1994

Oral History Interview: Sandra Page

Sandra Page

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA
400 Hal Greer Boulevard
Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667
304/696-6799

ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: _____

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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 8/5/94 Sandra Page
(Signature - Interviewee)

Please send copy of transcript

802 Brookley Blvd.
(Address)
Toledo, Ohio 43607
419-531-2030
(Phone)

DATE: 8/5/94 Barbara Smith
(Signature - Interviewer)

_____
(Address)

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(Phone)

H-00687

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MS. SANDRA PAGE

CONDUCTED BY: DR. BARBARA ELLEN SMITH
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

DATE OF INTERVIEW: AUGUST 5, 1994

SUBJECT: BLACK STUDENTS @ MARSHALL UNIVERSITY AND THE SUPREME COURT DECISION ON INTEGRATION OF THE '60S.

TRANSCRIBED & TYPED BY: GINA KEHALI KATES
PROGRAM SECRETARY/
TRANSCRIPTIONIST

Barbara: ....how long you've been in Huntington, so forth. This is an interview with Sandra Page on August 5th, at Marshall University. How long has your family actually been in Huntington? Do you know? Are you...did your parents move here, or...?

Sandra: My grandfather moved here with his family...I don't know the year, but years and years ago.

Barbara: And where did they come from?

Sandra: They came from Logan County.

Barbara: Oh, they did?

Sandra: West Virginia, uh-huh. And they moved here so that my aunt could go to high school. Because there, there wasn't a high school for the black students to go to. And so he moved his family here so that she, so that the children could attend high school.

Barbara: That's interesting. Did he work in the mines?

Sandra: Mmm-hmm, he was a miner.

Barbara: So education, it sounds like, has been an important part of your family values for a long time. Yes. Tell me where you grew up, what neighborhood in Huntington, where was it, and...

Sandra: Okay. The first neighborhood that I remember as a child where we grew up was down in Ritter Park. We lived right in the midst of the park, where the swimming pool is now.

Barbara: Oh, for Heaven's sake!

Sandra: And we were the only black family that lived in that particular area, though there were other families that lived on Monroe Street and you know, in the area, over at Monroe and Madison Avenue, 14th Street West.

Barbara: Mmm-hmm. But you were kind of an island there, it sounds like.

Sandra: Yes, we were the only little, the only little family on Harrison Avenue.

Barbara: And how long did you live there?

Sandra: We lived there until I think...probably I was thirteen or fourteen, when we moved. And we moved over on Sixth Street West, it was still in the, what they called the west end of town. But it was on Third Avenue and Sixth Street, because our address was 617 West 3rd Avenue.

Barbara: And what was the racial mix in that neighborhood?

Sandra: It was a black neighborhood. Lots of black families. But yet and still, say like the next block, there were all whites. And in our block...I guess you could really say a mixed neighborhood, though. Because people were like clustered, but maybe all, it was all black, and maybe like four houses and then it would be like all white. But people got along well. So that was no problem or anything like that. But we didn't go to school together. We played together in the summers...

Barbara: You did, huh?

Sandra: ...and everything. And we were friends. But we didn't attend school together. I remember that most especially when we lived down on Harrison Avenue, because we did play with the kids that were around. But when it came time to go to school, we went to McKinney School, which was on Third Avenue. And...and the other kids went to Monroe school. So when we went to school, if we walked, we had to walk past Monroe school to get to McKinney school, because that was the all-black school.

Barbara: That's interesting. And so it's interesting, you talk about the kids playing together and so forth, and yet not being allowed.... Did you, did you encounter much racism then, in Huntington, as a child? Or were you...?

Sandra: It...we knew it was there, because it was like two worlds that we lived in. We lived in our world, and it was our school, our church, our neighborhood, our family. And yet, there was the world that we went to when we went to work, when we went downtown, and when we ventured out beyond our neighborhood, there was a different world. And we were aware of our behavior, to make sure that we didn't get hit, you know, anything. But we were aware of racism. We were aware that we were treated differently when we went beyond our world. But we didn't let it consume us. You know? But we were, we were aware that there were places we weren't to go. We couldn't go in restaurants; we couldn't go to the movie. Now, the movie that we could go to was called the Orpheum. And the Orpheum had a balcony. And you had to go into the side of it, and up some stairs and we sat in the balcony. And, ah, white

patrons sat downstairs. Now we were watching the same movie at the same time. But we had to go upstairs and sit. And there was a person who monitored, he was the man that ran the camera and I think his job was also to monitor the balcony, because at times you would see him walk through the balcony. Now we realize that, you know, this.... But that was the way it was. And you could not sit down at lunch counters and eat anything like that. You could buy it and take it out. But you couldn't sit and actually be seated. And when we came to Marshall, there was like the Keith Albee, which Marshall used for its Artists Series. And now we could go to all of the Artists Series that they had there. But the next day, when it was movie time, we couldn't go into the Keith Albee. Because it was, it was like a movie. It was movies and, you know, we couldn't go. And we knew it was wrong. We laughed about it, sort of, because we saw the difference and everything. But no one ever tried to do anything about it.

