

## TRANSCRIPT—GLORIA WARREN

Interviewee: GLORIA WARREN  
Interviewer: Self-interview, with prepared questions  
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## START OF SIDE A

GLORIA WARREN: [about one minute of silence]--on Carr Street, and we were the only African-American family on that block. My grandmother, Leena Cole, had lived there for many years. In fact, some of my aunts were born there, in that house. We lived at the end of a driveway. There was my grandmother's house, my aunt's house, and in later years my sister and cousin built a house along this same driveway.

But at any rate, we were the only black family—I'm sorry, there was one other black family who were cousins of my mother's, who lived what we called over on the hill, John and Rosa Cole. But aside from my mother, my father, my sister and I, later another brother and sister, my aunt and her husband and three children, and the family of Coles on the hill, who were adults by the time I came to know who they were, we were the only black family in the neighborhood [tape stops].

Now the people who lived on the street, the Rigsbys and the Williamses and some other names of old families, white families, in Carrboro—these families had grown up with my mother. My mother moved there with her mother and father when I guess she was very young, I imagine probably younger than six or about six years old. And so she grew up with these families. But they never played together. She told me that she and her sisters generally just played with themselves.

Just as we did we I came along. We didn't play with the white children on the street. These was one white girl about our age whose name was Gail Humphrey. The Humphreys lived on the corner of Greensboro and Carr Street and had a huge house there because the Humphreys owned the laundry on Greensboro Street. And we could play with her sometimes. But she had to come down to our house. We never went to her house to play.

She died I guess before she—she died when she was about ten years old, from rabies. She had a big collie, a beautiful collie named Rex. As I understand her Rex bit her and he had rabies and she died. And so we didn't have any other playmates.

We played with each other, the five of us. There was my sister and I until the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was just my sister and I and my cousins next door, Caroline and Betty, and their brother Floyd whom we called Jake. We all played together [tape stops].

Now remember we lived in Carrboro, not Chapel Hill. Although black people in Carrboro associated more with Chapel Hill than with Carrboro because there were very few African-American families in Carrboro during that time. And so we had very few playmates who would venture into Carrboro to play with us. Very rarely did we have kids come to play with us before we became teenagers. As we got to be teenagers we had people from Chapel Hill, our friends, come visit us sometimes. But for the most part, we simply played with and amused ourselves with each other [tape stops].

My parents always worked. They were not professional people. My father I believe went to the sixth grade. His father died during the flu epidemic I believe in the 1930s. And he had to work. And my mom dropped out of school—she's the oldest of five girls—she dropped out of school when she was about twelve or thirteen when her father died. She dropped high school to care of her younger sisters [tape stops].

I think having to leave school early had a tremendous impact on my mom because all her life she had this burning desire for education. She stopped school I believe in the sixth or seventh grade. And I remember when I was in the sixth grade or so, she went back to school—we were going to the old OCTS then, Orange County Training School—and she started back to school and she went for a year or so. And she became pregnant with my brother. And so she stopped, she had my brother, she came back to school, and she eventually graduated from high school. So at one point my mother and I were in—I was in junior high, what they call now, we called high school then, but I was in junior high and she was in high school—we were in school at the same time. I can't for the life of me figure out how my mom did that, took care of us as a family, worked to help my dad because—as I said he only went to the sixth grade—and he worked at the Sigma Nu house on the campus of the university as a janitor. And actually he had three jobs. Because he worked as a janitor—that was his regular job—at the Sigma Nu house. Then, at lunchtime, he would go across the street, walk over to the Carolina Inn and wait tables. Then after lunch he would go back to the

fraternity house, finish up his work day there, and then in the evening he'd go down to what used to be the ranch house and wait tables there as well. So as long as I can remember my dad always worked at least two jobs [tape stops].

Of course, they didn't have to worry about child care. Because my grandmother, Leena, who was my mom's mom, was always home. She didn't work outside the home, at least not until World War II. She never worked outside the home. I understand from my aunts and my mom that before their father died and right after he died they had a farm up out by Mount Zion Church where they farmed some land that a relative then allowed them to raise vegetables and things on. But when I moved in, when we were living with her, when I was about four years old in the early 1940s, she didn't work. She basically stayed home. She had a garden where she grew everything. She used to sell vegetables to the local grocery stores. And that's how she made a living [tape stops].

Now my grandmother was considered during her day to be a well-educated person. She was born in Harnett County, which she liked to brag about. And I have her diploma where she graduated from Franklin Academy, which was then probably about to the seventh or eighth grade. And so she had enough education to become a teacher. And so she taught home economics in Orange County when she moved up with her husband, my grandfather—his name was Bradsher Cole. He too was a schoolteacher. I spoke once with one of his students—whose name I can't remember right now but I do have the interview on tape—this student of his talked about my grandfather and how he taught in Orange County out by Hickory Grove. Sometimes the students wouldn't have anything to eat and my grandfather would bring peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to his students because they'd come to school but they didn't have food.

My grandfather, Leena's husband, as I said died when my mom was quite young. I think he died some time in the early to mid-1920s. And he left each one of his children—he had five daughters, the youngest at that time was probably not even six years old—he left each one of them a lot. And so over the years—even today—much of that land is still owned by the family. My grandmother managed to pay taxes on it and to keep it up.

