened to her, and she would tell me stories about her big, three-story house on Champagnolle, and I would dream and think about that big house and thought how won—wonderful it must've been. And then he—she—he—she was not too well, so he had had an elevator put in the house from the first floor to the second, and I could just think about how you could ride on that elevator from the first to the second floor and didn't have to climb the stairs. Well, my father said—his name was John Gilmore—and he said, "Mr. Rowland, you need to have this lumber hauled over to your house and store it in the basement." The house—three-story house had a basement. And he said, "Store it in the basement until it is completely seasoned, and I—I don't—two years or however long it's going to take for it to dry. Then have it hauled up to Fordyce

to a large mill and have it plained." Well, Mr. Rowland followed his advice, and when my father would go in the bank, well, Mr. Rowland would always leave his office out of his—his office—desk and come out and talk to Dad. And his—"John, we're—I have a big tree of cypress"—or gum or different types of wood that he wanted him to saw. [00:12:29] So, of course, I—I grew up and in the seventh grade my father decided to leave this sawmill and buy one down on the Strong Highway. We were—uh—ten miles from Strong and twelve from El Dorado. So, of course, we were in the Strong district, so we rode a school bus ten miles to the—uh—stro—high school in Strong—to school in Strong. And my sister was a sophomore. She finished high school in Strong. I was in the seventh grade. My brother was in the third by this time. And we rode that school bus every day back and forth to the—to school. And then my sister graduated, and when I was a senior in high school—uh—we were—everything was doing well, but we still had no electricity. We had coal oil lamps.

KK: Yeah.

[00:13:17] SB: But they did have electricity coming down the highway, and we lived right on Highway 82. Well, the summer at—of 1940—uh—the—we had troops come from New York City

down from the state of New York—came down Highway 1 down to—and joined Highway 82, which had been black-topped by this time. And they crossed the river in Greenville. We had a new river bridge across Greenville, so they came across into Arkansas. And these—uh—I think it was National Guard troops—and as they came across the southern part of our state over—over to our—in our county. Well, they were in command cars just one right after the other [*KK laughs*], but driving slowly, and there'd be a certain amount of space between each one. We could hear the hum of those vehicles as they came across, hummin' and goin' down—down one—down the hill and then makin' a—a speed to go up the next hill.

KK: Yeah.

[00:14:21] SB: It was about a two- or three-mile run there. Well, during this time my dad and Mr. Thompson were in business together, and they had some—some men who worked for them that didn't have to work at the mill full-time. So they had a—I know we had a team of mules, and their names were George and Ida [*KK laughs*] because we had had an Uncle George and an Aunt Ida. [*KK laughs*] So I remember those mules' names, and they had them to plant a—a field that we had corn and black-eyed peas and purple hull peas, and on the front side of

the hill was just full of striped watermelons. So that summer, during 1940 when those troops were comin' through, Mr. Thompson had two sons and my sister and my brother and I lived there. [00:15:09] And we—we were not real busy in the summertime, so these men—uh—gathered the watermelons—the striped watermelons—in a wagon with the team and hauled 'em to our yard—our yard. We had two large sweet gum trees. They hauled those watermelons over and put 'em in big piles. And the—when the—uh—convoy would come, my—we made us a—a relay team, and we had about six of us, and we just—we handed striped watermelons into their command car [*KK laughs*], and they would reach and almost hang out of the side of their—their vehicles to get those melons. And they would be breakin' 'em open with their fist and eating 'em with their hands. [*KK laughs*] That was a real story I remember from my war—first World War II days. And then the next summer, of course, that—that winter, and that was in 1940 and 1941. In 1942 when I was a senior in high school, we went for a trip over to Lake Village, Arkansas . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:16:11] SB: . . . to hear a minister that had been a friend of ours that lived in Texas. He came to have a meeting, and they didn't

have a building in—in—uh—Lake Village, but we met in the courthouse at—at a courtroom upstairs and had a nice—a good church service. Well, after we went for lunch with the Tillmans [Charley and Pearl] who lived over there, that afternoon we—my dad in our 1940 Chevrolet, and my mother and dad and my brother and sister and—and younger sister then. I had a new little sister [Frances] who was born in [19]38, so there were—there were the five of us in a car that we drove over to Greenville, Mississippi, to see the bridge. We didn't go across it because you—it was a—a toll bridge, and we didn't spend any money, but we saw the bridge. And while we were standing there watchin' the bridge, a group of young people that had been at this church service with us, and we'd had lunch with them—they were my sister's age and she was with them—they—they drove up by—in the car beside us. And on the way, they had a—a radio. We didn't have a radio in our car, but they had their radio on, and they had heard that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. So from that afternoon on, our trip back to Union County to—uh—out between Strong and El Dorado was all we could think about was what was going to happen—World War II—because we knew what—you know, what was a-coming. And my mother and dad had both, course—and my mother had two

brothers [Henry and Amos Norris] who were in World War I, and my dad knew about it, so they began to tell us what to—what to look for. You know, our lives changed overnight.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:17:57] SB: But anyway, I finished high school that spring, and I was just in a small class of twenty girls and five boys, and those five boys were—as soon as graduation the next morning they left, some goin' to the marines and some to the navy and some to army.

KK: Mh-hmm.

SB: So that—you know, it—our whole world had changed a great deal by that time. So we—uh—had watermelons again the ne—that summer for the [*KK laughs*] troops comin' through. That was our way of helping with the war effort because everybody had a victory garden . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

SB: . . . and we all began to cut down on the sugar that we used. We didn't—it was rationed. We didn't have much sugar. And we would—uh—sweeten things with honey. My—my grandfather Gus Gilmore lived out from Strong on—on the Pigeon Hill Road north, and he had—they had an orchard that had—uh—uh—plum trees and a plum thicket, we called it, and peach trees.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:18:54] SB: And the—we had—uh—honey bees and—uh—uh—let's see, we called it robbin' the bees. They were down in hollow trees and—that they had fixed up for them to put ma—the bees made their honeycombs in those—uh—hollow trees . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

SB: . . . and they sawed 'em down and put 'em there. And so in—in the spring, my—my mother would sew a s—a mosquito net around some hats, and we—I went with my father down—would hold the dish pan for him to cut the honey out. And so we—we had honey for—for our hot biscuits and butter.

KK: Man.

SB: We always had a milkin' cow—a milk—a milk cow, and she'd have a calf, so that we had plenty of good milk and butter. And—um—we lived on the highway so that we had a—an ice box . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:19:44] SB: . . . and we could keep our milk and butter cold, and we had good vegetables, and so we—we grew up and did fine. And that—my sister had graduated and came to junior college here in—in El Dorado. She came up and rode ever morning with a man who was our neighbor who worked for Esso—drove an

Esso oil truck. So she rode—she came to junior high those two years—I mean junior college those two years. And I finished high school, and then the ne—the year I was a senior, she came—the—when I went away to college, then she came back to teach school at Strong. So I went down to Louisiana Tech to go to school, and I came home just not often because we didn't have any gas or any tires.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:35] SB: But it was okay. It was a good life, and my brother learned to milk the cow. He helped my mother and we—my dad ran that sawmill for—until I think it was in 1943 or 1944, and he sold it and moved back nearer El Dorado. But they both—my mother and father both were born and reared in Union County, and we—he came back up and built a sawmill just, oh, five miles out of town on the Strong Highway, and that's where my younger sister and my brother graduated from El Dorado High School. And I grew up here. Then, of course, after—graduated from Louisiana Tech, I went to Jonesboro, Arkansas, as an extension home economist. And there I had a—lots of wonderful experiences. Well, you still needed a car to be in extension and to go to the home demonstration clubs and the . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . the 4-H Clubs. But there were no cars. You know, during the war we still had that 1940 Chevrolet. And then we—I think we bought one in 1948. But anyway, I couldn't buy a car, so I rode with the extension agent—she had a car—or I'd go with the county agent—or many times I drove [SB Edit: rode] the bus out to wherever there was a home demonstration club. We had . . .

KK: Wow.

[00:22:01] SB: . . . forty-four clubs in that county, and I would ride a bus and then walk a mile or two. You know, I was young and energetic and enjoyed it. Oh, I rode with the health department man. The health—county health man was a dear friend of mine. His name was Bob Burns and he drove a war surplus—a command car, and I would go with him in that command car to the—and—because he wanted—he needed an audience—a ready-made audience, because up in that area of Arkansas, they had had a flood in 1937, and they had drainage ditches because the Cache River, I believe it was, had overflowed, and these people—the ditches were gr—raising mosquitoes, and they didn't know about how to protect themselves from mosquitoes, and the health department was telling about spraying with DDT, and he

needed to go with me to my home demonstration clubs and tell the—educate those people about those. And then, of course, I went to the 4-H clubs, and we taught nutrition and how—the "basic seven" and all that. But I went—my dad took me from [SB Edit: to] El Dorado to the bus station—gave me a fifty-dollar bill, and I had my little suitcase and sent me to Craighead County, which I had never heard of Arkansas State or Craighead County and . . .

KK: Oh.

[00:23:27] SB: . . . on the way up—I knew there was a college there, so we passed by a tall concrete structure and I—at Otwell, Arkansas, and I thought, "Oh, my goodness. That's the college." But you know what? It was the rice dryer. [*KK laughs*] I'd never heard—I didn't know anything about rice or soybeans or farming in that area like they did. They di—[SB Edit: were] all about cotton and soybeans and rice they grew, but I had come from a part of Arkansas that had oil wells and pine trees. [*KK laughs*] [00:23:58] But it was a wonderful experience, and one year from the day that I went to Jonesboro, I was married to a gentleman who had been in World War II—came home. He was—had been a—he graduated from Arkansas State, and on his night of graduation, he received his degree and was

commissioned as a second lieutenant because he'd been in the ROTC in college. So after being in the artillery for a while, he went into Air Force, and he had—he was a—had been a captain in the US Air Force and stationed in the South Pacific and flew twenty-eight missions in the South Pacific. So I met him and we were married, and we have three children [Mary Lou, Bill, and Sara] who have grown up and gone to college and done wonderful things. And my husband went to St. Louis College of Pharmacy and made a pharmacist. And after thirteen moves in thirteen years [*KK laughs*], we came back to El Dorado—Union County—and he worked at Hall Drug on the square at—in El Dorado in Union County. And from 1959 until he passed away in 1984—2004. [00:25:14] So I became interested in El Dorado's history, because my mother and daddy and I, we had all grown up here. And that when we came back in 1959, Ms. Rowland, the lady who wore the big hat out to my daddy's sawmill, ca—was still living in her big house on Champagnolle, and we lived on—just on Jackson Street just a block away from this house. So we were there five years, and Ms. Rowland—my mother and daddy came by and said they were on their way to Mrs. Rowland's ninetieth birthday celebration. Well, I was really impressed, and I loved—I had always enj—loved that house and

had driven by it, but hadn't been in but many times—a time or two. Well, not—in a few years they wrote the book about Mrs. Rowland's life, and it was called *Mother, the Overseer*. Her daughter, Mary, lived in Dallas, Texas, and we—she—they had, of course, still had a lot of oil money, and her daughter had married an oil man. [00:26:22] Well, one Christmas—the first year we were back home, and I taught sixth grade at Southside School, and I had a first-grader and a third-grader and a sixth-grader in that school, and they let me take them across town to 'em. I began to talk to my husband about us seein' about the Rowland home—if it would be available—if we could buy it. So I went to the dentist during the Christmas vacation, a Dr. Hanna lived—had his office down the street from us, and while I was there I wrote a little note to—Mary Sowell was her name—Mary Rowland Sowell. And I called Miss Rachael McKinney, who lived here—it was her first cousin. Rachael's mother was Mary's mother's sister and her father was her father's baby brother. So these ladies were double first cousins. I got Mary's address from Miss Rachael McKinney and wrote to Mary and told her we'd like to buy the house if it were available. I knew her mother had passed away, and we'd like to rear our children in it. [00:27:27] Well, my father had been written up in the book because he had,

you know, sawed all the lumber for 'em, and they had that one room that was sealed in black walnut—solid black walnut paneling. Well, I wrote Mary, and I didn't hear for, oh, I don't know, a year or two. But one morning before I went over to Southside to teach, we were eating around the breakfast table—George and me and the three children—and the phone rang. And I went to the phone. It was Mary Rowland. And she said, "We have a—I'm going to put the house on the market on Champagnolle and wanted to know if you'd be interested." Well, of course, I was thrilled to death—went back to tell my husband about it. And he—she—he said, "How much does she want for the house?" And I said, "Oh, I think fifty thousand or"—in nineteen sixty—let's see, it was 1959—about 1960. And he said, "Oh, Sadie, we can't pay that for a house. We have three children to educate. You know, we gotta raise these kids and send 'em to college." So I just, you know, knew what was comin'. So I went on to teach. We worked that day, and we worked many days. And a few years passed, and we had been able to buy a 1964 station wagon, our first station wagon. And George and the three children, who—now they were in the fifth and the si—eighth and the tenth grades, and I had, in the meantime, gone to junior high to teach junior high home ec.

[00:29:01] So that year we planned and wrote down Civil War monuments and grounds. George was interested in that part of history, and he and the children—they'd won—had finished a certain period of time in history about the Civil War. So we had a station wagon, and we left on the Fourth of July—er—yeah, because we had an—that would give us an extra vacation day. We had two weeks' vacation. And, 'course, it was summertime. The children and I were outta school. So we left here—left El Dorado—and drove to Knoxville, Tennessee, to spend the night with my cousin, who lived there, and go—start to the—with the war. We'd stopped some along the way, and we read every monument that we could find. [00:29:52] So my younger sister, who was back in El Dorado teaching at Barton Junior High, called me at this cousin's house and said, "Sadie, Mary Rowland is in town, and she is here to sell the house. The hou—the Rowland home is available." I couldn't believe it. [*KK laughs*] And I said, "George, let's just turn around right now and go home and buy that house." And, you know, he got me aside quietly at—we were in the home of these people who were going with us for a picnic. And he said, "Now, listen, the children and I have planned this vacation for a year, and you're not gonna ruin it by takin' us home—makin' us go home now and buy the

house. So let's just go on and go to Washington, DC, to Mount Vernon, and to Williamsburg and enjoy this two weeks, and then we'll see what happens when we get home." All right. We got back to El Dorado, and my mother and father had us out for supper that night. My mother always cooked the best pork chops and good French fries and homemade biscuits and still had plenty of butter and milk, and we were sitting around the table. My brother and sister had brought their families out, and they were all there to hear about our vacation. So during the time—as we were sitting around the table, I said to my dad, "I—Mary Rowland has offered to sell the house, and it's up for sale, and I thought we'd—maybe we might get to buy the Rowland home." And my father said, "Well, that might be a good buy." So that was all that was said. I didn't say anything else. We had supper, and we came on home, and everybody was enjoying the summer, and I got another call from Mary Rowland. But in the meantime, I had taken my children over—back to Crossett, where we had been for a visit, and while we were gone, the—our older daughter had gone to a Girl Scout camp, and the two younger children and I went. [00:31:57] And while I was in Crossett visiting those—with our friends there, I—we—the two younger children and I—we came home, and we just lived a

block from the drugstore, and I called George to tell him—he was working—that we were back home. And he said, "Why don't you run up here for a few minutes?" And I thought, "That's strange. He never asks me to come up to the drugstore often, you know, for anything." But I went up, and I when I got there, he pulled this bundle of keys on a string that had just been tied and tied and tied and put 'em down on the counter. And he said, "These are the keys to your new home." And I said, "George, what have you done?" And he said, "Well, you always wanted the Rowland house, and I bought it for you while you were gone." And I said, "George, did you have that house inspected for termites and checked out?" Because, see, I knew that the termites had eaten around the door. I'd been over, but I didn't tell him that I—it had termites. So [*laughter*] I was scared to death because I thought, "Why, he's bought a house that's eaten up with termites." Well, anyway, he said, "Yes, he had called the Terminix, and they had inspected. [00:33:11] So, I said, "How in the world did you buy that house?" And he said, "Well, Mary Rowland had been to town, and she knew that we wanted the house, and your mother and father had been a friend of her mother's and dad's. So, anyway, she called the real estate agent." Tignor Thompson was a customer of

George's. George had filled his prescriptions. And Tignor Thompson came over to the drugstore and said, "George, Mary Rowland is on the phone, and she would like to sell you the Rowland home on Champagnolle." And George said, "Tignor, I can't pay fifty thousand dollars for a house. We've got three kids to educate." And he said, "Well, you know, I'll go back and tell her." So he went back and called, and he came back, and they—back and forth, and then he came back for the third time, and he said, "Booker, Mary Rowland's tryin' to give you that house if you'll just take it. Will you take it?" And George said, "Well, I don't know." He said, "Well, make her an offer." And I—George said, "Well, I'll tell you, we just sold a house in Crossett that we built over there for twelve thousand dollars. I'll give her twelve thousand dollars for that house." So Tignor Thompson—well, he went back to his office a few blocks away, and he came runnin' in the [*KK laughs*] front door—George said almost tripped over himself and said, "George, she'll take it for twelve-five." [*KK laughs*] So we paid twelve thousand dollars—twelve thousand five hundred dollars for a four-story house that has an elevator. [*KK laughs*] And you know what? The solarium is paneled in that solid black walnut paneling that my father sawed when I was in the third grade.

KK: Wow.

