

**TRANSCRIPT—REBECCA CLARK**

Interviewee: REBECCA CLARK  
Interviewer: Bob Gilgor  
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Location: Chapel Hill, NC  
Length: 1 cassette (1 of 3); approximately 70 minutes

**START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A**

BOB GILGOR: This is Bob Gilgor recording Rebecca Clark on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000, at her home at 205 Crest Drive in Chapel Hill.

Rebecca, can you tell me about growing up in Chapel Hill?

REBECCA CLARK: Orange County. Consider where I was living then, ( ), I lived out about five miles from Chapel Hill, just beyond University Lake. I came into Chapel Hill in 1932. The reason why I was here in 1932, me and my brothers and sisters became orphans in 1928. My mother died in 1924. My father died in 1928. By then we had a stepmother, then a baby sister. And my mother had one horse, one cow, one pig at that time. No money was coming in, living in a log cabin just beyond University Lake. Then family and brothers over here, they would send us food and us. So she couldn't manage us so what she did was that she had to put us out for families that had to take care of us.

So, two families in Greensboro took me and my little sister. Two of my brothers stayed with my grandfather, John Harriston, who owned ninety-five acres adjacent to University Lake, that he sold twenty-eight acres to widen the lake. Then my daddy's brother took my other brother to raise. And my stepmother took her child to her brother and then with no money she went off to New York to live with a family and work to help provide help for her.

And from then, my little sister and I, first time we had ever been on a train, out from Carrboro. And they sent us on the train with a trunk—what few pieces we had—but we had a trunk. And in that trunk, my daddy had saved some of my mother's clothing. I thought they were pretty and I always wanted to keep them. Went to Greensboro, living with my family, and they were educators. They had a two-story house.

And running up and down the steps of the two-story house, something we had never seen. And tin roofs—we thought we had turned rich overnight. There, we stayed with two sisters, both were married. One lived upstairs, and one lived downstairs. And they had their mother, who was in her eighties and was somewhat aged. And there we lived with them. And in 1931, the person I was living with there during that time, she would go to New York summer school. Then that sister had moved out to Greenville, North Carolina, with my other sister. And there was nobody to keep me and I ended up back in this area. That was in 1931.

I went to elementary school in Greensboro, East Washington Street. ( ) high school, but the year I left there was in the seventh grade. ( ). And my sister finished—she didn't finish over there because my cousin had moved out to Greensboro with her husband because he was teaching out there. So they finally moved back to Greensboro. That's where she finished high school. And I stayed here.

BG: When did you move to Greensboro?

RC: 1928. I came back here and I lived with families. But then it was during the Depression: families had no money. They didn't want a teenager. And I was shifted from family to family. When I look back on it, maybe it was good and bad. But each family had families and the house was crowded. But I had an aunt, who was ( ). Her family had come to live with them because of ( ) half of a building burning, and they had nobody to stay with. But anyway [tape stops].

I entered Orange County Training School. I was in the eighth grade by then. During the evenings I would work at the school. I'll never forget: I worked for Dr. English back then, who taught at the university, had one daughter named Anne. And both of us was taking algebra. And I was learning how to cook for them. She would slip in, we would try to get—help me with this, you know, help me with that. But in the late evenings ( ) very long. ( ) a teenager. And he would drop me off at night.

Then in the summertime, later on, I lived with a family that I worked at the university summer school. And in doing so, I worked one summer at Ruffin dormitory. And my last year, I worked, the next summer I worked at Old East dormitory. And I remember that because of the fact that it's the oldest dormitory in the United States of America.

BG: What did you do at the dormitory?

RC: In summertime, maid, in summer school. With Mrs. Minnie James, who was very sick back then—I love her to death. We ( ) three sections to that building, then we had to take out mops and buckets

up and down each section. I don't know why they didn't try to put the students all in one section. They scattered them about. The students then had the choice of the rooms they wanted. In the evening, when we finished, we had to stay on until seven o'clock because—it was seven or five—it's been a long time. If they got a telephone call—there was only one telephone in that section—we had to run up and down those steps. With the windows open, there was no such thing as air conditioning then. They didn't allow you to go to a window, if you knew where their rooms were, and yell for them to come down. So I'm sure that had contributed to these bad legs and knees, running up and down those steps.

During that time, I was living with a relative, and she used to take in—her name was Rosa Hawkins, she had three children: ( ), Fred, and ( ). Her husband had died that past year and she had this beautiful two-story house on Church Street. She also was a member of the family. So ( ) said "Rebecca would be the ideal person to put there. She's big enough, she's old enough, she can help cook, take care of these teachers she was going to take in to help provide for her children because she was only working at the tailor shop."

And would you believe it, as I was there, the same summer I was working at Old East dormitory, on Sunday, her in-laws came to visit her. On Monday morning, as they left, we were sitting on the steps of her house. We waved to them goodbye and they pulled out ( ). And when they did, Sister Rosa says, "I'm so sick." She didn't know what to do. And what she did then, I looked to the children and I said, "Go get Aunt Minnie." My aunt lived within the block. And I said to the other, "Go get your Aunt Jessie." So the children ran to get their families. I don't know to this day how I got her in the house to the bathroom. But I got her there.

In the meantime, they had already called the doctor. The doctor was from Durham, he was a friend of theirs, and he raced over here to see what was happening. And we all had gathered, and in gathering, we was in the kitchen—they had a beautiful large kitchen, larger than this room. And the doctor came in crying, then we started crying. He said, "She is sick. We're taking her straight to the hospital." Anyway, sure enough, that was on a Monday; she was dead on Friday night. She had burst her appendix. Back then, when you burst your appendix, ( ) set in, and that meant death. They didn't have penicillin then. Had there been penicillin, just like that.

So from there I was dispersed again. What happened then, I ended up living with Dr. and Mrs. George Howell. President Woodrow Wilson's nephew, out Country Club Road, ( ). Now it is not Country Club Road, it's ( ) Hill Road. I lived with them, was it seven dollars a week or six? I lived with them, just the two of them. Learned to do dinner parties. And have a half a day off. Because you know, working for the ( ) during that year, black folks never had a day to sleep in. You worked seven days a week. Only half a day off. You get half a day Thursday, a half a day Sunday, that constituted your full day a week. Seven days a week, seven dollars.

