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TAPE #1

Subject: Life Histories

An Oral Interview with: Mrs. Virginia Harris

Conducted by: Travis E. Williams

On: October 31, 1998

Transcriptionist/Typist: Travis E. Williams

RELEASE FORM

Deed of Gift to the Public Domain

I, Mrs. Virginia E. Harris, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts

of my interview(s) on 10-31-98.

I authorize the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their Oral History Program.

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Travis E. Williams
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Mrs. Virginia E. Harris
(Donor)

10-31-98
(Date)

Abstract:

This interview with Mrs. Virginia Harris of Huntington, West Virginia is a short history of her life. She is African American and talks about the racism and discrimination she faced in Huntington as well as other counties in West Virginia and the different states that she visited as a child and teenager. She grew up in Huntington and shared with the researcher her grammar and secondary education days going to the all black schools in Huntington before integration, Barnett Elementary and Douglas High School. She discusses living during the Civil Rights Movement, World War II, and the Vietnam Conflict. Her thoughts about racism are documented as well. She talked about her strong ties to her family and to Antioch Baptist Church as well as sharing her thoughts on her Appalachian identity.

Travis E. Williams
Dr. Ewen
SOC 532

Researcher:

Today is October 29, 1998 and I'm interviewing Mrs. Virginia Harris. Now the first thing I want to do today is make sure we understand what we're doing today. Mrs. Harris do you understand that what your doing today is going to be tape recorded, and will be public domain and you're going to sign a release form.

Respondent:

That means anybody can read it right?

Researcher:

Yes Mam anybody can read it. You understand?

Respondent:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Just give me a description of where you were born, and where you grew up at?

Respondent:

I was born right here in Huntington West Virginia. I was raised right here around here what is now the 900 Hal Greer Blvd, used to be 16th Street. And this is where I was raised.

Researcher:

Well, what type of things would you do here while growing up in Huntington as a little kid?

Respondent:

What type of things did I do-played with my brothers. That's about it-I didn't do anything-I went to school, which I went to Barnett Elementary School and Douglas High School.

Researcher:

As far as your family you mentioned your brothers, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

Respondent:

I have two brothers and one sisters-I was the youngest.

Researcher :

Can you tell me a little about your neighborhood, was it mostly black, black and white?

Respondent:

This was the black neighborhood and far as I can understand the white was on the other side of the viaduct between 8th Ave. And 7th Ave. So the whites were usually over on the other side. I would hear (black) kids talk about how they would have to fight, when they left Douglas(black high school) or Barnett(black elementary school) to go home, with the white people. But I have always been on this side of the viaduct. Now except for when my brothers were young and they sold the Herald Dispatch, we would cross the tracks and go downtown to get the newspapers to sell them. We paid two cents for them and turned around and sold them for three cents. As far as the white people I never paid any attention to the them-I never paid any attention to them at all because I really didn't know anything about prejudice or racism. Because I wasn't taught that.

Researcher:

You mentioned that you went to Barnett Elementary school. I know a little about Barnett but tell what was Barnett like for you?

Respondent:

What was it like for me?

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Researcher:

Yes Mam.

Respondent:

Well, all I can say is that it was nice for me. Because it was all I knew. It couldn't have been anything else for me-that was all that I knew.

Researcher:

How were the teachers?

Respondent:

Good I had one favorite teacher Mrs. Marshall. I think she was my second grade teacher.

Researcher:

Was there a close connection between the community and the school? Because you had basically an all black school in a nearly an all black community.

Respondent:

I really don't know because I never paid any attention to anything, I think so I really only knew one side. I had nothing to compare it with that is what I'm saying. I couldn't compare it (her childhood discrimination) because it was no one to compare it with.

Researcher:

You said you went on to Douglas High School which I know was an all black high school here in Huntington. What was that like and when did you as far as the kids there, begin to understand a little bit more about racism as you got older in High School. Did you hear from other students in high school-things, like "guess what happen to me"?

