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N.8 Undergraduate Internship Program: Spring 2016

Interview N-0043

Sondra Burford

9 April 2016

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Abstract—Sondra Burford

Interviewee: Sondra Burford

Interviewer: MaKayla Leak

Interview Date: April 9, 2016

Location: Sanford, North Carolina

Length: approximately 1 hour

Sondra Burford, a retired senior accountant, begins by discussing her early childhood in Maxton, North Carolina. She mentioned her parents, Bernice and Robert Davis, who owned a grocery and wholesale store in town. Burford's mother was also a practicing beautician that worked out of her home. Burford discussed the segregated school she attended, R.B. Dean School, which served kindergarten through twelfth grade. Burford discussed spending her summers at Atlantic Beach, South Carolina, the only beach that blacks could attend. At Atlantic Beach, Burford helped her uncle at a beachfront restaurant that he managed for a doctor. Burford's father and uncle opened a black theater so that Burford and her cousins and friends would have somewhere to go. Burford remembered that some blacks, like fellow church members, did not support her family's local businesses. Next, she discussed the sense of complacency around segregation that was present during the early 1950s. Burford mentioned being the first black to work in a white establishment in her hometown. During World War II, Sondra Burford's father and uncle opened a music hall which was a place for adults to mingle and listen to local black bands and artists. Duke Ellington performed at this music hall, which Burford referred to as the 'Gym.' The war brought many patrons to and through Maxton because it was home to a military air base. When asked about her memories of the Civil Rights Movement, Burford discussed her family traveling on vacation and stopping at an establishment to eat after it was required by law that blacks be waited on. Sondra Burford's dad was the first black in town to run for mayor. Later, Burford's father was a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives. Burford applied to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and East Carolina University for undergrad. UNC-Chapel Hill admissions informed Burford that she would have to attend the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for two years and then transfer because they were currently not accepting women in the accounting program. Burford discussed a friend, her smartest friend at UNCG in her opinion, who failed out due to the unfair grading of some professors. When moving in to Connor dormitory in Chapel Hill, Burford's assigned roommate moved out once she realized Burford was black. After college, Burford took a job as an accountant at RCA in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Sondra Burford gave birth to her daughter Valencia while in New Jersey before shortly moving back to North Carolina. Upon moving back, Burford worked as an auditor at Bank of North Carolina in Jacksonville. Burford discussed finishing her career as a senior accountant at Magneti Marelli. Now, Burford is retired and spends her time as the treasurer of her church and helps out with the Girl Scouts. Burford concluded by discussing how her time at UNC set tone for coming into the work force and for life as an adult.

Field Notes---Sondra Burford

(Compiled April 9, 2016)

Interviewee: Sondra Burford

Interviewer: MaKayla Leak

Interview Date: Saturday, April 9, 2016

Location: Sanford, North Carolina

The Interviewee: Sondra Burford is a retired accountant who lives in Sanford, North Carolina. Born November 24, 1946 in Maxton, North Carolina, Burford attended R. B. Dean School for twelve years. Sondra Burford attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1965 for two years and then transferred to finish her accounting undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1969. Upon graduation, Burford moved to New Jersey to work as an accountant at RCA (Radio Corporation of America) for two years. Next, Burford began worked at a non-profit called Philadelphia Urban Coalition for seven years, where she helped small businesses get started financially. Before moving back to North Carolina, Burford gave birth to her daughter, Valencia Burford. Once back in North Carolina, Burford worked in Jacksonville as auditor at Bank of North Carolina. Burford then moved to Sanford to work as a senior accountant with Magneti Marelli, the company that owns Chrysler. Now that Burford is retired, she spends her time volunteering with the Girl Scouts and serving her church as the treasurer.

The Interviewer: MaKayla Leak is a junior undergraduate student double majoring in Anthropology and Exercise and Sport Science. She conducted this interview as a part of her internship with the Southern Oral History Program, focusing on the integration of UNC and the stories of the Black Pioneers.

Description of the Interview: The interview was conducted in the living room of Sondra Burford's home. Interruptions included: the sound of the pen while the interviewer took notes, telephone ringing, and interviewer's daughter on telephone in a different room.

Note on recording: I used the SOHP's Zoom recorder #2.

TRANSCRIPT—SONDRA BURFORD

Interviewee: SONDRA BURFORD
Interviewer: Michaela Leak
Interview Date: April 9, 2016
Location: Sanford, NC
Length: 1 file; approximately 1 hour, 15 minutes

START OF RECORDING

MICHAELA LEAK: My name is Michaela Leak, and I'm here with Sondra Burford. It's April 9th, 2016, and we are in Sanford, North Carolina. [Break in recording] OK, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

SONDRA BURFORD: OK, I was born in Robeson County in Maxton, North Carolina, to parents Bernice and Robert Davis, and I spent my childhood and through twelfth grade in Maxton, North Carolina. Typical childhood. I might-- Well, maybe not so typical. My parents were business owners, back in the late [19]40s and [19]50s. And they owned a grocery and wholesale place. So I started in a business background when I was fairly young, helping at the store, and helping with the wholesale side. So I always had a business, whatever, aptitude I guess, because that's what the family was involved with.

[I] went through--had--we lived very close to the school that I attended for twelve years, because at that time, it was a segregated school. So, it was [a] black school, and

had lots of good memories and friends, and good times, so we were all together. Classes moved from first to second grade. We were very fortunate. We had [an] actual kindergarten teacher that was not at our school, but operated a private kindergarten.

So there were those of us who had late birthdays, as it turned out. So we got to go to Miss Rayford's Kindergarten for two years. So by the time we were in first grade, the teacher--because it's a small town, Maxton--and the teacher knew all about our class. So we had some excellent teachers. And they started us where she left off. And so we went together as a group, through most of the school--we went to high school, the ones of us that were there. So we had a little bit of an edge, we thought, because we did have the kindergarten, and had that which a lot of the schools at the time, that wasn't a pre-requisite for going to school. We were fortunate.

I could see the school from my home. So if the first bell rang, I could still get to school on time, so that was a big thing. And so, I didn't have to take the bus. And the kindergarten--we could also see the school from that lady's house, so that was neat. Grew, you know, through the years, went to school there, had friends. As I said, I worked.

I had an uncle that managed a place at Atlantic Beach, South Carolina, which at that time was the black beach, since we couldn't go to Myrtle Beach unless you were in the kitchen, or something of that nature. So my uncle managed a place during the summers for a doctor in South Carolina. And when I was twelve, thirteen, or so, my dad, who trusted his brother very much, allowed me to go part of the summer and work. So I waited tables, and cleaned rooms, and did a little bit of everything. Because they had

several rooms, and they also had what we called a patio, a dance place, right on the beach front, with a little restaurant.

So I grew up being in the business world for a long--before I was a teenager, even, because my uncle had managed the place--Hurricane Hazel--let me backtrack. Hurricane Hazel came and destroyed his first place that he managed. It was a multi-level hotel, in a very nice place that a lot of black people came in the summer, because it was a good place to vacation. And after the hurricane, the doctor decided that he wouldn't build anything back quite that--you know, several stories. So he built a one-story type place with some rooms, and also had the dance patio, and a little restaurant.

My parents helped there on the weekend since I was five. So I always knew the water. I mean, we always had something to do. My parents were very busy. My mother was also, in her spare time, she was a beautician, hairdresser, and had her own little shop at the back of her house. So you always knew you worked, and you did things, and you went to school, and came home, did chores, and worked, and that was it.

