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### Cora Ann Westmoreland

Kelli Johnson

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Kelli Johnson:

This is Kelli Johnson and I'm conducting an oral history interview with Cora Westmoreland. And this is a part of the National Park Service African Americans Civil Rights History and Appalachia Grant Program.

Kelli Johnson:

So could you tell me your full name?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My name is Cora Ann Westmoreland.

Kelli Johnson:

And what's your birthday?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

August the 19th, 1959.

Kelli Johnson:

And where were you born?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I was born here in Huntington, West Virginia.

Kelli Johnson:

And what hospital were you born at? I always find this is a interesting question.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I want to say I was born at Cabell Huntington's Hospital.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay. All right.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah, yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

Because there was a time period in there, a lot of people were born at the Railroad's Hospital. If your people were working at the railroads.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, my dad was a railroad-

Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But we weren't born there.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

When I say we I'm talking about me and my sisters.

Kelli Johnson:

So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No brothers.

Kelli Johnson:

No brothers.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Two sisters. I'm the youngest.

Kelli Johnson:

Are you?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

And what are their names?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My oldest sister's name is Nita. My middle sister's name is Janet.

Kelli Johnson:

And what about your parents? Could you tell me their names and where they're from?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My father's name is William Rogers and he was from Spartanburg. What is it? South Carolina. And that's where his family stemmed at.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My mother, on the other hand, her name is Margaret Birchfield. And she came from Louisa, Kentucky. And I will say that my mother, and I can say this because she's no longer with us, she was half white.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But if you would've said that to her, that wouldn't have been good. My dad, on the other side, he came up through hardship in the south because actually his mother, her name is Cora, I'm named after my grandparents.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

When I say grandparents, I'm talking about my father's mother's name was Cora. My mother's mother's name was Doshi and my nickname is Doby.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh, wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. And then I had Cora. Okay. Which some people say that's my professional name. Whatever. But my grandmother on my dad's side was born just when slavery was abolished.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And my dad's side of the family, the family has done a lineage that goes all the way back to her mother, which she was a slave and her name was Kizzy. And they can't go any further back because after her it's just lines in the book.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. Just markings. And I know that they continue to keep up with the births that comes in the family recent, up until this time. I have never seen it. I would like to see the family tree.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because from what I understand, it's pretty big. I think she had five children and of course, back in those days, they was having a lot of kids.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Like my dad, we only had three, but his sister had like eight.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I think eight. So there was big families back in those days. But just moving up, since you're talking about family and stuff, when we were little kids, we was caught up in segregation.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, let me say this. Our parents never focused on color. We never knew whether we was Black, white, whatever, that was never discussed.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But we knew that there were certain places we would never go and they wouldn't go.

Kelli Johnson:

Just to be clear, we're talking about Huntington West Virginia?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Huntington, West Virginia, yes. We always ate at home. We never really ate out. I never knew why, but for a kid you don't know, right?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But during those times, when I was born in '59, it was still tough for Black people during that time which I did not know. But one thing I do know, just listening to grownups, which was very rare, my mother was lighter than me.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

She could pass for white and my dad was darker skinned and he had to be careful about where he took her because of the racial issues. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

A Black man with a white woman, because she looked white. Okay. So there was a lot of places we did not go because of that. He would not even take her to his family's side in Spartanburg.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow. So they wouldn't go back down.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No.

Kelli Johnson:

To the Carolina's.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No.

Kelli Johnson:

I don't want to interrupt your story, so I apologize, but I just want to put in context. So did you live in the Fairfield neighborhood or what we call the Fairfield neighborhood of Huntington?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No. We lived in West End.

Kelli Johnson:

The West End. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

We stayed on Seventh Street in the alley. And back in those days, I noticed a lot of Black people lived in alleys because they wasn't welcomed in the neighborhood.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. Because the alley we lived in Seventh Street, along that alley was a lot of Black people that stayed in apartments or over garage apartments.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Over garages. And there was a hospital named Guthrie Hospital, which was the Black hospital, which no longer is there now. We were like Kentucky, Ohio people and my mom's dad, John, moved right across the Sixth Street bridge.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

He was just right at the base of it, but he moved over because my grandmother was so sick and the hospital was not far. And back in those days, Black people didn't have transportation. You know what I'm saying?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So he moved over in West Virginia so that he could have medical access for my grandmother and we pretty much just stayed. He didn't like West Virginia. He didn't like West Virginia. But anyway, just as a sidebar on that.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But in the 60s growing up, we go there. Is that okay?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. This is your turn.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. The 60s growing up again, like I said, there was no color identified with us. My best friend actually was a white girl and her parents seemed to be okay with it.

Kelli Johnson:

You went to an integrated school? Because I'm trying to remember, I think it was 1960s when Douglas closed. So that was probably the end of segregated schools in Huntington.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, speaking of schools, we went to Buffington Elementary School. There was only five Blacks in that school. And during that time that was segregation, we wasn't even aware of civil rights, nothing. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was an all white school and it was me and my two older sisters and my two older cousins. We were the only ones in that school of color.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And we never knew why they pretty much mistreated us, was real mean toward us, didn't really help us a lot in our education. On the playground, the white kids didn't want to play with us. I've never picked up on any prejudice. I just thought that they didn't like us.