And he would bring me on Sunday, he would bring me in on Thursdays, but I got back the best I could to be there for his breakfast the next morning. And I'll never forget: I walked from Church Street to ( ) Hill Road. My thighs and legs used to burn up, and "Lord, something's going to happen to me down the road." Now I see it. So this is why I'm saying to young folks--. Back then I was very active—I played basketball, I played tennis. Getting back to basketball. I played tennis even after I married. I'll never forget: I had some classmates, we would get up on Saturday morning—I was home during ( )—or either early Sunday morning, run down to the tennis court that's behind the old cemetery to play tennis. There was no tennis courts for blacks then. When we saw whites coming, we started running off. That was back then in those days.

So while I was at Dr. and Mrs. Howell's, I married. And I stayed on there with them. They divorced. I stayed on. She stayed here about a year or two later. And I had my first child born. She still wanted me to come. I was going there all the time, six days a week. When my child was born, she said she had always had children. In her attic she had all this beautiful white wicker furniture, carriage, all of that, and clothing. My child had the best clothing and the best furniture than any other white person in Chapel Hill because she gave it to me. And the big carriage had a top to it that covered all of that ( ). So that was back in those days when I was growing up and had my children.

Then we moved. They divorced and she sold. I was already out of her house. We lived on Robinson Street. From Robinson Street we moved to Graham Street. There, I was working for families. I never stopped working. Even having children, I never stopped working. Because the men wasn't making anything and we wasn't making anything. We had to make ends meet. There was a family that would keep my children for a dollar a week.

And I would always make up a little ( ) bag and would be going about six-forty-five, seven o'clock in the morning, I would go over to the Carolina Inn and worked. I had that lobby all dusted and mopped and vacuumed and ready to go on the floor by eight-thirty to make beds. I worked at Carolina Inn, that was the wintertime. Summertime, it wasn't that many ( ) kids. The university hadn't grown to the extent it is now; they didn't have that much activities on campus. So the maids and things were laid off and some that had been there longer stayed. The last five ( ) laid off.

So during the summer months, at one time, I decided that they were doing a lot of laundry and they needed some people at the laundry. ( ) on Graham Street, I was right in front of the laundry. I started working for the laundry. ( ).

I got involved in the union without knowing that Dr. Frank Graham was involved at that time [tape stops].

BG: You were talking about the union--.

RC: Oh, the union. There was a union ( ). Everybody was reluctant to be part of it, thinking we might get fired, not knowing that Mr. ( ) was aware. But he was a man that never spoke but walked to see that we were there and working. Of course, back then, you wanted a job. You just didn't ( ) somebody, knowing that—black folks knew how far to go keep a job.

But anyway, right in front of the university library, the tree still stands. There would be some white fellows and maybe one black standing there to chat with us about the work and all of that and about raises. But not knowing, until I received this little bit of documentary here in the last few years, that Dr. Frank Graham was in our corner. But I knew Dr. Frank Graham was a mighty fine man because all that time, my husband was a custodian, and he was working at the South Building. And on Sunday mornings, I would put the children's clothes out and my husband would get them ready for Sunday school. And he always went down and got the mail and bring it up for Dr. Graham to review. And there was one Sunday, John had the children all ready, took them with him. Dr. Graham took him by the hand and he said, "John, you can do what you have to do and I'll take the children to the post office." That's the type of man Dr. Frank Porter Graham was. But not knowing it at that time, he was in our corner.

But I, my uncle and I, we were fighting for more monies. So we set up an appointment with Dr. Graham. We went down to his house; he told us what time to be there on Sunday. We walked down to his

house and walked up his long gravel walk. He stood at the steps and beckoned us in as if we were one of his own. We sat down in the living room. First time I had ever really walked in a white person's front door. And he sat down and chatted with us, talking about the situation on the jobs. And I was still young, still reaching out to help others and help myself.

So I was interviewed, '97 I guess it was, by a young, good-looking man—I don't know whether he was black, white, Jewish, Italian or what—but he was a very, very good-looking man. He said, "You know, you've been documented." I said, "Where?" He said, "I'll get you the book." And the book of the month, it was here—my husband says he don't know how it got here, but anyway it got here. In this book, there Dr. Frank Graham was fighting for the same thing we were fighting for. He had gone to the ( ) group in Raleigh. He was saying how unhealthy it was for the employees to be working at the laundry with no air conditioning. And the heat was out of sight. It was unhealthy for us to be in there, they needed a raise. And during time, the ( ) Labor Bank came in around 1941.

So they were wondering how they could put us in and let us make more than nine dollars a week on piece goods. So they had us doing piecework. That meant they count every shirt you did, or every whatever you did. There were only certain departments that would get paid by piecework. And some of them made a complaint. So in this book it tells us what group complained. And they wouldn't pick that department. But I was on shirts. I'll never forget the first week they started doing that, I think my salary came to about twenty-three dollars, more than I'd ever seen. I worked harder. In the next week or two, it was around about twenty-seven dollars. I think that's as much as I got.

When we left out of there, we only had thirty minutes for lunch. Those that lived near would run home to eat. And I'll never forget: I was living right here, which was a ( ) block from the laundry. I would run home and eat and go back eating. I had a relative that lived right up here at the corner of Merritt Mill Road and Crest Drive. He was saying, "Rebecca, the way you working, I want you during your lifetime in a day, to lay down ten minutes and stretch your body out because you need it."

But we were then doing what we was taught to do, was work for a dollar. And I almost had no choice. Because when you were even doing, before the laundry, doing domestic work, if your child got sick and you couldn't come in, they'd tell you, "If you can't come, I'll have to get somebody else." They didn't have no sympathy for you. And they didn't have no meals for you. ( ), you left it there for supper. Your



meal wasn't included in that. And most times, your lunch wasn't included in that; you ate whatever was left.

So coming up, the relationship between white and black, I guess everybody respected everybody, but there wasn't a lot of hostility because we knew we had to work and they knew they had to have some help. Back then, there wasn't that many black folks in Chapel Hill. During that time, in 1931, '32, '33, about five thousand people in Chapel Hill. There wasn't that much more than that were students.