ML: Do you think that was something that your parents explicitly said to you, or something that you picked up from seeing them, and their work ethic?

SB: Probably picked up. My dad was a very hard worker, and worked loading and unloading a wholesale truck. I mean, he actually took the orders from smaller stores and delivered to them. So he was a hands-on person. And saw him work many long days. Even as a child, even--with help from my uncle and everything. So I think it was, you saw it.

And I had other family members. My mother had seven sisters in the area, with their husbands and everybody was always working. They didn't have their own business--whatever they were working at. Some were teachers. I had an uncle--two uncles that had dry-cleaner's business. And those were the kinds of things that you didn't see a lot of blacks doing, at the time. So everybody had to work, and they knew that that's the only way you could get ahead, and try to prepare--help prepare your children for--. So that's what we picked up on.

ML: So was Maxton a place that it was possible for blacks to own these businesses, or was it rare, you would say?

SB: When I was young, it was probably rare--and probably still is--probably a rare thing. Especially back in that time, because my dad has his wholesale from the late [19]40s into the [19]50s. As a matter of fact, he and his brother taught school, initially. They were, when you could get your teaching license in two years. They both went to Fayetteville State. And they were able to do that. And they came back and taught school. And then they decided that they could do something like open a store, or open a wholesale, and provide that service, and they were given the ultimatum, "Either you teach school and let that go, or you do that." So they let the teaching go and started that full force. And I won't tell you it wasn't hard, because it was, even for my--when I was born and can remember--. But that was something they wanted to do.

And then, like I said, I had an uncle who married--I had two uncles who married two of my mother's sisters. And they opened a dry-cleaner's in Maxton. So it was just the right time. And they were the kind of people that said, "Well, this is what we're going

to try to do.” And it wasn’t easy, but they were successful in doing it for the years that they were there. And at that time, a lot of them were mom-and-pop type things, so it was a good time for the town.

ML: When you say “it wasn’t easy,” do you--is there something specific you mean about that, or--?

SB: Well, of course, most of your business is going to be, for the most part, usually blacks. And my dad had competition with white people who had wholesales, and who could provide things sometimes lower-cost, and even at the store. So people wouldn’t always take advantage of the fact that there was a black person offering the same types of goods and services. You had to keep working through that. I mean, you had people who might have been your church members, or in a club with you that didn’t even come to your store to buy their groceries. And it’s the same cans that you pick up at a store that--or the same meats. My mother had her license. I mean, all of that. So it’s something you have to work through. And I saw them do that.

But we also had, at the time, we had a black theater, because we could only go to the balcony of the other theater, when we were teenagers. So, some of the blacks, and my dad and uncle were part of that group, opened a theater for us, so that the kids had some place to go. And so that was neat.

So we came from a time when people were trying to do what they could, even though it may not have been as supported by the race--my dad had a lot of customers that were Indian. Because we’re from Robeson County. So we have blacks, Indians, and whites. And a lot of our customers, especially at the store, were Indian. So they were

patronizing my dad more than some of his black counterparts were. But you went on anyway.

ML: Do you think there was a reason for that?

SB: Unfortunately, like crabs in a barrel, we just don't like to see anybody else doing anything, especially then. And, "Who do they think they are, trying to do that?" And it's always been, you know, "Go there." And I think you have to rise above that mentality. So that's what they did, and you know, you saw it, and you thought, "OK."

I mean, I remember that there was a pool in town that we never--it wasn't--we couldn't use it when I was there, but I know since I left, it was like--you know, that was the thing. Because we went to lakes and other places, but there was a group that had a pool, but they didn't allow black people to use it. I think they do now, but it's a different take on it.

ML: You mentioned that the kindergarten you said you attended for you two years, you said the word "private," did your parents have to pay for that?

SB: I think very little. When I say "private," it was another black lady who was--could teach, and wasn't, because she had three or four-- she had four or five kids, at the time. And that was a way for her to make sure that the kids got off to a good start. So what they paid was just probably enough for Miss Rayford to make sure we had lunch. Because we all came with--already had eaten breakfast, so it wasn't like a fee when I say "private." Because now they do it through the schools, but that wasn't done through a school, because I don't even think the white school in town had a kindergarten. Their kids then could go to school when you were six.

ML: Do you have any siblings?

SB: No.

ML: No, just a--?

SB: I'm an only child. Mm-hmm.

ML: OK. How was that, life as an only child?

SB: Everybody asks that, and I'm going, "I don't, I don't--." You know--.

ML: You don't know any different. [Laughter]

SB: No, I don't know any different. As she said, most of what's left now are first cousins, and in one case, my other cousin in Maxton was--she was the only one, older than I was, but also the only one. And the others--there were a couple in the family. So I didn't know any different. And where I lived, there were kids, friends that you play with and stuff, and things to do, and--. I think the only thing with that is, sometimes you were held to a different standard by family, because you are the only one, so you're supposed to do certain things. Which is like, "OK, fine." But you learn to, "OK," roll with the punches.

ML: Mm-hmm. And what was the name of the K-through-twelve school that you attended?

SB: R.B. Dean. It was R.B. Dean High School, by the time we finished, but we started out--. Excuse me. It started out as Robeson County Training School, which just sounds terrific but one of the principals there passed away, and they re-named it, which was a good thing. So it became R.B. Dean School, and then it went through twelfth grade.

ML: And who were you closest to, as a child? And why, do you think so?

SB: Is this family, or--?

ML: Or whoever you--?

SB: Well, of course you know, you're close to your family. I had a neighbor that was a year older than I was. And so, we sort of grew up--Carolyn and I grew up together, and--. She was extremely smart. She was one of these people who didn't have to study. I love that. And she was an only child. She'd been raised by her grandparents. But they lived next-door to my parents. So, you know, we always did a lot of things--we attended the same church, that kind of thing--together. And she finished the year before I did, and didn't go on to college at the time. She, [as] a matter of fact, went to family members in New York. So it was a--. You know, she was back in the area after that. And we still had some ties, but I mean, growing up, we were pals, because we'd come home, we could have a little together time, play a game, do whatever. And then we both had chores. So, but you know, we were right there. So that one was good.

ML: Looking back, what was life like, growing up in the south, during the late [19]40s and early [19]50s?

SB: Of course, I don't remember much before the [19]50s. But [Pause] you were very used to things being the way they--you thought they were, until, in the late [19]50s and [19]60s, things started changing, throughout the country. And we saw that the South was even more behind--I mean, because you become complacent to it almost, even though we had things going. [Pause] So then it opened up things like, "OK, well, that is possible." You know. I can remember being the first black person to work in a

store in my hometown. As a kid, you know, like a--they would call it co-op now; it wasn't [a] co-op, but I worked a few hours a week, like Saturdays, or whatever. And it was a drug-store little gift shop, for lack of a better word. Because like I said, this is a small town, so people do--you know, a little bit of everything. And they hired me.

Of course, I didn't do medicines, or anything like that. But to wait on customers. Even though I--my dad had that, and I was doing that, but he thought it was an opportunity for me to see other customers. Because basically, most of their customers were white, and interact and get that exposure. So I did that for maybe a summer or two. You know, but like I said, between the business there and working at the beach, I was pretty much already working. So that was something for the exposure.

