

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

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**Arkansas Memories Project**

Marzell Wilbert Smith  
Interviewed by Kris Katrosh  
January 28, 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 15th 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
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

### **Citation Information**

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**Kris Katrosh interviewed Marzell Wilbert Smith on January 28, 2009, in El Dorado, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: Okay, we're gonna start with just some—some housecleaning business we have to do in the beginning. We are at the John Newton House in El Dorado, Arkansas. It's January 28, 2009. And we are interviewing—uh—Marzell Smith. And—uh—I'm Kris Katrosh. We're here with the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. And I just wanna ask your permission now—uh—Ms. Smith, can we record your interview and store it at the Barbara and David Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas and share this with others?

Marzell Smith: Yes, of course.

KK: Okay, thank you very much. I would like to start with—uh—first, if you would just give us your full name and spell it for us, so we make sure we have it right.

MS: All right. Uh—my name is Marzell Wilbert Smith—*M-A-R-Z-E-L-L W-I-L-B-E-R-T S-M-I-T-H*.

KK: Great, I'm gonna write down the middle name in here so we get

that right.

MS: I used to use it all the time, but I had to sign it so much until I left it out. [*Laughter*]

KK: Yeah. Got tired of it, huh? Sayin' it.

Trey Marley: Birth—birthplace and date too.

KK: Uh-huh. So where and when—when and where were you born?

MS: I was born here in El Dorado. In—and on January the twenty-seventh, 1922.

[00:01:27] KK: Okay. And—uh—wow, you were born right in that oil boom then, weren't you?

MS: Yes. Well, yeah. I was very young. I didn't know anything about it . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . but I heard enough about it afterwards. [*Laughs*]

KK: I'll bet you did. I'll bet you did. Uh—and—uh—if you could give us your parents' names and where they were from.

MS: Uh—my father—uh—s—was from—uh—Lisbon, Louisiana, *L-I-S-B-O-N*. And my mother—uh—was—is from El Dorado, really, outlyin' district, and she moved into El Dorado at the age of ten.

KK: Mh-hmm. And what were their names?

MS: My—my—my—uh—father's name is Shep—*S-H-E-P*—Wilbert. And my mother's name was Gracie Lee Williams Wilbert.

KK: Mmm. Gotcha.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: And so—uh—your husband's name?

MS: My husband name is Nile Eugene Smith of Morrilton, Arkansas.

[00:02:24] KK: Mh-hmm. Okay. Good. Uh—do you remember anything about your grandparents?

MS: Oh, yes. I do. They were "Big Mama" and "Big Papa."

*[Laughter]*

KK: Would that be on your mother's side or your father's side?

MS: On my mother's side.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: I know—I don't know too much about my father—uh—my father's side. Uh—I do know he had sisters and brothers, but his mother had deceased before I was . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . old enough to know her.

KK: Right.

MS: And his father—uh—I have a story about him a little later.

*[Laughs]*

KK: Okay. Do you remember their names?

MS: Uh—yes—uh—her name was—her name was ?Neddie Wilbert?.

And he was ?Jesse Wilbert?.

[00:03:05] KK: And then on your mother's side, wha—who were  
tho—who were they?

MS: My—my mother's parents were James and Julia Beasley Wilbert.  
I mean, not Wilbert—James and Williams—James and Julia  
Williams.

KK: Oh, gotcha.

MS: She was a Beasley.

KK: Oh, gotcha.

MS: Uh-huh. Huh.

KK: Okay, her maiden name was Beasley.

MS: Her maiden name was Beasley.

KK: And then she married into the Williams name.

MS: Right.

KK: Okay.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: Now did—were both grandparents from—from around here?

MS: Uh—yes. Uh—the—the—the paternal grandparents were, I  
think—had lived in Louisiana, because my daddy was born in  
Lisbon, Louisiana.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: But they had moved—well, I think, they probably stayed there.

He was the one that moved here and—and the other siblin's later

on in—in—in the race. But I—they were all from Louisiana.

KK: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:04:00] MS: Now my—my—uh—mother's family was from Arkansas. Going way, way back—uh—to my great-grandfather, my great maternal grandfather, they—they're not sure where he was originally. But he did settle in Three Creeks, which is a little community out from here. And everybody wonders how he was able to own a hundred acres of land which some of the parents—w—some of the kids are still living on. And some of the names out there for—what—family names out there.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: And they've got nice homes out there and everything.

KK: So he owned a hundred acres in the 1800s?

MS: Um—yes, evidently it had—I don't know whether he was using it at that time, I don't know the exact time . . .

KK: Mmm.

MS: . . . that he bought it. But—uh—most of his—uh—kids lived out there—married and lived out there. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And then, see, about the fourth generation or maybe fi—fifth generation now are living out there.

KK: Yeah.



MS: They work in El Dorado, you know, and they're very, you know, aggressive about, you know, doin' things and so forth.

KK: Well it sounds like that the—the—the great-grandfather—uh—left a legacy of hard work . . .

MS: Oh . . .

KK: . . . for people to follow.

MS: . . . yes, he did. [*Laughs*] Yes, he did.

KK: Always a good thing.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:05:25] KK: Well, that sounds great. Well, you know, I had heard—uh—I have a friend in Little Rock whose family owned—uh—I think, they owned about four hundred acres around Lonoke . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . in—in—in that same time period.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: There was a period in there . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . were there was more black ownership of land.

MS: Mh-hmm.

[00:05:42] KK: Unfortunately when Jim Crow came back around . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . then a lot of that got taken away.

MS: Yeah, and—and—and so many, yeah—and—but so—so many kept it. There was a man that I was talking to that I know real well, not too long ago, and he's—he's taking care of three hundred and some acres that—that he still owns.

KK: So—so that's—that's a good thing to talk about because a lot of people and then—you know, when somebody sees this fifty years from now . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . or a hundred years from now . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . they may not realize that that there was a lot of African American ownership of land in Arkansas . . .

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . uh—in—in the, you know—a—after the Civil War.

[00:06:18] MS: Mh-hmm. Now my—my grandparents—uh—my maternal grandparents, thought they were buying—here in El Dorado—a house. And this is when the boom was going on. My mother told me all of this, you know. And then—uh—the time came around and—and the—the people whoever she—they purchased it from, said that, "No, you weren't buying it. You were just renting." You know.

KK: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

MS: And that just kinda—I think they never owned anymore after that.

KK: Yeah . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

[00:06:49] KK: Well, that sounds like there was a little bit of a shady deal goin' on there.

MS: Yeah, right. And they—they didn't, you know, at that time . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . way back there in the early [19]20s or something around that time.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: They didn't know. They thought they were really buying it, you know. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah, yeah. We know . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . like, Crossett was a company-owned town in its entirety for a long time . . .

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . we heard some stories about that yesterday . . .

MS: Mh-hmm. Oh, really?

KK: Oh, yeah. And it was like—uh . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . finally if they wanted to be recognized as a real city, they were gonna have to let people own houses . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . and they finally did.

[00:07:24] MS: I remember going to Crossett and seeing all these houses row—rowed up like [*laughs*], you know—just rowed up, row after row. You know, but it's been a long time since I've been there.

KK: Uh—I believe . . .

MS: I'm sure they've a done a lot—a lot of progress since—since then.

KK: Mh-hmm. I believe—uh—uh—it was Sadieyesterday who told us that they were all painted Crossett Gray.

MS: Yeah, they were. They—as I can remember. Now I didn't know that until I was in Lake Village. Even though I lived in El Dorado, El Dorado was once a little city. It really was. Uh—when I was growin' up as a child. Uh—I guess, it was just kinda right after that boom and everything. People came in here from everywhere and—uh—it's like we had—uh—we had about three Black—uh—physicians.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:08:14] MS: Well one was a dentist. And in—in my neighborhood where I could just look at them. And there were people who came here that knew real music and—uh—this town was just really, you know, doing it [*laughs*] at that time. And we had—uh—right down from our house—uh—up on the hill, where Nelson runs into another str—uh—street there—there was that hi—we just called it "up on the hill." We all—we were little kids, and I don't know who did it, but somebody came out and put in a miniature golf course [*KK laughs*] up on that hill. And, of course, adults played it then at night because, you know, they were workin' in the daytime. They had the lights and everything up there, you know. And we just—I could sit on my porch and just look up there and see 'em, you know. The next day going to school, we could go right through there, you know [*laughter*], on our way to school and see—see the little holes in the ground and stuff like that. It was funny to us. Fun—fun to us, just to see it.

[00:09:10] KK: So you went to school in El Dorado as a child?

MS: Yes. All—all my, you know, I graduated from high school here.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: From primer. We had primer at that time. And—uh—there was Fairview School. They had two schools here at that time, two—

two black schools. And—uh—one was over in the Fairview district. It was south of here. And the one was here. This Carver building is still there, was the site for the—uh—original Washington High School.

KK: Mmm.

MS: And there were two buildin's on there—uh—before this Carver School was—was built. When they—they built the new high—Washington High School over on—it was Quaker then. It's Martin Luther King now.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: But—uh—the school at Fairview—uh—you went through—uh—primer through eighth grade. And I guess, I didn't know it at the time, but lookin' back I—I think, when you went to the primer it was kinda like preschool.

KK: Mmm.

MS: And if you did well enough, you'd go on to the first grade. Because I remember goin' to the first grade in the first year. And, you know, kids just go and they don't think about anything. Just do what [*laughs*]*—whatever—whatever they tell you to do, and in you're in there, you know, and that's the way it is, you know. But thinkin' about it later, you know, I said, well that's kinda like a—what—what do we do now, you know. Get them*

prepared for the first grade. And—and I—I think of my—uh—  
uh—primer teacher who was such a—a sweet, lovin' person.  
And you had to read. But she—she was real sweet with it. But  
she did it individually every day. And as I look back on how she  
had so much patience, you know. You come to her desk away  
from the other children and—and—and you would read to her.  
And—and everybody would be nice, because she was so nice,  
you know. And—uh—she'd read, and if you missed just too  
many of those words, she would tell you, "Go back home and  
read it tonight. Come back tomorrow." And she'd write it in  
your book, you know. [*Laughter*] So at—and her—her sister—  
her younger sister—uh—was my best friend. We started primer  
together. We finished high school together. Went to college  
together. And she came down from Detroit to visit with me this  
summer in July. [*Laughs*]

KK: Mhm. That's so sweet. Now what was your teacher's name? Do  
you remember?

MS: Yes. Leona—uh—Leona Green Gafford.

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: She's from the Green family. She was the only person—well, her  
sister did go to college with me—uh . . .

KK: Now how—how do you spell her last name?

MS: *G-A-F-F-O-R-D*.

KK: Okay.

MS: Gafford.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:11:39] MS: Mh-hmm. Yeah and—and she—she passed away a few years ago, but very, very sweet lady. A lot of our people—a lot of our teachers left here and went other places.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Because I—I have some relatives in California, and we go to visit 'em, and, "Well, you should come out here and—and—and work. You can make—you're not makin' any money there. You come out here, you make some money." And I have son who's teachin' in California now. Uh—but he—when we took him on this trip, he said he—he decided then, "This is where I want to go."

KK: Yeah.

[00:12:11] MS: And he's been there for a—for a quite a while. And he's still teachin'. But anyway—uh—back to Fairview, they had four classrooms. Uh—what's—chapel, as we called it, and that was the auditorium for whatever happened—it was there. And then we had the—uh—principal's office, which was a combination of the—of—uh—the library and the—a classroom, too [KK



*laughs*]—they had to move some chairs in his office. It was a little, long office, you know. And that was just for eighth graders, I think. And what else did we have then? Oh, yeah. I know—uh—they call it domestic science then. We didn't have it. I guess, sometimes, you know, with the workings of the government and all . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . they're tryin' to do things, and I don't know what plan it was under. But somebody had been there teachin' those girls before we got there. But by the time we got there, they weren't doing that anymore. And our room was right next to a third-grade teacher's room. You come out the third-grade teacher's room into that little room. And—and ever so often they would let the girls go in there. And we'd just go in there—uh—in groups. And—and do our own meals and everything.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: So [*laughs*] we always—we didn't have anybody to direct us, but we did it from what we knew at home, you know. This one would make this pie, and this one would make this vegetable, and whatever—whatever. But anyway, we were a crowded bunch of people . . .

KK: Mmm.

MS: . . . in that school.

[00:13:39] KK: So how many kids were in that little four-room school?

MS: Oh, it was probably—probably three hundred. [*Laughs*]

KK: Oh, my goodness! It really was . . .

MS: I'm sure it was every bit of three hundred.

KK: Wow!

MS: And then we had to teach the—had to—had to be taught in the auditorium also.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: And ever—uh—every—I can't forget these things. I didn't live far from the school. I li—I lived close enough that if he started—Mr. Harmon Hill was the principal, I guess, for about forty years. But if he started ringin' that bell, this is the way you—you knew that it was time for you to get movin' [*laughter*] toward that school, because you had to—you had to get in line.

KK: Mmm.

[00:14:19] MS: Every grade would have to get in its line. And he—and he was standing up there when the—till every—the last one got in line. He'd ring that bell—ring that bell. Big—big ol' soundin' bell. And—and, you know, your line had to be straight [*KK laughs*] before you could walk into that school. You had to

go up some steps too, you know. And then he would walk up and down the lines to see if they were straight and all of that, you know. I was scared of him. [*Laughter*] And then march you on into the auditorium 'cause you had to have devotion . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . ever—every day. And he loved the singin', you know. He loved the singin'. And he loved to sing the Negro spirituals and everything. A lot of 'em we learned from him. Uh—but anyway, then after that, you—oh, and when—when he come through, you know—he'd stand out there, and—and tap the bell like this. You had to walk—keep—he'd be [*laughs*—and so—uh—the ones that were inside would be in there cuttin' up, you know, and everything. And by the time he got the last one in, he come in through with a strap. Whoo! Gosh!

KK: Whew.

MS: That man was somethin' else. [*Laughs*]

KK: He . . .

[00:15:18] MS: I was afr—I was afraid of him forever. [*Laughter*]

And his daughter and I went to—went to college together. And—and sang in the choir together and everything. But—uh—she—she left here, and she just never—she—and when she come back, she wouldn't—oh, boy, I shouldn't be tellin' all of this on

[laughter] . . .

KK: You—whatever you wanna say.

MS: Forgot.

KK: If you would, direct your comments more toward me.

MS: Yeah.

KK: And don't—don't worry . . .

MS: Yeah, okay.

KK: Don't—he's doesn't—he's not here.

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Uh . . .

MS: But anyway—uh—he . . .

KK: Sounds like it was very disciplined.

[00:15:52] MS: Very, very disciplined. But we had some very good teachers . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . very good teachers. Later on they started to build a gym. You know, they were alway—all—all really into the sports in this area at that time. Playing between Smackover and Norphlet and Burnt Mill. Where I don't even know where—exactly where it is now. But it's just a few miles from here going north. But anyway, and—and they played. Uh—uh—I—I was—uh—sharing some of this from high school with a—a gentleman here in El

Dorado. And he—showed him some of the yearbooks and he said, "You all were playin'—you girls were playin' basketball?" I say, "Yeah, they were." He said, "Well, we weren't playin' basketball at that time." [*Laughter*] I say, "You weren't?" I—so I knew that they—that they weren't, you know. But anyway—uh—they loved the—the sports. Because that was the one thing—and, I guess, that's why there's so much emphasis on it with—uh—African Americans now because that is the one thing. Goose Tatum is from here, by the way.

KK: Oh.

MS: Did you know that?

KK: No.

[00:16:58] MS: He was my classmate. But he never graduated from school because that's what he wanted to do. And his sister, who lived on the corner right from me—uh—I didn't know her until—well, I didn't know these people till I got over on the—on this side of town with—uh—and living, teaching in this area. But she said that he would always go. He would get cans. Didn't have a basketball. And put some kind of loop or somethin' up there. And that's what he would practice with a lot, all the time. Well that's really what he wanted to do. And he—and he—he was—he was an athlete, too. He was a good athlete at school. But I

don't—I think, he—he must have stopped in about the ninth or tenth—ninth or tenth grade. That's as far as I can remember his being there.

KK: So what did he—where did he—what did he do? What was his sport and what did he end up doing?

MS: It was basketball.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: You know, they call them—what do they call them? Clowns, some kind of clown.

UK: Harlem Globetrotters?

MS: Globetrotters, yeah.

KK: Oh, was he one of those? Yeah.

MS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He was—Goose was one of the main men in there . . .

TM: One of the first ones.