( ) a little before that time, this group that was written, that my uncle was the secretary of, Dr. Frank Graham asked them—let me back up: they had an organization. And during this organization, the janitors just paid about ten cents a month. They did that in case somebody got sick or died among the group. They carried them some food. So Dr. Frank Porter Graham asked them once, "If you all see fit, would you all give us five dollars to help with the students?" Would you believe what those janitors did? Gave them five dollars.

BG: Each?

RC: No, out of their treasure. They were only paying ten dollars a week. You know what I'm saying? [tape stops].

BG: So you were talking about jobs and you just made a comment to me when you were showing me some documents here about what jobs were available.

RC: Back then, the only jobs in Chapel Hill for any black person was work as a domestic lady—cook, clean, wash, iron. And the onliest job the men had was ( ) and work for the university. And the women worked for the university. That was the onliest jobs available.

BG: Did you have a chance to use any of the facilities at the university at that time? Did you use any of their sports facilities or--?

RC: No, no, no. That just became available a few years ago. We ( ) the sports facilities. As a matter of fact, we knew nothing about it. I wouldn't know nothing about it. When my children came along at that time, as far as using the university, we could go see the ball game and sit in the end bleachers. When my children became a little older, they could see the game by picking up bottles and picking up things. They would pick up bottles afterwards and they would pay them so much money. I'll never forget: one time, my son picked up a bottle that was half full of whiskey and he brought it home. "No, son. You throw

that out. You don't know whether that's whiskey." He was going to give it to his daddy. But he put that out. They could put anything in there, they could use it for the bathroom. It would've been the same color.

So that was the onliest job for black folks until the University Memorial Hospital came to town. And that was 1952, when the hospital was opened. That's when jobs really became available. And then, if you got a job at the university hospital, twenty-five dollars a week, a hundred dollars a month. That was a long way from paying seven dollars a week.

BG: Were the hours better too?

RC: Yes. You did eight hours. But when you was at the Carolina Inn, when I was working there as a maid, it all depended on what your department said when you got off, whether there was some extra beds to be made. You probably worked nine hours but you didn't get paid any more. And I remember when I started working for the hospital in 1953. Before then, I had started working under Dr. Jones and Patterson. As their OBGYN patients returned home from the hospital, I would go home with the mother for four to six weeks until she was able to manage her own child. I would take care of the diapers, the bottles, and I would do their cooking, I was included. And then I would get no more than ten dollars a week if that much. But it began to go up to twenty-five dollars. Then I was asking for fifty dollars. That was at the time that the hospital was coming in. And that was considered nursing. So I was booked up from nine months to nine months. Before the hospital was opened I was under Patterson and Jones. Dr. Jones is still there.

So they referred me to all these patients. And that caused me, at different times, as the hospital opened and as different folks graduated from this school and went to different places, I was referred to them taking jobs—the first one was in Hartford, Connecticut. The next one was in Danbury, Connecticut. The next one was in Long Island, New York. Then back to Ridgefield, Connecticut. The next one was in New York. And I said, "This is it." I had had it traveling. All I was getting was fifty dollars a week.

My last job was with Nathaniel Henthoff. He does the editorial once a month in the Chapel Hill Newspaper. I went for his first-born child. That was in New York. It was in the wintertime. Snow was five-feet deep and I said, "This is it." But I was to take that child out in this beautiful covered carriage, covered up, and I could only see my baby through the glass ( ) thing. It was wrong. I would go snuggle up and sit in the park. I found out I was out in the part with one of the television stars. And he was out with his baby smoking a cigarette ( ). That was an experience.



BG: Who took care of your kids during that time?

RC: My husband. Because I had taken care of my kids when he was in the army for three and a half years. And I took care of my kids. When he left, we had two pigs, because there was only five houses down here. The pigs was up on the hill, that's where the pigpen was. My children were seeing pigs at seven and seven-fifteen in the morning. Because I had to feed them before I went to work at seven-thirty. So I would ( ), we were feeding the pigs. And so when I went away in '53, my kids were fifteen, sixteen years old because my older son finished high school in '52. The other one was still in high school. In the army, he came back from the army and his children was all grown. So that's what we did during the era of Chapel Hill—working at the High School, working at the laundry.

BG: Can you tell me what it was like going to school, how far you went to school?

RC: Oh, I only went to—then it was the eleventh grade. I was to go into the eleventh grade but I had to stop [tape stops].

And I didn't finish high school. I had always wanted to go to Tuskegee, Alabama, and I had saved money to go to Tuskegee, Alabama. And I saved money the year that I was telling you about that I went to live with this family and this lady became ill and I was to stay there with her and her children, go to school, come back and cook and clean up for the teachers. That was going to be my job.

I became ill with what I thought was appendicitis but it wasn't at that time. And that's when I had to go to the hospital. I had a bad case of indigestion, didn't know what it was. That took my money. It was only \$107 but I had already written Tuskegee asking them could they use a student to finish high school and work with some of the faculty members in the other college. I don't know why I wanted to go to Tuskegee, Alabama. I just wanted to go to Tuskegee because that's where the man did the peanuts. Can't think of his name, now, I'm forgetting.

Anyway, I didn't get to college. I don't regret it. I regret it, but I didn't, but I always wanted my children to because I worked hard so my children could go to school.

BG: What was it like going to school in this area, or was it Greensboro where you went to school?

RC: I went to Greensboro and here. It became natural to us as it is now. It was segregated. We didn't know the difference because we were brought up into segregation. Just like, right now, if I wanted to fly to London and stay a week, I couldn't do it because I wouldn't have the money. If I could do it, I'd have

to borrow the money and I'd have to pay it back. But anyway, we were brought up in a segregated society, knowing no different. Taught to be courteous and kind and get along. And that was part of Chapel Hill, when it was the Southern part of Heaven. There was no fighting and fussing and being ugly to black folks in this neighborhood. We went to work. We knew we had to work. If we held a job, we had to work and be courteous. You never heard of anybody getting rid of anybody because they stole from them. But you can't say it now. Even now you don't want folks coming through your home. You have to be real careful.