Kelli Johnson:

For some reason, who knows what? But not the color of your skin.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No, because it was never identified. You can't go there, you can't do this. It was never that. And I'm glad my parents did that in a lot of ways.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But in some ways I wish they had of given us a idea of what was happening because I think we would've probably handled it better.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because I did tell you the story about my second grade teacher, whom I cannot remember her name, but I could see her. She was a short white lady with cat glasses, with salt and pepper hair. That's what I remember of her.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And she had on dress because back in those days women wore dresses with those thick pantyhose with the pump shoes. We were sitting around a reading table, back then they had the big wooden reading table.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I was sitting at the head, like right here and she was standing at the table, and we was all around the table, the students.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And we was working on the word once and for whatever reason, which I still don't know to this day, she said, "The next kid that says onced, I'm going to hit."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I'm just sitting there minding my own business because I didn't know that I was saying onced. And I said onced. I thought I said once and next thing I know she backhanded me.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Oh my God, that hurt so bad across the bridge of my nose. And during that time I used to have real bad nosebleeds and my nose started pouring the blood. It hurt so bad. You know when you get those big tears? You can't even hold them back.

Kelli Johnson:

Mm-hmm.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I was starting to cry and she says, "Just shut up and go to the bathroom and clean yourself up." And I'm thinking, "Oh my God, my nose." It was dripping and I'm running to the bathroom.

Kelli Johnson:

And how old were you? You were in elementary school.



Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Second grade. Would have been...

Kelli Johnson:

Like seven.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah, yeah. And back then they had those little toilet tissues.

Kelli Johnson:

They came out of the yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. Little tissue paper. It wasn't the roll that we had now. And after going through a whole bunch of them and I was just crying, I was shaking because I thought that I couldn't get my nose to stop bleeding and then it hurt. It was hurting so bad.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So it finally started stopping and I finally got myself together. I was still boo-hooing and crying because my nose was hurting.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I went back and I sat at my table, and so I had some toilet tissue in my hand and it was bloody and I took it and I put it in the, back then that you had the wooden desk with the little slots in the desk, and I took my tissue and I put it behind my books all the way back in the corner.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I said, "I'm going to tell my mommy." And so I went home and I told her, and of course my mother was livid. Came back to school the next day.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And of course she lied, said, "I never did that." Even though I had a bruise across my nose. I guess I did it myself. And I told her, I said, "Yes, she did mommy. Yes she did." And I said, "I'll prove it to you."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so I went in my desk to get that toilet tissue out and it was gone. She had went through my stuff and threw away that toilet tissue.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I said, "Mama, I'm telling you it was full of blood." So anyway, of course, I'ma say it. My mother cussed her out and told her that she'll come back and beat her up if she ever put her hands on me again. The woman never touched me again. But I've never forgotten that. That was really bad.

Kelli Johnson:

Did she think your mother was white or did she just assume she was light skinned because she was here with her Black daughter or?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. Yeah. To be honest with you, I don't know what she knows what she was thinking.

Kelli Johnson:

Who knows what she thought, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Right. I just know that my mother was brow beating her. Okay. And she wasn't standing back and the woman was arguing with her saying that she didn't do it, she didn't do it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I'm pulling on her shirt. Yes she did, yes she did, yes she did. And then the argument was done. The lady never messed with me again. And I don't remember ever having a problem with her in anything again.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I did pass through third grade, but we still had that stigma where no one wanted to play with us. The teachers wasn't very helpful. We were just shunned.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Even when we stood in the line for our lunch, the kids' backs was always to us, it was never like, "Hey, how you doing?" Or anything like that.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They never really conversated with us.

Kelli Johnson:

And you really didn't have very much interaction with the other student-

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No.

Kelli Johnson:

The bare minimum.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Bare minimum. Only if it was classroom. Like I said, playground was you played by yourself. And if I went and sat on the swing next to somebody, they would get up and leave. It was that kind of thing.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But again, I didn't know why. I said, "Dad, they just don't like me. I don't know what I did to them." Because you start questioning yourself, even as a kid.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But it was one of those times when it was just really horrible for Black people. And I never knew why we never went out to eat. We didn't go out to eat because we couldn't.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

There were certain places you could not go in Huntington, Black folk. Okay. So a lot of Black folks did their own thing. They had their own clubs, they had their own restaurants, they had their own barber shops.

Kelli Johnson:

But you guys were away from that center of the Black community, which centered around eighth avenue.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. And then I'll tell you we moved up on Charleston Avenue. This had to be 19 probably 68. I was going into the fifth grade and my oldest sister was going to Oley Junior High, seventh grade.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

This was before the middle school thing changing all the grade. But she was born there and then my other sister she went to Fairfield and that was such a culture shock. That's when I realized about color.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. I wasn't around Black people. I was literally scared of Black people. I would actually cross the street. When I saw a Black person walking down the street, I would cross over and pass the person, then cross back over.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow. Because that was so new to you.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Oh my gosh. I was like, "Who are these people?" Literally it was like, "Who are these people? Why is their skin darker than mine?"

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I had no idea.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then in school they talk about bullies now, there was bullies back then. The only difference is they're not as aggressive with weapons as they were back then.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

There was the fights and all that, but the bullying was more of intimidation, taking your lunch. Because I never had money going to school because in elementary school you just ate the lunch.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, they might take your lunch or take something off your tray or bullying this classroom, telling you, "You better do this for me or I'm going to beat you up after school."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So it was an experience. I survived it and believe it or not, I hung with the bullies.

