

**Oral History Interview of  
Estella “Stella” Courtney**

**Interviewed by: Cosby Morton  
February 27, 2014  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:**  
*African American Interviews*

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### Preferred Citation for this Document:

Courtney, Estella Oral History Interview, February 27, 2014. Interview by Cosby Morton, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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### Recording Notes:

*Original Format:* Born Digital Audio

*Digitization Details:* N/A

*Audio Metadata:* 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

*Further Access Restrictions:* N/A

### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* Cosby Morton

*Audio Editor:* N/A

*Transcription:* Paul Doran

*Editor(s):* Walter Nicolds

*Final Editor:* Katelin Dixon, Elissa Stroman

## Interview Series Background:

The African-American Oral History Collection documents the diverse perspectives of the African-American people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, segregation, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11<sup>th</sup> 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Stella Courtney recalling her experiences growing up in the Chatman Hill Community of Lubbock and being in the first integrated class at Texas Tech University. Courtney also discusses her career as a teacher, particularly teaching special education students.

**Length of Interview:** 00:50:55

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Biographical information	5	00:00:21
Chatman Hill Community and teachers at Dunbar School	7	00:01:51
Growing up and what was done for fun as a child	25	00:11:33
The role of religion in upbringing	29	00:13:55
Dressing for school	36	00:18:32
Interactions with people of other races, integration of Texas Tech	37	00:20:07
Her children and their achievements	66	00:41:49
Experience as a teacher, involvement with special education	68	00:42:56

### Keywords

Dunbar, Texas Tech, band, integrated, Special Education, Chatman Hill

**Cosby Morton (CM):**

Good morning, today is February twenty-seventh. My name is Cosby Morton, I represent Southwest Collections for Texas Tech University. I have the honor today to talk to Mrs. Stella Courtney.

**Estella Courtney (EC):**

Yes.

CM:

Good morning.

EC:

Good morning.

CM:

First of all, Mrs. Courtney, tell me what your maiden name was.

EC:

Crockett.

CM:

Crockett.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, where were you born?

EC:

I was born right here in Lubbock, Texas.

CM:

Okay, all right, what year?

EC:

1943.

CM:

1943, all right. And your parents—what were their names?

EC:

David and Mable Ruth Crockett.

CM:

Where'd they come from?

EC:

My parents were born right here in Lubbock, also.

CM:

Both of them?

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, all right. Tell me a little about your parents. What did your dad do for a living?

EC:

Well, my dad was a custodian, or a janitor.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And as far as I can remember, he worked many years for the bank, First Federal Savings & Loan.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Many years he worked for them. My mother was just a maid.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And she worked for a Dr. Smith, Richard Smith I think, for over fifty years.

CM:

Wow. Now your dad also had something else that he did, he raised hogs.

EC:

Oh yes he did, absolutely.

CM:

He raised them for a long time I would imagine.

EC:

As a matter of fact, I guess probably you'd call that his first occupation. Yes, Yes. Yeah, he was always known as being in the hog business.

CM:

All right, and I'll tell you an interesting story about that. Your brother David that I grew up with and Kay, your dad would get the chips to feed the hogs.

EC:

Okay.

CM:

The potato chips. They were stale, they were greasy, but they were good.

EC:

They were good for the hogs.

CM:

We would eat those potato chips, I mean they were excellent. All right, now you started school—now so you grew up in the neighborhood called Chatman Hill?

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, and so I guess the impression that was left on you is probably from the early forties, but mainly the fifties. You were a product of probably the fifties.

EC:

Yes, growing up as a youngster in the fifties, yes, yes.



CM:

Okay, all right, tell me about the neighborhood.

EC:

Well, this neighborhood, Date Street, I think that it was one of the most popular streets okay. And as we said previously, it was surrounded by teachers.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

And I think those teachers kind of kept us in line. Miss Simmons, and Miss Cox, and Miss Lewis, and the Priestley's, okay.

CM:

Now you grew up down the street here on Date.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

And your next door neighbor was Miss May Simmons?

EC:

That's correct.

CM:

All right, she was the principal at the school?

EC:

Yes, yes, yes, she was, yes.

CM:

Do you remember your first grade teacher?

EC:

Miss Struggs.

CM:

Miss Lillian Struggs.



EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, and you had started school at this school that's located on Date Avenue?

EC:

Yes, right, right, right.

CM:

All right. Some of the teachers that you had back then, that left an impression on you. Just name a few of the teachers that were over there.

EC:

Okay, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Roy Roberts.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Mrs. Sheffield, Mrs. Ada Belle Jackson.

CM:

And she a Spanish teacher, right?

EC:

Yes, she was, Spanish.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Mrs. Hill, I don't remember her first name, Mrs. Hill.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Mrs. Sadberry.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Miss Lusk.

CM:

All right, Miss Lusk. What did Miss Lusk teach back then?

EC:

I think she was the librarian.

CM:

Okay, and see I've talked to different people that are older than us, and she was an English teacher at one time.

EC:

Oh, okay.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

All right.

CM:

So she was that at one time, and when I came along, Mrs. Sadberry was the counselor.

EC:

Okay, playing different roles.

CM:

And I'll tell you something else interesting about Ms. Hill. Mr. Hill lived when he first became Damon Hill, Sr. He lived with Mr. Priestley then.

EC:

Oh, okay, oh I didn't know that.

CM:

When he first came here, because there was not housing for teachers. Then Miss Hill lived around the corner with Miss Vinita Holmes before they got married.

EC:

I see.

CM:

Just interesting things that I've learned in talking to different people.

EC:

Well that is interesting—

CM:

I didn't know that.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

So when you came up, most of your teachers came from historically black universities?

EC:

I think so, yes.

CM:

Okay, and we'll come back to that.

EC:

Okay, okay.

CM:

The reason I want to bring that up now is because the image we're building something here.

EC:

Okay.

CM:

Now, when you were in school over here at Dunbar, how many people were in your graduating class?

EC:

Well I don't know the exact number, but I know it was less than a hundred. I'm thinking somewhere like the mid-eighties, eighty-five, eight-six.

CM:

Okay, and you graduated in—

EC:

In 1961.

CM:

1961. So you spent the majority of your time at the old Dunbar.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Which is located on Date Avenue.

EC:

Absolutely. Sure did.

CM:

Okay, and the your last couple of year you spent at the new Dunbar.

EC:

At the new Dunbar.

CM:

On east 26<sup>th</sup> Street. Okay, how did you get to school when they moved Dunbar across the railroad tracks.