BG: What kind of facilities did you have at the school? The books and desks and other things?

RC: Everything we had was used, old and used. They were used, books written into and some pages torn out.

BG: Who were they used by?

RC: At the white schools. Passed down from the white schools. I really don't know, after I left, when they started buying new books. I think they started buying new books when my children went to school. But then they used old school books.

BG: And were the schools different at that time? Black schools, white schools: did you have an opportunity to look at the white school?

RC: No. I never got into a white school. I was never invited into a white school. Never played basketball with any of the whites. And I did play basketball when I was in high school. I was on the varsity team! Got many knee bruises, many knee bruises.

BG: I understand that some of the black youth on the weekends would compete with the white men, and I wonder if any of that went on with the women?

RC: Well it could have been in the later years, but not early years. Not in my day, to my knowledge. Because there wasn't that many blacks in Chapel Hill at that time. Probably in the '50s it was so, but not in my day.

Even when I was in the country, living in the country, we hardly knew what a notebook was. Our dad would buy us tablets and we had to use the paper very sparingly. Our books then was old books. We didn't know what newspapers was, we didn't know what magazines was. I'll never forget: we got a catalog one time; it was ( )'s catalog. That was before my daddy died. We had to pick cotton before we could go to school to buy our shoes. And picking cotton, and to buy shoes, our daddy would measure our feet then

we weren't allowed to try on shoes in the stores. So our daddy would put our feet down on a piece of cardboard and measure our feet and come to the store to get our shoes. And he used to get them at the place we call ( ) which is out here at the forks of Smith Level Road and 15-501. There was a big department store there. When he didn't get them there, he got them at Hearn's in Carrboro. Hearn's was noted for its ( ) department store. Those days I do remember.

We picked cotton and I'll never forget the last year I was in the country, somebody gave us a ( ) catalog. My family helped me order a coat. That's the first time I remember a coat. I don't know where our clothes came from and what kind of clothes we had. And I remember I ordered a coat. The mailbox was about two miles from us. When it came, somebody would tell somebody it was there, because you paid for it.

Back then, we thought we were happy. We didn't know anything about ( ). We were in the country. Even in the country, we had to bring our water from down on the hill. ( ). For drinking water, for cooking water, and for washing water. In the summertime, we'd take our ( ) and pots down to the spring branch. And there we would put a fire under the pot to boil our ( ) with a lot of soap. And back then, the only people ( ) from the fat of the grease and stuff that they had left over from hog killing times and whatever you had left over. But in our house, there wasn't much grease left over because my daddy, to feed us, to make it go, he would take what's left and put a little flour in it, brown it, make some biscuits—put some salt and pepper in it and make some biscuits. We had that for supper—gravy, biscuits, molasses.

BG: You didn't waste much?

RC: We didn't waste anything. And I can't see wasting now. I had cooked a cake and put it in the refrigerator here last month. And it kind of dried out. I took it out, and somebody said to me, just the other day, "It's too dry to eat. Throw it away." I said, "Un-unh. I'm going to pour some milk over it, put some ( ) in it, some flavor, some sugar, and make a pudding out of it." I'm still not throwing anything [laughs].

How do you think I made it? I had to save.

I got clothes now I should be throwing in the trash. But one day I may have to reach back and get those clothes, because I didn't have none when I was growing up. I really didn't start buying clothes for myself until the late '60s when the children were out of school. I could buy a piece or two for myself, but there were many other things that I needed for the house.

BG: I think that's probably a good time to stop here. And we'll continue tomorrow. Thank you very much.

RC: You're welcome.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BG: This is June 22<sup>nd</sup>, in the year 2000, and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Rebecca Clark at her home at 205 Crest Drive in Chapel Hill [tape stops].

Good morning, Rebecca.

RC: Good morning. How are you? ( ).

BG: Yesterday, when we were talking, you mentioned to me something that I thought was very interesting, that a lady had come up to you at work, a supervisor, and she said, "What are you?" And your answer was very interesting. And I wonder if you would share that with me again.

RC: Ah, there was one of these nurses at that time where I worked. She still is very much alive. She worked downstairs at the out-patient clinic but I was in the in-patient, worked in the in-patient department. And she says to me, "Clark, what would you rather be called, Nigger, Negro, Coloured, or Black?" I said, "Neither. Just call me Clark. Because I don't know who I am? I'm of a mixed race because of how I look." My two grandfathers were slaves and their fathers, grandfathers were white men. And my grandfather on my mother's side married an Indian woman. I don't know what nationality, whether it's Cherokee or what. My father's mother was a black woman. So I'm black, Indian, and white, God knows what else. But my name is Rebecca Clark, so you can call me Rebecca Clark. So that was my answer.

BG: Are many of your friends in this community of the same kind of heritage, mixed?

RC: Of course. There are many. We know, we have multiple colors. I'll never forget: there was Robert Snipes, who's now dead. He went to a football game. And he looked over the crowd there—blacks sat in the end zone at the Carolina games—and he said, "Well, look at us. We're just a ( ). Multiple colors." And I'm reminded of a story. I don't know if you know of Mary McLeod Bethune. She was one of our warriors during World War II. And she worked very closely with Eleanor Roosevelt. I'll show you her

picture before you go. I'm still looking for the story of her, but I've got the picture in this frame. During wartime, right after wartime, she was talking about the struggle she had traveled during integration period, and how she went to airports and had to sit in an area with rickety chairs about to fall down. ( ). She went and sat in a white area. Someone came and told her she had to move, the colored would sit back there—they called you colored. She said, "I'm fine, thank you. I'm fine." They told her, she needed to move. In the meantime, a young, white soldier walked up and told her, "Ma'am, do not intimidate her. Leave her where she is. She's comfortable."

And she said the same thing happened to her when she was on the plane. She had to stand—it was a train, I just remembered—then a white man got up and gave her a seat. In the meantime, she says, they came and said, "No. She cannot sit in this area." And again she said, "I'm very comfortable, thank you."