Barbara: Were there then...were there a whole black business community of stores and restaurants and whatever?

Sandra: Right. There were...there were stores, ah, like grocery stores, little restaurants, ice cream parlors, a dime store—there was a whole neighborhood. In fact, what is known now as Hal Greer Boulevard, beyond 8th Avenue, was a thriving business district, too. And so...but then we went down, we went to town, there were, you know, the stores and everything that we went to downtown to. And...but we didn't move up in to this end of town until my, I think I was a freshman over here at Marshall. So we lived at what was called the west end of town until I was probably sixteen or seventeen.

Barbara: And then you moved...?

Sandra: Over on Daulton Avenue, we live on Daulton Avenue now. Mmm-hmm. So I walked to Marshall from Daulton.

Barbara: So you didn't live in the dorm?

Sandra: Oh, no, no, unh-huh. When we came to Marshall from Douglass, it was, as I remember, twelve of us on a campus of two-thousand.

Barbara: Oh, my goodness...mercy!

Sandra: As I look back now and think about how things are for young people, I guess we were really kind of brave. And we didn't even realize that we were. But we, we were like a little cluster, our class coming from Douglass was a close group of young people. So we, you know, we were comfort for each other. And our parents didn't come with us. No one came with us to register us. We just read and followed the directions and did like everyone else did. So that was one thing that, as I look back and see how easy it is for young people when they go to college now.... And it may have been like that for the majority group, and we may not have been aware of it. Their parents may have been coming and we just didn't know, or didn't notice. And there may have been activities, too, but...we just may not have known about it or whatever. I don't know. But we just came and registered and went to class and went home. And a lot of times we'd even go home between classes. You know...go home for lunch. But most of the time we would meet over in the Student Union and

have lunch. But we always were together because no one would let us sit or move in another direction. It was just that it was more comfortable for us, and we felt a little more secure, I think, with each other. Though, you know, we did venture out, and we did meet friends and everything. Because I remember I was friendly with a girl from New York and we were walking downtown and she said, "Well, you know, Sandy, let's go to a movie." And I remember thinking as I walked along with her, I said, "Now how do I tell her I can't go to the movie?" And as we walked and got closer down there, I just finally told her, I said, "Well, you know, I cannot go to the movie with you." And then I told her why. And she thought that was the strangest thing. It had never entered her mind that this kind of situation existed here. You know, so maybe a lot of people were really here and didn't know that it was like that.

Barbara: That may well be. That's probably pretty common.

Sandra: So they may not even have known.

Barbara: Yeah. Were you the first in your family to go to college?

Sandra: No, because my cousin had gone the year before and then I had other cousins that had gone, because they taught school in Cleveland. But they went to West Virginia State. And then...but my cousin that was older, just a year older than me, went to West Virginia State for a year, and transferred to Marshall after the Supreme Court decision and she could go here.

Barbara: You had said earlier before we turned the tape on about just what it felt like to be in Huntington and have this big university here and yet not be allowed to go to it. Could you say some more about that, in terms of how it felt and if it had any impact on your sense of aspiration, or maybe not with just yours, but others' sense of aspiration about college?

Sandra: Now, it is interesting, because it didn't loom really big. You know...it wasn't something that really worried us. We knew we wanted to go. We knew that because they had given us aptitude tests in high school, that we were capable of going, and they would tell you some of the things that you were capable of doing, and they would say going to college. And I remember this is what they told me. And so, it was something that we wanted to do, but I knew that I wouldn't be able to go because my family couldn't afford to send me. Though I'm wondering now if that was something that I kind of had in my mind, knowing that my mother and father never told me that. I remember that it wasn't something that they told me, but it was something that I think in my mind I accepted. I sort of maybe knew that we didn't have a lot of money. And that I might not be able, you know, to go. But uh, so it was something that we, you know, wondered, you know, about. And it, and that kind of wondering began when they had a Future Teacher of America conference here over at Marshall. And it was before the Supreme Court decision. And I remember that they came and got about six of us from our high school, and brought us to the Future Teacher of America conference. And it was held in the cafeteria over here. There were lots of young people, who were aspiring to be teachers. And then we were there, and we prob...we were aspiring, too, but we knew that we

couldn't come to Marshall to attend college at that time, to go. I remember the speaker and how she was telling people about aspiring for their dreams and things like that. But I can remember feeling like she wasn't really talking to me. Now, I felt like she, she really wasn't really talking to me because I knew I couldn't come there...and everything. So...but when it did open, when the opportunity availed itself for us, we did come and everything. So...and I think we were talking before, too, I remember that when we came our parents didn't come with us. And there were no special types of orientation programs for us. We just took the regular orientation class for freshman students and everything. And...and that was it. And we came to class. And uh...and we had not had special, you know, how sometimes they give kids special classes on how to study and everything. So we had not had any of those kinds of classes in high school. Or anything...we had no preparation. We just walked over here and registered.

Barbara: And this was 1955, so this was right after you were really the first entering class that included black students?