Kelli Johnson:

Love they enemy.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes, exactly. I hung with the bullies because that was my protection. And sometimes I look back on and laugh because some of the bullies I thought were bullies really wasn't bullies. They were just mean, but they liked me.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so that was a big thing for me because prior to that it was like, nobody likes me. But yeah, I went to Simms for two years, fifth and sixth grade, and it was okay. It was a mixture. It was more of an adjustment for me because like I said, I was in school with all white people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Even my cousins, we didn't see color. So we just knew, okay, we're in school. But then when we went to Simms and then Oley, it was just like, "Oh my gosh."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was really a major cultural for us because not only did we see white people, we saw Black people, we saw other people of color and we weren't used to that.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then too, we had to fight our way again to be accepted. Especially my oldest sister, she was being bullied by some girls and they were taking her lunch money because in junior high school you had to take 50 cent, 25 cent or whatever to school because they didn't have what you had in elementary.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so they would always take her lunch money until one day she got brave enough and she started fighting back and that changed from that point on.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But it's just amazing how we've come from there to where we are now. But yet still there's stigma. There's still the stigma.

Kelli Johnson:

So do you remember, because you said you didn't have those conversations about race at home, so it didn't sound like there were any conversations about the civil rights movement at home.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No.

Kelli Johnson:

So did you have any of those conversations in school? Was that talked about at all?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

In high school 10th grade we had a class called Black history.

Kelli Johnson:

You did?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. Carolyn Johnson, Dr. Carolyn Johnson, she used to be an employee. She taught it.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And that was before they took it out of school, changed the curriculum, but she taught it and that's when I started hearing about, believe it or not, the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I had no idea. When we was younger coming up, we had the black and white TV. The parents had control of the TV and then two in our household, it was very strict. We come up in a strict household.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And if they say, "Go to your room." You went with no questions asked, you just got up and left. You didn't have no control over the TV. What was on, was on.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so I don't remember that being on TV and that could have just been a protective mechanism that my mom and dad had. My dad worked for the railroad. My mother was a homemaker up until a certain point.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

As I got older, then she started going out of the household and she worked in housekeeping. So my dad would work during the day, she would work in the evening.

Kelli Johnson:

Did she work in private homes or at hotels or just anywhere? Don't remember?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

When you say that, I remember when I was little, this is when we stayed on Seventh Street. I remember her ironing clothes, but it wasn't ours.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I remember standing in her leg, I must have been, gosh, I might even been three or four years old, but I don't know why that stands out to me, but it's almost like I could see her ironing clothes and she would say, "I need to get these clothes done."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And you know how little kids hang onto the legs of their mom. I remember doing that. And she was just ironing clothes, but it wasn't our clothes.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I would say that she was washing and ironing clothes for somebody.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because that's what women did back in those days or either they would go to somebody's house and clean. But I do remember that one time, I don't remember anything else other than that.

Kelli Johnson:

The things that stand out to us are really interesting.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It is, isn't it?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. But I distracted you where you're talking about the news. Because that was one of the questions I was going to ask you. Where did you get your news?

Kelli Johnson:

Somebody I talked to their father had the whole family sit down and watch the nightly news because he wanted them all to be informed. They didn't talk about it. They all watched it together.

Kelli Johnson:

But then you're saying that you guys didn't watch the news as children.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, the news was on.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And my dad watched it because my dad was with us in the evening. Our mom was out working as we got older.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And he would have the news on. Walter Cronkite and all them. But I don't think we was really interested in it. We had our little childhood games.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

We'd play jacks, we play little cards and stuff like that. Because like I said, it was a very strict home. So it's just like let's stay over here and do our little things.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. Not bother daddy.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Stay out of the way, that's right. So we wasn't paying attention. We really wasn't. And we wasn't made to pay attention to what was going on.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But they knew and I think out of that they were trying to protect us from that. Keeping us occupied and not occupied with what was going on in the world so to speak at that time.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But like I was saying in the 10th grade when Dr. Carolyn Johnson was teaching, she wasn't a doctor at that time, she was just a high school teacher.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

She was teaching Black history and she started teaching us about the civil rights movement, Malcolm X and all that. And I was like, "Wow, that was going on?" It's so funny.

Kelli Johnson:

What year was that do you think?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Oh gosh, you see, 10th grade, I graduated in '77. So was that '73, '74. Yeah. Somewhere around there.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. So that's probably a direct result of the civil rights movement. The fact that they were even teaching Black history at, was it Huntington High, Huntington East?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Huntington High.

Kelli Johnson:

Huntington High.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Even the Vietnam War I think had ended. Somewhere '72, something like that.

Kelli Johnson:



Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because I had a couple of uncles and a cousin that was in the Vietnam War and I remember a little bit on TV about hippies and how they were protesting the war and how the men were coming back from the war.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

You see them on the news, how they had them set up. Did we have a color TV then? I think we did. Maybe. I can't remember. But anyway, so that's when I was introduced to the civil rights and Malcolm X and the upheaval that was happening in the 60s.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because see in the 60s I was a little girl. I wouldn't have really paid attention to that stuff. Even my oldest sister wouldn't. She's four years older than me, she would've been more aware of it than I.

Kelli Johnson:

It wasn't something like your parents weren't involved because I know the NAACP in Huntington was very active in those times.

