

AL 129

Interviewee: Hattie Hill

Interviewer: Patricia Smith Garretson

Date: April 5, 1991

G: I am taping Hattie Hill for the University of Florida Oral History Program. I am in her home located at 335 SE 1st Avenue, High Springs, Florida. It is April 5, 1991. I am Patricia Smith Garretson. Hattie, what is your full name?

H: My birth name?

G: Yes, ma'am.

H: Hattie Mae Perry Wilson Hill. Mae is my middle name, Perry is my maiden name, and I have had two marriages.

G: When and where were you born?

H: St. Petersburg, Florida, [on] November 21, 1920.

G: And [what was] your mother's name and where was she from?

H: You want her maiden name or her married name?

G: How about both.

H: OK. Gussie Roberts Perry. She married a Perry. And my father's name is Isaac Perry. My mother is a native of Kingsland, Georgia, but her father moved to St. Petersburg when they were children. My father is a native Floridian. He was born in Jefferson County, Florida. They met in St. Petersburg and were married there.

G: How did they come to High Springs, or [how] did you come to High Springs?

H: My mother and father separated, and after a long period of time my mother married again. The man she married lived in High Springs. That is when we first came here. I was fourteen years old. That is how we got here the first time.

G: Did you say you were fourteen when you first moved to High Springs?

H: Yes.

G: So you grew up in St. Petersburg?

H: I grew up in St. Petersburg and Quincy, Florida. My mother used to go [to the] North every summer. That was a popular thing during that time, to work up North in the summertime and to come back to St. Petersburg in the wintertime. She did not want to take us out of school twice a year every year, so she sent us to live with my father's mother, and we lived with my father's mother in Quincy, Florida, for about five years. Within the five years, that is when my mother married again. After she married again she stopped going backwards and forwards up North, so she settled here in High Springs.

G: And she married whom?

H: She married Jodie Jones.

G: So you went to several elementary schools, then, as a child?

H: Yes. I went to Davis Elementary in St. Petersburg, and I went to Stevens High in Quincy. By the time I got to High Springs I was [in] junior high, so I went to Douglas High.

G: So you did go to Douglas High.

H: I did go to Douglas High and graduated from Douglas High. I did not do all of my work at Douglas. I went back to Gibbs High in St. Petersburg. But I did graduate from Douglas in High Springs in 1941.

G: Did you teach at Douglas later on?

H: Yes, I taught at Douglas years later after I had been to school for a while. I did teach at Douglas. I was teaching at Douglas when the schools were integrated.

G: I am jumping ahead here. I should go back and ask you more about your elementary school years. Is there anything that you remember [about those years]?

H: To me they were the most glorious years of my life. It looks like the impressions that were made upon me then have always remained with me. My elementary school days were just happy days. Also junior high school. In fact, all of my school days were happy days. I loved school, you know. But I started off in St. Petersburg, I went to Quincy, and then came here in junior high school. It was kind of a triangle. I enjoyed my school days – every one of them.

G: What made them enjoyable?

H: Well, I will tell you what. I can remember in elementary school I was always chosen for the school plays.

G: So you liked drama?

H: I liked drama. And I liked my little circle of friends, because whomever I associated with in school most likely we associated at church. I just enjoyed it. Things were so different. Everybody was so caring and everything until it just made you love people.

I never shall forget the little note I wrote on the blackboard when we were coming here. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. We were always very competitive in the middle grades, and we enjoyed learning words and using words to the best of our knowledge. I shall never forget this little note [that I wrote]. I hated to tell my classmates that I was leaving to come to High Springs (we had never heard of High Springs before), and I wrote, "Dear Classmates, I am sorry to relate, but I am leaving, and I will not be back." And [I] just signed my name. That is how I told everybody I was leaving. I just could not bring myself to say it orally.

G: It is hard to say goodbye.

H: Yes. Then after that everybody started [asking]: "Oh, where are you going? Why are you going?" and that sort of thing. That is the way I made that exit from Quincy. And then when I came here, oh, to me these were the most friendly people I had ever seen in the world, it seemed. We were just accepted immediately, you know. Having come from a little bigger community and [having] had a little more experience, well, we were immediately accepted among our peers, and [we] seem to have been appreciated by the teachers. It was just a kind of happy life for us. When I say us [I mean] I had one brother.

G: What was your brother's name?

H: His name was William Henry Perry.

G: And he passed away?

H: He passed away about seven years ago. I can remember when we were children I was so jealous of his name. I loved his name because he was named after both of his grandfathers. He had one grandfather whose name was William, and the other grandfather's name was Henry, so they named him William Henry. I used to often ask my mother, "Why didn't they name me after both grandmothers?" I had one grandmother whose name was Polly, and the other grandmother's name was Anna or Annie or whatever pronunciation they choose to say. Some called her Anna and some called her Annie. And I wanted to know why they could not name me after both of my grandmothers. I

think that is the one thing that I resented during my childhood. I wanted to be named after both of my grandparents. I thought his name was just glorious. I just loved it.

G: My sister and brother both have family names, and when they got to me they just pulled one out of a hat. They just liked Patty Jane, and that stuck.

H: I asked them one time: "Where did Hattie come from? Why did you name me Hattie?" My godmother's name was Hattie. That was one reason they gave me [the name]. And then after I got to be older, after I became an adult, I had the privilege of going to Kingsland, Georgia, and I met some of the people from my mother's side. I noticed there were quite a few Hatties in the family, so then I assumed it was kind of a family name, you know. But I did not like it. I wanted my name to be Polly Anna or Polly Ann or something like that, but that is life. You know how children are.

G: After graduating from Douglas High, did you go on to college?

H: Well, yes. I went to Florida Normal [School]; it is called Florida Memorial now. I went to Florida Memorial and spent one year.

G: That is located in what city?

H: It was in St. Augustine at that time, but now it is in Miami, Florida. When I came home that summer – by that time my mother had passed [away] – I did not come back to High Springs. I went to Quincy to my grandmothers home, and she said to me: "Why would you want to go way [over] to St. Augustine to go to school when you have your state school [Florida A & M] right here [in Tallahassee]? You could go to the state school because when you graduate from any other school you have to come to your state school anyway," which was Florida A & M College at that time. It later became a university. So I really did not want to stay there. You know how young ladies are. I wanted to be out, but what she said made a lot of sense.

She also said to me that summer: "You know, you have been to school one whole year. We have a lot of teachers in this county that did not go to school a whole year. I believe that if you went to the superintendent's office, you, perhaps, could get a job." Well, I did not believe that too much, but I wanted to go to please her. You know how you always try to obey. I really wanted the man to say: "No, we cannot hire [you]. You just had one year." And my one year was in business, not in elementary education. But I got hired that year, so that is when I started teaching.

G: So you went to see a principal in Quincy?

