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## Interview no. 751

Frances Hills

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Frances Hills (1925 - )

INTERVIEWER: Charlotte Ivy

PROJECT: Black Community of El Paso

DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 12, 1985

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 751

TRANSCRIPT NO.: 751

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Member of a pioneer black family of El Paso

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Childhood in El Paso; attendance at Douglass School; the black experience in El Paso including typical occupations, recreation, shopping, and medical care; her college years in Alabama; career in Civil Service; relationships with Hispanics; segregation; Jim Crow cars; some discussion of anti-discrimination ordinances in the 1960s.

Length of Interview: 1 hour 40 min. Length of Transcript 38 pages

Frances Hills  
October 12, 1985  
By Charlotte Ivy  
Black Community of El Paso

I: Mrs. Hills' grandfather came to Texas looking for his mother after the Civil War. He found her in Wharton, Texas. He was a veteran of the Indian Wars and I believe he was an Indian scout in this area. He settled here and became a brickmaker. Frances Hills' mother was named Blanche Ethel Henderson. Her father is Sherman Grundy who is still living. He is a farmer near Las Cruces, New Mexico. Her mother divorced her father and remarried a man by the name of Harold Kelley in the '40s. Her mother was a teacher and taught at Douglass School and in Fabens and also Cold Springs. Sherman Grundy was a farmer. I'm not sure if he still is or not, but he actually owned his farm at the time. Her grandfather owned the family home at 1101 Park Street. They moved there in 1902. Her mother graduated from Douglass School in 1916; Frances Hills was also a graduate of Douglass School. Her mother came here in 1896.

[PAUSE]

I: This is the interview with Frances Hills. We're in her home with her granddaughters. You want to say "Hi"? The machine's going. Want to say "Hi"? Patrice, and let's see, what is your sister's name?

H: Michelle.

I: Michelle. Yes. All right. Mrs. Hills, when did your family first come to El Paso?

H: As far back as--I would imagine that my grandfather first came here in the 1880s. We have definite records of my mother being born here in the 1890s and my grandmother moving here in the 1890s.

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I: Where was your mother born?

H: She was born in El Paso.

I: And was she born at home, or was there a hospital here at the time where she was born?

H: She, I believe she was born at home, but there was a hospital where my grandmother went when she had a problem, and I think it was Providence Hospital.

I: Well, your mother's father came here in the 1880s.

H: Or possibly before because he was in the Army from '73 to '78, David was, and he was an Indian scout in the Indian Wars so he probably came here very soon thereafter or at least he was in the southwest. As far as coming to El Paso specifically I just don't know.

I: And he met your grandmother when he was searching for his mother.

H: That's right, when he went to Wharton, Texas searching for his mother he met my grandmother and he brought her back out here to the El Paso area.

I: Where did they first live?

H: They lived on Santa Fe Street initially. I don't have any records of the specific address, but I remember them talking about his living there. There was some kind of uprising during the time because I remember him talking about laying on top of the house with guns to try to protect his family.

I: Gee, I bet that was Pancho Villa.

H: Well, possibly, no. That was later because in the old house on 1101 Park there were holes where Pancho Villas' shots from over in Mexico had landed over here, I should say created holes in the house and that was during my mother's lifetime that that happened because she was aware of that. She talked to me about it.

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I: When did they move to the house on Park Street?

H: I would imagine that they moved there in the early, early 1900s. I have been unable to find anything back any further than 1909 but that was just a tax receipt so as a result I would assume that it was either the late 1880s or early 1900s.

I: And your mama, was she born at this house? Were they living at the house on Park Street when she was born?

H: I don't know. I think, I know she was born in El Paso and that's about it. She probably was born here.

I: About what year?

H: She was born about 1897, 1898.

I: And it was behind this house on Park Street that they had rental property?

H: Yes.

I: And these were called row houses or...?

H: Yes. Row houses.

I: Would you describe for me what the row houses were like?

H: The row houses, as I remember, there were five of them, and there were two rooms in each one of the apartments or houses and I guess you would say a community bath.

[Interruption]

I: So he was a property owner and these row houses were like...they were five attached units?

H: Yes, um hm.

I: And they were mainly occupied by Mexicans?

H: Well, I wouldn't say that. I would say that, I recall there being tenants that were of Mexican descent and I also recall black tenants.

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I: Did they come and go or was it sort of like a permanent home for the people back there?

H: Well, they, just like we rent places now for just a...we might move...I mean some of them stayed a long time. There were others that were itinerant.

I: And about how much did you think the rent was?

H: About two dollars a month.

I: Two dollars a month. What are your earliest memories of life here in El Paso that you remember as a little girl?

H: I remember playing down on Park Street and with my friends, which were mostly Hispanic, and I remember going to church, to Second Baptist Church. Those are some of my earliest memories.

I: Did the Second Baptist Church have a Sunday School?

H: Yes. And when I went to Sunday School, of course, I was with the others.

[Interruption]

I: So your playmates were primarily Hispanic. Did you have black playmates, too, in the area?

H: Normally, when I went to...when my mother would take me to visit or I would go with her to visit some of her friends where I might have the opportunity to play with other playmates or at church.

I: So it really wasn't a black neighborhood, at least for you. Was there a black neighborhood do you think here in El Paso at all?

H: I think that blacks were concentrated in Second Ward and the east or eastern El Paso, the central, I guess you would say east central El Paso; but there were also blacks in other areas. There were, of course, some areas where blacks were not welcome. The only reason, for instance, some of the blacks would be in Kern Place is that if they lived in servants'

quarters out there in that area. Probably both from a financial standpoint and economics, not being able to purchase in that area and also from the standpoint of their being not welcomed.

I: Sure. But it wasn't quite as restrictive as in some of the southern communities?