[00:34:54] SB: And it was just an amazing story. We now have been living in that house for forty-five years [*KK laughs*] and have reared our three children. Now our six grandchildren have visited there, and it's been a pleasure. But in the meantime, this Miss Rachael McKinney, who was Mary Rowland's double first cousin was a good friend—her husband, Henry McKinney, was at the bank also, and he knew my father because, you know, the McKinneys and the Rowlands were relatives and they all were in the bank. So, Miss Rachael, and I became very good friends and sh—as soon as we got the house, she came over. Of course, it was—she helped to empty it out and had a lotta the things her cousin Mary had given her, and she knew that I was a home ec teacher, and I was interested in old houses. [00:35:44] And so she started working for this—to get the John Newton House. And she said, "I need some help." And I said, "Well, Miss Rachael, I have no money to give you. We have to pay for the house, and we have the children still to educate, but I'll—I will work and help you if you have fund-raisers, so that we can have the John Newton House." Because I knew the house had been moved to this location where it is now that faces Jackson Street because when my mother was a fourteen-year-old student in

school down at—in—at—they called it—out at—let's see, it was a little school that she went to out near the cemetery in Strong, and it was called Concord School. My mother was fourteen, and she had been to school out there, and she was in 4-H Club. And she had won her some sort of an award, and she and two—one other girl were to come from Strong to El Dorado to be in this 4-H Club cook-off. So when she left on—Strong on the train and they came through Lawson on the Strong and picked up a girl whose last name was ?Llewellyn?, and they rode to El Dorado in nine—this was in 1914. She was born in 1900, and she was fourteen years old, and they—a lady at the railroad station picked my mother up and this ?Llewellyn? girl and took 'em to her home to spend the night. And it was the Garrett home. The big mansion. The Garrett mansion. Because they had—they—Mr. Garrett bought the property that this house was on—push—had this house moved and built his mansion there. [00:37:39] Now, the Murphy building stands on that property. But, anyway, that night when the—my mother, who was fourteen, and her friend, the ?Llewellyn? girl, started to go to bed, there was a light in the ceilin'—high up in the ceilin'—and they had always had coal oil lamps [*KK laughs*], and they blew the lamp out, and they were discussing how they were gonna get up there to turn

that light [*KK laughs*]—what—do—put that—blow that light out. So Mrs. Garrett, who was so kind and generous and always helped everybody, came to—in the door and said, "You know, I'll show you all—this old switch doesn't always work." She said, "You just push this little button up and down and turn the light off. I'll turn it off for you if you're ready to go to bed." So that was her way of explaining to them how to cut the electricity off. [*KK laughs*] So Miss Rowland and I had had some conversations, and we were—had been good friends, and I knew—we were in the house, and so Miss Rachael and I became good friends. [00:38:43] And she said, "Sadie, if you'll help me, we'll—we got to—we're gonna get to buy the house." She had a meeting down in the conference room of the—it's now the Simmons Bank building. We had it on Sunday afternoon. She'd had announcements put on the radio and in the paper that she was gonna help—we were gonna start a South Arkansas Historical Foundation. So I went to her meeting and told her that I couldn't contribute anything, but I would help do any work that I could. So they got the organization started, and she got in touch with these wonderful people—five couples whom she knew well. She—Rachael McKinney and her husband, Henry—were one couple. The other couple was Emon Mahony and his

wife, Mabel; and then his sister, ?Patty? Mahony Montgomery, and her husband, Don; and Miss—Mr. Charlie Murphy—Charles Murphy and his wife, Johnie, and they were my husband's customers at Hall Drug all these years, and Mr. Charles Murphy's sister, Miss Theodosia Nolan and her husband, Dub. The five couples gave three thousand dollars each. That gave—made fifteen thousand dollars, and that's what Miss Rachael needed to buy this house, for us to save the John Newton House. That's where she got the fifteen thousand. Then we had to start working and having a Mayhaw Festival and selling—having dinners so that we could save the house because when I—the first dinner I helped to make funds to help repair the house, we—the fireplaces were all gone.

KK: Yeah.

[00:40:45] SB: The floor was out. Didn't . . .

KK: Wow.

SB: . . . have much flooring at all. You had to be careful where you walked, so you didn't fall through the cracks. And we set up a table in this large room that we call the living room. We set a table up in there using sawhorses and rough lumber. Two-by-sixes—put 'em on there on the—make a table, and we had fried chicken and black-eyed peas and cornbread muffins, and I'm not

sure what else. But those I know where three items because I was in the kitchen cookin' . . .

KK: Okay. Yeah.

SB: . . . all the cornbread muffins all night. [*KK laughs*] But we had coal oil lamps. We didn't have electricity. It was not wired then. And we started to work—we made—we had—I've forgotten what those dinners were maybe five dollars ea—a person or somethin'. But we started a fund, and she had garage sales and then she came upon the idea—went over into Alabama or maybe northwest—someplace to a mayhaw festival and found out how you have that. So for the last—I know we had the—I was not on the board until 1990, but in 1990 I started serving on the board. [00:42:00] But before then, I worked for every Mayhaw Festival because we were always making slang Jane, she called it. It was a salad that we chopped tomatoes and chopped onion and chopped bell pepper and put a vinegar and oil dressing over and that—we served that with our rice and gravy and fried chicken and cornbread or hot biscuits. We had angel biscuits. Anyway I was always cooking and helping her with the Mayhaw Festival. But then we st—got some grants written. Some other people were very instrumental. ?Billy? [SB Edit: W. L.] Cook, I know worked really hard on the board. They got some grants, and we

got some money to have fireplaces replaced, and after that then we got the house painted and new roof and, oh, it's come a long way in the past forty years since we've had the house. And it's been such a pleasure to get to work with it. And, 'course, many of the friends—all the people, just about, who were on the board when I first started with them in 1990 are gone or . . .

KK: Oh, yeah.

[00:43:07] SB: . . . in one way or another, so I don't have—of course, Miss Rachael has pa—we had her eightieth—but one thing I was really pleased about. We had her eighty-fifth birthday celebration here, and it was the year that the house was a hundred and fifty years old.

KK: [*Unclear words*].

SB: So her family all came and many—it was in the paper. I have that write-up that's in the paper and her picture—and many, many doctors and, oh, lawyers and all the people who were interested in the house came and attended that open house that day. And we've had many, many functions since, but not as wonderful as Diane has started with all the history that she's gotten—started goin' back and preserving for us. And it's a wonderful thing—a legacy to pass on to our children and to our grandchildren.

KK: Yeah, no doubt. Well, let me ask you . . .

SB: Uh-huh.

[00:44:02] KK: Let's go back to—I wanna make sure we get on the record . . .

SB: Okay.

KK: . . . some names and things.

SB: Uh-huh.

KK: So if you would, tell me your parents' names and where they were—came from.

[00:44:10] SB: All right. My father was John Cleveland Gilmore, and he was born and reared six miles north of Strong on the Pigeon Hill Road.

KK: Oh.

SB: And he grew up on the Ouachita River. He helped his father. They rafted timber down the Ouachita to—and he was just, like, six or seven, and his father taught—said—pitched him in the river and said, "Now swim, damn you, or sink." [*Laughter*] And so he learned to swim, and they forded those logs. They cut 'em, so they would fall into the water and they—he would get to go as—and—as far as Monroe down the river, and they had one wagon that had their supplies in it that took the food along for 'em to have. And my father would go do—could go to Monroe,

but then he had to come with the supply wagon back to his home and his father and a crew of men rafted that timber on down to New Orleans.

KK: Wow.

[00:45:10] SB: They went all the way to the Mississippi and then down to New Orleans. And when—and my husband and I lived in New Orleans two years. Our first child was born in New Orleans. And when I came home to see my grandfather—in 1948 she was born, and I brought the baby home to see my grandfather, who was still living, Gus Gilmore, who was almost ninety before he passed away. And I told him about our living in New Orleans, and he said, "Is the little town of Carrollton still there? [*KK laughs*] And I said—or he called it "Carlton"—and I said, "Yes, it is. We live just off of Carrollton Avenue. It's now been incorporated into New Orleans, and I lived just off of that avenue." And he said, "We used to raft timber down the river to Carlton," and that's where they sold the timber and got their money, and I'm sure they celebrated. [*Laughter*] They were—they—I—no wonder they drank whiskey [*KK laughs*]—you know, what did they call it? Moonshine—[*KK laughs*]—because, you know, after all, that was hard, hard work and hard living on—they had all these logs piled together and put together with

some—I don't know how they put 'em together. With their nails [SB Edit: raft wooden pegs], I guess, and then they would raft—take the raft down and they had piles of dirt on the raft where they had to cook to have a—whatever they captured along the way. They killed wild turkeys or a boar hog or . . .

KK: Wow.

SB: . . . squirrels or anything they had, so they could have some meat to cook along the way as they went down.

KK: Yeah.

SB: It took 'em months to get down there. But, anyway, that was—that's my father who learned about—and then from then on, I think he was only twelve—he only went through the third reader. But he knew how to walk over a tract of land and estimate the number of board feet in a . . .

KK: Wow.

SB: . . . tract of land. And that's how—one reason he and Mr. Rowland got to be such good friends was because Mr. Rowland wouldn't sell his timber to anybody unless my daddy looked at it and told him that they were not cheatin' him, you know. [*KK laughs*] The other people. [*Laughs*] He gave 'em an estimate about how many board feet were in—and he could figure a bo—a build lumber or, you know, just through the third reader now

when the—but he learned—knew how. But anyway, then that was my father. But my mother grew up three miles east . . .

[00:47:38] KK: And what was your mother's maiden name?

SB: My mother's maiden name was Norris. *N-O-R-R-I-S*. And . . .

KK: Her full name was.

SB: Full name was Louquency [SB Edit: Nettie]. *L-O-U-Q-U-E-N-C-Y*. Louquency Norris. And she married John Gilmore. And she was—her mother, who's—she was reared on the Ira Lightfoot Wilson place, her great-grandfather—her grandfather. My great-grandfather was Ira Lightfoot Wilson, and they owned a house three—home—a farm—three miles east of Strong.

[00:48:13] KK: So you said Lightfoot Wilson. What was the first name of that?

SB: Ira. *I-R-A*.

KK: Okay, I wanna make sure I got that right.

SB: All right. Ira Lightfoot Wilson was his name, and my grandmother, Luty Wilson Norris, was the youngest of three sets of children. He had been married—she—he—this—my grandmother and her—was the third generation—the third one—a family.

KK: Yeah.

SB: He had been married twice before, and his wife—her name was

Mary Elizabeth Gatheright, and she had been married twice. She had married a . . .

KK: Mary Ellis . . .

SB: Mary Elizabeth Gatheright.

KK: Oh. Gotcha.

[00:48:55] SB: Gatheright was her name. Mary Elizabeth Gatheright. And she was married to Ira Lightfoot Wilson. And Ira Lightfoot Wilson had been married twice and had children by his first two wives, and she—Mary Elizabeth Gatheright Wilson had been married twice and had children by her first two husbands. But they married each other, and they were my grandmother, and her name was—she was born to them later in life, and she was their youngest child. And they named her for her four older sisters that her father had had, so that her name was Sara Ann Louisa Rebecca. And those four names—that was her name. Sara. They had one sister named Sara, one named Ann, one named ?Louisa?, and one named Rebecca. So she was named for those four sisters and they called her Luty. [*KK laughs*] *L-U-T-Y*. So her name was Luty Wilson Norris, and my mother's name was ?Louquence?—Nellie ?Louquence? Wils—Norris—Nettie ?Louquence? Norris Gilmore. She married my father, John Gilmore. And they are the ones who had—lived at

all the sawmills and reared their family—my brother, Jack Gilmore; my sister, Clara Gilmore Hollis, she was; and my younger sister, Frances Gilmore ?Michels?, who now lives in Atlanta, Texas [SB Edit: Georgia] She's fourteen years younger than me.

[00:50:41] KK: So you had three siblings.

SB: I had three siblings.

KK: Okay.

SB: Yes, I did.

KK: Okay.

[00:50:45] SB: And then, of cour—I have my own three children, whose names are Mary Lou Booker Meaher, and my son is named George William Booker II, and my younger daughter is Sara Quency Booker, and she is the one that lives with me now in the big house on Champagnolle. But . . .

KK: I see she took on a couple of those names.

SB: Yes, Sara [*KK laughs*] ?Quency? Booker. Yes. And Finnell. Her married name is Finnell. But, yes, she did. She took on some of those names. And, 'course, the Mary Lou is from family names, too. But the house itself has just been a pleasure to get to see be kept and in the—and restored to the beauty that it is today.

KK: Talking 'bout the John Newton House that we're in today.

SB: The John Newton House. Yes, yes. Uh-huh.

KK: Okay.

SB: And it's nice to be in the neighborhood . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . close by and to have seen it. I didn't remember this house as a little girl. I do remember the Rowland home as a little girl because of my dad's connections with—at—with Mr. and Mrs. Rowland at the sawmill.

KK: Right.

[00:52:00] SB: But then I never remembered—but when I—after we moved—bought the house in 1964—the house that we live in—and I passed this house—the John Newton House—going either to Southside or to Rogers Junior High or to high school. I taught high school thirty years after that. And every morning I passed by this house, and every afternoon I passed by going home. [*KK laughs*] And that's how I remember the shutters so well. I can't—I hope we can restore—get the shutters back on it someday. They were green painted shutters, and I'm sure that they were operable because, you know, they—we need 'em for protection against the wind and the weather, and they used shutters on these type houses for weather protection.

KK: Yeah.

SB: But, of course, we had—they had no central heat or anything, either. But it—that's just something else to look forward to and to work for to—in restoration you have to do it a little bit at the time.

KK: Yeah, yeah.

[00:53:03] SB: But it certainly is nice to get to see that it has—and to give those people credit—the Murphys and the Nolans and the Mahonys and the—Patty Mahony Montgomery. The ones who gave that three thousand dollars in the beginning to buy the house, 'cause we would never have had it had they not—and, of course, Miss Rachael McKinney is due so much credit because she not only had the idea, and many other people—many have worked on it. There've been people on the board who have been so conscientious and have helped so many years to keep it and to get it to the point where it is today. So it's wonderful to get to see it. And Miss Rachael got to see that it was, you know, finished and was in good shape before she passed away. She was almost ninety. We were going to have her ninetieth birthday party here, but she was not physically able to come. But her children are happy to know that it's doing well, and they're glad to know that she had a—took such an interest in it.

KK: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

SB: Because if somebody hadn't, it would've been gone before now.

KK: Yeah.

SB: As we have lost many houses, of course, but we still have some. This is the oldest one, I believe, but—and we have a—many buildings that have been kept, and I'm sure you've been by the McKinney home. Have you seen that brick home in the neighborhood? If you haven't, it's on Faulkner Street. It's just a coupla . . .

KK: Okay.

SB: . . . blocks—a brick home that she—it's wonderful there—restore and keeping.

[00:54:46] KK: And how old is the Faulkner hou—or the house on Faulkner?

SB: It's younger than this one. I'm not exactly sure. I know the Garrett home was built around—it was built in—and in operation in 1914. And I'm not sure when the McKinney one was built, but I—after the boom, after 1921. So—because they lived in a house where the First Christian Church is now first, and then they built that one. And it is lovely. But it's—a lot of people are interested and have worked to keep these houses.

KK: Yeah.

SB: 'Course, a lot of 'em are gone.

KK: Yeah.

[00:55:24] SB: We had a—and then we got to buy the Miles house, which is next door, and have it—now that was during my time as being on the board. We bought the Miles house, and it was Mrs. Theodosia Nolan, who is still living . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . and has a—she's supported and has paid for all of the pictures that are back. And so many of the mirrors that she's had redone and so many things that—and the houses themselves have been kept because it takes money to restore houses. They took a lot to fix this one and to get this picture back, which was wonderful. The—I—and the story of it is on—here on the wall. But many people have contributed much of their life to helping to make it a success. And I'm delighted to have gotten to be on the working part of it because . . .

KK: Yeah.

[00:56:20] SB: . . . then, you know, we can all do a little bit—whatever it takes. And I appreciate Diane and all the board and their efforts and the things that they do. And we're—and I think it's wonderful that David Pryor's interested in us . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . in us and, 'course, he's been a dear friend of ours since he

ran for office the first time. My oldest daughter, who is now sixty, was on his staff when he ran the first time for the Senate. And she—and then later, my son, Bill, who is fifty-seven, I guess, as a—worked on his committee. Once he had a program going with the Russians—some Russians he brought over and Bill was the bookkeeper and the money person for that, and he and David have been good friends and we—it's nice that he comes to see us some when he's down here. And I've gotten a hold of his mother's cookbook, and I'm delighted to have it 'cause it has a lotta Pryor history in it. But he is so nice to visit with us. Is there anything y'all should think of that I need to say?

[00:57:25] KK: Did you go to the recent orchestral concert where David Pryor did the reading?

SB: No, I didn't.

KK: Okay.

SB: I'm sorry.

KK: Well, no, I was just curious.

SB: I was outta town. Yeah, I missed that. I have been in Mobile quite a bit. I—my five granddaughters—each of them have been—we had the queen last year of Mardi Gras, and the three years before we had had first ladies-in-waiting, and since my husband has been gone—I was home ten years to take care of

him. But since he's been away since 2004, I spend a lotta time in Mobile or in Little Rock, so I've missed some of our things. But he is certainly a s—friend of ours.

KK: Oh, sure.

SB: And a good supporter. And I'm delighted that he is doing this—he and Barbara . . .

KK: Oh, yeah.

SB: . . . are doing this wonderful work.

KK: Yeah.

[00:58:16] SB: I—and I—you know, of course, I remember when he was governor. Being in home ec, you know, teaching home ec and school food service, we had—they're both federal and state programs, and you actually work for the governor a lot. And every year we'd go to those conferences and meetings, and we'd always have them to come and speak to us, so you get to know—they don't—they can't get to know everybody else but we all know them when they're in those [*laughs*] big positions.

KK: Sure.

SB: And that—nice to have people who take care of our money and do good things for the schools. We have some good schools in Arkansas, and that's why I appreciate him. Is there something

else that you can think of that I . . .

KK: Oh, yeah. I'm—I've still got more. You're doing great, though. You're gettin' it all out there. You know, when . . .

TM: Kris, we need to change tapes.

KK: Yeah, okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:03] KK: So yeah, let's talk about the World War II period a little bit if we can.