MS: . . . for when they first started out, you know. He did all these tricks and things . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . you know . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:18:09] MS: . . . with a ball. [*Laughs*] He—he came here with this—his team and all, several—several times. Uh—here in El

Dorado. Uh—but anyway, had—the boys were interested in ath—athletics. And—and—uh—I heard one fella who is—gosh, I wish he was some—somebody you could interview, Elzie Walker. He was my classmate. I didn't realize. I used to wonder why he knew so much. And it—it came to—uh—well, it came to a head sometimes recently because he was older than we were and had moved here from someplace up there. And he told me. I said, "I didn't know." I said, "No wonder—no wonder you knew so much." I said we'd be in the class during the time they say you should—should—should—uh—uh—who was it, Roosevelt, that they reelected for the third term? I guess it was—I guess it was out of the Depression when Roosevelt came and had all these programs and things . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: . . . uh—and—uh—they were debating and—and, you know.

That—that was in Washington High School. Now we did some work there. I mean, we did. We had—uh—orations and debates and—um—plays and all kinds of things. But anyway, we'd have this little debating team up there—would—uh—should—uh—what was his name, Franklin D. Roosevelt—uh—go for a third term? And I told him—I said, "You were always talkin' about that and, you know, I wasn't payin' any attention." [KK laughs] And I

said, "And you—why did you know so much?" And he said, "Well, I should have known. Uh—I was readin' it off the walls at home every night." [*Laughter*] You know, people were paperin' their—their walls with wallpaper. And . . .

[00:19:54] KK: With the newspapers, right?

MS: Yeah, with the newspapers. And I said, "Well, I—no wonder—I wondered why you were so smart." He said, "Well, I was lookin' at it every night when I went home." [*Laughter*] So we have a—that reminded me when we did the museum up here. I suppose Diane might've mentioned that to you.

KK: Mmm.

MS: That we put a room—we put newspaper—the—we selected historical things and put it on the wall in there, you know. And everybody just exclaims that comes through there, you know, about that, you know. But anyway . . .

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:31] KK: So you might explain for people who don't know why . . .

MS: Right, yeah.

KK: . . . why people put newspapers on the walls like that. Why?

MS: Well, that was because it was just for shelter for one thing. And just for—well, I guess, that was—that—I think, that might've



been probably the main reason why, because of cracks in the wall and so forth. And they weren't able to do otherwise, so they just used the newspaper or whatever they could get. Now that was one thing about my daddy. I don't remember that we had newspaper, but I remember we had something called buildin' paper. What it is, I don't know. They probably don't even have it anymore. It was thick, thick. It wasn't regular wallpaper. Thick, thick paper, and you didn't have to have the— what was that that goes up under the newspaper? That used to?

KK: The adhesive or the glue?

MS: No, it was a gauzelike material.

KK: Oh.

[00:21:24] MS: The paperhanger would have to come and tack that on to the wall. And then he would come with his paste and his— and the wallpaper would go on top of that. But before that, they had to have something that was called—well, at my house, they called it buildin' paper. It was a big, thick kind of paper. And it was, you know—it was decorative and whatever kind you wanted to choose from. And it was thick, and it would stay there a long, long time until they started with the regular wallpaper. But anyway, I'm tryin' to get back to the school. I wanna leave fair—I wanna leave Fairview School and get to Washington, but I

need to finish Fairview School. As far as what we had for, you know, entertainment or anything like that, as I say, it was, you know, basketball. But we didn't have anything outside with the games for a while. That we chose to do, you know. As I say, ring games with the girls, and the boys would still be out there playin' ball or somethin', you know. And one year they had—well, they had these basketball games they had—they would, you know—like ten cents to get in. They had saved up the money and bought one of these great big, tall slides, you know. And I tell my kids about it and laugh about it, that everybody in the school was lined up to get a slide. [*Laughs*] To get on the slide, you know. It was so funny, you know, if you look at it, you know. But that's some ?played? item. They played—girls played other things and whiplash, or whatever they called that. And these games that they sing going around in circles. And some Louisiana girls had moved up, and they brought some things that we never had heard about, you know. [*Laughs*] And everybody put their—put themselves in that circle to hear what those Louisiana girls were saying. [*KK laughs*] And I don't know to this day what it was about. It was just so different. Just—e—it's so close, but so different, you know, from what we—what—from what we do. You know, the eating. And there were no

lunchrooms. You either brought—well we lived close enough just to run on home and get our lunch. And a lot of kids did over in that area. That was in Fairview. But see some of 'em had to come from the outlying areas—out in the rural areas—and they had no way to get here but walk. And I would see them bringin' tin pails. You know, I don't know what was in it 'cause we were goin' to get our lunch, so we get back. But they'd have their lunch in those pails that they brought to school with them. And it was a long time before they had lunch programs here in El Dorado. I don't know about other places. But then finally they built another building. They thought it was gonna be a gym. And I think some of the—I think some of the people in the community were tryin' to furnish that too. But it ended up bein' four rooms for classes, and that added four more to that. We had a lotta men teachers, too. They were good, too. And some of 'em—the best teachers were men teachers. Some of the best ones that I had in—'cause w—I go back to the fourth grade, Mr. ?Thror—L.R. Thror?. He was a person that was, you know—he had a nature that you could relate to. And that you would learn from and all of that . . .

KK: Yeah.

[00:25:05] MS: . . . you know. And he'd—it seemed like he tried to

do his best. And then I went on from there to Mr. Henry—  
?Gillard? Henry. He and his wife left here—she was a music  
teacher—and went to Michigan durin' those perilous times.  
[*Laughter*] And they stayed on up there until they died. She  
was a hundred years old when she died. And she was my  
neighbor and taught me piano. But anyway, he was one of  
those thorough teachers. He never sat down. He walked the  
room. And if you were gonna use your grammar right, if you  
gonna stay in that room, you gonna use it. Because this is what  
he did from repetition. Now I say that today—that the more you  
repeat something, the better you're gonna know it and be  
familiar with it. And just say, for example, a verb—everybody  
had to make a sentence outta that verb in that class. If he was  
on that verb. Make up his own sentence and use that verb  
correctly. Start at one and go around. [00:26:15] Then  
another little thing we did, they liked for us to write. And I still  
think people should write somethin' if they gonna write, so that  
you can see it if you're writing. You know what I mean, so you  
can understand what the letter is. But anyway, we would see  
who could write the best, you know. And, of course, this is the  
secret stuff we're doin' in the class [*KK laughs*], while class is  
going on. And, you know, they were writin' "this is my name,"

or whatever. On around. On around. And then they gotta pass it back and say, you know, which one they voted for. [*Laughs*] We were havin' fun right there in the class, you know. But we couldn't let him—Mr. Henry see that though, because he was up on his feet walkin' around. But he couldn't keep up with us. You know how that is. [*Laughter*] I know how that is. Anybody that went to school would know how that is. But anyway, he was a good teacher. Good, good teacher. And have we got to the principal? No, Mr. Love was next. He was a good, good teacher. He was a coach, you know.

[00:27:14] KK: Was that sixth grade?

MS: That was seven.

KK: Seventh grade?

MS: Did I skip sixth? Who was the sixth-grade teacher? Who was my sixth-grade—oh, Mr. Henry again. No wonder.

KK: Ah.

MS: He was fifth-grade teacher and then he was sixth-grade teacher again. And he was my neighbor. [*Laughter*] But I didn't try to do anything, you know. Just have a little fun sometimes, like kids do. I had—he—I didn't—I couldn't have done it living in the area with him. But anyway, yeah, he was my fifth and sixth. And then I went to Mr. Hill—Mr. Love did seventh. Yeah, Mr.

Love d—and Mr. Love was the coach. And—but he was—he's one of those that turned out to be a minister. He walked the floor, too. You know, he walked the floor. And he taught with vigor, you know, and with—he was wantin' you to learn, you know. And you can hardly pass that by. He wants you to learn, you know. And sometimes he'd turn—he wasn't a preacher then. But he'd—sometimes he would turn into a sermon, you know. Not talking about the Bible, but he preachin' English. [Laughter] And all that kinda stuff, you know. So then next time it was—the principal couldn't do all of it. But we were his eighth-grade homeroom, and he taught us math, and he taught us literature. Forgot what they say—he ?used?—but anyway he was—well, I guess, he had to do what he had to do. You know, I didn't try to give him any trouble. [Laughs] Nobody else would very much either, you know. But I wasn't a troublemaker anyway. But anyway, I was scared of him. But anyway, he was—here I go again. But he was a good—you know, there were some tough boys. [Laughs] In that period, there was some tough boys. And, you know, if they didn't have some men to, you know, be there, that would stand up, you know, they would've taken over. Not that many, but there were two or three. And I remember one day, somethin' was going on in that

chapel where they were practicing ball or something. And one of these fellas did something, and Mr. Love—that—the coach—he was after him. And this guy jumped through the window. Mr. Love had jumped right through the window, right behind him. And caught him and brought him. [*Laughs*] And that taught them some lessons, you know, about, you know—because he wasn't gonna—no, he wasn't gonna take that, you know. And I could understand that then. Some—'cause some of those fellas would probably praise him, you know. If they're still livin'. I know I still have some come up to me, "I sure am glad you taught me." Some of 'em, I say, "Who are—now who are you?" [*Laughter*] "You know, [*unclear word*] Mrs. Smith." I say, "Oh yeah, sure, sure, sure." I—you know, who thinks about—what teacher thinks about gettin' a kid under control after forty years, you know. [*Laughs*] [*Unclear word*] . . .

[00:30:17] KK: But good teachers really mean a lot to kids.

MS: Yeah, I know it. Yeah, I know they do. I know they do—I—but you know what? They say, "Well, Ms. Smith, why do you just teach so hard?" I would scare 'em [*KK laughs*] by sayin' you're not gonna get your grade. You know, I was teachin' senior English. "Oh, you won't be gettin' a diploma this year if you don't get this done." [*Laughs*] If they had something to hand

in, you know. Some of 'em will try to get by and just think well, you know, "I'll just mess around, and she'll finally say that's all right." And, I said, "No, uhn-uhn." They start runnin' in there [KK laughs] with that work a day or two before rehearsals and things, you know. [Laughs] It was so funny now—when I meet 'em—they have reunions and things, and they call for my husband and me to come and do the hand out the diplomas, you know. Again, you know, from class of this and class of that. It's just—it's a lot of fun though now. 'Cause—a lot of fun.

[00:31:21] Going on to—I'll leave that and go on to Washington High School. I think there were about ten—nine or ten rooms in that building. And that's one through twelve. One through twelve on the other side of town. There were no buses. We had to walk from Fairview, and I shouldn't say a thing, because there were ple—people who had to walk three and four miles. And I heard one of my friends say—and this was later after we were grown—she was in Detroit too. And she said that their grandfather used to put them on a wagon. They lived out in some area. And bring them to Washington High School. And she said they would get off before they got there because they were embarrassed to drive. [Laughs] They'd get off and walk the rest of the way. Well, I didn't even know exactly where that



was. But anyway, there weren't any. There were plenty places that it was three and four miles to walk. But there weren't any buses or anything. And we were in Fairview, and I think it—I think we were about two miles all the way 'cross to this side of the town. And whatever, you know, rain or snow or whatever. You know, we—that was what we had to do. And we didn't think about it. Just knew that we had to do that, you know. And we didn't have any cars. You know, just a very few people had cars. My brother had a coupla friends that had cars. And if it were rainin' or something like that, I could get a ride. Even the teachers didn't have cars. They had to walk. Either walk, you know—my ninth-grade te—homeroom teacher walked by my house every day and back. And he was so comical. He left and went to Detroit, too. Everybody went to Detroit and Chicago and somewhere—California or somewhere. But, I think, Detroit and the—and Chicago and maybe some in New York, those were the ones that were leaving at that particular time.

[00:33:16] KK: Let's see. What year would that have been? If you were fifteen years old, for instance, that would've made it about . . .

MS: That was in 1936 or something . . .

KK: [19]36, yeah.

MS: . . . like that or . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: At [19]37 is when I became fifteen, I think. Mh-hmm.

KK: I mean, you were goin' to school durin' the Depression on top of the fact that . . .

MS: Yes.

KK: . . . you know, you were in the minority race . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . and havin' to deal with all those issues.

MS: Right.

[00:33:37] KK: Of course, as a child, you don't know any different.

MS: You—no, you don't know. You don't even know what's goin' on, especially when you have parents to provide for you.

KK: Yeah.

MS: My father was a railroad man—railroad man. And he was a what—his—he was a machinist helper. He never got above a machinist helper although he was a machinist. [*Laughs*]

KK: Mh-hmm. Right.

MS: He told this joke about—Diane said something to me about bringin' that—my nephew brought that down here from Detroit in Michigan last year. And I had never seen it before, but, I guess, my brother had seen it. It had been crushed or

something. He took it someplace, and they did a real good job on straightenin' it out. And he had framed it up and everything and presented it to me as surprise, you know.

KK: And this was a picture?

[00:34:32] MS: Yeah, my father and other men—other black men—a picture against the engine there, you know. And he would take my brothers—'cause we had to put—we had to pass over that railroad track to get to Fairview School. And he—my brothers all took rides. And my sons all took little rides in the engine, because that's what he did. But what—getting back to why I started with this was because he could—he lasted—at some time durin' the Depression. And, I guess, that made it—you know, we didn't catch on to what was going on till later. And then even after he could not work in El Dorado anymore with his seniority, he was moving from place to place sometime.

KK: Oh, right.

MS: Yeah, down in Leesville or somewhere in Louisiana. Even to—up in Arkansas—up above li—he was in North Little Rock for a while. He worked there. [*Unclear word*]

KK: Yeah, there's a big train engine . . .

MS: Big, yeah . . .

KK: . . . repair shop in . . .

MS: Right. Right.

KK: . . . North Little Rock. Was for many years . . .

MS: Right, right.

KK: . . . still is, I think.

[00:35:38] MS: Right. He was one of the machinist helpers. And on up the—Van Buren—he worked up there. He worked in St. Louis, Missouri. [*Laughs*] And then finally he just got tired of it, you know. Bein' away from home and bein' away from his family and everything. And he just came on back home. And he decided that he was going to buy him a mule and a wagon and put up his own business. At that time, you know, everybody in El Dorado just about own—unless it was way back somewhere—had gas and all that kinda stuff. My daddy even had gas lights, you know, becau—before they had electric lights. But anyway, he decided to put in this wood business. And my brothers would—now he was workin' on the WPA at that time. And, I think, they were makin' a dollar a day or something like that. I don't know exactly how much it was. Somethin' like that. S—very small amount of money. But anyway, they would go before school. The one that was older than I am and the one that was right next to me, younger. And they would hau—get two loads of wood they say from the stave miller. Well I was only—older

girl at that time. I didn't know anything about what they doing.

[*Laughs*] I just heard what they said. I didn't know what the stave mill was. I think, it's—I'm callin' it right, stave mill or something. But they . . .

KK: Right.

MS: . . . would come back with it. And . . .

[00:37:08] KK: Staves for barrels—making barrels.

MS: Oh.

KK: Staves are the—how they make barrels.

MS: Oh, yeah.

KK: Each piece of the—so . . .

MS: I know they some kind of, you know, thin wood, and they'd chop it up. And they'd find cross tires—places and split them and chop them up. People did not have gas. They had to burn wood. And sometimes small bits of it.

KK: Sure, yeah.

MS: 'Cause I'll sit up and talk all night. [*Laughs*]

KK: No, you're doin' a great job. I'm hearing some really, really good stuff. You know, it's just so important to get this African American history down. And for us, hearing it firsthand like this is very, very best. So . . .

MS: Good.

KK: . . . we're real excited to have you here today.

MS: Thank you. It's good to be here.

[00:38:00] KK: So he basically hauled barrel staves and crossties to  
different places . . .

MS: Right. Right.

KK: . . . on his wagon.

MS: Right, on the wagon. Now the thing about it was, he bought this  
little mule. And the mule was a—what do we call him, a donkey?  
He was donkey. There was another name. He ha—he made this  
sound.

KK: Was he a burrow?

MS: No, this is a . . .

KK: A donkey or a . . .

MS: . . . hee-haw—you know . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . this hee-haw sound—hee-haw. But what happened was my  
mother was so embarrassed because he would get out there and  
do all that—and everybody hadn't seen anything like that in the  
community. And they would laugh and, you know, the kids  
would laugh and poke. And it would seem that every time we  
got out of school, I guess—it might've been the kids that

disturbed him—and made him—make him do it, after I thought about it later. He would start, and the kids would just—aww—they would just jump and laugh [*laughs*], and we'd feel so embarrassed and everything, you know. And my mother would be cryin' and . . .

KK: Ah.