Respondent:

I remember one incident, during a parade in Huntington one time, and it was a parade-and we had our own black band and a lot of people felt like-and Douglas was a real good band. And a lot of people felt like when they had the parade showing-a lot of people felt like it by only being one black school that Douglas should have been in the front or in the middle. But they (whites) always wanted us to take up the rear, we were the last one in the parade. And I remember one time when Ms. Lovella Hughes was director over the band and they had march all the way from Douglas which was on Ruth St. and 10th Ave. right here in Huntington-all the way down where the parade started which I guess was on 4th Ave. I'm not for sure on that (where the parade started). But anyway she made them (black band members in the parade) disband. They march all the way down there (starting point of the parade)-and they wanted them to take up the rear. And she (Ms. Hughes) said, "no way". Cause she told me that this band can go anywhere they want to go. So Douglas didn't march that year.

Researcher:

How did that make you feel about them wanting them to march in the rear?

Respondent:

Oh we thought it was very wrong. Yeah! I remember that we were upset.

Researcher:

What did you do?

Respondent I didn't do anything. I don't think anybody did anything. They probably talk to whoever was in charge. She (Ms. Hughes) did talk to somebody about it. She thought it was very wrong because they felt -like I said with Douglas being the only black band, they should've been either in the front or thee middle. Not bringing up the rear end. But that's what they wanted them

to do.

Researcher:

As far as your teachers at Douglas did they ever encourage you as far as going to college. Was that something you ever wanted to do or what? How was your classroom situation?

Respondent:

Well I tell yeah, I never did hear them talk to me about it. I just never did hear them talk to me about it. It was okay you know the teachers were good and the principle was nice and maybe nobody ever talked to me about it because I didn't stay there long enough. They didn't talk to me about anything.

Researcher:

How long did you stay there (Douglas High School)?

Respondent:

I stayed there through the 10th grade.

Researcher:

So did you complete your GED or did you go back and complete your schooling?

Respondent:

No. I didn't.

Researcher:

Back in those days I understand that you were able to get a job without having a degree, was it hard for you to find a job without completing high school?

Respondent:

No. Because I worked with Memorial Hospital as a-I worked in the supply room. Like I did the-

during that time they didn't have gloves like they have now, you had to take those gloves (sterile gloves) and wash them, powder them, and then put some powder inside. And put them in the steamer. And I made up solutions like the boric acid solution, and saline solution. All that was done by hand during that time.

Researcher:

So basically you were sterilizing everything?

Respondent:

Right. and I remember the white girls-I was about the only black in there and they were basically nurses and they tried to get me to let them teach me. How to be a nurse but I wasn't interested.

Researcher:

Were you working with a few blacks or were the only black there?

Respondent:

There were a few blacks but the rest of them worked in the blacks worked in the laundry. All I remember seeing any black nurses. All I remember seeing is white nurses most of the black people there worked in the laundry-including my sister and my cousin worked in the laundry.

Researcher:

Did you like working there (Hospital)?

Respondent:

Yeah I like working in the supply room.

Researcher:

When you were there did you ever pick up on any ungrateful attitudes from white people because they saw a black in the hospital or anything like that?

Respondent:

No. But I remember one (white) lady saying to me something and she did it in a initial. And I didn't know what she meant and I went and asked her what did she mean by she said to me. And it wasn't very nice. I won't even mentioned what she said(respondent laughs). But she didn't say it no more.

Researcher:

You don't have to say what she said but was a racial slur of some kind?

Respondent:

No. It wasn't a racial slur. She invited me somewhere. And I didn't know what she meant by the initials. I asked, and did end up reporting her. They (hospital) reprimanded her.

Researcher:

Was that the first job you had?

Respondent:

That was the only job, then I got married.

Researcher:

When did you get that job?

Respondent:

I got that job in 1946. And I left in (19) 47 and went to New York.

Researcher:

What did you do in New York?

Respondent:

Nothing. Then I went to Baltimore. I was with my people. I was went my aunt and other family.