SB: All right. I'd be glad to. And, of course, it's so fresh on my mind because this young man who just got his Ph.D. in World War II-era history and, 'course, he's been applying for a job [*laughter*], but he was in—he—I—he sends me cards from all over the world. Those five daughters—granddaughters I love, and they're pretty, and they're Mardi Gras queens, and they do all this big stuff, but I never hear a word from them. But the grandson, who's thirty-four, writes me [SB Edit: from] everyplace. And this winter I've had about ten cards from Finland. He's been in Finland. He was there at—in—to the Arctic Circle. Is that the . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: North Pole. The North Pole.

KK: Uh-huh.

[00:59:52] SB: And he was there at Christmastime and sent me a—'course, I had a letter from Santa Claus. [*KK laughs*] And he said—he calls me Big. And he said, "Big, that—these people think they invented Santa Claus." [*Laughter*] They and the—everything was all kinds—types of Christmas stuff. And I told him—he didn't know this, but the thing that made it so special to me was when his mother, who is now sixty, was a little girl, her first—she was one—we moved back to Jonesboro and lived with my husband's mother and dad, and my mother-in-law kept that one-year-old child, and I went to West School next [SB Edit: was in] the next block to their house. I taught the third grade that year, and that year with those third-grade readers, it was all about Finland. [*KK laughs*] Lapland and it getting dark at three o'clock in the afternoon and all the—all—and so this—his postcards brought back a lotta memories to me.

KK: Yeah.

[01:00:48] SB: 'Cause he didn't know I'd ever taught the third grade, or that I—it was on Finland, but it was great.

KK: Yeah.

SB: It—that's good. But he w—he is the one who's been down to the—I haven't been to The World War II Museum in New Orleans. I've been to New Orleans several times. Had

Thanksgiving lunch at the Royal Sonesta with four of my granddaughters. And we were in the French Quarter, but I haven't been to that museum. But I would like to go, and that's what—he's plannin' for us to do an oral history thing on World War II.

KK: Right.

SB: About the days that we did the watermelons and . . .

KK: Oh, right.

SB: . . . and then we had to use honey, and we used—oh, molasses were a savior for us. We had—always had—my dad knew a—somebody who—the ?Magure? was their name—a family of ?Magures?. I don't know how to spell it, but they always ha—made ribbon cane syrup . . .

KK: Ah, yeah.

SB: . . . every year in the fall. In October we would get ribbon cane syrup. And my mother made a molasses cookie, and she made gingerbread using molasses. And, oh, you know, 'course, we had hot biscuits and butter and molasses just for dessert, and there are a lotta ways you can do—to preserve when you don't have sugar.

KK: Yeah.

[01:02:07] SB: But sugar was rationed, and those—are we getting

this?

KK: Mh-hmm.

SB: Those years down at Louisiana Tech, the first year I was—didn't get my name in to stay in the dormitory in time, so I had to live with an aunt and uncle [Mary Lee and Dallas McClung] who lived in Hico, which is twenty-five miles from Ruston. Ruston's where Louisiana Tech's located. So I rode with—I had a cousin [Abbie Ruth] was two years older than me, and she was a junior, and I was a freshman. We rode a bus—a—they—school bus from Hico to Tech. And we were not the only ones. There was a large area—building in the bottom of Keeny Hall. Had a lounge for their drive-in students. And there were school buses who came from Hico and Dubach and Bernice and Farmerville—all in the north area of Louisiana and south Arkansas. They drove down and ro—back and forth every day to school, and we—and this area we could take our lunches. And see, things had begun to get—not—we couldn't buy a lot of material things that we had always had that had sugar . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:03:01] SB: . . . in them and fat. Fat was a very important thing for the explosives during World War II. So they—we couldn't—didn't have a—unless you had your own home butter. But

anyway, we took a lunch every day to that—to the school, and we had—I remember very well that paper sacks—we didn't have any plastics or plastic sack or anything. Paper sacks were a premium, and we would buy something and get it in a little small—a paper sack. And we—the both of us—we'd take one sandwich, and we split it in half and then we had a cookie and a piece of fruit always. We would—our mothers would keep us in—we had pears that were ripe or peaches or figs—they had lots of figs in north Louisiana—or fresh fruit of some kind. And maybe we would have bananas if we could buy some. And we—that one little paper sack, we'd put our lunch in, and we folded it carefully and put it in our—in a book [*bell clinks*]—in a large book and took it back home with us because we had to use that paper sack for weeks and weeks to put our school lunch in. [*KK laughs*] And we would—we—this good milk that we had—my father had made us a homemade ice box when the—we first started having ice be delivered down the highway, and he made a big square box and put a—and lined it with about a four-inch area between the outside wall and the inside wall. And this box [SB Edit: space], it was filled with sawdust. After all, he had sawdust that was left from the sawmill, you know, there where they sawed the lumber. So they packed it good then that help—

and then inside he lined with a smooth tin, and it had a heavy, heavy lid on the top, and we put the lid down and it would keep—and the lid was sealed—had sawdust, and then they had the tin on the outside lining. And we lifted it up, and there would be our good milk and butter. Well, we had some little bitty bottles of—little milk bottles, they were called—a half-pint, I guess, and their—my aunt would fill it—our little bottle with milk, and she cut round pieces of cardboard from shoeboxes and put the top on the little bottle, and we put it in our lunch and took it down in the lounge, down at Louisiana Tech. They had a refrigerator where we could keep our milk cold during the—or if you had meat, you could put a meat sandwich in there. [01:05:55] And we met. I met my cousin [Ruth McClung], who was in the upper class. She was a junior in her classes, and I—we would meet at a certain time—have our lunch together and then go back. We shared clothing, too. We wore the same size shoes and the same size skirts and sweaters, so I would wear the navy skirt and the red sweater and a white blouse one day, and she wore the brown shoes and the brown set. And the next day I wore the brown, and she wore the blue. We just shared clothing. There are a lotta—so many ways that you can do things when you don't have a lot of money to buy clothes with.

But we always had plenty of good fruits and plenty of good [SB Edit: food]—we had peanuts that we picked off our—my uncle had raised a patch of peanuts, and we'd go down to the barn in the afternoon and pick off peanuts and parch them at night. And they had an open fireplace. I'd never lived in a house that had a fireplace before because at—my family always lived at sawmills, and we had plenty of wood, and we had a round, potbellied stove, we called it—a round stove in the living room. And then we had a wood stove in the kitchen. Well, they had a wood—these people in Louisiana had a wood stove in the kitchen where we put wood in for fire, but we had wood in the fireplace. And ou—you know, I always say I burned up on the front, and I froze to death on the backside, you know. [*Laughter*] [01:07:25] But anyway, it was in a house that I had not lived in that type before. They lived—they didn't ever own a house, but they lived with widow women. They would live with someone whose husband had died, and their children were grown—and married and gone someplace, and they would—this woman would live in a bedroom and share. They shared the kitchen. And then across the hall, which was like this one, there was an open hall for—to let the air come through and keep you cool in the summertime where we shelled peas and shucked the corn and

did the work in the hall. [01:08:01] But in the winter it was terribly cold across that hallway going from the bedroom across to the kitchen. But—and that was my first experience of having a fireplace that you had to bathe by, and we didn't spend—waste any time gettin' your clothes off and gettin' to bed. [*Laughter*] I did—so you could stay warm. But we did dri—ride that school bus that—we had milk and butter, so we could take our milk with us. And sometimes we made chocolate milk. We'd have a little sugar and cocoa and our—we would take a—now we never had to take a cold biscuit in a syrup bucket or anything like that. We always had bought light bread that we could take our sandwiches. We did eat a lotta peanut butter, which was good, and we had jelly.

TM: We need to stop for one second.

KK: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

SB: Now where do we begin?

[01:08:52] KK: Well, you know, you were still talking about, I think, the things—the sacrifices you had to make during the war because of rationing.

SB: That's right. That's right. We did. And then we would—I did—'course, see, I was fifty miles away down in Louisiana. So I

would take my little suitcase with me on the bus to—from Hico to Tech, and then we had classes on Monday-Wednesday-Friday and Tuesday-Thursday, and then on Saturday till noon. So Saturday I would go either ride the school—most of the time I would ride the school bus that ran down from Spearsville, Louisiana—Junction City. Junction City's right on the line, see?

KK: Mh-hmm.

[01:09:40] SB: Arkansas-Louisiana line. I could ride the Junction City school bus up—a Tech bus—to Junction City, and my mother and sister—my mother didn't drive, but my sister, who was teaching at that time—she was teaching in Strong—they would drive down Junction City and pick me up. I had another friend here who was goin' to school there from here, and her name was Betty Jo Hartsell, and she was an art major, and I was in the home ec department, and we would ride together on the bus and then I—one—either her father would come down pick us up sometime and bring us to El Dorado—home, or my sister and mother would come. Then on Monday morning early, we would ride back down. We had to go back to catch that bus to ride the fifty miles down to Louisiana Tech to Ruston for classes. But that's how—we wouldn't—I didn't come every weekend, but every few weekends we would. But after the first year of living

in Hico with my aunt and uncle and my sis—my cousin, who was my age, and the—she had a younger sister who was still in high school, and after that first year, I had my name on the list to get in the dormitory . . .

KK: Right.

[01:10:51] SB: . . . at Louisiana Tech, so I went into Harper Hall the next year and had a roommate whose name was Suzanne Thurman. She was from Longview, Texas. And her fath—her mo—father's family had grown up in Ruston, and though she wanted to go to school in Texas, 'cause she grew up in Longview and—but he insisted that she come back to Tech 'cause all their family had gone to school there. And he still had a brother—she had an Uncle John, who was a dentist in Ruston. We went out to their house to eat often, and he was a big—a hunter, and I know that was my first experience with having quail. It was a—it was really a delicacy you know, to ha—eat quail. And they had wonderful quail. But anyway, Suzanne and I were roommates, and we lived in Harper Hall, and while the—all the men just about were gone. We just had a few young men who were 4-F.

KK: Oh, right.

SB: You know, they for some reason were not able to do into the service. But everybody else had gone to war. But these young

men were—they were in the chemistry labs and the biology labs, and they helped us. But we had about six hundred girls, and then we got a—the V-12 were the marines, and the V-5 were navy. We got six hundred navy and marine students who were—they were in the navy and in the marines, and they sent them there for certain—study—certain programs. [01:12:22] So by this time, I was in the dorm, and I wanted to work in the cafeteria or the dining hall to help prepare the food 'cause I always liked cookin' and food. And I went to the office that had the professor who was over the student helpers—student workers. And I told 'em I'd like to apply, and he gave me an application and said I had to have my parents' signature. So when I came home that weekend, I told my father about it. And I wanted to work for my room, board, and laundry. I didn't see the—you know, any foo—any money. But they just automatically did your room, board, and laundry. And that would help. And my dad said, "Well, no, you—I won't sign it because," he said, "you might be takin' a job that somebody couldn't go to school unless they had that job. So if—you know, we can send you, and we'll pay for your room, board, and laundry and it's—be sure that you're not takin' a spot that somebody needs." So I went back on Monday mornin'—told my

professor my story, and he said, "You tell your dad that there's a war going on, and we don't have anybody to work, and we need workers in these—in the cafeteria [*laughs*] and dining hall." So he said, "All right." He signed the paper. [*KK laughs*] And it was fine. Well, that first year I worked in the cafeteria, and that's where the women ate and, you know, we served regular cafeteria line. And, oh, it was fun. I enjoyed it. I always loved—it was—you got credit for it. 'Course, I made the—you know what—the full sum of my room, board, and laundry for going to school the entire I was in the dormitory was twenty-six dollars and seventy-five cents. [*KK laughs*] Twenty-six seventy-five. This was in 1943 and [194]4 and [194]5. I graduated in [19]45. [01:14:09] But since we had the V-12 and V-5, the navy and marines, they changed from a regular semester basis like we'd always had. The second—the very second year I was down there—I just had two semesters the first year. The next time we went to a trimester basis, which gave us eighteen hours each trimester, and you had three—like, three trimesters a year. And we didn't have any summer or any vacation, just between each—finals and beginning the new trimester we would have a week off in between. But that way I went through four years of college in two years and nine

months, so—and now why in the world they ever went back is a [*KK laughs*] a surprise to me. I don't know why on earth, but—'cause it was fine. Once you were on that campus, you were there. 'Course, we didn't have any tires or any gasoline, so everybody was in the same boat, and they had many, many wonderful things for us. [01:15:06] The—while I was in the cafeteria I remember a kinda funny thing that happened. We were—I was coming around the corner from the walk-in with a tray filled with butter pats. You know, I had a large tray of 'em filled with it. About a hundred pats on that tray. And I met one of the workers comin' who had a tray with strawberries that she had—you know, fresh strawberries that she had in cups. And as we almost collided, and she said, "Oh, Miss Sadie, we almost had a conclusion." [*Laughter*] So if we had had a collision, it probably would've concluded a lotta butter and [*KK laughs*] strawberries, but anyway, that was one of the fun things that happened. But then after the first year of my working in the cafeteria, I was transferred to the dining hall because the sailors and marines were fed in the dining hall. And we had wonderful food. The—after we had the government provisions, see, for those sailors and marines, and they had a obstacle course they had to run and they, 'course, had a lot of exercises and lot of

special things. And you know what? We had—the women—PE department—I had to take PE every semester or every trimester, and we had to run the same obstacle course that those men did. [*Laughter*] So it was good. I think that's why I have a good heart today [*KK laughs*] and can still run and walk. But anyway, it wa—that was part of the wartime things that we had to do. [01:16:40] Another thing was I was so privileged, I thought—they transferred me from the cafeteria to the dining hall to work for these men, and the dieticians—we had three dieticians who were all trained and lived and had gone to school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. So they were in south United States, down in Louisiana, and they didn't know about turnips and greens. They—we had the agriculture department. It was a very large department, and one of my men cousins who's—the two brothers that—this cousin, the girl that I lived with—they—one of the boys had majored in agriculture. [01:17:25] But—and so there was a large agriculture department, and they grew turnips and greens out on the farm and would bring 'em to us at the dining hall. And I remember sitting on the back porch and cuttin' the turnips off and peelin' them. And the women said, "Oh, we don't—we just feed the green part to the cows. That's the livestock. We don't do anything with the greens. We just

use the roots," they said. Well, we called the roots turnips, and I—we—when I said, "Oh, no. We eat the turnip greens down here in the South." So we stripped off—you know, stemmed the turnip greens and chopped 'em up, and we cooked 'em with dry salt meat and, 'course, they had plenty of meat. We had ham and those things to eat. And we—and our—the men just loved—we had turnip greens and turnips. And also sitting out on that big back porch of that dining area, we got—they did purple hull peas for us at the farm and brought 'em to us. And I showed them how we shelled the peas. And we sat back there and shelled peas and, of course, the regular workers—the people who worked knew how. 'Cause they were native Ruston people, and they knew—and we all shelled those peas and we—but they had wonderful food. [01:18:38] And it was served like a "family style." We—and this big dining hall where it had been a regular college—had a large table, and we had, say like, six people to a table. And you'd have a host and a hostess, and then two other students at the table—well, 'course, these were all men, the navy and marines. But they did have a—they had—we had a lady who was in charge—one of the—my age—my—a student with me in school—home ec majors—they had one assigned to each table, and we were the hostess for that table. And I got to

be the hostess for one table, which was a good one, but I did the typing and to help plan the menus and look up recipes and all those things—worked those— rest of the time I was there until I graduated. But I very well remember the prayer that we always had to say—the navy and marines—they said, "Be present at this table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored. Thy creatures bless and grant that we may dwell in paradise with thee." That was a poem that—you know, the prayer that we always had. And I learned a great deal from the personnel. We were—we couldn't get off campus very much. [01:20:05] And, 'course, the girls had to be—you had to be signed in and signed out, and you had to be back in the dorm at a certain time. Wouldn't those students drop dead today if they had to [*KK laughs*] follow those rules and regulations? [*Laughter*] But, anyway, we had campus sings, and the—one of the girls' dormitories faced the east and had a large porch all the way across. So, of course, the sun was setting in the west, and about five o'clock in the evening after we'd had our evening meal, we would have a—they rolled a piano out the door and—double doors—and somebody would play and I—a young man whose name was James German—he was in the navy and was a—could play a—the organ in the auditorium, and he played the piano beautifully, and they would

put a screen up and we—you know, we had campus sings. And so all the rest of the students and the navy and the marines—we all sat on the ground out in front and sang together. And then, occasionally, we'd have a square dance in the gym, and the young men 'cause, you know, they didn't have entertainment and neither did the girls. Many—several—I know several couples who—the young men had come from other parts of the United States, and they have married and have families and are living other places, you know, because of that experience. But it was a wonderful experience for me. I enjoyed that part of the war, though we didn't have tires or gasoline or—we learned to conserve many things and do—you—there—we could get along without a lot that I've learned to enjoy the past sixty years. [*Laughter*] But it's all right. It was a—it was—we were—all felt that we were helping with the war effort.

KK: Yeah.

[01:21:51] SB: And we were. And it was a good thing, and the—graduation was just as great, you know. We had the degree, and we could go into the business world from then on, and it was a good time that we didn't have to—many, many people, now—I'm the only one out of my small graduating class that went to college right out of high school. Oh, some of the rest of

'em either took business courses or they went to work in war plants. That cousin that I lived with the first year—lived at her home—and then she went—the se—when I went to the—live in the dormitory, she was out of school for a year because she worked in a war plant in Minden. So many of my friends—all the twenty girls that I finished high school with went into some type of service or else they went to work and—or took a business course or . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . went to Washington, DC, or many other places to work. But—course—and it was—but the college was a good experience for me and having been that—those young men—we walked together to church on Sunday morning. I had some really good friends. In fact, one of the you—men that I walked to church with—my—the same minister who had preached that sermon that we went to in 1941 over in Lake Village, Arkansas, I was telling you about—this man had come back to have a meeting here in El Dorado, and we were out on the—he was at our house on the Strong Highway, and he said to my dad, "Well, Charles—my son, Charles"—his name was Johnson. We called him Brother Johnson, but Alva Johnson was the preacher's name. And he said, "My son, Charles, is—has been—he's in the

marines, and he has been sent to a small school down in north Louisiana." And Papa said, "Well, what's it—where is the school? What name is it?" And he said, "Well, it's Louisiana Tech in Ruston." So I was in the kitchen helping my mother cook, and he called—my father called me and said, "Come in here. Charles Johnson is gonna be down at Louisiana Tech this fall in the marines." So Charles and I got to be real good friends, and we walked together to church on Sunday mornin'. And when my sister—older sister, who was teaching, and brought my little, four-year-old sister down to see me—spend the weekend in Louisiana Tech—well, that was hot in the summertime because we went to school summer and winter. And this Charles rode my little sister around his neck to church on Sunday morning and then walked—we walked back together. But now that young man—that Charles Johnson has been dead for many years, I think. But his son is a minister at the church where I attend right today. So, you know, that's three generations. And it's amazing how life fits in sometime and things go—and you just sit do—when we think about history, that's making history, isn't it?