Kelli Johnson:

People I've talked to, people were either all the way in or all the way out. There was no middle ground.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. I would say we were all the way out. And it's probably because it was dangerous. It was dangerous times for Black people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

When I watched the movie *The Help*, now that projects somewhat of what it was like back then, but it's coming from a different perspective of course.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But I think about the women who were working in the white people's homes and how they were treated. And I was like, "Wow."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because sometimes I like to watch those movies to remind me where I've come from. The shoulders that I'm standing on has pushed me to do the things that I do now.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because back then it was so hard for women. I'm going to come from a woman's perspective. It was hard for women. Women not only had to take care of their homes and their children, but they were taking care of everybody else's home and their children too. And then plus trying to keep their family safe.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because the man at that time was out the home, working, bringing home the money. Whereas the woman was in the house taking care of the home. That was her job and it wasn't an easy job. It was very difficult for a woman back then.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And to me it's difficult now. It's just different for a woman today. But we went through some hardships. There were some difficulties dealing with Caucasian people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then too, I will tell you when I was in high school, I didn't know anything about how to get into college. My parents, their education, I think was a eighth grade, sixth grade level.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And that's not taking anything away from them because they were very intelligent people. It was just that back in those days-

Kelli Johnson:

That's how far we could go to school usually.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then the families were big and they needed the siblings to go out and work to help take care of these big families because you couldn't afford it. You wasn't making any money.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So anyway, I always had this drive to return back to school, but I didn't know how. And in high school I was a underachiever. I'm going to tell you I was a 1.25.

Kelli Johnson:

That surprises me about you.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I was a underachiever. I hated school, I hated school. But it could be because when I was a kid, I was a sickly kid. So I was out of school more than I was in school. But I just did not like school at all. I was just there.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And it could be because of the experiences I had when I was younger in the all white schools, because nobody paid attention, they didn't encourage you, they didn't push you forward, they didn't try to help you.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They just gave it to you and say, "Here it is. Do it." And you're like, "I don't know how to do it." Too bad. They wasn't willing to help Black kids. They was passing Black kids on D's and F's.

Kelli Johnson:

Just to get them through, get them out.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Just to get them through. That was even in junior high school.

Kelli Johnson:

What about Dr. Johnson's class that you were talking about? Was she that same teacher or did she just pass the-

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

No. She wanted you to learn.

Kelli Johnson:

Did all the students have to take that or it was elective? So it was just whoever wanted to and it was filled with Black students?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I'm going to tell you, I really don't know because for whatever reason, and sometimes I still think about this, I was always in a white class.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was me and this other girl, we were the light skinned girls. And I'm not saying we were the only light skinned girls, but for whatever reason, me and her was always in the classroom with nothing but white people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I remember one time in the science class at Oley Junior High I was in the classroom with more Blacks than I have ever had been. I was like, "Oh my God."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I still had that same feeling like-

Kelli Johnson:

Like what? This seems weird. Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. Because I was always in a classroom with white people.

Kelli Johnson:

Interesting.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I never knew why. I was taking the same courses as everybody else, but it just seemed like I always landed in a room with white people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so when I'm in a room with people of color, I'm like, "Wow." I don't even know how to act because it's like, "Okay, am I acting too white?"

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because you tend to pick up, right? Because you got to learn how to be in the room. Okay. But anyway, it was like that for me in high school.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But in that class, there was more Blacks in there. I was like, "Yay." But no, she was a good teacher. She wanted us to know about our past and she talked about the importance that we needed to have because this was our history.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And at that time it was in the 70s. So we was still dealing with that racial stuff. And it was still pretty dominant then. It wasn't easing up because segregation happened, what? '65, '67, '68.

Kelli Johnson:

It depends on what part of the country you're in.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Let's just say Dr. Martin Luther King. So you're talking about '68.

Kelli Johnson:

'68.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

'65, '68 somewhere around there, which was still fresh. So the early 70s, we were still dealing with that fallout of trying to be accepted.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because I remember in Huntington High, I'm going to jump to Huntington High, the Black people would stay on Ninth Avenue and the white people was on Eighth Street where the steps are.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh. Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And it was always like that.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

The only Blacks that would be over there would be the jocks. It was one, two, three, four on your hands or the majorette, there was only one Black majorette.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

With all the white, but the whites were always separated from the Blacks. And I don't know why, but we were always on one side and they were always on the other side and that's the way it was through my whole high school.

Kelli Johnson:

You talked some about some of the bullies in elementary and in junior high. Were there any tensions like that in high school too?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, the time I got to high school, I became a loner. I just started staying to myself and believe it or not, I had two white girls that was my good friends that would talk to me.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I had some Black friends, but for whatever reason, I just never fit in. And I don't know if it's because of just being around white people all those years, little coming up or I just wasn't accepted. I really don't know.

Kelli Johnson:

I understand those exact feelings.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Do you?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. I really went to a private school.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Did you?

Kelli Johnson:

My parents, well, I won't tell my story on this, but I went to a private school and as you can guess it was predominantly white.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. And again, it'd be like, "okay, is there something wrong with me? Because I don't understand. But like I said, I hung with the bullies, right?"

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I had this one, actually she was my next door neighbor, and I think that's the reason why it happened the way it did. But she was just so vocal in your face, the tough man attitude.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They were using me. Really, they were using me. "Oh, go over there and do this. Oh, go do that." So I was like a puppet and I hate to even say that, but it only went to a certain point because I knew who I had to go home to.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I'm like, "Nu-huh. You just want to beat me up."