Sandra: Right after...it was in September of '55; we graduated in May of '55, and this was in September. Mmm-hmm.

Barbara: And how did you feel you were treated in terms of teachers or administration? Were there problems in terms of acceptance or was it just...how would you characterize it?

Sandra: It was that you were here and you weren't here. This is the way you felt. Our advisors...they were nice,

but you got no advice. I remember that, and as I look back on it now, I've always liked art and everyone has always told me I was, you know, I was good. And I always got my, I always got really good grades in art, and I often think, you know, it would have been nice if someone had said to me, "Why don't you minor in that or take, you know, why don't you develop this or that or the other." Whenever you would given them your schedule, they would sign it, at least, mine did. He would sign it and I would go on. And that was, that was it. So I do think that it would have been, as I look back, more direction. We were, we were here, and...and, you know, we were, we were here and no one really, in a sense, maybe noticed you as being a real part of Marshall. And uh...

Barbara: I just want to make sure I get this right...that what I hear you saying is that you didn't really experience some kind of active hostility, but at the same time there wasn't any effort really made to include you or, you know, do something to help you, make you feel more...

Sandra: They were, the teachers were friendly. Most of the students were friendly. There was no overt, you know, pressure or discrim-...that we felt, you know, and everything. But it was just that you were here.

Barbara: Were all those twelve students from Douglass High School? Do you know?

Sandra: Mmmh, there were some, I remember, that came from Ashland. Then maybe from Charleston. There may have been more than twelve. But as I remember it, it was a small cluster of us from Douglass.

Probably...I would say maybe twelve. At least six and twelve of us. And six of us graduated. Because I was looking at a picture that we had, and it was...six of us that graduated. Mmm-hmm. But...so it may have been more, but I remember...the student body at that time was about 2,000 or more. And there were very few of us. But before that time, though, Marshall did include graduate students. Now, if you wanted to go to graduate school, I believe they were enrolling graduate students before the'54 court decision. So uh, but the undergraduate school, they hadn't opened up. So, you know...but...but t6hat part they hadn't opened.

Barbara: Mmm-hmm. You mentioned having this one white friend from New York. Do you...how would you describe the whole social atmosphere among students? I mean, did you pretty much stay within your neighborhood and other friendships, or did you really feel part of a social life here on campus?

Sandra: Now, there may have been some that...because there were one or two students that maybe stayed on campus. I think they felt more of a social life here on campus. Those of us who lived in town and stayed at home, it was really more of an extension of our regular activities. We weren't going to Douglass school, we were gong to Marshall. So not much changed for us. There were some, you know, we befriended some people who were in classes and everything with us. But we generally kept our own friends and, you know, and everything. So no, that was something that we never really talked about, so I can't remember anyone maybe having a friend that they maybe had met here and they always saw them with. You know what I mean? It might be someone that you had befriended and when you

came in the lounge you would sit with them and talk with them. Or, what probably happened a lot was that, a lot maybe they would come to our table and maybe sit and talk, you know, to us and move along, or whatever. But as far as having, you know, changing the way we interacted with one another or one social life, it didn't. A lot of things that happened on campus socially we didn't come to. In fact, I don't remember coming...I don't remember coming back to anything on campus.... Probably...we went to, because we were required, I think, to go to convocation, we went to that like on a Wednesday morning. But that wasn't really social. But that was where a body of students would gather. But there may have been some that did things socially. I think there was a guy from Charleston, I think he stayed on campus. Now he seemed to have mingled more socially than a lot of other kids did. But...but it was, but it wasn't.... So it was really just going to school and coming on back. Mmm-hmm.

Barbara: Did you...what did it feel like...I mean, when you heard the Supreme Court decision and you knew that this meant that you could maybe go to college, can you just describe? You talked earlier about how this was the first time you, a national event affected you.

Sandra: It...I was, I was glad to go because I had always wanted to teach. And that was, that was interesting. I had always wanted to teach, so I was glad to be able to go. But not until, I guess, I grew older and I really realized the impact of the Supreme Court decision, that it had on me. Now, you know, not until when I sit down and think about the things that have happened through the years, that made a difference in my life, that's one thing that I pick out to have made a difference. In fact, I

was telling them that at my church in Toledo that that was one of the things that had impacted on my life. And I hadn't realized that until, you know, they had asked me to tell something. [chuckling] And I thought, well, you know, aside from the spiritual things, that was one thing.

Barbara: Was this entirely your decision, or did your parents...how did they feel about this whole ration of you going to Marshall and...?