KK: Yes, it is.

[01:24:55] SB: But, anyway, those experiences were good. And when I was ready to graduate, my—the dieticians in the dining

hall gave me four sterling silver knives in my sterling silver pattern. So, you know, it was a good thing for me. And then I went on to Jonesboro, Arkansas, to seek my fortune, and I found it. So [*laughter*] that was great. And then we got to move back to El Dorado. That is the thing that pleased me more than ever, and I got to help Miss Rachael with her saving the John Newton House, which has been good.

[01:25:30] KK: How'd you meet your husband?

SB: Well, he—when I got to Jonesboro—of course, I had—we had no cars, and I was supposed to have one for—but this—there were four young women who—in the same boat that I was in, you know. No—they—one of 'em was a young lady who worked for the child welfare, and she had a car. And another one was a—they worked for Internal Revenue, and her office was on top of the post office in Jonesboro. And the extension office was down in the basement. So we were in the same building. And another one—I've forgotten what her job was, but some job about like that. Anyway the young lady—there had been four of 'em, and the one who was transferred from Jonesboro to be a home demonstration agent up in north Arkansas someplace—I think she went to Clarksville—but anyway, I took her place. And so I—they—I was automatically the fourth one to play bridge with

them [*KK laughs*] or to—they took me under their wing . . .

KK: Oh.

[01:26:38] SB: . . . because those girls—we went to foot—to basketball games together, and two of 'em had jobs that required a car. But this one who was with the revenue department was on the top floor of the post office, and I was in the basement with extension. Her dad is—had owned the men's clothing store on the main street.

KK: Yeah.

SB: And she—her brother—we had a—they had a—what they called a birthday club, so—and whoever had a birthday, they had us get together on Saturday night. Somebody would get the others up, and they'd be at different—four houses. So one house this month and one the next one, one Saturday night and the next Saturday night—it's weeks apart. Well, and October was my birthday, and those four girls had me over to the Booker house for my birthday. And Mary June Booker was the lady who worked—she was not—and not any of us were married—and she worked at the revenue office in the post office. [01:27:40] And when I—my birthday—I was twenty-one. I'd had to pay a poll tax when I was only twenty. I couldn't vote yet, but I had to pay poll tax before I could get a payday because it was a state

and a federal job. So I paid poll tax and had worked two months—September and October—this was October the thirteenth on a Saturday—and we had my birthday party at the Booker house, and the mother and father Booker came in that night after we'd played bridge, and we had eaten. They were so excited, and the sister had told us—I had heard that she had a brother who was in service, and they had had a call—phone call the night before that their son was back in the United States. [01:28:25] He had—he'd—was in California, where he had landed back—and they had been out—the mother and daddy—the mother had gone every Saturday—she went back to the store with her husband, who worked on—and had owned the store on Main and—men's clothing—she rode back with him at noon and had her hair fixed at the beauty parlor and did her little shopping at Penney's next door or at the Sterling Store on the corner, so that—her Saturday—that was her afternoon out was on Saturday. And that night they came by the grocery store, and they came in with a ham and beans and ketchup. I remember those favorite things that their son had called the night before he was back from the South Pacific and would be home in, oh, a week or two. Well, they began—oh, they were so excited and I thought to myself, "My goodness!" They—Mary

June had told me his name was George and, oh, they were just so happy that he was coming home, of course. And one of the girls that was over in the car, which they picked me up 'cause I didn't have a car, and she said, "Oh, Mary June has the most wonderful brother, and you're gonna—we'll have to see that you meet him. You'll—you're gonna like him." And I thought to myself, "My goodness! If he's that wonderful [*KK laughs*], when he gets home he'll have a dozen girls after him or, you know, he'll be so spoiled I couldn't live with him anyway." [*KK laughs*] But, you know, [*laughs*] I met that young man, and he's the one I married one year from the day—a year from the day. September 1 of 1946 we were married, and I'd gone up on September 1—Labor Day weekend in [19]45. So he . . .

[01:30:01] KK: And his full—again, his full name was . . .

SB: George William Booker.

KK: There you go. Yeah.

SB: And he was a—had been a captain in the Air Force for four years and he was back, and I met him back home. And sure enough, it was the best—we lived together fifty-eight years.

KK: Wow.

[01:30:18] SB: And we have these three wonderful children. And he's the one who was—he—'course, he worked for Woolworth at

first. He was in training for to be a manager at Woolworth. He was the manager of a large Woolworth store in Waco, and we were transferred to Galveston, Texas. And while we were in Galveston, Texas City blew up. You've heard about that experience. It was terrible when Texas City blew up. And then we were transferred to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and from Baton Rouge we went to New Orleans. And at these places—in Waco, I taught sixth grade and in Galveston I taught junior high, and Baton Rouge I worked for the Singer Sewing machine company, and then in New Orleans I transferred just with—bat—from Baton Rouge down to New Orleans, and I worked on Canal Street, and he was the manager of the large Woolworth store on Canal and Rampart in New Orleans. And we lived there two years, and that's where our first child was born.

[01:31:12] KK: Oh, let's go back to the Texas City . . .

SB: Okay.

KK: . . . story. Tell us about that.

SB: All right.

KK: What year was that and what happened?

SB: It was in 1946—[19]47. 1947. April. April of 1947. My husband was the manager of a large Woolworth store on the canal in Galveston. Galveston, of course, is an island. And I

was teaching home ec in a junior high school in Galveston. Well, one Friday morning a ship was in port over in Texas City. Texas City was a large oil and plants—they had all kinds of fertilizer plants and oil industry all on the—on their isle—it's on the coastline of the United States. But Galveston was—we had to cross a—you know, a bridge. We were on the island. Well, that morning—on Friday morning, a ship down—it was in port, and they had lots of sailors and other people on the ship, and they were loaded with fertilizer and string. They had big bundles of twine—string—and that ship—something happened. The fertilizer caught fire, and it exploded. And when it exploded, it collapsed the ship. Everything went up. And there was an airplane—a red—an airplane flying overhead that was—"Oh, look at this beautiful sight." The fire with—from the fertilizer made it look like firecrackers—you know. What do you call those? Sparklers.

KK: Sparklers?

[01:32:54] SB: Sparkler. And everybody rushed—or many people rushed down to see this beautiful sight down on the water, and the plane was flying over to see it, and the explosion engulfed the plane. It just was gone. And I didn't know it at the time, but I have a friend who—Ruth L. Jerry is her name, and she had

a little, one-year-old girl [SB Edit: Sherry] who was in a stroller, and her husband worked at a—they lived in Texas City. And she had gone to Louisiana Tech a year, and then she went—she married, and they moved to Texas City. And he was working at a laundry, and many of the sailors that were in port had brought the laundry and left it, and then they picked—he went down to take their laundry—deliver it. Well, he was engulfed, and when that ship exploded, it washed way up into the shore and a lotta the plants then caught fire, and they explan—exploded one right after the other. It was a terrible disaster, and many people were killed. And this young man who was delivering his laundry to those people was killed, and that left that wife and year-old baby. And the daughter now has lived here for many years, and the woman came back here and taught school at—we got to be good friends for sixty years. [01:34:12] But, anyway, that day I was at this large junior high school and teaching home ec, and I heard the rumble go down the hall. You know, we all heard it. It shook and rumbled. And I—the first thing I thought of, because I'd grown up at sawmills and they always had a boiler, and every once in a while a boiler would explode and, you know, it would shake the earth. Well, when that rumble went through those hallways in that big brick building, I thought, "Oh, my

goodness, the boiler has exploded." But, you know, didn't—in a minute, a voice came over the loudspeaker, and the principal at that junior high where I was teaching was the head of the Red Cross for Galveston. So, of course, he got the call immediately. And they came over the loudspeaker and said, "A ship has exploded in the canal over in—at Texas City, and we have to evacuate the building immediately." Everybody was to get—evacuate just like a fire drill, so we got out of the building. And they kept—and they—'course, they got our principal 'cause he had to go—Red Cross. Well, they kept coming on—they wouldn't let us leave. We couldn't leave. It was a big—it was a large junior high and a brick building, and it had a tall fence around it. And we had to go in different areas, and we'd walk round and round the fence or, you know, somebody—we—every class was in a certain area. Then we'd walk, or they'd sing, or we entertained 'em some way. And the children were just so upset, and they wouldn't—we never returned to that building. We stayed out there. [01:35:51] And the heavy fog of smoke came over, and it was just like it was a dark cloud. And I remember very well—I had on a black skirt and a white blouse, and all these little tiny things of burned twine, about an inch long, drifted down through the—and it just—it was all—I never got—I

didn't—I just threw that blouse away.

KK: Wow.

[01:36:13] SB: I couldn't get the oily stuff out of it—where the twine had blown up when that exploded. And, you know, I would talk to 'em and I'd say, "Oh"–somebody—one of the girls or if the kids would be crying, and I said, "Don't worry. You know, it's over in Texas City. It's not gonna bother us." And they said, "But my mother works in a cafeteria there" or "My daddy is at such-and-such a plant, or"—every child was affected. It was terrible. Well, when I walked home that afternoon—'course, we were still walking. We always lived in towns those years that had public transportation, and we didn't ha—you couldn't buy a car. And so I walked home, and I met my neighbor, who lived just—Galveston—the houses are just—you can open the window and reach out and touch the next house. Well, this one person who lived next door to us had gone—her brother I'd known at Louisiana Tech—and she and her husband had lived here in El Dorado, Arkansas, and he worked for American Oil years before then. They lived next door to us, and they—she had a little—a baby about six months old, and I met Corinne comin' up the street with the baby in her arms—the—Sue was the baby's name—Susan. She had the baby in her arms just crying, saying,

"Oh, I know that Joe was killed." Her husband was workin' for—I've forgotten now—I guess Monsanto. A plant and—but Joe was all right. All right. All it did was—he was havin' a coffee break, and it knocked him off the stool. [*KK laughs*] But he was safe. But, oh! Many, many families were affected, so I went home that afternoon and visited with her and, 'course, the radio was just full of it. And George said—he came home after they closed the store at six, and he rode the bus home. And, of course, ambulances were just . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . screamin' and goin' every direction, and they were—and they took a lot of 'em to Houston and a lot coming into—see, University of Texas Med Center is in Galveston, so the medical school was just—it was just a turmoil. And we listened to the radio. I didn't leave—we lived in—downstairs in an—a house [*interference in audio*] that a couple lived above us. They owned the home, and they were older people—Mr. and Mrs. Bass—and he worked for the railroad and was gone a lot. And she was alone, and she was afraid to live downstairs . . .

KK: Oh.

[01:38:35] SB: . . . so they worked—lived upstairs, and she rented the lower—we were in this apartment. And we were—we

visited—of course, we were sitting on their steps, and the radio would come on and say, "Well, such-and-such plant is exploding." And we were all watch—looking, and we could see the explo—the fire go up. And they'd say, "Oh, I have a—that little child that looks like he's about four years old. He has blond hair and blue eyes, and he doesn't know his name or"—you know, tryin' to locate. "Does anybody know some such-and-such a name?" Maybe they'd have one that was older who could give 'em their name.

KK: Wow.

[01:39:12] SB: They were just trying to locate parents, and they were—some of 'em—the whole families were killed. And, oh, it was awful. It was a terrible thing. Well, that Friday when the mail came—'course, the Woolworth doors were made double-doors, if you've ever been in a Woolworth building, and they have a metal rod that goes up into the door and then went down into the floor in the concrete, and they were—you know, you'd open 'em one—and they—the doors were still locked when—at eight o'clock when the explosion came. And the pressure from that explosion opened all of those doors. Just . . .

KK: Wow.

SB: . . . tore that wooden—the metal outta the doors. And they

were so busy that day that they didn't open the mail. I mean, every—the whole town was just—it was just turned upside down. So they didn't go through the mail. Well, that next morning—Saturday morning when George got to work—he had a letter in the mail from the Kansas City Woolworth—the head of this division out of Kansas City—saying that we were transferred from Galveston to Baton Rouge. Well—and, 'course, all we had that—we had rented furnished apartments and money was—and when we got to Baton Rouge, we couldn't—we just lived in a one little—a hallway and one bedroom, and we had to share the bath with three other families because it was—after World War II, nobody—no building had been going on . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:40:46] SB: . . . and all the veterans were back and marrying and, you know, you just didn't have places to live. So—but anyway, all we had were his two footlockers and my college trunk [*KK laughs*] and our suitcases. His army bag that was, you know—and I had suitcases. Well, when he got to work on Saturday morning, he had his letter saying that we were being transferred to Baton Rouge. So I had stayed in Waco when we were transferred from there and—just three days or so—and he went ahead of time to Galveston. But I told him after that—I—

"When you leave, I'm leavin'. You know, just—we'll just pack up and go." [*Laughs*] So we put our—everything that we had in our suitcases and our trunk, and that was—when he got home Saturday night and told me that we were bein' transferred, and Sunday morning we were on a train to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

KK: Wow.

[01:41:38] SB: Because—and people thought it was because of the explosion, but it was not. It was because it was a transfer. But when we got to Baton Rouge on that Sunday night, we were in—I'm tryin' to remember the name of the town that—it's on one side of the river—the Mississippi River, and Baton Rouge is on the other. I can't remember exactly. Somethin' port. Anyway we got there and—on the Missouri Pacific Railroad, and they had a bridge in Baton Rouge that went across the Mississippi, and the railroad track went down the center of that bridge. But the Missouri Pacific wouldn't pay their part of the bridge, so they—we pulled up on the—at the station—the train station on this ea—the west side of the river, and they used an engine and loaded our—we were in a—in coach cars. They loaded our coaches on—backed 'em on—onto a barge and didn't lea—take the engines 'cause it was too heavy, and they put our cars on there, and we ferried the [*KK laughs*] Mississippi over on the

side where Baton Rouge was, and our engine pulled up to there and loaded [*KK laughs*]—and hitched onto us and pulled us off. So that's how we got into—over the—across the Mississippi over to Baton Rouge. [*KK laughs*] But, of course, we didn't have a place to live, but we had a hotel reservation. So we stayed in the hotel for, oh, several weeks—two or three weeks—but it was always my job—and, 'course, I didn't—I was on foot all the time. But—'cause we'd—or I'd ride the bus or—it was my job to find us a place to live which they—George worked at the—as manager of that large Woolworth store. And I would walk and read the newspaper and call, and I found us a place to live. First we would live—we lived in a bedroom with just kitchen privileges, and, of course, we had a bathroom, and we'd just rent that one bedroom, and then I would find us an apartment to live in. [01:43:49] And we lived there. We were in Baton Rouge—that was in April, and we were there a year—we were there—I know we were there in the fall because we got to go to the football games at LSU, and I know it was—just as it happened, we were livin' in an apartment on Ninth Street, and the band [SB Edit: man] who had been—his name [SB Edit: Coach Skipper Hays] was—let me see, I can't—oh, I'll think of it in a minute. [01:44:20] There were six boys who had graduated from El

Dorado High School, and they'd been in service. They were brothers. Three sets of brothers. Two of—they—Ray and Raymond Bullock were two names, and two of 'em were—one of 'em they called "Egghead." I don't know what his [*KK laughs*]—he had a name—two Lyle boys and two—see, two Lyles, two Bullocks, and two—oh, I can't think of that other name. I should. They were brothers, anyway. Six boys were on LSU's football team. And the man who was the—had been the coach up here was on the LSU faculty, and he—those boys had come back from service, and they were on that football—and so that I knew six young men who were on the team. Oh, Lyle and Bullock—two Bullocks and two Lyles and two something. Anyway we went to ever one of those. They were wonderful, big, you know, LSU football. But I'd never seen anything like it. 'Course we—there, again, we were riding the bus always. But we would get on the bus and ride it to the football team, and state police were every place. Louisiana has the most wonderful state police department. They had flashlights that were this long [*KK laughs*] that, you know, had a long—and they were motioning and, 'course, we were riding on a city bus, and they parked people all over the place for those games. And they were great. We went to them all. I never got to go to any

football games in college because it was during the war . . .

KK: The war.

