

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Betty Chaney, Betty Norwood Chaney. I'm from Tupelo, Mississippi. What was going on there? This was in 1944. So, I don't think there was a lot going on at that time. In fact, there was not a lot going on in Tupelo for a long time, even the Civil Rights Movement. [inaudible 00:00:27] Tupelo, we got in on the tail end of things. And, I'll talk about that maybe a little bit later. But, things were pretty quiet, I think at that point.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I was born in a rural area. My father was a farmer. We lived there until I was about 6 years old. And then, my mom was ... Her dad left her a house downtown in Tupelo. My dad was not happy with this, but he did finally consent to move. At first when we talked about it, "Well, Daddy, this house ..." They were talking, "This house is so much better. It's got running water, and it has lights and all this."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, "No, no, no, I can't leave my cows, my house, my pigs. Oh, no, no, no."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, he didn't want to leave. But anyway, we moved downtown. And basically, I grew up going to the schools in Tupelo, whereas all of my other brothers and sisters had gone to the one room schoolhouse in the country.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But yeah, I was born in '44. Lived there until I went to college in 1962. I went to Jackson State. I wanted to come to Clark Atlanta University. That was my plan, because I had always wanted to ... I thought I wanted to be a reporter. And, I learned that they had a major, even at that time, in communications from Clark Atlanta. But, my parents were, "No, no, no. You don't need any student loans. We're not going to do it. You need to go here to State where we can afford to send you." And, I cannot believe that at the time that I was in college at Jackson State, it was like \$900.00 a year. I know now at Jackson State, it's way, way, way beyond that.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, I went to school at Jackson State, graduated and was planning to go to the Peace Corps. I had gone through the process. I was, I guess, one of the first ones. Because, see we're talking about 1966 at this point. I got approved and was assigned to Ethiopia. Told my parents, "What? Oh, my Lord. The world is ending. No, you can't go. Ethiopia, my ... What? No. Your momma's sick. She's got high blood pressure. She's got diabetes. You can't go way off over there."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, being the obedient child that I was, not like Al [Jost 00:02:54] who went to some African country anyway, I consented, and ended up not having a job. Because, my plan was to go to the Peace Corps. So I graduated from college in liberal arts. I had a liberal arts major. Could not find a job doing anything in Tupelo, Mississippi. They weren't hiring anyplace except maybe the school system. And, because I didn't have an education, I wasn't qualified to teach.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Fortunately, I was offered a fellowship to go to graduate school. Whereas, you come out of college, "No, I'm finished with school. I'm not going anymore."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I jumped on that opportunity to because I needed something to do. So anyway, I went up to Binghamton. Jackson State had an arrangement with Harpur College it was called, the state university of New York, the graduate program, and the undergraduate was Harpur College. So, we had an arrangement with them. Some juniors from Jackson State went up. And a couple of us went up as graduate students. I ended up getting my master's from the State University of New York in Binghamton.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, we came through New York. My roommates and I had our last little fling in the city. And, I saw Ed [Vulance 00:04:14] ... What was the name of Ed's play? Big Girl, I believe it was. I was just so impressed with that. Because, usually the Black theater that I had seen was where you're talking to the audience, the white audience basically. And, you're doing things for them. But, this was a play where it was just talking about our situation, our lives and whatever.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And so, when I came to Jackson State ... I went back to Jackson State to teach after they'd been so kind to give me this fellowship. I thought at least I owed them to come back. So, I came back to teach for a year. Well, I came back to teach at Jackson State. It ended up only being a year. Because, after one year of reading papers and going through all of that, I said, "No. No, I've got to get out."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, I slipped and, not slipped, but I resigned from my position without even telling my parents. I resigned and was going to come to New York. When I was coming through New York, that last little fling, I met what turned out to be my husband in New York. So, he was still there. He was in advertising. He was trying to make his way as copyright writer in advertising. So, I decided, "Okay, I'm going to back to ... I'm going to go to New York. This is what I want to do. I'm going to go to New York."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I would read about Peter Bailey, who worked at ... You guys are young, so you probably don't even remember Black World. He worked at Ebony Magazine, but one of their [inaudible 00:05:57] productions was Black World. So, I would read his column. He'd talk about New York and everything, Black theater. So, that's what I wanted, to go back and get into Black theater. As I say, I resigned my position and went and moved to New York.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

My boyfriend at that time was saying, "Oh, you can always get a job. You can get a job at the temp agencies until you can get a full-time job." Because at that time, the temp agencies were very vibrant. So, that's what I did. I was able to get a job at a temp agency.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, I realized after a very short time that to live in New York, I would need a little bit more than a temp agency provided. So, I ended up taking a regular job, thankfully. Urban League had a program. And at

this time also, Black studies was ... We were on the edge of the Black Studies Movement. So, people were still hiring Black at that time. So, I was able to get a ... My first job was at something called the ... It was at the United Church Herald Publication. It was through the Unitarian Church.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, I got the job there. And then after that, I was able in about a year to get a job at Redbook Magazine. So, I got a job there as an editor in the articles department. I stayed with that job for a couple of years. And then, I ended up getting married and moving to Atlanta. So, that's what brought me to Atlanta. This was in 1972. And, raised my kids here. Ended up having three boys. My oldest son unfortunately made his transition in 2004. But, I now have two sons, will be 40, and one will be 35 on May 5th. I have these boys. And, I now have my first grand baby, first granddaughter who's 15 months old.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But anyway, I'm jumping around. I don't know if I've answered what you originally asked me or not. But, I came here to Atlanta in '72.

Speaker 2:

Wow.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Let's see, I remember having this little doll. Of course, it was a white doll with the long hair. But, we often would create our own toys, like corn shucks with the ... I mean, corn cob with the little fringes from the corn. What do you call those things?

Speaker 2:

The corn silk?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yes, silk from the corn. And paper dolls, I loved paper dolls. I would often play with paper dolls, jacks. And then, one of my best buddies, we are still in communication now. They've moved out to Texas from Mississippi. We loved playing outside. I had, at my house, I had my own ... What do you call it? Not playground but my own dollhouse, not dollhouse. What's the name for it?

Speaker 2:

Tree house?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It wasn't a tree house, but it was kind of like a tree house. It was on the ground. And, I had it set up. I had a kitchen area. I had a living room area. But I had all this ... But, we also liked to play Tarzan and Jane. Because, we had this tree that was wonderful for swinging on. So, Joann and I would play outside on the trees. Then, sometimes we would play with the dolls, making mud pies, and all the kinds of things that little girls sometimes do.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, I had another friend, Freddie, who was different. She was like a little fast girl. Joann and I, we were green. We liked just playing around and doing things. But, Freddie was a little bit ... Momma wouldn't let me go to Freddie's house. Every time I'd try to walk down there, she'd, "Betty Jean, come on back up here. Come on back here. You don't need to be down there." Because, Freddie's mother worked. And sometimes, she would have boys around. And so momma was always, "You don't need to be down there." So, I couldn't hang out with Freddie very much. So, Joann and I would just do little kiddie things playing around. So, that was ... Let's see, that's basically it.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

We lived on a street that had a store at the top of the hill. I'd go back and forth up there. There was one girl, Charlie Faye, who was a thorn in my side. She was a little bully. And, she sometimes would interfere with me coming to the store. She would be there. At one point, Charlie Faye and I got into a fight coming from school. We got into a fight. And, I must have done pretty well, because after that Charlie Faye didn't really bother me anymore. But, she had been a thorn in my side for a long time. And of course, as we got older, we became good friends, but she was still a bully.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, it was just typical life in Mississippi. I guess, we really ... We were segregated of course. And, actually on my street, across the street from me was this white girl. We really didn't have any dealings. She went to her school. And of course, in the newspapers, you never saw anything about us. But, she was an attractive girl and was pretty popular. And so sometimes, I would see the articles in the paper about the girl across the street, and ooh wow, you know. We never got in the paper. I think we finally started getting in the papers a little bit when people started getting married, and they would allow us to put wedding announcements in the paper. But, basically we were segregated.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, I recall one time this girl across the street had some little boys visiting her. They wanted to get out there and act ugly and try to call us the N word. So, that was a big disturbance and a big fight. But, basically we lived in two separate worlds. The whites went to their school. There was no integration at that time. Integration was much later. And, we went to our school.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

George Washington Carver was not only my high school, that was my elementary school. I went there from 1st grade through the 12th grade. And, it was up the hill. I had to face that north wind walking to school every day. But, it was good. We enjoyed high school. And, we had our football team. I became a member of the band when I was in 6th grade, and ended up being in the band all the way through college. When I got to Jackson State I said, "I'm not going to do the band anymore. I'm not going to do the band."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, after one year, I didn't do it my freshman year, but then sophomore I said, "Well, you know ..." So, anyway, I did sophomore. And, Jackson State at that time had a great band, Jackson Boom. They have a great band now too as a matter of fact. But, we were the fast stepping, Sunny Boom, I think we called them.

Speaker 2:

So you were like a majorette in the band?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Oh, no, no, no. I played clarinet. I played B flat clarinet to begin with. And fortunately, my band director put me on the E flat alto, which I'm thankful for, because there's just one E flat alto clarinet in the band. So, I didn't have to compete. Because I would have still been playing third clarinet had I not. Because, you know, you have third clarinet, second clarinet, first clarinet. I never would have made it to first clarinet. So, I was really happy with that E flat alto clarinet. It looks kind of like a saxophone. I don't know how familiar you are with instruments. But, it looks like a little saxophone.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

When I got to Jackson State, I also played the E flat alto. So, that was my instrument all the way through, after the B flat. It has the same keyboard and everything. So, yes.

Speaker 2:

That's amazing. And did you-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I was not a majorette. I was too skinny, at least I thought I was too skinny. I never tried to go that way.

Speaker 2:

... neighborhood integrate. Where there Black and white people living in the neighborhood? Was she the only one, or was your family-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Well, it was on the opposite side of the street. It was that house and one, two, three more houses to the end of the street were whites. I lived on a street called, Broadway. And, that's why I wanted to get back to New York, to Broadway. But, I lived on Broadway. As I said, we didn't have any communication with each other. But those three homes on that block of Broadway were white. And then, the next whole block was white. But, from my side of the street all the way up was Black. And from where they lived, all the way up was Black. Yeah, there was not any integration.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It's interesting, sometimes you get to know your neighbors. But, we never really got to know them. We just would see them getting in and out of their car and going where they were going. And, we'd get in our cars and go our separate ways.

Speaker 2:

That's interesting. So, was the street like the dividing line between the white ...

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Actually, I guess it was. Most of the other area up north of me was Black. And the area south of me was white. And then, there used to be an area that they demolished after a while, that they would call, Shakerag. I don't know, I guess many towns or whatever may have something that you'd call, across the

track, the area across the track. A lot of my classmates and things came from that area to school. We came that way to school. The whites went back out that way.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It's interesting, now in Tupelo, because Tupelo is one of these places that has majority white population. And, I think that's why we didn't have that much Civil Rights activity in Tupelo for a long time, because there were not that many Blacks. And, they didn't worry about us, Blacks didn't do very much. At one point, we did have quite a bit of Ku Klux Klan activity, which surprised me. And, this was after I had left and gone to college that that happened. But something [inaudible 00:17:16] back to Tupelo and this segregation thing. I thought of something. I should have said it right then. Now, it's left my mind. But something I wanted to mention to you.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I think I was just going to talk more about the population of Tupelo and how it worked out. Because, yeah, we ... Yeah, yeah. So, now on Broadway, and when I say Broadway, very often you think of a street with a ... When I was going this end of Broadway, we didn't have the broad walk. On the next street up, there was a broad walk that went through the street where the white folk lived. And, even today, I think that's still predominantly white, although some Blacks do live around the corner there. But, I think even now ...