Sandra: They were glad. They were, you know, they were encouraging. They, you know, wanted me to go and everything. So it was something that they wanted me to do, and, and encouraged me to do. In fact, the other thing that impacted my life was my mother, as far as making me, in a sense, continue. Because I got down to maybe like my junior year, that second semester of the junior year, and I was just really kind of weary, I guess. And I had told her that I thought I would like to go away and work, and maybe stop school in February and not go the second semester, I'd go away and work. And I remember her telling me, she said, "You know, I think you should just go on thru second semester, and go away and work in the summer." And I thought, well, that sounds pretty good. It's a s good an idea as I had. [laughing] So I said, well, okay, I'll do that. And it really was good that I followed her advice, because I went away and I worked, and I had a, I had, in a sense, it was like mid-July before I really found a job. I worked temporary jobs and stuff; it wasn't easy to find a job. Once I found a job, and I remember I made $40 a week. By the time I paid my uh, room, then board and bought a little additional food or whatever, because I stayed in a place in Cleveland called Phyllis Wheatley. And I tried

to save a little bit of money and everything. And as it got on toward the end of August, then I said, well, this could go on forever. [laughing] And I said, I think I'll go on back home and go to school. And so I did. I came on back and went to school and finished, you know. And when I watched my cousin graduated, I told my mom, I said, "Well, next year I guess I'll walk." She said, "Yes." And so I did, I did. And that was, that was nice. But so, she, they were very encouraging, my parents were. And so they have always been, they've always been in our corner. So that's always been nice. So, yeah.

Barbara: Did you see, in those four years that you were here, did you see much change in Marshall in terms of efforts made towards black students or just, perhaps with the numbers increasing or....? Any change in atmosphere or anything? Or did it pretty much stay the same?

Sandra: Well, you know, that was the period of time when Hal Greer went to school here, so I think by him being the ball player that he was, maybe it might have, maybe in that somehow, that arena saw that people could excel, you know, But, I can't look back and say that I thought it was overall a real big change. I remember the people were all...people were nice though. The teachers were nice. At that time they had a lab school for the students or for the professors' children to go to school, and they used it to train the people in the Education Department. And I remember they were real, real nice there when I went to do my classes in, you know, the practicum and whatever you had to do. So generally, it was not, I don't remember an overt atmosphere of discrimination. It was just like I

said before, you just were here, and that's the only way that I can really, in a sense, describe it. You were here. And uh, you know.... And, and there, there weren't...I don't remember any really big problems, except that. There were no efforts made, at least that I can remember, uh, to, you know, include you or to advise you or to counsel you. So maybe there were some by other people and I just, I just wasn't aware of it. But it wasn't, it wasn't an overt effort. Once we were here, well...

Barbara: Yeah, so be it.

Sandra: Yeah, it's the Supreme Court decision, so here you are.

Barbara: I was thinking, I mean, I think it's...there is a continuing problem I think, for black students on campus here in terms of feeling, in some cases, feeling really a part of things in a way that's really personal...not just, you know, just occupying space on the campus. And it makes me wonder uh, what your own advice would be. I mean, even to this day, if you were here, looking back on your own experiences, what would have made it better?

Sandra: I don't know, because I can remember...I know how they feel, because I can remember I had not come back on Marshall's campus after I brought my robe back, until...maybe ten years or more ago. When they had the play "Pearlie Victoria's" over here and I think First Baptist Church put that production on over here at Old Main in the auditorium. And I hadn't been back on campus until then. I had never come back to an orient-, a homecoming. And so, I had, I never really felt an

allegiance to Marshall, though it made a big difference in my life. But I never really felt any ties personally with it. I have always gone back to Douglass's reunions. The ties that I have with people that I've gone to school with or whatever, have been people that have gone to Douglass, so there is that tie there. I have a tie to Huntington and an allegiance. But I never felt...and I've thought about this...an allegiance to Marshall, though it was, though being here made a difference in my life.

But uh, advice to the students who are on campus now, I think that the temper of our world is different than it was then. I think that, being people we were much more aware of who we were. And I think that's the difference now. We were kept in a...and it was good that we went to, I went to McKenny, which was a two-room school at that time.

Barbara: Really? Wow.

Sandra: And it was like a little incubator, you know, you were just nurtured. And when I went to...we stayed there until like seventh grade. And I think we went to Douglass in seventh grade. And it was like seven of us or something that went at that time. And it was small, and we were nurtured there. Our church nurtured us. That little community over there, that's all kind of torn apart now; it was wonderful for nurturing people. And it, it nurtured us. And it made us, I think compassionate and sensitive to the needs of people. I remember as a group of us started a little club. And the purpose of our little club was to kind of have programs and to do service work, and we were like, I think we were...I think we were in college. We were here at Marshall. But that part of us never came to Marshall. It was like we were

two people. We were the people that came here, and we went to class. But those skills and things that we acquired over there ah, didn't come here because no one seemed interested in that part of us.