So for their time, they were considered educated people because they had finished. They could go as high in school as black people could go at that time, without of course going to college. My aunt tells me—although I have no record of it—my mother's sister who lived next door to her, Georgia Hogan, told

me that my grandfather Bradsher went to Shaw and I have a picture of a Shaw university class and he is in the picture. So it appears that Bradsher did have some college education [tape stops].

Now in terms of pay, I don't know exactly how much money my parents made. I don't have any idea because I never heard them talk about money. They never shared with me how much money they made. I didn't feel that we were poor—a lot of black people didn't find that out until the War on Poverty—but during the time that I was growing up I didn't feel that we were poor because we always had plenty to eat, we had clothes to wear, we could go to school, we could participate in things in school.

So I didn't feel that we were—but looking back on it now I believe that they made very meager salaries. Because my mom basically always worked as a domestic. She worked for Dr. Patterson and some other families. I recall that as a youngster when the Pattersons would go to Myrtle Beach, that my mom went along to do the cooking and the cleaning. For a couple of summers she took me with her. Of course I protested vigorously because I really wanted to be home; I was going into my early teens, maybe twelve or thirteen, and I wanted to be back in Chapel Hill. But anyway, she took me with her to help her with the cooking and the cleaning because the family that she went with, the Pattersons, had three smaller children.

I remember also that she worked in what used to be the dairy bar across from the post office on Franklin Street downtown.

Getting back to my mom's education—after she finished high school, she did go to what was then North Carolina State College and is now Central, she did go there for about a year. It was a real struggle for her. I remember it was my last year of high school. She was working at the dairy bar, washing dishes. She'd clean off the counter and wash dishes. So she'd take me to work with her to wash dishes while she studied and I can remember particularly when she took me to work on Sunday night. I really didn't want to go because I wanted to be with my boyfriend because Sunday we could basically be with our boyfriends. I couldn't go. But my mom was very patient—she'd sit in the corner and study while I washed dishes. There were times when I'd help her write her papers. We had an old Royal typewriter that I'd type her papers up for her.

And that's just another indication of my mom's desire always just to get an education. And when she finally had to drop out of school, she didn't let that stop her because she just read constantly, just constantly.

She also worked in the bookstore which was right next to the dairy bar. I'm not sure she worked at both at the same time but she worked at both places. When she was working at the bookstore, I remember one summer in particular, things were kind of slow and we didn't have any organized activities to go to that year. And so I loved to read—I've always loved to read. My mom would bring me a book home every night. And I'd read that book that night and she'd take it back the next day because she couldn't pay for it. I started out liking Perry Mason mysteries and I read just a whole lot of books that summer. I can't remember all of them. But she'd ask me, what kind of book would you like me to bring you tonight? I'd tell her what kind, and she'd bring it to me, and I had to finish for the next day.

So I grew up in a house where education was highly valued. And I think that's true of all the people in Chapel Hill and Carrboro during my generation. African-American families—two-parent or one-parent families—in my opinion placed a great deal of emphasis on getting an education, on learning a skill so that you could do something, so you could take care of yourself, so you could contribute to the community.

Because the African-American community was pretty insular when I was growing up. We had very little contact with whites. And I felt rather secure when I was growing up. Looking back on it, though, and examining some things that I thought and felt, we were really quite restricted. On my street, we never played in the street, in front of my house. Because we were the only black family. No one every said, "Don't play in the street." But we didn't get any indication from my grandmother, who watched us most of the time, that we could play in the street. However, I remember the white kids did play in the street.

I remember when I went to South Carolina with my mother, when she went with the family that she worked for as a domestic, we slept downstairs, in one room downstairs. And I remember it was full of sand and sandcrabs and all other kinds of bugs that grow at the beach. I remember just being very angry. I don't know that I was angry because they were white. I was angry because they were upstairs and I was downstairs and even though I was almost a teenager—I may have been thirteen—I just didn't like sleeping downstairs and I told my mom that.

But at any rate, I grew up at a time when education was very important to black people in Chapel Hill and Carrboro [tape stops].

Now getting back to my family. Within the family, of course we lived in a two-generation family: my grandmother, my father, who was her son-in-law, and my mother and my sister and I before my younger brother and sister came along. Everybody was a disciplinarian. My grandmother was a strict disciplinarian. She just didn't play. She was a small woman—I don't think she ever weighed more than 110 pounds—but she was extremely strong and very stern. She did a lot of the discipline. My mother disciplined us. My father did when he had to. If we were really bad—of course I never thought I was really bad—but my mother and my grandmother would say, "We're going to tell your father when he comes home and he'll take care of you." Well my dad never got home until really late at night—many times after ten o'clock. My mother would be waiting to tell him what I had done or did on my sister and he'd have to whip us. And he really didn't like doing that and he said he didn't because he wasn't there when it happened. But during those days, you know, it was important to parents to discipline those children, and to give them some sense of what you could and couldn't do, and in fact you did it to respect your elders.

My dad disciplined us only when he had to. I remember when I was about, oh, maybe thirteen. The last time he whipped me he told me he wasn't going to do that anymore. He told me I was getting too big and he told my mom he was not going to whip me anymore and he was going to have to deal with me a different way.

Now when I say whipping, I'm not talking about beatings where they drew blood. I'm talking about a few licks with a belt. We didn't get punishments. They just went ahead and got the beating over with. I think I like that better than getting punished.

But at any rate, when I was about thirteen or fourteen my dad didn't whip me anymore. My mom did, but it was a few licks. It was nothing all that bad. Because I did have a lot of mouth—I was a pretty mouthy, smart-aleck little kid. And pretty headstrong. So looking back on it I think it did me more good than harm [tape stops].