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And they're awesome neighborhoods, new apartments and things they've built that Blacks are in south of ... But, for the most part, it's kind of maintained that structure with Blacks on the top end and whites on the bottom end. I do think now, just like coming in here, I kind of got lost. I've been away for so many years that there are some changes that I'm not aware of I'm sure in terms of the housing construction.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

What they did when they demolished Shakerag, they built some projects on the north end of town. A lot of the people that lived across the tracks then came up to those projects pushing us in that same area again.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But now, shortly after I graduated college I think they integrated the schools. And surprisingly, my niece was one of the queens at the North Atlanta ... I think it's called Tupelo High School. And, that kind of surprised me, although ... But what happened ... And soon after the schools were integrated, a lot of the whites left, ended up going to private schools. But at that time, it was a lot of whites in the school when she became the queen. As I said, that surprised me.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Now, of course ... Not now of course, but now, my nephew has become the first Black coach at Tupelo High School. But, I was surprised when I went there. When they told me that my nephew, Jeff, was going to be the coach at Tupelo High, I'm seeing him as coaching all these white kids and maybe two or three Blacks. When I went there for a game, it's like the school is almost totally Black now. It's interesting that ... I mean, it's great that he's a coach there. But, I thought it was more significant that it actually turned

out to be, because the school is so ... I thought he had been hired to coach a predominantly white school as a coach. But, it's turned out that the school is now predominantly Black.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, I don't know where the white folk are now. I guess they're still in private schools or something. Because there's just one high school in Tupelo, Tupelo High School, one high school. But, they do have some whites there, but it's almost ... As I say, Tupelo is predominantly white. I think the ratio is probably something like 1 to 4. So, I don't know where these white folk are. I guess they just have a lot of private schools around here or something. Because, they're not in the public school.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

The youngest of 8.

Speaker 2:

Oh, wow.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Four girls and four boys. And unfortunately, there's not longevity in my family. My mom lived to be 80, and my dad was 79. Although, it sounds like they were close. He was actually 10 years older than she was. So, he died quite a bit earlier than she did. But, my siblings, I lost my first brother at 35, and I was a freshman in college. And at that time, it didn't really ... It didn't seem that young. But later on, I said, "35, my God, Tommy was so young."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, I lost two sisters in their 40s. Now, there's only one brother left. He's 91. He was the second oldest, and he lives in Michigan. But, out of the eight of us, they're all deceased now, and from natural causes unfortunately. Diabetes, one had lupus, one had diabetes.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I don't know whether it's coincidence or not. We hear all the talk about smoke. And that's another thing. When I went to college, I had a sister-in-law I think who was instrumental in me not smoking. Because, every time I came home she would say, "Did you start smoking yet," like it's a rite of passage growing up.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So I said, "No, I have not started smoking."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But the two sisters that did pass first were smokers. It wasn't a smoke related illness that they died from. But, it could be that had something to do with it.

Speaker 2:

I was curious about your grandfather, because he was the one who gave your mother the house. What did he ... Did he live in the city and work in Tupelo?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

He had been a railroad man. They tend to make a little money. He had passed away. He had passed when I was born. But my mom, getting into too much information I guess. But my mom was his outside child. He left the house to her. He had one other son, but he left the house to her. He had been pretty ... He had done pretty well I think. He and his wife had purchased good furniture, some of which I have in my house now, because it was like good, solid wood and stuff. That was what he had done as a career. I don't know if he was a porter or what. All I know is he worked for the railroad.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Her parents that raised her were also farmers. They lived out in the country. She was one of three girls I think and one brother. And, they had land. They all had land. Where my dad lived, we had about, I think it started out being about 80 acres. And then, we ended up selling that land, selling parts of it when mom was down sick. We sold off a little bit to help with take care of her with her upkeep. We finally ended up selling all of it.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, I had an aunt, my daddy's sister, who was a schoolteacher. And that's who they said ... I think that's one reason why I didn't take education, I think, because I was determined not to teach. And, I ended up teaching anyway. But, I was determined not to teach, because everybody would say, "You're going to be just like Aunt Bee."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Aunt Bee was a spinster. She had accumulated quite a bit of land. So, she had I think over 100 acres of land somewhere. That was a bone of contention in our family. Because, she always talked about she was going to leave all of her 13 grandchildren so much. She was going to leave this [inaudible 00:25:44], leave that ... It ended up that one of my brothers got the land. But, he was the one that cared for her when she was sick. I had no problem with that. My brother, who's 91, he still has an issue with the fact that Steve took the land. You have these situations.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, I'm happy that he has land because his children are now living on the land. Had it gone to some of us, we probably would have ended up maybe selling the land. At least somebody is still on the land, not that they're farming the land. But, at least they are ... We are still ... Black land in the family. Whereas had some of us ... I don't know. But anyway.

Speaker 2:

What did your father do when your family moved to the city? Did he keep the farm? Did he keep his animals?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

No, he didn't. He had to get rid of his animals. He ended up working at Parnell's Pride, a chicken, like a slaughter house. I understand. I thought that daddy had ... I thought he retired. But, I understand that he was injured on the job. And so, his disability is really what sent me and my sister, Net, to college. At that time, we would get a check every month. It wasn't that much, but it didn't take that much. We would get a check. And, as long as you remain in school, I think I got it until ... Was it 18 or was I 22? It

seems to me it may have been I got that check until I was 22. No, what they had is what allowed me to go to college.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, I'm thankful to them now, because I came out with no debt, no loans. I had wanted to come, as I said, to Clark Atlanta. I said, "Well, I can get a loan. I can get a loan and go to Clark."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"No, no loans."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

They were not into loans and things like that. For me now, I might still be paying on that loan had I done that. But, they didn't want to do loans.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, I think my brother, Eldon, the one who is 91, he was our historian. He knew all of ... everything about all the relatives, and had all this information. And now, unfortunately, he's in the early stages of dementia. My history is just gone, because I don't remember anything. People are like, "Well, Betsy, do you know ..."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

When I hear somebody say, "Betty Jean ..." I know they're from home, because my name was Betty Jean Norwood. When I got married, I dropped the Jean and picked up the Norwood. But, "Betty Jean, don't you know such and such person?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"No."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And Eldon, before he got where his mind is like it is now, he was constantly talking. "You remember so and so, and so and so?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"No, Eldon, I don't think I do."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"Yeah, so and so ..."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, he was the walking encyclopedia for our family. We tried to ... My son, who's in to that, he's done his DNA and all that trying to track things, got a few interviews with him. But, not a lot. We should have been thinking and got a lot of interviews from him all the time, you know, the family history. But, we failed to do that.

Speaker 2:

Had your father passed away by the time you went to college? Is that how you-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

No, he had not. He passed away when I was in New York. And that was really one of the things that made me decide to go on back to Tupelo, to Mississippi when I graduated from State University in New York. Because, I had wanted to stay in New York at that time, but because he had developed cancer, I went back home. And also, I went to teach at Jackson State.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, he got better. It seemed that he was better. So, I took that little opportunity. "Daddy's okay now, daddy's good."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I slipped off again back down to New York after years of [inaudible 00:30:01]. He ended up passing away while I was in New York.

Speaker 2:

And your mother, was your mother ... Did she also work outside the home, or was she a homemaker?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

She had been homemaker. But, when we moved downtown, she ended up getting a job as a maid, a housekeeper for this white lady there, a short distance from her. She could walk. My parents never drove a car, neither one of them. She had a little job that she could walk to. Worked for that lady a number of years. That was her first job. Otherwise, she had always been just a homemaker, kids [inaudible 00:30:47] helping with the farm.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

When we lived in the country, she had a beautiful vegetable garden. And actually when we moved downtown, she maintained a garden out there in the back. And, beautiful flowers. Oh, she would have a beautiful flower garden every year. We had the kind of house that had kind of like borders around it, brick borders. She would have flowers sitting out there, potted flowers. And then of course, down in the yard, she had yard flowers, potted flowers up on the porch.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Neither one of them had had any work experience outside the farm until we moved down there. Then they'd have [inaudible 00:31:36] minor experience. I don't know how many years momma worked for that lady, probably six or seven years. After my dad passed, I think somewhere along ...

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Actually, she wasn't able to come to my graduation because we learned that she had diabetes during that time. And, she was not well. That's when she first ... her health started getting bad when I was graduating college. This was in, as I said, '66. She ended up living until my middle son was 18 and 20 months old or something when she passed away in '82.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I know there was squash. Probably the regular things that people grow, tomatoes. I think she may have grown string beans, pole beans, corn I think. Actually, the corn, in the country we had the watermelon patch on the hill there. And, I think there was a ... I think the corn was grown elsewhere, too. But, when we moved downtown, I think she would have a row or two of corn. I believe there was corn in her garden, and I think cabbage maybe, yeah. Things like broccoli, that's a new food. We never had that at home. We would have collard greens and probably she may have grown turnip greens I expect. I guess she grew collard greens. I can't really remember. I think maybe she did.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, we were one of those families that at every meal, we felt we had to have a green vegetable, a yellow vegetable, and maybe a red vegetable, something like that, and a meat. With my dad working at Parnell's Pride, we had plenty of chicken. We had chicken for breakfast. Momma would get up in the mornings, and that was something she always ... She always made sure we had breakfast before we left out of there. And sometimes, we would have chicken with gravy and biscuits. Always, this big breakfast.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

She had been used to doing the big breakfasts when they farmers. You know how farmers have to have a ... Well, they don't have to I guess. But, they would have those big breakfasts before they go off to work. She was a breakfast person. Scrambled eggs and grits and oatmeal. She used to bake a lot of banana pudding, not banana pudding, bread puddings. At Christmas, she would always have a raisin poundcake. Momma's cakes were good, but they were not fine like you would get the cakes today. They were kind of coarse. So, I don't think she was the best baker. But, us kids, we thought it was good. But yeah, she ...