( ) North Carolina Central, North Carolina Negro College at that time. In her speech she went on to say—that was in the '50s when she made this talk—she was sitting in her son's library down in Daytona Beach, Florida. She happened to look out the window and there was a cat and a dog. The dog was after this cat. That cat had run as hard as she could run and the dog right behind her. Suddenly the cat stopped and "grrrrr," and the dog stood back. I'll never forget because I was sitting in the back of Central's auditorium and it was packed with black and white who came to hear her. And in front of me was a group of whites. And when she said, "When the cat stopped, the dog backed up, that's what black folks have to do," I saw some of the red neck people turn red. That was the story during that time.

I guess at my early age, when we first went to Greensboro, we would go to Sunday school, have prayer for breakfast, go to Sunday school, stay for church, come back for dinner. If something was at A&T College ( ), we were there in the afternoon. So being there, I had learned, being from the country where I never was involved in anything like that as a child, those things, I was able to take in and remember. And the first time I saw Miss Bethune was at A&T Greensboro. And the last time was at Central. I always remember that.

My relatives always said, "Whatever you do, try to be courteous and kind, but don't let nobody walk on you." And my father always taught us, "Don't ever start a fight. If you come home and don't win it, if you come home and you were beaten up, I'm going to beat you again. If somebody jump on you to fight you and you don't win it, I'm going to whip you when you come home." So you had no choice. You

either stayed out of fights or you got double whippings. ( ). So they taught you to stay out of fights and keep going. So when I listened to Miss Bethune, that was it.

It was not the same lady, but it was the same era and the same department that I was working in when the lady said to me—I think I mentioned that to you—we had left a patient's room and coming up the hallway and apparently I had said something. And she says, "I will kick you." I turned around in her face and said, "Yes, and you'll pegging the rest of your life" and I kept walking. I didn't say I was going to hit her. I said she'd be pegging the rest of her life. She turned out to be real nice to me when I retired. She gave me the nicest gift ( ) at this particular place where I was working.

BG: ( ). You're describing a treatment as a second-class citizen.

RC: Yes.

BG: And I'm just wondering how you dealt with this on a personal level.

RC: Well, having been brought up during the integration period, I felt that at that time, I could say what I wanted—I was in the '60s. But when we were brought up, you didn't sass anybody. It was "Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am," and "Yes, sir." And you accepted what they said, did it or didn't do it. If they asked you to do it, you could be without a job. It was just one of those things you were born into.

Just like I had a friend, ( ), before the university started the housing, visiting students from Africa, they would stay in white homes or black homes. I had kept one of the ladies here and the lady was in dire need of some shoes. And I kept telling her I would go with her to the shoe store. Come to find out she wasn't accustomed like we had been accustomed not trying on shoes in the store. She was shocked, when I took her to Raleigh to the shoe department, that she had to put on a sock to try on shoes. So you blend into those modes and things like that.

And getting back to, you asked me how my sister was married in 1946 and I was going to be the bridesmaid. I needed a white glove. So I went up to this prestigious store in Greensboro. I told her I wanted some gloves but I had to try them on. And they told me they didn't have any, and not my size. I was small in stature, and slim. But they didn't want me to try on some gloves that another white lady had to try on. So those are some of my experiences. I couldn't fight the system as you can fight it now. You just lived with it and smiled upon it and went on.

BG: This affected the pay scales when you were working?



RC: Pay scales. In pay scales, the Negroes have always been low on the totem pole. I'll never forget: I was working at ( ) one year. ( ) ten years I worked at another place. The state would give us a little raise. ( ) I just remember what this raise was. I may call the lady soon and ask her but she may have forgotten because it was back in the '60s. I didn't get a raise. I went to my director. She told me the reason why she didn't give me a raise—everybody had gotten a raise but me—my sons, they had good jobs. I said, "My sons have families." And so I went down to the business office to talk to the lady. The lady said, "You should have given her that raise and not this one. She would have had a little bit more." And because I carried that lady down there, she really made it hard for me on the job. So I knew through the years that I was going to be leaving there sooner or later. So the following year, I left. And she probably was glad to get rid of me, but she was all right at that time. Because I had a lot of ( ) in the fire but I wanted a break. I had no money but I wanted a break.

Then when I left there and went to another job, they accepted me. Then, they told me what my salary was going to be. I said, "This being a university, why can't I have the salary that I had before?" "Well, this is what we're paying." Well it so happens the director, I knew. He knew me and my families. He had hunted with my families and he said he had had white liquor with them and all stuff back then in the '30s and '40s. So he went to the lady and said, "Give her what she asks. Give her what she was getting." So I found that hard, was where they were beginning to see the light. That was in the '70s, early '70s, '69. But right there on that job, you would get an income raise once a year. You would get a state raise.

But after you're there so long, if you haven't had any problems; your work has been good, they didn't have to call you in for anything, you're supposed to have a merit raise. So I had talked to the ( ), the aides, and asked them, "Have you all had a raise like that?" They said, "No, I don't think so." I said, "Tell me the truth, because I'm going to get busy." So, "No, I haven't had a raise." ( ) A merit raise, they hadn't had it. The onliest thing we had had was two or three state raises, that's all we could get. They never gave us that four-five percent.

So we had this new director and I felt comfortable talking with her. So I went to her and told her, "Nobody said anything to me about my work. I've been up to par. They haven't called me in to anything." And she always called me "Squeaky" because I was always squeaking about something. She called me

"Squeaky Clark." She said, "Clark, you haven't had a raise?" I said, "No. All I've had is a state raise and an income raise when I came here." She said, "Well I sent up for all of them to get a raise." I said, "The ( ) and aides, they haven't had a raise." She said, "Well you go downstairs and talk to the director. He's in his office." Well I knew him well; I considered him being a fine man. I went down and I talked to him and he said, "Well that hasn't come to me." He had to sign off. So what had happened, this director had probably given it to the secretary or whatever. They, too, didn't see the need. But every time you turned around, RNs was getting one. So when I told him, apparently he called up and in a few months, in our checks, we had a raise.

BG: She was white, the ( ).

RC: The RNs were getting raises, but the blacks weren't getting anything. And when she came on duty, she didn't want to stay there. I said, "Please stay. Because this director wants you to stay. These other ladies are fighting among themselves for your position." I left her there. And when I told her I was going to retire, she said, "( ), don't go before I go." I said, "I'm not going to stay here and wait on you." She encouraged me to stay there and take a leave of absence because I was retiring a year early, before sixty-five. "No," I said, "because I won't be getting any money." She said, "But your time is ( )." I said, "I won't be getting any money. I can retire at sixty-four with twenty percent. I'm taking care of my family out in Greensboro."