When I think about the hours that my mom and dad put in at work, it seems that they worked long hours. They'd leave home in the morning, early, usually eight o'clock or before, and usually didn't come home until late evening, like five or six o'clock. My mom at one time worked at the university laundry pressing clothes, which she described as just very, very hard work. My daddy, as I indicated earlier, very seldom got home before ten o'clock at night because he worked three jobs. And of course my dad had a

very active social life. He really enjoyed himself. When he got off work he socialized some times so he didn't get home until late at night. But they worked long hours for very low pay.

When I was growing up—as I look back on it and think back on it—I felt constricted, I felt like I was in a box, and if I stepped outside of that box I would get in serious trouble. I think when I look back on it what I was feeling were the effects of racism. I don't recall us ever talking about it at home. But I recall being disciplined and taught to and talked to in a way that led me to believe that I had a place and I needed to stay in that place and if I got out of that place it would make white people unhappy. Particularly our neighbors, who, like many white people in the South, called my grandmother Aunt Leena.

This calling older African-American women Aunt or Auntie was a sure carry-over from slavery because my grandmother was surely not their aunt. I'd like to think that it was a sign of respect. But I didn't feel that it was a sign of respect then, but I didn't know what I thought it was. My grandmother didn't really seem to mind because many of the whites in the neighborhood, she called by their first name, which was quite unusual—well, not necessarily quite unusual but was somewhat unusual to call white people by their first name—particularly in Carrboro, North Carolina, during the time that I was growing up [tape stops].

In terms of our family life, my mother and father really didn't get to see much of each other because they worked all the time. Like I said my grandmother was the primary care taker. When they saw each other it was generally late in the evening. They had a good relationship I believe. My father was very respectful to my grandmother, who was his mother-in-law. His mother was living at the time and he used to take me to see her every Sunday. She lived in Durham. And so he was quite respectful of her.

But my grandmother basically ran the household. She did the cooking and the cleaning. She was a good cook. Boy, she could make the best—what we called apple fritters, what today we would call apple turnovers. Because she was a home economics major and taught home economics, she was just an excellent cook. So we always had good meals [tape stops].

Well, to look back on it I'd say that I had a happy childhood. I was happy then and as I look back on it now, I believe that that was the case. As I said earlier I did feel the effects of racism. Although I didn't know what it was then, when I talk about this place that I felt I needed to stay in. Because in my opinion, as long as you stayed in your place you were OK. In some way I believe that my parents and my grandparents and other African-American people I came in contact with communicated to me—I don't remember

anybody just coming up and saying that something would happen to me if I did such-and-such a thing or that a white person would do something to me if I did such-and-such a thing—but somehow or other they communicated either by their actions, inferences or whatever that there were certain things I could and couldn't do, certain places I could and could not go, and certain behavior that was expected of me, particularly in the presence of whites. I felt restricted. Really, I did. I didn't feel free, as I think about it now. I think I was a little fearful that I might forget what my place was. Or the box may be made smaller and I would not know that it was made smaller and I might step outside of it and I was a little fearful of that. I was as fearful of whites would do to me as much as I was about what particularly my grandmother would do to me if I "ran into" whites in a negative way.

But all in all, when I look back on it, it was a happy childhood despite this feeling of being constricted because my life was in the black community. Except to walk through the white community to get to Chapel Hill to the black community to which we the blacks in Carrboro were connected. When we walked to school—which I'll be talking about later—we'd walk through the black community, we didn't have to come into contact with whites at all. Although I had a good three mile walk, sometimes it felt like five miles, every day across town. Because I couldn't go to the elementary school that was about a half of mile from where I lived. So basically I grew up in a black community, which, from my point of view, was pretty self contained.

We didn't have any need to come into contact with whites except for the days when you go to some of the grocery stores. There was a grocery store on the corner of Greensboro and Carr Street—Riggs' ( ). And they knew my grandmother, my family very well. And my grandmother and my mother had an account there—you could get things and put them on the account and they always paid them, I guess at the end of the month or end of the week or whenever. But I remember that as a young girl, we had to go in through the back door. The back door is now where a restaurant is—the building is still there. We had to go in through the back door and to come in by the butchery department. And we basically, if there were whites in the store, we had to wait until they were waited on. I remember my grandmother would send us to the store for things. And the whites were pleasant to us because they knew we were Aunt Leena's children, grandchildren, as they would call us. And so we'd take bottles up there, when you could get five cents for a bottle of whatever you got for a bottle. We'd go get things for my grandmother—she was cooking. But it



was just one of those things where I just felt it. I felt that there was a place for me and that I had to stay in that place. And if I got out of it, they would be unhappy, they'd tell my grandmother, and I would be in serious trouble.

Now I really think it all had to do with racism. Because when I think back on it, no matter how kind the whites thought they were, and they probably sincerely believed they were, I think that had a lot to do with the fact that we were not troublemakers. I don't know what would have happened had we been troublemakers. I think that my grandmother in particular would not have been pleased.