EC:

Across the river. Well, one of my best friends, Benny Whitfield, had a car.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And she would come around early in the morning and pick several of us up.

CM:

All right.

EC:

And I would say probably it was at least five or six girls in that car.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Every morning, and she'd toot her little horn, and we was always on time. So we would run out there, get in the car, and that's how we got over there.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

Got over there and got back the same way.

CM:

Wow. So, was the underpass here then?

EC:

The overpass?

CM:

Well the underpass right there?

EC:

I think so.

CM:

Okay, but the overpass was not there?

EC:

Well no, yes it was, that's the way we would go to school, the overpass over here.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

All right, okay so it was there. Okay. Now, at Dunbar, you developed an interest in band?

EC:

Yes.

CM:

And why was that?

EC:

I don't know, I think around probably fourth or fifth grade I guess they were asking students to join the band, and I just did because I was asked.

CM:

Well, now, one of the things that I remember as a kid, and that people have told me, is that the band since when it was located up here at the school down the street from where we're at now, used to actually march through the neighborhood.

EC:

Well, now I don't remember marching through the neighborhood, but I do remember marching on the campus.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yeah, yeah.

CM:

All right.

EC:

With band practice and the rehearsals, yes.

CM:

So you could actually hear the band in the neighborhood?

EC:

Oh absolutely.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Because it was right there outdoors.

CM:

And by the school being combined with the elementary school, and the high school there, you got a chance I guess to look out the window and see the band practicing.

EC:

As a youngster, yes.

CM:

Oh okay.

EC:

And maybe that's why I became interested in the band.

CM:

Okay. Now you mentioned Mr. Roberts was over there.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay Roy Roberts is—

EC:

Yes.

CM:

The band director for many years, and later on he was the principal at Dunbar.

EC:

At Dunbar, right.



CM:

Okay. What instrument did you play?

EC:

Clarinet.

CM:

Clarinet.

EC:

Called the B-flat clarinet.

CM:

B-flat clarinet, okay. Now, let's go back and let's go to the neighborhood. We were talking about all the teachers in the neighborhood. Tell me other things about the neighborhood. You had a lot of entrepreneurs over here.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

A lot of businesses.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

So even though you had a segregated environment back then, you had a lot of people that had businesses. What were some of the businesses?

EC:

Oh, and I don't remember the name of the person, but there was a business—you know where Mrs. Simmons lived?

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Okay, and right diagonally across the street from her was like a little grocery store.

CM:

Okay, yes, okay.

EC:

Now I don't remember the name of the store, or who even owned it, but I know that was there.

Okay, and then when you come back down this way, towards Nineteenth and Twentieth was that Pleasure Garden okay.

CM:

Oh, let's talk about the Pleasure—what was the Pleasure Garden?

EC:

Well you know what I was never allowed to go there.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

But I heard a lot about it. I think it was a place where the young people—I guess probably, they skated, they played music, they danced, they had parties and all of that.

CM:

And it was owned by Mr. D. C. Farris Sr.

EC:

Probably so.

CM:

Yes, okay, all right. Now, also across the street from Mrs. Simmons, I think—wasn't there a hotel there?

EC:

There was a hotel, yes.

CM:

Okay so you actually had a hotel in the neighborhood.

EC:

Yes, there was a hotel there.

CM:

Okay. I think Mr. King actually owned that hotel, and possibly the store across the street.

EC:

Probably so.

CM:

Okay, right.

EC:

Okay. And I think, maybe it was Cedar, the next street over, was the community center.

CM:

Ah, okay.

EC:

Remember that community center—

CM:

Yes.

EC:

—where the mothers would take their babies. It was like a well-baby clinic.

CM:

Right, it was a forerunner to Mae Simmons Community Center—

EC:

Yes.

CM:

And at one time it was a USO center.

EC:

Okay, all right.

CM:

And it was ran by Mrs. Corinne Fair, Mr. D. C. Fair's wife, at one time.

EC:

Okay, okay.

CM:

And later on Mrs. Charles.

EC:

Right.

CM:

Now, also upon the corner there was a funeral home.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Right by Twenty-Third.

CM:

Yes, so you had a funeral—

EC:

It was actually close to where your house is.

CM:

Yeah, right, exact place where my house is.

EC:

Right.

CM:

Well, so you had a funeral home—you had two in the neighborhood, you had Jamison on the other street.

EC:

That's right, a couple of streets over. Now the one right there, was that South Plains?

CM:

It was South Plains.

EC:

Okay.

CM:

And before South Plains, it was named Jackson.

EC:

Okay, all right, all right.

CM:

Now, one of the things that you had over here—part of your life was influenced greatly by your family?

EC:

Absolutely, yes.

CM:

Okay, so, how many siblings did you have?

EC:

We have six.

CM:

Okay, there was six of you.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

And what place do you rank in that?

EC:

I'm number three.

CM:

You're number three. You're number three out of six.

EC:

Out of six.

CM:

Out of six. Now, we've talked about your dad, and your mother, but about two doors down, your grandparents lived.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Your dad's mom and dad.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

Okay, and then what were their names.

EC:

David Crockett Sr.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And Estella Crockett.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And her maiden name was Williams.

CM:

Okay. Is your name Estella?

EC:

Yes it is.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
That's my legal name, but I'm called Stella.

CM:  
Yeah, incidentally my grandmother was named Stella.

EC:  
Oh, really?

CM:  
Yes, so—

EC:  
Oh, that's interesting.

CM:  
So I didn't know your name was—Okay, but you're named for your grandmother?

EC:  
Yes.

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
My grandmother and my mother. My middle name is Ruth.

CM:  
Oh, okay.

EC:  
And my mother's name is Mable Ruth. So I'm named after both of them.

CM:  
Oh, okay.



EC:

Yes.

CM:

My mother used to kind of dislike that because in her whole family you're named for somebody.

EC:

That's right.

CM:

Great-grandma—

EC:

I think that's they did it back then, didn't they?

CM:

Yes, everybody's got a—we have a lot of people in the family that are Richard and Robert. My great-grandfather was Richard, my grandfather was Robert. So there's Charles Robert, John Robert, Richard—they've got a lot of those in the family.

EC:

Lot of those in the family, yes, yes, yes.

CM:

All right, so, by being in proximity to your grandparents—and incidentally your grandmother's sister lived there, too.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Behind there.

EC:

Yes, Alberta Sanders was her name.

CM:

Alberta Sanders. So you had a big family influence.