Speaker 2:

What were your favorite foods when you grew up, what she cooked?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah, probably the food she cooked. We never had turkey I don't think. But I think I loved chicken and dressing and cranberry sauce. That's one of my favorites today. I want me some cranberry sauce with my chicken and dressing. I think I liked her corn. She cooks what we call cream corn. Or, we call it fried corn, but really it's more like what people call cream corn. Because, although you cook it on the top of the stove, it would be creamed. It wouldn't be ... I do the corn myself that way now, to cut it off the cob and scrape it and scrape it, and cream it down, add some milk and butter, and cook it on top of the stove.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I liked turnip greens. That was my favorite. When I got married, my husband loved collard greens. Now, my kids grew up eating collard greens, and that's their favorite. But my favorite is turnip greens. And that was always a mixture of the turnips and the mustards. So, we'd mix the turnip and the mustard greens. There was something that we call tenderloin. I think it came from the hog. It was kind of like a pork chop I guess. But, that was good. That was always good.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

In the country, we would always have the ... We had hogs. So, we ate all of that from the hog. My dad would cure the ham. We'd have the country hams. And actually, my ... Again, I'm jumping around. But, I just remembered, my grandad who made molasses. He had one of those things with the sorghum molasses. He would always make beautiful ... I don't really like sorghum molasses, but they would look pretty, beautiful sorghum molasses. But, my dad never made any of that. And, neither did mom.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

The other thing my mom did was she quilted. She would have those ... She brought that from the country. Downtown, she would put up her horses. I don't know if you know how quilts are done. They call these things a horse on each end, and have some of her neighbors and things, they would come in, and they would learn quilting too, I think from her. Again, it's like oh no, we don't have any of her quilts. Of course, we used them then just for cover. It wasn't anything ... I don't know if they were that pretty or not. But, she did quilt. We just let them get away.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

My sister, we always called her, Baby Sister. She was the oldest girl. But, the boys started calling her Baby Sister, and she passed away at 70 and she was still Baby Sister to us. But, she was the one who kept things. I probably would not have the bed and the dresser and the dining room, and all that now if it had not been for Baby Sister. She was insistent that ... Because she lived in Memphis. That's not that far from Tupelo. So, when momma passed away, she took a lot of things that momma had out of the house to her stuff in Memphis.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And she claimed that ... Because when people pass away, then some people are wanting this and some people are wanting that. There was a nephew of mind that momma had kind of raised. He started living with her. He stayed with her through high school and everything. He was wanting the bedroom set that I now have. He's Dick. And my sister said, "No, momma always wanted Betty Jean to have that."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

She pretended. I don't think that actually was the case. But, because of that, I was able to bring ... And, I had to get a U Haul when Baby Sis passed to bring this stuff to Atlanta. But anyway, so some of the furniture stayed in the house. When we were looking through her things, we found the diploma from my brother, Pete. She was the one who kept everything. She was the one who carried on the canning and making preserves and stuff. It's a lost art for me. I don't know how to can. I don't know how to preserve foods. And most people are not doing it anymore, I guess because now we have refrigeration. So, I guess some people may still do it.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But that's the other thing, mom would ... We would have a fair to come to town every year, the Mid South Fair or whatever. She would enter the contest. They would have a canning contest. She made beautiful watermelon rind preserves. She would always get a blue ribbon I think. I think the blue is the highest. She'd get a blue ribbon on her canned stuff. So every year, she'd take certain things to put on exhibit at the fair. She would win her awards.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But again, I mean I guess it's part of the times. But, there are some people who probably still do carry on some of those traditions in the family. But, unfortunately, I'm not one of them. I don't keep things like cards and things. I'm not good at that.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

My son, who will be 40, has his own house. But, he wanted me to keep his stocking, Christmas stocking. We had stockings. I had the name engraved on it or whatever. My husband at one time was screen printing. So, he made the stockings. And so, "You're not going to keep my stocking?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"No, [Omari 00:41:26]. If you want this stocking, you can have it. Take it." I wish probably that I was more like that. But, I don't. Even cards that people give me, I don't keep them.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Whereas my son's wife's momma now, her little girl ... I'm jumping again. But, the grand baby lost her earring the other day. Maureen, the other grandmother, had already sent down the earrings that her daughter had when she was a little girl. So, she was able to just put in those earrings in her ear. She kept all of her daughter's certificates and awards and things. She's a keeper. It would have been good if I'd been more like that. But, just clutter, I can't keep all that clutter. I mean, I guess I've got enough clutter. But, I just don't keep that kind of ... Anyway, that has nothing to do with anything.

Speaker 2:

No, this is what ... I was going to ask about watermelon rind preserves. I've never heard of that before.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

You've never heard?

Speaker 2:

No.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And it's beautiful.

Speaker 2:

You can eat them?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Hm?

Speaker 2:

You can eat them?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Oh yes, yes, yes. Yeah, they are ... You know pear preserves probably? Yeah, kind of like pear preserves. Yeah, you actually eat them. I didn't really like the taste of them that well. But some people do. But, I don't know if anybody ever makes watermelon rind preserves anymore. I never hear of that. You know, you can see certain things in stores. But, I never see that.

Speaker 2:

Never heard of that. That's interesting. So was it sweet or vinegary?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah, sweet. Now, some things would be like a pickle. But this was a sweet one.

Speaker 2:

And the furniture?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah.

Speaker 2:

It sounds like you have a lot of things, the bed, the dresser, the dining room.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah, the dining room comes with a table. Well, actually we ended up losing the table. Because, the table kind of got in bad condition. But, there's a dresser, buffet. Then there's a big dresser upstairs and chest of drawers and the bed. So, I have it in my house. And Omari will probably end up taking it I guess. As I say, he's the one who seems to have an interest. He lives in Tampa now. When I visit him, he's showing me the family tree. "Now, did you ever hear them talk about Uncle Will?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"No, Omari."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, he's got all that. So I'm assuming that he will. I need to put that in writing somewhere probably. Omari ... Because, I know my other son, my youngest son, [Kari 00:44:20], he's not a family person. So, I don't think he will have any interest in keeping the table and all those things. I don't know what will happen to them. And, I can't see them fitting into Omari's house. But, maybe he'll keep them. I don't know, this may be the end of them.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, they've had a long run. I have pictures of so many different ... I don't have a picture of myself sitting on that bed. But, I have pictures of my nieces and nephews and things sitting on that bed when they were 8 months old and 10 months old. So, it's been around. I hope he can keep it in the family somehow.

Speaker 2:

How old would it be, the furniture? I'm guess because it was your mother's father who bought it?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It came with the house, when we moved into the house downtown in Tupelo. That was in '49 or '50 maybe, 1950. And, so they had purchased it. And, I don't know how long ago. Actually, when my sister [inaudible 00:45:33] passed away, we had an appraiser to come, and they appraised the things. And, they probably told us how old it was at that time. But, I don't recall. But, it's pretty old, I guess.

Speaker 2:

I was wondering if you ... Did you watch more television, listen to more ... Did that change as you moved?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Of course, in the country, we didn't have any of that yet. I guess we had electricity. We had lights. In fact, TV hadn't even been ... TV came later. It came in early '50s. So, there was no television when we were in the country. But, we did have a TV downtown. And, I can remember coming home from school, and there was a soap. What was the name of that soap? It would be coming on about the time I'd get in from school. But, I know one thing, my mom never was not one for TV. She would talk about TV, "I don't even [inaudible 00:46:55]. That's not any good, blah, blah, blah."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And then, she got caught up somehow in, As the World Turns. And, she would be talking about Allison or Amy or somebody, just like it was a person in her family. So, she ended up being a TV person, because she got caught up in the soap opera.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, talking about the TV and everything and about what I liked to watch. That reminds me that now I did play clarinet. But my mom ... I had to take piano lessons. And, I took them for a number of years. Just could not get my hands going right. My mom, all she wanted me to do was to be able to play Nearer My God To Thee in church. I did not learn to play it. I did not learn to play the piano well enough to even do that.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

When I was visiting my brother one summer in Michigan. I wrote my teacher, my piano teacher back in Tupelo, Miss [Suber 00:48:03], and told her that I had decided to stop taking piano lessons. Of course, my mom was just super, super upset with that. But, I couldn't do it. We'd have these recitals. And, I hated them. Oh, I hated those recitals. Mary Allison wouldn't [inaudible 00:48:22]. I have to come sit there and play. The parents would come and sit Miss Suber's house. We'd have recitals. I was so terrible.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But the problem was that when I would come home from school, the piano was in the living room. And by the time I got in from school, they're sitting there watching the news and things on TV. Of course, I got in kind of late because I'm in the band and we had band practice. So, I never really had enough time to practice. I never took enough time to practice. I guess, if I really had a love for the piano, I would have. But, I never got a chance to practice enough. That's why I'd be so terrible at the recitals. But, when

I'd come in from school, the TV was on, and I couldn't practice. That's why I said, "No, let me just stop this. I'm not going to keep going." So, I just ended that.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But anyway, I can't remember my programs that I've watched too much on TV. I think I did watch some of the soap operas at that time. And *As the World Turns* was probably one of them. And, if I could remember this show, but I can't remember it, but it was kind of like a scary type of program that came on late in the afternoon. What other things did I watch? What kind of things did they have on TV at that time? Because, again we're talking about the '50s. What do I remember? Oh yes, Ed Sullivan, of course. Yeah, we watched the Ed Sullivan show. We would always watch that.

Speaker 2:

Did you watch it the night ... Wasn't that Elvis' break when he was on the Ed Sullivan Show?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It may have been. I don't recall that. But I bet that probably was. It seemed like to me I do remember something like that. With Tupelo being his home town, of course, we as Blacks said, "No, Elvis Presley, we don't like Elvis Presley."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, yeah, I think that was the case that he made his big break on Elvis Presley show. I can see that video now. I don't know if I saw it at the time, or just later. But it comes to my mind now, yeah.

Speaker 2:

What music did you like?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Whatever was on the radio. Because unfortunately, even today, I don't purchase music and albums and everything. I don't have a CD player with the music on it. That's like oh my goodness. Most people have their favorite music on a CD player or something. I don't.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, at night, we were able to get the radio station from Memphis, WDIA. The reception was better at night. We could pick up these Black music then. Because in the daytime of course, you don't really get anything except the feel good stuff. But, I recall my sister-in-law, who lived down in Starkville called me one day, "You've got to listen to this song. I just heard it on the radio."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, it was the Ode to Billy Joe. The first time that we heard that, it was like, "Oh my goodness."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But yeah, I just basically listen to the music on the radio. I guess now I'd say my music is jazz. I think that basically is mostly my husband. He was really into ... He was a collector, Harlem Renaissance stuff. He has a big collection of that. When we were in New York, we would go to the jazz clubs and listen to the

... Johnny Hartman and the [Ganders 00:52:41], probably not anybody you know, but that's one of his favorites. And, it's become my favorite. Because, he really does have a beautiful voice. He sounds kind of ... Have you ever heard of Johnny Hartman?

Speaker 2:

I have not. I was going to ask you how to spell it.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It's just Johnny, J-O-H-N-N-Y, Hartman, H-A-R-T-M-A-N. You probably have heard of Lou, Brook Benton, not Brook Benton. But you've heard of him too, possibly. I'm having a senior moment. You've heard the song, Everything was Changed? Everything was changed, the young becomes the old.

Speaker 2:

Yes.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

He sings that. Arthur Price sung it. That may not be a name that you know. But, he has a beautiful, beautiful voice, Arthur Price. Jazz music, I like mostly the vocals. I love the females, Etta James of course, Ella Fitzgerald. I was just trying to think, Billie Holiday of course, yeah. But, there was somebody else I was trying to think of. But yeah, that's the kind of music that if I'm going to select to sit and listen, that's probably what I would select, some of that old stuff from '60s, '50s.

Speaker 2:

No contemporary jazz?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Some of it. I don't like it if it's too contemporary. I remember, they were having the Black Arts Festival here one year. And, my husband just couldn't wait. Wanted to get the whole package deal because ... Again, I'm having a senior moment. I can't think of the guy's name. He was going to be at the Arts Festival that year. And, we got there, and doggone it, he didn't play any of this old stuff. He was playing all ... Like, "Oh, no."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I think I'm stuck back there in the '50s and the '60s with the music. Motown of course, I love that. Some of the contemporary is a little bit too ... I never did really like Charlie Parker that great. He's too far out for me. I'm kind of like I guess old school.