I'm kind of jumping ahead a bit but I remember when my mother, in the 1950s, when I had left home and come up and actually moved to Baltimore to go to school. My mom wanted my brother to go to the elementary school that was half a mile away from where we lived. And she filed a suit. She got some teachers, some local black teachers, to file suit with her. Well the teachers eventually dropped out of this suit because they were pressured by the school board. And I really believe that the white principal of the school board pressured the school board members, who were mostly white, to dissuade them from staying on this suit. I believe that their jobs were on the line. My mom, she was a domestic worker, she worked hard, she was determined that their children would get a good education, and so she hung in there. Eventually the schools were integrated. And my brother's case, Vickers v. The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education, eventually did go to court. By that time of course a couple of other students had integrated and by that time he was in high school.

But my mother was just that kind of a fighter. She also ran for the town council in Carrboro. She didn't win but—because I remember typing and writing up campaign material for her. She didn't have a committee. She just had herself and me—there were a couple of other people that worked with her, but mostly it was just the family getting information out. She went to meetings. She just felt—my mother was just angry about the fact that opportunities were not available to her. For a long while, blacks couldn't vote. For a long while, until Reverend Menley was appointed to the school board, there were no blacks on the school board. And my momma, she just didn't like that. And she definitely didn't like sending my brother all the way across town to school when he could go to a school that was about half a mile away. And in fact, my brother was born in January. And at that time, there was something about whenever your birthday was you couldn't start school until a certain time. My mother sent him to St. Joseph's Baptist Church in

Durham. They had a kindergarten. So that when he started school in Chapel Hill my mother wanted him to start in the first grade as opposed to starting at the wrong age. She sent him to St. Joseph's so he could start the first grade in the Chapel Hill school system at the right age. And I would get up every morning for a year or so, take him to a friend of mine's house who lived right across the street from where First Baptist Street is right now, and I'd leave my brother there because someone there was sending their daughter to Durham. And we didn't have a car—my daddy didn't drive, my mom didn't drive—but this family had a car and their daughter went to St. Joseph's. So my brother went to St. Joseph's. I don't know how my mom and dad paid for it, but it's just another indication of my mom's determination that her children would have a good education.

As I said, at the time he went to St. Joseph's, I wasn't in college, I was really in high school. So I would walk him from Carrboro to Chapel Hill, across from where First Baptist Church is now, leave him there, wait for my friend who lived in the house, we were in the same grade. It was a really difficult time for me, having to do all that before I went to school in the morning [tape stops].

But this is not unusual. These are the kinds of things that African-Americans did to get an education. These are the kinds of things that parents insisted that their children do because they felt that education was the way to a better life [tape stops].

During the years when I was growing up in Chapel Hill, the community did essentially help raise me. I can remember the black community helped raise me. I can remember walking uptown, as we called it in Carrboro, which meant walking up Main Street Carrboro into Chapel Hill to go to church or school or wherever, that if we did anything that parents did not approve of, we could rest assured that some other black person would see us and would tell our mothers. Even in church, we didn't usually sit with our parents or our relatives. But if someone saw us misbehaving in church, they would tell our relatives. So in a sense, we were raised and watched over by the community. As I indicated earlier, the black community during the time that I was growing up in Carrboro, in Chapel Hill, was rather insular. And so rather tight-knit. I felt safe as long as I stayed in my place. And as I've indicated earlier, I was sometimes ( ) about where that place was.

But I did feel safe, I felt loved. Our parents tried to provide us with toys at Christmas and gifts for birthdays. Birthday parties—I can remember that I had a sweet sixteen birthday party at the community

center. I remember looking forward to that with great anticipation. I remember getting a bicycle at Christmas. Getting a record player that played forty-fives [tape stops].

I don't remember how much forty-five records cost back in those days. I do know that I only had a very few. A lot of them were of white artists. I listened to them a lot. I loved music. My mother was one of these church musicians at First Baptist and played there for well over forty years. So we always had a piano in the house. I took piano lessons. My mother worked for one of the professors and his wife at the university. She did domestic work for them to pay for music lessons for my sister and I. And I remember once a week we had to walk from Carrboro all the way down to where the old Chapel Hill library used to be on Franklin Street to take music lessons from Miss Rice. While I liked music I wasn't such a good student. I never learned to play really good. I just memorized what I had to do for my concerts and go to that. But my mother really wanted one of us to take music. And she saw that we got music lessons. Even after I went off to college in 1955, my mother still worked for the Rices to pay for the music lessons that I had taken because she worked more than one domestic job and so she had to work for the Rices when she could fit in to pay for our lessons. I don't know how much they cost. But I do know that during at least my first year of college, she did do this to pay for the lessons that my sister and I had taken.

Also one summer when I was probably around twelve, we went to camp at ( ) Mountain. I don't know how it was paid for—as I tell you I don't know how my mom and dad paid for all this stuff considering their salary—but I went to camp for maybe a week. It was a good experience. I liked it. One of the first times I had an opportunity to stay away from home. Looking back on it I think it was just my parents' way of trying to expose us to a lot of things so that we could aspire to work hard, to take advantage of what life had to offer, the opportunities that would come before us.

And for some reason, I think that working as a domestic—although it's not the only way to find out—but working as a domestic helped my mother see what it would take to get along in the world, what other things were available to her children. They couldn't go to camp for white kids, and they couldn't work the places white kids worked. But there were some things they could do—to use the term used by some historians—to uplift themselves. I think she tried to expose us to that—books, piano lessons, camp. And it wasn't just me. I think it was typical of many of the parents in Chapel Hill and Carrboro during that

time. Now I can't say specifically because I don't remember which of my friends participated in these things but I know that my family wasn't the only one.