[00:39:07] MS: . . . going on and, you know. Dad would say he wasn't thinking about that. But he—those same—some of those same people lost their homes, had to move, and rent somewhere. And, you know, they just were down. But they would come into that wood yard. Pete McCall, who was the postmaster of El Dorado at that time, was a friend of my dad's. And he owned a lot next door to us. And he told my daddy, "You take that lot, let the kids play on it, and do whatever you wanna do." We—my daddy finally bought it. But, at that time, he told him, "Just use it. Just use it." And he used that for his woodlot. There were people who would come. He had that little wagon—let's see, if he stacked it in the wagon, it would cost a dollar. The whole wagonload. If it were a half load, it would be fifty cents. If he just threw it in the wagon, a whole load would be seventy-five cents. And whatever it was, thirty-five—something for the throwin' in a half a load. But anyway, then it was

reduced down to ten cents. They came in the tubs. And a lot of 'em had to do that. They came for a tub full of wood and didn't have any money to pay for it. My daddy would let 'em have it. Ten cents. Sometimes they come for a five cents worth of wood. They didn't have a stick of wood or anything. Because they weren't livin' out in the rural, see. They had gas all the time. But those rural people, you know, they had their own wood. So, and that's the way he made it—and at the same time, as I say, he was on the WPA. And my dad would go out and pick. And he never was a farmer, but he would go out and pick peas and take the boys with him, you know, and that kind of thing. And they could pick peas. At that time, they'd give him half of 'em, to pick 'em. So he'd bring 'em on home. And my mother would cook 'em. [*Laughs*] That's when I first started learnin' about the pigs and things. Everybody had a pig or a hog or something in their pen back there because that's the way they had to do it, you know.

KK: You had to have one if you wanted to meat, you had to . . .

MS: If you wanted to have meat. Have—and you didn't have any money to buy it with, you know. And it's—the stores were very ch—cheap, too, of course, at that time. But . . .

[00:41:45] KK: So this was in the [19]30s still?



MS: That was in the [19]30s. Yes.

KK: So the . . .

MS: Now cause it, I think—by the—let's see, when did he get his job back at home? 'Cause when I was in eleventh grade, he was in St. Louis. I guess, by the twelfth grade. He must've been back home. That was [19]40.

KK: Yeah, that would've been [19]39 or [19]40.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: Exactly.

MS: He was back home then.

KK: But the Depression . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . was still on . . .

MS: It was still on.

KK: . . . for most people.

[00:42:13] MS: Yeah, it was still on. But with his seniority, and I'm sure his character and everything else because he was that kinda person, he could get a job anywhere he wanted to. But he didn't wanna be away from home but—so he got back on at home. Now he worked seven days a week. I remember his comin' home for Christmas and getting two hours off on Christmas Day. Two hours off on Christmas Day. He worked

Sundays. He went to church at night. He never got to get to go to church—a long time just at night, because he's workin'.

Sunday was just like any other day, you know. 'Cause has a machinist helper. [*Laughs*] And he told us this joke about—and see my daddy, he was just—he was real smart, you know. And he knew how to keep his mouth closed. He knew how to get along. Well, he was just that kinda person. And he said that there was somethin' wrong with the engine there one day at the roundhouse, you know. And they just knew that it was somethin' that he couldn't do. And he say he just—he—you know, he didn't push—he didn't, you know. And they worked on it. Whoever was there—the machinists, I think, worked on it. And it was somethin' pretty difficult, I guess. Because he say they had to call the master—got a master mechanic over the mechanic—up. They got machinists, and then they've got mechanics, then they've got master mechanics. And I think they went all the way to the—they sent somebody to down here—a master mechanic. And they worked on it, and they didn't know what to do. And they say—and he say, he never said anything. He knew all the time what was wrong. And so finally they say, "Shep." Said, "Maybe you can do something to that." Daddy said he just went right on up there. Whatever it was that he did,

it was gone. [*Laughter*] It was gone. That's the kinda person he was, you know. He didn't brag about it. He didn't do anything. He just said, you know—he—make 'em think that he tried to know more than they did, and they were, you know, that kinda thing. That's the kinda person that he was. So he worked until he retired after he got back home.

[00:44:20] KK: And when he came back and started haulin' this wood and haulin' staves and haulin' railroad ties. I mean, he was an entrepreneur. I mean, he just . . .

MS: Oh yes.

KK: . . . made that happen.

MS: Yes, yes, he did. It—so he took care of us. And he was workin' on WPA. And the boys were up in high school—old enough to help him, you know. And he just worked it out. That's what—my mother usually got her way. [*Laughs*] But this is one time he said, "I am not se—losin' my home and everything. I'm—and bein' away from my family all this time." You know, 'cause when they were in St. Louis—when he was in St. Louis, my mother would go up and visit. And she had found Famous and Barr up there, and things so different. And you can buy things—such good things, so much cheaper than you could in El Dorado. And she'd be bringin' him back stuff, you know. And she could just

say she could envision. And she was that kinda person, too. Because she went into real estate business later. He didn't go with her. But she went anyway. *[Laughs]* And some of the property she—you know, she left it for us, you know—and everything so—they worked together what they ended up doin'. I must tell you this about people—there were men who would let people borrow money from them. Now I don't remember this because I wasn't old enough. My dad, as I said, was a very quiet man, sober man. And he didn't know it. Mama borrowed five dollars from him. She thought somehow or other that she would get that five dollars to pay *[laughs]* him back. But somehow, she wasn't able to do that. And this man—and, of course, at that time—some of them would just come into your house, you know. Just walk into your house. Excuse me. *[Long pause]*

[00:46:32] KK: So she basically borrowed five dollars from a loan shark.

MS: Yes, that's what he was. I would call his name, but I won't.

*[Laughter]* 'Cause I heard his name. I don't even know what he look like—but anyway, she wasn't able to, from her allowance—to get that money, because she didn't work. She had too many kids to work. And that's what Dad—she—that's why I went

nowhere but stayed at home, and she taught me, you know, things. And I'm blessed for it. And she—he came in. It was night. And my daddy was home from work and was eating at the table. He came on through. I guess, maybe one of the kids went to the door or something. I don't, you know—I don't remember. She told it over and over and—and he said, "Now Gracie Lee, now, you know, you said—you"—my daddy sittin' there eating his supper, you know. And said, "Now, you gonna have to pay me." My daddy didn't know anything about what was going on, and so my mother said it was one of the scariest time in her life, because daddy got up from the table and took this chair that he was sittin' in. And she say she had to swing on the chair. And she regretted that so much that she had done that, you know. But it was like my aunt told me one time, he said—she said, "Now, Shep is—he's not a—he's a quiet man. He's a nice man." All the people respected him in the community that knew him. And said, "But now, you can't get too far with him now." Said, "Because that's what happened with his father." Which meant that—that's why we never knew our grandfather—our paternal grandfather. We never knew him. Is because he had to leave from down there somewhere in— what is the name of that place in Louisiana—Homer, Louisiana.

And I just found that out just a few years ago, that he was livin' right up in Camden.

[00:48:35] KK: He had to leave from Homer 'cause he did somethin'?

MS: Yes.

KK: He . . .

MS: And said the people told him, "You get your wagons, load it up, and you leave. We will not do a thing or say a thing about it."

KK: He defended himself against somebody?

MS: Yes. Mh-hmm.

KK: A white man?

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm. And he went to Camden. And some friend of mine told me that used to be a kind of a haven for people in Camden. I didn't know about it, or I haven't done any research on it or anything. But anyway, but that's—but we never saw him. Now we're in El Dorado. And he never talked about his father.

[00:49:14] KK: So now exactly what happened? This guy came in the house and demanded the money, and what did your father do?

MS: He got up and got a chair. He was gonna break his head off.

*[Laughs]*

KK: And your mom stopped him or . . .

MS: Well she stop—she held to the chair.

KK: So he couldn't . . .

MS: So he couldn't . . .

KK: . . . hurt the guy?

MS: Yeah. Because she didn't wanna be—you know, she didn't want that to happen anyway. But she didn't wanna be responsible for something like that. But she was tellin' how that taught her a lesson.

KK: No doubt.

MS: But she said, you know—she never saw him as angry as he was. But this man—he's eating in his own house, and he comes in a-raisin' Cain about something, you know. He couldn't . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . take it.

KK: Yeah. I understand.

[00:49:50] MS: He just couldn't take it anymore. But she was swingin' on the chair that he was—it was probably one of these cane bottom chairs. And he just got up and got it, and he had it raised. And she said she knows that if he had hit that man, he would have broken his neck.

KK: And then at the end—and the very best outcome woulda been he woulda had to leave town forever.

MS: Oh, yeah.

KK: But it could've been a lot worse than that.

MS: Right. Right.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Yeah, a lot worse.

KK: You know.

MS: And all these kids he had here to take care of, you know.

*[Laughs]*

[00:50:28] KK: Well, tell me about your siblings a little bit. Now how many kids were in the family?

MS: Eight.

KK: What order did they go in? Can you give us their names?

MS: Yes. Now my father had married before my mother and his marriage. And—but she died either right after her child was born or somethin' like that. She never knew her mother. And it's like—we're not ha—we were not half—we were just sister and brothers. And she loved us as much as we did her. But she had grandparents, maternal grandparents, and they took her for the most part. But she would come and spend time with us. And, you know, she loved her daddy. She loved us all. Just as—you



know, 'cause we were all that she had. And I had a—my younger sister did not even know until she was grown that Etta was a half sister to us. Because we never said anything about half, you know. But anyway, that made nine for him and eight for my mother.

KK: So that was a . . .

MS: Five boys and three girls for my mother. Mh-hmm.

KK: So Etta was the oldest.

MS: Etta was oldest.

KK: The half sister.

[00:51:33] MS: Uh-huh. And she was crazy about her little sisters and brothers. I would go down to Bernice, Louisiana. That's where she lived with her grandparents. She'd come and spend time with us. But, you know, that's where she lived. And she'd go back. And—'cause she ended up bein' in California. But she was proud of her sisters and brothers. Because the ones down there were like her aunts and uncles. You know. And she was the baby down there, you know. *[Laughs]* But she was the oldest one when she came to us, you see. So I had five brothers. At—they were—Albert, who was the oldest one. He was a teacher, too, just like I was. He's deceased. Walter who lives in Detroit. He was one of those—it's—what do they call

them that—bud facilities. Something that comes under GM. And he was a—I've forgotten what his position—but he had a little position up there. And did very, very well. Very, very well. His—he married a—his classmate. They went up there together. And she did not go to college, but she took tailorin'. And she did—oh, she did—oh, she could do it. And she was always—she could do wedding dresses and all that kind of thing . . .

[00:52:55] KK: And so she was a seamstress.

MS: Yes, she was a seamstress.

KK: And what did he do? He worked in a gym?

MS: He worked at GM, but he—what . . .

KK: It's like a boxing gym or a basketball gym?

MS: Oh, no, no, no, no. G—motor—GM motors.

KK: Oh, GM.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: I'm so sorry.

MS: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KK: Okay.

MS: GM motors.

KK: Okay, GM. Yes.

MS: He was a—I'm tryin' to see what he. He was—I don't wanna use the word "boss." What are some names? He had groups—

what—anyway.

KK: I don't know.

MS: That—but anyway, I can't think of it. But he was over a group of men.

KK: Oh, okay.

MS: And that kinda thing, you know.

KK: Like a gang boss, maybe.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: Uh-huh.

[00:53:26] MS: And he says—he called me yesterday for my birthday. He said—he was—he says all the time—he said, "You know"—said, "These young men are—they—these people come from all parts of the world—all parts of the country. And, you know, actually, you know, I—it was a blessing for us in one way to be in this town. And then people really don't believe that you experience the things that you do on one hand. And then it's maybe positive on one hand and negative on the other hand." I remember when I first went to California to visit my sister, Etta. She had a friend that came from Texas. So while we were there talkin', she said, "Well, what kind of crops do you all raise?" [KK *laughs*] Well, I hardly knew how to answer her. Because, you know, we didn't have cars and things, we had—we always just

had—did raise crops. [*Laughs*] But we didn't go to Three Creeks and Mount Willie and those places because we were here in El Dorado. They came here for shoppin' and stuff. And we really didn't know much about it. Because as I say, my mother moved here at ten years old.

[00:54:41] KK: You were town folk.

MS: We were town folk.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And by that boom comin' in, they brought all kinda people in here. Musicians, doctors, you know . . .

KK: So there was a—there was an African American middle class.

MS: That's right. I mean, it—it's hard to name it. But there was a middle class. There were . . .

KK: There were professionals.

MS: There were professionals.

KK: And tradespeople.

MS: Right.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Right.

KK: In the black community.

MS: In the black community. We had beauticians and paperhangers and plumbers and electricians and . . .

KK: So this person. Yeah . . .

[00:55:19] MS: . . . dentists and podiatrists and all of those people, you know, that came in here from Meharry up there in Nashville and so forth. And, you know, people workin' for insurance agencies lived on my street, you know. And it was just—and we were just in this little place with what [*laughs*]*—*you know, the streets from us they fixed with—the family up there fixed with what they call a palm garden, a place for the young people to go and they—it's like the outdoor thing, you know. And they had the latticework and everything up. And my son owns that now. But anyway, we were just exposed to that at Fairview School we had like senior ban—we did the same thing that they did at the high school. Comin' from eighth grade. We had banquets. They had dances right after the—after the ball games every night. And there were just things that we did, you know. And we just did what we did. [*Laughter*] We had little clubs for boys and girls. And there were men who got the Mattocks Park started. There were Black men who got the park started. And then s—you know, some of the other people were a lot of help to them. But they the—were the ones who were advocates, you know, for this. Which we do not have now. Because these—and now I say a lot of it because of the boom. That brought people in here with

ideas, see. There was a man by the name of Sonny Moore. And I saw his name in a book somewhere. But I was not old enough to keep it or—I don't even know what the book was. But it was, you know—I was just really flabbergasted to see the man that lived around the corner from us, with his name in a book, you know. [*Laughter*] But he came into El Dorado from somewhere. And he had just about a block of land up there. He had a pool hall there. He had rent houses there. And he had his own home there. And they had a big garden with hedges as tall as you are. You could not see through there. And I could see they were partyin' away—outdoor parties, you know. I would be on my way to my friend's house around the—and you could just—you couldn't see them. They had 'em thick. And they were—that was the middle class, see. And they were carryin' on. And when I got grown, I learned a little more about it, you know. [*Laughter*] Bein' invited to these clubs and things, you know. And there were—they—these were the middle-class people. When I came back to El Dorado from Warren, they—first thing I know, they were inviting me to, you know, come in, you know. But anyway, I never did get through Washington High School. I guess, I won't. [*Laughs*] But . . .

[00:58:19] KK: Well, you graduated from Washington High School.

MS: I graduated from Washington High School. Mh-hmm.

KK: Now one thing we didn't finish was the names of your siblings.

MS: Oh, yes. I'm sorry.

KK: You started with Etta . . .

MS: Al . . .

KK: and then you had . . .

MS: Albert.

KK: . . . Albert and then . . .

MS: Then . . .

KK: . . . Walter.

MS: Then I was next.

KK: Oh, you were next. Okay.

MS: I was next. And then Walter, and then Willie, who left and went to California years and years ago. And he's died out there. In September, we went. And then there was a space between there, and then there was Jesse. He went to Arkansas Baptist College. And then that was another girl then. Ajeuensee who went to UAPB.

[00:58:58] KK: Now what was her name again?

MS: Ajeunesse, a rare name that . . .

KK: Yeah, spell that for me.

MS: *A-J-E-U-N-E-S-S-E.*

KK: Okay.

MS: And then there was Herbert, who called me yesterday. And he was also a worker at General Motors. And he became an electrician or something. He was tellin' me not long ago how hard it was for him to get that—get into that. Because—and he said it was difficult for him to get into it, but they encouraged him because there were no Blacks in it. And he say he had a hard time gettin' through. But he got through it, and he ended up bein' president of the unions and stuff up there. But he's retired now.

KK: Wow, that's a huge jump.

MS: Oh yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: From goin' from El Dorado, Arkansas . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . to being . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . a union head.

MS: Right. He . . .

KK: That is something.

MS: Yeah, yeah. He was a head of the union. Mh-hmm.

KK: Wow, that's amazing.

[01:01:00] MS: Yeah, and he went to—he was in the service before



he went to Detroit. He went to UAPB coupla of years. But that didn't satisfy him. He went into service. And then when he got from there, he went to Detroit, and he's been there ever since. And after he got out of the work thing, he was—he had an office downtown. And he was the senior thing, or something he was doin', you know. I can't keep up with all of them. [Laughter]

KK: Too many brothers and sisters, huh?

MS: Too many brothers and sisters. Yeah. But most of 'em—I think, there were about five of us who in the profession, the teachin' profession, to some extent.

[01:00:45] KK: I just think that's really interesting, you know. Your person from Texas just kind of assumed you guys were sharecroppers or whatever.

MS: Well, just like—see she—I don't know what part of Texas she came from right now. But my sister and she were very good, close friends. And she said, "Well, how do you all—what do you all do for a living?" And I was stunned because I hadn't traveled a lot. And I didn't, you know, p—you know, how that is.

KK: Yeah.

[01:01:12] MS: You don't know what anybody's doin' somewhere  
in . . .

KK: Right.

MS: . . . in this country right now. You don't know what they do to live. And so my sister said to her, "Matilda, she doesn't live"—because see she was—my sister was from Bernice. She knew about all that stuff, see. She said, "She doesn't live in a town like Bernice." You know, my daddy was workin' as a machinist helper.