So I retired. Then along with her and two or three more, I ( ) and I had it shining and pretty. Had them here for lunch. We had a ball. But that was after the fact that I was out of there. But it took a long time coming. When I think about the years they wouldn't give a raise because of my sons working. They won't buy me a loaf of bread; won't even give me a dime. I still have to help my husband with the money we've been making to pay for our home. And we had worked hard to try to educate them, you know what I'm saying?

And another thing, black folks weren't supposed to have cars. I'll never forget: I had a brother that was a veteran. In '53, he had been hurt in Okinawa and brought back to America, to Raleigh-Georgia in a body cast. And he survived it. And was going off to college and he had to wait two or three days—during that time, veterans had to stand around and wait to get in line to register. He was one of the more impatient folk you ever saw in your life. But anyway, he came here and started working at the School of Public

Health as a custodian. And one Saturday morning, he was going to Durham ( ), and we had school—UNC used to have classes on Saturday mornings—and he was coming to class, passed a car, and lighting a cigarette all at the same time. Hit my brother head on. And it just so happens, the car he was passing was once a neighbor of mine and she saw it all. She came and she called me, said, "I think that's your brother. If so, he might be at the hospital." And I had worked nights and I had just got home at about nine o'clock in the morning. And I rushed down to the hospital. He had become a quadra-paraplegic.

So in 1954, he died for a car, died for a car, so he could drive. So I got the car for him. And I was at Fowler's foot store and came out one night. I'll never forget it: I was getting in the car. One of the doctors from the hospital said to me, "Is this your car?" It wasn't mine but I said, "Yes it is." He said, "How can you afford it?" I said, "I can't." You weren't supposed to have anything. Back then, when I came to Chapel Hill in the '30s, most blacks and whites knew everybody that had a car. Very few blacks and not a lot of whites, because those that worked here worked on the campus. They lived near the university. Most of the men worked ( ).

But after World War II, the place grew out of proportion. As you see it's still growing. Nowhere to live now.

BG: What were the positions that you held at the hospital?

RC: In 1953, I went in as an aide. In 1956, I went to the state board and became a licensed practical nurse. So I was a licensed practical nurse from '56 until I retired in '79.

BG: What changes did you see in that time in the way you were treated, or did you see any changes?

RC: Well, black people has always been on the lower end of the totem pole. Just like now. They're fighting. You see it in the paper every day. Changes are just ( ). A black guy said the other day, "Yes, we've got these positions. They're moving us up. And they're trying to put women up. But they're moving us up ( ) pay scale." We're still on the lower end of the totem pole.

BG: So there's a ceiling there, a glass ceiling, not only for women but for African Americans here today?

RC: Yes, right. And Hispanics [tape stops].

BG: Rebecca, can you tell me some more about the jobs?

RC: In all fairness, under all circumstances, all the jobs I had I've made a lot of friends. I enjoyed working. The treatments, you had to take care of. I think I helped take care a lot of things. I think I helped other people by being outspoken. When this lady asked me was I old enough—I'm in my sixties now!—"Do you think you're old enough to say what you want to say?" I said, "Yes, ma'am. I've been saying what I want to say all my life. So you know where I am." Even my friends, when I said something, they said, "Well, Clark said it." I said, "Yes I said it." They don't get upset with me. They just said, well, "She said it." If it's something I said, I dislike what you did, I just come out and said it.

BG: Tell me about your children. What was it like raising your children?

RC: I feel humble. I never had any trouble with my two boys. There was any trouble for them to get in ( ). They had nothing to do. When they went to school, I gave them twenty-cents a week, that's all the money they could get because I wasn't making any. And there was a theater on the corner, Graham Street and Franklin Street, where they opened a theater of Friday night. And that's what it cost going to the movie. And back then children had a habit of ( ) and losing things. If I had to buy a cap or something, that was taken away from the little bit or bread or whatever we had to do with.

So I'll never forget: it was time to go to the movie. One of them didn't have the cash. I said, "No movie." He said, "Ma, let us go." I said, "( ). I'll be whipping on you now ( )." And I never believed in slapping a child. I had a friend in the country when I was a child. Her head was one-sided. She had this robust father. And then only had one child. Always wanted to know why ( )'s face was one-sided. They said her daddy slapped her one time and that's where it stayed. I said I don't like spanking the children because it can injure a kidney. And I don't like to spank them on the hand because it causes bruises in the blood vessels. Getting a cane switch where I can tickle their legs a little and let them jump while you hold their hand. That's enough. But I didn't have to do a lot of that. Didn't have too. Because they were punished. My oldest son, if you punished him, sent him to the room, all he needed was a funny book. He'd read all day long. Didn't make him no difference. He was kind of lazy anyway. It was the other one that was real active. ( ) was real active, more active than John, Jr. ( ). That's all he want.

So back then, they had nothing to do. No swimming pools at their young age. And when we moved down here where we now live, where this house now sits, there was a lot. The house was next door. They would play football—no basketball courts then. My husband knew folks on campus would give them

a football. And the neighborhood children would come here and play baseball and football. I'll never forget I said to my husband, "Let's buy that lot so the children have some place to go." "No, I'm putting a garden out there. I'm not buying no lot." I said, "Well, if somebody build there, it's going to take from us." He didn't care.

That was during 1942. I wanted this lot so bad. We had been living in here since '41. '42, my husband went into the service. And when this ( ) for blacks, blacks wanted the university to see that they, through FHA law, build them some houses. So they sold off to relatives. And I found out that this lot belonged to Mr. Geddy Fields. So I found Mr. Fields and asked him, "Mr. Fields, how much you want for this lot?" He said, "350 dollars." I said, "I don't have a lot of money. How much do I have to put down?" He said, "Give me twenty-five dollars. Pay me when you get it." My husband was already then in the service. He told me he wasn't going to buy the lot. So ( ). So despite this rationing of food and what little the government gave me, I'm still working for seven and a half dollars a week, going to the laundry with my children, taking care of them, I went on and purchased this lot but it took me about five or six years to pay Mr. Fields for it.