Speaker 2:

Smooth jazz.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah.

Speaker 2:

I understand that. The first question, I think, and you may answer this differently. But, the first question is, when was the first time you were consciously aware of issues concerning race? And I know you talked about sort of like the other side of the street. Was that the first time? Or, was it earlier on the farm?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

That may have been the first time. Because on the farm, I was only about 5 or 6 when we left the farm. I probably was not aware of it. I mean, I was aware of white people. But, I don't think the segregation thing may not have been a factor in my mind until later probably then down the street.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

There was no Civil Rights activity going on that I knew about when I was growing up in high school. And in college, going to Jackson State, they put the fear of God in us. "Don't you get involved in that ... You'll get sent home."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

We were afraid that if we got involved in anything, we would be put out of school. Unlike Tupelo, which was nearby. They were very active out there. But, I found out later that some of my classmates were involved in things. When I was a sophomore, the year that my brother passed, and I went up to Michigan to work, because I wanted to ...

Betty Norwood Chaney:

That was another situation. It used to be that during the summer months, you try to find you a job for the summer months. The rich Jewish people would hire students to come and spend the summers with them taking care of their kids, taking care of the house, whatever. And, that's what I wanted to do, because I had an opportunity to live with this family in New York. Not New York City, I don't think, but just New York, probably New York state.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And so, I made my plans. Again, just like with the Peace Corps, I made my plans to go and work in the summer. My parents had another hissy fit. "I didn't send you to college to go work in no white folk's kitchen."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, that ended that. To appease me, my mother let me go to visit my brother in Michigan that summer. And, went there. But, that was the same summer that they had the March on Washington. And so, I found out later that some of my classmates had been active and gone there. But, none of the folk that I knew well at Jackson State were active in the movement.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Our little one thing of defiance was after they ... I think some of the restaurants had opened up and was allowing Blacks to come. My girlfriends and I, we went downtown and had lunch or something in one of the places. But, that was just to ... That maybe wasn't illegal at that time. They had opened it up. But it was just to ... for the feel of being able to go and sit where you wanted to sit in a restaurant.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, I was not active at that. As I said, in Tupelo, nothing much was going on. Now, when I came, I was ... And, this was when I was ... Was I in college and had come home for the summer? When the Democrats tried to ... When the Loyal Democrats ... We had some canvassing going on that summer leading into the convention, the Democratic convention. We were going around canvassing up in the projects. I was back there getting ready to go, ironing my clothes. "Where are you going," my daddy? "You ain't got no business going off up there. Don't you know ... Do you want to kill your mamma?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"What?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"I'm sick, and you're momma going ... You can't [inaudible 01:00:11] up there."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, even doing that little safe stuff, I was able to slip off and do it a couple of times. But even that was too much for them. I didn't get involved. Although, as I said, Tupelo did do some of that, some canvassing for the convention, trying to get people to sign a petition for the Loyal Democrats. So at home or in school, there wasn't much activism going on, on my end.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah, I had come down to Atlanta from a job, as I said, at Redbook as the associate editor there in the articles department. And, my husband found a job for me, before I even go here. He said, "You know Atlanta Voice, you ought to try to go work for Atlanta Voice."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Well, actually I was hired to teach at Kennesaw College. I was kind of torn between, well should I take that or take the job at the Voice? I decided to take the job at the Voice. Mr. Ware who was the publisher, editor at that time, he said, "Okay, you were associate editor at Redbook, we'll make you an associate editor here."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

He just basically took the title. But what it meant was I did everything. I was running out trying to cover stories. I was coming back trying to do the layout on the paper. I just had to do it all because he was a publisher, editor. He didn't do any writing at all. We had one reporter that went out and did some things. Anyway, I was trying to ... He just used that title, and I became the ...

Betty Norwood Chaney:

The paper was really doing good work, investigative reporting during that time. This fellow, Bill, the reporter, was able to ... And at that time, the police situation, the police chief, and the whole police department was terrible. We were able to break some stories about the conditions there, and actually I think was responsible for some change that came to the police department.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So yeah, we were coming. And Mr. Ware ... The Atlanta Voice was known during that time as being the newspaper that did cover real issues. So, we would cover things that maybe the Daily World or other

Black papers, or the Inquirer, the Atlanta Daily and Atlanta Inquirer didn't cover. We did some pretty good reporting, basically because of Bill Cutler who happened to be a white journalist. But, he was a great journalist. And, he did some really good writing for the Voice at that time.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So yeah, I guess in a sense, that was some activism. We covered very, not good situations, but situations that needed attention in Atlanta. When I got here, there was a whole lot of talk about the ... I think they had just passed ... Atlanta decided to go with the M to M Program as opposed to trying to integrate. Because, Atlanta was so predominantly Black, that it just wasn't feasible to integrate the schools. So, what they had was the M to M Program. So, you would have buses going from the Black community into the white's. That was the way that integration was achieved. So, anyway.

Speaker 2:

... some of your ... What did you think were some of the most powerful stories you covered while you were at the Voice? I know you mentioned the police department. Was the police department predominantly Black, predominantly white? Was the police chief-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It was predominantly white. And then the police chief was ... What were those issues with the ... They were ... Gosh, no, what were the issues? I know they had a few Black police. I don't think there was so much hiring. It was more so their treatment of I think the Black community, how they were just brutal in some respects. I wish I could remember specifically some of the things that we covered. And I know it was something because at one point we discovered that they had sent a spy to the Atlanta Voice. They had actually sent somebody to the Voice to try to see what was going on with the paper. I wish I could remember that. It's fuzzy in my mind now.

Speaker 2:

So, a person that you all hired and was the just kind of-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, Bill Cutler was the reporter that we had. He was finding out some things that were going on in the police department revealing certain things. But, I can't remember what kind of things-

Speaker 2:

Was there corruption in there? Did they-

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Yeah, corruption. But what was the nature of the corruption? I should have ... If I had thought about it I would have pulled up some old documents or something to refresh my memory on that. But, I can't really get it together.

Speaker 2:

It seems like you felt like that was important work. It sounds like activism.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I did. When I came, I was really young and excited to be a reporter for the Atlanta Voice, running around covering stories and going to meetings, going to the courthouse. Just doing all that, covering whatever little stories we had to have covered, because as I said, Bill and I were the only two really doing writing at that time. I did like that. I remember writing back to some of my friends in New York, telling them how I was Betty Star Reporter, running out to get the stories. But, it didn't pay anything. But, it was good experience. Met some interesting people through that work.

Speaker 2:

What made you leave the Voice?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I had my first child. Actually, we don't even talk about it now. Because, the way it happened, we just chose to pretend that that was what happened. But really, we had an issue with Mr. Ware. We were protesting. We had worked really hard. We worked really hard and gotten the paper out and everything. Was it Thanksgiving? It was some day that he still wouldn't give us the day off. It was the day after Thanksgiving, something we thought that we should have off. We'd done what we needed to do. So we said, "I'm just going to quit. I'm just going to quit."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But for me, it was near the time that I would have been leaving anyway, because it was in December. My baby was going to be born in March. So, I would have been leaving pretty soon anyway. So, later on, I came back to the Voice to do guest reporting and stuff like that. And Mr. Ware acted like there wasn't any ... that didn't happen, that we didn't protest and threaten to quit. I did leave, and we just acted like that never happened. It went on and came on ... bygones be bygones. We all good again. But, that was it. It was something and having a baby was part of it, too. If I hadn't ... I'm not sure I would have ... Because my husband was, "You need to leave that." He was on his high horse about it.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But, if I had not been leaving because of the baby, I may have come back. The other workers ended up coming on back. They may have stayed off one day. We protested a little bit and they came on back in. I may have come on back in, too. But, I left because of that and the baby. I didn't come back to the Voice probably for ... and not-full time ever anymore. I came back to do certain little stories.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

And, that's how Vincent Harding and some of the other people at the IBW learned about me. Because, I had written a story. I had come back with Kari and interviewed some of them and talked and whatever, and then pulled together the story. Vincent was impressed with the story, that I was able to pull the story together and had the baby with me and all this. When they started looking for an editor, when Jillian left, they thought about, "What about the woman that came and did that story for us?"

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It's interesting how most of the jobs that I ended up having I didn't really have to go and interview to get them. Somebody sort of referred me. Vincent had them call me. And although Kari was only probably about 6 or 7 months old when they called me about taking the job, I did go ahead and take the job since

Jillian was leaving. And, I became the editor for them, and stayed there a little over a year, something like that. But again, because of the baby.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

My husband, who was, as I said, he was an advertising copywriter. When he left New York, he came down here with the idea he was going to have his own advertising agency, "Chaney Advertising. Come into the Black mecca. We'll have all this business, oh my goodness," he said.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Of course, it didn't turn out that way. But, at the time that I was at IBW, he got a pretty good client, Stay [Softpro 01:11:39]. One of his clients he introduced to the market and ran ads and all this. He was riding high with his career. "You need to be at home. You need to be at home with the baby. You need to be so and so."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

"Okay. I'll take care of things for a while. You take time off."

Betty Norwood Chaney:

So, that's why I left IBW to spend time with my son. So, it wasn't anything on their part. I think it's just that I wanted to try to spend more time with Kari at that time.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

But yeah, they were ... And I think I told you, my job at IBW was the editor for this short paper. We had what we called a monthly report, which was like an 8 1/2 by 11 page folded. On occasions, we would have enough news we would have an insert. But mostly, it was just those eight pages that we would have. It was that. And then something we called, occasional papers, we would do, and I would do that. But the big book editing kind of thing, that was done elsewhere.

Speaker 2:

What kinds of things were in the monthly report and the occasional papers?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Things of interest to the student Black world. Maybe reporting on what Bill Strickland had done or somebody else, Walter Riley is doing this project, different people associated with IBW, and just articles of interest to that. I forget what kind of circulation we had. But people would find the articles of interest to them, short articles, yeah, little news stories. Little feature articles. I don't think we ever had any ... probably reporting on books that were being published.

Speaker 2:

And the occasional papers, was it more of the same?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Well, I think it was like if one of the ... What do we call them, the fellows? Do we call them fellows? One of them might write a paper on apartheid or something, or might write a paper on the Atlanta school

system or something. So, it was a short paper again. It was coming out of their academic work at the university probably. I can't remember exactly.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I think when we had our reunion back about, what is it now, 10 years ago. More than that. I came across some of those, and I passed them on. I wish I had it now so I could look back at the occasional paper and the monthly report to just see what kind of things. Yeah, I think that that's basically what we just covered, things of interest to the student Black world.

Speaker 2:

How do you feel about the work at IBW?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

It's good work, good work. I have the greatest respect for it. I was not deeply involved with that. It was kind of like a job for me to work there, to do what I was doing. But, I wasn't as invested in it as some of the people that work there I think. But, I do have great respect for the work.