KK: Everybody worked.

MS: Everybody worked.

KK: Yeah.

MS: I say—and she said, "Well, how do people live if they don't have farms—if they don't have crops?"

KK: Yeah.

MS: I say, "Well, they do a lot of different things." I say, "We got refineries that hire a lot." We—I think we had about three refineries or something at that time. Maybe one more, I don't know. 'Cause I didn't pay all that in attention. You know, I was just a kid livin' there. And I say, "And then we got, you know, all these people that do all these different trades and things." I said, "We got these big, marble-floor hotels downtown that they tore down." [*Laughs*] I said, but at that time, you know—I say, "You got all those people there that work. You've got laundries." We had a El Dorado laundry and there were even ladies that did

the laundry, and I didn't know that. You know, you don't know into everything when you're a kid.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And you don't really care. [*Laughs*]

KK: Right.

[01:02:30] MS: And after I got really good and grown, I found out a lot of things that people were doing in El Dorado that I didn't know nothin' about. Some of 'em were bringing those sheets and pillowcases and things home, and that was there job. To do them and deliver 'em back to the hotels. And to say nothing about, you know, the domestic work . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . that people did. My grandfather, James Williams, was a gardener and a huntsman. He would get the furs and things. And fix 'em up to send 'em up in Iowa, I think is where he sent them. To get his—to sell. And then he liked to garden and there were some people that he did—gardened for here.

KK: Well hold on a second . . .

TM: We need to change tapes.

KK: . . . while we change these tapes.

[Tape Stopped]

[01:03:20] KK: So I think that's a really important point. And I

know we've gone over it a couple of times. But a lot of people today did not realize that when a town became prosperous in segregated Arkansas that you had a white middle class, and you had a Black middle class.

MS: Definitely.

KK: You had white businesses, and you had black businesses.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: And that prosperity spilled over . . .

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . into the Black community.

MS: Well, it did. And you know what? We had lots of business places open. Stores and cafeterias and restaurants and things like—and clubs. Because down on this north side, there was a street called Liberty Street. And they had all the big bands. Because, see, they were in need of money, too. All those guys, Earl Hines and all of those people. Of course, I didn't go to them, but my brother older than I—he went. And there would be—and I tell you something real funny. [01:04:25] One day—one evening, we had been at church. We had been to church to—I have choir rehearsal. And my friends, same one I told you came down this summer to visit with me. Her sister was my first-grade teacher. She had a brother, Lawrence. And we—he

had a car. I didn't know it was not his car that the time. It was daddy's car. He was sneakin' out. [*Laughs*] But anyway, we begged him and begged him. We—after we came out of choir practice, "Please take us down in St. Louis." This area is called St. Louis down here. And, of course, it doesn't exist anymore. But anyway, there was gonna be some big band. And we just wanted him to drive us through there and let us just get the—a little, you know, taste of the aroma [*laughs*] of it. And he said, "I don't have time." He was—you know—he was older. "I don't have time to fool with y'all. I don't have time to fool with y'all." He—I guess he wanted to get down there himself, you know. [*Laughter*] He didn't want us with him. So we said, "Please, Lawrence, just let us go, let us go. Take us down there—we will." And he said, "Well, get in, get in, get in." So we had to sit in each other's laps and everything. And so we came down through there and turned from the back of where Barton School is now and came out that little, short road, and then we went to Liberty Street. And he said, "Uh-oh, I see the policeman. Some of you got to get out of here because he'll [*laughter*—I'll be arrested with this many people in this car." And I said, "Oh, goodness. What we gonna do?" You know. He said, "Some of you gotta get out now." And the ones that were sittin' in the

laps—and I happened to be one of those—I had to get out. And there was this friend of mine—that she was so emotional anyway—she was scared to death. I was scared, too, but I wasn't as scared as she was. And we were holdin' hands. Now we didn't know—didn't have—couldn't think well enough to know that we didn't have to go through Liberty Street. All we had to do was go on down one more block and turn, and we'd be right back on Northwest Avenue again. [*Laughter*] But we went through Liberty, and we were scared to death because the streets were filled. The sidewalks were filled. And it look—it just looked like it was—I don't know, a war goin' on. I mean, it was nothing—people were—were just havin' a ti—good time. Talkin' and laughin' with each other. The dance hadn't started, you know. And we got through there, and my friend started praying out loud. [*Laughter*] She started—Dorothy started praying, "Lord, if you just let me get through this time, I will not ever do it anymore. Father, just let" —'cause we were slippin' off, see. We were supposed to been goin' home. But instead, we got him to bring us through St. Louis. But she prayed. And she prayed all the way through to Northwest Avenue again. [*KK laughs*] And we were just holdin' hands tight. And the thing about it was, they were not payin' us any attention. They didn't even

know we were there. They were findin' their friends and sayin', "We gonna have a good time tonight." And this and that, you know. And all that was goin'. They were up over our heads. And they didn't even see us. [*Laughter*] And we laughed about that a long, long time. I tell you.

[01:07:40] KK: You were scared for no good reason.

MS: For no good reason at all. [*Laughter*] But my mother never did know I went through there.

KK: Yeah. Well, now that would've been scary. I'm sure you would've been in trouble.

MS: Ooh-ooh.

KK: 'Cause that's where, like, there was alcohol down there.

MS: Yes. Yeah . . .

[01:07:53] KK: And there were . . .

MS: . . . and. . .

KK: . . . some bad people down there.

MS: Bad people down—See they were from everywhere, Camden and Urbana and Strong and Smackover and all around. They were from everywhere, you know. Magnolia . . .

KK: Now did just Black people go to this area for entertainment, or did Black and white people go?

MS: You talkin' about now or then?

KK: Then.

MS: Oh, then. Yeah, there were just the—I—there were probably some white people down there too. Yeah, but Black—it was a Black p—Black thing [*laughs*] as they say.

KK: And when you say "St. Louis," of course, you're not referring to St. Louis, Missouri. They just called this area . . .

MS: They call that area St. Louis. The black area down here was St. Louis, and the area that we lived in was Fairview.

KK: Which was near there.

MS: No. No.

KK: It wasn't near.

MS: All the way across town.

KK: Oh, okay. So that was . . .

MS: Where we lived . . .

KK: . . . a few miles—a couple miles away.

MS: Mh-hmm. Uh-huh.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Uh-huh. We didn't have—that—well, yes, we did have a little street there, but it wasn't like the St. Louis area. It could get kinda rough down there.

KK: I bet.

MS: Yeah.



[01:08:53] KK: Now when you went through there, that was still  
afternoon daylight, right?

MS: No. It was . . .

KK: Was it nighttime?

MS: . . . it was just, you know, early night. The evening . . .

KK: Oh, you really woulda gotten into trouble if they'd known . . .

MS: Oh.

KK: . . . you were down there at night.

MS: I would have gotten into trouble anytime [*laughter*] if I . . .

KK: But it was exciting kinda, wasn't it?

MS: Yeah, it was. But it was scary.

KK: Yeah.

MS: I didn't wanna do it anymore. [*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah, yeah. Well, you were a good girl.

MS: I didn't wanna do that anymore. Mh-mm.

[01:09:17] KK: How old were you when that happened? What grade  
you were in?

MS: Let's see how—we were about fifteen, I think.

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: Mh-hmm. I think we were about fifteen. And I didn't know until  
later. Until I started runnin' this museum and got some old  
writings and things that some girls were goin' to the dances.

KK: Some younger girls.

MS: Some younger girls were goin' to the dances.

KK: Yeah, that's a little scary, isn't it?

MS: Yeah, it is. And, you know, we didn't know anything—we didn't think anything about goin'. We didn't ever plan to go. *[Laughs]*

KK: Yeah. You were a little more innocent maybe than some others.

MS: Yeah, yeah. I think so. You know, we were—our group was kinda closely kept or something like that.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And we intermingled with each other, you know. And who you see in school is not who it is all the time.

KK: Yeah. Yeah.

MS: They just had much more experience than we did. You know, you sit in the classroom—you'd never know that.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Because they didn't publicize it, you see. *[Laughs]*

[01:10:58] KK: I'm sure they didn't—I'm sure they did not. It woulda ruined their reputations, right?

MS: You know, yeah. Right.

KK: In those days.

MS: And it's not—what was I about to say? It's not that—I mean, you're the same at school. And many times, you don't know the

lifestyle of everybody that you're in school with.

KK: That's right. That's right.

MS: And especially if you have a certain group that you, you know—you go to church together. You go to the little things—the basketball games and the little stuff—little club stuff together. That's what you know. And then when you find out, was she doing that? Was she goin' over there for that, you know? And it's shockin' to you when you hear it like that, you know.

[01:11:05] KK: Yeah. Do you happen to remember anyone mentioning what type of artists played down in those clubs?

MS: Well you had people like, let's see—all these big names playing.

KK: Like did Duke Ellington and his orchestra?

MS: Duke Ellington. All them . . .

KK: Count Basie?

[01:11:18] MS: Count Basie. All those were playing, I think. As I say, they were on the road looking for something to eat.

*[Laughs]*

KK: And then you had people maybe like B. B. King?

MS: B. B. King.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Mh-hmm. I heard 'em talkin' about him.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Sure did—all those big names. And what is the other . . .

KK: You said—you mentioned Earl Hines earlier . . .

MS: Earl Hines.

KK: . . . who was a dancer, right? The dancer?

MS: Well he was a . . .

KK: Did he dance, or did he . . .

MS: . . . he was a band person.

KK: Oh he was a bandleader.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: His sons, I guess, were the ones that were . . .

MS: Probably so.

KK: . . . dancers.

[01:11:47] MS: But it was all of 'em. They were—I guess, they were  
travelin' through the country, you know, tryin' to make it.

And . . .

KK: They all were, and they mainly played, you know, Black clubs.

MS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

KK: But they sometimes played in places where white people . . .

MS: White people, too.

KK: . . . came, too. Yeah.

MS: Up there in Harlem and around. Yep. And they would be here. You know, the people—according to their own lifestyle, had to have something to do, you know. As my mother said, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" [*KK laughs*] or that whatever it is she'd say.

KK: Well, people like to dance . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . they like to hear good music.

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: It's exciting stuff.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: I understand.

[01:12:25] MS: It's the only thing, is where you hear it and who you with when you hear it, you know. You may not interpret things the same way, you know.

KK: Yeah, I know. [*MS laughs*] I know. And I'm sure, you know, that in those days, you know, things were just much stricter.

MS: Oh they were.

KK: You know, as a teenager . . .

MS: They were.

KK: . . . you don't drink . . .

MS: No.

KK: . . . you don't go where you're not supposed to go . . .

MS: No. No.

KK: You do your work and you . . .

[01:12:48] MS: 'Cause like you didn't drink in the house. You didn't play cards in the house. I had a neighbor next door, and I was a—we were classmates. But she was in with her grandmother—her mother had died, and her father lived there. But when my mother found out that they were playin' cards, I couldn't go up there. And I really didn't want to because she was my age, my classmate, but she wasn't—she visited St. Louis, I'll say it like that. [*Laughs*] She visited St. Louis, and, you know, I wasn't about to be comin' to St. Louis to visit. And, you know, I'm not tryin' to say that—well, that's just the way I was reared.

KK: Right.

MS: Yeah.

KK: And, yeah. I understand.

MS: That's just the way I was reared.

[01:13:32] KK: I understand. Well, that's real interesting, you know. And that's a whole different side of El Dorado that we haven't heard much about.

MS: Really?

KK: And I think it's really important that we get that. And, in fact,

we were talkin' about it with Edwin and Diane last night. They said, "Man, you gotta get her to talk about St. Louis because that's one of the most important things about, you know, the Black community of that time. Was—is all these big musicians came down here, and there was a black middle class, and you gotta talk about that stuff." So I'm really glad—I mean, you just came up with it on your own. I'm glad you talked about it.

[01:14:04] MS: Now in our community, we had, let's see—and some of these I remember from talk—more than things—but doctor—there was a Dr. [*unclear word*—a regular, you know, doctor—and Dr. Washington. Now they lived like not even a block from where we lived, those two doctors. And then there was a Dr. ?Rainey?. He lived maybe [*laughs*] another block from where I lived. He was a dentist. And now Dr. Graham was a podiatrist. He lived in the St. Louis area. And I'm sure I'm missin' some more of 'em. But those were, you know—and then at one time, you didn't hear doctor anybody, you know. And whoever's here now, they don't have that many here now. They don't have . . .

[01:14:50] KK: Well, the town's changed a bunch of times over time.

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah, you might wanna put that necklace in your purse.

MS: Yeah.

KK: 'Cause it makes a just little bit of noise.

MS: Oh, I'm sorry.

KK: No, it's fine.

TM: You're fine.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: All right, so you got through high school.

MS: Mh-hmm. [*Laughs*]

[01:15:06] KK: And then what happened for you after high school?

MS: After high school, I didn't go to college the first year. My—  
they—my pastor wanted me to go to Arkansas Baptist College. I  
didn't—we had gone up there for church trips and things, and I  
didn't much wanna go there. But anyway, there was a friend of  
ours who had gone on, and it was a—it was kind of a strange  
thing that my best friends didn't go either. And my mother was  
ill. And I stayed home that year. And I worked some. I've got  
a story already been printed on that. But, the next year, I went  
and the rest of 'em went. [*Laughs*]

KK: So you guys took one year in between.

MS: Yes.

KK: And worked and stayed at home and thought about it. And  
then . . .

MS: I don't know—well, one of 'em was—one of the girls was ill



'cause her mother was a schoolteacher. That's why she didn't go. But the girl that I told you, her sister was our first-grade teacher. She didn't go. I don't know why Jewell didn't go. Her sister always said, "Well, you know, they were waitin' for you."  
[Laughs] And then the other girls—there were four of us—went. And I don't know why she didn't go.

[01:16:22] KK: So where did you guys go to college?

MS: We went to AM&N.

KK: Okay.

MS: It was AM&N then, but it's UAPB now.

KK: Right. Right.

MS: Yeah, that's where we went. Now I went on to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Not when something—you know, not when it was segregated. It was segregated, too. Because—but—'cause I went in summers. Went in summers. And 'cause we had our own hall. I'm trying to think of the name of it. It was probably the oldest and the best one up there. I think they started to tear it down one time—where the girls were. But it had marble floors and everything. That, you know—that didn't bother me, because when we went to classes, we were together [laughs] in the classes but not in the, you know—in the living area.

KK: Right. So you couldn't share dorms with white students.

MS: No. No.

KK: But you went to class with white students.

MS: But went to class with them.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And . . .

[01:17:20] KK: What—let's see, what year would that have been?

That'd been about . . .

MS: I got—let's see, I got my masters in [19]58.

KK: Okay.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: In [19]58. And whenever the dorms closed—'cause a lot of people come for that first semester and then leave. You had to go to—they had a little house there they called something. But it was just a regular house 'cause there wasn't that many to be there. And then when my husband and I went, we had to go out in the community and find a place. And that was difficult. But we had—now . . .

KK: 'Cause they didn't have married housing for Black students?

MS: No.

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: That's about the time with—right before, C—I think, C. C. Mercer was and ro—Branton . . .

KK: Wiley Branton.

MS: He was my classmate, Wiley. Wiley was my classmate. They had been there and some others had been there. And that's how we got the name of these people where they had stayed. And we went there and stayed. They let us stay couples, you know.

KK: And George Haley, was he up there, too, at that time?

MS: I . . .

[01:18:29] KK: You remember George Haley?

MS: No—I didn't know George . . .

KK: Okay.

MS: . . . but I knew his father was a teacher at AM&N at the time. I knew him then. He taught us conservation and made these trips about the fisheries and, you know, the coal—the diamond mines and stuff all over there, you know. So, I didn't know George at the time, but I knew Wiley Branton from the beginning. Because they had a—his family had a taxi company. And he and his brothers worked with it. He was my classmate, too. And so was—C. C. Mercer was my classmate.

KK: And that was at U of A at Fayetteville at that time. Yeah.

TM: Are there any stories?

MS: No, that was at UAPB.

KK: Oh, that was all at UAPB. Okay.

MS: 'Cause they lived there. They had a business there. You wanna conclusion of some kind? *[Laughs]*

KK: No, you're doing great. I mean, there's more.

[01:19:22] TM: I was curious about any stories about either C. C. Mercer or Wiley Branton. Is there any stories you have with those guys—about those guys?

KK: I mean, did you spend time with 'em, or they just classmates only?

MS: No, I spent some time with some of 'em. Wiley, he picked us up at the—when we got off the train. *[Laughs]* And then I knew him ever since, and we did have some social activities, you know, where we were at the same—in the same setting, you know. I knew him well. He was smart. C. C.—in fact, C. C. was down here one year for Emancipation Proclamation. He had dinner with us. I knew him well. My husband knew them better than I did. We were at the same time

[01:20:14] KK: Now so when did you meet your husband? Sounds like it was somewhere in this college age.