H: Oh no. However, there were very definite limitations and they grew worse as I grew older, it seemed. For instance, when I was very young, there was a theater where you could go. You had to sit up on the third floor in what we called "the buzzard roost" [laughs] but you could go to the theater and see movies, a movie house. You could go to the Texas Grand Theater when my mother was younger too; of course, you were restricted to a certain area but you could go there. As I grew older, most of my movie house experiences were such that I went to the Alcazar or Colon with my Hispanic friends and any other movie experiences were nonexistent.

I: What was the name of the movie theater, other than the Texas, that you remember was open to blacks?

H: Crawford. The Crawford Theater.

I: Where was that located?

H: It was on Mesa--right across at that time the railroad tracks [laughs]--which were in the area where Main Street is now. There was a tall building, say about three stories, and of course on the third story a little area [there] that was a small seating area, that's where we were allowed. I think soldiers in the 1940s kind of ruined it so they closed it.

I: When were you born?

H: I was born in 1925. Most of my records say '26, I don't know why.

I: But you were a little girl then and in the late 1920s and early 30s you

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started to school.

H: Um hm.

I: And where did you attend school?

H: Douglass School.

I: Was that located where Douglass School is now?

H: It was located where Douglass School is now, but it was a different building.

I: What was school like for you? What was taught there and did you take a streetcar to get there? What was it like?

H: Oh, I went to school with my mother. She taught at Douglass School, and we had an old 1929 Ford, and we drove to school and I enjoyed school very much. I recall being very unhappy when I couldn't go to school or if there was anything that kept me from going to school. I had all kinds of perfect attendance records because I enjoyed it so much. It was fun to be around others, being an only child; it offered a social outlet of a type and at the same time it was very great to learn.

I: Was it just a black school?

H: Yes, it was all black.

I: No Hispanics?

H: The only Hispanics that were there were the Hispanics that were mixed with black. In other words, one of the families that I recall quite well was the Sessions family; and he was a black and she was, of course, Hispanic and that family attended Douglass School.

I: What were the courses like that you took as you grew older? What kind of variety did you have? What did they offer?

H: I think for instance in the high school I took a lot of math courses, I took science courses, I took English. It was a normal type of



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curriculum. The only thing is that it was paced more or less to what I call the traditional courses or the basic type courses. You didn't have the typing, you didn't have any of the vocational type courses except manual training, which the boys had, or woodwork and like that. And we took homemaking, but other than that it was strictly mathematics, English, literature, things that you could get from a book, the very basic kinds of things and no applications. It was very limited as far as facilities for teaching chemistry and physics and this kind of thing. The laboratory facilities were extremely limited.

I: Where did the teachers come from?

H: Well, I was trying to think of some of the schools that some of my teachers came from. 'Course we had teachers from Howard University. We had teachers that attended Prairie View University, and of course there were teachers from other black colleges throughout the country.

I: Did you have any from Tuskegee?

H: Yes! In fact, I remember Mr. Oliver. He was from Cuba and he attended Tuskegee and he came here to teach in the high school and he was the one that encouraged the team during my days in high school, the basketball team, to go back to Tuskegee and play in the competition. Most of the black schools played in [it] because, of course, we did not compete against the white high schools in his community.

I: What did you do in your sports programs to compete? Who did you play with?

H: Mostly black schools from other communities to the extent that we could get the money to go and compete, and of course we had to raise the money to try to find competitors.

I: Did you have a schoolbus?

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H: No. No money for the school bus.

I: So when the team travelled, they had to travel in private cars?

H: Yes. And usually they had to raise the money from the... 'course the total community contributed usually, but they had to raise the money in order to be able to go.

I: Did they have uniforms?

H: One time I recall that they were able to raise some money and get some uniforms. I don't recall what happened after that. They might be able to get some castoff uniforms from El Paso High or Austin High, sometimes.

I: Did you all have a band?

H: Yes, we had a band. That was the first time that we had a band, in the 1940s, and we performed in the Sun Carnival. I remember playing the saxophone. It was a small but good group. Mr. Jerome Collins was our band director and subsequent to that there were others that were able to participate as a band director and so forth.

I: What happened to most of the graduates?

H: Most of the graduates left this community. There are a few--for instance in my class there are three people that graduated with me and my class was one of the larger ones; there were sixteen in the class.

I: (Laughs)

H: And there were three that graduated with me and among those one of them left but came back. I think Mrs. Barrow, Birdie Barrow, has been here and I don't think she left but for a short period. As far as I am concerned, I left for college and then, of course, I went to Talladega College in Alabama. Then of course I left with my husband when I married and went out to Fort Ord for a few months, came back here and then it was subsequently we went to Fort Meade for a few months. But as far as being

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away for a prolonged period of time, I wasn't. I've been here most of the time.

I: When did you graduate from high school?

H: 1941.

I: And then when did you come back here permanently that you didn't leave any more?

H: 1954, '53, '54.

I: Do you recall where you shopped and ate and did for for entertainment? What would you do when you wanted to go out and do something outside the home?

H: I recall that we ate mostly in Juarez when we called ourselves going out to eat. We also had a few black restaurants around, one or two on Second Street, but we didn't go there. The only way that we would eat out would be to go down there and one of the male members of the household would go down there and purchase the food and bring it back. As far as recreation is concerned, for the most part it was limited to home activities. And it was not very often that we found ourselves participating in recreational activities away from home.

I: I imagine the church was outside the home...

H: Yes, the church.

I: The other area where you had socials.

H: Yes, yes, yes, the church was definitely a very vital part of our lives.

I: Where did you go to eat in Juarez? Do you recall the restaurants?

H: I remember going to the Club Florida and a place called \_\_\_\_\_ Rojo. I remember one time that we went to the Rex Cafe but that was an area where very few...I mean I found myself going very rarely.

I: Did you find the atmosphere in Juarez very accepting?

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H: Oh, yes. At the places that I went.