EC:

A lot of adults influencing me.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

All right. And see you don't see that anymore. From what I get by talking to people from the old days—I say old days—from that period of time there was a lot of families. Because a lot of people moved out here, and then other people moved because of a family member.

EC:

Right, right.

CM:

Now, a picture of the lots here—your great aunt lived behind your grandparents.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

Okay, so on the alleys, there were just as many houses—

EC:

Right—

CM:

—as there were on the street?

EC:

Absolutely, yes, yes.

CM:

And then the side streets going through east Twentieth, east Twenty-First, they were dirt, right?

EC:

Not paved at that time.

CM:

Okay, all right. Growing up in the latter part of the forties, and early fifties, as a young lady, what'd you do, jump rope?

EC:

Play jacks.

CM:

Play jacks.

EC:

Okay, yes, and, now this is maybe a little bit later but we had a lot of slumber parties.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

My girlfriends, we were very, very close.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And most of the slumber parties were held at Lydia Jackson—

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Down on Date, okay. And really I think that we had a slumber party almost every weekend.

CM:

Okay

EC:

That's something we really looked forward to.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

And we had parties over at Benny Whitfield's house.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Sandra Menefee okay. And one or two at my house.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Okay, but that was one thing I remember that we really did a lot of .

CM:

Yeah, and Miss Ada Jackson is Sandra's sister.

EC:

Or her aunt I think.

CM:

Oh aunt, okay yeah, okay I knew there was some kin.

EC:

No not her sister, her aunt I think, yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yes, I think so.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Man, that's a—

EC:

And of course you know we were all in the Girl Scouts too.

CM:

Oh they had Girl Scouts?

EC:

Oh we had Girl Scouts.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yes and I remember going to camp, and I think it was—

CM:

Where'd you go to camp at?

EC:

Well okay, out near Buffalo Lakes.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

Okay, and I don't know what they called it at that time, but that's where we went. Very interesting.

CM:

Now, so the time that you grew up in the neighborhood, because you lived in a neighborhood where the community helped raise you we'll say, what impact did that have on your life?

EC:

It kept me in line, it kept us in line. No seriously, like when we go to school, we knew that—and not that we really wanted to get away with anything—

CM:

Yes.

EC:

But you know how youngsters are—

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

Whatever happened in school, the parents would believe the teachers. I couldn't come home and say "Well mom, the teacher did this, the teacher said that."

CM:

Yes.

EC:

It's like nonsense. Whatever that teacher told my mom and my dad, that's what, yes.

CM:

Same deal. And it was amazing with the communication system. There was not cell phones, anything—

EC:

No.

CM:

But whatever you did could beat you to the house.

EC:

That's right, that's right.

CM:

Which was really amazing. Now you mentioned the fact that your parents, they did parenting back then, because you couldn't go to the Pleasure Garden.

EC:

That's right.

CM:

And of course it was for entertainment, but there were things that went on at the Pleasure Garden. So your parents, even though it's down the street, you were not permitted to go down there.

EC:

And I think probably, and I'm really guessing, but I think maybe it has something to do with the religion. I'm COGIC [Church of God in Christ]

CM:

Okay.

EC:

So, people called us very, very strict.

CM:

Well let's the impact of religion, because I look at the neighborhood and I see seven or eight churches over here.

EC:

Oh we have a lot of churches.

CM:

And you go back into the history of East Lubbock, and starting in the Flats where it started at, there's a lot of churches. So, tell me what the church did for you. Who was the pastor back then when you first started?

EC:

Well, at that time my church was over I think on Ash.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And it was a Revered Carrington, who has a son who is still living right now.

CM:

Yes.



EC:

Wiley Carrington.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And when he was there, I was very, very young, all right. I mean like not even a teenager. And then, some years later, we built a church over on Fir, at 2411 Fir, Christ Temple.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Church of God in Christ. And at that time it was Revered Haynes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

W. D. Haynes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Was our pastor.

CM:

So Bishop Haynes?

EC:

Bishop Haynes, and I would count him as the pastor that I really grew up with, yes.

CM:

So, the church on Ash, where was it located on Ash.

EC:

Well you know as far as I can remember, I think it was like right at the corner before you go over the tracks right there Ash, right Avenue A.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

Right there, yeah.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yeah, right at Twenty-Third & Ash.

CM:

Yeah, and that was a dirt street back then, right?

EC:

Oh yes, all of those were dirt streets.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay. So I've looked at history and Mrs. Barron lived in that area, because there was some little houses over there. She had actually lived back over there.

EC:

Probably so.

CM:

So it was on Ash, okay. And going back to your church. Okay, the church had a big impact on your life.

EC:

Absolutely.

CM:

Because of your parents?

EC:

Because of my parents, yeah, we were told that we had to go to church, we had no choice.

CM:

Well it seems to me, I looked at the cornerstone over here one day at that church, and I saw your grandfather's name, or your father's name on the cornerstone.

EC:

My grandfather.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

So he was actually a deacon or something in the church, or an elder?

EC:

Yes, he was, he was a deacon, and then an elder, and his major role was the superintendent of Sunday school.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And my grandfather, before he became disabled, had been the superintendent for sixty-five years.

CM:

Wow, wow.

EC:

And I say that because right now, I am a superintendent of my Sunday school in New York. So that makes me feel good.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

And speaking of your grandfather David Crockett, I guess senior?

EC:

Senior.

CM:

Okay, he passed away, he was how old, was he a hundred years old when he passed away?

EC:

No, he was ninety-six.

CM:

Ninety-six?

EC:

And I think it was in 1991 when he passed.

CM:

Long and fruitful life, okay.

EC:

It was December of 1991, and my grandmother passed in April of 1991, same year.

CM:

Wow, wow. The church, now correct me if I'm wrong, I'm thinking that your church at some time had, I call them revivals, but they had a tent

EC:

We would have tent revivals. Now we'd always have the church building, but then we would set up a little tent and make it like adjacent to the church. We had tent revivals going.

CM:

And I haven't seen that in a long time.

EC:

Well, they still do those in New York mostly, but not as much as they did in the old days.

CM:

Did you have a lot of memories of the church back then?

EC:

Yes, I would say more than we have now.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yeah, I think people were more "church-ified" back then than they are now.

CM:

Well one of the things I've noticed—

EC:

And I don't think it's just with our church, I think it's with all of the churches, you don't find them really packed as much.

CM:

And one of the problems they have at my church is the fact that we don't have young people. And young people will kill your church.

EC:

Absolutely.