And so, but to get back to the young people today, we were made confident in who we were. And so I think this is what the kids are missing now, because I think that young black students now are always having to deal with making them their little mark or who they, who they are, very early in life. They go to schools in integrated settings, and if they have a sensitive teacher, and if the setting is sensitive, then that side of them can be nurtured; they can be who they are, and they can grow confident socially. And then they don't have to deal with the other little things that happen. And if they are in a setting where the people are not sensitive, they are always trying to find their place. They are always looking for their place. So really, they...they are always being consumed with looking for that place, instead of developing comfortably with themselves and who they are. And I think this is the difference ah, then and now. We never wondered who we were. We could come over here and, and if the people didn't really treat us right, I mean, we didn't, it wasn't something that consumed us. On the way back walking out Sixteenth Street, is what we called it then, we laughed about it; we told each other how it happened. And what happened. But it wasn't something that said you weren't quote who you are. We never worried about that part of it. And we never had to prove it to anyone here, other than, you know, doing your school work so it was that we were able to grow comfortably. So uh, and so when we got over here, we were very much the people that we were. And on one could, in a sense, "weasel" their way in and

make you feel less than who you were because you knew who you were. And I think that's real, I think that's the difference now, that's where the real problem lies. And, and I think I've noticed that over the years with the children that I worked with, too. And, and I, that's it. So, more so than maybe having a message for the young people as to how they could fit comfortably in, I think we're going to have to really work with our institutions where our children go, where our black students attend, and in their neighborhoods and in society, work on nurturing them. Because they are too young, trying to figure out who they are. So they never find out who they are. And I, really, you know, that...our institutions are going to have, in a sense, work on that part of it.

Barbara: I mean, what we're talking about here, it seems to me, is basically the negative side. We're talking about both the positive side of desegregation, in terms of opportunity...

Sandra: Right, right.

Barbara: ...and then the negative side, in terms of the impact of the black community.

Sandra: Mmm-hmm, because I really feel like a person will survive if he knows who he is. We survived. You know, we may could have done better in some areas, I don't know. But we survived and were able to, to overcome whatever negatives might have been here. And we didn't...in a sense, dwell on the negatives. Because even the negatives, when we were together, they were things that we talked about and me, you know, "Do you believe...?"

It was something like well, you know, I can share this with you and you can share yours with me. And then we go back and face it again and that's it. It's not like I'm going to have to, I'm going to go in here and do battle. Or I'm going to deal with this, with that person and mess up my whole situation or mess up the whole class, whatever. No, we, we uh, I really think that there were some pluses. And, of course, you know, it would have been a negative being...being just here, if we dwelled on or if were always constantly trying to get someone to say, "Look here, I am..." If we didn't know that we were important and that we had a contribution to make in our churches and in our school. And it is interesting because, to show you how it really was, when we were in high school we all had really pretty important roles in the high school. We were leaders in our high school. When we had our senior class play, we did the play, "Father of the Bride", and, you know, the parts were long and everything. And I remember that I was the bride. Another guy that came over here was the father. And another one was uh, the groom, so we all had important roles in that play. We had long parts to memorize and everything. So, over in the union, where all of us would eat lunch when we came to Marshall, uh, after awhile there was one of the students that began to eat lunch with us. They would come over to the table and just really kind of talk with us. And we, when they'd go back, we'd say...wonder, what's the deal here? What's going on all of a sudden? He's coming to eat lunch with us. But we never dealt with this person. And I can't even remember the name or anything like that. I just remember the incident. So after a while, he told us he was in the drama club here, and that they were going to put on a production and they needed someone to play a maid! [laughing] And they thought that one of us

would be good for the part. And so then the first thing that hit our minds was, here we'd done "Father of the Bride" and we had memorized all those parts. We had no cue cards when they did that, and we did the play and everybody, the auditorium was full, everybody'd thought we'd done a great job. And then here this is. So we just said, "Well, no, we're not interested." And we would not have been able to say "no" and been okay if we had not been nurtured and had not succeeded, you know, in the sense before we got here. So that was, now that's something that I remember. There are different th8ings that I remember, you know. But that was one thing because we were so proud of our play and how we had done it, and we'd done the set and we'd done all of it, and uh, we.... And I remember how hard it was memorizing all that stuff, and how worried you were that you were going to make a mistake and everybody was going to know. And then when he said that, we just said, "Oh, I shouldn't have said no." Or, "I'm not going to be included in the things that go on here." Or, "This part could have been a stepping stone."

Barbara: Right.

Sandra: It would have just been demeaning. So we wouldn't do it. And uh, so.... But that was, that was about the only thing that I can remember that happened that dealt with us because of race. Because that was the only reason they asked us about that part was because of race. But that was about the only incident that I can remember, you know.

Barbara: I was talking with a friend of mine, a black friend I used to work with who lives in, grew up in a small town in Reidsville, North Carolina. And she was

talking about how there was so much overlap between the school—it was a segregated school—and the community and the church and teachers and the principal went to your church. Everybody kind of looked out for you. And there was this whole, it was just a community that was very strong.

Sandra: It was.

Barbara: Could you talk about that? Did that exist here in Huntington?

Sandra: It did, it did. Because we attended, attended First Baptist Church then, and we still do now, on Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street. And it was a strong church, you know, in the way they felt about us. I mean, you just really…there was a feeling of belonging. The neighborhood was not all fragmented like it is now. And anyone probably going through the neighborhood would sense a sense of neighborhood and cohesiveness and everything that was there. There the teachers you felt were interested in you. You knew them personally. In fact, one of my teachers, in fact, my first grade teacher kept in touch with me and I with her until oh, maybe ten years ago when she died. And when I sent a note and everything to her, you know, her son, he wrote me back the nicest note, you know about…you know, growing up and, and also, there was a sense of uh, of knowing they cared about you. Yeah, there…there, there was that overlapping where you felt like you were a part of something. And you really, not in a sense, always felt it was only your parents that had aspirations for you and wanted you to do well. And encouraged you. And all of your teachers in high school, all of your…you know, I didn't have but two elementary teachers because it was

like one through four, and then five through seven. But there was a real sense of, of community...