[PAUSE]

I: All right, we're going to continue with this and I wanted to find out, did you all have a radio?

H: Yes, in fact, it's a Majestic radio and my son has it still.

I: How wonderful. Do you remember when you got it?

H: As far back as I can remember, it seems like we had one.

I: I remember when we got the television.

H: I remember that. I remember that. And what happened was that I came back from Fort Meade and my mother had a television. I had had one, of course, at Fort Meade but when she got it, when the stations started here, she was ready to receive as soon as the station got going.

I: I imagine. She wasn't going to let anybody get ahead of her, was she?

H: Yeah.

I: Well, do you think most of your friends had radios in the black community?

H: Well, I don't know. I know some of them did.

I: Do you think the Mexican people that were your friends, did they have a radio?

H: Some of them didn't. The one next door did, but I don't think...

I: Do you remember more that they did not, and it was more of the black people that did?

H: Yeah, well, you must remember that my connections in the black community were with people that we went to see. So they were friends of my mother's.

I: And they would have tended to be more educated?

H: At the church, through the church. Of course a lot of the people in the

church that probably didn't get a chance to go to their homes, some of the, some of the people in the church, the ones that my mother knew quite well and everything, most of them did have it or I didn't realize they didn't.

I: Do you know what the friends of your mother, what they did?

H: Well, a lot of them were maids and butlers, that kind of thing. Some of them were teachers, some of them were, of course, mailmen that worked for the Post Office.

I: Did you have any people like photographers here?

H: I don't recall anybody like that. I don't recall a photographer. I don't recall a stenographer and I don't recall any of those kinds of people. I recall blue collar workers as we call them today, in construction, that kind of thing. I recall chauffeurs.

I: 'Course we had teachers. Were there any trained nurses, do you remember? Or nurses that you all used maybe like as midwives or would come in your home and take care of your sick people?

H: I recall people in the church that were very knowledgeable in taking care of sick people. I recall that when my grandfather was sick in the 1930s that his Masonic brothers would come and stay up all night with him, and there were certain ones of them that had learned a quite a bit about taking care of sick people and the others would pay that one to take care of the sick member. And I remember Mr. Traylor. He could do almost anything that the physicians could do, but of course under the direction of a physician.

I: His name was Traylor?

H: [Yes.]

I: Did he do anything, you know, [like a] curandero, I think is what it's

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called, sort of like a, not a witch doctor really, but...

H: Oh no.

I: But the Mexicans use these healers.

H: No, he wasn't anything like that. He was retired from the shops, the railroad shops, and he just enjoyed going around and helping people that needed help.

I: Were any of your mother's friends railroad people?

H: Yes, many of them were railroad people. Many of them were people that worked in the shops and there, up on what used to be Piedras and I guess where the yards are now, Piedras, right off Piedras going west.

I: Sort of off the access road there?

H: Yes.

I: Do you remember any mining or civil engineers or surveyors? Now there was Flipper, he was here.

H: Yes, except for Flipper, I remember my grandfather talking about them changing the route of the river, of the Rio Grande River, and he had a friend and I guess it must have been Flipper, a black friend, that they used to go down in Mexico to do work in that connection, and he would go with him. I assume that he was some sort of assistant to a worker of some kind.

I: I want to get back in order here now. You've talked about your friends having left here and that there were three of you, or three more than you I guess, that had stayed from your graduating class. Why do you think you stayed here and so many others have left?

H: Well, I went to college and I came back here and I taught at Douglass School a couple of years and when I left when I went to teach as a critic teacher down at Talladega College, I decided to go to the University of

New Mexico and do some graduate work and to actually get some information in the field of business, having majored in mathematics. And I came home that summer and worked with USO. I met Jethro Hills and I got married and we went out to California for a few months. And then he was going to Alaska, and of course the Army says, "No wives, no pets, no so forth," so I came back here, and since my son was on his way by that time--he was born here--and of course I stayed with Mama because I wanted a support system that only Mama could offer and with my husband in Alaska.

So I think that then, while I was here, the Federal Service opened to blacks and I went out to Fort Bliss and made the arrangements to take a civil service examination. 'Course I couldn't take one. I had a degree in mathematics but I couldn't take one in that, so I ended up taking one for typing and applied for a clerk typist. There was a lady at Fort Bliss in the Civilian Personnel Office by the name of Mrs. Fleming and she looked at my application blank and she looked at the fact that I had a degree in mathematics and she called me and she said, "Frances, would you like to work in mathematics?" And I said, "Yesss!" And she sent me for an interview with a Colonel Sale at Fort Bliss to be a Ballistic Computer, as they called them then, which was using a calculator and doing certain trigonometric type problems and that kind of thing. It was at what was called the Army Field Forces Board Number 4. So I went over there, and he at first didn't choose me. I got home and I got a telephone call from him saying that he had chosen me to come to work the day after Labor Day of 1951. So I did. The problem was that...the woman in civilian personnel, Mrs. Fleming, was very surprised that he didn't choose me immediately. I found out later that what he did was consult with some of the employees about a black girl being on the

staff, and I am grateful to Peggy Brand because she was the supervisor and she said, "As long as she can do the work, it's okay with me." so I was hired.

Having joined the work force in that manner, I was able to come back here after we went to Fort Meade and get a job again in that area eventually. I did have to go in as a clerk typist for a few months, but then I was able to get back and then I just went up, up up. So as a result I have found my career very rewarding and that's the reason why I didn't leave. Actually to boil it all down, it was because I had a good job. [Laughs]

I: Sure. Well, you were comfortable raising your kids here though, weren't you?

H: Yes, and that's another thing. I didn't particularly want to. I was very comfortable because it was in 1957 when my first child went to school, and of course that was the year that we were planning to move to Albuquerque. We didn't move to Albuquerque after our son could go to Houston School along with all the other students. That was the oldest boy and he was in the first class, the first integrated class, 'course at the first grade level.