Speaker 2:

What kinds of other things were you doing at the time? I'm not sure, I can't remember if it was you or Miss [Aruma 01:15:43] who said you didn't necessarily like ... You weren't necessarily friends with the people who worked there.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I was friends with them, but I didn't hang out with them later. I get the feeling many of them had a bond outside of work. Like Lynn, her child went to the school that was over there in the area. So, I didn't have that kind of a relationship. It was like I was at work and then I would go home. It was like two different worlds. But some of them, I think, continued their association with each other beyond the office. And, I didn't necessarily have that.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

We would have events. In fact, now that I've left, we seem to get together. I mean, not now that I've left. But now that we've gotten older, we have what we call these family, not family dinners, but we have these dinners that the crew ... You may have heard somebody talk about the crew meetings that we have. So, we kind of get together now more so than we did then. We didn't seem to have to many things like that. Although, I can remember maybe one or two activities outside of the office that we had. But, there wasn't a lot of that I think going on. And, not a lot that I knew about anyway at that time. This is the main part, and this is the part that I'm vaguest on, this whole thing with IBW.

Speaker 2:

No, it's okay.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

This is where Pat Daily or Al [Josie 01:17:33] can talk for days about it. But, I just don't really have that. I guess my interests were not so much academic or the intellectual as it was ... Because, I always had this interest in the theater although I left ... When I was in New York, I was fortunate to get to be a little

involved in theater there. At the time, there was something called the Lafayette Theater. This Peter Bailey, that I mentioned, that I was reading from Black World and everything, I was actually able to meet him when I got to New York at Ebony Magazine, at the office there. And, he told me about a show that was going to be up at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem. So, I went up there.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

As a result of going to that theater and everything, I became involved in a group called The Black Theater Workshop. We had a workshop over in Harlem around 16th and St. Nicholas I think. Ed Bullins was the director of that workshop. So, we would put on productions there. And, some of the people ... Stan Latham, that may be a name that you are familiar with. He came out of that group. Richard West also did some plays. So, some of the people that were in the workshop went on to do things in theater that I know about today.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

I was one of those late, well I won't say late bloomers, but I'm just now getting around to ... I started a play when I was ... in 1985, that's why I said 1985, when I was still of course at Clark Atlanta. I didn't complete it until after I retired in 2009. But, that play now has turned into a trilogy. The last trilogy will be this summer. My play writing has come after children, after retirement. I'm just now getting around ... I think in '72 was when I had my first play produced. And so, I guess in that sense, I am definitely a late bloomer.

Betty Norwood Chaney:

My interest was kind of like more into the arts than it was academic, intellectual. And, I guess that's why maybe I wasn't as attached to the group as maybe some of the others were. Because, I think some of the females may have felt that we were ... I think, not I think, but ... Well, yeah, I think all of the writing was done by males at that time. I don't think any females were doing any. So, that was some of ... I'm thinking that some of them probably had a problem with that. I didn't because I wasn't interested in that kind of writing. Maybe some of them may have had a problem with that.

Speaker 2:

... people like student workers who would get fellowships at the institute?

Betty Norwood Chaney:

Well, I call them fellows, because I was at a loss for word. What did we call them? I don't know. But no, I wasn't talking about that. I was talking about the ... What were they? Like, Bill Strickland and Walter Riley. I think before I came, I never actually met Walter Riley, but I think they were there one summer or something, and ...

Interviewee:

Yeah. I think they were there, so that's who I was speaking about. But they did have interns, I think to come through. [Malika 00:00:12] and Sue, Ross and some of them came through as young people to work for the institute. And actually... Yeah, that was somebody else too, because I think somebody named Fisher was there. And I think they called them interns, I guess.

Moderator:

Okay, I see what you mean. And Pat did talk specifically about some of these Caribbean scholars that would come, spend time there and go do some work. But then there were also the interns from the surrounding colleges.

Interviewee:

I definitely should've listened to Pat. I will listen to this at some point, but I had spent the whole week in Tampa last week babysitting, and then this week has just been [inaudible 00:01:00], and I didn't really get a chance.

Moderator:

The time you worked at IBW and the things you know about their missions, do you think that they were achieving the things that they were trying to get done: having a black think tank, working on black studies departments in universities around the country? Fighting, not only for civil rights in the U.S., but thinking about it in these different places like the West Indies. Do you feel like they were effective?

Interviewee:

I think for a certain period of time that they were. As I say, I was working there, but really not that fully knowledgeable of all the work that they were doing. But it seems that they... I think just before I got there, not just before, but before I got there, I think things were a lot more active. I think when Vincent was still in town and they were there doing things. And by the time I got there, they were all gone. Howard Dotson was there, but Bill Strickland and Vincent and others were gone.

Interviewee:

But I think there had been a time prior to that when they were really active in the U.S. and abroad and as you say, in the West Indies. The idea for the institute is, was, still, it is good but I can't talk intelligently about it because I'm not really that familiar with what they were doing abroad or here. I know it was a think tank and they would have scholars to come and have sessions and whatever, but I'm still vague on all of the activities that were going on.

Moderator:

Did you go to things like the sessions and the talks, or no?

Interviewee:

Very few of them. I don't really remember going to too many of them. And I don't know why that was. I don't know whether it didn't happen while I was there during that period of time. Before I got there, I hadn't been to any, because I was learning a lot about them when I pulled together that article. I learned a lot about them. So I don't think they had as many things going on during that short period that I was there. I think that was kind of one of their lulls.

Moderator:

And you were, remind me of the years.

Interviewee:

I was there from, it was somewhere between 74 and 76.

Moderator:

Were you still active in theater when you here?

Interviewee:

When I first got here, yeah. There was something called the Atlanta Play Project or something, I think. And I was doing a few things and had one of my plays read at something, at one of the activities that they had. But then, I got caught up in three boys and everything, so it kind of fell by the wayside. I wasn't really active anymore.

Interviewee:

And then not only was I not active, some of those things stopped being done too. The Atlanta Play Project, I don't know what actually happened to that, but it's not longer around. It didn't stay around for too long. So yeah, for a while, I did try to continue with the plays and with that. But basically, I was just trying to, maybe in my own time, to write and not really... And I wrote and submitted a couple of things to a theater here, Jomandi Productions. That's just one of the theater [inaudible 00:05:23] that we had. It's no longer in existence, but I recall sending a play to them. And the girl told me, "No." Sent it back and she said, what did she say? Something that just crushed me and my husband, because his persistence was his first name, not his middle name, but his first name.

Interviewee:

He persisted and persisted. He sent an article to Black World, it must've been 15 times. He'd change it a little bit and whatever, revise it and send it back. He ended up being published ahead of me, because I finally did get a story published in Essence. And in fact, when I left Redbook, I already had an article published in Redbook. But he, just by his persisting. So he would say, "Why are you going to let that girl tell you something about the play, and you're going to just take it and go? You have to keep on."

Interviewee:

So anyway, but I just didn't have but so much time to write and revise and revise with the kids. So that's why when I did finally retire in 2009, I was able to go back and pick it up. Fortunately, it went on very well with the public. I'm hoping that this summer will be the one that will really bring it all together, and I plan to put it in a book as soon as the third sequel is done. I'm going to try to publish it. My idea was to have more of a story of a certain period of time. It takes place between 1985, and it ends right after the election of Donald Trump.

Interviewee:

So it was to cover that whole period of time in history, and the setting is Mississippi. And Mississippi with this particular black family, the Townsend family. But some of the things I had in there, and some of the other... One was called, the first one was called The Rooting Place. And then I did The Uprooting. And then this last one is called The Re-rooting, the culmination of The Rooting Place saga.

Interviewee:

But some things I had in there was about black farmers, and when I did the readings for the play and ran it past the director and everything, they said, "You need to scratch this about the farmers." Because I was trying to bring out that situation. At one time, there was a whole lot of talk about black farmers, every farmer was going to finally get their 40 acres and a mule. They were going to get so much money. And so I was trying to incorporate the history of that into the play.

Interviewee:

And they were saying, "Strike that." I was trying to do too much editorializing in the play. So they said, "Take this out." So what has happened is that, in order to make the plays, we've got to have conflict of characters and so on. So I've had to create things that I didn't plan to have in there, just to make the play work, and I had to take out some things that I wanted to have in there to make the play work.

Interviewee:

So I wanted it to be a little shock of history that somebody could pick up and read 100 years later and say, "Oh, this is what was going on in Mississippi at the time. And the farming was this, and so on and so and so." But it hasn't worked the time into the script, so it's not really in there. If I were to try to just write a book, I could have it in there, but in terms of just planning to have the three plays to speak for themselves in the book.

Interviewee:

So it'll be in there, all this history about the south and how it changed and what was going on during that time. Just little statements dropped here and there about Trump and about... And it's a coincidence, and this really did happen because there was one time when all of us African-Americans were naming our kids, giving them African names.

Interviewee:

So as I say, the play was started in 1985. And this young baby is two months old, and his name is [Obakawasi 00:10:09] Townsend. And that was well before Barack came along. So he goes through the period of that. Of course they're talking about, "That'll never happen. With a name like Obama, that'll never happen. So on and so on." So this name that he has Oba, Oba means king in Obakawasi Townsend. Anyway, all of that, some particular people will probably see it and say, "Oh, she copied that from Obama, President Barack Obama, Barack Hussein Obama." But it actually happened before he was even thought about. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. Did you even understand what I was talking about?

Moderator:

Yes. I was actually, well it's a great segue, because the next section is about your family, and I noticed that all of your children sound like they were given African names?

Interviewee:

Yes, they were.

Moderator:

[Bakhari 00:11:08], or just [Khari 00:11:08]?

Interviewee:

Khari was my first son, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Moderator:

And [Omari 00:11:08].

Interviewee:

Omari, mm-hmm (affirmative). And then [Mati 00:11:08] is the last one.

Moderator:

When did the IBW close, and why?

Interviewee:

When did it close? I don't know. I don't know the answer to either one of them. I don't know when exactly it closed, and I really don't know why it closed. I guess there is a reason. I was assuming that it was funding, but then there may have been a reason beyond funding that they were closed.

Moderator:

Do you feel like it did all the things it set out to do?

Interviewee:

Actually, it did not. There's some guy who has something now called the... Well, first, you probably think somebody's finally talking about it. He was actually using the Institute of the Black World, but I think he had to change the name somewhat. So does he call it the New Institute, or the some other kind of institute of the black world?

Interviewee:

So I think that think tank kind of organization is still needed, probably more now than ever. But I don't know, it's kind of like... I don't know whether that will happen again or not, because... And what did you say? Do I think it's... What did you ask me?

Moderator:

Well I asked if you thought that the institute achieved its mission.

Interviewee:

Oh, achieved its mission, yes. I think at a certain time, at a certain period, it was achieving its mission. It was making people aware of, putting out materials that, [inaudible 00:13:36] materials. But I don't think, I don't really know who the mission... I forget what the mission really was. So I doubt that they fulfilled, and you hear me saying they, achieved their mission. I doubt that they fully achieved it. To a certain extent and for a certain period of time, I think that may have been a yes. But overall, I expect not.

Moderator:

I do want to ask one followup question before we move on. You said, you were saying that we might need spaces like IBW even more now. Why do you feel that way?

Interviewee:

To try to figure out what in the world we need to do as a people to move forward, whether it's party affiliations or just trying to stay abreast of this crazy president we have in office and everything. A whole discussion about reparations would probably be an area that would benefit greatly from a good, strong think tank.

Moderator:

What was your husband's first name?

Interviewee:

Robert, we called him Bob.

Moderator:

Where was he from?

Interviewee:

He was from Cuthbert, Georgia. A little town down in South Georgia.