[01:45:54] SB: . . . and we had no band, no football, no anything. But we enjoyed those LSU ones. And we were there about a year and a half or two years, maybe. And my father and mother—we came to El Dorado for Christmas on the train. We came to Monroe, and they picked us up that Christmas Day. I remember bringing my grandmother, who was seventy-five, and she'd always been my bed partner and lived with us all of my life. I was only five months old when my grandfather died, and she moved and she—my younger uncle [Ted] moved with us. And I brought her a poinsettia in a pot, which—we'd never had poinsettias here then. They were—and I—poor George—on the train, he was six three and weighed about two-fifty and was—you know, had a size fourteen shoe [*laughter*], and every time he moved on that train at night he was kicking the pot plant, of course. [*KK laughs*] You know, but he helped me get that pot plant to my grandmother that Christmas. But we got—we were there during the football season and after Christmas. Then the next January, I think, we were transferred to New Orleans. But that was a wonderful experience. We'd never been in New Orleans before, and we had to learn our way around and rode

the streetcar named Desire and . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:47:13] SB: . . . rode—every Sunday. All week long we would read history. George was a—he was a history buff always, and he would read all this stuff about the cemeteries or the east end or whatever was important in the—down in the French Quarter. So we'd read whatever section was all week, and then on Sunday afternoon, as soon as we went to church, we grabbed a sandwich, and we could buy a bus ticket or a streetcar ticket for—I think they were fifteen cents maybe. Ten cents. And you could get a transfer all over town. So, you know, we spent the—until dark we were riding and seeing New Orleans. And so we had two perf—wonderful years there, and our first child was born there. And soon after, he decided to come back to Arkansas. I'm surprised—he was so happy with the West Coast. But he had never been in that part of the country, and he had been on a tour—the—in 1940, right at—you know, during the Depression years, a teacher he had had in high school—I think his Spanish teacher—George was a—he had worked for the Highway Department in the summertime to—when he was in college and countin' the loads of gravel that—they were graveling a highway between Jonesboro and Paragould, and he would—he counted

those gravels at night because he was big and fat and hot. [*KK laughs*] And he would always—you know, in the daytime he didn't wanna job—he had to have a night job, so he counted the loads of gravel. And they graveled that road, and one heart doctor that we had here that I took George to when he—after he retired and was ill, and I was tell—this doctor said somethin' about he came from ?Brookland? to El Dorado. And I said, "Do you know where"—George said, "I helped gravel that road from Jonesboro to Brooklyn. I mean, up to Paragould." And he said—I said, "Do you know where ?Brookland? is?" He said, "I know where Goobertown is." [*KK laughs*] [01:49:22] So, I said, "You are a native if you know where Goob"—'cause I'd had a 4-H Club at Goobertown, you know. It's a small world when you have all these experiences, but they're good. We enjoyed Baton Rouge and New Orleans, but we just—'course, we visited the capitol. On Sunday afternoon, it was open, and you could go and—a lotta things at Baton Rouge. And then New Orleans had all sorts of things to see—do. But he decided that he would—well, and the summer of that year, 1948, when our first child was about six months old, his mother and dad always came to see us for a week in August each year. And in January, Granddaddy would have a week's vacation, and they came wherever we were.

[01:50:04] And that summer, when they got to New Orleans, I had been reading about Mobile's Bellingrath Garden, and I was so impressed with this man who had started the Coca-Cola Company. Mr. [Walter] Bellingrath had made this garden in Mobile. So I wanted to go to—over to Mobile to see the garden, and they said, "Okay, we'll go." So they—George was on—had vacation, and they did—were there. So, we went in their car. We still didn't have a car 'cause we lived in towns that had public transportation. So we rode over one Sat—one day to—one Saturday to Mobile, and Sara—Mary Lou was in—the six-month-old child was in the front seat in a car seat, and she kept turnin' around and cryin' and pullin' to back—to the back seat with me 'cause, 'course, I was the only one—I'd kept her all of her life and that she knew. So any—we stayed—we had reservations at the Battle House—the old Battle House Hotel. And so we had adjoining rooms and up—one—our room had the baby bed in it. We spent the night there. Well, that night we walked around—Mr. Booker had false teeth, and he liked to eat in a cafeteria. He loved a cafeteria. So we walked around the Bienville Square, and we found a Morrison's Cafeteria. Not any of us had ever heard of Morrison Cafeteria, but we went in there and had supper. [01:51:34] The next morning after we spent the night,

we went to Morrison's Cafeteria again for lun—breakfast—and then we went in the car on—out to Bellingrath Garden. George had found a map, and we went to the garden. When we got to that garden, the gate was open and there was no fee—entrance fee. And there was a big red Coca-Cola box about six feet long up on a stand that had Coca-Cola on it—red box—and a gentleman in a tan suit that had green stripes down it and on the pocket had a insignia of Coca-Cola. He'd be standing there and handed us out—we were—it was a nickel Coca-Cola then. You—that was the small, six-ounce size. He was servin' us—and you'd go a little piece further—the garden covered acres and acres. It's on a branch—a bay—from the bay. You know, the Mobile Bay. And it had acres and acres of azaleas and, oh, beautiful, beautiful blooming plants everywhere. And we'd walk around, you'd find it, and somebody else would be servin' you a Coke. And we couldn't figure out what was going on. Granddaddy Booker—we had Mary Lou in the stroller, and he was pushin' the stroller and, of course, he made everybody there, "Look at the baby." But the flowers were so lovely and come to find out, it was Mr. Bellingrath's eighty fir—fifth birthday. And they were having open house, and this was the celebration that we enjoyed. [*KK laughs*] So we didn't know

anything about it—Mobile or anything that—you know, I had just read that in the paper. So, anyway, we drove back to New Orleans. Well, on the way back, I had to take the baby out of the [SB Edit: car seat] 'cause she would cry if her Daddy took her or her grandfather, so I was holdin' her back [SB Edit: in the backseat]—and George said, "I'm going to change my profession. I am not going to have a job that I—my children will grow up and not know me because," he said, "I go to work every morning while she's still asleep. I come home at night, and she's back in bed." So she didn't even know who—she cried every time he took her. [01:53:45] So he said, "I'm"—and that summer he decided to quit the Woolworth Company and went to Tulane and got his chemistries that he needed to go to pharmacy school. So then we—in that fall we trans—we went back to Jonesboro, and he went out to Arkansas State and got whatever else—something else—maybe organic or something he had to have. And he taught night-school classes. The men—many of the veterans were back, and they had not finished high school. And he taught history and math at night, and I got the job teaching the third grade at West School, which was just in the next block, and his mother kept the baby while I was teaching. And he got that—got whatever he needed at Arkansas State that

year, and then he transferred to St. Louis College of Pharmacy because it was one of the top—well, at first we went to Arkans—to Clarksville—he went to Arkansas Pharmacy School, and it was located in Clarksville at Clarksville—at the College of the Ozarks then. Which was a Presbyterian school. And he went—we were one year there, and then he was going to be transferred and have to go to Fayetteville for one year and then go back to Little Rock for whatever they have to do—an internship. So he checked into St. Louis, and it—they were on a trimester basis, and he could go around the clock and get through sooner. So we went back to Jonesboro, and then he went to—he—we took—every Sunday afternoon we drove up to Walnut Ridge. He rode the train to St. Louis, and on Friday night he rode the train back, so he got that pharmacy degree. And then we had a child born in Jonesboro, and then we moved to Conway. And our third child was born in Conway, and he had a job at—with Cox Drug and—in Conway. So we were there a year and in the—I—you know, was—had visions of maybe getting a master's at—out at—it's now called—Conway's college is sta—Arkansas—not Arkansas State, but it's state . . .

KK: University of . . .

SB: . . . u . . .

KK: . . . Central Arkansas.

SB: . . . UCA.

KK: Yeah.

[01:56:05] SB: UCA. So—but I didn't get a master's there, and we had the third baby. And then we got—he got a job in Crossett, and we moved to Crossett for five years, and it was wonderful. I loved being in Crossett. It was a little town. We had a first-grader and then—well, we had a first-grader there, and then the—she was still—gone the first four years. She was in the fourth grade, and our second child was in the first grade, and then Sara and I were still at home. And I baked birthday cakes and wedding cakes and all that kinda stuff. We built a house, and I was baking cakes at home, and my husband was workin' as a pharmacist at Crossett, and he was very fond of Hanks Spikes, who owned that drugstore. They got along beautifully and every—and we were just forty miles from El Dorado. We came across the Ouachita River and visited over here at [*unclear word*] with my family. But one night he came home—we'd just been in our new house two years—and he said Hanks Spikes, who owned the drugstore in Crossett—his older brother, Bill, had paid for Hanks to go to pharmacy school. So he—his older brother, Bill, had a son—who's young Bill—and he had just

graduated from pharmacy—Arkansas Pharmacy School. And young Bill didn't want to work with his dad in Pine Bluff—he wanted to come to Crossett to work for his uncle. So they said, "George, we'd like for you to transfer. You've trans—just go from Crossett to Pine Bluff to work in that drugstore." [01:57:35] So that's where we went, to Pine Bluff. And we lived in a two-story house again, which is a Victorian rent house and right across the street from First Ward School. So I got a job teaching third grade at First Ward, and we had a fifth-grader and a second-grader, and George went to school—I went to work at twelve at noon and worked—Cherry Street Drug was open till nine o'clock at night, right across from the hospital. He worked there from twelve to nine. And some salesman came along and told him about there being an opening at Hall Drug in El Dorado. And we—he called us on a Sunday afternoon, and the next morning we had vacation, and we were going—coming through El Dorado to see my parents and spend the night, and then we were going on to New Orleans for—take these kids back to show 'em New Orleans. And that afternoon one of the salesperson—a detail man—called George and said, "There's an opening in a drugstore in El Dorado who'd like to hire someone." And George said, "I'm going through there in the morning." So they—he

said, "I'll call and tell him you'll be by for an interview." Well, when we got to El Dorado, we met my mother and daddy on the way. We were having a revival meeting. We had the kids all in shorts, and we put the skirts on the little girls [*KK laughs*] and put—transferred 'em from our car to their car, and they went to church and kept the children for us. We went to Hall Drug and had an interview, and he was hired to come here, and that was in 1959, and we've been here ever since. So that's what? [*KK laughs*] Been forty-five years or so? Fifty years. Fifty years. This is 2009—[19]59, so it'll be fifty years this year.

[01:59:21] KK: So that actually worked out pretty well, didn't it?

SB: Very well.

KK: Because you got to come back and be around family . . .

SB: That's right.

KK: . . . in a town that you knew you liked.

SB: That's right. And had many, many friends and acquaintances and, you know, it—and so it worked very well, and he was very happy to be here in the—and it must've been—we got the house that I'd always wanted and . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . that was nice of him to buy it for me when I was gone visiting, wasn't it? He bought the house while I was gone. So

that—and it—but we've worked on it many—though we only paid twelve thousand five hundred for it, we have spent many, many dollars since redoing it and up keeping and, you know, doin' all that stuff. But we still have the elevator and it still works. [*Laughter*] That's good.

KK: Now how come you think he sold it for so little to you?

TM: Kris, we need to change tapes. Excuse me.

KK: Okay.

SB: All right. Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:00:07] KK: All right. Go ahead.

SB: Well, I just feel that I've been so blessed to have these wonderful, five granddaughters who've done such great things, and my—the grandson, who I told you that has finished his Ph.D., but then my oldest granddaughter, Meg, is a CPA, and she's with Bank of America now. But she has—she was with Price Waterhouse for about six years, or seven. And she lived in the Washington, DC, area, and lived in Alexandria, Virginia, but now she's in Charlotte. And then my second granddaughter, Annie, is—the other one was Meg, and this Annie is in New York City seeking her fortune. They've all—these both have graduated from Tulane in New Orleans. And they ha—she—

Annie is working for a—I believe it's NBC. It's a music company anyway and doin' somethin' in New York. This is her third or fourth year there. And then the third one, whose name is Sarah George, has my daughter—younger daughter's name, Sarah, and this is—and for my husband and my son is George William II, so she—her name is Sarah George, and she graduated from Elon College in Elon, North Carolina and now has been working—I guess this is two or three years. She's with Disney down at . . .

KK: Ah.

[02:01:36] SB: . . . Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and she has a—been—had several promotions. She's now not having to ride the little, two-wheel thing [SB Edit: Segway], you know, [*KK laughs*] around or not putting—loading somebody on a ride. She is in the executive offices. And so she's gotten a promotion and has to wear a suit and hose and heels so, [*KK laughs*] you know, [*laughs*] that helps. Then . . .

KK: Now did you say—what college did she go to? Elon?

SB: She went to Elon College.

KK: How is that spelled?

SB: *E-L-O-N*.

KK: Okay.

SB: Elon.

KK: All right.

SB: Elon. And I think it's in Elon, North Carolina.

KK: Oh, okay.

SB: And I know that—I went for her graduation, and on the way up—I had always known about Replacements. It's this place that's about—it's a building that's about the size of a football field that now I—we have replaced—if you have a piece of sterling silver that . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . or china.

KK: Yeah.

[02:02:28] SB: Well, I'd heard of it, and I'd ordered somethin' from them, and we were on their mailing list, and we'd get that sheet—lots of sheets of paper. Well, on the way up for—Sarah, my daughter, who lives in Mobile, came through El Dorado and picked me up, and we drove to Elon, and she said, "Mother, we'll pass—we'll go to Replacements." And I said, "Oh, it's"—we—it was getting late when we got there. We'd been all day on the highway, and I said, "It's all right. You don't have to go if you don't want to." And she said, "Mother, this vehicle will not pass the exit [*KK laughs*] that goes to [*laughter*]—to Replacements."

Every time she goes up, she—it turns in—she goes. So she said, "Well, you know, you may want to"—we—she took the wheelchair along for me. She said, "You may want to get in the wheelchair when you get inside," and I said, "Oh, no. I can walk to look." I wanted to see—didn't wanna miss anything.

KK: Yeah.

[02:03:23] SB: But I wasn't in but a few minutes until I decided I needed the wheelchair because it's a place that has the—oh, it's like I said, it's about the size of a football field, and it has everything in the world in the way of crystal and silver and china—all of the old patterns that I had known back even when, you know, I was getting married and all those things. But they—it really has a lotta stuff. But anyway, that was fun to get to go on that trip with her. And to think that that one trip back in 1948 that we went over to Mobile to see Bellingrath Garden, never did I dream that with that year-old baby—Mary Lou Booker was her name—she grew up and graduated from Arkansas State. Then she went to William & Mary for a master's, and from William & Mary she went to Emory in Atlanta to get her—a master's in librarianship. And by that time, the third—our third child—the other two were in college, so that's—she just kept goin'. So then she was down and came home to teach.

She taught one semester out at Parker's Chapel, which is a large, community school here. But—just outside of El Dorado. She was teaching there that fall, and she went back for—down to New Orleans for her Phi Mu convention. Well, at that convention she saw some of the friends she—the year that she was at William & Mary in Williamsburg, we went to see her that summer for our two weeks—we were paying for her—an apartment—anyway so we toured [*laughs*] Williamsburg, which I loved, and it was fun for me. [02:05:12] But when she came home and was teaching, they—she had been a—had a Phi Mu assistantship. She worked with all the Phi Mu chapters on the East Coast from Bangor, Maine, down to Miami, Florida. She would visit on those chapters. Well, then she graduated from William & Mary and came home and went over to—was teaching one semester. Didn't take her long to get—to finish her career as a schoolteacher. [*KK laughs*] She went down to New Orleans for that Phi Mu convention, and on the way home, they—she called to tell us that she was on the plane. We had a little plane called—it was TTA—it was a small plane, but it went from here to Monroe and, oh, Dallas, New Orleans—other places. She called and said she'd be—they couldn't land. They—we went out three times. We went out to our air force [SB Edit: airport]—pa—

air—what do you call . . .

KK: Airport?

[02:06:15] SB: Yeah, airport—to pick her up. And she did—wasn't there. So finally, she called back and said, "Mother, we just can't land in El Dorado because we—they don't have—ceiling that's in." I was looking at this ceiling that we have right now. [*KK laughs*] She said, "We can't land there, and so—we're—they're sending us by limo to El Dorado." And she was in a limousine, who had—a driver who had never been up to El Dorado before, and three gentlemen—there was a young man whose name was Gus Meaher, and his two senior partners were with him. They were on their way from Mobile, Alabama, to El Dorado, Arkansas, to spend the night at the Holiday Inn because they had a lawsuit from—there was a Firestone at that time—I guess it's still there—a Firestone plant in Magnolia, and a young man, who was a professor, I think, at—down at the University of Southern Mississippi had a race car, and he had had an accident, and the race car tires caught fire, and he was burned seriously. And it was supposed to be a—I think it was non-flammable or something. Anyway they were coming to represent Firestone or somebody. Anyway it was a fire—and this young man, Gus Meaher, and Mary Lou were in the back seat, and she had on her

fox fur coat. She had taught school a year, and she bought herself a fur coat in Memphis. So anyway, she was all dressed up. [02:07:44] And they couldn't land, so they—the limo—the driver of the limo had to have some help. She would tell him, and they got—came the Iron Mountain Road, we call it, and when they got down to a certain church, well, you turn right and when—you know, how to come Highway 7. Down in that area is just like it is north. Highway 7 is curvy, and it didn't have—so anyway, they—she got home that night, and she opened the door and hollered upstairs and said, "Mother, I'm home, but I'm gonna get in my car and lead this limo down to the Holiday Inn," because from our house to the Holiday Inn on West Hillsborough, you had to make—turn every block you had to—so she led them down there. Well, the next day she came in from teaching school at Parker's Chapel, and Sara and I had taught school, and we were all home, and the phone rang. [02:08:43] And it was this young man saying that he would like to speak to Mary Lou Booker. Well, I got her to the phone, and sure enough, this young gentleman [Gus Meaher], who was an attorney in Mobile, invited her down to the Holiday Inn for dinner that night, and that was the beginning of their courtship. And she married that young man the following June. This was in the

fall. And so those—he's the father—they're—and they have a wonderful, old home. This house reminds me of it. That one was—their house was built in—before the Civil War. And there's a cellar in it where they hid some general or somethin' [*KK laughs*] during the Civil War. And anyway, it's a—it's called the Georgia Cottage, and it's on the National Register—has the great big sign out front—and it sits at the back of two acres and the—has forty-five live oaks as you come up the front—down the driveway and a circle around a fish pond and a bird bath and go back out the gates. But in—that—those—that—it has a huge—like, it has the four fireplaces like this one does. It's all of 'em one floor, though. Not a two-story house, but it's all one floor and has the parlor and the dining room, and then the entrance hall is something like this one. It's forty feet by twenty, so it has—and it was at one time like this was a fox-trot [SB Edit: dogtrot] hall in a—down in the South, and it's—'course, it's been enclosed. And then it has—they have, what, I think four, five, maybe six bedrooms and four baths or something they've added on the back. They can't touch the front because it's on the . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . National Register. But they have beautiful azaleas and camellias and all those things. And never would we have

thought that in 1948—we went over for the weekend and spent the night in the Belling [*KK laughs*]—at the hotel—the name of it—I—not the Bellingrath. It was—we were at the Bellingrath Garden, but we went to the—what hotel did I tell you that was? It's the old Battle House.