I didn't go there to work or anything like that.

Researcher:

Can you tell me, was there any difference in the racial perceptions that you saw in your visits up north. Did people tend to get along better up north (researcher was referring to black and whites) then they did in Huntington?

Respondent:

I really didn't see-where my aunt live at, well I'll tell you what happen. I had never been used to sitting down and eating with white people. So my aunt and I was on the train and then we stopped. And after we got off the train we went into an establishment to eat. And I just couldn't eat in front of all those white people standing there. I refused to eat and she thought I was crazy. She said "What's a matter with you?", and I said "Nothing I'm just not hungry." (Laughter) They (whites in the establishment) probably thought I was crazy but I had just never been in an environment like that before. I had never sat down and ate with white people before. I'll I knew was black people on this side of the tracks. You know and that was it. And she was very upset with me because I embarrassed her but, I couldn't help it I just couldn't eat. But she was used to it because she lived up there. So she didn't pay it any attention.

Researcher:

While you were up north did you ever get used to that?

Respondent:

No. Because I didn't stay there long enough. I worried my aunt so much she sent me to Baltimore. In Baltimore my aunt lived out in the country like. So I was very well satisfied with that. So that's where she (aunt from New York) sent me and that's where I went and that's where I stayed until

I came back home.

Researcher:

How were racial relations in Baltimore?:

Well you never did see any-you never did see in white people out there.

Researcher:

As far as the stores, were they basically segregated

Respondent:

I never really paid any attention to them. Now we would go in town to the market but, I never really paid any attention.

Researcher:

I know I skip over this before but you just said you were on this side of the tracks. I take it from the history of Huntington that I've learned so far, the black community in Huntington back in the past was pretty much self sufficient. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up on this side of the tracks?, because I understand that you had everything you needed. You really didn't have to go to the white community or downtown for much.

Respondent:

There were white grocery stores here which were across the street from us and then there was a white barber shop right where the Barnette childcare center is. There was a white barber shop there, a bar, and a drug store. Now that was all ran by whites. But they were always nice to us that's why I say I didn't pay attention to it. Because they were nice to us. Then there were white grocery stores across from Barnette childcare center. They had several grocery stores up and down 16th street (currently Hal Greer Blvd.) But like I said before I never was insulted I didn't pay attention, I just

went on into the store I got what I wanted, they talked to me and I talked to them. At the time I was just a little girl but I never heard the names then that I hear now. I guessed they used them but I didn't hear them.

Researcher:

So your mother and your father never really talked to you about racism.

Respondent:

No Sir! My mother and father never talked-never said anything about white people. They never did and like I said they grew up in Virginia they were born and raised there. They probably encountered a lot of it. But I guess like anything if you see enough it you get used to it. It just come naturally you know. No, my mother has never said anything against a white person except, for one time when she was working for this (white) woman and she accused her of doing something that she didn't do. She told us about it but she didn't mentioned color or anything like that. She just like what she was accused of but otherwise, no. My mother and father neither one of them said anything. That's the difference in a lot of white people and black people. Because like I said I found out, that all white people are not raised to be prejudice by their parents too. I just found that out recently, but the majority of white people teach their kids what to call you and point your color out to them. And like I said when their coming from the womb almost. Why do you think we have the Ku Klux Klan and these skin heads. Hatred had to start from somewhere. I'm not saying all of their parents teach them hate but somebody did. If you ask one of them, why do they hate you, they wouldn't be able to tell you.

Researcher:

Are you talking about people in the KKK?

Respondent:

I'm talking about any of them! That hate a black person. If you were to ask them why do you hate me?, when they don't even know you. And it's stupid when they just say the color of your skin. But what else can they say. They can't tell you why they hate you, unless you have done something to them. They can't go by what your mama and daddy did because it was the other way around. And just like they getting mad now because of the mixing of the races, who started? The white man! With his slave women, having children with them, that's where that mixed blood started. But their not going to put it where it (blame) should be. And now they get mad if they see white man with a black women or vice versa. Which is none of their business, you can't tell no body how to live. But they'll try.