Moderator:

You said Guthrie or Cuthrie?

Interviewee:

Not Cuthbert, C-U-T-H-B-E-R-T. Cussbert is what the people down there call it, but it's C-U-T-H-B-E-R-T, Cuthbert. And it's a strange little town. It has had some really interesting people to come out of it. I know you probably don't know Fletcher Henderson, because he predates Duke Ellington. But he, again, like I said, my husband's a serious collector. So he collected a lot of stuff on Fletcher Henderson. And it seems that he is considered by a lot of people to be the father of jazz, big band sound and all that kind of thing.

Interviewee:

But they have people that became presidents of... The Wright brothers, somebody that was at Atlanta University and the elder brother was at some other school. But when you look back, and I said, "Well Bob, I can understand it. Because in that little town, they can't wait to get out of there, so they have to do something."

Interviewee:

But he had all the history on it. He could tell you who was from there, then what they've done. It appeared to have quite a bit of... And it's one of these towns in South Georgia that's really predominately black. They had their black first mayor some years ago. And it's down near Dawson and some of these areas that had some really terrible things going on.

Interviewee:

But anyway, he moved here in the 50s or whatever. His mom was a school teacher, and she came up to this area. So he went to service, and then he relocated to Atlanta, so he's been in Atlanta since the 50s.

Moderator:

But you met in New York.

Interviewee:

We met in New York, yeah. He was there trying to break into, and had broken into advertising. As I say, we were both, I think, on the heels of black studies and the movement and everything. They were putting blacks in positions. When I was at Redbook, there were two black editors. There were eight editors altogether, but they kept two slots open for black editors. So we had two black editors.

Interviewee:

I rarely look at Redbook anymore, but when you look at the mast head, and when you look at them now, you see a photograph of them. You may find one person in there. But Bob was the same way, he was a copywriter. And he was, they brought him in and provided training for him as a copywriter. And then as soon as things kind of died down, they'd get rid of them.

Interviewee:

So he lost his job there. He was at J. Walter Thompson. That is the largest agency in the world for advertising. So he was there, and then he lost his job. So he decided that he was going to just come and create his own agency, as I said, in Atlanta. So, that was his plan.

Interviewee:

So we were in New York during the late 60s and early 70s. And I think the Urban League and some other people were instrumental in getting blacks into certain positions. And that soon played out, so some of the slots that were for blacks are now being filled by whites again.

Interviewee:

But we were there at a good time, so that we were able to at least get our foot in the door. So that's, and having worked at Redbook, I think was what helped me when I got to Atlanta. One thing was, "Okay, we'll make you the associate editor." And when I went to work at SR... where was that, at SCLC, Pearl [Clague 00:19:09] was the one who recommended me for that job. She had heard about, well we had babies about the same time, so I knew Pearl from that.

Interviewee:

And then when I went to work for SRC, a young man that I had worked with at The Voice, he was there taking photographs. He recommended me to SRC. So it's like, I had been fortunate that I got recommended to jobs. And I think, for me, the thing that helped a lot was, "Okay, you worked at Redbook? You were an editor at Redbook, so that means you should be able to do this." So I think it's helped me get my foot in the door in some places down here. Not that they were that great, because like I said, I got my foot in the door at The Voice and I did like it. But \$125 a week, I think it was back then, I forget. But it was not a lot of money at all. It's like teaching, it doesn't pay a lot.

Interviewee:

And then I ended up... I forgot to even mention that. I taught about 24 years over at Atlanta Metropolitan. I was an adjunct professor though, because I was working full-time. And occasionally, I

would go over maybe and teach a class. It wasn't constant, but over the period of time, about 24 years I think, I worked over there.

Interviewee:

And when I retired from Clark, I called the secretary up over there, and I said, "Oh, I'd rather see if you could get me some classes for next semester." My money's going to stop, and am I going to be able to make it? And so she had me setup. I had an eight o'clock class. I went to Michigan for Christmas, and I got back, she had me in an eight o'clock. I said, "Oh my Lord." So I had three classes, and I worked more in retirement than I had worked... Because my job at Clark Atlanta was just staff. I was not teaching, I was staff. I was the coordinator for the center of academic achievement, it was called at that time.

Interviewee:

But there, I'm having to get up, grade papers. So I did that for a year, and then I said, "Look, I am retiring again. I'm cutting this a loose." So I cut that a loose as well, and I've just been struggling on retirement income since then. But yeah, that teaching is, that's why I left it at Jackson State because it was like, "Oh, you have a perfect schedule. You just have two classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and three classes on Wednesday." Hey, it's not over when you leave the classroom. You've got to go home and grade papers and try to come up with things for the class, lesson plans and all that. So it wasn't as glamorous as it seems. So that's why I said, "Mm-mm (negative). Let me retire from this as well." So everything since 2010, I've been totally retired.

Interviewee:

Well, not totally. Not totally, because I was also working out at Shore. I had a little Saturday job. I went out there at the writing lab. But it was a nice little job. I'd go to the library and that's where we had our writing lab. Students wouldn't come, support services, they don't take advantage of it. So very often, I was sitting in the library writing all my stuff and doing whatever, and using the printer to print out my drafts of the play. But I loved that too. So since about 2012, I think I've been totally, totally retired.

Moderator:

All right. So I just want to trace your work trajectory. So first, you worked for The Voice, The Atlanta Voice, and then you took some time off to be with your baby. And then you came back, and that's when you worked for a year with IBW. And then, is that when you moved on to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference?

Interviewee:

Let's see, when I left IBW, I... Yes. Yes. I went to the Southern Leadership Conference, yes.

Moderator:

And then, after that, the SRC?

Interviewee:

SR, Southern Regional Council. And from Southern Regional Council, I went to Emory. And I was at Emory for about a year and a half. And after Emory, is when I think I came to Clark Atlanta.

Moderator:

And did you do the same kind of work at Emory?

Interviewee:

Yeah. What they call the faculty staff publication. It was a newspaper faculty staff. So I was the editor for that, Campus Reporter was what it was called.

Moderator:

Okay. And what year, so SCLC was, it would've been maybe mid to late 70s?

Interviewee:

Yeah. SCLC, I didn't stay there very long at all, because SRC upped my salary by a lot from SCLC. So SCLC, I used to think in terms of my children. SCLC was, must've been, it was somewhere before 79 because I was at Southern Regional Council when Omari was born, and that's my second child. So yeah, it was before 79.

Moderator:

Okay, and then to Emory, would that have been early 80s?

Interviewee:

That would've been... Yeah, that would've been early 80s. That's right, because... Yeah, early 80s.

Moderator:

And then to here.

Interviewee:

I started at Clark in 89. Yeah, I started at Clark in 89. I had worked here as an adjunct in the mass communications department, as a matter of fact in, I think it was 85, I was working here as an adjunct. But then, I was hired full-time in 89. Again, my guardian angel, somebody who had interviewed for the job over there referred, the person who was trying to find somebody referred me and I was able to get that job.

Interviewee:

And actually, the woman who was my director, Sandra Flowers, I had met when I was at Emory. She had come out there, and she... Well that's not even, I'm talking and it's not related to anything, but she had been published by Redbook, and so that's why she came out to meet me because she said, "Oh yeah, I wanted to meet you."

Interviewee:

And she had published a story, a short story. And it's difficult to get fiction published in Redbook. But anyway, so that connection got me over here. And I never thought I would stay anyplace 20 years, and it's like, "Wow." But it did happen, yeah.

Moderator:

Did you like the work you did here?

Interviewee:

I did. And as I said, we had a good group of women. There was no real stress and strain. My last few years were over at the new, what we called the new science building. It's now called... What's the science building called?

Speaker 3:

Thomas Cole.

Interviewee:

Yeah, Thomas Cole, in a program in the intelligence, with the intelligence program. It's called the CANE studies program, Center for Academic Excellence in National Security studies. So this is where they were trying to find African-Americans who were interested in working for the FBI, the CIA and something like that. That is a difficult sell. A lot of blacks are just not interested in that. Plus, the requirements are so strict. It's so high. You have to have a 3.4 GPA, I think and they want you to speak foreign languages. And not French and Spanish, the one girl that they were interested in spoke Mandarin Chinese. So they want you to have those language skills.

Interviewee:

But anyway, that was a good job. It got me a trip to Turkey. I carried a group of 17 students over to Turkey one year. So I really liked that. So, fully covered and paid for. So that's why I loved that job too. But that was in my last, that's where I was when I retired in 2009.

Moderator:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). But it was overlapped with adjuncting at Atlanta Metropolitan college?

Interviewee:

Yeah. When I first started out there, it was a junior college. But now it's a four-year college.

Moderator:

Talk about a number of things, because you mentioned going to Turkey, and it made me think about whether you and your husband traveled a lot.

Interviewee:

Yeah. Unfortunately, we weren't able to travel a lot because my son that passed away in 2004, had seizure condition. And so, my middle son went to France when he was in college. He had an exchange program over in France. So he went one time, and I went at one time. So we weren't able to travel together, because one of us needed to be there with Khari.

Interviewee:

So that was his travel abroad. And we did little things here like we went to the beaches. What is it? In South Carolina, what is that?

Moderator:

Hilton Head.

Interviewee:

Hilton Head, yeah. Hilton Head, and the other one down here, Panama City. And so, trips like that, Callaway Gardens and stuff. So we were able to do those short trips that we could take him with us. But abroad, we had to do that separate.

Moderator:

What was dating him like? You said that you went to a lot of theater together. You went to a lot of jazz clubs. Were there other things you liked to do?

Interviewee:

Let's see... Well, museums and stuff. Of course, he had to be in line for every Spike Lee movie that came out. When he'd open a movie, we'd have to go opening night. And usually, back then, they would have a line. And so, yeah, that was a lot of it. He knew a guy from Detroit. Actually, he was an aspiring poet himself, but he never really published anything.

Moderator:

And this is your husband?

Interviewee:

Yeah. And he knew... Oh, a senior moment. The guy's name won't come to me now, but he ended up being quite a well-known playwright. And he was in New York at the time that we were there, so we would... yeah, we would go to a lot of plays at NEC, Negro Ensemble Company downtown in the village. And uptown was Lafayette Theater. So yeah, a lot of theater, a lot of... We went to see [Aminalien 00:30:48] and some other things like that too. So concerts and museums.

Interviewee:

And there was a lot of free stuff going on. Are you a New Yorker? Have you spent any time there?

Moderator:

Yeah. Not as much as I would like, and no time on Broadway. I don't have money for...

Interviewee:

I guess Morris Park is still there. There was a place in New York called Morris Park, kind of like Piedmont Park. They would have a lot of activities there, free things that you could go to. And so we spent time there a lot. Yeah. Those were some pretty good days. I always said that my time in New York was like an extended vacation. I really didn't feel that I couldn't have called it home. I had one girlfriend who really is not from New York, but she spent some time in New York too. And she said, "I'm a New Yorker." If somebody asked her, she'd say, "I'm from New York." I never said, "I'm from New York." I'm from Tupelo, but I lived in New York once for a period of time. But it was good, the time that I was there, it was good.