KK: Ah.

[02:11:01] SB: Well, this past year I was back—'course, I go now—I had ten years of takin'—of stay-home mom. I was a stay-home mom in Conway and Clarksville and Crossett and those places until my third child started in the first grade. Then I started teaching. And then I—my husband was ill—has—was a diabetic and was seriously ill for ten years, so I was home with him. But somehow, I got forty years of teachin' school in the middle. [*Laughter*] So that's good. I'm glad. [02:11:36] But I never would've thought that we would get to go to Mobile and see the grandchildren, and this past year for my eighty-fourth birthday, I was taken back for dinner at the Battle House Hotel, and it has been completely restored. I don't know if you've been down there recently. The retirement of Alabama—the retire—RCA, it's called, I think—or something—the retirement associ—RA or something—Retirement Association of Alabama—the schoolteachers and all the state employees have one retirement

system, and they purchased the old Battle House Hotel that was just about to fall down and have completely restored it as a hotel for the first three or four floors. And then above it they have a tower. It's called a Tower building where they have offices. It is a lovely building. They've been working on it for past four or five years. They also bought the hotel over at Point Clear, which is the Grand Hotel. The Grand Hotel. And they bought that one and have restored it since Katrina did a—you know, a lotta—these—this family that Mary Lou married into, he—this—Gus has two brothers. A younger one—well, two—both of 'em are younger than he, but the—our six grandchildren are the only grandchildren the Meahers had, too. And they own—Mrs. Meaher owned five houses. She had three over at Point Clear and two in Mobile. So—and then they have their big house where they reared their children. But it's been interesting that she's just—she was almost ninety-five and she got to clear out all those houses, and to think that that child who went over to visit Bellingrath now has been living in Mobile for thirty-five years, and we've been back for many, many trips, of course. And it's—the flowers are so beautiful. But it's been—it's a good thing and everybody's—the last one—and she named her for all of us—little Sadie as—has been in her junior year at Tulane, but

last week she left for a semester in London. [02:13:58] So they've traveled a great deal. Four—when Four was in—at Tulane, and he spent his junior year in Australia. I guess he was at Georgetown in Washington, and he spent his junior year in Australia, and that's when he just fell in love with it. He hasn't been home since. [*KK laughs*] He's gotten his Ph.D. there. But they went—the whole family went to Australia that summer and stayed a month and toured the continent—crossed it lengthwise. Then they went back another year and went up and down. [*KK laughs*] But then this Meg—when Meg was at Tulane, she spent her junior year in Hong Kong, and that was the last year before it went back into eng—to un-English rule. So they went over for a month in Hong Kong with her. And little Sadie was just a two- or three-year-old child, and she said she bought her some silk pajamas, and if Mom would just let her wear her pajamas, they would think she was a native [*KK laughs*], and everybody wouldn't be [*laughs*] wanting to speak to her. But they—then the next one, Annie, spent her junior year in Rome, so the whole family went to Rome for a month. And Helen—Sarah George spent her junior term at Orlando, so I went twice in one year to Orlando and got to ride all the rides and do all those things, and I came home. George and Sara were so dis—

upset with me. They said, "We are sick and tired of hearing about [*laughs*] Orlando. [*Laughter*] We don't wanna hear that anymore." But anyway, it was fun. I think she's back there now on their staff. And then little Sadie has now gone—Helen was a—graduated from Rhodes.

[02:15:43] KK: Now which one was Helen?

SB: Helen is the fourth girl, and she now—she's the fourth girl. She graduated from Rhodes two years ago, I guess, in Memphis. Rhodes. And she spent last year at—in London, and it's at Mountbatten School. Mountbatten—Count Mountbatten, whoever he was, established a school, and you had to have a job—Four told us this—if you stay in London over a month, you have to be employed. And be—gainful employment. So Helen was a drug rep while she was there, and I thought her grandfather—wouldn't that [*KK laughs*] pleased him to think that she was, you know, a—now—the drug reps are great. [02:16:32] But now she is back in Tulane and has—in law school. Tulane Law School. And they just purchased her a condo on Pine Street in New Orleans, and it's in the Garden District where we lived and just a few blocks away from the apartment we were in when we were in New Orleans. And at Thanksgiving this year, Sara and I drove down to Mobile, and

then Mary Lou and Gus took us over to the French Quarter, and we had lunch at the Royal Sonesta, and we went to go—we went out to Helen's apartment. But—so they're all doin' great things, but, you know, nobody's married, and nobody has any children. But they have wonderful professions, and it's been a good thing. I appreciate their going on to school, and it was good that Mary Lou met that young man on that plane that night [*laughs*], so that worked out well.

[02:17:27] KK: Well, and they're all still very young. They have their whole lives ahead of 'em. I mean . . .

SB: Oh, they do. They do.

KK: I'm sure they'll have . . .

SB: They're from . . .

KK: . . . great families, too.

SB: Right. They're from, what—twenty-two to thirty-four, I guess. So they are young and have—all have professions and . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . that's good.

KK: Yeah.

SB: We have a lot to be thankful for.

KK: Yeah.

SB: But you—we never know, you know, it's—life—what life's gonna

bring for us.

KK: Oh.

SB: It's interesting. And it—we were going discuss—what were we gonna discuss next?

[02:17:55] KK: Well, now you—what you haven't really talked a lot about is your forty years of teachin'—your . . .

SB: Oh.

KK: . . . your dietician years and . . .

SB: Okay.

KK: . . . and those kinds of things.

SB: All right.

KK: I mean, how did—you know, I know you worked—you said you'd worked in the—you enjoyed the food to begin with . . .

SB: Yeah.

KK: . . . in college you worked . . .

SB: Yeah.

KK: . . . in the dining halls . . .

SB: Right.

KK: . . . during the World War II era . . .

SB: Right.

KK: . . . and then—so, I assume that after that, you went on to . . .

[02:18:17] SB: I did. After that, I—and, 'course, married and had

the three children and, like I said, I was a stay-home mom those ten years, but I baked a lot of birthday cakes. In Crossett there was not a bakery and there—we had a dentist who had four little boys, and I baked one little boy a birthday cake, and all the other children came, and from then on I was in business. And then I had a cousin who—my mother's distant cousin—Gus Phillips was the man's name. He had been my mother's family, and his daughter [Roena Phillips] was my age and she married. And I—of course, I had—we called him Uncle Gus, and this young lady—they asked me to make her wedding cake and I did, and it was at the First Methodist Church, and everybody, you know, in Crossett knows everybody else, and so I was in business for wedding cakes. So, you know, I could stay home with Bill and Sara and do the cakes anyway. And I enjoyed that. I bought myself a—I think it was a dollar ninety-eight, little metal thing, you know, and decorated that whole wedding cake and the birthday cakes with that at first. Then, when we moved back to—from El—from Crossett to Pine Bluff, I taught the third grade there 'cause there was a—First Ward School was across the street, and that worked out for me teachin'. [02:21:39] Then we came to El Dorado, and I taught at Southside which was across town. I taught the sixth grade four years, and I

really enjoyed that. My—I had a first-grader and a third-grader and a sixth-grader. And the sec—my—Bill Booker, who was in the third grade, was in the same room that I had been in thirty years earlier and had the same teacher. Had the same pictures on the wall and I—you know, the same thing. The same school where I'd gone to elementary school through my first seven years of school. So Bill was in Miss Robertson's third grade, and I taught Miss Robertson's third son. She had four boys, and I taught her son, Joe, the same year. She taught my third-grader, and I taught her sixth-grader. [*KK laughs*] And I always remembered her. She was a very dear lady and a good friend of mine.

TM: Should we open that up or . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[Tape stopped]

[02:20:37] KK: So let's see . . .

SB: We were in . . .

KK: . . . you were teaching . . .

SB: Yes, in—here at Southside. So it was a pleasure to get to come back to be—no, Miss Robertson, I think, was the only one that I had known. She had taught me in the third grade. So that was good. I—when I was at—down at—how—the sawmill here when

Mr. and Ms. Rowland came out, and my father sawed their lumber, I was in Miss Robertson's third-grade class, and one day—my mother always fixed us wonderful lunches and, like I said, we had the little bottles of milk, and we could put it in the cooler at the school. And we had—we did have bought light bread and good food, but no school lunch of any kind. And we didn't have 'em. in those days. So it hadn't been—so anyway, I was in her third-grade class, and my little brother was in the first grade, and my daddy—it was raining one day, and he had to bring—come to the house from the mill and bring my brother to school. And when he brought him to school, he brought my lunch. And instead of my mother fix—packin' me a sack lunch, she sent my lunchbox. [02:21:47] And when I opened it, it had wonderful, fresh-cooked, hot [*KK laughs*] cornbread in it that had homemade butter in between the slice. And it had turnip greens and, oh, some—I don't know what else. But anyway, as I opened that box—it was a rainy day, and the—all the children had to stay inside, and when I opened that box, you could smell turnip greens [*KK laughs*] all over the room. And I thought, "Oh, no! Miss Robertson is gonna kill me for havin' turnip greens." Because just a few days before then in October, I told her it was my birthday, and she called me up the front and used

the ruler and turned me over her knee. She was a great, big, fat lady [*KK laughs*]—turned me over her knee and just gave me a good little paddlin' for a birthday spankin'. Well, when I got the turnip greens, I thought, "Oh, no! She's gonna kill me for havin' turnip greens." She looked up from her desk and sniffed around and said, "I smell turnip greens in the room." She'd walked back there and sat down at a desk beside me and ate every bite of my [*KK laughs*] turnip greens. So I think when I was in the third grade, I made up my mind that I was going to work in the food department [*KK laughs*] and do something someday that would help school children have a good, hot lunch at school. And that was just a third-grader in mind but—so, anyway, all these things went on and I—we had grown up and I'd graduated from college and worked in Jonesboro and married and had the children and had—got to come back to Southside. Well, Miss Robertson was still there, and Bill was her—in her class, and I taught her son, Joe. And we worked together that four years that I was at Southside. [02:23:36] But later, I went to junior high to teach junior high home ec and seventh-grade science for a couple of years. And I—when I went to apply for a job at Southside or in the school district here, Mr. G. A. Stubblefield was the superintendent, and he said—I said, "I have a degree in home

economics." And he said, "We don't have a home ec vacancy." There was not a place for anybody to teach home ec. That very same year that we moved back in 1959, my younger sister, was fourteen years younger than me, had graduated from Louisiana Tech in home ec, and she got the job at Barton Junior High before we knew we were gonna be transferred. So that's okay. We didn't—and I said to that superintendent, "How about letting me be your school food service director?" And he said, "Oh, we don't need one of those. We have a—our"—and I had just come from Crossett, and they had a school food service director, and I'd had a first-grader and a . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . and a fourth-grader over there. And he said, "We don't need one. Our principals and their cooks in the kitchen plan their own menus and buy the food and prepare that food."

KK: Right.

[02:24:51] SB: "And so we didn't need one." So I thought—after I was at Southside teaching, well, we did have a cafeteria, and every Monday morning we had beans—white beans that had been put to soak in a alumin—an aluminum dishpan on Friday afternoon in the walk-in, and we had a white slice of light bread. We had a white onion ring. We had a white glass of milk, and

we had white apple pie. [*KK laughs*] Well, after being there about, oh, a semester or so—a while—I thought, "My goodness, I know why he thinks he—you know, he does—he thinks he doesn't need a dietician, but he does. [*KK laughs*] He needs a home ec major." So I was lookin' through my sixth-grade science book, and I found a chapter on the basic seven—the food groups.

KK: Right.

[02:25:47] SB: And a health chapter. And so I persuaded my—by this time, I'd gotten to be a good friend with the principal, who has—was an only child, and she had no children, but she was a lovely lady, and she liked my children. And so I talked with her, and I said, "My sixth-graders and I would like to plan a week's menus with—using this chapter as a guide. Let us plan these menus, and then you all—if you'll buy the food and prepare the food there—this menus—in the kitchen—in the basement where"—and when I was a child there, it had been the girls' restroom, but they made it into a kitchen later and was servin' food. And so she agreed, and she did that. Well, after we went through that, and those kids ate that food, they wouldn't eat the other stuff, so [*KK laughs*] I had my foot in the door to work with the cafeterias. So I had been transferred up to Barton

Junior High—I mean, Rogers Junior High—to teach home ec and science. So I taught there two years and was a good friend of their cafeteria workers, and then the superintendent who didn't need the food service director [*KK laughs*] retired, and we had another superintendent come from Blytheville. Mr. Tommey came to El Dorado, and he had asked me when he first got here—when I first went to high school, he said—they had—in 1968 there was a program from—the federal government—started that home ec students would need to work, like, a—like the typing and the other business teachers, so they wanted to call it occupational home economics. It was OHE. And he wanted me to take that OHE program. So it was 1968 . . .

[02:27:46] KK: And what was his whole name now? You said . . .

SB: His name was Mr. W. D. [SB Edit: Dean] Tommey.

KK: Oh, it was Mr. Tommey.

SB: Mr. Tommey.

KK: Okay.

SB: Uh-huh. His—he was—his last name was Tommey.

KK: Now hold on one second.

[Tape stopped]

[02:27:54] KK: You can just go on from wherever you want to.

SB: Okay. Well, when we lived in Crossett—it's located near the

Ouachita, again, and for the first time in our lives, my husband, of course, having grown up in Jonesboro and in the city limits. He is—his mother and dad still lived in the same house that they had built and moved into when he was five months old, and they were still in that house all their li—married lives.

KK: [*Unclear word*].

SB: And he had never been in south Arkansas until he met me—came down here. So when we were in Crossett, we—he was very interested, and we got a boat. He bought a boat and my brother-in-law, Ralph Hollis, who lived on the Strong Highway and married my sister—older sister, Clara—bought a boat. They bought boats just alike. They were—I've forgotten what craft they were called in those days, but we boat—had boats and every Saturday, Ralph and Clara would come over to Crossett. And George worked every other weekend—every other Saturday and Sunday he worked, and then the next Saturday and Sunday, he'd be off. And so they—we met at the river or they would come to our house, and we got our boat, and we would put them in the Ouachita, and we went up and—we taught our children to ride in the boat a lot. [02:29:07] And that's my first experience with mayhaws. Mayhaws are a little berry that grow on a tree, and they like growing in the water—in the river. And we would

go down, and we had some high rains that year—some hard—a lotta rain. The water ?came?—got up. And we would take our fishin' net—George would—we'd take us fishin', and we would catch the fish in the net, you know, after you had it on the line—hook and line. We took our fish nets and would scrape up the mayhaws that were floating on top of the water, and I made mayhaw jelly. That was my first experience with mayhaw jelly. But after I came to El Dorado, then, Miss Rachael [McKinney] had had the idea of us having the Mayhaw Festival later on, and we made lots of mayhaw jelly, which they make and have in the kitchen here. [02:29:57] But I was—the may—the Ouachita River was interesting for us. The children grew up and learned to ski, and George was—we got skis, and they was interested in pullin'—the girls especially liked to ski. [*KK laughs*] And Bill, our son, was not much for the water, but he would be as Daddy—as he called him—George called him his co-pilot, and he would be looking back the other way to say, you know, "Speed it up, so you can pull the girls outta the water," or what—we went to the Ouachita quite a bit and used it as recreation. But my husband was always very upset with the pollution that was in the river, and he was—especially at—Camden—pa—had a paper mill and, of course, they—you—this foam and stuff would just come

[*jingling noise*] down the river. And he was always battlin' that and didn't—he wanted to clear—clean up the river. And I know—he—my dad loved the water. Course, he had rafted and grew up close to it. And my mother didn't care for it very much. She would come down, and she'd hold on tight and ride [*KK laughs*] a little bit with George in the boat but not a lot. But after we moved back here, George on his Thursdays off—every other week he would work on the weekend, and every other work he would have all day Thursday. He took my father down on the river and they—in the boat—and they found Jack's Isle, which was a place that was very familiar to my dad, because as a young man, his older sister—Ada was her name—Ada—I knew her as Ada Bradshaw, but she had been Ada Gilmore. [02:31:40] But her first husband was an—a—was a man named Jim Overstreet, and his sister, Ada, had married, I think, when she was about thirteen or fourteen, and she had four children. And in the winter of 1918, her husband was farming on Jack's Isle, which is an island up north of Pigeon Hill someplace on the river, and he had a farm and had a cotton field, and that's—in those days people were raising cot—a lotta cotton—and they had—would have to pick it and send it to the gin. And my grandfather had a gin, and that's how the first sawmill down at—

where—it started with—where the gin was. They called it the gin lot. But I—he—I'd never known the gin. But anyway, my dad's sister's husband, Jim Overstreet, had got the flu in 1918 and died and left a [*interference in audio*] widow with these four little children [*cell phone rings*] and . . .

KK: Oh.

[02:32:40] SB: . . . my dad went [*cell phone rings*] over to help pick the cotton. And it was cold, cold weather, and he told—would tell us a story. It's about—he picked cotton all day on Christmas Day, so that his fingers would bleed—try to get that cotton in so they could have some food and something to eat, but—sell the cotton. But he—and then after he'd picked cotton all day, he walked five miles to a neighbor's house and got a syrup bucket full of buttermilk and brought it back so the children would have somethin' to drink at night. And this was in 1918. And he was taking care of that family, and they had just barely enough food to eat. His—the—those nieces and nephews when they grew up, and we knew them later, and I worked at a grocery store that one of 'em my—the year I finished high school, she said, "He kept us from starving to death." [*KK laughs*] She could remember her Uncle John from helping 'em that year. But he didn't go to World War I because of that. He

and Joe—my husband's father and my father were born both the same year, nineteen—1892. But—and they both would've gone to World War I, but my father was raising that family, and he was—my—he was eight years older than my mother because he had helped to rear that family first before he married and had a family of his own. So . . .