H: No, I went to the superintendent's office in Quincy. He said, "Well, we do not have anything right now, but if we have anything, we will let you know." So about a week later I heard a neighbor of ours [coming up to our house]. She was also a principal of a school at that time. During that time they had a lot of little schools in rural areas. So I heard her coming down the walk, and she was calling Mama. I heard her calling, "Miss Perry." You know how you can hear people coming in? "Miss Perry." I heard her walk up on the porch and say, "Where is Hattie Mae?" At that time I was on the back of the house, so I came up front. She came, and her supervisor came with her. During that time schools used to have supervisors. I do not know whether you remember that era. But you would have a principal and then you would have supervisors of a certain area. So she came with her supervisor, and she told Mama (I call my grandmother Mama), "They had three people in the superintendent's office who applied for jobs, and when I saw Hattie Mae's name, I wanted her immediately." So that was that. I was hired. So I started teaching school in Quincy with one year of college learning. And it was in business, not elementary education.

G: You wanted to go into business? You had not thought of yourself being a teacher?

H: No. I tell you what. You know how young people are. I thought of myself as being a secretary, and I wanted to go to New York. New York was my ideal place. That is where I wanted to go and get a job in an office. But after I got the job, I decided, "Oh, I will teach a year just to satisfy Mama," which was my grandmother. But I got the job, and what I did was end up teaching in that county for four years.

G: In Quincy?

H: In Quincy for four years.

G: What years were these?

H: Let me see [if I] can think of them.

G: The late 1940s?

H: Let's see. I graduated from high school in 1941. Well, 1942, 1943, 1944, and 1945, I guess, would be about right, because by that time the soldiers from World War II were coming home. Anyway, I taught there for four years.

But the way I got my education is, I would go to school every summer. A lot of people used to do that. You taught during the winter, and you went to school in the summer. Or you could take extension courses during the winter from the

campus or off campus. You know, they had lots of ways, because that was prevalent during that time. You did not find too many people with four-year degrees at that time, in other words. So that is the way I did it. I went to summer school every summer, and I taught every winter.

All right. My husband and I got married in 1942, so this [High Springs] happened to be his home also. We had courted before he went to the army, see. So he brought me back here to live.

Well, the first year I got back here I was not able to get a job. I did not get a job in Alachua County as a regular teacher, but I got all of the work I could do as a substitute teacher. But, anyway, I continued to go to summer school and take extension courses and that sort of thing, and I got a job after I had been here a year in Columbia County, not Alachua County. There was a teacher who was out on maternity leave. During those years when you knew you were going to have a baby you had to kind of take a leave of absence, so this teacher had to take a leave of absence. So they hired me for that year, and I went to Columbia County and taught that year.

G: At which school?

H: It was Bethlehem School.

G: In what city?

H: Well, Bethlehem we always referred to as Columbia County. See, it is not right in the city, it is right across the [Santa Fe] River.

G: OK.

H: Mrs. Lovett was the principal, and I taught with her a year.

G: What was her first name?

H: Believe it or not it was Hattie: Mrs Hattie Lovett. And I taught with her a year. So their supervisor hired me that year. He came to my house one Saturday morning, and when he came I was mopping my dining room and kitchen. He came in, and I had never seen the man before. I did not know who he was. He said, "I know you do not mind working because I found you working." And I did not exactly get what he was talking about. So then he introduced himself and let me know why he had come, and he told me that Mrs. Lovett had recommended me. So they hired me for that year.

G: Here in Alachua County?

H: No, that was Columbia County.

G: OK.

H: Then I came back to Alachua County, and I subbed a lot. But I still did not get a regular job because by that time Alachua County had already begun to look into four-year-degree people. I did not have a degree at that time – not quite.

G: You said in the summertime you would go to school. What schools did you go to?

H: Florida A & M University.

G: So you would go up to Tallahassee in summers?

H: Yes, every summer. And I would also take extension courses from Florida A & M University, and I took a few courses from the University of Florida through . .

G: Continuing education or correspondence?

H: Correspondence. I took a few courses from the University of Florida. Anyway, I still did not get a job in Alachua County, but I worked in Lafayette County [in] Mayo for two years.

G: But you lived here in High Springs?

H: I lived here in High Springs.

G: Boy, that was a commute.

H: Yes. But just about that time, see, I was getting ready to – No, what happened [was] I got pregnant. No, that is not exactly true [either], because I was already working in Alachua County. I had gotten a job in Alachua County, but at that time when you knew you were pregnant you had to take a one-year leave of absence. That is what happened. I had to take that one-year leave of absence, so while I was off on that year leave of absence, I went to Florida A & M University and finished my last quarter of work before getting my bachelor's degree.

G: When did you get your bachelor's?

H: That must have been 1954 or 1953, I cannot remember [which].

G: It was a bachelor of arts [degree]?

H: A bachelor of science, and my major was elementary education.

G: So you switched from business?

H: Yes. Ever since the summer that my grandmother had suggested that I go to [Florida] A & M, [I was committed to teaching]. What happened [was] I enjoyed teaching so much that year [that] when I went to school that summer, instead of taking business courses – I never shall forget – I took a 300 course. I took children's literature, and I have forgotten what the other subject was, but I enjoyed teaching so much that year that I wanted to learn more about the teaching world. So I took children's literature that summer and I cannot [remember what else]. I imagine [I took] some of the basic courses. But I can remember I took that children's literature [course].

G: That course is still [being] offered; it is very popular.

H: Yes, it is good. I loved it! By that time I had a little girl, and I used to take her to the campus with me. I remember one summer we were giving a kind of dramatization of children's lit, and the instructor wanted to see how children would really react. It was the members of the class [who were] acting these little plays, and she just enjoyed it so much that I guess that helped the instructor make an evaluation, [but] I do not know. Anyway, I remember taking her to FAMU [Florida A & M University], and she enjoyed it so much. Now, what was I saying [before]? I am so forgetful sometimes.

G: We are just jumping all over the place here. We were talking about [your] taking a year of leave.

H: Oh, yes. That was the year my son was born, so that is when I got my bachelor's degree. But I did not stop with [a] bachelor's. I continued to go to summer school. For one thing, I always have enjoyed school. School has always been a positive thing to me. So I did not stop going to school because I had my bachelor's [degree], although by that time I had a permanent job in Alachua County. I continued to go to school until I completed the work for my master's degree in elementary education. So I think I must have gotten my master's [degree] about 1971.

G: And that was also in elementary ed?

H: That was [in] elementary ed.

G: From FAMU or from [somewhere else]?

H: Yes, it was from FAMU. Also by that time I had qualified for special education, [to teach] reading [in] grades one through twelve. Then [I] qualified for English, and when I got the English qualification, they cut [the special education in reading] from one through twelve down to one through eighth. You know how the state department does those kind of things.

G: Yes, ma'am, I do.

H: Anyway, I had elementary ed, special education, reading, and then the county during that time would have teachers in workshops, and you would get so many points for the workshops. So during that time instead of just being qualified for slow learners, when I took those points from the county, then the county qualified me for learning disabilities and all sorts of little things: EMR and that sort of thing.

G: What is EMR?

H: Let me think. EMR is emotionally retarded children.

G: I understand. It is an acronym.

H: Yes. The county qualified me for that, so that made me have four things on my certificate.