END OF SIDE 1 – BEGIN SIDE 2

Sandra: ...we felt when we came here, you know, that.... And the people that, you know, who we were and the people that we met here and everything. We didn't really feel threatened, though, we really didn't feel a part, and that's the way Huntington was. Huntington, you didn't feel, you know, there was your community that you were in, so you didn't miss this community. Now, you went out and you worked and, and everything, so.... And I've always had little jobs and everything. And these, these jobs were beyond our own community, except when I was a junior and senior in college. I worked at the swimming pool and....but the other jobs that I had were, like I did domestic work, and I ran the elevator downtown in some of the stores. And I did domestic work in the stores downtown. Those were all the jobs that were, in a sense, available to us at that time. So the job at the swimming pool was really like a nice job to have in the summer and everything. But there was a real sense of community. So when I come back to Huntington now, that is the part that I do notice and that I do miss. Because it's like something has just come through and, and just torn it apart. Which is like in most cities now. It's...it's just been destroyed, that part.

Barbara: what do you attribute that to? Do you think it has to do with desegregation or is, are there other things as well?

Sandra: Oh, there are so many other things, I think, that attribute to it. You know, the schools and the situation in the schools certainly has some bearing on it. But there are so many other things that I think are societal now that have just contributed to the things that are going on. And I think, just now people almost don't know what to do to get things back together. It's like Humpty-Dumpty's fallen off the wall and nobody really knows how to put him back together. And I think this is, this is some of what has happened. And it's just not in Huntington. City after city after city you go through and the problems are the same. They are all the same. And it's really, really sad.

Barbara: It is.

Sandra: I really, I really don't, don't know. Some of that, I think, the children are maybe ill-equipped from the beginning. I don't think we dwell enough in the schools on, uh, the real skills that they need to do well. I think we've introduced a lot of programs, you know, in schools that are really not the answer to what it is, that's really bothering the children. So uh, I...I...I just really think that if we were able to give them the skills that they need, since we know that our language or our society is a language-based society, then you should make sure that their language skills are really good. So, dwell on phonics and those kinds of things so that...teaching them to read would be one thing that they would be able to learn, because if our language system is based on sounds...and lots of time on the sounds and teaching them so that at least you can present the material and the majority of them will get it. And uh...but there's, there are so many other problems. So much has come down the pike now that that is

destroying it, it's...it's...it's really something, it's really sad to sit back and watch and feel helpless to do anything about it. And I think that's really one thing that's happening to the whole country. Nobody really knows what to do. And so that, that is it. But there was, if there's one thing that is different, there is no real sense of community, no real sense of having people, you really know that these people really care about you, you know. And you can walk...when I was growing up in Huntington, you could not walk anywhere that you didn't run into someone that knew you. And they really knew you by name. They would ask you how is your mother or how is your aunt or someone. They always knew my aunts and my uncles and all of them, so they knew our family, and they would ask about the family. Or they would say, "Oh, I know you, you're Julia Cox's niece," or "You're uh, you know, Loraine Cobb's niece." You know.... My aunt worked in the nursery that was at Barnett, you know. Over there on Eighth Avenue and Sixteenth Street or Hal Greer Boulevard. There was a school and in there, there was a little nursery, and everybody knew her. And so, but...it's just like a whole thing of not caring about community or people per se. Because as you go through there now and...and it has to do something to a community to go out and look at Barnett, the old Barnett school, and see what that looks like and that no one seems able to do anything about that there. You know, you just can't...and how can anybody really feel good if you walk down there and you look at that and they say, "That's okay for this neighborhood," you know. And then right across the way they're building apartments and naming them after Carter G. Woodson. Well, what would Carter G. Woodson think? [laughing]

Barbara: Yeah, about that, yeah.

Sandra: To look at that and, and it seems to me before they get those completed that as a tribute to him that there would not be just this symbol of decay right across the street from there. It just seems like such a conflict, you know, to me. And that's really, I guess that's really our country now. There are so many conflicts. In uh, what we say and what we believe and what we do. Because as a tribute to him we build those apartments and name them after him. And he who would just die again [laughing], to see that. And going to build a life-size statue! And it just…I hope someone's able to do something about that before they are, you know, all of the other takes place because for you stand out there and dedicate all of that. And then all you do is turn and you look at that. I drove by today coming over here. And I thought, when we were growing up there was what you call the D & B across the street. And it was an ice cream parlor, and everything. It was, it was a different world then. And I think that's why people latch on to the 50s. it was a completely different world that we live in now.