[02:34:04] KK: So he was raisin' two families? That's why he didn't have to go to war?

SB: No, he was raising just that one family.

KK: Okay.

SB: His sister's family.

KK: Okay.

[02:34:10] SB: He didn't marry until later. He married my mother, and then we had the four children, but that was after the war—after World War I. But that—we had some different experiences on the Ouachita later when we got to live in Crossett, and my father would come over and he—it would—just pleased him. George would take him to the river and he loved riding in the boat and fishin' or—on the river, because those days that they rafted timber, you know, they would have to hunt either wild turkeys or squirrels or rabbits or whatever they could find in the woods to kill to eat along the way. And it—I remember in his

latter years, after we were back here, and our children were growing up and maybe grown, I had an aunt—the same aunt that I lived with in Hico was back in—she had a daughter and her husband and their children were in Monroe, Louisiana, and we'd take my mother and father down to see this aunt later. It was in a nursing home there. And Papa would stand outside and look around. He said, "You know, I believe I remember we docked at certain place here," that he could recall when he was a younger boy, when he used to could ride down the Ouachita. But, of course, George is being upset with the pollution. Was—see, he, being a pharmacist, he knew the danger it was doing, and he—I remember one Sunday night after church he invited my brother and his wife and their children and ours. He said, "Now everybody has to be in here and seated before this television." He was a—he loved television. He bought the first one in Crossett when they first came in, and Monroe only had a station that came on at five o'clock in the afternoon and just ran a few hours and . . .

KK: And what year was that, about?

SB: . . . that was about in—let's see, Mary Lou was in the first grade. It was in 1953. 1953.

[02:36:05] KK: And you got, like, the first television in Crossett?

SB: I—'bout. [*KK laughs*] He had one of the first. There was a great big—the Crossett Company, you know, had been owned by three men—Crossett, Watzek, and Gates—those three men's names. And they came over to Chicot—no, over to Ashley County and were buying up land, and they had a land office set up out on the—they didn't have sidewalks out on the—right of the side of the street in Hamburg, 'cause Hamburg was the county seat. And those three gentlemen were buying land that was lo—was just growing full of pine trees—virgin pine. And they said—there was a story in the—after we moved to Crossett, there was a story in the *Reader's Digest* about this, and that's how—I read it and knew how it was in the beginning. Those three men would—and somebody who was on the street—some—one of the men who owned land over there—haw—called to another gentleman across the street and said, "So-and-so," I don't know what he called him—some name—"get over here and sell your land before these fools run outta money. They're paying a dollar an acre for it." [*KK laughs*] They were paying 'em a dollar an acre for that land that had pine trees—virgin pine on it. And that was, 'course, way back. [02:37:23] And so that musta been in the early 1900s, and then the Crossett—those three men put in the Crossett sawmill—a big sawmill in Crossett.

And it was still running when we were there. But by the time we moved to Crossett in 1953, they had a paper mill and a—made—charcoal plant that made charcoal pellets that we used in the barbecue pits. They had—those big plants had—they were a big company, and they owned the whole town. And they had a large mercantile company on the corner of the street. They designed it so they had just one main street, and it was very wide because the story is that they told to us, the reason that street was so wide—that the log trucks [SB Edit: horsedrawn log wagons] could come up the treet—street from out in the field where they'd sawed the logs on the—and they could turn and go into the sawmill, and they made the street wide. And it's still that wide today. It hasn't been narrowed any. But they had a sawmill, and these people went over to work on the sawmill. Then the next thing they did was to put in a paper mill. But this big store they owned—the company-owned store—and it was told to us that you could buy—your baby bottle nipple was bought there when you were born, and then they sold everything that you ever needed at their mercantile store between birth and death.

KK: [*Unclear word*].

[02:39:03] SB: And then they sold caskets in the end so, you know,

they owned everything. They owned everybody's house. They were all painted "Crossett Gray"—every house in that town. And they were painted gray and had a white trim. Now they—in nineteen—after—after World War II, they tried to get a ?grade A? post office in Crossett, and the US government wouldn't let 'em have a number one post office with a [SB Edit: when]—some personal—people owned every—the whole town, so they had to sell the town. They offered everybody—a lotta the men that I knew had come back from World War II and got jobs at the paper mill and the sawmill and the—at the—a man I knew who taught chemistry in Norphlet School came back and went over to Crossett and worked in the chemical plant and all—and then they had many, many when we lived there. It had more college graduates than any s—town of its size because they had all these industries. [02:40:11] But they started to—offered the house to the people who were living in 'em in the Crossett—in their—they paid, like, thirty-five dollars a month or whatever—they paid rent. Everybody had to pay rent because the company owned your house. And they—you got your house painted every three years whether it needed it or not 'cause they had some big company up in the East—Pittsburgh, maybe—owned a paint company, and they had one color that they called

Crossett Gray [*KK laughs*] 'cause everybody's house in Crossett was gray. And they painted it—had a crew that just painted their wooden houses. They had a wooden—everything was wooden. The hotel was a great big ol' green wooden building. And then they have a wooden pipeline—a water line—that's huge around, like this. And it's made out of cypress lumber, and they—their water line—water comes through it, and it has to run all the time to keep it—as long as the wat—the cypress has water in it. It doesn't decay. Now it's—when we lived there they still had that water line. I don't know—I was back over visiting a friend last month, and as far as I know, they still have that water line. But, of course, Crossett has grown and grown and grown. Has big houses now. But when we moved there in [19]53, they had just offered the house to the person who was living in it—they could buy their house for a small sum and make payments on it like they were payin' rent—like, twenty-five or thirty dollars a month. And everybody [*clattering noises in background*] bought the house they were in. They—just almost everybody bought their house.

TM: Do we . . .

KK: We should probably find out what's . . .

TM: Yeah.

[Tape stopped]

[02:41:56] KK: There—so these people could either buy the house . . .

SB: The—at Crossett. Crossett. You could either buy your house, like, for twenty-five or thirty dollars, and everybody who lived in those houses in 1950 in Crossett—everybody bought their own house that they were living in, except the three old-maid schoolteachers who couldn't [*KK laughs*] afford to buy their house, and they had taught most of the people who were there. So all of these people chipped in and bought the house for the schoolteachers. And their names were Mrs. Calhoun, and they named the school for—Calhoun School. The elementary school is Calhoun School. And they bought their house for them.

KK: Oh.

[02:42:34] SB: But when we moved to Crossett in 1953, all this housing business had been—and they had a great new—a brick post office. And the old commissary—the store where you could buy your baby bottle or your casket [*KK laughs*]—they had had to sell that, and it was a ?Burr? store—company, and they had a bank now. That was the Crossett bank. And the hotel was still a wooden hotel. Still the big ol' green—Rose Inn it was called. And all their dishes had a rose on them. But the Rose Inn—

people stayed there. And the teachers used to—Rose Inn had a third-floor attic. It was a hotel on the first floor and a large banquet room. And I know we had the garden club. I remember that I was in the garden club 'cause we set out trees at the elementary school. They would buy so many dogwood and redbud and all those trees, and I was in—on the PTA, of course, and I helped plant the trees at the churches and the schools. And they—we had—the garden club met. And Mrs. Rockefeller came down and gave us a program at the garden club, and she talked about Williamsburg and that, 'course, set me on fire. [*KK laughs*] It was a long time before I got to go, but then I got to invest in William & Mary, but anyway, it was a—where I learned about Williamsburg. [02:44:00] But the Crossett people had—everybody had bought their house. So in [19]53, when we moved there, the houses all had asbestos siding on 'em, and they were pink and purple and green and brown—every color—you know, they were so sick and tired of lookin' [*KK laughs*] at Coshett—Crossett gray, that they all got a color asbestos shingle and put 'em on their houses. And we lived in one of those houses at first before we built a house in Crossett. But it was a unique town. A good situation. Had a wonderful school system. And I knew that the lady who was

the—'cause I had two children were in that—and, like I said, I was on the PTA, and I always went to those meetings. And the lady who had been the school food service director had a degree in home ec. So when I got to El Dorado, I knew that there was such a thing as a school food service director. That's why I asked Mr. Stubblefield if I could be it, but he didn't need one. But when Mr. Tommey—Mr. W. D. Tommey had been in Blytheville—he was a math teacher, and then he had been their superintendent at Blytheville, and he had a brother here, Dr. Tommey—Mr.—mine was Mr. W. D. Tommey, the superintendent, but Dr. [Charles] Eldon Tommey is a surgeon. And he came—was in El Dorado, so his brother moved here. [02:45:26] And Mr. Tommey had—knew that—they had made this mandate in 1968 that we would have to have home ec students who—boys and girls we had to teach—and they had to work in a food service somehow or way. So Mr. Tommey called and asked me if I would be interested in that, and I said I would. I'd been in high school one year. I—he transferred me out to high school that year. He called me down to the superintendent's office, and said he needed a high school home ec teacher and wanted me to go out there. And I really didn't want to go. I'd just gotten into home ec and was teachin' the

junior high, and I wanted to stay there. And my daughter, Mary Lou, was a senior in high school, and she begged me. She said, "Oh, Mother, go out there. It's air-conditioned." [*KK laughs*] And I said, "Oh, I don't—I'm not hot." I'd raised the windows in my school and, you know, enjoy. And—but she kept insisting that I go. And I—Mr. Tommey needed a teach—me to come. So anyway, I didn't—was reluctant, and I said to George, "You know, I just don't wanna go out there." [02:46:43] We had what we called—they had just built a new school—the one we're in now—to me it's new. It's thirty-five, forty years old [*KK laughs*] or fifty, and they're fixin' to build another one. But it was built for the modular system, and it was built so that you—the students went to school to their—the classes, and then they went back for rescheduled time. If you were having trouble with math, you went back to your math teacher at a certain time, or if you were in biology, you needed the lab or chemistry or home ec—you know, whatever you were in, you had a—that kind of a schedule. It was more like a college schedule. You had the same classes Monday-Wednesday-Friday, and then you had Tuesday and Thursday ones. And then you have—now, the students got to calling it free time, but it was not free time. It was rescheduled time for you to go back to get help with. But

anyway, I didn't want to go to high school, so I was caught at the clothesline hanging our clothes on the line, and my—one of the children came down where I was crying, hangin' up the clothes. And they said, "Oh, Mother, you'll love it out there." Well, George got me to the side and talked to me. He said, [02:47:51] "Sadie, Mr. Tommey is new here. He just got—came as a school superintendent." And he said, "He is in a bind, and he needs a home ec teacher, and if you do him a favor now, you'll have a friend for life." So, I straightened myself up and got out to high school and got in that big home ec department. There was another home ec teacher, too, who was my dear friend, Charlene Burns. So we worked both in the home ec department, and I actually didn't know very much about what I was doing because of the schedule. Every thir—and I—one—some—we went to PTA, of course, and one—somebody asked George at the drugstore—they said, "Well, what is the modular system?" And he had just been out to—we had a student out there—a senior and, I guess, a freshman there, and he was tryin' to run two students' schedules on the first night of PTA. And I had to stay in my classroom for my students, and some guy said, "What is the modular system? What are they talkin' about, anyway?" And George said, "I'll tell you what it is." He

said, "It's a big building that has outside doors. You—everybody has to go outside to go to the next class, one room at the time." And he said, "Every thirty minutes a bell rings, and all hell breaks loose. [*KK laughs*] Fifteen [SB Edit: hundred] kids run all over you." 'Cause, you know, all of a sudden everybody went out the same time. So that's his description [*KK laughs*] of the modular system. But I got used to it. [02:49:22] I was in this home ec department, and there was a young man there in my homeroom. I had, like, twenty-five seniors in a homeroom and had to call the roll the first thirty minutes. We had homeroom every day. And this young man had just moved to El Dorado from someplace in Alabama. His father was a minister who had gotten a church here and, 'course, I didn't know those descriptions except that he was in my homeroom. And he—we had had a schedule that—it was scheduling that they did by computer, and we didn't have computers, and this was 1966. 1965. Nineteen six—the fall of [19]65. And we didn't have computers here, but Murphy Oil had come—somebody in California who did scheduling for them and computers. Well, our students wrote down what they wanted to take, and it was sent out to that university in California—Stanford University, I believe—and they scheduled everybody. Well, this young man

who had just move there—here didn't—wasn't here the year before to make out a schedule, so they didn't—he couldn't—he didn't have classes. He didn't have anyplace to go and nothin' to do. [02:50:40] The schedules had a lots of mistakes on them. The counselors—the school counselors were workin' them as hard as they could to get them into their classes at—like they were supposed to be. Some students were havin' to sit in the gym and wait, you know, to get scheduled. And so this young man said he didn't know where to go, nor what to do, and I said, "Listen, you and I are in the same boat. I don't know where to go, or what to do, but the good thing about me is that I can just stay in this room all day long, and my students are scheduled, and they'll come to me." Some of 'em are takin' foods, and some were taking sewing, and childcare and development, and I just stayed there and would teach 'em. And he didn't—he couldn't do that, so I said, "I tell you, instead of letting them put you in a study hall, or you have to stay—you just stay down here with me, and I'll tell the counselor where you are. And when they get ready to make you a schedule, you'll be here with me." Well, that young man—'course, my classes came and went, and they were all girls at that time. And he was—would be there with me. Well, I'd give him an assignment, and he would—I was

teaching a class in the foods lab while he would be up in the front in the sewing machines. And I had him to inventory every machine and every drawer and everything in that department up in the [SB Edit: there]—and then when I would be teaching a class in—up in the sewing—the girls' sewing—we'd closed off, and he would be in the kitchen. And he inventoried every drawer, every s—knife, fork, and spoon—all the dishes in the cabinets. And anyway, he stayed with me two weeks. And we got the place inventoried. He didn't have to waste that time. Well, later on—much later—now, his mother was a teacher, and she was teaching in one of our rural schools out in the county, but then later, she came into the El Dorado district. But we got to be good friends. And to this day, when we go—and I go to the Teacher Retirement System all the time—I always—they always put me on the committee to serve refreshments at Christmastime. [*KK laughs*] And she's—has retired, and so have I, but she still says, "You know, I'll always be grateful to you for what you did for Chuck our—his first two weeks at El Dorado High School." So it was fun, and it worked out. [02:52:53] And I—the first day that I was in that classroom and called those, oh, thirty students—whether they were present or absent—took the roll—well, the na—the loudspeaker came on. I

wasn't accustomed to the speaker system, 'cause I'd been in an old school. But the speaker came on and said, "Mrs. Booker, you have a package in the office," and I said, "Well, you know—well, I'm in homeroom. I have thirty students." And one of the boys volunteered. He said, "I'll go pick it up for you." You know, they were glad to get out of homeroom for a few minutes. He came back with a bud vase and three red roses in this bud vase, and on the thing [SB Edit: card] it said, "Mary Lou, Bill, and Sara." My three children had sent me the three red roses for my first—because they'd wanted me to go to high school, and I [*KK laughs*] didn't wanna go. [02:53:44] So later on that year, we—you know, I got accustomed to that kind of scheduling, and so did they. Mary Lou was a graduating senior, and she—course, all the *B*s—they did 'em—fixed us alphabetically and I had a co—a homeroom that had *C*s in it or something. And they were up in the sewing department. Well, we had a new principal and he—Jim Rileywas his name, and he was teaching Mary Lou in some class and he—a high school teacher—but somebody left from the business office, and they made Jim Riley the assistant superintendent. So that meant that her homeroom was without a teacher, and they put somebody else in there and gave a new teacher to her. She was on the

student council. And then they moved that person that came up to the high school's assistant principal. Anyway they—and finally after having three different people with one homeroom, they said, "Well, we're just gonna dissolve this homeroom. We'll put three students in this room and three in another and, you know, do that and do away with the homeroom." Well, one—Mary Lou and her buddies—she was—as I said, was on the student council, and three—and she and about six students came down to me, and they said—she said, "Mother, let us—you take our homeroom. If you'll just take our homeroom, we'll stay in the kitchen in the foods department, and we'll help you." And I said, "Oh, listen, you know, I have to call the roll every morning—see who's here." They said, "We'll take the roll." And I said—then we had these grade sheets that you had to put ev—child—the student's name down and every grade that they made for every nine weeks, and they said, "We'll help you do that. "We'll do"—so anyway, they talked, and I said, "All right, I will. I'll take it." [02:55:43] So, they went to the principal, Mr. [Harold] Smith—called me down to the office, and he said, "Miss Booker, do you realize what your—these girls—these kids have come in here beggin' me to let them keep their homeroom that they're in their senior year. They don't wanna be divided and put in another—

little—other rooms. And he's—they've talked you into letting them be in your foods department, and you'll be their homeroom teacher." And I said, "That's right." And he said, "Do you realize what you're doing? This is your first year out here, and you've got all these such-and-such to do." And I said, "Mr. Smith, there are so many eighteen-year-olds out here who don't even speak to their mothers and don't want to acknowledge who they are, and my mo—my child is volunteering me to do this. I can't afford to say no." [*KK laughs*] And he said, "I agree with you." [*KK laughs*] And he let me keep the [SB Edit: them]—I had thirty in one and thirty in another and that—it worked just fine. We had a good time that senior year, so it worked out all right. [02:56:43] And Mr. Tommey called me down to take—wantin' to know if I was interested in teaching boys and girls and getting them jobs. And that's—this OHE program had to be started, and I had been recommended for the job and was the first teacher in Arkansas to do it. And I said, "Well, I'm interested." And he said—well, he was interested in it, too. So we—he told the State Department, and they came down and told me to do it. And I had to go around and make a survey of the places that would hire the students. Well, we had one nursing home who would hire some students who'd been trained in

foods. We had the hospital who would work some. Hall Drugs had a fountain. We—they still have a fountain. [*KK laughs*] But they would work a student. And I got this survey—the Minute Man we had—and we had a Dairy Queen. But we didn't have ven—anything like the foods places that we have now

KK: Yeah.