There were a number of black families who lived in Chapel Hill who were professionals, where the mother and/or father were teachers or nurses or professional people because they had complete college. And I associated with these children—we played together, we were in school together—but their parents didn't have to work like mine did. And so I believe that their lifestyle was a little bit different than mine in terms of the things that they could have and doing the kind of work that their parents did [tape stops].

And because these people were college-educated and because of the emphasis on getting an education, I think they were looked up to in the community. I think that adults as well as the children looked up to these families. I hesitate to call any names because I'm sure I can't remember all of them so I won't do that, but there were families who lived in Chapel Hill who had been to college and were looked upon by others as community leaders [tape stops].

There are two men that I remember as especially active in the community. One was—his daughter was in my class—Mr. ( ) Robinson. I remember him. I believe he was the first African-American on the Chapel Hill--. I'm not sure what position he had in the government of Chapel Hill, but he had some important position in the town government. He was well respected in the black community. His wife was well respected. His daughter was in my class. I was young at the time, but I do remember feeling as though he represented all the African-American people in Chapel Hill and in Carrboro. Which really wasn't the case because Carrboro, where I lived, had no African Americans in government for a long, long time after I left Chapel Hill. But during that time the black community in Carrboro and Chapel Hill at least in my point of view felt as one. Although I don't want to speak for the people in Chapel Hill. I'm not sure how they felt about blacks in Carrboro. I think they kind of [tape stops].

But you have to remember that the university was in Chapel Hill, not in Carrboro, so there might have been some inter-class tension. If not tension, some feeling there [tape stops].

I wanted to talk a little bit more about going to school in Chapel Hill during the time that I lived there. The school I went to, the teachers, how I felt about the kind of education I got. Well, as I stated earlier, when I went to elementary school, in fact all the way through seventh or eighth grade—about seventh grade—I went to Orange County Training School and I made that long walk for many years. But

eventually the school board did get buses and we were able to ride the bus across town. And so I don't remember walking but maybe three or four years—maybe a couple of years—but I remember at some point we did ride the school bus. Picked us up at the corner of Carr and Greensboro Streets I believe and we rode the bus to and from school.

Now the school was a wooden building with first grade through twelfth when I started. Again, it was a safe place. I felt safe, that the people at the school cared about me. The principal, Mr. McDougle, he was a very stern man, very strict. But he set real high standards. He was a no-nonsense kind of person. But we all respected him because at least I felt that he was concerned about me—I can't say he cared—but he was concerned that I make the best of the opportunity to get an education. Here again if you did something wrong in school, or you misbehaved, the teachers would tell your parents and you would be dealt with accordingly.

We used to have school plays and pageants. We used to have May Days where we'd wrap the maypole and we'd come to school dressed in the kings and queens and their attendants—I'm not sure about a king, I know we did have queens. We had evening gowns on, and hair done all pretty. And the playground was red clay, but it was an exciting time for us when we'd have May Day. There was a program out on the field and it was just a good place to get an education.

We didn't always have new books, but the books that we did have, our teachers did use them. We took learning seriously.

I remember that much about Orange County Training School. And I remember playing basketball. I was not a good basketball player but I played on the team. I used to sweat it every year, wondering, "My god am I going to make it this year?" But I made the team. And that was a time when girls played half-court. You could play up to the line, and then you could go over the line.

But my mom and dad, and particularly my dad, came to all my games. He worked at night as a waiter at the ranch house in those years. But whenever he finished waiting tables, whether it was the last quarter or whatever, I could see him come through that door. And when I would see my daddy come through that door, boy I felt so good. Sometimes I'd be sitting on the bench—I hardly got any playing time. But I felt so good to see my dad come through that door. He never—he hardly ever, let's put it that way—missed a game. I think my daddy was a particularly handsome man. And I would just be so glad to see him.

He always dressed so sharp and clean. He's a very friendly person. As I think about it, my mom and dad always supported what I did. What we did as kids. They came to PTA meetings; my mom was active at PTA meetings at one time. I'm not sure if she was the president, but she did hold an office. She was quite active, as were other parents in the African-American community, lots of parents during that time were active in the PTA in trying to ensure that the school [tape stops].

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

GW: We had a gym at Orange County Training School. But when Lincoln High School was built, there was no gym that I recall. As I remember, Lincoln High School had an auditorium where we would have assemblies and things. I could be wrong on this because this was forty years ago almost—but I think that we played our games at OCTS. And by the way, when we were at the old school, at OCTS, we had lunch in a separate building [tape stops]. —go outside the building to go to the cafeteria. In fact, there were classrooms downstairs. We had to go outside of the building to get down to the classrooms. Even if it was raining, there were some classrooms down there. If that was your class, that's where you had to go.

But back to Lincoln. It was a new school when we moved in. We really had a good time there. The teachers were committed, as I remember. A lot of teachers whose names I can't remember now. I remember the home economics teacher, Miss Pope, who lives in Raleigh. I was a debutante in my junior or senior year, I don't remember. But those of us who were debutantes attended the ball in Raleigh. She had us ready. We—at least my family wasn't rich, and a lot of made our own suits to wear to the tea. And I remember I made this green wool suit. It was just the prettiest material my mom bought me with gold buttons, a short jacket, treated skirt. And I never did like sewing. So Miss Pope helped me finish my suit. But we did go to Raleigh. I had an escort. My mom and dad were there. I have pictures of my mom and dad there in their ball gown and tuxedo and me as a debutante with my dad. That was a wonderful time.