ML: How was that? Do you remember [it being?], like--?

SB: It wasn't--because the couple that ran it, which was a husband and wife, were I guess decent people. You know, fairly fair-minded. I think most of their customers accepted it for what it was, and I wasn't treated badly by anybody. I mean, if somebody I guess didn't want me to help them, they'd wait till the doctor and his wife was free with what they were doing, and they'd wait on them. But I don't remember that being a problem, like, were there people who come in and leave the store, or anything? No, I don't remember that.

ML: [Pause] Okay, so the next question. I know the war was over, but was your dad a part of that, or--?

SB: Neither my father nor my uncle were in the military. But they--it was a very busy time for the Maxton-Laurinburg area, because they had an air base there,

during the war. So even after the war, there were still things going on. It was--what I hear most people that talk about it, like my parents--it was exciting. It brought a lot of different people to the area.

As a matter of fact, as I said, my father and uncle were industrious to do different things. They actually operated an area. We called it "The Gym." But it was a place where people could come--grown folk, pretty much--could come, and they had parties. But they had bands--one of the black bands, at the time, to come, Dizzy Gillespie, some others--you know, brought their bands. So they got to meet people. And I'm sure I met some of them, but I wouldn't remember, because I was little. But they were trying to provide some way to entertain--and plus, they drew people even from as far away as Fayetteville to that, because they would have, I guess, headliners of the time, Duke Ellington, I think.

So, people like that were able to come. And so they drew people from as far away as Fayetteville, and of course from South Carolina, because Maxton is around the border of--. It's not that far from South Carolina. So they did that, and it was that you always see something going on, something trying to be positive. I mean, they couldn't have that type of thing now, probably, with all the different things that have come. But back then, they didn't have any problems, and it was a known thing, and I mean, it was something that anybody would feel comfortable coming to. And it was--the people who could pay--because it cost a cover charge, to come in. And I don't remember of any of them saying that they had any real problems, you know, like the police had to--. None of that. So everything--. But it was a different time. But it was exciting, because they had a lot of people coming in and out the area. Yeah.

ML: So, the Civil Rights movement, you were about eight, when that got started?

SB: When it first started.

ML: Yeah.

SB: But then, of course, everything was so slow-going. I can remember when they first did a lot--well, of course, were doing marches and sit-ins, and all of that. But when they first said, "Now you're able to go wherever you want to go, and eat." That, my father said, "OK," when they said that. So, and Maxton was small anyway, so we didn't have a lot of places. We went to Aberdeen, Southern Pines. And at the time, it was a-- it was a Howard Johnson restaurant that was right on 15/501. And one as you go into it, it's now something else. And we went there one Sunday, after church. My parents, myself, and my girlfriend, Carolyn. And my dad said that my mother and Carolyn were all were very nervous about going. I guess I didn't really have any thought. You know, he said that's what we can do. So I thought my dad knew what he's doing, so it was we could--. And we ate. And of course, people looked at us. But it was a thing. So that was my first thing.

Before that, when we traveled--and my parents believed that you took vacations. A lot of times, we went north; we went to New York. But the times that we did go south--like we went to Florida several times--I can remember, even as a child, having to find the part of town that was black, because if you wanted to eat something, or really find a good place to stay, that's what you had to do. I remember that. Or like my father said, "Oh, we won't stop there, because I'm not going to go in a back door to get anything to eat," or

whatever. So things like that, you remember from a child. But then with all the changes coming, you thought, "Well, OK, now we don't do that anymore." But as a child, you don't look at it like, "Oh that's--." I mean, because it was the way that everything was, at the time. I was only when we started seeing change. You're like, "I don't have to be that way." And why? So--.

ML: Did you admire your dad for that? For his--?

SB: He was always that way. He was just--he was the first--in our town, he was the first black to even run for--he ran for mayor. He didn't win, but he ran, like okay. He didn't mind trying. He said, "I won't make it. But they need to know that other people have ideas, and can do that." So you think about that now, and you think, "Now, that could have been problematic for him, but he took it on faith."

My dad ended up years later--he was, late in his life--he ended up being a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives. He was appointed, and then he ran one term--he won one term; he didn't win the second term. So I have to think that came about because all through his life, he was--well, he was in NAACP. And because he was always doing things, and trying things, and there was a gentleman from Red Springs, which is another small town down there, who was a representative. And he was asked to move and do something else in the state. And they needed somebody that--at that time, there were three counties. It was Hoke, Robeson, and Scotland. I think that's what it was. And they needed somebody else. And, as my dad said, out of the clear blue sky, somebody called him and wanted to come and sit down, and they asked him if he would complete that term for the gentleman. And then he ran one additional time, and won. And then after that, he

wasn't successful. But he said he felt like he had a chance to see it, from what politics really is like, in a different venue.

His picture is actually in Raleigh. My daughter went--my mom was saying it, and she--. I don't think she ever got up there to see it, after they were saying they'd put them up, even though they've redistricted, and all this stuff. And we went to see it, and I said, "That's my dad." Yeah.

ML: And did your dad receive any backlash for running for mayor in your town?

SB: Not that I know of. I mean, other than people just said, "Why are you doing it?" You know, it's called--and like I said, his clients were basically blacks anyway. So, his customers were that base, so I guess he figured he could try. And I don't think the whites in town thought anything, other than the fact that somebody else wanted to try, even though he said, "I know I won't make it. But I need to let them know that we deserve a voice, or deserve to be heard." And I think it accomplished that. He was on the Town Commission for years, you know, after that. So it went the way it could.

ML: Did your dad's passion or drive for change, did it inspire you, or make you feel obligated, or did it affect your life in any way?

SB: Other than the fact, as my daughter said, that I was told that I was going to an integrated college, not, you know, blacks. Central, or--because, "That's not where you're going to go." That part was, "You're entitled to go there, so you need to go. And you can do at your--academically. I think you can handle it." So that part was OK. And I

won't say that that was--but you're like, "OK, well, they say I can do this, so I guess I can."

ML: OK, so you went to undergrad at UNCG first?

SB: Yes.

ML: What took you--did you live in UNCG, or live in Greensboro, and then go, or did you--?

SB: No.

ML: OK.

SB: I applied to Carolina, and to ECU. I got accepted at ECU. And this is [19]65, so, you know, but I got accepted there. The letter came back from Carolina, and said that they were not admitting females in their accounting/business program; that in order to do that, I would have to go to UNCG and transfer. And so I'm like, "OK! I could do that, or I could go to ECU." But my dad said, "Nah--" at that time, it had a reputation. He said, "Nah, you don't need to go to a party school. You go to UNCG, and you transfer, because that's what you said you're going to do. You're going to go into accounting. And if that's the way you have to do it--." At UNCG, they had a business--I know it was business education--a business administration-type thing, but I was really interested in accounting, and it wasn't offered there. So I'm like, "But I want to go--I want to do what I said I was going to do." And so I went there for two years, and then transferred.

ML: How were your experiences at UNCG?