G: So that was your Alachua County teaching certificate?

H: Yes, and I taught in Alachua County for about twenty-one years.

G: Let us go back to Quincy for a minute.

H: OK.

G: What grades did you teach there?

H: In Quincy, the first year I taught I had second grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade. See, this was a country school, remember, so you did not have [just] one grade. You had several grades, and the principal usually balanced it according to the number of children in each grade. That was the first year I taught. The second year I taught they sent me to a place called Greenshade, and in Greenshade I had a combination of classes, too. [I had] probably fourth and fifth grades, because you had to have so many children. Then the third year they sent me to a school called St. John. Boy, I felt that I was being promoted then, because St. John went to tenth grade, and we had four classrooms. That meant I had [only] two classes that year; I had fifth and sixth grades. So I taught at St. John for two years. By that time the war was over and I was coming back here.

G: So during the war you were teaching in Quincy?

H: Yes.

G: And you were married?

H: Well, my husband and I got married in December 1941. I had been teaching about four months before my husband and I got married. When he came home for Christmas that year, we got married. I had started teaching, and when he came home for Christmas we got married during the Christmas holidays. He went back to the army. The war was not over then, but it was not long, because he was home by June [the year the war ended], I believe. What year did World War II end? In 1943?

G: In 1944. [1945]

H: Well, he was in the army all of that time, and when he came out of the army, that is when we came back to High Springs.

G: Do you remember much from World War II, what it was like, [and] how your life was changed by having so many men overseas? And was it different for black people?

H: In what way?

G: Oh, I guess I know what it was like for white women.

H: Let me tell you. To me there was no difference. I had been dating my husband before he went to the army, so in those days girls were pretty true. They were not like they are [now] or got to be later: out of sight out of mind. So I guess I had this image in my mind. The only thing I can remember about World War II and the way it affected my life was the rationing. You know, during that time you rationed meats and salt and soap powder and that sort of thing, and got them with tickets. You got so many tickets coupons. I have even forgotten where you got the coupons.

G: Did white people also get those coupons?

H: Yes! Everybody got these [coupons].

G: Were they equitably given to people?

H: I think so. Because what happened was the government was saving the best of everything for the soldiers, see, so you got so many stamps a month that you

could use for meat. Now, you could use it all up one weekend, or you could scatter it through the four weeks. You could use it anyway you saw fit, but you did not get any more. Oh, and gas was also rationed, gas for the car. But during that time I did not have a car, so the gas [rationing] did not bother me.

But for the soap powder, like Tide and stuff like that, you would get rationing stamps. You got rationing stamps for butter. And even salt [was rationed], because I remember one time a friend of mine came up from Jacksonville, and he was able to get his hands on some extra salt and pepper and brought me some. And that was a luxury. They were not in the stores. It is not that you could not get them. I mean, they were in the stores, but you had to have the tickets in order to get them. If you did not have any tickets, you did not get them. Other than that [I did not suffer] because, as I said, I still had my friends. I was still teaching school. We were still functioning, you know. During those years I was always transferring between home and the university. By that time, [Florida] A & M was a university.

Oh, another difference I saw was in traveling on buses. You know they always wanted black people in the back of the bus, and this one thing stood out in my mind more than anything. I remember one night this same principal, my very first principal, and I were going from Quincy to Tallahassee, and there were a lot of men on the bus, black and white. Some of them were soldiers. The seats were just filled with people, and we were standing in the aisle. The bus man just kept very rudely saying: "Y'all stand back. Get back! Get back!" So I never shall forget my principal said this. She said: "Can't some of those men go back there in the back? I do not want to. We are afraid to go back there in the back with all those men." See, it was just a lot of soldiers, you know. So the bus man was nice. He said, "Yes, they can get back." So he had the men to move near the back, and the women were standing near the front. I never shall forget that, because that was the first one of those kind of situations I had encountered. But just living I really did not see any difference, unless you point out a specific thing.

G: Well, that is one of the things. I have been doing some reading in preparation for this interview, [and] I saw that sometimes the school years were much shorter at the black schools because there was not the funding to keep the schools open. When you taught, were your school years shorter than those of the white schools?

H: I do not know whether they were shorter than the white schools. In my recollection everybody used to get out in May, white and black. We used to get out of school in May. So [staying in school until] June was something that happened later on. And [starting the school year in] August was something that happened later on. School used to open in September, and it closed in May.

G: Did the black schools get the same kind of resources that the white schools got: books, microscopes, learning materials?

H: Listen! After I got older is when I got conscious of all that kind of stuff. When I was in school myself, we did not know the difference. We just got books, and we thought they were just books.

I never shall forget when my brother was in seventh grade he had to buy his books. They were not free like they are now, and I remember my mother had to pay \$7.01 for his books. [They were] brand new. And the next year I used his seventh grade books. He was in eighth grade, and he had to pay \$8.01 for his books. You had to buy your own books once you left sixth grade. Now, whether that was the same practice among whites schools I really do not know. I do not know the difference. I thought that is the way it was supposed to be.

Then when he got in ninth grade, she [my mother] had to buy his books, and I have forgotten how much they cost that year. But, then, that is the year we transferred here. He was [in] ninth [grade]; I was [in] eighth. So we brought our books with us, and so far as I can remember they were using the same kind of books we had bought. Whether those books were new editions and that sort of things, see, I was not conscious of it then.

G: Well, I have a friend in Gainesville who is black, and [he] went from Lincoln [High School] to Gainesville High [School]. He said: "My goodness! I could not believe all of the things we did not have."

H: In Quincy it was every girl's ideal to reach seventh grade so you could take home economics. That was the most appealing thing at the school. You know, you would be in the home ec room, and you wanted to be there. You thought that is what it was about. I do not know what the special thing for boys was, but the boys seemed to enjoy a good social life. But on up [in] high school, like [when] you get in ninth grade, then they started playing basketball, [as] I remember. They played a little football, but football was not the thing like it is now. Football was something just coming in. But they played basketball, because I can remember as little girls we would be so glad when the big girls were not on the court so we could get out there and play basketball. But by the time the high school years came around, we were down here [at Douglas]. And, of course, this school was a much smaller school than what we had been accustomed to. We just took it all in stride. [Douglas] did not have a home economics department over here. I never shall forget. The home economics department was in what had been built for a cloakroom. It was a cloakroom. [The school] did not have any football team at all, but they did have a basketball team. But I can remember so well that they did not have any basketball uniforms. And we

could not understand that at first, why they did not have any basketball uniforms.  
G: That can mean a lot to a young person.

H: Yes, to a young person [it would mean a lot], but having been used to seeing all these things, we could not understand why it was not [the same] here in High Springs.

G: This was a considerably smaller town?

H: High Springs was just about the size then as it is now. During the years it has grown a little bit, but I am thinking it is closing back up again to just about the size town it was when we first came here. The railroad shop was here when we first came here, so that probably made a difference in the number of people who were living here. But they had a good basketball team.