I tell you: despite the fact that racism existed, discrimination was there, that we were definitely segregated—there were just two separate communities at least as far as I knew—it was a good time. There were good times. We had food to eat. We had parents who cared for us. We lived in a community where we felt free within the black community. We knew—at least I felt—after I heard my mom talk about—she

didn't call them injustices but that's what I call them now—but some of the things that were wrong that she didn't like, and not having access to certain things. But for the most part those were happy times.

Now remember I left Chapel Hill when I graduated from high school in 1955. In June, I was accepted at Morgan—actually I was accepted at Fisk, Morgan, and another university, another historically black college. I knew I couldn't go to Fisk because, by looking through the catalog and what I had heard about it, that's where the elite black people went. And I didn't consider us to be elite although I didn't think that we were poor. I just didn't feel that I would fit in. My dad, who worked at the university and was used to being around college kids, he told me I could go anywhere I wanted to go. He said, "Don't worry about how much it costs." I could go anywhere. And I almost went to Fisk. But I decided that I couldn't have the kind of wardrobe that I would need if I went to Fisk. So I decided to go to Morgan and I came to Baltimore in September of 1955, which is where I've lived ever since.

Now because I'm the only child in my family who lives away from home, I've come back home at least once a month every year that I've been up here except for perhaps the time when my children were young and I missed a Christmas holiday or something. But for the most part I'd catch the train or the bus or whatever and go home.

And I remember going home on the train and coming to Baltimore—I'm not going to talk about Baltimore—but I can tell you, when I came here, I thought that I was going North only to find out that Baltimore is a border State, the last State before you get to the free State of Delaware. And segregation and discrimination and racism was just as obvious here as it was there. I basically stayed in the black community. The thing was, you could ride the bus and you could sit where you wanted to on the bus. And there were some kinds of jobs that you could do outside the black community, which was somewhere unlike Chapel Hill. But it was the same thing.

I didn't come here to escape racism. I just wanted to see what was on the other side of Richmond, Virginia, which was as far north as I had been of Chapel Hill when I was living at home [tape stops].

But getting back to my days at Lincoln High School. I was talking about Miss Pope and going to the debutante ball—which was I think an effort on the part of black teachers to help us move up in the world, to show us that there were things that we could participate in. They tried to expose us to that. I remember the basketball coach—whose name I can't remember now, believe it or not. But she was a very

stern coach. As I said I wasn't one of the better players on the team—somehow or other I made it. And it was about winning. But we learned other things too as well. It was fun.

When I went to Lincoln High School, I didn't ride the bus anymore because it wasn't too far from my house. I could just walk down the hill and we'd be at school. I don't remember riding the bus.

I do recall sometimes the price of the school lunch would go up. And I remember one year—it must have been in the tenth grade, maybe—the prices went up and my dad, he gave us money for the cafeteria. So when the price went up, my mom and dad decided, "We're not going to pay. We're just going to let the kids come home." Because my grandma was home and she cooked a big meal in the middle of the day. So what my dad did was, he had a taxicab. We didn't have a car—my dad always rode in taxis—he would have a cab pick us up at school, take us home. The cab would leave. We would eat lunch. And then the cab would come back and pick us up and take us to school. Now that was my sister and I. Now my cousins, Betty and Caroline, who lived right next door to me, I don't remember—I think for a while they rode the cab with us as well. But I think at some point my parents figured out it was cheaper just to let us eat at school. Besides, we missed the socializing. You know, coming home, the playtime at school, whatever boys and girls do at school. So we then went back to eating in the cafeteria just as we had done before the prices went up. That didn't last that long.

I think I just wanted to point out that my daddy didn't have a car—he walked or got somebody to take him or caught a cab just about everywhere he went. And one thing I always thought—my dad walked home a lot at night, particularly in the summertime. And Carrboro, it shuts down at dark in the wintertime. If it's dark at five, it shuts down. There was nothing in the street, not even leaves blowing in the street. And he would walk home and he would sing. You could hear my dad sing coming down Main Street in Carrboro. And then he would turn on Greensboro Street and he would come down to Carr Street and he would just be singing. And I believe—I don't know why I came to even think about this—but I believe he did that so that the whites would know who it was. Because, you know, I believe that a black person being on the street at that time at night might have had to answer some questions [tape stops]. So I think he'd sing so that the police ( ) or whites would know that it was him. I'm pretty sure they assume that that was Lee Vickers going home.



And another interesting thing, too. When I started going to Morgan and I started going home on the bus—I took the Trailways bus home. At that time, once you got past, I think, Washington, you had to sit in the back in the bus. And coming up from North Carolina you had to sit in the back of the bus. You couldn't sit anywhere you wanted to when I first came up here. I remember one Thanksgiving I came home, and I didn't get home until about maybe two o'clock in the morning. And that had been my first Thanksgiving away. Generally the policemen would meet the bus at the bus station. Now this was a segregated bus station—an entrance for whites and an entrance for coloreds—whatever that meant—well it meant African-American of course. And of course there were also separate water fountains in the bus station because there were separate washrooms.

But at any rate, the policemen would meet the bus. I remember this, that on more than one occasion, when the bus got into Chapel Hill down on Franklin Street in the early hours of the morning—the policemen would take me home. Two policemen would be at the bus station. They would ask me who I was. I told them I was Lybia ( )'s daughter and I lived in Carrboro. My grandmother was Leena Cole. And they would take me home.