SB: Interesting. Met some very--as a matter of fact, I met a very good friend that we're still friends. There were a lot of blacks, coming in, the year I was in, [19]65. We were not the first; there were some that were there before. They were like our big sisters. They were telling us, "Don't go here, don't do this. Don't take this class, because that--" I actually ended up getting my--one of the first classes I took was a history class, and they told me that that was a very racist instructor. I didn't have a choice. I mean, you're first-year, you get placed where you get placed. And I was all upset, because I thought, "Oh, this is going to make me--and I'm not going to do it." But my father said, "You go. You do the best that you can. If you really think that there is a problem, after you've been in the class, then you need to let us know. Come and try to find out." I think I actually earned a B in that class. And I thought, "OK, if this is--what are you going to be up against?" Because we were steered away from some instructors because they didn't want us to be at UNCG. And that was a big group of girls coming in that year, big group of black girls coming in. And we met, and the second year--I mean, I knew I was going to transfer. That was already a given.

I had good friends. One friend of mine, at the end of our first semester of our sophomore year, was not able to return. And she was probably one of the smartest ones. Some of the rest of us were there, you know, praying through, and staying up all night. But she was very smart, and she didn't maintain the grades to stay there. And her family was not--they weren't in a position to really know how to help her. Do you know what I'm saying? Luckily, she had two older sisters, who came and helped her try to find out what was going on. And one of the instructors said to her sister, "If I had known that that

grade was going to be the cause--you know, the top that made her not be able to come back, I would probably have done something different." So, you know, we're like, "Oh, no, they didn't." But I mean, I'm sure that they told the truth. And so, she could not return, and ended up being out that semester, and then she went someplace else to finish out her degree.

So that left the rest of us with a taste like, "OK, we still see it's here." We were through the first year, so you think--and we're thinking, "No." So I had no idea. I'm thinking, "Oh, I'm going to Carolina. That's a lot bigger. Oh, Lord have mercy." But it is what it is, so I mean--and UNCG, I met a lot of good people. I had some good classes. We ate ice cream. There used to be a place called Yum Yum Shop, and we used to--.

ML: It's still there.

SB: Is it?

ML: Mm-hmm.

SB: And we used to go. That was our treat, over the weekend. "Oh, we got to get a break." And we'd go get ice cream. And I loved ice cream. So we'd get a break, and it was a good group of girls. They all went on to do--most of them went on to do good things. And it was just that one incident, really hit home with all of us. So I think everybody tried even harder [to] make sure that we finished.

ML: So, the first sit-in in Greensboro was in 1960.

SB: Yes.

ML: So, being in Greensboro during that time, did you feel compelled to, I don't know, be an activist, or be a part of the movement, or--?

SB: Not necessarily. I mean, of course, you know we went to--everybody had to see where everything had happened. That was a given. And I think we tried to maintain, while we were in Greensboro, maintain a level of, "OK, we're here. Maybe they don't want us here. But we can do what we're supposed to do when we're good students and good people. And that's what we're going to do, and that's how you show people that all this other stuff that you're doing is just stupid." And that's what we did.

We did a lot of things with Bennett [College] and NC A&T University, in terms of us personally going over and visiting, either friends that we knew, or some of the girls--. Like I said, I was with a lot of girls that were from Greensboro, Winston-Salem area. And they had--say, "OK, we'll go visit." I had a couple of family members. I had one family member that was there as an undergrad after I was--so, you know. People to visit, just to get off-campus and see another side. So we felt like we could prove things that--what had been fought for was certainly justified, and that we were continuing it by trying to make sure we got our education, and do the things we were supposed to do. And there were groups, but nothing violent or anything. Just groups to keep you aware of what's going on. So in that, but more low-key.

ML: Were you part of any of those groups?

SB: Just the ones--you know, when we had school, like school groups, like black students getting together, interacting; trying to see if we were still relevant--if things were still relevant. That's the biggest thing. But not like a named group. And at the time, it was a youth, like NAACP. A lot of us were members, to keep our hands on the

poles, because things were changing still. So we wanted that involvement, but we knew we were there for a purpose.

ML: So your involvement with the youth NAACP, was it more like keeping you up-to-date and informational thing?

SB: More, informational. I mean, we didn't do--we weren't part of any sit-ins [or] whatever. Other than, if the question came up as to how do you feel about something, or don't do something [on] this date, and trying to support them, then we'd try to do that, within whatever reason we could. Because most of us were saying, "Well, we're here, and our parents are going to expect us to maintain a certain thing, but we can do limited--some things. Because we want to show that we know that there's a struggle still going on."

ML: So your transition to Chapel Hill. Looking back, how was UNCG different than UNCG--or than Chapel Hill? I'm sorry.

SB: Of course, it was a smaller campus. I had a lot more girlfriends. When I transferred to Carolina, I did not have that group of girlfriends. And [as] a matter of fact, most of my classes were with males. So I ended up having a group of guy friends, because that's who was in accounting that, you know, were fellas. And so, they're like, "OK." And sometimes with fellas, it's--they're more prone to be violent. Not violent, but to want to antagon--keep things going. Sometimes females are a little bit more laid back. So you get involved, and you're like, "OK, now what are they getting ready to do, and do I--am I going to be involved with that or whatever?" Because a lot of them were--there

was so much going on. So you try to keep pace with what's going on, and continue with what--but then UNCG looked a lot safer, perhaps than UNC did, at the time.

ML: All right, so moving into your time at UNC, what's your first memory that you have, going to school there?

SB: Moving in the first day, and I was in Connor dorm. I was trying to think; I said, "Lord, what dorm did I live in?" It was Connor at the time. And moving, I had my room assignment, and going into the room. And my roommate was already there. And my dad took me because my mother had to work that day. My dad took me. And we were getting things, and we noticed a young lady and her family were missing. They decided that she didn't need to be in the room with me. So, for a while, I had a big room with--well, not big, but you know--by myself. And then they found another student who was a transfer from--did she come from Campbell College? I think she did. She was [from] a military family. Her parents were military, rather. And she became my roommate.

And that was a little bit--I always remember that. I'm thinking, "I guess I must have been contagious or something," that this child felt like--I mean, as far as I could tell, an ordinary girl. But I don't think her parents liked that idea. This other girl was white, but military; she probably had had more--. And that was my first memory of the way it was going to be. I'm like, "OK, this is going to be interesting to be in."

ML: How was your relationship with the new roommate?

SB: It was OK. She was coming at things from a different angle. I was there--I knew I had to get done what I was supposed to get done. She was a little bit more free-

spirited. Can I say that? She--. We were roommates for the first year. I was trying to think--first-year. And then, she was under the impression that because I, like I said, tended to have more guy friends than girl--because that's who were in my classes, and that's who I hung with--that maybe I would want to get a smaller room, or do something different. And I said, "I don't plan to lea--. I was assigned here first. I'm going to have this room next year." So she moved in the second year with a friend that she had.

And actually, that year, because I was a regular senior my second year--regular because I went an extra semester. So I was--and I had a freshman. It was part of a program that they were starting, to give undergrads--to give freshmen--you know, something with a senior. To kind of give--. And my roommate happened to be a young black lady from Greenville, North Carolina. And I don't think her parents were real--. Let me back up. So, I went there in [19]67 and [19]68. And in the summer of [19]68, I got married. But I was going back to school. So, her parents get this--you know, pairing her up. And they see that I'm married, so they were probably like, "Who is this person?" So they met me, and then I went down to visit with their daughter, and I think then that was fine.

And she was a really good roommate. You know, really good. As it turned out, for my very last semester there, she went in with her--with another young lady who was-- then they were both sophomores, because I was going to be leaving. And that was fine. I didn't have a problem. I had somebody for like a half a year. And it was OK.