When my son was in high school and early college years, they said, "Mother, I wish we had another bedroom so we could have ( ) some time." So that was one of the things that really stuck to me. And so when my oldest son finished college in '56, I persuaded my husband—it was the hardest thing in the world to do—but the gentleman that helped me persuade him was a member of my church. He was a ( ) of the church. And being a ( ) of the church, I had him get on his case.

[pause] No, I'm trying to see if it was my son, but it's the bus driver.

So we finally got him to say yes. And in saying yes, we were able to get this house built. The day my son graduated from A&T College in Greensboro, Monday, we started digging the foundation for this house, the next morning. So my son worked here all the summer that summer and this house got built. So I had no problem with my children. And they haven't cost me a dime, except when I loaned them some money but they paid me back.

So I didn't have any trouble but I understand—I'll never forget: Mr. Hubert Robinson was on the town council. ( ). And the younger son, he bought a car. We didn't know he had it, but he hid it. You

know in whose home he was at at night, but he ( ). Nineteen, twenty years old. He didn't finish college. He had a four-year scholarship, ( ), so he started working locally.

I got a call. They were going to play for a band someplace. Doug called me, "Mother. I forgot. I'm supposed to go to court. Tell Mr. Hubert Robinson, tell the man that I can make court of something." I said, "For what?" He said, "I ran the police." [laughs]. And so, I called Mr. Hubert Robinson. And Judge Stewart then was the judge, a friend of the family, most liberal. Mr. Robinson called him and said ( ).

BG: Do you not want Mr. Robinson's name in there?

RC: You can call his name. But I don't want the judge ( ). OK. He called the judge and said, "Doug Clark. You got him for outrunning the police." The thing about it: they knew it was Doug. But they never caught him. They were on a dirt road and he left so much dust so they never knew which was he went. They charged him anyway. So Mr. Robinson called Judge Stewart. Judge Stewart said, "Well, I got him on the docket. But you all didn't tell me it was Rebecca's and John's son." So they took it off the docket. But it's because of the work I did.

When I was twenty-one years old, I voted. When we moved in here, there was only five of us moved in here the same day. ( ) day after. I marched everybody across the field, over to Carrboro because we were in the county then—we were annexed in the late '60s. I registered every black person as they moved into this neighborhood.

BG: Were you having trouble registering?

RC: Yes, we were having trouble registering as they began to move and build homes and people were buying them. I carried a man that worked down at Eubanks Drug Store, I carried him out here. The man that was there—I think he's dead there, I won't call his name—he said "You bringing this man here." That was after I had gone out there and I was kind of—well, because I could read, they wanted everybody to memorize the Constitution, whatever. He said, "He can't read." I said, "Yes he can." He said, "Well, you read it to him then." So I read it to him, and he could write his name. That's how I got Mr. Cole and Mrs. Cole. That was back then in the '40s.

It was hard as black folks moved in here—I'm still doing it.

Getting back to that—these folks that ran for office knew they could depend on me to get some folks in so I've done it all these years. With many candidates. And if I got a few dollars to spend ( ). I



figured if one person can provide fifty votes and get about a hundred more to get fifty votes, then your candidate will win. I bet ( ) dollars and dollars from senators, congressmen, state, county commissioners, school board members. Back then, "Rebecca, if you get so-and-so proposed, you can drive my car, I'll give you 'x' amount of dollars, my ( ) for you." I never took a dime. ( ). I do it now. ( ) congressmen now and I worked together with Howard Lee. We led his song, we got out literature, we worked into the night. That was when David was working at Duke Hospital, David Price. He worked for Howard Lee. Back then, the Democrat Party was just the thing to be. We worked hard ( ). Looks like we don't have many interesting people that come.

BG: Did you help Howard Lee in his campaign to get elected mayor?

RC: They said I did. They said I did. What happened, I'll never forget: this lady called me to her home and said, "You know, Rebecca, we're thanking you. We got a young man on campus, have you met him?" I said, "No, I heard of him." "His name is Howard Lee. We would like for him to run for mayor. We want a black mayor." And I said fine, we met two or three other people. He lived up on McAuley Street. And we all got together and we worked. And talk about working; we worked hard.

At that time, my son had a Greyhound bus. My children were all registered to vote. We were getting everybody that we knew to vote. So on that election day—I'll never forget it—my son had a Greyhound bus ( ) and he went street to street and they knew he was coming. We loaded them to the poll. Howard Lee won before the votes all got in.

And I'll never forget because I was working with Charlotte Adams and Mrs. Pappas, from the School of Social Work—Dr. John Pappas's mother. We were out at that poll with Charlotte Adams and others counting that night. Then we were doing it by hand, counting ballots, one, two, three, four, five ballots. And that place was packed. We must have had a thousand people to vote in our precinct that night. And I had a man at our table who became a good friend later. And we were counting. And ( ) was standing there. ( ). And Howard was winning. And in doing so, the fellow was looking to see how we were tallying so he'd know what to call into the newsroom. And this fellow turned and said, "Stop standing over me! I don't want you breathing over me!" Of course that fouled up everybody's count. We had to count over. We did more counting over than we were really counting that night because of this man at our table.

So we had this lady by the name of ( ). I was hoping I'd remember her—I'm getting where I forget. She worked at the Y. So she was there. And in doing so, the votes were coming in, the votes were coming in. And she came to me and said, "When you get a break, come into the janitor's room." After a while, I asked for a break because you're not allowed to have radios at the polling place. But somebody had put a radio in the janitor's closet. So we were sitting in the janitor's closet. And Howard Lee was getting ready to make his acceptance speech. I said, "Can't be. ( )." She said, "Oh, yes, we are." But we're still counting at Lincoln precinct. And he went on to thank all the folks that helped him, called out all those names. She said, "You heard that?" I said yes. He called out all those names.

And when he was winding down, he said, "I'm asking for Rebecca Clark. Where is she?" And they had packed St. Joseph's Church. The spread over in the street; there wasn't any room inside. The whites and blacks; they had to close off part of Rosemary Street there where St. Joseph Church is. "Rebecca Clark, Where are you? Come on down." And we're standing there, laughing. We're in the closet at Lincoln Center. And they were applauding, they were applauding.