MS: Yeah, I did the first year I went up there in [19]40, [19]41—in

[19]41, yeah.

KK: In [19]41 as a freshman in college?

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Yeah.

KK: How'd you guys meet?

MS: Well, let's see, how did we meet? [*Laughter*] We just met somewhere.

KK: Yeah.

[01:20:38] MS: I think I was comin' from the library or something like that. Met him in the—he was a football player. I met him in the dining hall [*laughs*] for one thing. I know I met him there. Just—you know how you go, and everybody's new to everybody and you just, you know. Tha—we had some—this [*laughs*—I tell my kids that. They just laugh. But we were on a square at UAPB. And there were like—there were two—a lot of kids lived in the city. They came from other places and still lived in the city because they didn't play the tu—you know, I guess they weren't able to pay the tuition. And they—or lived with other people. But anyway, there were two dormitories on this side, and way across the block, there were two dormitories on that side. One for the men over there and one for us over here. The dining hall was just right close to us. And then there were other places and administration way over there somewhere and the

library way over there. But a lot of times when we would go to the library or something like that, that's when you would meet people. Even though we had chaperones, you know. To—you'd meet people comin' and going and seein' 'em in the library and stuff like that. Meet 'em in the dining hall, you know, like that. And they even had a laundry on the campus. Because everybody could earn something. I think most of the black schools kinda based it on like Tuskegee and those places where people worked and, you know, did things—and Fisk University. And maybe Mary McLeod Bethune-Cookman College and those places that were established a long time ago, you know, with the Booker T. Washington idea. And, that they could work. And that was good because they'd have somebody to do everything, you know.

[01:22:35] KK: So working there was part of the way you paid your way through school?

MS: Right.

KK: You were working in exchange for being able to go to school.

MS: Right. Right.

KK: And also you had to pay somethin' too, right?

MS: Yeah, you did. Oh yeah. You had to pay something.

KK: But that made the tuition lower.

MS: Oh yeah.

KK: And it got the work done.

MS: Right. Right.

KK: Is that what you're saying?

MS: Yes.

[01:22:50] KK: Okay. So people worked, you know . . .

MS: And most of 'em worked. They—you would—couldn't find over two or three that didn't work. And, you know, they give you something to do, if you wanted. If you wanted to work, you could have a job. I think, my husband lighted the boilers or somethin'. Because he had that steam heat, you know—to—in the—I said, "Well, I didn't know that was you down there lightin' the boiler. [*Laughter*] Why it was so cold this mornin'?" And then, you know, they would work in the offices. You know, in the administration building. You know . . .

KK: Right.

MS: . . . secretarial work.

KK: Right.

MS: And just all kind—music . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . assistant to the directors and things like that. And then sweepin' the halls, and moppin' the halls and cleaning, that kind

of thing, you know.

KK: Sure.

[01:23:41] MS: That the students didn't do, you know, in the buildings. And just bein' receptionists in the buildin's. And all kinds of things. Assistants to the teachers. But they—workin' the laundry. You know. And the guys—and the next thing that I—was pickin' potatoes. We didn't know what we were—you know, freshmen don't know anything when they get anywhere. [Laughter] And they say well, "They named the day we gonna go to pick potatoes." "Pick potatoes, pickin' potatoes." And we went out to the—they had a farm, you see. They had a farm out there for the agricultural part, I guess, you know. And they had cows and chickens and all that. It was way out from the campus, you know. A coupla miles, I guess. But anyway, we had to walk, and there was no school this day. We going to pick potatoes. Boy, they had a—they had planted the potatoes they had grown, too, but they had dug 'em. They had gone through with the plows or whatever it was, and they were just there. And all we had to do was just pick 'em up and put 'em in a basket or something like that. And they . . .

KK: Oh you didn't have to use a shovel and dig 'em up.

MS: Oh, no, no, no.



KK: Okay.

MS: The fellas that were agricultural fellows had done all that work, I guess, but they were just lying there for us to pick up. And, of course, they used them . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . in the lunches, you see. The foods that they grew out there, to some extent.

[01:25:10] KK: So they may not have grown all their own food, but they certainly grew some of their food.

MS: Oh, yeah. They grew some of their food. And not all of it. But some of it. And they gave us on Sundays, they just had two meals. And they gave us sandwiches to bring back. And sometimes you think you didn't want that sandwich. [*Laughter*] And about eight or nine o'clock that night, you're hungry. And they would go down the hall, "Anybody got a sandwich? I didn't get mine today," you know. And some would have 'em. And, you know, because they had a place called the Lion's Den right across there, and that's where everybody wanted to go, you know. That's the Lions' club, you know. And they sold stuff like that, you know. And it was a place to go, you know, for the evenin' meal or any other time you wanted to go. If you had any money to go. [*Laughs*] If you had a quar—twenty-five

cents. Oh, it was just that bad, too, I tell you.

KK: Oh.

MS: Well, it wasn't—I guess, it wasn't bad. That's just the way we lived. And we got just about as much, I guess. Yeah.

[01:26:18] KK: Now did your parents help pay for your college?

MS: Oh, they paid for it. And when my brother went into services—Albert, the oldest one—he had me set up for—to receive money from him every month. And that was good. They thought I was rich. [*Laughter*] It wasn't but ten dollars. It wasn't but ten dollars a month. But they—my friends, "You got money. You got money." My mother would send me, like, three dollars or five dollars. And what Albert would send me. And I had a friend, this was my classmate—she s—my roommate—she said her mother would send her like two dollars or something. But she had two—she was a widow lady, and she had two daughters in college.

KK: Whew.

MS: One was at Southern University, and she was up there. So she couldn't do, you know, what—you know, my daddy and mother and brother, you know, could do. But anyway, it was a good life. A lot of experience. When we went to Fayetteville, we had to—we had a little room. It was 'bout as big as from that door

to here, about—'bout that width—Nile and I had. We had to sit out in the yard to study, 'cause there wouldn't be enough light in there. And it'd be too hot in there in the summertime. It would be cold when you wake up in the mornin'. [*Laughs*] It would be cold. And—but up in the day, it would be hot in that house, you know. So we—there was another couple lived there. And we—they'd get on one side, and we get on the other. I told the kids, "You don't know how hard it was for us to get our education. You can get it so easy now. People pay you to get it." I said, "But it's—it was hard work for us." It really was. It was hard work for us.

[01:28:16] KK: Well, just the living—just living . . .

MS: Yeah, just . . .

KK: . . . was the hard part.

MS: Yeah.

KK: You know. So tryin' to put a study on top of that . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . it's hard to make that a priority when you're tryin' to—you're sweltering in the heat, or you're freezing at night.

MS: Right.

KK: I understand.

MS: And I remember one night, I sat up all night long to get that

paper ready. I didn't know I was going to. But I kept going back over things—going back over—I ?laid? up. I heard roosters crowin'. [*Laughs*] I said, "I'll never sat up all night long." G— but I got it though. But I made good grades there.

[01:28:47] KK: You made good grades in college?

MS: Yeah, I made good grades. I made better grades at Fayetteville. A doctor, I can't think of his name right now—but he passed out the test this way. You, this sheet—you—the other one a sheet—a different sheet. That's to keep people from cheating. But I never did believe in that anyway. I would trust myself better than I would somebody else, you know. [*Laughs*] And so what happened was, as he passed the pages, and he'd pass you another page, same way. Well, I didn't get all the pages. I didn't know what—I wasn't countin' the pages. I was just takin' what they placed on my desk, you know. So when I saw my grade—they put the grades up, you know, out there on the thing—not your name but just your number and your grade and so forth. And I saw it and I said, "Oh, this is not right, Doctor—Dr. Beck." That's what it was. He was the—he was over the department of education. And I went to him, and I said, "Well"—I said, "I"—I took the pa—no, he looked for the paper 'cause I didn't have it, he did. I said—I had found the grade.

And I asked him about it. I said, "Now, there's something wrong. I don't think that—I think a mistake has been made." So he said—he went back and got it and said, "Well, it's"—got my paper, and then he found out he didn't have all of the exam. And then he say, "Well, the only thing I can do is to"—he—I had a C. And he said, "The only thing I can do is to let you take the rest of it now." I said, "Well, I'll take it now." And I did get the B. [KK laughs] Because I knew I had studied, and I was ready for that exam, you know. And I probably would've done better than that, you know. One time they changed me from one professor to another. You know, they had professors comin' in from everywhere in the summertime. From New York and so forth. And Missouri and other places for the summer. They had other teachers, you know. I could go on and on about that. But is there anything else you wanna ask me?

[01:30:57] KK: Well, you—we didn't really hear much about your gettin' engaged or your—you met your husband there. I mean, how did that—I mean, how—it was a kind of a strict environment. So how did you guys date? What did you do for a date?

[01:31:09] MS: Oh, well now, they had activities. You could to the movies. You could go to—after you were there for a while, you

could go to the movies. But that bunch of freshmen that came in there—when they took us downtown, there were chaperones with us when we first got there. I guess they were introducin' us to the town and, you know, where you could go to do this and that, and the other. Yeah. But we could go—but we sign out—you sign out, and you sign back in. But it would have to be in the daytime. But if you went to the dances or whatever, you gotta sign out to go there. If you went to the library, night or day, got to sign out to go there. Sign back in when you come. That's the way they kept up with us. And one thing [*laughs*] I— one funny thing, you know, freshmen learn a lot of things. [*KK laughs*] We—I was in the choir that sang for vesper. We had vesper. We had to attend vesper services. We had—our seats were numbered. And if you weren't in that seat, well, you know, I think, two times you could miss or something would happen. But anyway, it was rainin' that day, and it was dreary and everything. And we decided in our room that we weren't gonna go to vesper. So we had a dorm matron there was Mrs. Pious. [*KK laughs*] I never will forget her. And we said, "Well, we're just not goin'. It's, you know—it's messy out there today, you know." Hadn't thought about Ms. Pious, you know. And we stayed in the room and after a while we heard somebody comin'.

So we got in the closets [*laughter*] of the room and closed the door. That was so silly. And Ms. Pious opened the door, you know. No, the door's locked. But, you know, we forgot—we didn't think about master keys. Ms. Pious opened the door, and she came in, and she didn't see us. And she called in there—she called me "Mayzell" all the time. Nobody ever got my name right. [*Laughs*] "Mayzell," and then she—I didn't say anything. And girl you didn't say anything. Then she came to the closet doors [*laughs*]. Opened up the closet doors, and there they—we were. [*Laughter*] Like we had—I don't know how I looked. How much—but we were so outdone. But we didn't have to go because it was too late to go to vesper then, you see. But she caught us in there. She—you—at seven o'clock you gotta be in the room. That's study time from seven to nine. You through with lun—you through with your su—your dinner. And you have a little time there, and you're not goin' out anywhere else after that, see, when you get through with your dinner. And I said, "The sun is still shinin', and we got to go inside." [*Laughter*]

But that's the way it was. And one night I was up there. One of my roommates had gone home for the weekend, and I was by myself. Well, I was by myself. I don't where they were—one went. But anyway, the—another friend was next door. I said,

"Well, I'm gonna go over here." It was between seven and nine. Who would come up but Ms. Pious. We were on the second floor too. She would come up from down there, and she'd knock on the door. And, "Mayzell"—I don't know why she kept her eyes on me. [*Laughter*] Went next door, and there I was in the room with—"Mayzell, you're not supposed to be outta your room. It's study time. It's study time." I go back down there. I say, "I can wait a long time. I know when she goes back, she's not comin' back in." Every time I went in there—I think I went in there two more times, Ms. Pious was back up there. [*KK laughs*] She got a good exercise. And was [long pause] . . .

KK: What?

[01:34:56] MS: I just—I want—I know I need to conclude this some . . .

KK: No, no, no, you don't need to conclude it. [*MS laughs*]

KK: Yes.

[01:35:02] MS: That was a good story. I—so just tell me—so you met your husband. You started datin'. You went to movies and stuff?

MS: Oh yeah, that's what you were—yeah , yeah, yeah.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Well, I met him right there, and we start—and he went into the



service. Well, he was—what do you call when you—they were signed up for? What do you call it?

KK: Was—were they—was he in . . .

MS: It's got a classification.

KK: . . . was he in ROTC?

MS: Reserve Officers'. . .

KK: No?

MS: No, it's another name for it, I think. Maybe it was ROTC. But anyway, they were supposed to have been there until they got outta college. But they pulled 'em all out at one time and sent them on to wherever they were. We—I was in—we were in—on our way to Little Rock to fort—what was that fort in Little Rock? The . . .

KK: Well, there's Little Rock Air Force Base, and then there's . . .

[01:35:54] MS: That was in [19]40—[19]41 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

KK: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS: We were on our way to sing in the choir.

KK: Camp Robinson?

MS: Camp Robinson.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And well I'm just throwin' this in . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:36:07] MS: . . . and we got to Little Rock. And they were out there. You know, they had "extra, extras". You're too young to remember that. But you probably seen it in movies or something. And they were hollerin' on Main Street, "Extra, extra"—in the paper. "Read all about it," and this and that. And the driver stopped and said, "Well, let's see what's goin' on." He said, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." And we went on to the camp. You know, they had the food there for us. They had everything and you—wasn't a person in sight. They were waiting for us to come and sing when that happened. I don't know what they did with 'em. But they—the soldiers and everybody were outta sight. And they had the food sittin' there. We took some of the steaks and things, brought 'em back to our friends. [*Laughter*] And—but that's what happened. But anyway, later than that, you know, they took every guy that had signed up out of college.

KK: So they were supposed to finish college first and then do . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . their service . . .

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . that they were committed to. But because of the war . . .

MS: Because of the war.

KK: . . . they just pulled 'em . . .

MS: Pulled 'em all out.

KK: . . . everybody who was committed out . . .

MS: That's right.

KK: . . . and put 'em in service.

MS: Pulled 'em all out.

[01:37:12] KK: Now what branch of the service was your husband  
in?

MS: He went and serv—in the army.

KK: In the army. Okay.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: Well, you know . . .

MS: Yeah.

[01:37:18] KK: . . . they segregated the soldiers, too, in those days.

MS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They—he told me a lot of stories about that,  
you know. He told me how some of the whites protected them.  
He told me about that. He said there was one guy—they were at  
some place one night, and there were certain places they went  
they didn't want them to be where they were, and he said they  
were in there, you know, just sittin' around and havin' a beer or  
something, you know. And so they came up to them, told them

they were gonna have to get outta there and everything. Said this white guy jumped up on top of the table and had—he described the kinda gun he had. And I—whatever it was, it was somethin' very powerful. And say—he told him—said, "They don't have to go anywhere." Said, "They are in here just like you are." He said, "And they don't have to go anywhere." And say, he pulled this gun out. And they backed off. Now, I say, they didn't stay, naturally. I don't blame 'em for not stayin'. Said they just got up and left, you know. And then when he got back, we were married. And . . .

[01:38:27] KK: Now did he go overseas during his service?

MS: Oh, yes. He was . . .

KK: What did he do?

MS: Well, at one time, he was a tech sergeant. And I think he was with a—I heard him say some—the fumigating and bath part one time, I know he said. That they, you know—that they had to—I've forgotten how he said that. They—it's 'cause of the—there were times when they—I don't know whether they had to spray 'em or get 'em to some place where they could get cleaned up and all of that. And he was kinda in charge of some of that stuff, you know.

KK: Did he go to Europe or did he go to the . . .

MS: Yeah, he was in—like in Germany and France and some of those others, Luxembourg and some of those other places.

KK: And this was during World War II, right?

[01:39:15] MS: World War II. My dad was in World War I.

KK: Oh really?

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: What did he do?

MS: He was in France.

KK: Really?

MS: That's the only place I heard about was France.

KK: You know, I didn't know much about the African Americans that served in World War I. What . . .

MS: That's a project that we're workin' on now.

KK: That's really interesting.

MS: Yeah. For my museum. Mh-hmm.

KK: You don't hear as much about that, I guess . . .

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: . . . because . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . it wasn't as close to civil rights time?

[01:39:37] MS: Right. But there were quite a few African Americans called into war—World War I. We have our picture of my daddy

in his uniform. And he doesn't talk a lot about it. I think he talked more about it—he and my mother were not married at the time. But when he came back from the war, he married her. And I think he told her everything, and most of the things that we got, we got 'em from her.

KK: Yeah.

MS: The songs and things that they sang. And, you know, everything—we got 'em from her. About—what is it that you blow in the mornin' to wake 'em up?

KK: Reveille?

MS: Reveille. At nights it's taps, right? But any—is taps the reveille?

KK: You know, I don't . . .

MS: What is what?

KK: I know that taps is played at funerals. I didn't know—I couldn't remember. . .

MS: They would used to sing—well maybe I'm—I've—but anyway, he—they would have words to it.