Researcher:

You were saying that your parents are from Virginia. We mentioned off tape that you had taken a train down there before, can you tell me about that trip you took and what happen when you took that train trip?

Respondent:

Well, I remember like I said they used to-we would be sitting in the coach and they would flip this thing over that said for "colored only". So if we were in the wrong place we would just have to get up and move. I remember once while I was in Virginia and my cousin were taking the city bus coming to town. And she said you have to-when you get on the bus, you have to go to the back of the bus. She said because you can't sit in the front. And I think I might have said why? Because you black your not supposed to sit up there. That was a shock to me because I never did ride the buses here in Huntington. I imagine it was plenty of it here too but, I didn't know anything about

it.

Researcher:

Did that lady give you a look like how could you not know or anything like that? Because it seems to if that was the way it was that lady would probably be shocked that you didn't know.

Respondent:

Well I never really paid any attention whether she was or not I just went on and did what I had to do.

Researcher:

How old were you then?

Respondent:

I was about sixteen.

Researcher:

Can you tell me a little bit more about your family history as far as your mom and your dad? What was there back ground? Were they Indian, white, black-?

Respondent:

My great grandmother was Cherokee Indian and I guess it was white blood on my fathers side. Because from what I've been told my grandfather looked like a white man. And he had one son that was very fair. The rest of them were brown skin like their mother. And my great grandfather his name was Daniel Price, he was a laborer in Virginia and I have my grandmother's birth certificate and that birth certificate I guess is going on two hundred years old now but, I do have it.

Researcher:

When did you meet Mr. Harris (her husband)?

Respondent:

I met him here in Huntington, West Virginia in 1949.

Researcher:

How did he make his way up here?, I understand that he's from a different state.

Respondent:

He came here at the service he had an uncle that lived here. He came up here to stay with his uncle after he came out of the service.

Researcher:

Was he working at any particular place, can you tell me how you met?

Respondent:

Well, a girlfriend of mine was dating a guy that always hung around his uncle's house and that's how I met him.

Researcher :

Can you tell me about him courting you? Because I know back then dating was much different then how it is now.

Respondent:

We would go to church and to the movies. You see we were both church goers when we met. Although we weren't really saved. He was brought up like that and I was brought up like up like that. So when we met the seed was already planted in both of us. So we would go to church- sometimes we would be sitting up in church at night. When was a young couple we would go to church day and night.

Researcher:

And how old were you when you met?

Respondent:

I was twenty one and he was twenty two.

Researcher:

And how long was it before you got married?

Respondent:

We got married in 1950.

Researcher:

How many children do you have?

Respondent:

Three.

Researcher:

And what do they do?

Respondent:

One's a teachers assistant, one an electrical engineer, and one is a underwriter for an insurance company.

Researcher:

Can you tell me what it was like raising black children during the 50's and 60's?

Respondent:

It wasn't hard for us because we didn't have any problems we didn't have any problems what so

ever. They did what they were told, when they got sixteen they went to work and that was basically it. And they were obedient children, they might not have liked what was said to them but we never had any rebellion from them. So I think it was alright raising ours. I can't speak for how the rest of them came up. But I know how these three came up (reference to her own three children).

Researcher:

Can you tell me what it was like-Mrs. Harris you lived through World War II, Korea, couple other wars and I don't know how many conflicts. Can you tell me what it was like going through World War II, I understand your husband is actually a World War II veteran, can you tell me about the whole time.

Respondent:

I really didn't know him then. I remember hearing about it in 1941, at that time I wouldn't nothing but about thirteen years old. So really it did not bother me. I heard the songs that they were singing during the war time- "The white Cliffs of Dover" and "My Buddy" and all those types of songs. That they were singing during that time. I would hear about the war but I really wouldn't pay that much attention to it because I wasn't that old. I really didn't pay that much attention to it. So really it didn't bother me.