ML: Did you have the option to do this program, or did they assign you this freshman roommate?

SB: They assigned it. And at the time, what they were trying to do--because Carolina, like I said, didn't have a whole bunch of black females, unless they were in nursing, which is what--well, she was in science and nursing, and going into research. Was one of the room--they were trying to assign the young ladies coming in to somebody who'd already been on-campus, and knew the ropes, to give them--because, once again, you're still in the late [19]60s. So you've got people coming from varying backgrounds. Some have come from integrated schools. Some--most of them came from segregated schools, or they hadn't been integrated very long when they came to college.

ML: So how would you describe student life at UNC while you were there?

SB: It was there, and I was there. Um-- [Laughs] I mean, I was probably more into the fact that I had to study. I knew groups--as I said, I hung out with a lot of the fellas, because a lot of our classes were ingrained. I did a lot more with them until after the young ladies came, the freshmen that I met. I kind of-- I'm like a big sister to them, so you try to do good things.

But campus life was OK. I mean, I met some students from other backgrounds, some white students, and others that were good people. Everybody has to adjust to everybody. So it was really, an adjustment for all of us at that time. Even the girls who were your neighbors, and next--whatever, on your--the way the bathrooms and things were set up then, you'd be several of you, not showering together, but with the sinks and things set up. So getting to know people, and try to do that. And a lot of times, I told them, I said, "I don't go to the things that you-all go [to], because I'm in the business

school, and I'm with guys, and I've got to hang with some of the things that is about that, because I've got to get finished." You know?

And this is no reflection of anybody, but a lot of students were there, especially white females, because it was going to be where they met their husband. Or, they were-- and nothing--they were either going into some field that they knew they probably wouldn't have to work at, because they were going to finish school and be a mom, or housewife, or whatever. And I'm going in it [Thumps table], "I got to get out of here, and have some job that's going to maintain me." And so, we were coming at it from a different--so I didn't do--I mean, yeah, I ate meals with--you know, we might say, "We'll meet at such a time to eat," or something like that. But in terms of going to a lot of things--. I didn't pledge anything, so I wasn't anything involved with that. I sort of did [Thumps table] whatever at the time. Like I said, because I was probably more low-key, a lot of times, you have--I wasn't assigned to students, but they'd say, "Well, you just kind of look out for--." Because you're like, "I'm not doing anything that I think was crazy," to me. Everything was real low-key.

So it was OK. And I went home a lot on weekends. When got to UNC, I got a car. My parents bought me a car. So I could go--and a lot of weekends. I stayed when I had classes on Saturday that I used to--. But other than that, a lot of times, I went home or someplace, out to Greensboro, or somewhere. So I didn't do a lot of socializing outside of the normal week stuff.

And I did go to church there. I did do that when I was there.

ML: In Chapel Hill?

SB: Mm-hmm.

ML: Where? Which church was it?

SB: All I know is it was a Methodist church close by. Within walking distance, because I was brought up in a church in a--. I mean, OK, "Well, if I'm going to be there some Sundays, I need to find a place to go to church." And that was good. And they reach out. They try to reach out. But you know, but you can't make a lot of their other meetings and services, because you've got a crazy schedule at school, where you've got to study, and whatever. And like I said, after my first year, I got married. So that limited me to some things, anyway.

ML: Did you have a positive experience, going to that church?

SB: Uh-huh. Pretty much. But then you see a lot of students. A lot of us thought, [Thumps table] "OK, well, we need to go to church." So, be it black, white, blue, green; students were ending up at church on Sunday morning. So that was good.

ML: Were you involved in any organizations on campus?

SB: Other than like a business group club-type deal, but that was about it, because I'm like, "Pooh!" I don't really have the time or focus. I was a student who had to really study to get through my curriculum. I was much involved in that.

ML: So do you remember anything about the black student movement, and the things that they did during your time at UNC?

SB: They were always at the forefront of telling us what was going on. For those of us who weren't at--I mean, we were all black students, so of course we were [Static interference]--in a way, were members. But we didn't always go to all the

meetings. They were--it was more an aware thing. Keeping you aware, and keeping you focused on the fact that even though you're here and trying to do things, there's still so much more we have to do, which I don't think escaped any of us. We knew that. But we knew a way to do it, for some of us, was to complete what we were supposed to do.

ML: Do you remember any of the specific things they did, like helping the food workers, and dining hall, and--?

SB: I know that--and most of that was done by the time I was there--that they had had actual, some sit-ins and stuff, right--[19]66, [19]67, probably, when I was in UNCG. And that was for not only integration, but for trying to improve the rights of the-- and for most of us who were black that were there, we already felt like we needed to try to do--to be more cordial, to be more understanding of the black workers that were there, period. Because most of them were the people that were cleaning, or cooking, or doing whatever. And they always were saying, "We have to keep in mind the fact that they're trying to still earn a living, and do their things, while we're here at school. But we have to be positive, because these are people, too." You know, other people. So they tried to keep us focused on, "Life is still going on, even though you're here in school." I don't know if that answers it, but that's pretty much what I remember.

ML: Yeah, so the food-worker strike was from February to December of [19]69.

SB: A lot of times, they were saying, "Don't go there, to--." Of course, you have other choices anyway, so a lot of times, we didn't. Trying to let them know that we believed in the fact that they needed to be treated better, earn more. So you found

someplace else to eat. You know, I mean, a lot of us weren't on strictly meal plans at that time. You had--see, when I first went to school, you were on a meal plan, because that was UNCG. But the others, you had so much that was--you could go wherever you wanted to go. So then we're like, "OK, well, if they're trying to get better here, then we don't need to go here and support the fact that we don't care what they get paid, because that's not right." So then you went, you know, other places that were not in a spotlight at the time.

ML: OK. So how do you think being a transfer student affected your experiences at UNC? Do you think it was different than had you had the opportunity to go there the entire four years?

SB: UNCG was a good place to start for me. It was smaller, and even though I'd been to Carolina before for some music things, I don't think I knew how big the campus actually was, the number of people. So it was a good thing for me, and to get the realization that, "Even though you're here, people may not want you here." And to get into that mindset before I went to Carolina. Because I'm like, "OK, you may not want me here, but I'm here, and I've got two years behind me. And I just want to get my other two, and be done. And so, just let me do my classes."

I had instructors, even at Carolina, that did not want us there. I had one particular one in my major. And I remember, and he told me, he said, "Well, I don't really think you need to be in accounting." And I thought, [Thumps table] "Man, you can say that now." Because I was in my [senior year?]. "Forget you." And someone told me once, they said, "Well, his wife makes him feel very small, so he has to take it out on the

students.” I said, “He has to take it out on *some* students. He doesn’t take it out on all of them.” And I did not fare very well in the class, but I did enough to get by. “But you’re not changing my mind because you’re doing this in this class. This is what I’m going to do, if the Lord’s willing. And I’m going to do it.”

I mean, even there, I mean, I had the other guy at UNCG that I came out OK with. This one, I didn’t even see going in. Nobody said anything. Because even though I had black fellas that were friends, either they hadn’t had him or-- So, you know, it’s a class maybe with white males. You know, and I’m sitting there. And there were not-- I don’t say there were five of us in accounting when I was there. I doubt there were that many.

ML: Five women?

SB: Five women.

ML: Wow.

SB: Not even female--just female, just women. They weren’t--.

ML: And then how many black women, do you think?