And interestingly enough I was not afraid. As segregated as I knew it was, as racist as I knew it was, I was not afraid. They'd take me home and drop me off. And the next time I came home the same thing happened. I think that's kind of an interesting aspect of what I was like between the races in Chapel Hill during that time [tape stops].

Anyway, back to Lincoln High School again. When I was at Lincoln I played in the band. I started out playing the saxophone. And Mr. Bell, who was just a wonderful band director, just a great music teacher, soon asked me to play the oboe and I did. My parents rented the instruments for me to play. I think I wrote in the school paper for a while. I remember going to Greensboro. All the African-American bands would get together in Greensboro once a year. There'd be this competition for best band, for best high school band. And not always but a good deal of the time, we'd get mentioned some way. Either a person would be mentioned because of how well he interpreted a piece, and I remember one year that the oboe got mentioned—I don't remember the name of the symphony, but that was such a thrill for me. It wasn't unusual for our band to receive some kind of recognition. Mr. Bell was good. Of course, his wife was the choir director, and she was good as well. They were a good team.

Another teacher I remember—although he didn't teach me—was Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith taught shop and the boys respected him. I remember my cousin, he taught my cousin—not how to drive, but my cousin drove the school bus under Mr. Smith. That was the kind of teacher he was. He tried to give the young men skills, teach them something they could use when they left school. No matter what they did, they could do something with their hands. That was important in those days: to be able, it didn't matter what you did as long as you did honest work, if you were a carpenter or a plasterer, if you going on to college—as long as you could do something with your hands to earn a living.

And of course everybody could go to college. But there was no stigma attached to you because you didn't go to college. I can remember people who graduated before I did. Along with me, when we would talk about what we were going to do after graduation, particularly in my class, some would say, "Well, I'm going to go to college." And some of the guys would say, "Well, I'm going to lay bricks with Mr. Register." A lot of the guys used to work with him. And I think even today, some of them still—they do plaster work, they lay bricks, they do all kinds of work that I guess—you make a lot more money now than you did back then. But the thing then was that you did something—it didn't matter what you did—that you were going to do something. And that was something else that we got from our teachers. We were focused on what are you going to do when you finish high school. Not just finish high school but what are you going to do. They tried to point you in a direction, a way to make a living. In that way you could make a contribution to the black community, and that was important, being able to be a responsible member of the black community. That was something else that I carry with me. I even tell my grandchildren now: "What is it that you want to do? You want to go to college. For what? What are going to do with your life?"

We of course always had a prom. And it was always so exciting. I can remember trying to figure out who was my date going to be. You know, Chapel Hill was a small town. And we all knew everybody. We knew kids in classes ahead and behind us. Because our classes weren't that large [tape stops]. High school graduating class, there were about thirty-two people. I imagine, when we started out say in the seventh grade, seventh or eighth grade, there may have been maybe forty, forty-one or forty-two, there weren't a lot of dropouts from my class that I can remember. Some people maybe didn't pass to the next grade. And so they graduated or passed behind us. But for the most part, the majority—I'd say ninety percent or more of the people who started with us in the seventh grade—ended up with us in the twelfth

grade. But we had proms. I had pictures of us without gowns, with those crinolyn slips under them and high heel ankle strap shoes like they're wearing now with the toes and everything out. And the guys would get us corsages. We'd get our hair done. If you had a boyfriend, good. If you didn't have a boyfriend, you still tried to get a date. I can't remember anybody not going without a date. Probably there were people who did go without a date. As I recall in the 1950s, when we went to the prom, you really had to have a date. Even if you didn't like the person. You just didn't go to the prom by yourself. There may have been people who went by themselves, but I just couldn't do that. I just thought I had to have a date.

But we had a lot of fun and we got to stay out late. We'd go to breakfast to somebody's house the next morning. We didn't have any limousines. We also tried to pick a guy who could drive and had a car or had access to a car. Not many guys had cars during those days, but had access to a car. That was one time when we could be alone with a guy in a car. Boy, was that something.

Now the class that I graduated in in June of 1955, we were the first class to graduate from Lincoln High School. And I remember our class motto, "We Shall Not Pass This Way Again." We were so tired of high school. We were ready to get on with living, ready to get on with college and work. Some people got married. We were ready to go out and start living. So we'd walk up and down the halls reciting our motto, "We Shall Not Pass This Way Again."

I remember one of my teachers, Miss Robinson, used to just shake her head at us. Speaking of Miss Robinson, she taught the sciences, like biology. We were going to kill this mouse. And Beatrice Robinson and I, we didn't want to kill the mouse. So what we did is we hid the mouse and they couldn't find it. Eventually, we had to give the mouse up. We really didn't like having to put the mouse to sleep with formaldehyde. And then sit there and do an autopsy on the mouse. We thought that was just gruesome. Probably nowadays who knows what the animal rights activists would say about something like that.

At any rate, another teacher who was quite memorable and made quite an impression on all of us was Miss Turner. Miss Turner taught French. And she was a most elegant woman, a most elegant woman. She exuded good manners and elegance. She was extremely stern, though, extremely stern. She dressed very well. She carried herself in a stately manner. And to this day, I can sing the first verse and possibly two of the French national anthem—in French. She was serious about us learning the language. I took French as my language, because I wanted to go to college and I knew I needed a foreign language. But she

was extremely impressive and concerned about our learning and quite strict and quite stern. But we respected her. Back then I don't guess we called it love, but looking back on it I know at least for us I could say, I did, I loved her because of how she carried herself and because I knew she had expectations for all of us, not just me but for all of us.