And so how an institution like Marshall could meet the needs of black students now, you would have to probably do a real outreach, you know, into the community. And begin to make a difference in, in the schools and like that. Because it's to change it it'll have to be changed a whole generation. And when the kids enter, you know, to, to maybe the Education Department making a difference in, you know, how things are taught. And not just specifically to black students. It will make a difference in the black student's out there who are missing…it's not just now a black community problem.

You know, so...how...how it would make a difference would be probably, probably getting really in to the schools with valuable programs that would really teach basic skills that the students need. And then, when they are comfortable with being able to, to do their work, then they're going to feel better about themselves because they'll be able to compete. And that would be one way that I think that it would make a difference. Because lots of times I think that happens to institutions who are in neighborhoods, they grow where they are and they perfect their programs within the institution. And the only time that an institution reaches out is when it maybe sends students out to do practice teaching and everything. But they already have in mind...or they...they're not sending students out with a way to do something. The students come in with maybe a mind set as to what it ought to be, but with no real skills in a sense, you know. To come in and make a difference, whereas I think if the schools are already there with a program.... That's why, as I look back, and think of one of the plus things for Marshall, it was that lab school. Because I think you can develop some types of programs that you know worked. You know, you could really...I, as I look back, I don't know whether or not they did that kind of thing. But I think doing practice teaching, you felt very comfortable when you would go into the classroom. And the teacher was, felt comfortable turning different aspects of the class over to you. And because I had a good—my, my, my cooperating teacher was really nice, because that was at a time when there weren't many black students going out practice teaching. And she made sure that when I was presented to the class, that they accepted me. She made sure that I succeeded in the things that I, that she gave me to do. And I remember how she, in a sense,

was buffering me to make sure that I knew that she had given me the grade that I earned. Because what she did, she let me see what she had given me when she filled out the paper, and she signed it. She put it in an envelope, sealed it up, and it was tamped. And she says, "Now, I want you to mail this. Because if you don't get it, then it's not me." And so I think that she, without telling me, realized maybe that there were problems. And you know.... But yet, and still she didn't talk to me about that kind of thing. She only made sure that I did well when I did my practice teaching. And she talked with me about when I was going to be going away to teach or whatever, and she knew that they weren't hiring here, so she said, because I remember her talking to me and telling me that, she says, "But you know that they are not hiring new black teachers."

And so, I think professionally, people were aware of Huntington and its problems. But, like people now, I guess people then didn't feel that they were equipped to do anything about the things that, that existed. But, but I do remember the lab school as being a positive in training people. Because you worked with...with some small groups of students and you were able to develop some techniques for discipline, that you could use with a larger group. You know, you were able to really kind of pick out differences in personalities and whatever. Whereas now when students go out, generally they meet a large class of students, and they're got lots, you know, of people to interact with right away and everything. So, you know, maybe if uh, something like that could be developed where people were able to really be trained in, in developing programs that might would be able to nurture students, because I think that's one of the things that are lacking today. That even children go into

large settings now and, they're not equipped to...to deal with it. They are just not equipped. To deal with it.

Barbara: I wanted to pick up on some of your comments earlier about Douglass because I'm real interested in Douglass High School, it seems like such a, such an important institution for a lot of people, and you mentioned being in a play there. The senior play, playing the bridge in "Father of the Bridge". Could you just talk more about some of the activities that you were involved in there. Or even more generally why you think Douglass has a kind of meaning. It's almost a symbol, it seems like.

Sandra: There were lots of activities. There was the band. And I think that's interesting with the band, as I look back. None of the people who were in the band really took additional lessons. The band director taught you to play the instrument that you played. And there were spring concerts where the classics were played. And it was interesting that he had taught everyone to play those instruments and then they could play classical music. And that was, that was really something, as I look back. And that was not, I didn't really think about it at that time, because that's the way it always was. But now when I see how in schools now they offer lessons for everyone to learn to play the instrument. And yet and still when you go to those band concerts, it still sounds like novice playing. Whereas when you would go to the band concert at Douglass, it was very professional-like music that you would hear.

So, you always were, it was always a high level of participation. And the product that came out was always really on a high level of achievement. Also, we had like the Y-Teens, I remember that was a group that

we had; we came back in the evenings, I think, for that. Uh...there were all so many different clubs that you could be involved in. And so much, where you, there was a, we had a Wednesday assembly that we called it. And there were people who would come in who had been achievers, and they would come in, and they would be invited to come and to talk with us. And it only lasted an hour. And students were encouraged to be like the mistress or master of ceremonies. I mean, you were trained to do that kind of thing. You participated in it and you presented the speaker and that, and then at the end the principal would get up and talk. But there was a real involvement of the students and everything in uh, things that went on. And I mentioned to you how you always felt that the teachers were interested in you. The classes were small so...you had a real sense of belonging to that. And our class was only forty-nine people to graduate.

Barbara: Wow! I didn't realize it was that small.