SB: Now? Or the--oh, when--?

ML: When you were there.

SB: Probably not any more--probably not a half-dozen. Really, there weren’t-- see, that’s why they didn’t accept them. Because they wanted-- they wanted us to all change and not do strict accounting, but do bus--and I’m like, “But I want to major in accounting. Understand, I know that I want this.” So they would be in business, and maybe administration or something, with not a concentration in accounting, and I wanted a concentration in accounting, so that was the route I went.

So there were not a lot of females, period, and there were not a lot of black females in any of the business--at the time. They were basically in nursing, what few there were. And some of the things that might lead--like English and stuff--that might lead into maybe a teaching career. But not--there weren't--the girls that came in, after I did; the group that came in, because it was more--were probably more than were going to go into some newer areas that really hadn't be taught. But there weren't a whole lot of just black females there when I went. I'm like, "OK, well, this is what I needed to be aware of before I came here."

And definitely, in my class--like I said, I'd be the only female in some--in most of them. And the only black in a lot, I'm like, "OK." Because the fellas were older, so they were through some of the classes. They were telling me, "Do whatever, and don't do this," and whatever. And some of them were business majors, not necessarily accounting majors. So it was interesting.

ML: Well, do you remember any specific instances with your peers? Were they accepting of you? Your fellow--the people in your class?

SB: For the most part. I mean, you had some that didn't speak to you the whole semester, but that's OK. I mean, you had others--I can remember a couple of white fellas. They'd come at me and say, "OK, well, we're going to go do thus-and-so, because we're going to study for this. And if you are going out, and you want to come and join us." Or they'd--we'd talk about assignments or stuff. I mean, they were encouraging and whatever. And it wasn't--but it wasn't everybody. So I could probably--it probably was--

if it was six people, the others were like, “Well, you’re here. Just don’t bother me, [Thumps table] I’m not going to bother you.” “OK.”

ML: So, do you think that the negativity came from a top-down method of the administration, and the professors?

SB: It possibly did at the time, because it was a change that was happening, and a lot of places were not quite ready for the change. And we were there saying, “Well, we want the change. We want it now.” You know, in our very subtle way of black movement. And they were trying to grasp whatever, and that’s what happened. Yeah, so I’m sure it didn’t just start with the indivi-- I’m sure there were tones and things that we didn’t see, but you could get it from the instructors, or you could get it from the other students.

And I guess, after they saw that most of us, for the most part, were going to try to maintain and be there, they [said], “You just leave me alone; I’ll leave you alone.” “OK. That’s fine.” Because I didn’t hang out with a lot of them. Like I said, I hung out with the fellas. Then, as girls came into other areas, and you get to meet them because of your dorm and stuff, you might hang with them. But it was a male-dominated thing. And if I had thought that way before, I would have had changed, maybe. I don’t know. But it was accounting, and I’m like, “OK.” Everybody says, “You like math?” I’m like, “Accounting is not really math. It’s different.” But I did like math. And so, I go, “Well, business, math. Whatever.”

ML: Besides the incidents you told me about, your first roommate, do you remember any other personal encounters on campus? Like in regards to racial relations, or--?

SB: Other than the fact that you don't get included, even if--. Sometimes in the dorm, if there are things going on, in a certain group, they may feel like you don't--. You wouldn't feel comfortable being involved with their little group set. You know what I'm saying? And you find out later, and you think, "Oh, why'd y'all do such-and-such?" "Oh, well, we just decided, this group of us." But like if you're in the dorm, or on the hall, it [would be] kind of be nice to be invited, whether you would or not.

The second year, like I said, I had a better roommate. So I mean, we did things, even if other people didn't. And plus I was married, and I was back-and-forth--my ex-husband was back-and-forth. So I'm like, "OK, you know." But you didn't get the close friendship with anybody. Not like--I had had more of that at UNCG. Because there was a group of black girls coming in, and we all hung together, because we were all roommates, too. Most of us were rooming with each other. See, I was at Carolina, and I was, for a while, rooming with white students. You know, found out that things didn't grow out of my ears, and I wasn't so contagious, and so whatever.

And then, like I said, they were accepting, but it wasn't like, "Would you want to go home with me," if they lived close, "for dinner?" Or the things that maybe some of us would do, if we were doing that. And you didn't have that, but that was OK. I certainly, if my parents came up, and there was somebody close who was basically bla--. You know, you'll say, "Well, they're going to take me out to dinner, if you'd like to come with us.

You know, enjoy.” But maybe not so much for the girls, but they know their parents, and they know family. And so maybe you don’t bring that to the--. And so you’re like, “You don’t understand--” You know. They were like, “My family’s coming, blah, blah.” You hear people talking about it. And they’d be inviting--but you’re like, “Well, I wouldn’t expect anybody--.” That’s the way I felt. I wasn’t going to get one anyway, and if I did, I’d probably fall out. Because I’m like, “Oh, gosh, that’s [a surprise?].” But I mean, the girls themselves I think were trying to be as accepting as they thought they could, given their backgrounds, and whatever.

ML: If you feel comfortable talking about it, how was it, being married and still--?

SB: It was different.

ML: Yeah.

SB: It was different. All my family said was, “You are going to complete school?” “Yes, I’m going to complete school.” [Pause] When the girls found out, because I--we didn’t--I mean, I told them that in the summer--a lot of them were, “[Oh, how?] are you doing that?” You know, and he was someplace else working. I’m like, “I’m doing what I have to do, because I don’t intend that I’m going to stop, and he’s going to take care of me for the rest of my life. I’m this far, you know? And it was a little stressful, but I was still there to finish what I was supposed to do. So I managed to get through it.

ML: What do you think was your most joyous time at UNC?

SB: Graduation day. No--. [Laughs] No, [what’s?] joyous were my parents, because like I said, I came back to march just for them. Well, not just for them, but they--

I think it did my dad good to see [me]. We took his picture near the old well, so that was good. It was good for--I guess, getting through all of my--getting through everything, and still feeling like, "I can do this." Even though it was getting close to the end, I mean like, "I can actually do this."

I didn't have as much of a social life as my ex-husband did when he was on campus, because he was on campus with me for a short span of time. But I didn't have the--mainly because I'm a different person. He's a fella. And there were fellas there, so of course they're going to do things. Mine was like, "OK, I'm here. [Thumps table] I spent time off-campus, on other campuses with friends." And I kept thinking, "But this is the path I chose, and this is what I want to do. And it's going to come out OK." And so, when I finally finished, it was like, "I got done. I'm finished. I completed what I said I was going to do. [Thumps table] I have my degree. And now, I interviewed and stuff."

And I was happy with the interviewing process. If that's anything. People came, and I had a cousin who was a recruiter for RCA at the time, and he said, "Well, interview with RCA." Because they were in New Jersey at the time, and he said--and I said, "Well, I'm not planning to move to New Jersey, so therefore--." "Yeah," and he said, "But interview anyway. It's good experience." And so I sort of enjoyed the--you get to meet people. You get to see, and they get to see different sides of you or ask questions and say things, and this is what we're doing. And you thought, "We're up to that point, where I can actually go and do this, and make some decisions." And I made it. So that was, I guess --you know, a good time. When you're in it, I don't know that it's always so--

joyous is not the word. But you're thinking of the end. The end of what you wanted to do, or that, "I'm accomplishing what I set out to do."

ML: So where was your husband, the last year?