KK: Oh, okay.

MS: To "can't get 'em up, can't get 'em up this mornin', can't [*sings melody*] da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. [*KK Laughs*] "Coffee, coffee, coffee without any cream. And salty, salty, salty without any lean." [*Laughs*] And "soupy, soupy, soupy without

a single bean. And you can't get 'em this mornin'." [Laughter]  
My mother used to sing all of that stuff, you know. And we'd  
learned it from—with—but he never said a word. [Laughs]

[01:40:58] KK: Well a lotta people didn't like talkin' about it.

MS: No, I know it.

KK: Their service.

MS: No.

KK: Now your husband probably didn't even like talkin' about it.

MS: No, because a lotta things that, you know, I know he didn't say.

He didn't talk about. He'd do a few things, but he—'cause he  
was tellin' me about how he almost—he was a guide of some  
kind because he could meet—read maps and stuff. Because he  
was in vocation—mechanical and stuff like that, he had had to do  
that. And he was tellin' me about how they almost ran into the  
enemy when they were goin' on a truck. They just did get it in  
time enough to make the right turn. And a lot of stuff they told  
us about, you know. Yeah.

[01:41:38] KK: Well, I know that the—a lot of the African American  
troops were in the s—worked on supplies. They drove trucks,  
and they supplied troops and—from way up back behind the  
lines all the way up to the front lines.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: Did he work on some of that? Now you . . .

MS: He—like I . . .

KK: . . . said he did the bath . . .

MS: . . . like I say, he was doing the directin'. But he was that tech sergeant—staff sergeant—I said—I don't know which came first now. I'd have to think about it. Staff and then tech, and then it was about fumi—what is it? Bath and—fumigation and bath. I think that's what it was about.

[01:42:22] KK: Well, I'm sure the soldiers, you know, sometimes had head lice and other things . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . and they had to get rid of that. And, of course, they would be out in the field for long periods of time without a bath . . .

MS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

KK: . . . so when they had to set up bathing facilities, that was really important.

MS: And he was telling me about how they give 'em cigarettes and things, and he didn't smoke. And they'd buy the cigarettes from him, and he'd keep the money. [*Laughs*]

KK: That was very common as I understand it. Those that didn't smoke sold the ones they had.

MS: Yeah.



KK: That was a good way to get a little extra money.

MS: Yep. He has a couple of swords that he got home. He say, he coulda bought more stuff, but he was just wantin' to get home.

[Laughs]

KK: Yeah, I completely understand.

MS: Yeah.

[01:43:03] KK: So did he stay overseas in Europe until the war was over?

MS: Let's see. When did he get back? In [19]45.

KK: Okay.

MS: I think, yeah, it was over.

KK: All right.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: Yeah.

MS: It was over.

KK: And he went in . . .

MS: He went in . . .

KK: . . . they called in him in [19]41.

MS: . . . [19]40, [19]41.

KK: Wow, that's a good long time.

MS: Mh-hmm. D-day, you—they . . .

KK: Now were you married to him when he went over?

MS: No.

KK: Okay.

[01:43:25] MS: D-day was June the sixth, I remember. And he has talked about that.

KK: So he was involved in that landing?

MS: Yeah. He's talked about how you could see, you know, bodies floatin' and stuff like that, you know.

KK: Was he . . .

MS: And a lot of times, I know, they just don't wanna talk about it, you know. To . . .

KK: Well, it was pretty horrible.

MS: Yeah, it had to be. Had to be.

KK: So did he tell you anything about what his role was on that first day, on D-day?

MS: No, he—I don't remember him goin' into any particulars on it.

KK: Mh-hmm.

MS: Sure don't.

KK: So he was there from D-day until the war was over.

MS: Yep.

KK: Man, that's a long time.

MS: Mh-hmm. Yep.

KK: That's amazing. I don't know how those soldiers took that.

MS: Well, I guess, when you get acclimatized to something, you're in it, and that's it. You don't like it at first—you can't take it at first, but you finally have to take it.

[01:44:21] KK: Did you get letters from him when he was over there? Did you guys know each other well at the point?

MS: Oh, da—oh, yes. Daily.

KK: You'd been dating, right?

MS: Daily, daily, daily. We wrote daily. [*Laughs*] Sometimes we get twelve letters at one time. [*Laughter*] That's the way they came—you know, they get held up and so forth.

KK: Right.

MS: I'd get twelve letters at one time. Same hi—from him to me.

KK: Wow.

MS: I got 'em now.

KK: Oh, that's great.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: That is great.

MS: I got 'em right now. Mh-hmm.

KK: Oh man. Those must mean a lot to you.

MS: Mh-hmm. It's . . .

KK: So you guys stayed in touch.

MS: Oh, yeah.

KK: And then he came home from the war.

MS: And we married right away.

[01:44:54] KK: And you were living—where were you living when that happened?

MS: In El Dorado.

KK: Okay.

MS: His home . . .

KK: And so you had gone . . .

MS: . . . his home's Morrilton, and I was—I had just started teachin' school, and I went up there to Morrilton to meet him with his family, you know.

[01:45:14] KK: And then you got married in El Dorado?

MS: Mh-mm. We went to Muskogee—what? Oklahoma. Had some relatives up there. We kinda did like a honeymoon thing. And just went on up there and got married and came home. Stayed there a while and came on back.

[01:45:33] KK: So when you guys got back to El Dorado, he'd just been done with the war, you'd been teaching. So what did he do for a living when he first got back?

MS: I was teaching. I was still teachin'. I had just taken off from my job. He came back to El Dorado and stayed a few days, and then we come up here. But he went back to school, see. And

that was in October when he came home. I don't know the date right off hand, but it was in October. And then in January, see, he was back at school.

KK: Okay. And when he . . .

MS: He was back at school.

KK: And when he went back to school, he went back to UAPB?

MS: UAPB.

KK: To AM&N?

MS: Yeah, AM&N.

KK: Okay.

MS: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: Because he hadn't—you know—and he was on the GI Bill then, right?

MS: Right.

KK: Okay.

MS: Mh-hmm. Right. Mh-hmm.

KK: So, and they owed him that schooling anyway 'cause they took him out early.

MS: Yeah.

[01:46:18] KK: So he finished his degree.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: How long did that take? How many years did that take?

MS: Oh, no. He—see, he was in the—it took him from—'cause that's—that was a semester, and the summer semester he was finished.

KK: Good.

MS: Yeah. That semester and then the summer semester. Two summer semesters. Then he was finished. And then he—they—they'd had a job for him down at Lake Village, Arkansas. And so we went down there.

[01:46:47] KK: So you guys moved to Lake Village.

MS: Uh-huh.

KK: And you rented a place to live down there?

MS: Right. Uh-huh.

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: Very fortunate. It was a brand new, little shotgun, two-room house. But he took it and they would—had—they had the—what do they call 'em—the pump things to get the water? Pump the water.

KK: You had a hand pump?

[01:47:10] MS: You—hand pump. And he talked the ladies into lettin' him put the electrical system in, so they could have water comin' into their house. And into ours, too. [*Laughs*] So . . .

KK: And he knew how to do that, so . . .

MS: Yeah, he knew how to do that, see.

KK: . . . he did the labor on it.

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay.

MS: Yeah, he did the labor.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And so they were glad, because they were laundresses, and they didn't—and pumpin' that water. I never could get any water outta the pump. [*Laughter*]

KK: You had to pump it hard, didn't you?

MS: Yeah, well I just never—didn't get it out because we were fortunate enough to have—always have running water in most of El Dorado. 'Cause, now, we lived on the street with whites. They would live at the upper end, but we lived on the same street. And kinda knew some of them, you know. And, you know, we used to get along. There weren't any—there weren't any problems. My mother was friendly with some of 'em. And worked with—worked for some of 'em. He—she didn't work away from home, but sometimes she would do laundry after it got so bad, you know. For some of them. And a lot of people just did laundry. And sometimes she would sit with that man right around the corner on Hillsboro. He was working for a

Armour meat packin' company or somethin'. And she and that lady would sit and talk and—with each other, you know. And just were friendly with each other, you know. But anyway, it wasn't as bad as a lot of people think. I don't know. I guess it's accordin' to where you live and where you live and all of that.

[01:48:47] KK: Well, again, you were in a middle-class Black neighborhood. That was probably better than some people had it. But still, you didn't have, obviously, the rights that the white people had.

MS: Oh, no. Not by any mean. It just that, you know, you took certain things for granted. That this is what we do. And if you do that while you're a child, you'll continue to do that, you know . . .

KK: That's—yeah. . .

MS: . . . until you get to a stage somewhere where you start realizin' some things. Because used to be some of the meanest lookin' policemen. They would teach you to, you know—I wanna be a policeman. [*Laughs*] The policemen would help you out and do this and that. We used to come through town, and it was some of the meanest lookin' policemen. They would look at you, you feel like runnin' or something, you know. But, you know, they stopped us from comin' through town one time from Washington



High School. There were so many of us, but something happened, and they took that back. Because, I guess, the business people up there were missin' some of the business.

KK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:49:54] MS: Because, you know, when the girls, you—there'd be two or three of us, when we comin' back—we had to come through town anyway—we would stop at a store and look at the dresses and Easter bunnies and things, whatever we were gonna want for Easter. And sometimes we'd put 'em in layaway. And they were glad because things were slow.

KK: Yeah, it's hard times.

MS: Yeah. And I guess they told 'em that well, you know, "Our business is fallin' here, so let those people come on back through town." We couldn't sit at the counter, of course, in—at Woolsworth, or anything like that. But we didn't know anything about it anyway. It didn't make us any difference. If they had something we wanted to buy, we'd buy it and keep goin', you know.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Didn't think about it. You just think about it, because it just wasn't part of your culture at that time.

KK: Yeah.

[01:50:43] MS: But then when they did break loose, they did it right  
in El Dorado, too. My kids were in some of it, see.

KK: Yeah.

MS: Mh-hmm. Without my knowledge. [*Laughter*]

KK: Well, you know . . .

MS: 'Cause they were out there with the rest of 'em, you know.

KK: Yeah.

MS: What I mean—in school, and they decided they'd try some sit-  
ins and things like that. So . . .

KK: Everybody has to make their own way a little bit, don't they?

MS: That's right. Yeah.

KK: When they get to that age.

MS: And I didn't know it until long afterwards that [*laughter*] . . .

KK: They probably didn't wanna scare you. Well—or maybe they  
thought they would get in trouble.

MS: Yeah.

[01:51:16] KK: But, okay, so after your husband got outta school—  
outta college . . .

MS: He went straight to work . . .

KK: And he went straight to work. . .

MS: . . . Lake Village . . .

KK: He went down there—Lake Village.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: Then . . .

MS: Then from Lake Village to Warren. We were in Lake Village only two years.

KK: And he was workin' as a machinist assistant at that time, right?  
Or . . .

MS: No, not machinist. He was a vocational man, trades and industries.

KK: Oh, okay. He was teaching.

MS: That was my daddy was a machinist.

KK: Oh, that's right. Okay.

MS: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: So your husband was teaching.

MS: Yeah.

KK: You were teaching.

MS: Mh-hmm.

[01:51:46]] KK: And you were in Lake Village. And then how did you get to Warren? Why did you go to Warren?

MS: Well, it—like the vocational work is kinda like through the state. And he knew that position was open. And so he just got it. It's a little bigger place and a little more convenient place than—it was—some good people had been in Warren, too. You could tell

that when you got to the student body, you could tell the difference. But the people were sweet and nice and everything down in Lake Village. Just . . .

KK: So he just transferred to Warren.

MS: Just transferred to Warren.

KK: Yeah.

MS: We were there for five years. Could have come to El Dorado before we did. But they had offered him a job at the college too when he got his degree. But, I told him, I didn't wanna go there. I didn't wanna go to Pine Bluff. So El Dorado was open, and he didn't take it at first. But he told—he gave his friend, up in Camden, a chance to take it if he wanted it. And said—well, he didn't tell me all of this then. But he told him that, "Whenever you get ready to leave, let me know." [*Laughs*] So when he left, he let him know. I didn't know all that.

KK: So his friend took the job for a while. And then when he was ready to leave he let your husband know that El Dorado was gonna come open again.

MS: Mh-hmm.

[01:53:04] KK: And you wanted to come back to El Dorado?

MS: Well, yes, I did. Because . . .

KK: 'Cause you grew up here and you had family here

and . . .

MS: Yeah, and a little more, you know, goin'. I know—knew people, like you say. You know how that is. It's a little more enlightenin', and, you know, experiences that I would have here, that I didn't have there.

KK: So this is [19]40s, you're into the [19]50s. So what was the year that you moved back to El Dorado?

MS: In [19]53. In [19]53.

KK: Okay.

MS: Mh-hmm. [19]53. Mh-hmm. I taught at Carver. And at that time, you had to teach wherever they had an openin'. [*Laughs*] I . . .

KK: Sure, especially if he moved to take a job, then you just got to get whatever . . .

MS: Yeah, right.

KK: . . . you can get.

MS: I started with the first grade. I was teaching senior English, and I started—but I don't regret it. I really don't. Started first grade, and then I ended up back with the—with teaching senior English at Washington High School and El Dorado High School. And then I became the coordinator of English at El Dorado High School and was there until I retired. So it was good

experiences.

[01:54:23] KK: So that—how many years did that cover though from when you got back, from [19]53 to when? When did you retire?

MS: I retired in [19]83.

KK: Okay. So [19]53 to [19]83 is a really interesting time.

MS: Mh-hmm.

KK: You know, 'cause you have Jim Crow laws are in, and then you've got a civil rights movement, and then you have integration . . .

MS: Yes.

KK: . . . and then you have all the changes that . . .

MS: Oh, yes.

KK: . . . come with that.

MS: Yes.

[01:54:45] KK: And you have the fluctuation in the Black middle class that happened because of integration and how all the town got mixed together. So if you could talk a little bit about the—those transitions, that would be great.

MS: Well . . .

KK: I mean, at first you were teachin' at an all-Black school again, right?

MS: Right.

KK: Okay.

[01:55:03] MS: Right. And they were having their little run-ins here and marches and all of that. And you prob—might've heard about the Reverend ?Payne?, who led a lot of that here in El Dorado. You might not have. But he left here and went to Louisiana, but he was a—the—well, he was a president of the NAACP.

KK: Oh, in . . .

MS: In . . .

KK: . . . El Dorado.

MS: In El Dorado. And then he was responsible for getting people jobs, like in the stores downtown and all. You know, because, at first, they didn't have anybody workin' unless they were workin', you know, downstairs pressin' something or doin' something like that.

KK: Yeah. Right.

MS: And at the grocery stores, you didn't have any but carryin' out food, or something like that, for you to your car. But he got some of all of that going. And . . .

KK: And that was in the [19]50s still?

MS: That was in the [19]50s. Yes.

KK: That's really something.

MS: That was in the [19]50s. Yeah.

KK: Yeah, that's . . .

[01:56:10] MS: Because we integrated—completely integrated in [19]69. That's when I went to El Dorado High School. My husband and I went to El Dorado High School. And then they had the other junior high schools and so forth at—it was completely integrated in [19]69. And he worked very hard. And he was a pastor of a church. And I think maybe some of them were afraid for him or something and, you know. But anyway, he work—he gave us his—he just gave his life. And he had other people with him because they—there are some things that I'm still learning about that that I didn't—I had never heard of before. Because, you know, I didn't get out there. I know my mother would say every time he came across town, he—she said—they were doing somethin'—she said, "Take this to Reverend ?Payne?." She would fix up something, you know—"Take this to Reverend ?Payne?." You know, and I—we just took it, you know. And, I guess, I'm kinda person I just kinda—don't take in everything that, you know, I hear. And, you know, I had a family, too. And church and all of that. The community and other stuff that I was doing. But I was a part of it, you know what I mean. And supported it. But anyway, he worked very



hard, and sometimes he wouldn't have—every day downtown on the square. He would march with a placard.

KK: Wow.

MS: Every day.

[01:57:34] KK: That's pretty brave in those days to do that.

MS: Every day, and then sometimes his daughter would be the only one that would march with him. He did that.

KK: That was a brave and lonely effort.

MS: Yes, it was. It was. And he passed away too. Yeah, left and went to Louisiana. Yep, and he had a—he had several children too. And they had to experience something with that. Yep. But finally—I'll tell you one thing that I think we made a pretty good—it was a pretty good example for our day. I don't know what other people did, but we got together, and there were people in this town who got together with everything, too. And, you know, we didn't know all about it then, but they met . . .

[01:58:34] KK: Whites and Blacks, you mean—leaders.