CM:

Because if you don't have them, you have nothing—

EC:

You're not going to have a future church, that's right

CM:

Yeah, you don't have a future, and that's one of the things that we're in a dilemma. And not only the churches, but all the clubs and stuff. Used to be Knights of Carpathians and so forth. There's no participation anymore by the young people.

EC:

The young people.

CM:

So you're dying out because—you look at my church, and at sixty years old, I'm a young guy.

EC:

You're considered that, you're right. Well we always say that the young people are the church of tomorrow. And like you said, we don't have a lot of young people.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Now, I have heard, I don't want to call it a rumor, but I've heard that young people don't prefer COGIC, because they feel that we are so strict.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And I mean we are, we have a dress code.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

And that's okay, but I think that we are strict when it comes to the word, and I think that we should be.

CM:

Right.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Well let's go back to your family though. I would think that your parents were—I knew your parents, but you couldn't just wear anything.

EC:

Oh no, not to church.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

Absolutely not.

CM:

Right.

EC:

No.

CM:

And probably not to school.

EC:

I remember my mother getting up with the iron, ironing my sister Dora and I, ironing our little dresses, and we had those little sashes where you put around you, put the nice little bow. They were starched; they were ironed. And then that's how she sent us to school, in nice little dresses. I really don't remember wearing pants, not that there was anything wrong with pants, but we wore dresses.

CM:

Well I could tell you my—I'm thinking 1969, the Lubbock Independent School District changed the code where you could wear coordinated pant suits.

EC:

Oh, okay.



CM:

Because my whole time I never saw girls in pant—well if it was cold, they'd wear them, then they'd go into the ladies room and change out of them into the dresses, because I went through the same thing. And it was 1969 or '70 before they let you—and they were coordinated pant suit, you couldn't just wear jeans with holes in them or anything. So that hasn't been around that long.

EC:

Right, well, and I remember when I went to Tech in 1961. Even the people out there, most of them were wearing dresses and that's when, believe it or not that's when they started wearing what they call "culottes".

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And it was like, we were so amazed to look at all the girls, because all the young ladies were wearing the culottes, because they could wear them. So pants, even for a lot of other people, not just COGIC, were really kind of like taboo, for a long time.

CM:

The neighborhood that you grew up in—your parents, they did a lot of parenting back then. It was a segregated environment, we know that.

EC:

Absolutely, yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

So, talk about your interactions with people of other races.

EC:

Well, actually my first interaction is when I was still in high school, but doing day work, okay.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

I would take the bus out to the other part of town, and work for mostly Caucasian people, well Caucasian people. And it was no being too compatible; I just went there to do the work. And after the work was done, I would go.

CM:

So you were house-keeping?

EC:

Oh, yes doing day work, yes, yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Being a maid, and doing the typical things, washing, ironing, making up the bed—all the things that you do to keep up a house, that's what I was doing as a youngster in high school. And then of course I didn't have any transportation, so I'd always ride the bus to and fore.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And I'll never forget, I had done a day's work, and I was standing on the corner waiting for the bus, and this little youngster, little boy, I'll never forget, he must have been like four or five years old on his little tricycle. He came up to me and he was just amazed to see me. His little eyes were bugged, it's like, "Who in the world are you? Where did you come from?" And I'll never forget, this little boy looked at me and he actually grabbed my hand, he says, "Oh your hand is so black!" I don't remember what I said to him, but I'm telling you I will never, never forget that. But he was innocent, what can you say?

CM:

Did you take home economics in school?

EC:

No, I didn't.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

No, I didn't.

CM:

Well something I found out, and I didn't know for a long time, is the building that's up here, the little house-looking building?

EC:

Kind of the one that's in between right there?

CM:

When I went to Ella Iles, that was used as the nurse's office.

EC:

Okay.

CM:

But that is actually, Ms. Barrett told me, that was actually the home economics building.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

And I said, "Well it looks like a house." And I believe she was telling me that Miss Bonner taught cooking, and Mrs. Barrett taught the house work.

EC:

Right, right.

CM:

Cleaning the bathrooms and all this. They actually taught that back then.

EC:

And I think it's still like that now.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

I think that is still the home economics building.

CM:

And what I'd like to see is, I think everybody should, especially guys, everybody needs that.

EC:

Everybody, that would be nice, yeah.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

Well, I don't know why I didn't take home economics. I think probably because I was in the band I think probably. But I know the boys took auto mechanics.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And the girls took home economics.

CM:

All right.

EC:

So, yeah.

CM:

So, what age were you when you went to work out there?

EC:

High school.

CM:

Okay, so high school.

EC:

I'd say maybe junior, senior high school.

CM:

Did you want to work, is that what it was, you wanted—

EC:

I don't remember being defiant.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

I guess I worked because we probably needed the money.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

That was just a thing to do.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

So you actually helped out the family?

EC:

Oh, absolutely.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yeah, I don't really remember how much I made, but I do remember giving my parents money.

CM:

Now, even with six kids with the occupations that your parents had, did you feel like you were needing for anything?

EC:

No.

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CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
No. I always say you don't miss what you never had. So I didn't feel that. And I think one thing too, my parents shared the finances with us. I remember sitting down and my dad with a piece of paper saying "Well, this is what we got, and this is what we can do."

CM:  
Really?

EC:  
So, oh yes, and I think that made a really big impact on me. Because when you know that the resources are limited, you're not going to ask for all these elaborate things. Because I already know my parents made whatever it is, and I can't go buy this thing because they don't have the money, they'd already shown me that.

CM:  
That's amazing, because you don't see parents doing that now.

EC:  
You most certainly don't, no.

CM:  
Actually so they sat down with you, they explained things to you.

EC:  
No, you don't, you don't.

CM:  
That is fantastic.

EC:  
Yeah. And then a lot of times too, the Caucasian people, the doctor that my mother worked for, they had children too. Actually they had one of the their daughters about my age.

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:

And they would give us their things that they didn't want anymore.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

So that really helped us out a lot.

CM:

What influence do you think your mother had on those kids?

EC:

They looked at her as being mother.

CM:

Okay, and I've seen that, because a lot of kids I saw in the neighborhood, Caucasian kids, but they parents—well my aunt, and my mother at first worked out there. But they would actually treat them just like they treated us. Maybe not as strict, but same rules. You can't do this, you can't do that.

EC:

Right, I think the doctor's children really respected my mother. Even though she was the maid—

CM:

Yes.

EC:

They really respected her, yes.

CM:

Oh, okay. That's something that I'm seeing that we're missing now, because one of the things I always say no meant no back then, because they'd just tell you no. But I really like the fact that you said that your parents sat down and explained to you—

EC:

They sure did.