The only time we went to the white school was at night when we got ready to play basketball, because the black court did not have lights on it. When you played a night game in High Springs, you had to play it over at the white school. I can remember that.

G: And the white school was High Springs High?

H: Right. Right uptown there.

G: The same building?

H: The same building and everything.

G: It is now abandoned. [It is located] right behind city hall.

H: Right. And you got to go there to play the game. I guess we thought that was thrilling because we had never been to a white school before. Not because we saw white students there, because at night there would not be any white people there. I imagine they had the janitor or somebody looking out [for the place].

G: I understand.

H: But we played all our night games over there until they finally put lights on the court at the black school, old Douglas [High School].

G: [Douglas] was built, I think, in 1930. Was the school torn down, or is that the same block building that sits there?

H: The school has been torn down. Only one piece of it is left, and that [part of the

building] was added much, much later. They added three elementary school rooms and a dining room to Douglas. What is left standing up there now is the walkway from the old school and the dining room. That was left standing.

G: So it was considerably bigger?

H: Oh, yes.

G: Well, I went by there and wondered, "My goodness. This is so small."

H: That is just the dining room [that is standing] now, because they tore the other building down. In later years, they added a great library up there. It is the same brick building that is out on the [Spring Hill] Middle School campus now. But it is not the library now; it is one of the buildings for class out there. They moved the brick building because it was practically new when integration came about, so they just moved the whole building. But they did not pick up the dining room, so now it is what High Springs uses as a day care center.

G: Yes, that is the Dr. Martin Luther King Day Care Center.

H: Right. That was the dining room. And that little walkway was the walkway coming from the main building going to the dining room.

G: Do you recollect when Douglas was torn down?

H: I will tell you only to say this: It was right after integration, and I think integration took place in 1970 and 1971--along in those years. But the reason they had to tear it down, [and] I am ashamed to say this, but black people--[and] I know black people did this – demolished that building so badly until it was just an eyesore in the community. I remember my brother came here once, and he almost cried. He said, "What happened to the schoolhouse?" Well, it was because the school had deteriorated so [much] – with the help of people – until they just really had to move it out. They tore the building up! Now, that is the only thing that really hurt me.

G: Why do you suppose people did that?

H: [They were] destructive. I think that it was anger and misunderstanding when integration came about. And ignorance, too. That would have to play a part, because nobody with any good common sense would have torn a building like that down. We could have been using that building now for things that we have to use the civic center for. I remember one or two years [when] they had a convention up there. And then for a few summers – I do not know how many summers it was – they had summer recreation before the schools had a regular

recreation program. But it was during that time and a little later on when the school was misused, because the three new rooms that had been added on [were severely damaged]. I can just remember so much deterioration. It looked like somebody had swung up on a fan like that and just pulled it down.

G: [They would] tear the blades off.

H: The little new rooms had the little built-in cabinets with little sinks where the children could wash their hands. I went in the rooms, and the pipes were just torn from the walls. You know, that sort of destruction. It went on and on and on until they just really had to tear it down. I do not think they would have torn it down [otherwise].

G: I know it was a high school, but did it also teach middle school and elementary school students?

H: It was everything from first grade to twelfth grade.

G: That is what I thought.

H: There was no kindergarten there then.

G: Yes, that is a recent thing, kindergarten. I felt funny when I had to send my son off when he was only five.

H: I never shall forget the first graduating class they had at Douglas was three people.

G: What year was that?

H: I cannot remember the year.

G: I guess in the 1930s.

H: Probably in the late 1930s, about 1936 or 1937 or somewhere along in there. I remember my graduating class was [in] 1941, and we had fifteen, and that was the biggest class that had ever graduated. We felt really special, you know, because it was fifteen. But the very first graduating class was three people.

G: I think the first graduating class from the University of Florida was only a half a dozen.

H: Yes.

G: When you taught at Douglas, what grades did you teach?

G: Well, when I taught at Douglas I taught fourth grade and fifth grade. I taught fourth grade some, and I taught fifth grade some. And what made me conscious of this was [something] my own child told me [when] we were talking about school one day. My son [and] his little cousin said: "You taught us two years. You taught us in fourth grade, and then we had to look at you again in fifth grade." [laughter] So most of my work was in fifth grade, but I had taught fourth grade too. Those were my two grades.

G: That is a fun age.

H: Yes. He told me, see, because he and my son were mischievous. We did not have delinquents like we have now, but we always have had mischievous children. So I had kind of watched my son from the time he was in primary school, and I would say to myself – I did not voice it to anybody – "You know, it looks like to me they are not working enough." It just looked like they were just having too much fun. That is the way it seemed to me. And his teachers would tell me – because I would ask them very often – "Oh, he is doing fine. He is doing just fine in his classes." I was saying to myself, I will find out when he gets in fourth grade. That is what I was saying to myself.

But like they said, he was doing very well. There were three little boys – two of the boys are good friends today, and this third little boy was his cousin – and they would always get together as a little team and get all of the class work worked out together. The other little boy was a good math kid, my son seems to have been good in the language arts department, [and] the other little boy (which I did not know at the time) could not see well. He had to get glasses later on in junior high school. But those three would always have their work done. But they just seemed like they were just doing it so easy [that] I thought they were not doing anything. That is what was happening, see, they made a little team of it. So they got along very well.

My son was the first black child from Mebane [Middle School in Alachua], because when the schools integrated what they did was send everybody for seventh grade and eighth grade down to Mebane, and then in ninth grade you came back to Santa Fe [High School]. Well, when they sent him down here – I think he was [in] eighth grade the year they integrated, or something like that – he did not like Mebane. He wanted to go to Santa Fe. Well, integration was new then, and we all had our hang-ups about integration.

G: Yes, it was scary!

H: Right. And I really did not want him to go. I really did not want him to go to Santa Fe. But he said: "Mom, I want to go. I want to go to Santa Fe." He just

did not like Mebane. He did not seem to care for the teachers, he did not seem to care for the atmosphere, he just did not like anything about it.

G: Was that the first time he had studied with white students?

H: When he went to Santa Fe.

G: So Mebane was an all-black school?

H: It was an all-black school.

G: OK.

H: See, Mebane used to be a high school, too.

G: Oh, I did not know that. All right.

H: So his dad and I really tried to talk him out of it, to tell the truth, and I said, "OK, you want to go to Santa Fe High School." And we tried to show him all the advantages and disadvantages. I said, "But remember, now, if you go to Santa Fe High School, you are not going to be able to come back and tell us at the end of the semester that you want to leave Santa Fe High School, because we are not going to keep changing schools." We were really telling him that to discourage him. So he said, "Well, I guess I will go on to Mebane." But it did not discourage him, but we held to that. "If you go to Santa Fe, you are going to have to stick with Santa Fe." So he stuck with Santa Fe until he graduated from high school.

G: When did he graduate?

H: I believe it was 1971.

G: He is about my age.

H: I am getting forgetful.

G: Well, that is [one thing] I was going to ask you: your children's names and when they were born.

H: I can tell you that. Ronald Kent Wilson was born October 30, 1954. Adelma Wilson was born September 21, 1957.