MS: Yes. They met and like our teachers' association—they met, and they came up with some conclusions about the matter. That, you know, whenever we get together, you know, we gonna be one. We gonna be united. And it's not gonna be like you gonna be the president, and always somebody white the president. We

gonna—everybody's gonna be a part of it. So then when—I know, when I went to El Dorado sch—High School, somebody was the president—I don't remember right off, but—and then I got to be the vice president. Then the next year—then, you know, I'm the president. Somebody else is the vice president. The president and I, who was white, she and I traveled to the national convention together. She ate at my husband's brother's house with his wife, you know, and all of that. A wonderful lady, you know. And there's so many good people that—with good hearts—that you really don't know about until you get there. And I tell them all the time, you know, there's no all-bad people in any race. You know? There's some good people in every race of people. And so we don't need to try to fathom that, you know. Just go on and do what you're supposed to do. You know, I've had them at my house. They come by and sat with me in my yard and talked. Some of the best people that I've known were white people. Some of the best that I've known. Well, I guess, I didn't wanna know the others. *[Laughter]*

KK: Well, go ahead and . . .

MS: That's a . . .

[02:00:25] KK: . . . go ahead and take your drink, and we'll—so we can set that down. And when you say that you were the vice

president of the president, you're talkin' about the El Dorado schools teacher . . .

MS: Yes.

KK: . . . association.

MS: Yes. And then I've been with the English state thing [IS THIS THE Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts?]. And I had the—an area. I was a secretary. I had to—for student council. Now one, when I got over there, I think, maybe one year—I became the counselor for the student council. They wanted to—and they were good kids. They wanted to go places and, you know—like, you know—a lotta people don't wanna do that. But I remember we went to—one of the trips to Fort Smith. All those kids, you know. And then got up there, and they voted for us to—they—for us to be the guests for the next time. Not the guests, but you know what I'm talkin' about.

[Laughs]

[02:01:31] KK: The hosts for the next meeting?

MS: The hosts for the next meeting. So I know the man that was principal thought that this was a Black school because they had a Black leader . . .

KK: Ah.

MS: . . . for student council. So he tried to give us a little problem

there, you know. And so they weren't going to take it, and they called the principal back here in El Dorado. And then I had to talk with him. And he's still here, good principal. And he told 'em on the telephone—said—well—you know, all the groundwork had been done. But it was when we got there, see. And I don't know what excuse he tried to find, but he did. But anyway, he told him—the principal told 'em yes, he had told them that we could have it. And that kinda ended that, you know. And so those kids worked so hard that year. Those kids worked so hard. They—I—they got up more food for refreshments than you could give [*laughter*] to a city of noneaters. For somebody who hadn't had anything to eat in two or three weeks. But they—the stores were generous to them. And they had all the drinks. And the teachers were so nice. They had never had a meeting of the council in El Dorado before.

[02:02:56] KK: Right. And this was integrated schools.

MS: This was integrated school.

KK: And . . .

MS: And they had places for the kids to stay. Some of the Blacks stayed with some of the whites. It was . . .

KK: That's a great experience . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . for those kids . . .

MS: It was.

KK: . . . especially at that time.

MS: It was.

KK: Because you're right, you know, it's—the whole point is get the people together.

MS: Right.

KK: Let 'em know each other as human beings.

MS: Right.

KK: So I think, that was—musta been an incredible time.

MS: It was. It really was. I couldn't believe it myself. And then I told the teachers, you know. Because where I had gone, they would have some refreshments in the lounge or somethin', where—all of those teachers brought so much stuff out there until, you know, I had to give some of it away to the janitors and things to take home. It was just that much.

[02:03:39] KK: Well that's the way you want it though.

MS: Yeah.

KK: You wanna make a good impression.

MS: Right.

KK: And you want everybody to be happy.

MS: Right. Right. And they were so shocked [*laughter*] when they

got to El—we way down here in El Dorado, you know.

KK: Yeah, that's right.

MS: And from Fort Smith there was a man that was over the—but anyway.

KK: So the Fort Smith—this is going back to what you said before. The smart—Fort Smith principal or the Fort Smith leader of the student council was really . . .

MS: He was a principal

KK: . . . not—he was kind of afraid to come down here.

MS: Oh he was.

KK: Okay.

MS: Well, I don't know why. But, you know, all that was over. Well, wasn't anything goin' on at the time. Well, it—maybe it wasn't as far as I knew. [*Laughter*]

KK: Well . . .

MS: I don't care.

KK: . . . you're talkin' about as far as race relations was concerned.

MS: Yeah.

[02:04:19] KK: You were fully integrated, and it was . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . all goin' fine.

MS: Oh yeah.

KK: There wasn't any trouble here. So . . .

MS: No problem.

KK: . . . there wasn't any reason not to come down here.

MS: Well I won't say there weren't any problems. But, you know, they were just little problems . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . you know, they had a few little. [*Laughs*]

KK: Well, you know, there always was.

MS: Yeah, they've had a few little now. I've had to be in on quietin' some of 'em down and everything, you know. 'Cause the way our school is made, you know, you can be doing something over here, and nobody will ever know it. But it worked out pretty well. And a lot of things I know that none of us never knew that they were doing. 'Cause there's no way for you to know.

KK: Now the Fort Smith people that came down, was that all white?

MS: Oh. Oh . . .

TM: Excuse me, we need to change tapes.

MS: . . . no.

KK: Okay. Okay, so it was integrated already, too. Okay.

MS: It was int—yeah, it was integrated at that time.

KK: Okay. . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . so, you know, there really wasn't any reason.

MS: And if it was it was just Fort Smith. See this was in Arkansas.

KK: Yeah, exactly.

MS: The whole thing.

KK: Okay, well we're gonna change tapes here.

[Tape Stopped]

[02:05:08] KK: Oh, no. That's okay.

MS: Oh.

KK: I just think this race relations stuff is very, very important . . .

MS: Yeah. Yeah.

KK: . . . for future generations . . .

MS: Yeah. Yeah.

KK: . . . to hear about.

[02:05:13] MS: Let me tell you this. Now this is funny. When this teacher and I went to Chicago together for the National Educational Association, I took her to—my husband's brother lives in Chicago. And I took her over there, and the wife had prepared food for us. And [*laughs*] this is funny. Her—his wife has a sister that worked at one of the universities there in Chicago. But she was gone to New Orleans—that's the original home—to visit or something. I think, the—some—the women of education or something national was goin' on down in New



Orleans . And anyway, her sister that was the teacher at the university referred to Edna, the younger—she called her Blackie. And so [*laughs*]*—this—now this is New Orleans, and this is, you know, again like the California situation with me, you know. And so this white lady was with me. And then she referred to herself like—"Well, the white lady is so and so and so and so—white lady so and so and so."* That's what she called her sister.

[*Laughs*] I guess, she was teasing her, I guess. But I don't know how it got started or anything. And then I said, well—I had heard her say that before. But I didn't say a word. And the lady that was with me there, she didn't say anything. And I said, "Well, I'm gonna explain this to her [*laughter*] when she—when we get outta here." So I—when we got out, I told her—I said, "Now she wasn't talkin' about you." I said, "She's talking about sister—that's the way they address each other." With—by those names, you know, they probably had done it all the way from New Orleans on up to Chicago. I don't know. But I had never heard anybody say anything like that, but she—that's what she said. But—and she—oh, it was a sigh of relief for her. I say, because she had that and, you know—in mind, "What was she talkin' about," you know? So, you know, the different cultures makes a difference.

KK: Yeah.

[02:07:30] MS: Different cultures makes a difference. You have no idea maybe what somebody else is thinking about, and it's not what you think. [*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah, it's not necessary as negative as you might take it.

MS: No. Right. Right. So, you know, at these different places you go to, you don't know how people speak. But anyway, that was the joke that I had on the way. And she was so relieved, so relieved after that was over.

[02:07:56] KK: Well, you know, ever since before the civil rights movement even—there's been tension, you know, between . . .

MS: Oh yes.

KK: . . . there's this. We all know that there was a history of slavery. We all know that African Americans were treated poorly. Whites and blacks both know this history. So there's still tension out there. And everyone's afraid to say any little word that might upset somebody else a little bit.

MS: Right. Right.

KK: And so, you know, I'm hoping that maybe the next generation will get past some of that.

MS: I hope so. I hope so. It's just like I tell them. I teach Sunday school classes at church. And then—anywhere else, you know.

I say now, "We don't need to go around here saying or even thinking or believing that one race of people are just a bad race. You know, I think you're bad, and you think I'm bad." I said, "There are good people and bad people in any race of people." And then I will say this to them and I will repeat that anywhere. I say now, "We—there are some things that we're doing today that we could not have been doing had it not been for some good white people. And there are some things that they are doing today [*laughs*] they certainly would not be doing if there had not been for some good Black people, see. So just forget that, you know, and go on and do the right thing, and everybody will be okay," you know. But unfortunately, they're not gonna be—everybody's not gonna do that way . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . and you just have to go on and live according to the way you know to live and what you believe in, see. And finally I doubt if it'll get through this generation. But finally, it'll improve a lot. It'll improve a lot. I think, it has already improved some. I really do.

[02:09:50] KK: Well, what do you think it's gonna mean for the country to have Barack Obama as president?

MS: Well, you know what—we never know what to really expect, but

I think he has the stamina that it takes. And it seems that he has the right direction that he wants to go in. And that's all positive to me. Now it's not gonna be exactly the way he plans it. We know that just by being human beings ourself. He . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: And that's why I don't know why people say well, "If he can't do it"—well, you do what you can.

KK: That's right.

[02:10:27] MS: That's what I think. If you have goals set. If you have things that you believe in. And then when you find out you can't do it, you know, you just can't do it. You got to make some other amendments to that Constitution or whatever it is. *[Laughter]* That you gotta change it up a little bit. You know, you can do that—just any little thing you can—you think you gonna do this, you think you gonna do that, but until you get into it. But I think he's a man that can withstand a lot of problems and insults and whatever else that goes on. I think he can stand up to it. I hope he can.

KK: Me, too.

MS: Yeah.

KK: I hope so, too.

MS: I believe he can. Because any time you start enlightenin'

people, you got a better group of people to deal with. Nobody wants to be a part of anything and not know what's going on. And especially when you're investin' in it, you know. 'Cause sometimes I look at my—some of our bills and see the amount of taxes [*laughs*] added to just utility bills, and you wonder, "What in the world?" You know, and I can understand why some people can't pay their light bills and their gas bills and so forth. It's just so high. I remember when we paid no more than a dollar. When I was growin' up, no more than a dollar for water. No more. And there were people then that sometimes didn't have water. And they'd say, "Well, can I get some water?" And you'd say, "Sure, get it. 'Cause it wasn't gonna cost me anymore than a dollar." And y—imagine people that can't buy water. And water is so expensive now with all that taxes and stuff added onto it. So, you know, I know that he—in his heart—I believe that he feels that he wants things to be straight for everybody. And I think that's the way we all should think. You know, I really do. You know, if you are doing well, encourage somebody else to do well, 'cause it's gonna be better for you if they do. You rather them to do that than have 'em comin' and blowin' your house up or stealin' everything—gettin' your car [*laughs*] and all that kinda stuff. Because people—a lot of

people don't do because they don't know what to do. That—this has been their environment. See. This has been what they grew up with. And that's what it is. A lot of people don't know. They don't know. They don't know because they don't know, see.

KK: Yeah.

MS: It's not just because they're always mean. They just are misinformed and all that kinda stuff, you know. So I feel that Obama will give it his best. And I was always taught when you do the best that you can, the best will come back to you. I believe he'll give it his best.

[02:13:21] KK: Could you have imagined as a child, or as a young woman in college or as a young woman in the workforce, that a African American would be president in your lifetime?

MS: Oh, no. I never thought about it, see. Just probably like people—just like anything else, you know. You never thought about that. Because this is your culture. You know, like I was sayin' about a lotta kids—and they shouldn't've done this, but a lot of people used to scare their children. Said, "I'm gonna let the police get you." You know, "If you don't stop bein' bad, I'm gonna let the police get you," see. And then immediately the kids are what? Frightened. They're frightened because they

think the police might get 'em. They might start runnin' if they saw a policeman or something, see. But that's part of the culture. And, you know, about tellin' 'em, "Don't be bad, you a bad boy," or something like that. Tell him you're not doin' right, but explain to them, take time. But that's a part of the culture, you know. And until, you know—till you can get the integrated culture [*laughs*]. And it's not gonna—that part's not gonna ever—I don't think. But change, what I mean, some things will change with—'cause too deeply instilled in people. You find yourself sayin' some things that you know how to say differently, but you find yourself sayin' 'em because they're part of your culture. And sometimes you have to say things a certain way because of your culture. For them to understand what you're saying, you know. You gotta explain it. And you don't wanna explain too much to adults. Actually you don't wanna explain too much to anybody because they think—you think you know everything or something, you know. And so you kinda go along with it. But then when you're going your due, you know, you can do it the way you want to, you see. But anyway, this—it—it's—what I'm hearing from schools and things is saddening to me, what I'm hearin' from schools and things. Kids are not learnin'. And I heard one little girl said, "Our teacher said she

wants us to have fun." I say, "Well, that's all right about the fun. But you need to learn something, too, as you go with it." Get something in your head. [*Laughter*] Because that's what's gonna take you. And I think a lot of— 'cause, I know, our rate has increased here at the college. I was readin' that the other day. They—seemed like they've gotten several hundred more this year than they had last year. And then I read something about Murphy is gonna give more money than they did, you know—for them to be—'cause books are very high. Yeah, you know, they way on up there like two hundred dollars, some of 'em—some. But anyway, I think that this is a time for a change. And people just go on and act like they're supposed to act. Do what they're supposed to do. Regardless of race, creed, or color. And just be people, you know. And, you know, the certain expressions they used to use and—on both sides of the, you know, page. You know, "that old so and so" or "that ol' so and so." And you don't need to do it. You know, nobody needs to do that. They don't need to do that anymore. [02:16:55] Now there's some things—I'll tell you this little joke about my brother who passed away in California last summer. He said—no, this is one in Missouri. But anyway, he said—they drove up a service station down here when they were down here visitin'.



And said, this white gentleman say, "It sure is hot today." It was in the summertime. My brother said, "What you say." And you may not even understand that, I don't know. But [*laughs*] and said—and the man said, "It sure is hot today." He said, "What you say." "It sure is hot today." He said, "Well, I caught on." [*Laughter*] He said—that was his answer—"Yes, it is." He said, "Yes, it is." You probably don't hear anybody sayin' that much now. Anyway—"what you say"—you know—"what you say." And the man kept repeating it [*laughter*] and what he was saying—"It sure *is* hot today." That was so funny.

KK: What—when was that?

MS: Oh, that hadn't been all that long ago, maybe five, six . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . six or seven years . . .

KK: That's pretty recent.

MS: . . . six or seven years . . .

KK: So it still happens, this miscommunication because . . .

MS: I—yeah. Yeah, right, right.

KK: . . . of culture.

MS: Because of the culture. Yeah.

KK: Two people tryin' to be nice to each other . . .

[02:18:09] MS: Yeah, right, right. And he was sayin', "What you

say." And, you know, he wasn't—he didn't say "What'd you say?" You know, he said, "What you say." [*Laughs*] And the man just kept repeatin' it. And he said, "Well, I thought I better stop sayin' 'What you say,' you know, because he didn't understand what I was sayin.'" Thought he was deaf . . .

KK: Well, at least, they were nice enough to . . .

MS: . . . or something.

KK: . . . work it out.

MS: Yeah, [*laughter*]. Right.

KK: And that's what you're talkin' about.

MS: Yeah.

KK: That's what you're talkin' about. It's like . . .

MS: Right.

KK: . . . just keep tryin'.

MS: Keep tryin'.

KK: And that's all you can do.

MS: That's all, just keep on goin'.

KK: Yeah.

MS: That's what I tell my children and grandchildren. "Just keep on goin'. Do your part." You . . .

[02:18:47] KK: Tell me a little about your children.

MS: Okay, I have four children. I have three sons and one daughter.

All of my children have graduated from college. And my oldest son is a minister. And he has the doctor of ministry degree. He went to—he was a graduate of AM&N. And he was at Morehouse School of Religion for his masters and in Mississippi for his master—minister of the divinity, and now lives in Little Rock. My second son, Ralph that said that he knew the first time that he went to California that's where he wanted to be. So he is still there teachin' school in California. My two last ones were twins, a girl and a boy. And my son lives here and has a law office in Louisiana across the line there at Farmerville and that other place down the road there somewhere. But anyway, he lives here, drives there every day. And my daughter, she's married to a minister. And she has—Beverly has a degree, and then she has two master's degrees. She and her husband both have two master's degree. He was in the air force for years, and he retired from there, and he's still workin' for the government. And has established a church down in Maryland. And they were able to see each other the other week, because Brian went to the inauguration in DC, and they met up down there somewhere. They got to spend some time together. So that's where we are now. And I have grandchildren. Some—one granddaughter works at a college down in Dallas, Texas. And

one that's in Missouri at a college. And two guys that are working—one—some of 'em are goin' to school. [*Laughs*] And the little ones, of course, are around for me to fuss at.