SB: The last year, he was in Virginia, in Williamsburg. Because he was working for--actually working for Woolworth at the time, as a manager. And that was his particular store that he--so he was there that last year or so. So I was up there, when I had to go back for the fall, I was in Williamsburg that summer. But then I came back in the fall, and thankfully was getting my last courses in.

ML: So, let's move to your time after UNC. What did you do after you graduated?

SB: I took a little vacation. Well, no. I actually finished my course work. And we were--by that time, he--my ex-husband was back in the area. And we were going to move to Greensboro. Because he had [a] position, I think at another Woolworth in Greensboro then, and we were--I was set to go to work for the IRS as an agent, or as an auditor, or something. I mean, that's where I had said--but I wanted to take a little break. And he and I ended up going to New Jersey to visit family. And this was the cousin's husband, who had said, "Interview with RCA." And he said, "Well, while you're here, why don't you go out there and talk to them?" And I said, "What if I got something? I couldn't--my family's not going to want me to move up here." But I actually got a job offer while I was on vacation. So we said--. And he was looking to make a change anyway, and he was more into marketing and stuff like that, so we made the move.

ML: So how long were you in New Jersey?

SB: Nine years.

ML: And did you work with RCA the entire time you were there?

SB: I worked with RCA for about two years, and then I went with a non-profit group, the Philadelphia Urban Coalition, where we helped businesses get started. I worked with the Small Business Administration, and all that good stuff, and helped some minority businesses get their start. And so, I worked with them for six or seven years before I moved. And then I moved back to North Carolina.

ML: Is that when you had your daughter?

SB: My daughter was born in New Jersey, yeah, uh-huh. And she'll tell you she's not from North Carolina, she's from [New Jersey]. She said, "Not that there's anything--." But it (), "I wasn't born here." I said, "No you weren't." We came back when she was a little over four.

ML: And then you moved to--.

SB: Up.

ML: North Sanford?

SB: No, I moved to--I came back home, and I went to Jacksonville, North Carolina, and I worked with a bank as an auditor. I would have probably stayed there, but my goal had been years ago--and it's gone now--to sit for CPA exam. Because I thought, "I'm going to do this." So I actually got a job with a CPA firm in Durham. So I moved from Jacksonville with the bank-auditing stuff to Durham, and then found out that wasn't going to be the life for me, because I was divorced by then with a small child. But traveling and--. I'm like, "Oh, no. As much as I--I can't do this. I've got to find

something different.” And was reading the paper in Durham one night, and saw an ad for something here in Sanford for--and I thought, [Thumps table] “I could do that.” You know, the things they were qual--I’m like, “I can do that. I’ve done,” you know, whatever. And I actually sent a résumé in. Then, that’s when you used--they had it in paper. And you did résumé--you know, send it in, mailed it in. I didn’t think anything more about it until the person actually called me and said, “We have your [résumé?], and we are interested.” I’m like, “Oh, please.”

And so I actually came down to--because this is like a half-way point--kind of a half-way point for my parents, when they’d pick my daughter up for a break or something, and she’d come visit them. And so I was bringing her at one particular time, and I said, “Well, I can meet you, like, that--whatever.” And met with him, and he said, “Well, I think we’re really interested. Now, can you come and do it?” And I’m like, “You people, I’m trying to maintain my job,” you know, where I was. But I came, and they offered me a job, and my dad said, “Well, how fast can you take it?” Because it was more money than I was making as a staff accountant. And at the time, I know with a family, I needed to do that. Plus, as an accountant, you have to travel sometimes, and I wasn’t in a position right then, when she was little, to do that. I didn’t think that was a good fit for me, being a single parent.

So I decided to come here, and however many years--thirty-one years later, I’m--well, we’re still here. But I mean, I tell people, “I’m not from Sanford, I’ve just lived here that long.”

ML: So are your parents still in Maxton ()--?

SB: My parents, they are deceased now. But they were both in Maxton, uh-huh. My mother's been dead twelve or thirteen years. My dad died twenty-seven years ago. But I actually got to Sanford [Thumps table] before he passed, because he told me if I kept moving, he was going to have to shoot my foot, because he wanted me to stay in one place. And I said, "But [I will move about?]." And he said, "While you're there now, then stay there." And not too long after that, he got sick and passed. But my mother--so I told her, I said, "Well, I stayed with the company. And through all the ups and downs of the company, just managed to stay there and do whatever for thirty-some years."

ML: And do you still work there?

SB: No.

ML: No?

SB: I retired. I decided it was time to get out before I went crazy and they went cra--no. [Laughs] There were some changes going on. It's a part of the Fiat group, automotive. And now they're Fiat-Chrysler, Daimler-Chrysler, whatever; however they term it now.

And the question had been posed to my boss, who's a lady. They wanted to know when I might be retiring. And then she asked it in a good way, not as a way that I could come back and say, "Oh, well you harassed me--." Because they wanted to line up my replacement. I told her I really hadn't thought about it. I said, "I haven't," and I was telling the truth. And I was something like--I'd prayed to get to sixty-five, so I could be sure I had the Medicare, because it was--. And then I was probably sixty-five or so. And so I said, "Well, I'll let you know."

And then I was talking to my daughter, I said, "I need to do something." I always prayed, "Lord, if it's going to be my time to leave someplace, if there is any way you can let me know. I know that's asking a lot of you." So when she--I said, "OK, this is his way of telling me, 'Get everything in order, because if you don't leave when you--then there's somebody--you know.'" So I ended up giving her a time framework and ended up staying six or eight months longer than I had originally planned. But that's because she was looking for a particular person to fill whatever. Because she said, "Well, you don't have to leave," because that boss that asked her left. I mean, he was transferred. And she said, "You can just--" And I said to myself, I said, "No, I don't really--. I think if they start looking to hire up, and looking at ages--." Because I was one of the oldest ones there. I have people that have been there longer than I have, but they weren't as old as I was. So I'm like, "OK, you know, just go with the flow. Just--." So I retired a couple of--well, it's been almost three years now. So I'm thankful to get to the place where you don't have to worry about it. It was a lot. I did a lot.

We were Italian-based, American part of the Italian company. And we had to do a lot, which meant when you get there at eight o'clock in the morning, it's already two o'clock in the afternoon, their time. So you're already behind from whatever. And then, when you hope they've gone home, they're still there. At maybe two o'clock our time, you think, "Well, they're gone." Somebody's sending you something; an email, or [whatever?]. [Thumps table] A telephone call. "Go home. You know? Can't you just go home? Leave me alone." So it was time. I was putting in a lot of overtime, and not getting paid for it. So I thought it was time.

And they were going to be changing some things. And I said, "You know, it might just be a good time just to not have to worry about how to learn systems." I've been to Italy to learn a couple, say, I'm like, "You've done enough now. It's time to get out while you can."

ML: How was that; going to Italy?

SB: If we could have done some sightseeing, it would have been wonderful. We went--. I went twice for two different trainings, once with my boss, and then once with a co-worker. And it was interesting. We met a lot of people from other countries.

The lady that was--. The first year, we had to use the ear phones, because it was in Italian. And they had it for each of the countries, because it's--China was there, and Germany; all the countries. So they had it set up. And then we broke into groups [phone rings]--. We broke into groups that would [phone rings]--.

It was learning a new system. And my boss and I actually had to come back and decipher. But the ladies we trained with were very good, and they spoke some English. Well, one spoke very good English; she speaks five languages, or something. And so, that was good.