Kelli Johnson:

Right.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because I got to go home to my daddy and my mama. So it was only to a point and it wasn't really nothing major. It was just in the classroom, "Get up and go over there and sharpen my pencil." When I shouldn't be getting up out of my seat.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then I would get in trouble because back in those days, that was the paddling days if you remember. They used paddling as their way of getting you and they didn't hold back on those paddles. They did not hold back on those paddles.

Kelli Johnson:

I moved here in '97 and enrolled my kids in school and they sent a paper home, did I want them to be paddled or not? That was in 1997.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Well, they were asking then. Back then they didn't.

Kelli Johnson:

Well that's true. They did have courtesy to ask.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

That was the method that they used. It wasn't about putting you in the hallway or putting you in a room.

Kelli Johnson:

That was discipline.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Detention or whatever, that was it. And I would just remember in the hallway, man, you could hear it echoing in the hallway where kids were getting hit with the paddles.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And these paddles would probably be 12 inches or longer. And some would be very thick and some would be very thin with holes in it, which they preferred that one.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And they would say, "Lean over and grab your ankles." That was one time I was walking in the hallway and there was a line, lot of Black kids, a line, and there was this one guy and said to him "Lean over and grab your ankles."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

He said, "Man, I'm not leaning over and grabbing my ankles." He started bucking up because the paddle was one of those great big paddles. And he said, "No, man, I'm not going to do that."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And he said, "You're going to lean over and you going get two licks." And so he did, but he kept looking back. So when he came with the paddle to hit him, he would straighten up to where he wouldn't get hit. And that made that principle hot. He was red in the face.

Kelli Johnson:

A white principal, I'm assuming?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. Well, yes. There wasn't really no Blacks in the offices. It was white.

Kelli Johnson:

And there was at least one Black teacher?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Well, let's just say that was one Black teacher I had.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I don't know how many Black teachers there were, but getting back to when I was talking about, I always wanted to further my education.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I never knew how and I never knew what it took to do that because there was never no one there to guide me through, get your grades, do your grades, pull your grades up, let's work on your grade.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because see I never had anyone to help me with the problems I had in school. It was just a given. And so Black people were really set up for failure.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because if I can pass on these with no encouragement to do better, I'm thinking I'm doing good, right?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. You're fine. You just keep on passing.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I didn't like school. If I was sick, I was sick and I wasn't worried about it. I do my little work the best I could and turn it in. But I wish I could have done better.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I wish I had somebody there to encourage me to do better or to show me, or guide me through on what was needed because I had to work hard coming from the bottom up because that's where it was.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So now I'm coming up. I'm a young woman now. I had a couple kids out of wedlock and I didn't want to be on welfare. I was on it for just a short period of time and realized, hey, I can't make it on this.

Kelli Johnson:

This is not for me, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Right. This was when I had my first child. And so what I did, I said, "I got to get me a job." So like the bullies, I was still hanging with them, and when I got a job, they didn't want to have anything else to do with me.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:



I was like, "This is not even about you. This is about me and my son. I have to take care of my son. This is not cutting it for me. Now you want to be on it, that's you."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But I lost a friendship because they said that I was too good. Now you're too good to hang with us. And I was like, "Oh well, I guess I am."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I moved forward. That's when I started working for Mr. Henderson. But prior to that, I was working in the CITA Program. They had this program called the CITA Program and it was established to train people for jobs so that you can get experience so you could get a job.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because back then you had to have two years of experience before they would even consider your application at that time. I was like, how you expect us to get the training if you won't give us a chance to get in the door to get trained?

Kelli Johnson:

And a lot of those job programs, those sprung up in the 60s and 70s as a result of the civil rights movement.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

I won't go on but a lot of that came from that. So I'm glad they were doing that around here.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Right. And I was in the legal field. I was working in the magistrate court clerk's office through the CITA Program and it was six months long.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I worked in there. I worked in the prosecuting attorney's office because I kept renewing and then I worked in data entry. I got my business degree in data entry and back then it was called clerk typist, which all of that's obsolete now. But I worked for Mr. Henderson and way back-

Kelli Johnson:

And that's Herb Henderson who was a prominent attorney in Huntington, West Virginia. And actually the state office of minority affairs is named the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. And yes. Well I'll tell you how that came about.

Kelli Johnson:

Please.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was because I was in the CITA Program and I was working in the magistrate court clerk's office and he would always come in and file his claims, okay, his court documents and that's lawyer court.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And we would have little conversations and stuff. And again, I was the only Black person in there. And so one day we was having a conversation. I said, "I'm going to have to try to find me a job because my CITA Program is running out."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I don't think at that point I could renew because they had changed some of their policies then. And he said, "Oh, you need a job?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I need one really soon." And he said, "Well, I tell you what, you come and see me." He said, "I got a job for you." And I was like, "What?" I said, "Okay, when you want me to start?"

Kelli Johnson:

Right.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And that was what it was at the time. And what it was, Vera Jackson, who was his office manager, had been with him gosh for many, many years, she was pregnant.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They had another lady in there. She was getting ready to go out maternity leave. So he needed somebody else in the office. And the other lady, her name was Bev, she worked with Bill Redd.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

She was Bill Redd's secretary.

Kelli Johnson:

Another prominent Black attorney in Huntington who recently passed away.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes. So she was working with him. I came in, started helping with Vera Jackson, or they call her Vicky, and she got me up to power. So when she left I could do some of her stuff.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then that's how that relationship started. But I did go to school with his daughter, which one did I go? Gail. I was in school with her.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then me and Sherri, his other daughter, we got really close. Because she worked in the office too doing the financial part.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh, okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. So that's how all that started. And I worked with him for about two years I think.