G: Well, they are both my age.

H: They both graduated from Santa Fe, and they both graduated from the University of Florida.

G: You were saying that your daughter graduated from Florida.

H: Florida A & M. She got her bachelor's and master's [degrees] from [Florida] A & M University. She got her bachelor's in speech therapy, and she got her master's in counseling. She is counseling in Broward County. My son went into the army, but he is retired now. He is a retired army captain. He developed multiple sclerosis; that is why he retired. He almost fainted when the 82d Division went to Saudi Arabia back in August [1991], because that was his division also. My daughter – the youngest one, Adelma – lives in Tampa. She is a nurse. That is it, [except for] my grandchildren. I am on my grandchildren now. This is my newest little grandbaby right there. [Shows photograph of her grandchild.]

G: [She is] beautiful!

H: And this is Adelma when she was a baby. [Shows another photograph.]

G: This is Adelma and this is her baby? [Refers to the two photographs.]

H: Yes.

G: Boy, you look like your mama!

H: She sure [does].

G: What is the baby's name?

H: The baby's name is Sarah.

G: What a happy looking baby!

H: And this is my granddaughter that I keep now. [Shows another photograph.] She made her debut Saturday night.

G: Here in High Springs?

H: In Gainesville [at] the Le filles Club. [Shows another photograph.]

G: Oh, my! Isn't that nice? A cotillion. Aren't they beautiful? Look at that dress!

H: I am sorry the man did not have flashes in his [camera] because it made them

[dark].

G: Did you go?

H: Yes, I went. That is Sarah also. [Another photo.] The red dress is Christmastime, I remember that. I had never put them [the photographs] up. And this is sometime before Christmas. [Another picture.] You can tell she is a little younger on this one than she is on that one. [Another photograph.]

So I am working on my grandchildren now, and the little granddaughter that I keep, her name is Veronica. She has already been accepted at Auburn University for next year, and she is going to major in engineering.

G: Good for her! I like to see women going into non-traditional fields.

H: Yes. She has a 3.85 grade-point average.

G: You must be proud of your children and your grandchildren.

H: I am very proud of them. Very proud of them!

G: Let us get back to Douglas. You were teaching there, and then around 1970 Douglas was torn down and High Springs [Elementary] was forced to integrate. I guess because they had not [integrated previously]. Gainesville integrated in the mid 1960s, and the NAACP came and was very helpful to the black community in doing that and testing the neighborhood school theory. I do not guess that [integration] happened up here, and the newspaper, the *High Springs Herald*, does not say much at all.

H: [That is] because we had such a smooth integration. It was really smooth. When they first moved the high school from Douglas, they let it stay a middle school. I guess it was a middle school not very long. But, you see, the elementary people had all transferred over to High Springs Elementary, and the middle school people who were teaching at Douglas had gone to the various middle schools. The few high school teachers had gone on to the high schools. As I said, Mebane was a high school at that time. Mebane changed [to a middle school].

G: So [to] what school did you [transfer]?

H: I was transferred to High Springs Elementary, and I taught there until I retired in 1981.

G: Oh, I wish you were still there.

H: Well, I have subbed. I never stopped subbing until last year. I began to slack off some because I could feel myself getting to the age [that] I could not keep up with the children.

G: Yes, they are little live wires.

H: Of course, when you are subbing, they will call you to any school if you will go, but I had chosen to just do my work in High Springs. I worked at the middle school and the elementary school because it was easier on my nerves. I did not like fighting that traffic trying to get to Gainesville. When I first retired, I used to go to Gainesville quite a bit, but I stopped that. So last year I kind of slacked off from going to school, and this school term I did not even tell them I was going to work at all. I did not sign any card. Even so, I got three or four calls. But then when I kind of spread the word that I was not subbing this year, then they stopped calling. You see, you have to supervise children, and I can understand that. They need supervising. If the little children need to go to a music class, the teacher needs to supervise them – walk with them. If they need to go to the library, the same thing. If they go to any extracurricular thing – wherever they go – you are supposed to supervise them, and I understand that. But being my age, I had begun to have trouble with my legs, and I just could not take the walking. That is a big campus out there. So rather than not be able to do what I was supposed to do, I chose to just stop. It was about time to stop anyway. I had [been] retired since 1981. But I taught an adult class, and this is going to be the last year that I am going to teach the adult class. When class closes in June or July, then I am going to leave that to somebody younger, because I really do not feel like [continuing].

G: So you are presently teaching a nighttime course?

H: Yes.

G: In what area?

H: Basic education for adults: anything from "can't read" to about fifth-grade level. Whatever it takes to satisfy their needs. So I have been doing that, but I think this is the last year I am going to do that. I am going to be really retired next year.

G: Well, in 1970 I guess you went from Douglas with some other teachers to High Springs Elementary. How many black teachers were there?

H: I will tell you what. There was Miss Gadsen, Miss Spring, Miss Bryant, Mrs. Banks. In fact, to make a long story short, every elementary teacher that was there went over to the elementary school except one. And all the middle school

teachers that were over here went to the middle school.

G: How did you feel about that?

H: Well, I will tell you. I did not feel too bad about it because I have never doubted my ability to teach, and I have always loved teaching. But I never shall forget this experience. My principal, which at that time I did not know she was going to be my principal, [came to me]. We had not heard who the principal of the new elementary school was going to be. We knew Mr. Diedeman was going to the middle school, but we did not know who was going to the elementary school. But at that time Mrs. Doris Richardson [who was later appointed principal at High Springs Elementary] was functioning as a curriculum specialist at Douglas. She just came to me one day – you know, when anything is new you hear all kinds of rumors – and she asked me, "Hattie, how do you feel about integration?" I said: "I really do not know. I do not care so much about integration. I am not worried about going to school and doing a good job at school because I know I am a good teacher. But what bothers me most of all [is] I have two little children at home, and I heard that wherever the superintendent sends you you would have to go or you would lose your job. I said, "I cannot afford to lose my job." By that time I was a widow, see, and I said, "I have to work." I also said: "Just suppose he decided to send me to Hawthorne. I have my home here in High Springs. That means one of two things: I either have to be on the road all of the time--I would have to get my children up way before day to get to Hawthorne [and] to school by 8:00--or [else] I [will] have to sell my home here and buy me another home in Hawthorne, because I cannot not afford to just go like that every day." So she said: "I do not think the superintendent would do that. I think he is a very reasonable man, and I believe what he is going to try to do is put everybody as near home as he can. He is going to try to make it convenient for everybody." That consoled me, but that is all she told me, see. That is all she told me.

So then when schools integrated and we all went over there, I decided she was getting my feeling about integration then. But I had no feelings about going to the white school. All I was thinking about was my little children. So we all went right on over there [High Springs Elementary] with her, and we all got along fine, even to the day I retired. We got along just fine.

G: So there was not any big shock?

H: [There] might have been a few new things that we had not been used to, but [there was] no big shock, no big shake up, nothing like that. School just went on smoothly because, as I said, Mrs. Richardson had been our curriculum specialist for maybe two or three years. Then she was appointed principal over there [High Springs Elementary]; she was the principal. So we had no major problems integrating because she already knew all of us.