CM:

—at a young age what's coming in. And that gives you a different perspective on life. So you tend to value money.

EC:

That's right, that's right.

CM:

More.

EC:

I do.

CM:

That is fantastic. When did you start thinking about you wanted to go to college?

EC:

Well I think I've always thought about that. I guess probably when I was in second grade, I was sitting there looking at my teacher, Mrs. Struggs, and I said then I wanted to be a teacher.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

So I guess maybe that was the first instance of it.

CM:

Did anybody say, "You can't be a teacher, because your race doesn't permit you to be teacher"?

EC:

Oh no, absolutely not.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

No because all of our teachers were black.



CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
And they encouraged us, oh absolutely.

CM:  
All right.

EC:  
They encouraged us to go on and further our education.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
And as a matter of fact, I have to say Texas Tech was integrated in 1961. And I had just graduated from high school, and being in the band—most of the band students went to Langston University in Oklahoma.

CM:  
Yes, right.

EC:  
And Mr. Roy Rodgers had gotten us all prepared, kids that year.

CM:  
Yes.

EC:  
And we were all set to go. So my family were visiting down in Waco, Texas I think that summer after I graduated. And when Texas Tech integrated, of course it was all over—the news was all over the state of Texas.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
I mean every time you'd turn on the—well, we had TVs too, but radio, you'd turn on the radio.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

“Texas Tech is integrated.” And when I got back from vacation, guess what? Mr. Roberts called all of us, and how did he say that, “You’re going to Tech!” Not “Do you want to go to Tech?” “You are going to Tech. You need to go to Tech. It’s integrated now, and you need to go.”

CM:

Wow.

EC:

And we didn’t fuss and fight about it, because we obeyed our teachers and our parents at that time.

CM:

Did you get a music scholarship?

EC:

Oh yes, I had a band scholarship.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Oh yeah, I had to turn that down. Can you imagine having to turn that band scholarship down? So we just changed plans, and just went to Tech.

CM:

So, perspective, you were in the first, second class to integrate out there?

EC:

First class.

CM:

First class to integrate.

EC:

First class—

CM:

First class to integrate.

EC:

—of 1961.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And I graduated four years later.

CM:

Who else from Dunbar went with you out there?

EC:

Well, I know Ann Burrell, and I think Ann Burrell, now she was in the band, I know she was in the class. And I believe, now he's not in my class, but James Price.

CM:

James Otis Price.

EC:

Connie Graves.

CM:

Connie Graves.

EC:

And they were like in another class, okay. And those the only ones I can think of—It was more than that, but I just can't think of more right now. Maybe Sandra Meniffee, I'm not sure, okay.

CM:

Well what's interesting is when you look at these names you're saying, when we talk about today, and people will say the problems they have with large families—James Otis Price, nine kids. Your family, six kids. Connie Graves, a slew of kids.

EC:

That's right, [unintelligible] got twins in his family, that's right.

CM:

Right, you know because there's a lot of kids.

EC:

Yeah, a lot of them, you're right.

CM:

There's a joke around church that he had three different families, him, Mr. and Mrs. Graves had. They had kids, and they stopped, and they had kids, and they stopped.

EC:

Oh yeah, right. Yes, had the big gaps.

CM:

And then I'm down here with what you call Voncile Graves, and Tommy Graves, because there's a big difference between—

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Because the older brothers, Joe and all them, had kids our age. So, but they still—instilled in that. And I believe Connie became a pharmacist?

EC:

I'm not sure.

CM:

Yeah, he became a pharmacist, and James Otis of course was a accomplished drummer. But he was a teacher, he's in real estate now.

EC:

Okay, okay.

CM:

And then you were a teacher.

EC:

Right, right.

CM:

So coming out of a small, black school, out of a segregated environment, you achieved a lot.

EC:

I think so.

CM:

Because you had a dream.

EC:

That's right.

CM:

And you achieved that dream, and people encouraged you.

EC:

Absolutely.

CM:

Because your parents never knocked it down.

EC:

Never knocked it down.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Never, never. And I remember—okay the big disappointment was that I wasn't going to be able to stay in the dormitory.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And we always looked forward to staying in the dormitory, that's a big part of college life.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

So I stayed at home, which was okay, but I still feel to this day that I missed that dormitory experience, okay.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

But even at that time, there were two young ladies, and I can't think of their names, who came from other parts of Texas—

CM:

Okay.

EC:

That same year, they stayed in the dormitories.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

So we would go to their rooms, okay.

CM:

Ah, okay.

EC:

And then socialize that way. That was a big part of that. But I really miss that. I had to ride the bus, well most of the time I had to ride the bus from here, out to the campus. A lot of times my dad would take me, on the way to picking up the garbage and stuff for his hogs. He would drop me off at school.

CM:

Did you feed hogs?

EC:

No, I didn't, but I was at the hog pen, yeah. I didn't actually feed them, I watched my parents do it.

CM:

Yeah, my mother did that when her father got sick, we were down there and my mother and her sister, they took turns feeding the hogs and doing that, because I was shocked that she could actually—

EC:

Oh yeah.

CM:

Yeah, yeah.

EC:

Lift those big barrels, yeah.

CM:

Yes, yeah.

EC:

And when my dad became a little bit incapacitated, my mom really took over.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

So I would go out there all the time, so I don't know, but I didn't actually do the physical work, but I watched my mom lift those big barrels, and then put them over the side.

CM:

How long were they married?

EC:

Sixty-five years.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

I believe it was, yeah.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
Sixty-five years ago.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
And my mom got married I think she said when she was fifteen, and I think he was eighteen.

CM:  
And your mother has an interesting story in that she was raised and raised a family on the same street, her entire life.

EC:  
On Date, yes.

CM:  
Date Avenue.

EC:  
Yes.

CM:  
And I was shocked when she told me that. That's an amazing story, because you think people living in the same city, or the same neighborhood. But to be on the same street, that amazed me.

EC:  
That is amazing, isn't it?

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
Yes.

CM:  
Yeah.

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EC:

Yes.

CM:

Let's talk about your first day at Texas Tech. So, you explained to me that when they integrated Mr. Roberts was the one that said, "You need to go to Texas Tech."

EC:

That influenced us, he said that's where we needed to go.

CM:

Did you ever at any time feel that—of course, it had to intimidate you the size of the school, and then going into a new environment. But did you feel at any time, that you were not as good as anybody?

EC:

Well no, I didn't—I never felt in my heart that "Oh, I'm lesser of a person."