Sandra: Mmm-hmm, it was small, forty-nine. So we all really knew one another. And so, when we have our reunions, like last year when Douglass had their reunion, the classes got together and it was funny how you went back into the roles you were in... [laughing]...in school. And the people who were take-charge people, was the take-charge person. And so we laughed about how uh, how it was, and how we got along, how we accepted the role that they had, they accepted the role that we had. It was...it was funny. So now I don't think that the students, by classes and everything being so large, and by people really in the sense now knowing who they are, they really...you know, it's, it's too many things to get used to fro them or

whatever. But Douglass was a good, a good place for students, because it...it was a real...it was just like a little cocoon and you just felt, you just felt good. You felt accepted for who you were. It wasn't that you had to try to be anyone else. Which I think is what happens to a lot of kids now very early on. They do a little bit of role playing. And so you being to wonder, well, who is this person. And they learn early to, to try to cover up who they are or to try to compensate or whatever. But no, you...and so you received training. Like I said, the band, the...and other groups that you were in. And you enco...there was a lot of encouraging, in a sense, student-by-student, you know. You were one hundred percent behind whatever group was up doing, you know, anything.

Barbara: Were you here when the decision was made to close Douglass? Do you recall anything about that?

Sandra: No. I don't know when that happened. I wasn't here. I think I was away when it was closed. My sister went to Huntington High, I believe. And I believe that a lot of them had gone, had left Douglass because of the things that had happened, you know. The enrollment had dropped and everything, and I think some of the things, you know, they didn't feel that they were getting what they really needed to move on to another setting. Because it's really funny how it had changed even in that period, you know, from the time that, say like in the 50s, to remember things really in American began to change real fast in the 60s. You know. So, I think she graduated from school in, from high school, in '65. So between, and I left here in '59, so Douglass closed in between '60 and '65 or something, in that time period. I don't really know when it closed, but I wasn't here at

that time. But, so I don't know if it had begun to lose that sense of being like a nurturing ground between that time. You know...when it closed and when I was there. But it was really, it was a strong, important, vital part of the community. You know, it was like, you know, it was important to, to everyone. Lots of things went on there that had to do with the community.

Barbara: Mmm-hmm. The building was used even if it wasn't something by the students?

Sandra: So it was...it was important. And it was well-kept. It was clean when you went in, you know. You had a feeling that the people cared about the building. And even the people that worked in the cafeteria and everything. And so, it was an important part of the community. And that's what's nice about going back to the reunions, you know, when they have reunions. Because there's still that sense of togetherness, that sense of that one common thread that weaves through all the people who are there. Even if you weren't there at the time that they were there, there's still that same kind of feeling that they had experienced the same kinds of things that you had experienced there. Mmm-hmm.

Barbara: I'm hoping to do some interviews around the time of the next, the next reunion is in '96, is that right? Every three years.

Sandra: Mmm-hmm.

Barbara: That would be a good time to interview.

Sandra: Oh, that would be.

Barbara: Folks who are coming back.

Sandra: That would be, that would be. That would be nice, mmm-hmm, to do it then.

Barbara: Let me ask you one other thing. You mentioned that you always knew you wanted to be a teacher. Did you, are there...is there a particular teacher who was, teachers who inspired you to that, or just...could you just talk about that?

Sandra: I don't know. I guess by me being at McKinney and it was a two-room school, and my first grade teacher, first through fourth grade, was Mrs. Warren. And you know, I always, you know, wanted to emulate her, you know, and.... And then there was Miss McGhee, who taught fourth through or fifth through seventh. And her personality was completely different from Mrs. Warren. You know, Mrs. Warren was a typical kind of like first grade teacher and.... But Mrs. McGhee was, had a personality that was a bit stronger, that you would need to, in a sense, to be able to discipline older children or whatever. But I think they, the two of them, made a difference in my wanting to teach. You know, they...they were, and I guess when I taught first graders or primary students, I was probably Mrs. Warren. [laughing] And for when I taught older students, I was probably Mrs. McGhee. [laughing] So, so they impacted on me, but I can't ever remember wanting to do anything else. You know, at that time. So...

Barbara: Is there anything else that we haven't touched on that you'd like to mention?

Sandra: Mmm, I guess I'm just really glad that you touched on, on how colleges and...could meet the needs of black students now, you know. Because it seems like now is when it's, it's...things are happening that not only affect them, but it affects the larger community. And so I think that we see now that we have to meet the needs of all the people. Rather than just meet the needs of one segment. Because eventually, whatever affects one, affects all. And that's one thing that I think that, over a period of time, universities have missed that, and communities have missed that, in try to meet the needs of just one area and one segment of society. So that's one, one area that I'm glad we were able to mention. And the importance of places like Douglass...because if we could have more schools that met the needs of all the students and...and that saw the importance of nurturing the spirit, which is what I think we've missed nurturing now is the spirit. And schools like Douglass nurtured your spirit, too. And...and seeing that, that will develop into all of the other things, because if you are a strong person and know who you are, then you can go out and do the other things that, that society would expect you to do. Because you're really not then trying to build a person. The person has been built. And you can go out and do the other things. So that's...that's what I'm thinking.

Barbara: Well, great! Well, I really appreciate....

END OF INTERVIEW