And the second time, the co-worker and I were there to learn, and change system again. And they wanted people--. And I came back, and I said, "OK, I'm going to be leaving this company soon, because I'm not--I don't understand. I'm not the most computer-literate person in the world. I don't understand all these things they were telling me about." And my co-worker was very good at that. And she said, "Oh, I understood it." I'm like, "OK, fine." So I'm thinking, "I'll just be finding another job." And this was

2001, before 9/11. So I was thinking, “What am I going to do? I’m older now. I’ve got to find something else.” And it didn’t work out--I mean, it worked out that I was the one-- because I’d always been doing it. I was the one to get the training, and have to work with them on the phone, through email, through everything else, to get it done. And my boss said, “Well, the other lady didn’t really have an interest in it, and she said she doesn’t know like you know some of the things. So it’s still yours.” I’m like, “OK.” So that was 2001.

So by 2013, I was thinking, [Whispers] “It’s about time for me to do something else.” So I said, “I don’t know if I’ll do anything [else].” I do volunteer stuff now for church and stuff, but I don’t know if I’ll--. I never thought I would retire and be retired. But I hadn’t seen anything else that really piqued my interest, and I’ve got things to do.

ML: I was going to ask you what you do these days. So you said volunteering?

SB: I do. I’m the treasurer of our church. So that could be busy, if you let it. And I do a lot with that, because I’m responsible for the moneys, and all the accounts, and stuff like that. So that still keeps my accounting going.

I’m a member of a couple of other organizations. One, I call it an adult 4-H for the ladies. And I don’t know why they have me in there, because I don’t like to cook extra, and I don’t like to sew, or do--. But I went in because a friend was in there, and she wanted some more minority faces, as she called it, in the group. And they do have some interesting topics. We learn lifestyle things. We’ve learned about credit stuff. We do all kinds of things across the board. And I help with them, and I’ll do volunteer for their groups. We take some of our information [Phone buzzes] to churches, and to schools, and

other agencies like that, when we have a program. Is that something you need to get? Your friend's saying, "Where is she? Why won't she answer the phone?" But so I do that. And I'm still trying to tackle things here. I've been trying to tackle them for a while.

I did a lot in the years that I was here of caregiving, because my parents lived about a little over an hour away. And most of--a lot of my aunts and things that were older were there, too. So I was a caregiver to--the last one passed away in like 2009. So I was back and forth on weekends and stuff, so a lot of things I didn't ever get to do, or didn't do, because I had to--that was priority. Family was priority. And then after they passed, of course, too, there's always the stuff that goes with someone's passing, and trying to get it all settled, and everything. So it's taken me a while. But I stayed-- I don't stay bored. And I volunteer at the school sometimes. And when my daughter needs somebody to talk about accounting, I'll--since she teaches in middle school, I'll go tell them what little bit I do know, things like that.

I work with Girl Scouts. I've been a Girl Scout for almost thirty years; not quite thirty yet. Because I went as an adult. But she went up through it, and earned her Gold Award. So I stayed in it after she left. So I try to help with them, as they need me. I don't have a troop anymore, thank the Lord.

ML: Well, that probably keeps you busy.

SB: It does. It does. It's good to keep interaction with some of your--I would do more, but the children now are all different. And I don't want to kill anybody's child at my age, because I really don't want to go to jail.

ML: [Laughs]

SB: And so, that kind of thing. But it's-- sometimes I'll think, "Well, I can do something." I think, "No, you can't. You still need--." I have a garage full--I'm not talking about the house--of things that I brought from my parents, and my family members; memorabilia that I need to go through and sort. I'm not talking about thing[s], I'm talking about scrap-books, and things off the walls that were very significant at [the time], that are still packed up in the boxes in the garage. So I'm trying to get myself to the point of, "Well, if I can get here," done a little bit. Then I go work in the garage. And then I'll have a place to put it. I won't have to worry about moving it, [or] taking it down. But that's why my daughter said, "My yearbook is probably out there."

ML: Okay, so my last question. Looking back, how would you describe your time at UNC?

SB: The challenge that I told you, you probably had. It was very--, and "interesting" is not a good word, but it was informative. And I guess it set the tone for me coming into the work world, because--and when I say "tone," I don't mean just the curriculum. I mean actually going--actually knowing that everything is not going to be readily yours. OK? That you're going to have to make your way through it; that you're not going to always have people that are going to support you, but you know what you've done. You know how to do things, and you can do it.

And so you go out--if you conquered them--I felt like it was a conquest. If I conquered Carolina, I could go about anywhere, and do anything, because I meet people now, and I'm like, "Black, white, blue, green; it doesn't matter. You're just people." And

I know what I went through, and I think--I like to help people feel comfortable, at ease, and knowing that they can do things.

So I'm like--. I gained all of that, because I came from a high school class of forty-nine. There were forty-nine in my class [Thumps table]. And a very small class. And I think, "We've got people in our class who are--." There's a fella now who is a CPA who wasn't even interested in that stuff in high school. Some have been into business and higher parts of it. We've got people that are teachers. People have done things. And I'm thinking, to come from that background, and go to a school--and I was the first at my school to attempt to go to a white school. [Thumps table] And to think, as somebody, as a teacher told me, "Don't go up there and fail." [Thumps table] Encouraging words, sir. Really, really good. But I mean, everybody else was saying, "You can do that." I'm thinking, "I can do this." So now I think, "I can not only say I want to do it, but I can do it."

And if Carolina didn't teach me anything else, it taught me, "You can do this. [Thumps table] You have to keep focusing on what it is you want to accomplish, and you'll do it. And it may not always work out exactly--." It's not the plan that I had fifty years ago, or whatever. But it's the plan I guess I was supposed to have, and I--it wasn't His plan for me; it was my plan for me, and He had to come down and say--the Lord-- "This is where you're going to need to go, and you're going to need to do this," because I always--my dad had said, "Well, you'll be a CPA." And I never got there. [Thumps table] And I always thought, "Oh, you know--." But I thought, "But what you did, and what your life, and your work accounts for a lot of stuff, and it's important." So that's good.

And I mean, he wouldn't--I think in this day, he, [my dad], would be saying, "Well, you did well. You did OK." But that was something that's in the back of your mind, "That's what I'm supposed to do," and I didn't. I'm like, "OK, but you accomplished maintaining, and raising a child, and getting your life's work done, and caregiving," and I'll never know how I did that. With all of them from a distance, I had to do that, because there were so few of us cousins, or children that we had to take on responsibility. Family is very important. [Pen clicks] And so I felt like that prepared me for the challenges of today. So I'm like, "OK." So whatever it is now, it's like, "OK." A lot of times, I look back, and I think, "If you got through Carolina, UNCG Car--you can handle this." So, I guess it makes you stronger, or more set on accomplishing what you know you can.

ML: Do you have anything else that you'd like to share with me?

SB: Oh, I've shared more than enough.

ML: [Laughs]

SB: My fifteen minutes--which, over an hour and a half--.

ML: That is what you told me on the phone.

SB: Yeah.

ML: Do you have any questions for me?

SB: Well, how do you--how is the life there now? What do you think, as a person--. OK. No, I don't have anything else for you. And I encourage everybody to just do the best they can, wherever they are, Carolina, or otherwise.

END OF INTERVIEW

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