Researcher:

Did any of your brothers get recruited?

Respondent:

One, of my brothers and he was in the army. And he was stationed in Hawaii and my other brother didn't go, my brother James did.

Did James share any stories with about the war, what it was like being a black soldier in the war?

Respondent:

No. He never did talk about it. If he did I didn't have time enough to listen. I was always on the go so no he hasn't talked to me about it at all. He never had. Even as old as he is now he never has.

Researcher:

So he's still alive?

Respondent:

Yeah he's the one lives over in Ohio.

Researcher:

Well what was it like living Korea and Vietnam, I'm sure you remember those situations too?

Respondent:

Yeah, I remember them like I told I wasn't a person that paid attention to a lot of things. I heard people talk about them. And I heard war veterans talked about how bad things were for them but if your not in the midst of something yourself-for me I have a tendency not to pay any attention to it. But I had heard about it over the news, on the radio, and how a lot of people were bitter about

End side 1/beginning of side 2

things that happened to them during that time.

Researcher:

So none of your boys had to go to Vietnam?

Respondent:

No. He was in the Navy for twelve years then he went into the Reserves, and he still affiliated with the Navy. Because he was a submarine man. And anytime there was something wrong with the

submarines he would go where the submarine was. And like I said he teaches now. Basically everything he learned is what he is teaching now.

Researcher:

Let's talked a little bit about the Civil Rights Movement and as far as you living in Huntington at that time. When did you here about a Movement taking place?

Respondent:

The Civil Rights Movement and when did I hear about it?

Researcher:

Yes Mam.

Respondent:

I don't remember, when I heard about it.

Researcher:

Can you remember when it first dawned on you that things were happening down South?

Respondent:

Oh!, I remember was it in Arkansas, when the kids were stopped from going to that school when the government-the man had just died, what was his name? George Wallace, and the governor from Arkansas now I thought that was terrible and I just recently saw that on TV. Now I do remember those things.

Researcher:

How does that make you feel?

Respondent:

It made me very angry. Because these people are just programmed to you know like I said with stuff

(hate) in them from a baby on. And that's all they know is to fight the black man and keep him down you know and to me it was awful and they had one of the first women-they showed it not too long ago on TV where they showed the day she was block from going to that school in Arkansas but she went anyhow and look where she is now. But she made something out of herself. And she's standing above them right now. That was on TV recently, they interviewed her. They showed back when they were blocking the school, bringing out all the police and dogs and mess. Trying to fight for what, for what? I don't even understand their reason is, except that your black. It's just like the white has been taught that he is superior, over the black man and as far as they are concerned we're not supposed to be as smart as they are. I'm really thankful for my mother and father because they never did say anything like that to me. They never did teach me prejudice. I don't have anything against whites because I got a lot of them now in my family. I got a lot of white people in my family. And I would be very miserable if I went around hating them all! I would be a tormented person because anybody that hates they can not tell me that they are not tormented. Because that evil is torment. And I know they can't rest at night because they're always trying to see what they can do against the black person. To keep him down. I know they got to be miserable.

Researcher:

When you saw the students at Marshall begin to protest against segregation downtown, that's when I understand some the Civil Rights Movement rhetoric came to Huntington. What did you think about that?

Respondent:

Well, I tell you for me it was terrible. My husband worked for the Herald Dispatch (local newspaper) for thirty-six years and there was a picture in the paper and I think during that time it

was a lot of black students that was protesting the Board of Education. And one of the white guys down there where my husband was working at (Herald Dispatch) was speaking to my husband and said do you know anybody on this picture? And there was our daughter sitting right in the midst of it-Pat. He said (her husband) that's my daughter. They had a sit-in against the Board of Education.

Researcher:

Do you remember what they were sitting in about?