- G: And the parents of the children seemed to [go along]?
- H: So far as I know. You know they were curious at first. White people were curious at first because they did not know anything about us. I do not know what they really thought about us, but I guess they figured we would not be able to teach their children, so they had to go a little slow to see what was going on. We would be glad to hear a rumor back. I have had white parents say to me, "My little girl (or "my little boy," whatever) said, 'Oh, Mom, she is a nice teacher!'" But that was not quite what you needed to hear, either. It is one thing to be nice, but what you wanted to hear is "she is good teacher!" That is what I wanted to hear.
- G: Yes. "Mommy, Mommy, look what I have learned!"
- H: Yes, that sort of thing. So you did not quite hear that maybe the first semester you were over there, but then by the next year they had begun to see us as people, too. You know, we were just people. And then you started getting the kind of feedback that you wanted. Yes, you wanted to be nice, but you wanted to be more than just nice. [At least] I did.
- G: Did the High Springs community start changing?
- H: In what way?
- G: Since, at last, black and white people were working together in the same environment. Because this is a small town, and everybody knows everybody here.
- H: And I think that is just why they got along.
- G: Did the white people and the black people start getting along more or knowing more about each other?
- H: Well, in school I would have to say yes. In just regular community life I really could not answer that question.
- G: Well, things like the Priest Theater. Was that off limits for black people?
- H: No, no, no! When I first came here I never shall forget we just thought High Springs was the most wonderful place in the world. We could go to the movies for eleven cents. But they [blacks] did go upstairs, which was no big thing to us. You know, children do not think about things.
- G: Yes, you do not know.

H: No. We had always gone upstairs to the movies, except when you went to a black theater. Now, when we went to a black theater there was only one story. So we had to go upstairs in [the] Priest [Theater]. So what! Eleven cents, you know. You could get eleven cents out of your allowance. Mama used to give you a quarter a week. You could go to the show once a week with eleven cents, and that is what we did. Boy, we just got to go to the movies, and we thought that was something. Number one, my grandmother would not have permitted us to go to the show no [more than] once or twice a week, whether you had the eleven cents or not. That was just their morals. We would probably go once a week or maybe once a month or once every two weeks or once when a special movie came on, but then my mother let us go *every week* with our eleven cents. You could not tell us [there was anything bad happening]. Boy, we thought that was just great.

But we did go upstairs, and they [blacks] went upstairs for years until that theater closed. You know, the theater closed, and here a few years ago somebody remodeled it, and I think everybody goes anywhere he wants to go now. But a lot of kids still go upstairs. A lot of kids still go upstairs, [especially] teenagers.

G: Well, the kids are always wanting to get away from the adults.

H: Right. I remember the last time I went to the theater. I think I went to go see this movie *Noah's Ark*. So I decided I would go up to the theater to see it. I had not been up there in years, and I went up there to see it. But it was so noisy! Nobody goes but teenagers; you did not see many adults going to the movie. And they [the teenagers] made so much noise until the theater manager came and apologized to me. She said, "Miss Wilson" – I was a Wilson then – "you can come back anytime you want to [for] free." Because I left before the movie was over. See, the teenagers had it. They are not looking at the movies anyway. They are not looking at those movies. They are just there to meet in little gangs and to pet and whatever.

G: Do what teenagers do.

H: Right. And they could care less if you heard the movie. So I did go back one night. I said I wanted to see this movie, so I waited until the last show. I think the last show started maybe about 9:30, and I figured maybe all the teenagers had gone to the first show, and I went back up there to see the movie. Well, I have not been back since. I have not been there since they have remodeled it and everything. I do not know how it looks in there now. [Maybe] I have been in there one time, but I am not sure.

G: I was in there about a year ago. It is nice looking. It still had that old movie

theater feel to it. It was nice.

H: I do not even go to movies much anymore for that reason. I went to the movie last Monday because I wanted to see one of the so-called good movies of the year: *The Long Walk Home*. [I went] just last Monday. But I do not even go to movies that much, maybe four times a year, because movies do not appeal to me anymore.

G: And it cost so much to go, too. You can go down to Pick of the Flicks and for fifty cents rent a movie.

H: Yes. But I just do not have that desire to go anymore. I know a lot of things contribute to that. My age may be one [thing], and the fact that I do not like to drive at night may be another. [There are] just several things. It just does not appeal like it appealed when I was going to movies up here for eleven cents.

G: Prior to integration, where did the black community shop for clothes and food?

H: Uptown.

G: In Gainesville it was like two different worlds.

H: Well, you see, we only had one world here.

G: OK. This is interesting.

H: You understand? This is why I think you did not have a lot of trouble about the schools because you only had one high school. Everybody shopped uptown. And I am really prone to think that maybe 60 percent-plus of the trading came from black people. And I am almost willing to say that that is why the white people of this community did not want [Interstate Highway] 75 to come through High Springs. See, when they first started working on [Interstate] 75, it was supposed to have come through High Springs, right through High Springs out by the [railroad] shop.

G: I did not know that.

H: Yes. But all black people bought their groceries here, usually on credit. And clothes [were purchased] the same way. That is another thing that I thought was great about High Springs. My grandparents did not buy food on credit. We were fortunate enough [that] my grandparents had their own home. My grandfather grew his own vegetables, and he even sold some vegetables. We did not live in the country, but he had enough space around his yard to grow enough vegetables that he could sell them to the stores. Then he would go out

and cut wood. In other words, he was his own boss man. My grandmother used to do some work in tobacco factories when the factories were open.

G: This was in St. Petersburg?

H: No, this was in Quincy. My grandparents lived in Quincy. My mother was a maid, [or] what they call a maid. That is one of her pictures up there. One of her mistresses painted [a portrait of] her in 1929 when she was working in Connecticut that summer. That is a hand-painted picture of my mother.

G: It is pretty.

H: I thought it was pretty.

G: She is a very striking woman.

H: Yes. The only thing I kind of regret [was] I sent it to Santa Fe when my youngest daughter was in high school. The art teacher just wanted to brush it up so bad, and she made over the eyes a little dark, but it did not ruin the picture. What were we talking about?

G: Your grandparents. Your grandfather had a vegetable garden. It [commerce] was apparently different [in High Springs].

H: Oh, about the trading up here. All black people traded at the grocery stores uptown, and they charged their groceries. You know, that was a new experience. My mother would send us to the store sometimes and say, "Get this and get this and get this, and have them charge it to George Jones."

G: And then you would settle the account once a month or something?

H: About once every two weeks. See, this was a railroad town, so most everybody here was connected with the railroad [in] one way or the other. My stepfather was a fireman. They got paid every two weeks. So every two weeks you went to the store [and] paid your bill. If you did not pay it in full, you paid on your bill, and that bill was continued until the next month. The same thing [was true] with the department store. People bought their clothes, and they paid some on it, and then next time they paid another thing. And the thing that appealed to me so [was] when you went to the grocery store to pay your bill – at this particular store that my parents traded in – you got a big bag of candy. Well, you know I was about in the candy stage during that time, so that was fun to me. Just go in the store and say, "Charge [it.]" I had never said charge it before in my life. I did not know what "charge it" meant, so that was new.