CM:

Okay.

EC:

But I was intimidated—

CM:

Okay.

EC:

—by all of the newness, all the Caucasian people—

CM:

Yes.

EC:

—how they treated us. I mean they weren't real, real friendly.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

I mean you might have found maybe one of two, but the majority of them was like, they're not friendly. And I remember going to the Student Union.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

You know, where you eat and do all that.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

I would say it would be five or six of us black students, we had our little table. And I don't know if we deliberately chose to be in the back of that, but I remember being in the back in the corner. I think we felt comfortable. But we would always just come in at different times when we got done with our classes, and we'd just go to that table. We all would eat together. And we never ate with anybody else. And I remember, and I don't really like to—I'm not picking on anybody—

CM:

Right.

EC:

But the truth is the truth. The guys from the agriculture department really seemed like they just did not want us there.

CM:

Wow, okay.

EC:

And I remember November, the November when President Kennedy passed in November.

CM:

Yeah, '63.

EC:

Right around in '63. I was a junior at that time.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
And those guys—and we were in the Student Union at the time that it happened. They jumped up and hollered and screamed as if they were at a football game.

CM:  
They cheered?

EC:  
Oh they cheered. I don't know if I want to use this word, but they said the—

CM:  
N-word.

EC:  
“The N-lover is dead.” And that was like—I couldn't believe it. That made us feel so bad. I couldn't believe that.

CM:  
So you stayed four years out there and graduated?

EC:  
I graduated in four years.

CM:  
So you accomplished that goal?

EC:  
I did.

CM:  
So it did not defeat you, no matter what they did.

EC:  
No, no.

CM:  
Or what they said.

EC:

No.

CM:

You were there for a particular purpose.

EC:

And you talking about being defeated—Now, if I was very, very timid—I remember my first psychology class. I went to that class, it was a male instructor, and he was an older man. I wouldn't think of his name now, and I always liked to sit on the front, I never liked sitting in the back.

CM:

Right.

EC:

Even in church I sit on the front seat.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

I guess you hear better or something. And that man was saying something, and he used the n-word.

CM:

Oh wow.

EC:

And I'm sitting right there looking at him. You know what I did? I got up, I left that class, I went to wherever it is the department, and dropped that subject.

CM:

Oh, wow.

EC:

Oh yes, I said now if he's going to call me that on the first day of school, and I have to do this whole semester with him, he's probably not going to be fair. So I just got rid of that.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
I did, yeah.

CM:  
Talk about the band, what'd you encounter in the band.

EC:  
Well I didn't stay in the band the whole four years.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
I think I spent only two years in the band.

CM:  
Okay, all right.

EC:  
Okay, and of course I loved marching and playing the clarinet, so quite naturally I would join the band. And I don't remember having any problems joining the band, got in okay. I think it was the second year that I was in the band—okay, going back to that now, when we were at practice, it seemed as though—I think it was Dean Killian, I think he was the band instructor.

CM:  
Dean Killian, yes.

EC:  
Now I felt like he was picking because—now, you know Mr. Roberts in the marching band.

CM:  
Yes.

EC:  
You know he did a good job.

CM:  
Right.

EC:  
Okay, and it seemed like he was always saying "Get in line, you're out of line, you're out of line" in marching band.

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
So that kind of like intimidated me a little bit. Then, the band took a trip to Austin.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
For the inauguration of somebody, the Mayor, somebody, whoever.

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
To me that was very disappointing, and I think maybe that's why I did not stay in the band. Our band director told—and it was four of us, me and Ann Burrell, Connie Graves, and James Price.

CM:  
Yes.

EC:  
Okay, the two boys stayed together, and me and Ann stayed together. But, we could not stay in the same hotel with everybody else. Do you believe that?

CM:  
Oh, I didn't know that. And see, Mr. Price has told me that there was some controversy about you even going down there.

EC:  
Oh yes, yeah.

CM:

Because Dean Killian had to get that, because the people at Texas down at Austin did not even want you there. And he said, "Well, they're in the band, so they get to come." Wow, so you—

EC:

I think that was probably my biggest disappointment in my whole four years of Tech, yeah. We had to stay at a different place.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Can you imagine that? Even though the band director allowed us to go, and made it possible for us to go.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

We had to stay in a different place.

CM:

I'll tell you a story that Mr. Braxton told me about Mr. Roberts. Back when he first came, I guess in the fifties, the band actually rode what we called yellow dogs, the old school buses to the games. Mr. Roberts actually went down to the central office, and said, "Look, we cannot ride these buses to the games, because we have to travel to Amarillo, we have to use the bathrooms, we need to get something to eat." He said, "We can't stop. We cannot stop anywhere." And he got that changed.

EC:

He did, okay.

CM:

Because also the band uniforms, because they didn't have uniforms then. Mr. Roberts was instrumental in getting that changed.

EC:

And I'm so glad, because I remember going someplace with the band, and you're right, we couldn't stop. And this is almost shameful to say—



CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
You know what we had to do? Stop the bus, and the boys like I say to the front of the bus, the girls to the back, and just use the bathroom out there, on the other side of the bus.

CM:  
And see there, that's something that I hadn't heard, but I could only—and see, I guess what it is, you become complacent with some things, because you didn't know.

EC:  
Right.

CM:  
Our parents did a good job of shielding us, I think, because they knew.

EC:  
I think it was just the fact that we kids knew what we could do.

CM:  
Yes.

EC:  
We didn't expect to go and stop at a big restaurant, and go in and use the bathrooms and eat.

CM:  
Right, yeah.

EC:  
That wasn't even part of us, so to stop the bus and use the bathroom right on the ground was like, "Well that's what we have to do." And I don't know if I should say this or not—

CM:  
Yeah, no.

EC:  
Okay, but I remember one young lady—and I don't remember exactly who it was, but I'm not going to call her name, but we got out and we were urinating, and she said—and it was a whole lot of us and you had to do it all at the same time, so what's on the ground, all the—



CM:

Yes.

EC:

And she says “We”, and she used the p-word, “peed a river!” And we just thought that that was so funny. And it was funny to us, and it was a lot, because everybody did it right there at the same time on the ground.

CM:

And see people today, if you would tell a story about doing that now, man there would be all kind of court cases.

EC:

I know, I know.

CM:

There would be all kind of—parents would be up there in a minute. But that’s a sign of the times, which thankfully has changed.