Kelli Johnson:

And you told me he mostly hired other Black people.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

He hired Black people. There was no white people in his office and he did not want any white people in his office.

Kelli Johnson:

But from what I've heard, it was because he wanted to empower us. We needed to empower each other.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

He wanted to give us the opportunity.

Kelli Johnson:

Exactly.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Other than, nothing against housekeeping or janitorial work, but he wanted to give us the opportunity. And when I say us, I'm talking about Black people, show us that there's a different route you can go.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

We don't need to be at the bottom. We're very intelligent people. We just need to use what we got. But just history has put us in a position where we think we can't do anything other than clean a toilet or clean a floor or be in somebody's kitchen and cook their food.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So maybe that's where I got the drive to further my education besides my kids, of course, but I always had that drive and I just remember telling my dad, I said, "Dad, I really want to go back to school, but I don't know how, and I don't know what to do."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And he said, "Well, if you want to do it, go ahead and do it." Because see he didn't know either.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I was like, "Dag." So when I got a job here at Marshall, I worked over in the student activities in Greek affairs. It was a part-time job and then the other part-time was in a law firm.

Kelli Johnson:

And this is before you were a student here? This was just a job that you got?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah, yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I had two part-time jobs because see, I'd gotten married, divorced, and all that, had kids, blah, blah, blah. Okay. Came here, got a part-time job over in student affairs working with Greeks.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I had to make a whole job. I got a part-time job at a law firm at the [inaudible 00:41:49], which I was overqualified for and they knew it. But anyway, that's how I did it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I worked here in the morning, worked at Marshall in the mornings, and went there in the afternoon. I was eating my lunch walking down the street.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Eating my sandwich because it was just a baloney sandwich with some chips and something to drink, that was it. And so Dean Thomas, Maryanne Thomas, she said, "I think I'm going to make this a full time job." And I was like, "Okay, that's great."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And she also encouraged me to return back to school and I was like, "Oh, I don't know." She said, "No, you probably should." And at that time that's when Washington University still had the community college here.

Kelli Johnson:

Oh yeah. Mm-hmm.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so I thought about it and I said, "I need to further my education," because we still had conversations up to that. And so I enrolled in the community college because I didn't have the GPA to get into Marshall.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And at that point that's when I realized I was like, "My GPA is what? 1.25. Lord. That's low."

Kelli Johnson:

When you finally have the knowledge and you look back, you're like, "Oh man, what was that?"

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes.

Kelli Johnson:

Yes.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I enhanced my skill when I was in business college.

Kelli Johnson:

Of course, you did.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I went to the Huntington Junior Business College and that was a nine month. So I kicked it up. But when you have to get your transcripts, that's when I saw my high school, I thought. "God dang."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But I was just determined that I was going to be successful. And I went to school. I had issues with a grammar because I missed that when I was little, because I was sickly.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Number one, I was more out of school than I was in. I was in school, but I didn't get that teaching and they wasn't really caring about teaching.

Kelli Johnson:

I was going to say, didn't seem like they were really worried about stealing any wisdom.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Not any Blacks.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. It wasn't just me. Any.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I was having issues with that. So I took the bone head classes. I'm not above that. Because sometimes you have to just start from where you're at.

Kelli Johnson:

At the beginning. Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Because I try not to be prideful about that. It's just something I had to do to prepare me for the classes, the more higher end courses.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so I did. And to be honest with you, I still remember today. I had no transportation. I was walking.

Kelli Johnson:

And where did you live at that time?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

At that time when I was in community college, I stayed on Ninth Avenue, 11th street. And my route was I had to walk from my house to Barnett Childcare Center, take my youngest son at the time, drop him off.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My other son went to Miller School, walking, drop him off and I would come up Howard Boulevard all the way to my job over in the student center. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then leave from there, do my little thing, eat my lunch walking down the street, go into the other place. Then I would leave from the law office, walk back over here, see my transportation-

Kelli Johnson:

Rain, sun or snow. It didn't matter.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It didn't matter how cold. And that's the reason why I don't have patience for people who say, "Oh, I can't do it."

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It's determination. So I walked and I didn't really have them income. So I only had three pair of shoes, about four pair of shoes, because I had a black pair, a cream pair and navy blue pair. And I had a pair of tennis shoes, that was the everyday shoes.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I would walk and I tell you, I could literally feel the concrete in my shoes, but I still had the sole.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I still had a sole but they were so thin. But going back and forth to work, I would pick up my kid, make sure that my other kid was at home, make sure they got their stuff.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I would hurt and cook ravioli or whatever, because I had night classes. Then I would leave, walk back up, come over here.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Go to Harris Hall and took my classes to nine o'clock at night. Come back, walk back home, get my kids together and then I would do my homework or study for a test.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And when I hit the pillow, it was-

Kelli Johnson:

Lights out.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

That's right. And then I would start up the next day and do the same thing again. But that's what I did. And sometime I look back, I said, "Girl, how did you do that?" But that's what I did.

Kelli Johnson:

You had to do.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I had to give my mother praise because she took care of my kids. My mom was sickly. She had COPD. My mother was sickly, but she took care of my kids in the evening for me to get my degree.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And it was just walking back and forth and not really having the money to catch a ride and all of that. So my transportation was my feet and that's what I did.

Kelli Johnson:

So you were busy taking care of what you needed to take care of.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Well, I was taking care of my mom.

Kelli Johnson:

You couldn't get involved in everything.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I was taking care of my mother who was sickly and then my two kids at that time and I was working full time, going to school part time.

Kelli Johnson:

So this was in the 80s?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Mid 80s.

Kelli Johnson:

Mid 80s.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. Mid 80s. Yeah. And sometimes I do pat myself on my back because I'm like, "Gosh, girl. You did it."

Kelli Johnson:

You should.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Sometimes I had to tell myself, "You really did it." And then as time went on, I really wanted to go back to school to get my Bachelor's. I was like, "Dag."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so by the time that happened, I was a little bit in a better situation. I had a little bit of transportation then. My kids were older, but I still had responsibilities and all that.



Cora Ann Westmoreland:

My mom, let's see, she died in '91. So it was after she had passed away but my kids were old enough to take care of themselves at the time.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because I was taking my classes during the day and let me back up, when I was getting my associate's degree, I was also taking classes on my lunch hour.

Kelli Johnson:

Wow.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And I had two night classes and the third class I was taking two times a week during my lunch hour. And then when I got into my Bachelor's degree, I had an eight o'clock class.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I would go to the eight o'clock class and then go into work. And I had a class at lunchtime and then I had a night class. So I was doing all of that.

Kelli Johnson:

So I have a question for you. I meant to ask you this earlier, but I was so involved in your story. So when you were talking about being in high school and thinking about, I'd like to go to college, but there was nobody to talk to.

Kelli Johnson:

Was that the way it was for all the students? Did they encourage some students? I have some experiences with when my kids went to school.

Kelli Johnson:

So I'm just curious about how it was around here in terms of who was encouraged to go to college, who was not encouraged to go? I don't know if there was any differences.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I think there was a difference. I don't think any Black people were encouraged to go to college or knew how to go. I think there was certain ones that knew.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. And I would say it was just because how the parents were in the community, you know what I'm trying to say?

Kelli Johnson:

Mm-hmm.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

We've had a lot of people. I do remember Bunchy Grey, she was a civil rights person.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. I hope I can talk to Michael for this project.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. And her husband worked down at spaghetti show, Jim Spaghetti. And actually from what I understand that sauce was his sauce.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. I've heard that too.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

That was his recipe.

Kelli Johnson:

I've heard he was treated very well down there too.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yes.

Kelli Johnson:

I think sometimes-

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They did a big write up on him. The daughter did five years or so ago. And she was talking about how they met and the spaghetti sauce and all that.

Kelli Johnson:

I think sometimes people confuse them with Whites Pantry and some other places where Black were not allowed to go in the 50s and 60s. But from what I've heard, Jim Spaghetti, they've been open and welcoming.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

They have.

Kelli Johnson:

Yes.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And they've done a couple of big write ups. Now that pantry you're talking about.

Kelli Johnson:

White's Pantry.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. I didn't know anything about that.

Kelli Johnson:

Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But see that was during the time when, well, I'll say for my family, because I don't know about anybody else, we didn't go out to eat. We did not.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And my dad worked for the railroad. My mom, I told you, was a homemaker slash housekeeper at one point. I don't ever remember us going to any restaurant whatsoever, ever, until we were grown.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then we started going to McDonald's and that was like, "McDonald's. Wow." That was the big thing going to McDonald's and maybe for my mom, that was a big thing for her.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. Oh yeah. It's going someplace not your kitchen.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. And it was a treat. Even though we didn't really grow up in that era, even though we were in it. That was just a normal thing for us. But she knew.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I remember going one time to Pizza Hut, that was when it was over here on Fifth Avenue and 21st Second Street. That's when pizza was really hot then. That was a treat.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And we actually went in and sat down and she was just so happy cutting that pizza. And I was like, "Okay. Pizza."

Kelli Johnson:

But you don't think about it because you were younger and then you look at...

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was a big deal though.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah..

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because we didn't go out. We was just starting to go, "Oh, we're going to Pizza Hut? Really? Or we going to McDonald's? Really?" It was just like a surprise because we always ate at home. We never did go out and eat. So it's amazing. Yeah.

Kelli Johnson:

So we've been talking for 52 minutes and I like to reign it in around this time, but I just wanted to ask if there was anything more that you wanted to say, either about the 60s and 70s in Huntington, or about now that you think might owe itself to the 60s and 70s and the civil rights movement?

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Yeah. I will say that 60s and 70s gave me the determination to do what I do now. And it pushed me to get my education. Not only did I get my business degree, I got a associate's degree. I have an undergraduate degree and I have a Master's degree.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It pushed me because I wanted to do better, I wanted to be better. But not just for me, but for my kids. I wanted them to see that, okay, no matter how old you are, you can still further your education.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because when I got my Bachelor's degree, I was 51. And when I got my Master's, I was 54 and when I got my associates, I was 34 and then my business degree was in 1978.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I'm just saying, all of that span, I just saw a need that I needed to push myself to do better for my family. And coming from the 60s, growing up, seeing how people will keep you under if they can.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But you have to have that determination to move forward and you got to let people go. Some people will hold you back just because I don't know why, but just because.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And just like I told you, I started working, I lost friends, but really I shouldn't have lost them. They should have come along and worked too.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then when they told me I'm better than them, just because I got a job that didn't sit well with me, because I'm like, "Well, how do you survive in this world without a job? I need to do something to better myself to get better pay."

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. Nothing wrong with janitorial work, please, nothing wrong with that. Because if that's where you're at, I've worked for McDonald's before. I have cleaned toilets, I have mopped floors. I have done those things. Those things is what told me what I didn't want to do.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Okay. That's where the determination comes in. You got to find your way in life. And those were places in life I was at those times and it made me aware of what I did not want to do for the rest of my life.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I was very, very determined to get my education. And if anything I hope that I leave my kids is to know...

Kelli Johnson:

You're fine. I'm tearing up though, too.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Just to know that you can do whatever you can when you put your mind to it and you can become whatever you want to become. But you got to get on that path to put you on the right track and stay on that path and not let nothing hinder you.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because there's so many things that can, especially nowadays for young people. I watch them how they let things hold them back. But sometimes you got to let those friends go in order for you to move forward. Thanks. Sorry about that.

Kelli Johnson:

No, I was a single mom that went back to college and so I'm just here feeling it all.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It makes a big difference. I was just determined to do better for my family, for my kids. And to set that example, to let them know that you can become successful in your life, but there's sacrifices you have to make along the way, whether it means giving up friends or giving up your time doing nothing.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because school wasn't easy for me. It was hard. Like Masters. Okay. Gosh, that was a lot of reading. A lot of writing. I had to go out and talk to business people. I had to write a thesis and I took the thesis with me on my trip. So I'm just saying the determination matters.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And it's about your focus. Because when I learned that I needed a thesis committee, I didn't have one. I said, "What?" See it goes back to not knowing.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah, yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I said, "I didn't know I needed a committee." And so my committee was my family. I said, "Here, look, take this. Read this."

Kelli Johnson:

We should have been friends then I would've done it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I was like, "It's almost 20 some page." "Oh I got to?" "Yeah. Read it and tell me if it makes sense." Because the way my thesis was, it was a question answer and it had to be a story and it had to line up. Okay.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And it was about nonprofit organizations on how they manage Ronald McDonald's house real quick. And I just sent out 10 questions to the area of Ronald McDonald's houses and I got some hits back and I took those questions and answers and I brought them all together to make it make sense as you're reading a story.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Because everyone was different, even though it was the same place. And that was the research. And I got an A out of that. I was like, "Oh gosh." I was really stressing.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And when I gave it to my family, they was like, "Dag." I said, "Yeah, but I don't need you to say dag. I need you to critique my paper." And so they were my committee.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So I'm just saying determination is the key and you have to learn how to close some doors so that you can do what you need to do because there's always goals.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I always talk to my sons about goals, short term, long term goals and keep your eye on the mark. Like I said, my Master's degree, that was the goal. I knew it was down there, but I had to keep my focus on it because it wasn't easy getting to it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It was hard because I was still the mom. I was still working full time. I was still running here and there. Actually my youngest son was still in school and he had events that I was running to the events and then all of it was online this time.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So that was a big difference. Just trying to stay up on it and make sure that I had everything that I needed to have done, submitting the papers, correcting the papers, all of it. It wasn't easy.

Kelli Johnson:

It takes focus.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But I'm going to tell you that was my driver because it was hard. It challenged my mind and I like challenges. So I just put in my head that I'm going to look at it as a challenge and not as being hard because if I look at it from being hard, I won't do it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And the reason why was because that's the way it was when I was little coming up. Oh, it's too hard. It's hard. You see what I'm saying?

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But then when I changed my thought process and looked at it as a challenge, then the perspective changed because now I'm challenging my mind to see how much I can learn or what I needed to do or how I could put it together.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So the creativity kicked in and it just started flowing and I was like, "Oh gosh, it's sounding great." And for me to get an A on thesis that I'm not used to writing in the first place.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And then the fact that I had problems writing when I was little coming up because I didn't have the teaching that I needed just to make everything make sense.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Not saying that all stuff wasn't making sense, I'm just saying putting a document together of that magnitude and the weight that it carried in order for me to get my Masters meant a lot to me.

Kelli Johnson:

Yeah. And you should be very proud of that. That's not a small thing.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Oh, gosh.

Kelli Johnson:

It's a huge thing.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

It is because I didn't think I could do it. When I started the Master programs, I like, "Oh my God, I got to do this thesis." And it was on my mind.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But I said, "Let that be there. And I'm just focus here," because sometimes that can take you off your mark and it can cause you to have more problems. So you lose your sight of your goal.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

But that determination and challenging my mind and wanting to do better, to take care of my kids and to set that example, it all played a role into getting to where I'm at.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

So now I sit in the president suite working for the corporate attorney of the entire university and have been given lead way. I have value. When I go they see him because he could trust me with that type of information.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And that really, really said something and I respect it. I don't take it for granted. I respect it because I could have been somewhere else. So going through all of that has put me to where I am today.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

And so now I'm holding on to that because from where I've come from, because I know where I've come from and I know where I'm at.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

I didn't start where I'm at but just the determination to get to where I'm at today. I can pat myself on the back and say, "Girl, you did it."

Kelli Johnson:

Yes you can.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Mm-hmm. And that's it.

Kelli Johnson:

Thank you so much.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Sorry, I didn't mean to...

Kelli Johnson:



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No, no, it's fine. Like I said, I was right there with you. I was feeling that vibe. Thank you so much for sharing with me today.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

You're welcome.

Kelli Johnson:

I appreciate it.

Cora Ann Westmoreland:

Oh, you're welcome. Is that all you need? I hope I didn't.