All these new things were happening in High Springs, and I just loved High Springs. So I did not mind staying here after I got married. I had my brother say to me several times: "What do you see up there? How can you stand these woods? What do you see?" I said: "Well, my husband is here, and we are both working here. Our children were born here." So I said: "This is just like the rest of the world. I can go to St. Petersburg when I get ready, or I can go to Quincy when I get ready." But to me, High Springs was home. They used to wonder how did I get hitched, how did I get caught up here. The way he was thinking looked like it was something I could not get out of. But I stayed [of my own free will].

G: He was looking out for you. He was making sure you were happy.

H: Right. But I enjoyed it.

G: What do you remember of the railroads? Your father-in-law was a fireman.

H: My stepfather was a fireman.

G: With the railroad?

H: With the railroad. With the Atlantic Coastline. See, the Atlantic Coastline used to have a shop here in town.

G: Oh, they had a mess of shops and a roundhouse.

H: They have moved the shops from High Springs. They moved part of it to Jacksonville and the other part to Waycross, Georgia. But during my stepfather's lifetime, oh, this town was full of people! That was why, because a lot of them were railroad people coming in. I do not think we have as many people now as we did when all those railroad people were living here. And almost every other man was connected with the railroad shop in one way or another.

G: Do you remember anything about the railroad that sticks out in your mind?

H: No, I do not really know anything about the railroad business. All I knew was that my stepfather was a fireman. And I remember this. We had a telephone when we first came to High Springs because a fireman had to always have a telephone in his house. Because, see, they [would] call him up when it was time for them to go out on a run.

G: Your stepfather lived with you at this time?

H: Yes, he and my mother. What I am trying to think [of was] you always had to call the operator. If I wanted to call you, I would have to call the operator and say, "Please give me Patty's house." I do not know whether they even had numbers then. I think they just went by names. I do not remember them having numbers. But we had a telephone for that reason. When the shop called you [and wanted you] to go out, they had to have some way to contact you. And when they say "go out," that means go to another city. Sometimes they would be going to Waycross; sometimes they would be going to Jacksonville, sometimes Tampa, sometimes St. Petersburg. I can even remember when my stepfather and my mother were dating, but I did not know what dating was. You understand?

G: Yes.

H: We were living in St. Petersburg. We were very small, and my father had gone. And I can remember this man coming to our house several times, but I just thought he was a friend. I did not know they were dating. I did not know. See, people were not as bold in front of their children as they are now.

But I do remember this: My mother used to let us play "in her hair" a lot, for lack of a better word, and I remember this particular night she had had it parted down the middle. My brother was on one side, and I was on the other. Boy, we were just platting, and we were trying to out-plat each other. So this man came and knocked on our door. As soon as she could ascertain who he was, she said, "Just a minute." I can remember that. And she went into her bedroom and took all of those things we had put on her hair loose. I can remember that, so that is why I say he probably was dating her then. They probably dated.

G: Yes, there she was [and] you all had mussed her hair.

H: Oh, yes. We were just styling it, and I guess she was just letting us do it. So that is all [I can remember]. I do not remember anything about the railroad business itself.

G: I see you have a beautiful piano here.

H: Oh, thank you.

G: Do you play piano?

H: Well, a little. I bought that when my children were little because I wanted them to take music, too. My mother had me taking music. In my family it looked like it was understood that you were going to take some piano music whether you were a boy or a girl. So my brother and I took piano lessons. When we were

going [to school], they did not call it private school then, but I can remember when we were very small we had private school run by people in the neighborhood. You did not hear the word day care center, but some people ran a school. Now, they actually taught school work, and they taught piano. And they kept you until your mother came home [from work].

I can remember our teacher lived in our neighborhood, so my mother did not have to come to school and get us everyday. She just knew to send us home about whatever time that was. And we took piano lessons. So when I had children, it just was a common thing.

G: Did they take lessons?

H: Yes, they took lessons.

G: Did you teach them?

H: No, I had other teachers to teach them. My brother took piano lessons, and my son took piano lessons. He is the only one who never grasped the concept at all. He is the one that still has to start at the bottom of the piano and work up until he finds middle C. But both of my girls play pretty well, and I play a little bit. I never did play classical music at all.

G: So you still play a little?

H: I still play a little bit, maybe for Sunday school and like that.

G: What church do you go to?

H: Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church.

G: Right here.

H: Right here in High Springs.

G: That is a couple of blocks from here.

H: Yes, the stone church. So that is why we have a piano. I tried to get my little granddaughter, the one I showed you [who] lives with me, [to learn the piano]. So I gave her music because I wanted her to grow up and be the piano star of the family, but she did not care too much for it either. She took music about two years, and she was beginning to get slack with her practice. [She was] doing well, really well. Better than any of my children or I had done because she had a good teacher. Mrs. Welch in Alachua was teaching her.

G: What was her first name?

H: Thelma. See, she had her degree in music, and she understood the mood. You know, she was just a good teacher. So she [my granddaughter] was getting slack, [and] I asked her one day [when] we were talking: "Now, tell me. Are you really interested in taking music, or are you not interested? Because if you are really not interested, Granny would like for you to tell her, and we would not have to waste all of this time and all this money." [I] thought I was "psychoing" her around to my side. She said: "Granny, I will tell you the truth. I really do not want to take music." [laughter] So that was the end of that. I said she has told me now! I asked her [and] she told me, so I am not going to see it.

So she surprised me here a week or two ago. They were having a talent show down at Santa Fe, and she said, "I was going to play, but something happened." I said, "Well, what were you going to play?" She said, "I had decided I was going to play 'Let There Be Peace On Earth.'" She was taught well, and if she had continued taking music she would have been the musician that I had hoped my children would have been. But she just did not want to take it, so I did not insist.

But what I started to say about the private school [was that] I can remember when we went to school for twenty-five cents a week, and it was fifty cents a week if we took music. So we went to this school in the neighborhood. We lived about two blocks from the school, and this teacher knew what time to send us home. She knew what time my mother would be home in the afternoon, so we would have to stay there until that time.

I did not go to public school until I was [in] second grade because there were a lot of these little private schools. She was not the only one, but I imagine a lot of children about my age in St. Petersburg went to private schools because there were a lot of them.

By the way, I thought about that this morning. That was the most contact I had with white people, too. White people used to come to our church all the time.

G: This was in St. Petersburg?

H: St. Petersburg. It was Bethel Metropolitan Church. And they would be tourists. I know that now since I have grown up. They would come South, and our church would be packed with white people. Evidently, they enjoyed the services, because being a child I did not know why they were coming.

G: That is unusual.

H: Right. They used to just crowd the church out.

G: Because even now there is very much a separation in Gainesville and everywhere you go.

H: There would be a lot of white people.