EC:

Hopefully, yeah

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

But see those things happened, and I can remember when I was working in the Caucasian neighborhood as a high school kid, we still could not go into the restaurants, you know that. So I would ride the bus, and we would have to change, you know get a transfer.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Okay, so I remember being downtown and I think it was Woolworth’s. Okay, so the bus would wait for a while before the next bus would come. So I remember getting off the bus, going into Woolworth’s, ordering a hamburger—

CM:

At the counter, yeah.

EC:

At the counter, but still they had said we could sit down, but I still wasn't comfortable about sitting down. So I remember standing up, waiting for them to get my hamburger done, so they got it done, took a little brown bag, hopped back on the bus okay. Bus is ready to go, so I'm going to eat my hamburger on the bus.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

I open up the bag, and guess what? It was a hamburger in there, but they had not wrapped it in any paper, or any foil, or anything.

CM:

Just threw it in.

EC:

Threw it, and all the stuff was just falling out in the bag.

CM:

People tend today, young people tend to—that's not that long ago.

EC:

No, not that long ago.

CM:

No, no, it's not.

EC:

Not really, no.

CM:

And you look and well you say "Well that was way—" no it's not way back then.

EC:

No, no, not really, yeah.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

I mean it's little things like that, that really left an impact on me. But I don't remember being just like really—I think if that happened today to some of the young people, it would be a riot.

CM:

Yes, yeah, yes.

EC:

But I don't remember, it was just like oh my goodness. And I ate the hamburger anyway.

CM:

Well, now you're traveling on the bus, you're going out into white town. Were you worried about that?

EC:

I don't remember being, no.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

I think, again because with the bus thing, you knew where you were supposed to sit, didn't make any waves, you just went there, got on that seat, and sat there, stayed there, until you got to wherever you were going.

CM:

So we accepted that.

EC:

I think that's what got us through.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

Was just accepting things the way they were. And I think that's why we made it. I think that's the difference now. And we shouldn't expect our young people to act the way we did back then.

CM:

Right.

EC:

Our young people, they won't accept things now, they will not.

CM:

Right, that's true.

EC:

They'll put up a fuss and fight.

CM:

Back in the neighborhood, we talked about the park, Booker T. Washington Park that was there, do you remember any activities on the park over there?

EC:

Well, just on holidays, like Fourth of July and Juneteenth, whatever, we would have picnics, and big gatherings with all of us.

CM:

They were celebrating Juneteenth back then?

EC:

Yes, yes, yes.

CM:

Okay, see that's amazing because when I came up, they had stopped celebrating Juneteenth, and then started again celebrating it.

EC:

Okay, all right, yeah.

CM:

Because, one of the things that I thought I missed out on was that we didn't talk a lot about black history. Of course we heard about George Washington Carver.

EC:

Right, right.

CM:

Booker T. Washington, Phyllis Wheatley, Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

EC:  
Right.

CM:  
But we really didn't talk about anything else. Because the books and everything we had, and I've talked to Mr. Henry about this, he told me about when he first got over to the school, Dunbar, teaching science, he said the science lab they had one flask—

EC:  
Oh yeah.

CM:  
Couple of things to do the experiments with, and that was it. But they made do, and they did that because you got exposed to geology, you got exposed to chemistry, you got exposed to all of it. They still taught you with whatever they had.

EC:  
That's right, they did. In some kind of ways it's amazing, isn't it?

CM:  
Yes.

EC:  
And I always tell people we never had brand new books.

CM:  
Right.

EC:  
And again, we didn't fuss and fight about it.

CM:  
Right.

EC:  
Okay, we got the books handed down from Monterrey, and Lubbock High, and all those other schools.

CM:  
Yes.

EC:

And we kids, first thing we'd do was open a book, you'd look at the inside, that first hard cover, and always somebody else's name.

CM:

I remember that.

EC:

And I remember crossing out the name, and writing my name there.

CM:

Yes, yes.

EC:

But it was something we just accepted because we had to. We had no other choice, hand-me-downs.

CM:

But out of the neighborhood, and out of that environment, there's so many people, like you, that have come out and achieved a bunch. I mean your parents, even though they didn't have the education that you probably have, but they knew they had God behind them.

EC:

That's right.

CM:

And then, they knew from their parents, and their parent's parents, they knew how to raise kids.

EC:

And they wanted us to have an education.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Just like we want our kids now to achieve better than what we have done. That's what my parents did; they wanted us to have an education.

CM:

Now you have a daughter, right?

EC:

Yes, a daughter and a son.

CM:

Oh, I didn't know you had a son.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yeah, our daughter's thirty-three, and our son is thirty-seven.

CM:

Wow I didn't know. Well see I'd saw your daughter when she was young, before she went to college I think. It had to be back '91, or somewhere back in there, it may have been—

EC:

Oh, probably so, in '91 she would have been eleven years old, I think.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Yes.

CM:

I didn't know you had a son.

EC:

They're both registered nurses now.



CM:

Wow.

EC:

And she's a traveling nurse.

CM:

Yes, all right.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

Yes, all right. So, you're from good stock, yeah.

EC:

I guess so.

CM:

You inherited a lot of stuff—

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

Is there anything else that you could think of, that you want to bring up or talk about?

EC:

Well, yeah I want to say something about, and I know she was a doctor, Dr. Hazel Taylor.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Okay. When I was in Tech, and being that I wanted to be a teacher, we had to do our student teaching.

CM:

And let me add one thing, I believe she's the first person—black person to go to Tech and get a PhD—get a doctor of education.



EC:

That's right, I think so, I think so.

CM:

Go ahead, go ahead.

EC:

Well, when I had to do my student teaching, they placed me—she was at Phyllis Wheatley, I think, yes.

CM:

Yeah, she was a third grade teacher at Phyllis Wheatley.

EC:

Absolutely.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Third grade teacher. So she was my supervising teacher. And she was the one who influenced me to go into special education.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

Okay, because I remember going there every day, and we would have the reading groups. Usually they had three reading groups. And she wanted me to get the experience, so I would take—it was the top, the middle, and the low group. And she'd say, "Okay, do the top group today," and this group, and this group. I felt very comfortable doing that low group. And that low group was very low.

CM:

Right.

EC:

So I remember asking, "Can I just do the low group?" And she said, "Yes." And then after she saw that I was doing a very good job with that low group, and she said, "Well, why don't you just go into special ed.?" And I said "Well, okay, maybe I will." So I went on and I graduated

and got my degree. Got my first job in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and she was responsible for that, because—now if I'm not mistaken, I think there were some people named the Neals, I think.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Okay they lived in Albuquerque.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And Mrs. Taylor knew them, and she called them up and told them that I was coming, I needed a place to stay in the beginning. So I stayed with them, I don't know maybe two or three weeks, okay until I got my own little apartment, okay. So I went to Albuquerque, and I think I taught a regular sixth grade class.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

For a couple of years.