Respondent:

I've forgot what it is now but I'm sorry that my son didn't get to go to Barnette or Douglas because I think it was about two years before he entered school was when they began to integrate. But we were still blessed because he was right at the school were he had to go. It was Simms school and it was only a block away from where we lived at. All he had to do was cross Dalton Ave. And he was in school you know so that was a blessing for all three of my kids. Although, I would have liked them to go to an all black school for a while anyway.

Researcher:

Why?

Because I went there. I just wanted them to have the chance of going there. But it wasn't like that. It was only because I went to those two schools. It was no special reason why I wanted but I just sort of wanted them to follow in my footsteps.

Researcher:

During the Civil Rights Movement taking place here in Huntington did people your age get involved as far as-because the college kids were doing their thing but was there any type of community effort?

Respondent:

Not that I know of. -Yeah there was some. I won't name their names but there were a few people that were really involved in it. Yeah and they were adults.

Researcher:

Was it a large number or small number involved?

Respondent:

It was a small number.

Researcher:

Why do you think it was a small number of adults getting involved.

Respondent:

Because a lot of them was so busy working trying to raise their families, they really weren't paying any attention to it I guess. I know there is one lady who was really upset about the black people not getting involved. It would probably be good to interview her too. I won't call her name but you might have already talked to her. She's one of these fighters, she's a fighter-yeah.

Researcher:

Did your children grow up during the Civil Rights Movement?

Respondent:

Yeah Pat(one of her daughters) was right there.

Researcher:

But don't you have a child that is older than Pat or is Pat the oldest?

Respondent:

No. Pat is the youngest. She's the baby.

Researcher:

So James (oldest child), and Teresa (second oldest) are older than her?

Respondent:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Did they get involved in the movement. And if so, were you worried about Pat, and the others?

Respondent:

I think Pat was about the only one. She had a lot built up in her. And I don't know why she had so much built up in her against another race. Because she wasn't taught that. She really wasn't taught that. But now-she's beginning to smooth out now. (Laughs). She's beginning to smooth out now.

Researcher:

What was the other children's attitude regarding the Movement?

Respondent:

I didn't hear them say anything about it. I don't remember them saying anything about it. Because they were working and things and they never did say anything to me about it. Like I said Pat didn't even say anything to us about it. I had find out by seeing her in the newspaper. Guess that it was during that time-I wish I could find that newspaper clipping. Larry left home in 1970, he went to Marshall for two years, and then he left.

Researcher:

Can you talk a little about your grandchildren.

Respondent:

I have eight grandchildren. I help raise three, Mikki, Tereka, and Tosha. The other five never lived

around me. I grew very attached to these girls because like I said they grew up with us. The same thing that happen to my children happen to them. Like I said they weren't perfect but they were good kids. And we never had any problems with them what so ever. And we knew where they were at night. We knew where they were in the day time. And they were obedient kids and they still maintained their morals-they went on to be. The oldest one Mikki is registered nurse at King's Daughter Hospital in the neo-natal department, Tereka is a license beautician, and Tosha is a school teacher. And I thank God for how he has led us to teach them the rights and wrongs, the do's and the don'ts, and the wills and the won'ts and they have really maintained. So I can stand and say that I am really honored that these are my grandchildren and the other five I love them dearly but I don't know them as much as I do these three. I have two that live in Ohio, I have one that is a student at Ohio State University and one is still in high school, and the other three live in Rhode Island.

Researcher:

Can you tell me what are the biggest differences as far as the challenges you saw with your children raising your grandchildren compared to the challenges you had raising you them because I understand the black community was much closer when they were coming up?

Respondent:

Well I don't know-but I felt like our kids didn't have to study as hard. I guess the challenge would be to stay right there with the man or above the man. So that means a lot of times blacks got to study a little bit harder because things came so easy to others where it didn't come easy to them. And I guess it was challenge for them to get in there and get what they had to have-to get what they needed. And I've seen these children (grand) do that. Mikki burnt the midnight oil a lot of times. Because Mikki was working at Lens Crafters, going to school, maintaining her own apartment, and

she still made it. My children got their education too but Mikki I guess was really a go getter she had her mind made up about what she wanted to do. And she did it you know. So she knew it was challenges out there but like I said she past the test. She maybe have to go to work in the morning but she would get up maybe three or four o'clock in the morning to study then would have to go to work at Lens Crafters. Then would have classes in the evening. Tereka she went to beautician school. And Tosha spent five years at Marshall too. So they all made it.