You talk about work. We had worked and registered more people-- ( ). But what I'm going now, I do absentee ballots with the city. I was in the ( ) in March. By April, I had a lady bring me absentee ballot sheets and had another lady that carried them to all the folks that couldn't go. They signed the absentee ballots and sent them in. They came back. Those that needed help, I helped, a week before May the 6<sup>th</sup> or whenever it was. I had been allowed to drive and I would go to their homes to assist them or help them, whoever would call. I gathered all of those and carried them to Carrboro. The lady said, "If you bring them to me, I'll take them to Hillsborough." I don't know why—this always happens—they were sent out the same day, two of them didn't get there ( ). So that meant, when they got ready, they called me on Sunday. I said, "Well I tell you what. You put it in mail, it may not get there because another gentleman did it the other year and his wife never got into the box to vote." I always stayed until everything is counted in my precinct—I've been doing it for thirty years or more—and doing so, they brought them to me because I said I would get them to Hillsborough. They brought them to me all sealed. And I called the sheriff's department. They said, "Don't worry about it. We'll get somebody there to bring them up for you. Somebody's in the area, be coming back to Hillsborough." So that's how they got in. I did more laying in my bed that some of these ( ) walking around. I've been doing it since 1920. ( ). Late '30s.

BG: A long time.

RC: Don't forget: just remember I was living on Graham Street. And I went down to old Chapel Hill High School, which was sitting there where University Square now sits. And the lady said to me—I was joyful, gleeful, just remember who the other candidates were—she said, "What are you doing here? You don't know who to vote for." I smiled and kept walking. I said, "Well I know she's ( )." That was a long time ago. I haven't heard anybody living 140 years old.

BG: Rebecca, what were your thoughts, what were your feelings when Howard Lee was elected?

RC: I felt great. It was time. Time had arrived. He was very liked then. People worked with him. That year, when he was elected, he carried in with him—not only did I work with him, we worked for a slate and our slate got in—Joe ( ), Steve ( ), Joe ( ). Our slate went in. Our slate won. ( ). So it made you feel good. I'll never forget: there was a certain minister, a black minister, at the corner of Robinson Street, Graham Street, Franklin Street. I was waiting for the red light. I was coming up and he was going down. As he passed me, "Oh, you're the one that nominated Howard Lee!" Because what happened was, he—well, I'll leave it at that.

BG: He was obviously upset--.

RC: He was black but he didn't want Howard Lee. Said he wasn't ready for a black mayor. And he walked the street early in the morning and all the department stores, "We want to keep peace in Chapel Hill. We don't want a black man." And I had an uncle that felt the same way.

BG: Did Howard Lee keep peace in Chapel Hill?

RC: Oh, yes. Howard Lee was one of the ones along with Edith ( )'s husband who was a doctor at UNC—they're the ones that went in during the nights when the cafeteria workers went on strike. He helped them through.

BG: Howard did?

RC: Yes, sir. I called Howard, I said, "They're going to be there in the morning to keep the milk and bread from going in. I'll go with you down there." He said, "No, Miss Clark, don't you come. You got enough." I used to be bold. I was tomboyish. I played basketball and I played tennis. They always called me a tomboy for playing basketball.

BG: Tell me about your children's experience at Lincoln High School.

RC: Lincoln High School, that was an all-black school.

BG: When did they graduate?

RC: Mine graduated '56 and '54.

BG: And integration occurred '60, '61?

RC: Was it '61? Whenever. OK, yes. I'll never forget, Virginia Nickelson and—I cannot remember this lady's last name—anyway, there was two ladies saying that they were building Chapel Hill High School. They bough the property from a black family. The whites had already said there would be no school buses for the blacks. The blacks would probably stay in Lincoln High School. They knew the black families didn't have cars to bring them over there, to the white school.

BG: This is after integration?

RC: Yes.

But anyway, the same group that I started out with working said, "Rebecca, I don't think it's fair." I had a cousin that lived next door that was in school already with some of the white kids that integrated. "This is unfair that we put in that school out there. Lincoln High School is going to be in theory, that means the blacks is not going to get it. So we're going to do a letter saying all these high school kids want to go to Chapel Hill High School. We'll see how it's going to work."

I didn't have no furniture then; about two or three chairs. We came here. We had every high school graduate name and family name. They had copied it, had letters all ready. We sealed those letters. ( ). And that year, I'll never forget: when it was time to open school, there was no blacks to go to the school so they had to put them over in the white school.

So that's how they integrated. They figured the blacks would not go ( ). So when parents filled the letters out that said, "We want our children to go the school where they can get the best—they can have a good science room, a larger library, larger this, and all of that." So this is how it integrated.

In the meantime, Mr. McDougle, who was my teacher in 1931 and '32, was now then the principal of Lincoln High School. So that meant he didn't have a high school to go to so they made him assistant principal out at Chapel Hill High School. So it was demoting him in one way but I don't see how it would have, because he was going to a bigger school. He could be over more students than he would have been down here at this school. So they turned this into a middle school and put Mr. James Peace of Northside

there. And when they built Frank Porter Graham School, they moved Northside down Lincoln, no, moved Northside to Frank Porter Graham. So that's how it came about during that time.

James Peace would be somebody to talk to as a black male. He's older than Ed, and Ed is the same age as my older son.

BG: What kind of experiences did your boys have at Lincoln High School? I'll just leave it open like that, How did you feel about their experience there?

RC: Well, Lincoln High School, it was an all-black school. So there were still with their black friends. So there was no problem.

BG: Were you happy with it?

RC: We had to be happy. We had nowhere else to go at that time. They had not integrated. When my kids finished high school, Chapel Hill High School wasn't completed.

BG: Did both of your boys get interested in music?

RC: Oh yes, that was during when they were very young. They all got interested in music when the pre-flight band in 1942 came to Chapel Hill. The children had never seen a black band before. Mine had not. And when they go out in the morning for the raising of the flag on campus, there were kids in the neighborhood who would run to the corner to hear them play [tape stops].

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B