I: So the opening up of the community to blacks, the desegregation of the schools really is what came first, made it possible for you all to stay?

H: That's right. Because my husband was determined that... In fact he was living in Albuquerque; he had a job up in Albuquerque as an accountant for the student union building at the University of New Mexico and he was looking around up there, looking for a home and everything because we were definitely planning to move. The only reason we didn't move was because of the fact that the children were able to go to schools that



were open and not segregated, and things in the community began to open up such that we could participate in a lot of things. Of course we did have a problem with him trying to get a way for our son to learn to swim. Even the Y wouldn't accept him because he was black.

I: Let me check this tape, just a second. I've never used this before... How did you all solve the swimming pool problem?

H: We just didn't. My husband said, "Well..." In the meantime, of course, my husband had moved. That's another thing that influenced. We didn't move to Albuquerque for two reasons. My mother was very sick and I was determined I was going to stay here with her as long as she needed me, and she died and I just didn't want to move right then. I said, "I'm just too unstable to make a big change," and so my husband was very patient and so finally he decided, "Well, I'm just going to...I have nine years of Federal Service in the Army, so I will just come back and go into Civil Service." And he did. He got a job up at White Sands and he ended up going to school and he became what we call ADP intern, automatic data processing. He went to school and of course he was on the ground floor and so he went up pretty fast. And then when he changed back to his favorite, accounting, in federal service and he was able, so we just stayed here. 'Course there were several opportunities that he had to go to Washington, D.C. or some other places but I told him I'd feel very uncomfortable there with the children. I knew how to cope with some of the difficult things in this community but I wasn't sure that I would know how to cope with them in the Washington, D.C. area. Then, too, I would have to get a job. Of course that was no problem either because they even offered me one to try to get him. (Chuckles)

I: Well, you both are associated then with the military in one way or

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another with your jobs.

H: Yes.

I: As far as the employment opportunities here in El Paso, the Army then must have been one place where blacks were able to...?

H: But not until...I think I was probably one of the first blacks to start working in...other than the laundry in Fort Bliss.

I: Uh huh. When you were a little girl or a young lady, the Army employed blacks in the laundry?

H: In the laundry.

I: That was all?

H: [Yes.]

I: What other places would you have been able to get a job here in the community? What was open to blacks? Well, I know that as far as porters, that kind of thing, but...

H: Before I went to college, you know how...I know my children all tried to get little jobs to kind of get some extra money before they went to college. The only thing I could get was taking care of a little boy or being this maid, so to speak, in a private home.

I: Did any of the black businessmen employ any of the blacks or black children?

H: There weren't that many. About the best they could do was to employ themselves.

I: There were some opportunities for mail carriers, and I guess the railroad.

H: Yes.

I: Did any blacks work in Juarez?

H: Now I don't know. It's funny that you would ask that because I've always

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wondered if there were some because there should have been. [It was] very open, at least I never had any problems in Mexico when I went over there and everything. But of course I spoke the language, so that might have made a big difference.

I: Do you think that most black people ended up speaking Spanish?

H: No.

I: No. Very few. So your relationship with the Mexican community was unique and more so than the experience of your other...?

H: It might have been, might have been. However, even now I find that there are several...I see several black youngsters that are very good friends with Hispanic youngsters. I don't know. I just kind of think that there was a pretty good rapport between the black and Hispanic community.

I: There was a cement factory here I think early on and then the foundry...

H: Um hm.

I: So there were employment opportunities I guess as factory workers to some extent in places?

H: No. Not for blacks.

I: Porters?

H: Yes, or janitors.

I: So they weren't offered any opportunity as craftsmen at all?

H: No. That's the reason why even today I think you will find that a larger percentage of blacks are either college educated or at least have finished high school because they had to, in order to get a job.

I: Perhaps the ways to make a living with their hands were essentially closed.

H: Except for janitors and that kind of work.

I: Do you remember riding the streetcar?

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H: Yes, I do.

I: And where did you, did you have any problems with the seating?

[PAUSE]

I: I was wondering, do you remember your first ride?

H: I don't remember my first ride because that was a mode of transportation that we used quite a bit, particularly going to town. Or we'd walk down Park Street to Seventh Street and catch the streetcar and go to town to make purchases or to the marketplace that they used to have over there on Overland and just really... It was a way that my grandmother used. My mother, of course, we had the car with her when she would go away, to school or what have you.

I: Were there signs in the streetcar that told you to sit at the back?

H: Yes, it was. There was a sign that left maybe two or three seats at the most in the extreme rear and it had black, I mean colored, on one side and white on the other, and of course the white was facing you as you entered the streetcar. You better go to the portion back there in the colored. I am told that the soldiers at Fort Bliss and their resistance to this kind of thing--because you would have a black guy standing up in the back and plenty of seats in the front--and their resistance to this kind of thing was the thing that kind of got the situation such that they somewhat ignored the fact that possibly blacks were sitting in areas where they aren't supposed to sit.

I: There were early boycotts in other communities like San Antonio and Houston.

H: Oh, we had straightened it out by then, here in El Paso. In El Paso we were just going into the streetcar by then and sitting wherever we wanted to.

I: But there were early boycotts like in 1910, 1916, 1920. I'm not sure of the exact date but real, real early boycotts which were a real surprise because of the extent of the racism. It was a surprise that there was that much organization in the black community. Do you think there was ever anything like that here?

H: I recall my grandfather saying that it wasn't until later, much later, that they put up those signs. As I told you earlier, the impression that I have gotten over the years is that El Paso is just more or less open. We were all friends and we lived and worked together until later. Then, I guess in the 1920s, I don't know... My guess is that then, when there were more blacks in the community, there was this separation pushing. Of course there has always been a separation. I don't mean to imply that there wasn't because, of course, the white people have established the black church, this kind of thing. No, but as far as signs, it wasn't anything we could do. There was too few of us and we didn't, did not participate. We weren't there that much so they just left the signs.