Respondent:

I would like to say one thing, Although I did not graduate from high school God gave me a diploma in wisdom. Just because I didn't do it, I never did teach my kids not to get an education. All my grand kids went on and did it. Because this what we taught them to do, go on and do what you have to do-you know. So they all made it.

Researcher:

I'm trying to get an idea of your relationship to Appalachia. When I say the word Appalachian do you think you fit into that category of people, Do you think you're Appalachian? (Researcher explained the geographic parameters of Appalachia)

Respondent:

Well why do they call it Appalachia?

Researcher:

It is just referred to as Appalachia because the region is located in or around the Appalachian Mountain chain.

Respondent:

Well you know I never saw the mountains except from the highway because we're always asked-told

about our mountains, our mines, and I don't care where you travel. If they ask you where are you from and you say West Virginia-they think your barefooted, and that all you know is the coal mines. I never seen a coal mine except from the highway. Now I did stay up in Logan with grandmother just for a season. I knew the coal mines were there but like I said the mountains- I've always been down here on flat ground.

Researcher:

How was your stay at your grandmothers'?

Respondent:

I went one year semester at school up there where she lived, she lived in a place called Christ, West Virginia and where she lived at the train would go to this place called Loretta and that was the end of the line. It would go from Huntington to Loretta. It would go from Huntington to Loretta then turn around, It would leave here at seven o'clock in the morning and arrive at twelve. My mother and I rode it. And it was interesting I was twelve years old when I stayed with my grandmother. It was a season it wasn't very long and like I said I went to school up there for one semester and I came on back to Huntington.

Researcher:

Can you remember the white people treating you any differently?

Respondent:

I didn't pay any attention. Up there where we stayed we didn't see any. I think any time you seen any white was if you went to Logan (the town) and shop and I never did go to Logan to shop.

Researcher:

Was that a black coal camp?

Respondent:

Yeah. Our first pastor the one from Antioch, Rev. Murphy was from there he lived up there. I knew him before he came to Huntington, when I was a little girl my grandmother was a member of his church up there. Before he came to Huntington he lived maybe a mile up the road from where we lived at. And he was a coal miner. Yeah it was a coal mining town.

Researcher:

Getting back to Appalachia. Do you ever feel like people don't feel like it is any black people living in West Virginia?

Researcher:

No I never thought that. But you know it's another thing too. A lot of people think that West Virginia and Virginia are one state and you can't get it through their head that it's not. It is divided, they said at one time it was one state. But it was divided and one became west. Just like a friend of mine was telling me the other day. Something came up in the family and she was telling her friend that she was going to West Virginia and her friend said oh, your going to Virginia. She said no West Virginia-you can't get it through their head that these are two different states and they still don't believe it, then I say well follow me home. You don't believe what I'm saying then follow me home. I don't know what they think we live in.

Researcher:

I've struggle with the question -are you black or are you Appalachian quite a bit myself?

Respondent:

Yeah, that's just like right here in Huntington, how they have named different areas of Huntington. Now we're supposed to be Fairfield West. The only thing that I overheard was the Southside. The

Southside was the well to do white people. Which was over there by Ritter Park and everything. That's all I ever heard was the Southside. But now everything looks like it has been sectioned off into different categories. That's the way you identify yourself right now. We're supposed to be Fairfield West -what does that mean? Poor black folks sitting up in there (laughs). I don't understand what they mean.

Researcher:

So how important is church to you?