Interviewee:

And I was able to get an apartment that was between West End and Riverside, it's a nice safe area there of New York. Because my idea going in was to just work for the temp agencies and get an apartment in

Harlem and write. I found out that that wouldn't happen. Plus, my husband is one of those risk safe... "You can't live in Harlem. It's too dangerous there to live." And so and so and so and so. So I ended up having to find... And I realized what he was talking about, and agreed with him after I got to know some of the areas there. So I never lived in Harlem, but we spent a lot of time up there. There was a lot going on.

Moderator:

How did your parents feel about your husband when they met him the first time? Well, I think your dad.

Interviewee:

Well both my dad and my mom met him. Although, my father had passed away by the time we were married. He thought that my dad didn't like him. I don't know whether Daddy didn't like him or not. I don't really know, but he always felt that my dad didn't like him. And my mom was okay with him. Yeah, she was okay with him. He came to visit me once in Tupelo, and I was telling him, "Oh no. Don't worry, Mom. He's not my type." So when we were talking about getting married, "What happened to he's not your type?" She never let me forget that. And her advice was to me, "Just don't marry an old man." As I said, her husband was 10 years older than she is, and my husband turned out to be six years older than I am. Although, he had lied to me. I thought he was about three years older than me. He turned out to be six years. He was hiding his age because he thought if I knew how old he was... Oh dear.

Moderator:

That's interesting. What about his family?

Interviewee:

His mom, he was married... His mom divorced, and he's the only child that his mom had by his dad. Then she remarried and had two other boys. But my husband's dad remarried and he became Muslim. He was high up in the ranks of Elijah Muhammad's-

Moderator:

The Nation of Islam.

Interviewee:

Nation of Islam.

Moderator:

Oh wow.

Interviewee:

And she had nine boys and one girl. So he's from a big family on his dad's side. And that's why I was so thrilled when my son had his granddaughter, because I said, "We don't have any chances of having a girl. Your daddy's is one of three boys from his mom's side and one of nine from his dad's side." And my mom had three boys before she... And I understand that male is supposed to determine the sex of the child, that's what I heard. So that's why I figured that Omari didn't stand a chance of having a girl, but his first baby is a little girl. So I'm so happy to have a girl in the family.

Moderator:

What's she like?

Interviewee:

She's sweet. She's 15 months old, and feisty, spoiled. But she's fine, she's fine. She's real sweet. When I spent the week there last week, we were taking her to swimming lessons. Everybody, I think... Well, not everybody, but so many people in Tampa have pools in the back of the house. So they have a pool, and they got this little gate up around it. But still, these little ones, if they're really determined, if they happen to get a chance, they'll climb over stuff. So they wanted her to learn at least water safety, because I think at 15 months, she's too young to learn to swim. They said they don't have enough upper body strength.

Interviewee:

But they want her to be able to float and to be able to turn over on her side and reach for the side of the... So, that's what she's trying to do. She hasn't achieved any of that at this point. She cried the first two days we were there because the water was cold and she was, "Aah." But the last couple of days, the water got warmer, and so she's coming along. She's coming along well. So she's going to continue the lessons.

Interviewee:

We carried her because both her mom and her dad work, of course. So while we were there during the week, we started her with these swimming lessons. And so at least she can kind of get acclimated. Neither her dad nor her mom swim, so they've got to learn to swim. They've got the pool right there at the house. All they've got to do is just go out to the pool. So the teacher was trying to tell them, "And this is what you need to do with her. You all need to do this so she can really get used to the water and everything." So, anyway. So hopefully that'll happen. She can teach her old grannies, because neither one of the grand mamas can swim either.

Interviewee:

Well, Omari, the middle son, even growing up, he was like the older child because he had to help with Khari so much. Khari had this, he had intractable seizures. We were never really able to control them with medication. So it not only was physical, it affected him mentally. He was at a certain level. When he was in first grade, on the California Achievement Test, he scored really in the high percentile. And then by the time he was second grade, it had fallen and then it just continued to fall. He regressed.

Interviewee:

So Omari was like the big brother throughout, and so he's fine. He's very solid. And he works for Johnson & Johnson. He's... I can't even remember his title, but he's something like industrial. He went to Davidson College up in Charlotte, and then he got his Master's at the University of Georgia. So it's something in industrial something that he's... it's something. So anyway, he works for Johnson & Johnson, and he does little stuff with the stock market.

Interviewee:

My younger son will turn 35 on May fifth, as I said. He's in real estate. He has built quite a few homes, and he's working on one now he's really excited about. And he sales and manages property. And he's

getting ready to go on his first cruise to, I think it's Cozumel and Cayman Islands or something like that, for his birthday which is coming up, as I said. He fine. He's a Taurus, and I was surrounded by Tauruses. You may not be into astrology, but having had him as a child and my husband, who's a Taurus as well. And the little girl that I worked with for 15 years over at the rescue was a Taurus. There's something to astrology. The three of them were so much alike, I said, "There has to be something to it." But he's a little fireball, but he's wonderful.

Moderator:

When you started your family, was it difficult to... And I know you talked about sometimes taking time off, but was it difficult to juggle all the things: work and adjuncting?

Interviewee:

Yeah, it got to be pretty difficult, especially with Khari with the seizure condition. And my husband ended up being the primary caretaker, because he was trying to be this businessman and it wasn't really materializing as he thought it would. So he would be the one, because Khari wasn't able to be in school on a regular basis. He would be able to go sometimes, and then sometimes he would stay home. So he was able to keep him there at home, and to care for him.

Interviewee:

So yeah, it got to be kind of difficult because you're working, and then running over to teach the classes, when I did have the classes and juggling the kids. When they get to be a certain age, you've got baseball and you've got this, and you've got a lot of other things going on with them too. So for Mati, it was basketball and baseball. And for Omari, it was baseball. So those kind of things, and the school systems, they both went to North Atlanta High School, and Omari was in the... What do they call it? Mati was in the business end, but Omari was in the scholars program. What do they call that thing? The schools have, in Atlanta, have, they did have. I think it's kind of stopped now. But they did have...

Moderator:

Like magnet programs?

Interviewee:

Magnet programs, thank you. Magnet programs. So the magnet for North Atlanta was performing arts, and it was in international studies, international studies. So, that's what he was in at North Atlanta International Studies. And that's one of the reasons that he chose Davidson, I think, because they had international studies and encouraged all the students that came through to spend some time abroad and stuff like that.

Interviewee:

Omari, on the other hand, surprised me because Omari didn't want to go to the... I tried to get him to come to [inaudible 00:42:13], because he could've come for free because I was working, he could've come tuition free. He didn't want to come, so he was able to get a scholarship and go. And with my income, and my husband didn't have much of an income, so he was able to get a full ride at Davidson.

Interviewee:

Mati, on the other hand, did agree to, so he went to Morehouse, and he used a tuition waiver. But he also went, he wasn't interested in going abroad, but he went to Stanford and did a domestic exchange at Stanford. So they both were pretty active in school and other activities related to that. And Khari, was not really even able to finish high school. He tried to go to high school, but he wasn't able to function very much.

Moderator:

What role do you think academics has in changing society, and have things like HBCUs or black studies programs at any institution, have they done the kinds of things that they set out to do in terms of social change?

Interviewee:

I think so. I was really, some of the students coming down from California to other places, helped me understand because they would talk about wanting the black experience in coming to an HBCU and this, that and the other. And I would always think, we don't have that many courses in black studies in the curriculum. But they were making me understand that even if it's an English class or a psychology class, their teachers would be talking about black people in that area, field that they wouldn't get in other places. So that made me understand, "Okay, so if you don't have to have a course in black studies to get the black experience."

Interviewee:

So yeah, I think... because so many of them speak of it... Well I guess, I was about to say segregated situation... Well, not always, because when I went up to the state university of New York, it was mixed, very mixed. In fact, I was trying, one of the things I had to do, I had a teaching fellowship. I had to try to teach students the Iliad and the Odyssey that I had not even read myself. I'm trying to stay two or three pages ahead of them and teach it. And this school was predominately Jewish, and you have these Jewish kids coming there who had PhDs for teaching in high school. And they would get a pretty good crop of students up there. So, that was a real challenge to try to do that. But anyway, I got through it.

Interviewee:

But basically, I've been in Jackson State segregated, and then working here. So I've been in a segregated situation. And as I say, I couldn't really sometimes see the value of the HBCU and the impact that it had on students who had not had that kind of experience, that they were indeed able to come into the situation and thrive, because they felt, I guess, comfortable and they were getting things in every aspect of the [inaudible 00:46:13], not just for the course, but in... Well, it's the courses too, but they infused black studies into all of the courses, and that helped them. So that's helped them, I think, understand and feel empowered to do things by being in that situation with blacks in charge and all of that.

Moderator:

Do you follow contemporary activist movements, like the Black Lives Matter movement?

Interviewee:

Not as much as I should. Yeah, just periphery. I know of it, of course, and I keep thinking that I should try to become active in some kind of program, but I'm really... I can't say that I am. One of the girls that you will interview or have interviewed is Colette. I have so much respect for her, because she's into all sorts

of things. I do a little volunteer work with Families First that she at one time worked with. But to be immersed in it like she is, I really respect and admire that. But I can't say that I've been.

Moderator:

I was just going to ask you if you thought contemporary activism leaders, are they using effective approaches to solve problems? Do you feel like other things could be done?

Interviewee:

I don't know. I listen to a lot of... When I'm in the car, I keep my radio on WAOK for the most part, CLK occasionally when I want to hear some music. But there's talk radio, and Al Sharpton comes on at one o'clock, so I often hear his discussions and him talking. It's difficult to try to figure out, this is what we should be doing. This is what we should be doing. So I don't know. I think, in some respects, we are. I don't know what to say that they should be doing that they are not doing. I think what they're doing is having some impact, and I can't really say... Somebody called in the other day and was talking about, "Well, what you ought to do is this that and, what you ought to do." And I think this was Rashad Richey that comes on, turned right back around and, "Well, what are you doing? What are you leading? What group are you leading?"

Interviewee:

As long as you're out there trying to do something, I think it's a good thing. And they keep explaining all the time, now we look back and talk about the civil rights movement and how so much was done then. But back then, it was the same thing. You had Stokely Carmichael. You had Martin Luther King. You had, up in New York, you had Malcolm X. So it wasn't... Now, we think they were together. They were moving. They knew how to do things. They did things together. It was not any different then, than what we have now. You have these different factions, so it's just a situation that we have... Just like with Tulsa, Oklahoma, you're two steps up and then somebody comes along and wipes it out.

Interviewee:

I don't think any other group of people have had this much opposition to their growth as African-Americans. And so we just have to try to figure out... Okay, we tried this, make it through over here and make it this way. And if it's not valid, then come back and try... so I don't have any answers to this, but I know it's complicated so I just have the greatest respect for anybody who's out there trying to do something. Yeah, to do something.

Moderator:

What do you think our biggest obstacles to progress are?

Interviewee:

White folk.

Moderator:

No argument there.

Interviewee:

Bigoted white people, yeah. I think that's our biggest. Now I'm not one of these folk who, I value a college education, but I think that there's lots of other things that we should be doing, other ways that we can excel. Because I used to, I would get so frustrated with those students over at Atlanta Metropolitan. They would come over there, and then instead of going over to Atlanta Area Tech, where they could probably go and get through in 18 months or something and have a skill, air conditioning or something that they could get a good paying job with, they'd come into Atlanta Metropolitan where they spend years, but they're planning to come to Clark Atlanta and then get their degree.