I: Did you ever travel by rail, go by railroad car?

H: Oh, yes. This is where they would change to the Jim Crow car coming from the west and then going west you could get off the train here and at anywhere you wanted to. However, it was very seldom that they did that. Actually, that car would just more or less go all the way.

I: And the people would...going here west, they wouldn't remove themselves and to other cars.

H: Not usually.

I: What was the Jim Crow car like?

H: Well, it was probably the least comfortable car on the train. It was right next to the engine I think, as I remember them talking about it and

of course I had ridden on it. I remember when I went to college--and this was in 1941--that I was on a Jim Crow car all the way down to New Orleans, and then of course I got on the L & N and it was the same thing, and when I got to Birmingham there were several of us students who were going to Talladega College and we changed there, and they put us on a baggage car because there were too many of us for the portion of the little train that took care of the blacks. And of course our president raised all kinds of scene and they had a big blowout about it. There, in the years following that, they usually had some kind of bus to take us over from Birmingham or if we did ride the train, they would more or less say, "Now, you have this particular train. It's going to be the one for Talladega College."

I: How do you spell that college?

H: T-a-l-l-a-d-e-g-a.

I: How do you say it?

H: Tal-la-de-ga.

I: Talladega College. Were there any services on the Jim Crow car? Did a porter come through to your car and offer you anything to drink? Did you have restrooms available?

H: You had restrooms available. Out of ignorance--I was told I shouldn't have done it--but out of ignorance, I'd gone to the dining car when I was going to school and sat down and ate. Nobody said anything to me so I don't know whether there were facilities or not. I don't know whether they were afraid to say something to me in thinking that I was not black or whether it was something else. But I know I did it. I would go dine every time. I'd go down there; I'd go in the dining car and have my meal.

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I: Didn't you tell me when we talked on the phone about going sometimes and sitting in the theater because you were so light-skinned that you could go actually and sit in a movie theater with your friends?

H: No, no. I just said I went to the Alcazar and the Colon.

I: Oh, but you never did go to an all-white... Maybe it was Mrs. Bundy.

H: Yes.

I: Do you know the men that worked on the Pullman sleeper cars? Did they have a union here, the Pullman car union for Pullman Porters?

H: Yes.

I: Was it active? Do you recall?

H: Yes, I think it was very active. J. Phillip Randolph was the national man and, of course, Mr. Lopez was one of the leaders in Pullman car [organization].

I: Who was Mr. Lopez?

H: He was a black man. His name was R. W. Lopez. He just died a couple of years ago.

I: But he was very influential. Does he have any family here now?

H: No, I don't know of any family that he has here.

I: With his last name being Lopez, was his mother black and his father a Mexican?

H: He came here from somewhere, I think it might have... He might have been a Cuban or something like that, West Indian descendant, because he came here from that part of the country, Florida or...

I: What organizations did the members of your family and your friends belong to?

H: My mother belonged to \_\_\_\_\_ Club which was a civic social club. She also belonged to Phyllis Wheatly Club which was social at that

time. It's primarily civic now. Of course she belonged to the church and the related auxiliaries of the Second Baptist Church. She was also a member of the Masonic family. She was in Eastern Star, a member of the Golden Circle and all of these other things in the Masonic community. My grandmother, likewise, was a Heroine of Jerico and an Eastern Star and everything.

I: What is a Heroine of Jerico?

H: That's an organization that is a part of the Masonic family as well, and they do charitable work in the community.

I: Was this an organization that existed like in the '20s or in the '30s?

H: It existed back in the 1900s. My grandfather was of course quite active in the Masonic groups, all of them, and he was a pretty good Freemason.

I: Did they have monthly meetings that they attended?

H: Yes, and sometimes bimonthly. He was also a member of the Shriners and I recall that for many years, even when he died in 1934, he was just being \_\_\_\_\_ the Shriners, because there had been a suit against black Shriners being able to function in the state and the members all continued to pay their dues to fight that and of course it was eventually [resolved].

I: Where did they meet? Where did they hold their meetings?

H: They had meetings in a structure that still exists down on Virginia, 407 S. Virginia.

I: Does it still function today as a lodge?

H: Yes, still functions as a lodge. In fact, my grandfather made...he took great pride in saying he made the brick that they built that with. [Laughs] It's a three-story thing. During the war the black USO was housed on the second floor for a while. Of course it had three locations



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in El Paso; one on Texas Street, one up there, and one on Mesa. That was the last one.

I: Is this where you worked in the USO?

H: Yes, I was working with USO for a while.

[PAUSE]

I: This Masonic Lodge, is it the house also for the Shriners, the black Shriners?

H: Yes, uh huh.

I: So they functioned as a civic organization helping the members of their community out and I guess working for the community of El Paso as well?

H: [Yes.]

I: And then provide a social outlet, too, where you all could get together?

H: Um hm.

I: Did they have dances?

H: Yes. The Shriners did; not the Masonic groups, of course. They had other types of functions but not dances per se. The Masonic group did.

I: Did you all go to the parks? See baseball games? Was there a black baseball team here?

H: No, not that I know of, no. I should say not that I know of because I was not into sports as much, as a very young woman. There was a community center out near where Dudley Field is. They had fought very hard to get a black community center where people could go for that kind of recreation and so I remember going there to different activities.

I: Is this where the swimming pool was eventually built?

H: No. The swimming pool was eventually built on Missouri Street and that was of course much later. I was thinking back in the days when I was very young that they did have this community center out there.

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I: Did you ever go swimming? Did you go swimming in the river?

H: No.

I: It was very dangerous, I know, but never went swimming?

H: I never went swimming. I didn't learn how to swim until I went to college and the only reason I learned how to swim in college was because they insisted. (Laughs)

I: There isn't any use in this, I can't go home and swim. (Laughs) Forget it!

H: I didn't know what bowling, tennis and all that was either. Because we didn't have any facilities that were open to blacks for those kinds of things.

I: What sporting events were available? Boxing. Did you have black boxers come here that you, perhaps not you but some people in the community, would go see? Were you allowed to do that if you wanted to?

H: Yes, if you sat in the special portion of wherever they had it, in the black portion.

I: If there was a baseball game here, although it was white teams there was a black section for you to sit if you would go watch the games?

H: As far as I can remember. Of course I can't go back too far.

I: No. I was going to ask you some things about the '60s. Oh, do you recall any Negro newspapers when you were a girl?

H: Pittsburgh Courier, I recall.

I: Pittsburgh Courier, and how did you get it?

H: I don't know, but I know that my mother had it and we would read it all the time. It must have been sent here by mail to maybe Dr. Donnell, maybe he got it at his drugstore and sold it to us. Another thing that we started taking, or subscribing that is, to some of these black

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periodicals. As far back as I can remember there were black periodicals in the home.

I: But there was nothing that was local that you can remember?

H: Yes, The Interpreter. When Marvin Reeves had a paper called The Interpreter, I remember that.

I: That was in the 40s though, wasn't it?

H: Yes, that was later. The church had a newspaper where they would tell you about all the things happening in the black community.

I: Was that primarily published on Sunday? It was like a church bulletin or was it a regular news...

H: It wasn't published on Sunday but primarily it was more or less just handed out on Sunday though. That's when you would get it.

I: This was the Second Baptist Church?

H: [Yes.]

I: I had found reference to a Negro journal in the real late 1800s and maybe the first part of 1900, but I can't find anyone that knows anything about it. I wasn't really sure, and I had a feeling it was connected with the churches.

H: Second Baptist did have a journal way back then. I don't know if it was that early.

I: Well, who delivered your babies?

H: My babies?

I: Um hm.

H: Oh, they were all born in Army hospitals. No, two of them were born in Army hospitals and the third one was delivered by Dr. Tubbs, William Tubbs. He's a general practitioner.

I: Is he white?

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H: He was our family doctor.

I: When you were a little girl?

H: No. Well, when I went to college he gave me my college physical.

I: Who were the doctors that you remember people talking about that were the black doctors or that you remember knowing when you were a young girl?

H: Dr. Nixon and Dr. Collins.

I: Was there a Dr. Gravely?

H: Gravely! Yes, I remember Dr. Gravely. His wife was a music teacher.

I: Was he a general practitioner?

H: I don't know what he was. I just remember the name and the general location where he was, somewhere down there on Piedras, in something like the 600 block, I mean 100 South Piedras, or somewhere down that way is where he lived if I remember correctly.

I: What about going to a black doctor. Who were their patients?

H: I went to Dr. Nixon on several occasions. I take that back about [Dr. Tubbs giving] my college physical. It was my working physical that Dr. Tubbs did and of course my marriage physical he did. Dr. Nixon did my college physical and we used to go there, my mother and me until he died.

I: How about store owners, do you remember we talked about?

H: The Sherrod Market is the only one I remember.

I: How do you spell that?

H: S-h-e-r-r-o-d.

I: Sherrod Market. It's just a grocery store and meat market?

H: Yes, uh huh.

I: Was this down in Second Ward?

H: Yes.

I: Do you remember any candy shops or cigar stores, jewelry stores, apparel

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or furniture stores that were owned by blacks?

H: No.

I: There was a drugstore, right?

H: Yes.

I: Donnell?

H: Donnell Drugstore.

I: And the barber shops.

H: Yes. there were several barber shops. I don't recall the names of them, but there were several.

I: Where did you go when you wanted to have your hair taken care of?

H: My hair was taken care of usually in the home. There were some beauticians that had shops and I was trying to remember back to the days when I was a little girl. I remember Mrs. McCoy that used to do my hair. She had a shop connected to her home.

I: Do you remember where that was?

H: It was on Tornillo Street.

I: Do you remember any filling station owners? Were there any men who owned repair shops or automobiles or...?

H: I believe there were some filling stations. A filling station owner, but I can't remember the name of the person that had the filling station, and of course there were many blacks that did repairs for cars. Some of them on an availability basis, others in shops that were run by other colored people, people of other races.

I: But some of the automobile repairmen had their own businesses? The people brought the cars to them.

H: Yes.

I: Were there any wood or ice providers, blacks?

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H: Not that I know of.

I: That's one of the occupations that's mentioned frequently in other towns. They would haul ice and wood and sell it. There were a couple of restaurants owned by blacks. Were there any bars that were owned by blacks?

H: I think so, um hm. But I'm not too familiar with that as a youngster.

I: How about hotels?

H: Now, hotels, yes. Dan Daniels owned a hotel down on Oregon Street, and there was a man named Murray that had Murray Hotel over on Mesa Street, which of course a portion of his building I think is what they rented to the USO for use during the last few years with the USO. There was a family named Washington that had--incidentally, Leona Washington married their son--and they had some kind of hotel down on Oregon or somewhere in that area. There was another hotel over on Durango Street that was owned by blacks but that's all I know of.

I: That's quite a few, four. At least in a community that didn't amount to more than say 1500.

H: Yeah.

I: That's quite a bit, really.

H: Well, of course, I'm thinking that, you know, after the soldiers came to town, they might have been established after that. There was a nice, I guess you would call it a home. Mrs. Phillips was the teacher at the local school. She was my fourth grade teacher. And she had I think it was a two-story home that she and her husband had lived in, and of course her first husband was Cleveland. And then she married Mr. Phillips, but Mr. Cleveland was the one that owned this big home and she converted it to a place where you could rent rooms. Now, that was on St. Vrain Street

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and as I remember it, it must have been about the six or seven hundred block on St. Vrain. It might still be there, being used for something else at this time.

I: Did these hotels have eating establishments in them?

H: The Blanche Phillips Hotel didn't. I don't know about Mr. Daniels. I think his might have had, or at least very close to it there was an eating establishment. The Murrays didn't have eating but they were very close to an eating place. The Durango place didn't, and I don't think the Washington Hotel did.

I: Let's see. Were you involved at all in the '60s, any of the meetings that had to do with the anti-discrimination ordinances passed here?

H: I was not. I did not go to any of the meetings that I recall but I can give you the names of several people that were very much involved in that. I remember the dentist, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ Williams, and his wife Miss Margaret was involved and Mrs. Johnny Calvert might be able to give you some additional information.

I: Is Dr. Williams' wife still alive?

H: No, Margaret Williams is dead but she was a good friend of Miss Calvert. They were both in the same church, the Myrtle Avenue Church.

I: Did you hear anything out at Fort Bliss that let you know the Army was either trying to get this passed or supporting the passage of it?

H: Well, yes. Very frankly, yes. I heard that there were some people out there that were listening or that had the ears of the highest officers out there that were working with them in an effort to get the people in El Paso to pass the ordinance. The black soldiers would have more places to go in the community and there would be less problem in the community as far as rebellion against certain kinds of racial discrimination, and

of course the fact that there on the post they were trying to be much more, shall I say liberal, in their attitudes and since they were not able to have certain activities for the soldiers because they were so close to a community and they couldn't just take over everything, because of economic pressures from the community, they were in favor of this kind of thing because it was coming to the point that they were just flat going to have to put off-limits any place that discriminated against people because of their race.

I: How did it affect you and your family? How did you feel about it?

H: Of course I was very anxious for us to have the liberty to do what we wanted to do and certainly if I wanted to go somewhere to eat, it would be a good thing that it would be like my choice as an American rather than finding myself tied by the kind of things that I'd had no control over, and so I felt very good about the fact that they had passed an ordinance.

I: Was the black community aware of the participation by the Jewish community?

H: Very much so. Very much so.

I: So that they did know that there were white people or even people of Spanish heritage working for this in the community?

H: Well, I just remember the general impression that the Jewish community had done quite a bit to help the black. I didn't know that Hispanics had done much, but I'm sure that with a community that has such a high percentage of Hispanics, they had to or else it wouldn't have passed.

I: Did you notice an immediate change? I mean was it passed and then the next day the doors were opened or was there a conflict that came after that or were you eased into it?



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H: You know, I really felt and I felt this way about El Paso but of course it might be anywhere. But I always felt that EL Paso was just waiting for somebody to say, "Okay, this law doesn't apply anymore. You can go ahead and do that," And boom! Everything just opened up immediately. I felt that way about school and I felt that way about the other things that have happened in terms of our people, all people, to participate in various activities.

I: So the racial conflict or unrest or the fear what we've seen maybe in other communities didn't exist here?

H: I don't think it was as strong, anywhere near as strong here. If it was here, it was underground just as it is now in most places.

I: Sure. Well, were there any sit-ins or anything that accompanied this ordinance?

H: I don't know of any. I know that there were some protests but as far as I know there were no sit-ins or anything like that. It was just more or less, "Let's make sure, let's make our community an all-American community."

I: There was something else I wanted to ask you because I was thinking about shopping. When you were a young lady here and you wanted to go out to buy your clothing?

H: No problem.

I: No problem. You could try on clothes?

H: Oh, I could try on clothes and everything. I was really struck when I went to Atlanta and I went into the store to buy some clothes at Rich's and she told me that if I wanted it that I could take it but I couldn't try it on. They didn't have any facilities for trying on clothes. I says, "That says fitting room." "We don't have any facilities for you to

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says, "That says fitting room." "We don't have any facilities for you to try it on. Now you can take it home. Of course, we don't take back merchandise that blacks take home." And I was really shocked because I had never experienced that in this community.

I: That's one real difference that I have noticed or have heard in my readings and all that made it different. Also, I think having Juarez so close, besides the black community being small. Juarez allowed you all, as a group, a place to go and eat out so there was a release for you.

H: That's right. And of course you could do all kinds of things over there and you were respected by all the people.

I: What about when you would drive to Las Cruces? What was it like there?

H: Las Cruces didn't have that thing that everybody fell back on here: "It's a state law."

I: You were able to go to the school there, is that right?

H: Yes, they, no they had a separate school for blacks.

I: Oh, you could not attend with the whites?

H: They didn't. They weren't integrated 'til, of course before the ordinance, but way down the line I had a very close friend whose father was the principal of the black school and I remember I used to go up there to see her quite a bit. It was the Davis family, and you might ask Mr. Grimes because he's from Las Cruces but I remember very distinctly there was a black school. Now, whether they, if they wanted to, they could go to the so-called white school, I don't know, but I know that there was a black school.

I: Was there the separation, though, in New Mexico like there was in Texas? The Jim Crow car began in El Paso, right?

H: No.

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H: No, no.

I: Like you say there was no state law where you had to be separated.

H: That's right.

I: But it was there.

H: It was there. It was there. And of course Albuquerque was different.

I: Let me ask you, too, a little bit more about Dan Daniels. I've heard him called the Negro mayor or the black mayor.

H: Yeah, I've heard that, too.

I: Why was he called that?

H: I guess because he had more money than anybody, any of the other blacks. I just don't know enough about it to know if there was the kind of thing...that kind of thing in that area. But I always heard that he was really rich.

I: What did he have that was his... Was the hotel his primary source, his obvious primary source, of income?

H: Obviously yes, but I don't know.

I: Well, let's see, I think we just about covered it. Oh, I know. You were telling me before about mixed marriages where a black man married a Hispanic woman. Was there much of that here?

H: Yes. As I mentioned one family to you, I can think of two others, the Williams family, the Turner family, where they had a lot of children, and of course I know the children; some of them were my contemporaries. One of the ladies, Estella \_\_\_\_\_ is still here. She was a member of the Turner family. She was my friend. She was in my class. She didn't graduate, but she was in my class, and of course the Session family. There are several of them still here.

I: Well, I'm not real clear about the legality of this.

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H: It was illegal in Texas so they were illegitimate as far as the state was concerned.

I: Did they live in El Paso?

H: Yes, they lived in El Paso but, you know, they didn't do anything about it. I think that that's another thing that was kind of looked over. The only thing they did about it was insist that those children go to the black school.

I: I went through the census of 1900 and I noticed where a black man married an Hispanic woman and racially they are listed as B and I think W, white. But you can tell, you know, Maria Lopez or something like that that she's a Mexican, and it goes "black" for the male, "white" for the female, and all of the offspring are B, B, B, B, B, B, B, all listed as black.

H: That's right. It used to be if you had just one ancestor way back there that as black, you were black.

I: You know, one thing, too, I noticed in the census material was that the largest percent of those that were asked about their literacy said that they were literate.

H: Um hm.

H: And did you feel that most of the people you associated with, your mom associated with, but also like at church, I mean, did they know how to read so that they were truly literate people?

H: Most of the ones that I found myself [associating with] in the Second Baptist--it was the largest black church at that time, way back there. In fact, I think some of the other churches came from that one--and most of the people could read. They read with varying degrees of expertise but certainly were able to read, as I remember.

I: Well, that was one thing I noticed that seemed to be quite high and

looking at some other statistics, it seems to bear out that fact. Dallas' rate of literacy I think was like in the 60 percent and we and high 80s and low 90s at varying points.

H: I had that general impression. I didn't know the statistics but certainly that's the general impression.

I: What were the major denominations for the churches here for the blacks?

H: Baptist, Methodist, and I think they called it Methodist-Episcopal. They were all Methodist but they were different kinds of Methodist. They had what they call CME, AME and ME and then Methodist, but those were the predominant ones.

I: Did any blacks attend any of the white churches like St. Clements' Episcopal?

H: As far as I know, no.

I: Pretty well confined themselves to their own black churches?

H: As far as I remember. However, there were some blacks that attended the Catholic churches. I know St. Ignacio's down there in Second Ward had a pretty good, pretty large number, pretty nice number of blacks that attended. And as I understood it as I grew older, there were other churches, Catholic churches, where blacks attended.

I: Was there a black cemetery that was separate from the white cemetery so that, you know, you had your part where you had to be buried when you died?

H: Yes, ma'am. Not a black cemetery as a whole, but a portion of Concordia Cemetery was designated the black portion and if you go out there today, you'll find probably all of these people you've come up with, a lot of them buried in the black portion. The Masonic group had bought a large plot there and several blacks were buried in that area, and then there

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were some where they had their private plots, but they were all in that same area.

I: How was it kept up? Was it kept up by private donations?

H: It's not kept up, very frankly. It needs attention right now.

I: Who would take care of the body? Were there funeral homes here that took the bodies?

H: Now that's a type of Negro business.

[END OF TAPE 1]

I: ...home and a Fullmore Funeral Home. Where were they located?

H: Well, the Banks Funeral Home I believe was on Alameda where it is now, currently called Banks-Marlin now. Of course I think Marlin took it over from them; he worked with Banks for awhile. And the Fullmore Funeral Home I believe was also in that area. It was down the street further, closer to Texas Street, but I think it was in that area. There have been others that have sprung up and not lived. The Banks Funeral Home was perhaps the one that had lived the longest. Most of the blacks, [like] when my grandfather died in the 1930s, went to Pete Hagden Funeral Home which was a white funeral home.

I: Do you recall when you were a young lady who the most successful blacks were, who people regarded as either money or looked to as the leaders in the community?

H: The doctors, teachers, mailmen and railroad men were perhaps the ones that were looked up to the most.

I: Was there any one or two men or women in the community that everyone looked to, either revered or loved especially, you know, that they stood out?

H: Well, I think Doctor Nixon, by virtue of the fact that he had gone all

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the way and used his own resources to a very large extent to fight the battle of the white primary, was probably looked up to [the most]. He would clearly be the most outstanding in my opinion.

I: Well, I sure do thank you. You paid poll tax. Did you get to vote?

H: Yes, I got to vote after I paid my poll tax, because Dr. Nixon had opened it up by the time I came along and was able to vote and everything, and I really took advantage of it. As soon as I was old enough, I went to register to vote and paid my poll tax. I think I didn't pay poll tax but once before it was outlawed. It was a dollar and 75 cents.

I: \$1.75. Where'd you go to pay it?

H: People in the community at the church and then in various organizations had these books to try to encourage people to register to vote.

I: So they'd collect the money and then take it and turn it in?

H: [Yes.]

I: Did your granddaddy ever talk about voting or trying to vote and not being able to?

H: I don't recall him saying anything but one time he had gone and tried to vote and found that he couldn't vote. I think he had protested in some manner, but anyway he could vote in some elections.

I: Maybe not in the primary. The general elections, I think [you] had to be allowed to vote. Do you remember where the money came from to support Douglass School? Was it a public school?

H: It was a public school.

I: So that it had to receive state funds but it received less?

H: I assume that it received less. You know, El Paso, when I was a little girl, you had your Hispanic school, you had your white schools, and you had your black school. And most of the Hispanics went to Bowie High

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School.

I: But you think that discount on this teacher's certificate may be because your mother was a black teacher so they paid her less? Do you think they discounted the Hispanic teachers also?

H: I don't think so because there were very few of them.

I: Most of the Hispanics were taught by white teachers.

END OF INTERVIEW