[02:57:42] SB: But I got those surveyed, and they said they would take a student and I reported that back to Mr. Tommey, and he said, "All right. We'll try it." So, it was time for registration for the next—the [19]68-[19]69 year. Okay. This was 1968, and I had my—I was talking to the students. Some of these students I had had in the sixth grade at Southside. Some of them I had taught in Rogers Junior High. So—and I had a second child in 1969 who—[19]68 he was senior—graduated in [19]69. The [19]66 one had gone on to college. The [19]69 was there. Well, I—he was in my homeroom. He—I had talked to those students and I said, "You know, we have an opportunity at"—and I didn't know what they were gonna call the program. So I called it "wage earning." It—to me, it was—and I said, "I'll get you a job. You can work at the Minute Man. You can work at the hospital. You can work in the nursing home in foods. You have to be a food service, and then you'll get paid and I'll give

you a grade. A—you have a class grade and you get a credit for a job grade. And I have to go around and get your job—grade at the job," so we were bo—all stumbling, just finding out what it was like. But I called it "wage earning." [02:59:11] So the next—that fall, in 1968, when the schedules came in from California—they were still doing all this stuff over—on the computer out there—well, the schedules came back and I had, I think, maybe fifteen students in this new program. And the superintendent [SB Edit: principal], Mr. Smith, called me down to the office again, and I thought, "My goodness, what does he want me to cook now? I've made cookies and made punch"—you know, whatever he had me to do. So I went down there to see what was—he wanted, and he said—and he and the counselor were sitting in there, Mrs. [SB Edit: Williamson]—oh, I can't—I'll think of her name. Anyway they were sitting in the office, and he said, "What are you doing down there? What are you teaching?" And I said, "Well, I'm trying to teach some home ec to the students that I have." He said, "Well, we have this schedule here that just came in from California, and this girl—this young lady has put on her schedule—she was taking 'Mrs. Booker's wayward journey in homemaking.'" She—see, my slurring of wage earnings [*KK laughs*]—"Mrs. Booker's wayward

journey in homemaking." So we all had a laugh, and I said, "Well, you know"—and that wayward journey [*KK laughs*] I did for twenty-eight years. [*Laughter*] And it was a wayward journey, but it—I was the first student to teach occupational home ec in this state. And then we began to get more and more—Northwest Avenue is just lined with eating places now, and they're more job opportunities, and I had boys who—and then that first class that I taught, guess who was in it? [*KK vocalized noise*] [03:00:55] A young man whose name was—the others—the one I'd had in sixth grade was named Joe Robertson. This one was Mike Robertson. He was the youngest son of the teacher who ate my turnip greens in the third—when I [*KK laughs*] was in the third grade. I had her youngest son in my class the first year that I taught occupational home ec. Mike had a job at the Holiday Inn here, and they had a restaurant there, and it was a wonderful experience for him and he liked it very, very much, and he—I worked with him and the man who owned it, D. R. [David Randolph Jr.] James, who's a neighbor here, and he liked Mike, and we both talked Mike into going to Louisiana Tech and majoring in foods management. And he was the first person—the first male to graduate from Louisiana Tech in foods management—first male to graduate in the home ec

department at Louisiana Tech. So that worked out good. But all the—and then I taught that—occu—OHE for those twenty-seven years. But Mr. Tommey called me back the next year and I—well, in 1970 and . . .

TM: Excuse me. We're gonna need to change tapes.

[Tape stopped]

[03:02:12] KK: So you were kind of on the forefront of this occupational home economics thrust in—at least, in south Arkansas and maybe in the whole state.

SB: The whole state.

KK: Yeah.

SB: First one in the state to do [SB Edit: OHE] . . .

KK: Yeah.

SB: . . . occupational home ec. And it—we just had a few students the first year—well, I think fifteen. And most of those worked either in the nursing home or in one or two—the Minuteman was here. And we had a—oh, another restaurant or two. And, like I said, Hall Drug, and then there was another drugstore who worked some. And I had to convince the people who ran those places that these were students who would work a few hours and they paid them. And so it worked out well. That was in 1968-[19]69, and I had, as I said, Mike Robertson that year.

And he went on to Louisiana Tech and majored in foods. But others—I had one boy whose father owned a restaurant at a motel that we don't have anymore, but it was in connection with this motel, and he—they went—did banquets and other things. [03:03:20] We had some really good experiences. And at the end of the—each of these years, after the students had worked, we had what we called an employee/employer banquet, and the occupation—the OHE, which was the home ec section, and the other business department—all the vocational department—'course, I was in charge of the banquets because [*KK laughs*]—being the home ec and the—and we would have different speakers. And Mr. Tommey came to be our speaker several times and different other people. John Ralston, who's at Young's Funeral Home now, and somebody from the Chamber of Commerce and those people—you know, we show—we had a program that we went out to the media lab, which was a government thing, and made posters and, oh, teaching materials. And we did one on taking slides, and I made slides of my students on their—at their job and in their uniform or what—and back in the kitchen, the things that we were doing. And the—that worked out real well. I had one boy who was a—his name was [Bruce] Gilmore. He was not related to me, but we

had the same name. [03:04:34] But that young man—I learned we—I taught—we—a class in cake decorating, and I was teaching that at night for Southern State. All these years I taught three nights a week sometime for either the community college or SAU—their "Catering for Special Occasions." And he made his own wedding cake in our class and, you know, we decorated it for—he got married as soon as he finished high school. And there were many, many lives that I touched, and we had that banquet every year combined when—where we had the speakers and the—there was an employer/employee banquet and the people came that were—the doctors and Mr. Tommey was almost always there and others. But, anyway, the OHE program turned out to be a really good one and young men—and today, the young man who is—he's a black student, he was—I had that first one—we started integration. And I had two, Hazel, and I can't think [SB Edit: Luther Tidwell]—I had one—they were twins, and they were in my first class, and they worked, and that was a good thing. It was a good place for them. I had students who lived in Urbana who rode a bus up here, and they didn't have any transportation to go to a job but, see, the very next year, Mr. Tommey asked me to take—he—after he got here and found out how the school food service was going, he had

been asked by Miss [Ruth Powell] Rudd, Miss [Ernestine] Camp and Miss ?Christine? [SB Edit: Alma] Keys—let's see, Miss Ruth Powell—Miss Ruth Powell and Miss Camp were in school food service. And Miss [Frances] Rudd and Miss Keys were in the home ec. And I had two diff—separate supervisors who came to supervise our teaching and also those—the—Miss Camp and Miss Powell had known Mr. Tommey over in Blytheville, and she—they knew that we didn't have a centralized food service in El Dorado. [03:06:38] And it was the largest school in the state that didn't have a centralized buying system or food production or anything. So they talked to him and told him every time he—they wanted him to centralize and have a school food service director. Well, he asked me about doing that, and in the meantime, I had gone back down to Louisiana Tech at night with—there was dietician here who did, and a lotta the men were going—the—in PE and different areas—and music. They—we were drivin' down to Tech at night takin' two classes at night to get our master's. And so in 1969, when Bill Booker finished high school, Mary Lou graduated from Arkansas State, and I got my master's that summer from Tech. Well, I had the—I decided since I was going to get a master's anyway, I would get—take all the classes that it took to be a registered dietician. And Mr. Tommey asked me

to take the school food service. Well, I couldn't—the last—the one class that I couldn't get from Tech was human anatomy, so I had to take it by correspondence from the University of Arkansas. [03:07:53] And I was down in the central office. I had helped—he had let—he asked me to take it, and I said, "I—you know, which do you want me to do, OHE or the school food service?" And then, 'course, he said, "Well, I'll have somebody else to do it." So he let another lady do it for a year or two, and she needed a lotta help. She was a real good friend of mine, and I met with her every week down at the business office and we planned the menus. And I helped her figure out the quantities and, you know, buy the stuff. And we had an old school building here that had been [SB Edit: was not in use anymore]—not an elementary school anymore. It was a two-story building. They put the—started buying the food in larger quantity and storing it in that building. And I worked with her, and we did that planning down at the business office. And so then he wanted me to take that as a school—the—to do the school food service, and I thought—I said to George, "Well, you know, I feel like he just wants me to do two jobs for one salary." And George said, again, "Well, you know, Sadie, Mr.—he's in a tight—and he needs some help, and you need to help him if you

can." So I went—worked with the lady to do—plan the menus, and I knew what they were doing. And I got my master's down at Tech and got the—was a registered dietician. [03:09:17] So, I said, "Okay, George, if you'll let me take on this extra responsibility, that additional money that I get, I'll put in a separate fund from bein' the school food service director, and you can buy a new station wagon with it." Well, so that's all it took to persuade him [*KK laughs*] to let me be the—both the school food service director and the—and OHE. So we—it—they worked—they were very compatible, and that—those students who were from Urbana or from other areas around, would work in the cafeteria for me. I needed some two- and three-hour workers—part-time workers—but I couldn't hire another person to do that, 'cause they wouldn't—I don't blame anybody. I wouldn't dress and go to work for just two hours. But those students could work—in the morning they would work during the breakfast program. I started the breakfast program. My—Mr. [Bob] Watson, who is now the superintendent—he's about seven feet tall and wears a size fifteen shoe, and he's been there a long time now. But he was my—he was the principal at Barton Junior High when I first started tak—the school food service. [03:10:24] And I went up to him one day and told him I wanted

to start the breakfast program in junior high. We had it goin' in elementary school. And he looked down at me said, "Miss Sadie Booker, we bring 'em to school on a free bus ride. We give 'em a free textbook. We feed 'em a free lunch every day, and now you wanna feed 'em a free breakfast." [*KK laughs*] And I said, "Yes, sir, I do." I was [*laughs*] lookin' up. "Yes, sir, [*laughter*] that's what I want to do." So anyway—of course, he came on to high school as my principal there, and we've been good friends—he still is—the superintendent for years. And my daughter Sara is his—is their school food service director now. She was a kindergarten teacher for twenty-five years, but now she's the director. But anyway, they were very compatible, and my students could work two hours for the breakfast program, and I had a class in the afternoon, the last period of the day. The other students could—I had a class at eleven o'clock and—to twelve—and they could go to work in the afternoon because they had already taken my morning class. So it worked out well and they—got to do both. I was both the school food service director, and I got to be the OHE teacher. And that was a memorable summer for us, when our oldest daughter, Mary Lou, graduated from college and Bill from high school, and I got my master's and then, you know, we just—it worked—it was a

family affair. We all had to work together, and [SB Edit: as] we have done through the years. But those students—I think it was a—I was school food service—and went to many national conferences, like, in Boston and New Orleans and San Francisco and, you know, all the—it was a really great thing, and I have good friends in the state department in the home economics and in the state school food service, too. Fact, I just called Miss Camp when I was in Little Rock this weekend. She had—was in a—at a conference, and she's eighty-eight now and had had a stroke, but she's better. And we—you know, we've still been good friends. And li—two years ago, in November, I was in Little Rock having some dental work done and stayed with my son. [03:12:41] And I called to talk to Wanda Shockey, who was—is now the director of school food service in Little Rock at—the whole state. She's the state director. And she told me that she was going to Oxford, Mississippi, to the University of—Ole Miss and—to a meeting, and we now have a building—it's a beautiful building—it's a national school food service meeting building, and they have different conferences and teach classes and things. And it has the columns on—at—that their campus is famous for. Well, anyway she was going down there for this three-day meeting, and Dorothy Caldwell, who had—was at Marianna when

I worked, and she worked with us. She had been president of—our state president one year, and then she was a national president. And I'd been to Washington, DC, several times to a—to the legislative conference to get more money for school food service and to approve the recommendations that they had. And one year when I was there, the last—in 1990, the last year I was there, I was in Washington, and my grandson was at Georgetown, and I had him to come in that night to have dinner with me. He always, you know, ordered the most expensive steak [*KK laughs*] on the menu, and the—I was with about, oh, eight or ten of the Arkansas delegation, but all of the group was there. [03:14:09] Well, anyway, I had a friend whose name is Carolyn Huber, and she was with Clinton during his administration. She had been working for the Rose Law Firm. And when Clinton got to be elected governor, she was over the mansion, and so I'd been to a tea at the governor's mansion, and she is a good friend of my son's and of mine, and when I went to [SB Edit: Washington, DC]—I wrote her. She went to Washington to work for Hillary. So I wrote her a note and told her that I was coming to Washington for the legislative conference, and I—and—but I didn't have time to receive a letter back or that note back. And so when I—Four came in from

Georgetown to have dinner with me, and we were sitting there with all the other Arkansas people—twelve or fifteen—and he said, "?Biggie?, I'm gonna run up to your room and check your messages." And I said, "Oh, I wish you would. I don't know how to do that." And he said, "Well, I do." And he ran up to the television and checked it, and he came back down and, 'course, all—the whole group heard him—"Oh, Big, you have a message from the White House." [*KK vocalized noise*] [03:15:21] And we're—I—course it thrilled me and him, too. And it was an invitation to come to the White House. The next day the conference was over, and I was gonna stay an extra day, and I had an invitation for lunch in the White House. So I went to the White House with Carolyn Huber and this young man—it had snowed and the—a young man came out and met me and helped me get into the—to the White House and I—Carolyn, of course, had somebody to pick me up and I was up in the—her office. And then I—she said, "Would you like to tour? We have some time before we have [SB Edit: to]—go for lunch." And I—?may?—took the tour, which I had been on one time before with my family. But I—yes, I was delighted. So I went around, and I came back around to the same man who let me go the first time, and I said, "I wanna go again. [*Laughter*] I didn't see it all."

So he said, "Why, of course, go as many times"—so I went back around, and by that time it was getting to be near twelve, and we were going to the—for lunch, and I got back to 'em, and he said, "Don't you wanna go again?" [*KK laughs*] And I said [*laughs*], "No, I have to go for lunch this time." [03:16:27] So I went with Carolyn, and we had lunch. Well, it was a wonderful experience—a delicious orange shrimp, I remember, and the—I brought my menu and the whole thing. You know, the navy personnel prepares lunch for the employees in the White House, or whatever they're called. But anyway, I brought my menu back and showed it to my class—put it—made a bulletin board of my visit to the White House, and that was good, and they were all interested. And so then I had this young man who was in—had been in my class. He's—and he's still, right now, he came back every year to talk to my students and he was working at the time at the Sonic. Well, today he is the manager of the Sonic, and when he came and this—I've been retired fifteen years. When he came back the last time, he talked to those students and told 'em—he learned all that he knew, you know, from that class and how he had worked, and he's now—he said, "I'm makin' twenty-four thousand dollars a year"—no tellin' what he's makin' today, but I hope a great deal. He's still there, and

when I go—drive into the Sonic occasionally, he'll recognize my voice, and one time I ordered a hamburger, and he—when he—the girl delivered my hamburger to me, I—she had a Coke for me. And I said, "Oh, I didn't order a Coke," and she said, "Todd sent it to you." [*KK laughs*] So, you know, that does me good. That's the good things. [*Unclear words*] a lagniappe. Down in Louisiana our yearbook, and—Louisiana Tech—is called Lagniappe, and it's a French term for something special or something extra. You know, I felt like my Coke from Todd was something extra. [03:18:12] And he's still the manager of our Sonic, and I see other students. You know, it thrills me to death for them to recognize me. Saw one student last Thursday. I went to—I'm having posts put in—some implants—and this young lady lives in Chicago and has four children of her own. Her mother's my age. We taught together. And she was at the doctor's office, and I walked in to go to my little chair, and she hollered, "Hi, Miss Booker!" And you [*KK laughs*]—and she was one I'd had in school. So, you know, I think that's the—you don't make a great deal of money, but it—it's worth it in the long run for all the extras that you get. Now we were going to have something about—you said you wanted to hear more about . . .

KK: Well, you did it, I think.

SB: Did I?

KK: I think you did exactly what I needed.

SB: I hope so. I hope so.

KK: You did a great job.

[03:19:05] SB: All right. Well, it turned out to be a good thing. I enjoyed it. And by the way, I have been back to the White House and had a full—on the Christmas of 2000, my son took me to Carolyn Huber, and we went inside for a private tour and saw all of the decorations that the . . .

KK: Oh, yeah.

SB: . . . Clintons had had for the eight years they were there and went to the Oval Office—sat down in the president's seat and toured the—you know, the upstairs that most people don't get to see. It was a wonderful thing. And I had a letter this week from Carolyn Huber. We're still friends that—even though she's not at the White House anymore. [*Laughter*] Yeah, but anyway, it was good. And I thank you for letting me tell you all of my tales.

KK: Oh, we really appreciate it. You did such an incredible job.

SB: Oh, you're kind.

KK: You did a really great job.

SB: I . . .

KK: We're really glad to hear it.

[03:19:58] SB: . . . didn't get to tell you about my trip to Mississippi to do—last year when I went in November, my friend—oh, I can't—I called her name a while ago, and now I can't think of it. She [Wanda Shockey] was head of the school food service. Anyway she wanted me to go down there to do this same thing. I think—did I give you a copy of my living history that I did for school food service, Diane [Alderson]? I may have. I'm not sure. But anyway, he took a picture, and I told—in my experiences with school food service, and it was the first living history that—and only one I've ever done besides this one. And it was a delight to get to go to Ole Miss and to talk of—think of the—see all the things that's going on in school food service. They also have a building on the University of Southern Mississippi at Hattiesburg. And during my years of working with the OHE, being—and got the master's down at Tech—I—those ten years between 1970 and 1980, I taught in the summer for the University of Southern Mississippi—those teachers—how to do their occupational home economics classes.

KK: That's great.

SB: So that was great.

KK: That's great.

SB: It was fun.

KK: You've had a really wonderful experience.

SB: I have. I have.

KK: I think you've been a . . .

SB: I'm grateful.

KK: . . . you've been a lucky person . . .

SB: I have been very . . .

KK: . . . don't you think?

[03:21:18] SB: . . . the Lord's been good to me.

KK: Yeah.

SB: As I said at the end of my other interview, my cup runneth over.

KK: [*Laughs*] Well, thank you so much for spending time with us today.

SB: Thank you. My goodness, it's almost time to go to bed. [*Laughter*]

[03:21:34 End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]