[*Laughter*]

KK: Now give me . . .

MS: Don't have many of 'em here though.

[02:21:14] KK: Yeah. Now give me the names of your children one more time.

MS: My sons and daughter?

KK: Uh-huh.

MS: Now the oldest one is named for his daddy, Nile Eugene Smith. And Ralph—just one name, Ralph Smith, the one in California. And Brian Granville Smith—that's the lawyer.

KK: What's his middle name?

MS: Granville.

KK: Granville, uh-huh.

MS: Uh-huh, Granville. And Beverly, Beverly Joy. Beverly Joy Smith, the twin to him. Grey is her husband's name

KK: Well, that's fantastic. And you've got a lot to be proud of there.

MS: Well, I'm thankful. I sure am.

KK: Yeah, well, I can sure see it. I mean . . .

MS: I'm thankful.

KK: . . . you know, all your kids went to college. I mean, I think, that's a pretty big achievement right there.

MS: Yeah, everyone of 'em went. Uh-huh. Everyone of 'em went.  
Hmm.

[02:22:06] KK: Now let's see, your children—your oldest son, what year did he start goin' to college about?

MS: [19]62.

KK: Okay. So he was right in the middle of it.

MS: Mh-hmm. Right, [19]62, Mh-hmm.

KK: That had to be a really—for your kids . . .

MS: Yeah.

KK: . . . the [19]60s had to be a pretty amazing time.

MS: Right, it was. But, I tell you, I think our school part went pretty well. You know, nobody got hurt or anything like that.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And kids gonna argue—they had some, you know, little dealings over there, of course. But, you know, you don't—I don't see color. I never did see it. My mother didn't see it. I tell you what she would tell us and tell the boys and all. She said, "Now, when you are talkin' to white people, don't look down at your feet." Say, "You just look 'em in the face and say whatever you've got to say. And don't scratch your head." [*Laughs*] And

I said—I—it was funny. I told somebody—I said, "Well, my brother—my oldest brother, sure took in what she said, because he would blare you in the eyes—necessary. He certainly didn't scratch his head." [*Laughs*] I say, "He went a little overboard with it sometime—with it, you know." Yeah, but he would be doin' the right thing, you know. But, you know, I never—it doesn't matter to me. It really doesn't. It doesn't matter to me. And you know, you can take it or you can leave it or whatever. You got your business to do. You got your business to do. You know, I just wrote a note to a young man that I taught in El Dorado High School who's white—just finished another book. And I hadn't seen him. And when I knew anything—he's writing—givin' me an invitation to come to the book reading. Got there and he had my name as one of the names. He acknowledged three teachers. One was elementary, one was high school, and one was college. And I was one of those, high school. Probably hadn't seen him in thirty years.

[02:24:31] KK: You obviously made an impression on him.

MS: I guess, I did. And as I look back at him, I can remember him. He was just a gentleman in the room. He was just a gentleman in the room. And just—I can see what his writing was like and everything. He was good then. But just to think about it, you

know—something like that. Over a period of time, you know. Because, you know, I could play with 'em too. White kids—now with the boys more than the girls. [*Laughs*] That's with all races, I guess. The girls are the touchy ones, you know. [*KK laughs*] But I had some good ones. They brought me gifts, you know. And right now when I meet 'em, they're glad to see me, you know. And, of course, some of 'em I don't know anymore. But, you know, I—they stayed around me so much until I had to hide. [*Laughs*] We had a system over there where, you know, you had these—what did they call 'em then back there. But anyway, they had these—like in college. And in-between there, they come back and study or whatever, you know. And I went back there one day and I said, "I'm turnin' the lights out. [*KK laughs*] I got to get this paperwork done, you know." Got way back in the back of the room. I forgot the windows were down like this on the ground, you know. And they wasn't locked. This was a down floor—ground floor. And when I knew anything, they were crawlin' in through the window. [*Laughter*]

KK: Yeah.

[02:26:02] MS: And they said, "Mrs. Smith, what you doin' sittin' up back here in the dark?" I didn't tell 'em "I'm tryin' to get rid of you, so I can do some work." [*Laughter*] But they were nice

though . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . they were nice. I had fun with 'em . . .

KK: Well.

MS: . . . sure did.

[02:26:17] KK: It's so rew—it must be so rewarding when you see students who have done well like that.

MS: It is. It is.

KK: Like your friend the writer. I mean, I think, that's really great.

MS: Oh, that was just—I was shocked. I was stunned.

KK: You didn't even know the effect you'd had on him.

MS: No. No.

KK: Yeah.

MS: I—and I remember him bein' such a gentlemen in school. You know, he didn't—he wasn't around with the cutups. And, you know, there were some of those. And we got along well, 'cause I just told them what I needed to tell them, you know.

KK: Yeah, yeah.

[02:26:44] MS: And two boys went out and shot—I was tellin' somebody this yesterday. Killed some hogs and brought 'em to Nile, my husband. Two down in his department one Sunday morning. They came with some wild hogs. [*Laughs*] They had



killed 'em and brought 'em to him. I don't know how Nile—what Nile did with those hogs. [*Laughter*] They shot 'em out in the woods somewhere. And you had that kind.

KK: Yeah, what were you supposed with those, right? I mean.

MS: Yeah. They had that kind. But they were doin' . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . they were doin' a favor. And some . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . say, "Well, that was good." Well, yeah. It was nice of them.

It was nice of them to do that.

KK: Yeah.

[02:27:19] MS: I said, "But who was gonna do anything with the hogs?" [*Laughter*] That was so funny to me, I tell you. They had really done something 'cause they liked him. And they wanted to give him something. And they were out shootin' hogs in the woods.

KK: Well, everybody's . . .

MS: You had that kinda bunch, you know. You—but they didn't wanna do anything. But, you know, they had to do something to get outta there, you know. And they did. They'd do enough to get outta there. You'd have one or two in there with—they had 'em kinda—had them kinda segregated, too, you know. But we

had smart kids. We had all kinds of kids. And that's, you know—I love 'em today. I really do. I love 'em today. Mh-hmm.

[02:28:08] KK: I think they love you, too.

MS: Yeah, I got a lot 'em—they run up to me when they see me.

And I had one down there at Urbana, she teaches her children at home. And every time, you know, we would meet in the store or somethin' like that, she'd run up to me and hug me and introduce her children to me. And they say, "Mrs. Smith was my English teacher," and this and this and this and this and this. They all grown up now kinda. So it's been a good experience to teach in these different le—at these different levels, you know.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And kids will still say, "I remember when you let us bake cookies as first graders," you know. [*KK laughs*] And when Valentine's Day, and we had punch, and that's the part they—the first graders can only remember that. They—one of 'em told me—said, "Mrs. Smith let us have parties all the time." [*Laughter*] Maybe they'd had two things, you know . . .

KK: Yeah.

MS: . . . for the year. But they had party—they remember the parties.

KK: Uh-huh. That's funny.

MS: Yeah. Had smart kids and so forth.

KK: Yep.

MS: How can I end this? [*Laughs*]

TM: [*Unclear words*]

MS: You wanna answer—ask me any more questions, and I'll be ready whenever you're ready.

KK: Well, I d—well, I think . . .

TM: Did a door get open?

[02:29:16] KK: It—the only other thing I would—that I didn't—that I wonder about is—and you talked this a little bit but not a whole lot, and that is the—when your children were goin' through the civil rights period, and they were in school and everything. I mean, that had to be a little trying on them at times.

MS: Yeah, but you know what? They have a way of doin' things, and you don't know about it. I don't know that they got into too much of it, but they would tell you about it later, what they did. And I remember one of my sons tellin' me that he was with a group of fellas in downtown somewhere they went for a sit-in. That's what they were doin' then, sitting-in, you know. And, I guess, they, you know—people of the town were workin' on this problem. And they could've gotten hurt. But they weren't, you

know. But they did go in and sit-in. And I didn't know anything about it until later—much later.

KK: They didn't wanna worry you, I guess.

MS: Yeah. No, no. They didn't wanna—and I didn't want them to do that.

KK: Yeah.

[02:30:25] MS: They were still in high school, you know—in high school. You know how boys can be when they want to, you know. And they gonna do some things that you never will know about. But [*laughs*] I certainly didn't want them gettin' all mixed up in this civil rights thing. You know, when it came to fightin' or something like that, you know. 'Cause we had it so fixed that like president of a council, president of a class—one race would be it this year, one would be the next year. They were already lined up, vice was gonna move up to that, see. And that was something that made it kinda smooth. And plus the teachers getting together with the principals and the grade levels and all of that, you know. And havin' conf—they were havin' conferences in El Dorado that I knew nothin' about until later. With some of the ministers of the city bein' involved in it and all of that. They would be meeting somewhere—the Chamber of Commerce or somewhere. Everybody didn't know what was

goin' one. And then there were also people that were ready to do whatever it took at the time, that I didn't know about until later on. You know, when you're kinda doin' your own thing, you don't get involved in a lot of stuff. But—and I'm not sayin' what they did shouldn't be done. But, you know, I just heard of some things. But they—because they burned some crosses. They burned some crosses not far from our neighborhood. And I didn't know—and I'm still learnin' about some of 'em that I didn't even know about. And then I also know that there were people who knew that that was goin' on, see. But, you know, if you are not a part of whatever that is, you just don't—you are a latecomer, see. But, you know, I never was upset or anything like that. Never was, and then, you know, I was in a dangerous position, and I didn't even know it. [*Laughter*]

[02:32:29] KK: Well, sometimes that's better, right?

MS: Yeah. I was thinking—I said, "Well, gosh." You know, I was just treating everybody just like I always did, you know. But I could've been in danger. I didn't know. I didn't know that I was. I never did hear that I was.

KK: Well, it sounds like that things went smoother here in El Dorado than they did in some other places.

MS: Oh, definitely. Definitely. Definitely. Yeah. The Little Rock

Nine was something else, wasn't it?

KK: Oh yeah, absolutely.

MS: Yeah.

KK: Big deal.

MS: We have that group in our museum. [*Unclear*] center for historical—historical in li—part in Little Rock.

MS: But anyway, it's—El Dorado's been a pretty good town. But, you know, you had people of authority, long time ago—you had people of authority. And I've heard people say, "well I'll talk to Mr. so-and-so about this," you know. And, you know, if they were good people and there were good people. Like I said, there were good people. And I remember—and I don't why I would do this, but I always did things like that. I guess it was just me. There was a young lady that had graduated from high school, and she was workin' for a family. I think, just babysitting. She was ill, and they came to the school to see if they could get somebody from school. Now I've wondered about that since that time, you know, but—why you wanna get somebody outta the school, you know. But they were people that wanted to be sure that they got somebody that, you know, they could trust. Because they weren't gonna be at home and that kinda thing.

KK: Yeah.

[02:34:32] MS: And, you know. So, the principal came to me and asked me that. I knew the young lady. And, you know, I said, "Yes." I would—I took a week out of school and went in her place. And just a little boy there about four years old or somethin' like that. And so the mother was—'cause she had a job, you know. And, you know, and they were kinda, you know, up. But anyway, she was so nice to me. And I thought about that lady. I wonder why did I go out—take off from school and go do that? But I knew the girl was sick, and they needed somebody. And anyway, I didn't have anything to do but just stay there with him. And she had called herself cookin' some—well she did, cook some—no, she had me to do that. She cooked something. Some kinda vegetable she had cooked and told me to make some bread. And I did, and I burnt it. And then I was kinda—"Oh, she—what's she gonna say about this burnt bread when she get back." She said, "Oh, no. That's not burned. That's just browned real good." It was burned.

[*Laughter*] So she had—my husband—she say, "He's not gonna eat it anyway 'cause he's a Yankee." [*Laughter*] And I stayed there for over a week. And another time, I—another time the principal came to me and said, "This principal over here somewhere going toward Magnolia needs somebody to train the

kids for an Easter program." And came to the principal—a principal from over there came to the principal over here. And then Mr. Jackson came to me. And I, you know—I wonder why they sending for me. And I just knew my mother wasn't gonna let me go. But they went over to the house and talked her into it. And Mr. Jackson, of course, they all believed in him. And he was tellin' her that you won't have any trouble. He's got a wife there, and she'll stay in the house with the—they had some kinda—I—sch—I learned a lot about schools. They had places where they had built for teachers—teach—they called 'em teacheries and things. But I heard that long after I was grown. But you didn't have anywhere to stay. Even in El Dorado, teachers had to stay in the house with people. They didn't have any apartments or—in fact, they didn't have any houses for them to live. And they all was—people would have places for them to come and live. And so anyway, they had this building—this lady and I that kept house for them. And I stayed there a whole week out in the woods. You had to go a long time before you could get to highway. And it was so dark. And the funny part about it was I took postcards with me. You know, these kinda cards that you just write on the side, and they was a penny or two pennies—whatever it was. And I wrote back to my



friends. And I said things—I said, "It is so dark out here. You can't see even a car light goin' by." I was just sayin' all kinda things on the card. [*KK laughs*] Sent them all to the school, so they could get 'em. [*Laughs*] Mr. Jackson, the principal, had read every one of 'em. [*KK laughs*] And when he met me, he couldn't do anything but go down to the floor laughin'. But when I got from outta there, I went straight to—it was Easter. I went straight to New Bethel Baptist Church where I always was for the Easter program. And I was so glad to get home, I did not know what to do because I was so lonesome. I was s—I couldn't see anything. I couldn't hear anything. Oh it was just so lonesome back in there. But anyway, he had read them. And he just kept laughin'. Just kept laughin'. Kept laughin'. And one thing, and I'm gonna close with this.

KK: Okay.

[02:38:23] MS: We were able to have Latin two years at Washington High School. And then later French. Now it wasn't required, but this is a salute to good teachers. This young man who had finished college and everything. He had had to take—think he was from UAPB. He taught Latin. And we had to have it three times, because we were in his homeroom. And whenever the juniors got ready to have Latin, they had to come there because

they didn't have enough teachers to—or room to take 'em anywhere else, you know. So, we had to slide over and sit together. And they came in one side. So we had to hear the class. Every day we had to hear the class. Then when we got there, then it was our time. Then the next year—we had two years to take it. We had another session of Latin. And it didn't go for the semester now. It went for the year. And, you know, I think of that a lot. I say now so many, you know, kids they don't—of course, they don't have to take anything hardly now if they don't—they just—a few things. But anyway, I thought about that. And I said, those teachers were tryin' to help us. He didn't have to do that. He wasn't hired to do that, but he was tryin' to help us. Then later some of the ladies came in who had had French. They did the same thing. Wasn't required, but they did it. And I think about that with teachers who were teaching us. Whatever they knew, they wanted us to know it, too. And that's the good part about it. And, I think, that's why we've come as far as we have. It's from those teachers who really had the real interest in having us know things, you know. You know, you've got to know what the fifty states are. You gotta be able to recite them. [*Laughter*] You gotta know. You know, you gotta know this geography, you know. You gotta know where

everything is, you know. So you—there was so many things that's we learned under teachers who didn't have just a lot of education. But those standards were there. Whatever they knew, you knew it, too.

[02:41:03] KK: Well, that's wonderful. That's a great comment on teachers and how important they are.

MS: They are important. Nothin' can take the place of a good teacher. You know, I've stayed in from lunch to help kids. After school a little bit to help kids, you know. Because I didn't want them embarrassed. Because see that's another thing, you can't embarrass kids that don't know from those that do know, see. You have to work with them very particularly for them to—and, you know, I know 'em today. A lot of 'em I know today. And I don't tell people, you know. But anyway, it's been a good career. It's a workin' career. It's a hard career. But if you love to help people, it's a blessin' for you and them, too. [*Laughs*]

KK: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. You've done a wonderful job today.

MS: Well, thank you.

TM: Very good. Very good.

KK: Excellent.

[02:42:12] MS: Thank you. I go to talkin' about it, and you know.

[Laughs] Be pretty glad for you to look for something and not tell you. There were enough of 'em over there. We had the first Black queen—homecomin' queen. And I heard this one woman's—well, probably more, but I just happened to hear her say that, "She deserves it." And she was a real solid teacher—a teacher of Latin that was hard to get. She had to retire and then come back and teach a half day or something like that. She said, if anybody deserves it, she does. The girl was smart. She was sweet. She was just whatever. Nothin' was said anymore either about it.

KK: Good. That's great. Remember what year that was?

MS: What year was that Denise graduated? She was a senior. It was about somewhere around maybe [19]72 or [197]3, or right in there. In the early [19]70s, I think. 'Cause we went in [19]69.

KK: That sounds about right.

MS: The—yeah.

KK: 'Cause that was happenin' in other places in the state, too. About that time.

MS: Early [19]70s, I'll say. Between [19]70 and [19]75 maybe.

Yeah, and she's a lawyer now in California. This girl is.

KK: All right.

MS: Well, gentlemen, about time to have lunch, isn't it? [*Laughter*]

KK: Yeah.

[End of Interview 02:43:49]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]