Interviewee:

There's too much emphasis put on the degree thing, because I think even when they get a degree... One time, it was like one year over there at the... Where we are, we had a computer lab. This young man spent the whole summer in there on the computers trying to... There were no jobs. It was just terrible. They were coming out of school with degrees, and there were just no jobs. And I think he finally got picked up toward the end of the year at some job. But he had, the whole summer trying to put in, find jobs and send out resumes and everything. And had he had a skill that he could've acquired at Atlanta Area Tech, he could've been out there working probably. But no, a college degree doesn't always compute to a job.

Interviewee:

So I think if we could get out of that mode of thinking, I think we can help ourselves along by just not thinking so much about "education" in that way, not a formal college education. That's not for everybody, and it has its limitations. So I think getting out of that will help a lot. And I think gradually, we are beginning to do that. Even Barack Obama sometimes, I even heard Michelle saying that, "Whether you're going to this school or that school, as long as you're going." But that's good, but again, I can't help it. I really do, although I am "formally educated", I don't really, I think we need to get away from that.

Interviewee:

I'm almost of the old school that George Washington may have had the better idea than the boys. I don't know. For us, it's getting ahead. You can have the intellectual part of it, but you also need something practical, it seems to me, that you can use to create your own jobs. I think you're more likely to create your own jobs from what you would get at a school like Area Tech than you will be from a Clark Atlanta University, I don't know. I'm thinking that anyway. I'm going to get in trouble, and especially with intellectuals at the Institute of the Black World.

Moderator:

It kind of ties into the next question, what could we each be doing every day to nurture a more positive future? And I feel like you've talked about that in a sense of acquiring skills that can help you survive, and valuing those skills as much as an education, sort of thinking practically about survival and being able to take care of yourself and your families, but are there other things?

Interviewee:

I think there's a spiritual component too, that we all need that would help us greatly. And if we can get to that, I know when I first started... I attend a church here called Hillside, and it's a unitarian kind of background that I think it creates our situation. And I was thinking, I said, "My, if they would teach that in the schools" In the elementary and high schools, "wouldn't that be so wonderful. It would put everybody up several notches if we could just learn to focus our thinking."

Interviewee:

So I think that that spiritual component, everything that's spiritual is not leading in that direction, but I think a spiritual component that talks about the God in us, would be good for advancing black people. Society period, but I'm most interested in advancing black people. So I think that would help us a lot if we could learn that it is our thinking that probably puts us where we are. And of course, I'm working on it myself, because I said, "Oh my goodness."

Interviewee:

And we've come by it, our thinking, I understand how we got that way and how it continues to be that way. But in order to free ourselves from it, many of us will have to change our thinking. And so if we could learn and have that taught at an early age, I think it would be really advantageous. If I'm making sense, I don't know.

Moderator:

Oh yeah. What gives you hope?

Interviewee:

I was about to say young people, but I guess, yeah. Our future or our young people. Some people, I know a person now that things like the Black Power movement, and young people getting involved, that's hopeful. What gives me hope? On a personal level, I guess it's yeah, my children and offspring. So I think, even for everybody, if we could kind of, on an individual level make our contributions, it would carry over. I don't know. What gives me hope? Yeah, I think it's just believing that we have value and that we instill it in our young people, and that our young people will... I think a lot of them give me hope. I would have to just let that be the general thing is that our young people give me hope.

Moderator:

If you had a specific message to communicate to those young people, what would it be?

Interviewee:

I don't know. I don't know. I wish I was a philosopher or could think like that, but I just, I can't think. When I had my 75th birthday, some friends were over there. Jillian over there was one of the people, and they said, "Well what advice would you give, from your 75 years of wisdom, what advice would you give?" I don't know. I can't, I'm sorry, that just, I can't expound like that. I hear you translate what I've said, I said, "Oh yeah, why didn't I say it like that?" But maybe I could write it out for you, but in terms of thinking it and speaking it, it just doesn't come to me. I don't know.

Moderator:

What about as an artist? Because you're a playwright, right?

Interviewee:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Moderator:

What advice would you give to a younger playwright? I know you talked about... I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but I know you talked about [crosstalk 01:00:18]... well, I know you talked about having these ambitions of playwriting and you worked on it for a while, but then you started a family, and now you're coming back to it. And I'm just interested in that, hearing more about that experience. How does it feel to come back to it after having lived and had all these different experiences? Are you happier that you're taking it on now, after a time, or do you wish you had done it earlier, or are you just like?

Interviewee:

Some people were able to do it and have families and everything early. But I, because I may not have been able to juggle all of that, I'm happy that I had a family, that I have a family. So I don't regret that it's come later. And I don't like the celebrity part of it. It takes a certain amount of that to be successful, have a social media presence and all of this. It would be really helpful if I were able to do that, maybe I should've taken some public speaking classes or something myself. It may have helped me out a little.

Interviewee:

But I like that. I'm enjoying it, and I feel really... When I'm into it, when I'm trying to create it. And like now, I'm having to do some revision. I have this woman that works with me, kind of like a [inaudible 01:01:55], kind of like an editor. And so she's shifted me. I had completed the play. It was ready, and she thinks that one of the characters should change from a female to a male. "Oh no. My Lord." So that, of course, changed a lot of the dynamics.

Interviewee:

So I like that and I enjoy that. But when I finish this one, I don't think I will try to do anymore. I don't think I'll try to write. I'm in a senior group, and so if we come up with something, we need something written, something short to write, I may do that. But I'm interested in just going on and living now. I heard, and I think it's really true that old people are the happiest people in the world. I think that may be true.

Interviewee:

I'm more interested in somehow finding a way to have money to travel. Some people have been able to do all this traveling already. But my birthday wish, my son made it, was to go to South Africa. So I'm saving and hoping to do that, and to do some other traveling around. Just enjoy life. At this point, just day-to-day, nothing special, nothing big.

Interviewee:

But I don't regret that I didn't do it early, yeah. I'm just happy that I do have a family to fall back on. I shouldn't call it fall back on, but I do have family. Because when I left New York, one of the girls that became the editor for Essence, was one of the editors there at Redbook. She was in fiction, Audrey Edwards, and I don't think Audrey has a family now. And I'm thinking, "Oh, if I had stayed," because sometimes I do think, "I should've stayed on at Redbook. I should've worked on developing my career and worked, and I probably could've been an editor of one of the major publications or something if I really worked hard at it." Like I said, she was there, and one of the other editors at Redbook at the time I was there, became the editor for Mademoiselle.

Interviewee:

So there were things that could be done, but then not that. That just happened to be Audrey's situation that she didn't have any family. But if I had to do that and not have a family, I would've rather do it this way and have the family and just have minor success as opposed to major success and no family.

Moderator:

What brings you joy on a daily basis?

Interviewee:

Getting up and looking out the windows. "Oh, the sun is out today." The grass has been cut, it looks pretty decent out there today. I try to start every day with a devotional. We do, at Hillside again, we do daily thoughts from the hill. And so it's a little devotional book that sets you in the frame of mind for the day. So yesterday or the day before or something, I read, the affirmation said, a person gets up every day and says, "Thanks God." So I'm trying to remember to do that as soon as I get up, to say, "Thanks God." and just go from there.

Interviewee:

So just, thankfully, I have health issues. But thankfully, I don't have any... I feel good. I don't have any aches. I don't have any pains. Some people, unfortunately go through pain. And so I'm just happy that I can get up and feel good every day. Go to my little water aerobics class and my yoga class and the Darnell Group, whatever. Just do some things, worked in my yard yesterday, tried to plant a few flowers. So just things, and it's unfortunate that we have to wait until we get to old age.

Interviewee:

I can understand why they say old people are the happiest people, because we have less responsibility and more options than young people. We went to, this is when I say we, the Darnell Group went to speak with a group of nursing students a couple of times. And one of the young men, because we're trying to help them understand old people and how to treat old people.

Interviewee:

So one of the young men in the audience wanted to know, "Well, do you think about dying all the time? Do you think about dying much?" And so one of the guys said, "No, actually I thought more about death when I was 19 than I do now." And I think that's true. When you're young, you think, "Will I live to this? Will I live to something?" But once you get old, I've beaten the odds. I've already got my seventh score in 10, so you're not so concerned and fearful of dying of this, that and the other as you were when you were younger.

Interviewee:

So it's kind of unfortunate that we have to come to the end of life. And here, because we do get little social security that keeps us going. In some other countries, I'm sure that's not the case when you get old. And maybe some countries are even much better than what we have here, but at least you have a little bit of a steady income when you get old if you've been able to work.

Interviewee:

So as I say, you have less on your mind and you have more freedom. So I just enjoy that, getting up and being, not having to get up and go to work. When that rain is coming down out there, and I don't have

to get up. I can lay down here and listen to the rain if I want to. So that's what I enjoy about it. And it's kind of unfortunate that... And some people may have that at 20, 30, 40, I don't know. But for me, it's come in old age. And that's why I'm happy in old age. So again, I think I touched on what you asked me, but I'm not sure.

Moderator:

Yeah, you did. I do have a followup question though, and this is just from talking to you. Particularly, you talked about how a lot of your family members passed away, some of them very early. And what would you attribute your longevity to?

Interviewee:

I don't know. I've been, for a long time now, I just try to have a good frame of mind. Thinking, try to have certain affirmations that you repeat and say to keep you in a good frame of mind. I do have my issues. For some reason, my blood pressure just wants to be up there high, and I don't know why it wants to be high. But I don't... I'm not going to say knock on wood. I haven't had any strokes or anything like that.

Interviewee:

So I don't know. I wonder now. I mentioned when I was talking to you about the smoking. I don't know if that smoking may have had a greater impact than we realized on people. Because even my other sister that passed away, was a social smoker. She lived to be 70, though. But my brother had lung cancer. I think about that commercial that they now have on TV, oh my Lord, that woman whose face is all.

Interviewee:

So I think not having smoked ever, may help a little bit with the physical. And I think maybe because I'm now associated with a group, as I say, Hillside and the thinking that we... I can't say taught, but that's espoused there, I think that helps too, to have a good positive frame of mind helps with how I'm doing, I think. And some of it is just, I can't say genes, because the genes have done most of my family in. So I think it's a combination of... And I try to eat well and exercise. So that, I guess, along with the positive frame of mind, may attribute to it. I'm just guessing.

Moderator:

You mentioned you did yoga. Have you done that for a long time?

Interviewee:

This is not the yoga that you're thinking about, not all that serious yoga. We have a chair yoga. This happens to be at Hillside. It's not a church function, but it's at that location. So I've done it for about three or four years, I think. But it's really good. The teacher's excellent, but it's just seniors. It's a senior class, so no getting on the floor and no turning over on the mat. I had a hot yoga class. Ooh, that made me sick, sick sick, as sick as I've ever been. So I can't do that hot yoga. Have you ever tried that?

Moderator:

No. But is there anything that you would like to add? I know earlier, you talked about your oldest living brother and how he had so much knowledge that the family wasn't able to capture. So are there things you want to leave on the record? Any other things about your life, about your experiences?

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Interviewee:

I think I've rambled enough. I think I've rambled on enough. I don't, nothing really comes to mind. Again, if I were given this as an assignment and overnight to think on it, I might would come up with something. But off the top of my head, no, I don't think of anything.