That's what I mean about it being a good time. Those were good days. We were in a segregated school system. The segregated school system that I came out of was extremely good for me. It prepared me. When I got to college—even when I went to graduate school in social work—I could write a sentence. In the segregated school system, you learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. I could write. It's been that way all through my educational experience. So in a segregated system, you felt that people cared about you. You felt that they wanted you to make something of yourself, that you were not just a number in a class. I don't recall people being passed on just because they didn't know the work. You didn't know the work? You didn't get promoted. That was it. You got left behind. And people accepted that.

Another thing about going to school in Chapel Hill—I thought it was over, I don't know the population but it wasn't large compared to today's classes of a thousand or more kids in a school compared to today's school populations of two or three thousand kids in a school. So we knew everybody. I knew people in the classes ahead of me and people in my sister's class, who were a year younger than I. And we often maintained contact with these people after they went away to college.

I remember one person in particular who shall remain anonymous [tape stops]. He was a year of two ahead of me. He was at Hampton, and when I came up to Morgan—I don't know who wrote who first, but he wrote me one time and I didn't write him back. So when he didn't hear from me for a long time, the last letter I got from him was written on toilet tissue. And what it said was, "This is what I think of you!" And I thought that was just the funniest thing. That was just an odd way of sending me a message. This is just an example of how you got to know people outside of your class because the student body was not so large [tape stops].

There were other people too who were not in my class but—particularly when we were at Orange County Training School, she was Mildred Farrington then. And a friend of hers, Lucille Edwards. Some other people who were, like, four years ahead of us. We used to have play mothers. We would see them at

recess and we would play like we were their children and they'd have little treats for us and they'd talk with us. They were our play mothers. That was a rather unique experience I think [tape stops].

I haven't talked a whole lot about the church in our lives so I just wanted to wrap up by talking about how important church was. A lot of our socializing revolved around the church, and actually the community center when we were old enough to attend. We went to Sunday school on Sunday morning. We stayed for church. We often would go to prayer meeting on Wednesday night. If there were Sunday afternoon services at other churches, particularly the wholeness churches—we liked to go to the wholeness churches because we liked to see the way they shouted, man. I mean, it was really a spirit-filled service. But we went to church because that's where our parents were most of the time. And also a great place for socializing. That's where we saw our boyfriends. But even if we didn't see them in church, we'd see them at the church and they'd walk us home.

So the church is a place that was really an important part of our lives when I was growing up. It's practically all that my mother was doing in terms of socializing—my father was a little more outgoing and did a lot more things socially—but my mom, her life and her sister's life and her mother's social life revolved around the church. There was one thing that my aunt Georgia, my mother's sister, who lived next door to us, would do every Sunday, is that we'd leave Second Baptist Church where we belonged—my mom and dad belong for First Baptist, but I joined Second Baptist with my cousins and my aunt. But my daddy would leave the church, walk down maybe a couple of blocks to the dairy bar where they sold the best ice cream. But we had to go through the back door—there was a side door, we couldn't walk into the front steps of the dairy bar. And she'd buy the ice cream and that was her treat for her family on Sunday. Sometimes my grandmother would give my sister and I money and we would buy ice cream as well, for us.

I recall in recent years a friend of mine told me the incident in which another friend of ours, who used to go to the dairy bar back in the '50s when it was segregated, a few years ago maybe some time during the 1980s, walked into the dairy bar—there's not side entrance any more—before the dairy bar closed, ordered ice cream, different flavors, on cones and all of that. And then after it was all put together, the person waiting on her got it all together all these different cones and different flavors, my girlfriend told them to keep it. She said, "That's for all the times that you made us come in that side door." [tape stops].

But all in all we survived those years of segregation and discrimination [tape stops].

--the years when I was growing up in Chapel Hill, it was in Carrboro. It was a happy time. I felt loved. I felt protected within the black community. I felt that people cared about what happened to me. I felt that the total community, I felt safe. But as I've gotten older, I've looked back and I've [tape stops] I've looked at some of the feelings that I had at that time [tape stops]. I came from a poor, working-class, African-American family who wanted their children to have more than they. I lived in a community that, as I looked back on it, when I was growing up it seemed like Nirvana. I loved it. When I think about it now, there was a lot about it that wasn't good. But that community helped shape me. It helped me go to Morgan, where I earned a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in social work, a master's degree in history, and a Ph.D. in history, which will be conferred actually on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

And I think that these achievements go back to my roots and the experiences I had in that segregated, discriminated environment in Chapel Hill. And I know that there were people in the African-American community—people like Mr. Hibbard Robinson and Mr. Smith and other people like Miss Rebecca Park, who for years before I left and after I left in 1955 have been out in the forefront of race relations and trying to level the playing field [tape stops]. Another people I think was an activist was Reverend Manley. And there are others whose names I can't recall. I think Mr. Preston Weaver—I believe that's his name. There are others who laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights [tape stops] demonstrations during the 1960s. Because by that time, a new generation of African-American students were coming along, and the country as a whole, African-Americans in the country as a whole were basically tired of second-rate citizenship.

And so while I have good memories of what it was like to grow up in Chapel Hill, I don't discount the fact that we did live in a society where we were not allowed to participate fully in that society.

END OF SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW