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### Woolfolk, Carl-Oral History

T'Rayah Paschall

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Oral History of Carl Woolfolk, interviewed by his granddaughter T'Rayah Paschall on 07/17/2018 in Huntington, West Virginia.

T'Rayah Paschall: I am interviewing my grandfather, Carl Woolfolk, 85 years old. So first question: Where were you born in Huntington, West Virginia? If not, where?

Carl Woolfolk: I was born in Huntington, West Virginia in 1933.

T'Rayah Paschall: Where were you –

Carl Woolfolk: At home.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, next question. Next question: What's your fondest memory of living here?

Carl Woolfolk: My fondest memory of living here is – that's a hard one. That's a hard one.

T'Rayah Paschall: Yeah.

Carl Woolfolk: There's quite a few things that I was fond of.

T'Rayah Paschall: Just say one.

Carl Woolfolk: Livin' here, so – I guess goin' to school at Douglass High School, all black school.

T'Rayah Paschall: So, how – tell me about it.

Carl Woolfolk: Tell me about it. Well, it was, it was great. I liked it, 'cause we had everything of our own, and it was great, it was just great. The segregation was nice, but it was black kids that went to white schools, they didn't get to do as much as we did. We had our own thing for ourself – own clubs, own everything. But in mixed schools, I don't think it's like that. I don't know. And my fondest memories are going to Douglass High School and graduating.

Other Speaker: It was a all black high school you all did thing –

T'Rayah Paschall: At Douglass High School y'all did things that like the white schools didn't do, so what were those type of things? Name one of them.

Carl Woolfolk: One of the things that – we used to have our own clubs of the students that went to Douglass. We had different little clubs or gangs and things that we were running around with and all that. And everything was –

T'Rayah Paschall: What's one of the clubs?

Carl Woolfolk: Well we didn't have no names. It was just get together and have fun. That's what it was.

T'Rayah Paschall: Yeah.

Carl Woolfolk: And we called it a club. I forgot the name on it, it's been so long ago.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, so you ready for the next question?

Carl Woolfolk: Yeah, why don't you just give it to me?

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay. What was your favorite place to eat and your favorite place to shop?

Carl Woolfolk: Well, everything was segregated at the time. And we didn't have too many places to eat, but the only one place that we had to eat was a restaurant on 8th Avenue. I can't think of the name, it's been so long ago. Had two restaurants on 8th Avenue that we would eat at. And then we had a little dairy bar where all the kids hang out. It was called "D and B," which stood for Douglass and Barnett. Douglass and Barnett were the schools, the high school and junior high – I mean elementary – schools in Huntington. Douglass was the high school and Barnett was the elementary school. And that's where we spent our time there.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay. So did you have any favorite places to shop or anything?

Carl Woolfolk: No, not really 'cause I was young and didn't have any money. [Laughter]

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay. So tell me about your parents or your family background.

Carl Woolfolk: Well, see my father was from a little small town in Virginia called Louisa, Virginia and Appomattox, Virginia. But he grew up here in Huntington. They moved from Virginia to West Virginia in 1910, I think he said. Somewhere along in there. My mother was from Pomeroy, Ohio, which is about 70 miles up the river from Huntington. On the other side of the river it's about 70 miles up. That's where my mother was from. And I had one, two, three, four – four brothers and sisters. No, wait a minute, more than that – about five of us. And we all had our times and everything. We made our own play time and enjoyed every bit of it. Everything that we did, I'll have to sit here and think about some. And those were good times for me. And just sittin' here thinkin' about it makes me feel good. And, got another question?

Other Speaker: And then we need you to elaborate on some stuff.

Carl Woolfolk: That's what I'm getting ready to say.

Other Speaker: I'm takin' him around the corner.

T'Rayah Paschall: So, you said "D and B." Douglass was the high school, right?

Carl Woolfolk: Douglass, yes. Douglass was the high school. Barnett was the elementary school.

T'Rayah Paschall: So, did you attend Barnett?

Carl Woolfolk: Yes, I went to Barnett from the first grade to the sixth grade, then I went to Douglass High School from the seventh grade to the twelfth grade. I graduated in 1950.

T'Rayah Paschall: How was Barnett?

Carl Woolfolk: It was just like any other school, I guess. [Laughter] Fun. You enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. Have very fond memories of Barnett and very fond memories of Douglass High School.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, hold on. Let me get my next question ready. What do you remember about your grandparents?

Carl Woolfolk: Well, see, my grandmother, she was part Indian, and I barely – I just barely remember her because she died when I got about five, about six years old. She died when I was six years old, but I remember her. I remember she had long black hair and was sort of short and plump like. Pretty brown skin, pretty skin, pretty lady.

T'Rayah Paschall: What about your grandfather?

Carl Woolfolk: Grandfather, he was a – he was a black man, brown skin, had real coal black hair, slick coal black hair. I remember him and all his brothers. I remember all of them. All them, they looked like they were white. [Laughter] It's the truth! You got 'em and it's the truth. If they would walk in the room, you wouldn't know who – you couldn't tell 'em. My Aunt June, my Aunt June, I'll show you a picture of her. I got a picture of all of 'em, I'll show it to you.

T'Rayah Paschall: Oh, I see. Okay. What was one of your fondest memories living here in the 1950s?

Carl Woolfolk: Well, in the 1950s was the year that I graduated from high school. I graduated high school in 1952, and that was it. That's the fondest memory was gettin' out of school. [Laughter] The gettin' out of school, y'all know what it's like.

T'Rayah Paschall: How was it different from the 1970s or 1980s?

Carl Woolfolk: Well, back then, they were very – everything is sort of real – so many prejudices, it's sad, but as it got a little later on, it starts slackin' up. But Huntington was – we could go anywhere that we wanted to, but Huntington was very prejudiced. You had to – it was a very prejudiced town.

Other Speaker: Go ahead and ask, then.

T'Rayah Paschall: How were you treated and did you feel like you were still segregated when you were into a job, when you tried to get a job?

Carl Woolfolk: Yes. We ran into it sometimes. Quite a bit. Sometimes. You will always run into that – what is it called? Segregation. Segregation always will stick its ugly head up when it comes to people. And it was very segregated here in town. We had to go to the theater down – named the Orpheum. We had to sit upstairs in the balcony. And then, quite a few places were segregated, I just can't remember all of 'em. Couldn't go to the shows downtown. And, in some of the stores that you would go in, I remember when I was a kid, some stores that you would go in like I wanted to go in and get me a candy bar and some of these stores around here, they didn't want us in there and all that. Tell us to “Get out, you know what,” and all that old stuff. So it was rough for a while, but as I grew older I got used to it and I just took it like a lump of sugar and went on about my business.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, so I have one question that was not in anything that I wrote down. Okay so this was once a school, right?

Carl Woolfolk: Yes.

T'Rayah Paschall: So, what was the name of the school again?

Carl Woolfolk: Simms. This was a white elementary school right here.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay. So, this is white elementary school?

Carl Woolfolk: This is a white elementary school. I stayed over a block and a half away, but I had to walk five blocks to school, and Simms was just two blocks away.

T'Rayah Paschall: But do you think if this was a black school, would you think you'd be able to get here faster than you could get to –

Carl Woolfolk: Oh yes. I mean, it was easier. But see, that's the way it was at that time. Just the way it was at that time. But we didn't care. We were kids and we just went along with the program. So, didn't bother us too much.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, so –

Other Speaker: You'll be alright.

Carl Woolfolk: You'll be alright.

Other Speaker: Hold on.

T'Rayah Paschall: Describe a time when you felt the most proud of someone in your family, self, community.

Carl Woolfolk: Well, when my brother – we call him Bossy – won the marble championship in Huntington. Everybody, all the blacks in this community were very proud of him when he won that. His mother and father were proud of him and all the kids were proud of him. Everybody around here was proud of him 'cause he won the marble championship here in Huntington, West Virginia.

T'Rayah Paschall: Was there black and white people in it?

Carl Woolfolk: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it was right there what is now a [inaudible 00:14:37]. Played on the playground there. They had the rings right there. Right there. I forget what year that was, but it was great. He enjoyed it. We all enjoyed it.

T'Rayah Paschall: What did they do with that?

Carl Woolfolk: With what?

T'Rayah Paschall: How did he win, really?

Carl Woolfolk: They just had the game. They played the game, played the games of marbles, and he won so many out of a certain amount. I forgot how many it was. They shot so many games. And he won the most games in the marble championship of Huntington. He didn't make it to the trip to go to, I think it was Asbury, New Jersey.

T'Rayah Paschall: Why not?

Carl Woolfolk: He lost.

T'Rayah Paschall: Oh. [Laughter]

Carl Woolfolk: He didn't win. He didn't win, he got beat. Got beat on the last game, he got beat.

T'Rayah Paschall: 'Cause that's what happened to me. I was at a cheer – no. Yeah, I was at a football game and I was a cheerleader, and we made it undefeated, and on the last game we lost.

Carl Woolfolk: Yeah? Yeah.

T'Rayah Paschall: Next question: Where did you work?

Carl Woolfolk: Well, I had a job after school. I worked at St. Mary's Hospital. The job, when I first went up there, I used to wash pots and pans and everything. And then the guy that was the chef, he took a liking to me and he taught me how to cook and cut meat, and that's how I got my first job. I worked up there about 15 years, and then – worked there 15 years. But in the meantime, he died and then I did the cooking and the cutting the meat, and the ordering and everything for the

hospital, and I was just still in high school. I think I was in the twelfth grade, and I still – and I did all that. I worked up there at least – after that, I graduated from high school. I worked up there about 15 years or more altogether before I quit and found a job makin' more money.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay, so were you treated differently because you were black?

Carl Woolfolk: No, there's, there's some – you know, it was mostly I worked for the sisters and she was pretty, she was pretty good sister, she was nice. She was nice. The majority of sisters up there were nice. It was the people that worked in there that you had your trouble with. And you had that – we was running through that segregation stuff between the people that worked there, but the sisters, they were real nice towards us. It was me – let's see, it was me, my brother, and two other boys that worked in there. Mitchell got – he would get young boys that went to school and give them a job for the summer, and we worked – all of us worked in the kitchen. And we did that every summer for about seven or eight years, and then I went to work regular up there. I worked there about 15 or 20 years before I found a better job, makin' more money. The only reason I quit, because I got more money out of it and my family was growin', so I had to find a job that was makin' more money. So that's one reason I quit.

T'Rayah Paschall: Was that man that taught you how to cut meat, was he white or black?

Carl Woolfolk: Black. He was a black man. He was a chef there and he was black and the name was William Mitchell. He come through Huntington, he start up at St. Mary's in 19 – I think 1924, start up there and he was working there when I was there in 1949. I was there in 1949, 1950, and he was there then. And he got all of us – he hired quite a few young black men to give them a job for the summer so they can make some money. So we could have money in our pocket. And he was real nice. He was a little rough sometimes, but he was nice.

T'Rayah Paschall: Okay. So –

Other Speaker: Pause it.