Respondent:

Very important, very important. I am a Christian, I have been in Church all my life. But I have to say I've only been saved for the last twenty five years. Because I found out that you can be sitting in church and still miss out. Your not saved if you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior. You just lost-that's the word not me you know. So for twenty five years I've been at Antioch Baptist Church, I first was at Calvary Baptist Church all my live until I moved over here. We have brought kids up in church, we have brought our grandchildren up in church. They're still working for the Lord. Some our choir directors, some our Sunday school teachers, and they all have been gifted in singing. So God has really blessed this family. All my grandchildren are singers (Mikki, Tereka, and Tosha), my daughter Theresa, and my brother can sing. I was the president of the Church A club from 1976 to about 1995 but anyway I was there for about 14 years. This was a position that only two have held. I thank God for being able-and I was just thinking about this the other day. The Lord has blessed me to be able to work with my granddaughter on the usher board. She (Tosha) and I both work together on the usher board when I was President of the Church A club my daughter (Theresa) work with me. So we have been blessed to work together in the work of the

Lord. And I think that is terrific because you hardly ever see families working together for the Lord. You see them working together for everything else but for the Lord. And I am really honored to say that I've worked with children and my grandchild in the church. And like I said we are just a family saved by grace.

Researcher:

With all the high divorce rates where do draw your strength from to continue to have such a long lasting marriage?

Respondent:

The good Lord if I did not have the Lord. I know the word and what he says and I dependent on the word of God. And I know there has been a lot of times that I have fell flat on my face but with prayer things change. We're not perfect "teeth and tongue fall out", that don't mean you run to divorce court. Because that's all they waiting for and I'm like the Lord I hate divorce, and that's one thing I pray that my grandchildren will never have to go through because all three of my children have been divorced some not by choice but it still happen. And I'm praying to God that he sends everyone of my grandchildren a mate and if he sends it to them I know it is going to be alright. Now I'm not saying that it won't be disagreement but, learn how to talk it out and not walk it out. And go to the Lord with the other stuff, and ask the Lord to solve the problems because he is the only one who can and that is one thing that I hope he blesses my granddaughters with, my grandsons with. That he sends them their mates and that they will love God, love each other, and grow in the strength of the Lord and keep their marriage together, because those vows are very, very important. Some people think that I'll just get up there and say it. When it is from the mouth and not the heart, in a month they are sitting up in divorce court. Because they didn't mean anything

they said. But I asked the Lord to lead my grandchildren to take it seriously before they marry anybody. Weigh the pros and cons and be sure that this is the one that God's got for you be very sure.

Researcher:

The importance of family is a big thing to in Appalachia. I would just like you to comment on the importance of your family and what that means to you?

Respondent:

It is very important. Because dysfunctional families everybody is fighting each other, everybody is against each other, that's not good nowhere and for nobody but I like for my family to be even closer then they are right now. And always recognized your family regardless now where you are or what you do or how you go. Remember from whence you came. And I think a good relationship between family members is good. And if you got the love of God in you then you going to show that love to your family. That's what I think about it. Let the love of God be in your family and let God lead your family. And you know that everything will be all right.

Researcher:

Where do you see yourself as a black lady in Appalachia?, I wanted to know because we (blacks) are not doing a good job in expressing our Appalachian and African American heritage.

Respondent:

That's because we don't who we are. First we were black, then Afro American, and now African American. And I won't say the other word but you know what I'm talking about (racist terms). I know we must confuse other races because I know they don't know what to call us. Because we don't know what to call ourselves. And so like I said I'm seventy years old so I guess I don't pay

attention to some of the things the younger people do. I look at myself as just being a person that is just in Appalachia because I don't even know what they're talking about. So as far as the mountains and stuff , how do they define it. It's only been a few years since I've heard that name(Appalachian). Like I said I've just been here and things probably just went on by me. People talking about Appalachia I never knew what they were talking about and didn't give it much thought really to what they were even talking about.

Researcher:

Well Mrs. Harris, I want to thank you for the interview.

Respondent:

Oh, your welcome God bless you.