CM:

Right.

EC:

Then I met my husband, because he was in service there.

CM:

I was about to ask you how did you meet, okay, go ahead, okay, all right, go ahead.

EC:

I met him, he was in the Air Force there in Albuquerque, and we went to the same church, so I was at church, he was at church, and we met that way.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And been together ever since.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Forty-seven years.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

Of marriage, okay.

CM:

That's all right.

EC:

So then after that we left there and went to Michigan.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Was it Michigan or was it—it was Michigan—Rhode Island, it was Rhode Island.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

And then I taught for the Association for—they called it Retarded Citizens, but I don't say that anymore, handicapped people.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

Okay, and they were young adults, so I got two years of experience there in special ed. Then we went to Michigan. And then I started teaching special ed. then in Lansing, Michigan.

CM:

Well it's commendable, because one of the things I'm looking at—a challenge, you don't back away from a challenge. You went to Tech, and then you take special ed. people, which is a difficult job I would think.

EC:

Very difficult, yes.

CM:

A lot of people can say, "Well I teach the straight-A students." Well that's not as hard as teaching people that are in need. And I can see that's commendable.

EC:

And the thing is I love those kids. Even after retiring.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

When I came back to Lubbock here, I substituted, okay right here in Lubbock.

CM:

I didn't know that.

EC:

Yes, I did.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

For like three or four months I substituted, yes, yeah.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

But I love those kids, and the thing is—and I'm really, seriously not bragging, but the school—my supervisor told me that she would tell parents and other teachers and principals "If you want your child to learn how to read, send them to Mrs. Courtney's room."

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
Okay.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
And most of the experience was with fourth and fifth graders. Majority of my students were boys, a lot of them were black boys.

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
And they would come, believe it or not, as a fifth grader and could not read, nothing. And so I remember telling them when they would come their first day of school, I would look them in the eye and I'd say, "Do you want to learn how to read?" And of course "Yes, Mrs. Courtney I want to learn how to read." "Okay, all right, then I'm going to teach you, but there are certain things you have to do."

CM:  
Yeah.

EC:  
"First of all, I'm going to start you with these little books you call baby books, okay."

CM:  
Okay.

EC:  
And that's how we did, because I think the mistake that a lot of teachers make is that if you don't know how to read they start you with something like this, you know words you can't even read. But you got to start from the bottom. So that's what I told them, we're going to start with the picture books, the baby books and whatever, and I would just progress from the easiest one, all the way up.

CM:

Oh, okay.

EC:

And I tell you, by the time the end of that school year, those boys knew how to read. Maybe not on fifth grade level, but they could read. And just to see them, the little light up in their face, it just made me so happy, just to see that they were happy too. So I was really, really happy.

CM:

So you translated what you've learned, a young lady coming from Lubbock, Texas, you've been enrolled—and I think you're in New York now, right?

EC:

Yes, in New York, yes.

CM:

Okay, so you've been to Michigan, you've been to New Mexico, you've been to Rhode Island. So your teachers over here, Mrs. Struggs and all those that came along impacted you.

EC:

Absolutely.

CM:

And so you learned from those teachers, and you're taking that and you're an asset to society.

EC:

And I think because we knew that our teachers liked us at Dunbar and whatever.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

And I think that that's probably why I felt like I had to really have that good rapport with my students. I had to really be concerned about them.

CM:

Okay.

EC:

About their learning.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Because I mean if you know anything about special ed. kids, they're almost like minorities. And I guess they are minorities in a sense. They're mistreated—I remember in one school building you have the halls, and my room is here, and then in order to go to the lunchroom, all the other kids had to pass my room. Do you know, that when those kids, along with their teachers—because the teachers would walk the kids to the lunchroom.

CM:

Yeah.

EC:

When they passed my room, you know what they would do? They would walk to the other side of the hall.

CM:

Wow.

EC:

As if we had a odor or something, or as if we were dangerous or something. They would actually cross on the other side of the hall when they got to my room. Our kids were really mistreated.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

And it didn't have anything to do with race, because it was an integrated class. It wasn't like a racial thing, so.

CM:

Well one of the things I see in you, from what I miss from the old neighborhood from when I came up, is the teachers cared about the students.

EC:

Absolutely.



CM:

I heard numerous stories, I've talked to a Mr. Guyton, and he graduated I guess back in '47 or '48, and he was saying he had dropped out of school a couple years. And it was Mrs. Lusk—

EC:

Okay.

CM:

—that said, “You need to come back to school. You need to get this education.” And he went on to Huston-Tillotson and graduated from there.

EC:

Okay.

CM:

But it was Mrs. Lusk. And a lot of—they promoted this, and Mr. Struggs did a lot of hiring of the teachers back then.

EC:

Oh yes, yes.

CM:

They didn't go through the employment office, Mr. Struggs hired the teachers.

EC:

He hired the teachers, yes.

CM:

So he did the actual hiring, but you have the same thing, the same characteristics, and same quality that the teachers I grew up with, they cared about you. They cared enough about you to tell your parents.

EC:

That's right, that's right, or to tell you when you were wrong.

CM:

Yes.

EC:

I can't remember exactly what it was, but I was talking to my neighbor Mrs. Simmons, Mae



Simmons, and we were just having a casual conversation, and whatever I didn't use the correct word, or whatever and she corrected me.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
And of course, I was happy.

CM:  
Wow.

EC:  
I didn't get angry, didn't get upset with her.

CM:  
So you wasn't off duty, you're still in school, even because you live next to—

EC:  
She's my neighbor, oh yeah.

CM:  
So you still in school.

EC:  
Oh that's right.

CM:  
So you can't get away with saying ain't.

EC:  
Right, I'd never said ain't. That's right, that's right.

CM:  
Well, Mrs. Courtney, I really appreciate it, we've covered a lot of things today, and I want to thank you for what you've done.

EC:  
I'm delighted.

CM:

And what you've accomplished.

EC:

Yes, yes.

CM:

Because it's a testament to the old neighborhood, and to Dunbar. And I want to thank you again.

EC:

Oh, I'm just delighted that you asked me, really, seriously.

CM:

All right.

EC:

Yes, I am, okay.

CM:

Well thanks a lot then.

EC:

Oh, you're welcome.

*End of interview*

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