G: We are all worshipping the same God. We just do it in separate churches.

H: But I think most of them were tourists. You know about how the tourists always come down in the wintertime? They probably did not feel the same about black people as the southern white people did, maybe, because they would just keep our church crowded all the time. I can remember that. Believe it or not, my first conception of white people was not the color of skin. [Do] you know what I used to think white people were?

G: Tell me.

H: I knew you would be interested. My mother used to take us downtown on Central [Avenue] in St. Petersburg. That is when Central was central. Like all the cities, Central is not central anymore. It is just dead. But down on Central was the main street, and I would see all these people sitting out on benches downtown. And [they would be] walking. See, that was the business section. It seemed to me in my mind they would all have on white clothes. That is the conception [perception] I had, that all these people would have on white clothes. Even the men. They would have on their white knickerbockers.

G: When they came to church?

H: No, no, no. This was down on the street. Just on the street.

G: OK. At the bus stop.

H: No, no, no! Downtown on Central Avenue in St. Petersburg. They would be near the bay, and I imagine they were getting sun or whatever. I do not know what they were doing, but it just seemed to me in my young mind that all these people had on white clothes. And I thought that is what they meant when they said "white people." [laughter]

G: [You thought] it had more to do with what they were wearing.

H: Yes, I thought it had more to do with what they were wearing than the color of their skin. It was later when I got to know the difference in the color of the skin. But I really thought that [they were called white people] because they just all

[would] be dressed in white. They probably were not dressed in white, but that is what I thought.

G: When you are children it is funny the things that stick in your mind.

H: Yes.

G: Your church is one of the oldest churches in this community. Do you know much about its history? Is it an important part of your life?

H: What I gave you?

G: Yes.

H: That is what I know about it. But I started attending Sunday school there when I came here at fourteen. I attended that church until I left to go away, so the years that I was away, naturally, I was not here at the church. But when I came back here to live, I joined that church, and it has been my church home ever since. My mother was a Baptist. Now, my grandparents on my father's side were African Methodists, so for five years of our lives, while we lived with them, we went to the African Methodist [Episcopal] church. Then when I got to be of age, when I started teaching in Quincy, I joined the Missionary Baptist church. So when I came here [to High Springs] I went to the Missionary Baptist church. But my most vivid religious experiences were in that A.M.E. church, the African Methodist [Episcopal] church.

G: And that was when you were a child?

H: Yes, in Quincy. From nine to fourteen [years old].

G: Are there women's organizations in your church?

H: Yes. In my particular church they have missionary societies.

G: And what do they do?

H: They are supposed to be the ladies that look out for the care of the needy in the community. [They] visit the sick, and help the sick and that sort of thing. And they also play a pertinent part in raising moneys to send overseas for missionary purposes. That is what they are supposed to be doing.

G: But their missionary work also encompasses the community as well?

H: [It is] supposed to, yes.

G: [In] so many churches when they have a mission it is something overseas.

H: Yes. Well, most of the main part is overseas in our church, because that is what the Missionary Baptist Church kind of stands for. So they contribute every year, and the contributions usually go overseas for some mission to Christianize so-called un-Christian people and that sort of thing. But they also have this little responsibility at home, which does not always turn out to be exactly what it should be. But they do manage to remember families when they have a crisis like death or serious illness or something like that. That is the only women's organization [that] we have in Mt. Olive Baptist Church that I know of. Every other organization is [made up from] men and women. You know, the missionary [society] is about the only one I know. But I am not a regular member of missionary society. I attend sometimes and I support it. The reason I do not consider myself a regular member [is] I do not attend the meetings or the business meetings, and I do not participate in some of the activities. But if you are a Missionary Baptist, you are automatically supposed to be a missionary.

G: I understand. So does Mt. Olive believe in a literal translation of the Bible?

H: Or what? Variations?

G: How does the Old Testament [fit in]? Is that an important [aspect]?

H: We believe in the Old and New Testament, and we do have a covenant in our church that we go by. It is all Biblical. We are not into this seed-planting faith. You know, you plant your seed of faith and it grows, and [something like] you give \$100 and you get back \$1,000. We are not into that, per se, but we do go mostly by the Bible. We baptize.

G: You mentioned a Mr. Diedeman earlier. He was, I understand, a black principal?

H: No. Mr. Diedeman was the white principal at the white high school before integration. Then when integration came he had to come over here and be the principal of the black and white middle school, because they broke it [high school] up.

G: What was his first name?

H: I really cannot think of Mr. Diedeman's first name, but I will tell you what the kids used to call him – black and white. They loved him, [and] his name was "Pop." Most all kids just called him Pop.

G: He is still around, is he not?

H: He is still around. He just retired last year or the year before that.

G: That is what Martha Roberts was telling me.

H: And the kids were just crazy about him. Yes, sir!

G: Are there any stories, or [other] things about your life [that] we have not covered? [Are there] experiences that you want to share?

H: Well, it is hard to think right now. I just started to add [something] with Mr. Diedeman and my youngest daughter.

G: Well, let us go back to Mr. Diedeman.

H: He seemed to have cared a lot for her. She was a smart girl in school, and in high school she was lead majorette. They just seemed to have cared a lot for her. I remember he was talking with me one day. Everytime he sees me he asks about Adelma. But he told me one time when we were talking, before I retired, "Now, that is one young lady [that] if she wanted to come to my school tomorrow, she would get a job." I thought that was most complimentary for him to say [that]. There was another principal standing up there too. He said the same thing, but I have forgotten who he was. But I know Mr. Diedeman said that. I think he genuinely meant it, because he still remembers her. When he meets me on the street now he will want to know how Adelma is doing. Adelma finished teaching at the University of Florida. [She] got an elementary [education] degree, but she had also gotten an A.A. degree from Santa Fe Community College for nursing. So when she got out, though she had a choice of both things, she seemed to prefer nursing.

G: She is down in Tampa?

H: Yes, she stuck with nursing. She is a nurse. I think that was her senior year. They all thought she was going to teach, but she did not teach.

G: She surprised everybody. How might Essie Gasset's experiences as a teacher have been different from yours? I am going to be doing the same thing with her when she gets back from New York and settles down.

H: Well, Essie is a younger teacher than I am, so I cannot tell, and I do not know what her outside interests were. Now, when I was in school, some of my activities were [to] act as librarian. We did not have a librarian at the black school, so I acted as librarian. I taught English for a while, but I was certified to

do that. I taught music for a little while, but it was not instrumental; it was vocal music. I taught vocal music. I taught social studies. This is aside from my main fifth-grade class.

My hobby was giving plays. In those days, now, that is how we used to finance our schools. Black teachers gave plays. This is how the children got a chance to express and develop their talents. There was always a play at least once a year from a teacher. The finance you gathered was really what the principal used to supplement his budget. But I used to enjoy doing that. I gave lots of plays that I was very proud of. I remember one time I acted as the school's reporter. I did that for a while. But, see, all this was just extracurricular activity. You did not get paid for this. This was just something you knew you had to do in order to help the school keep moving on.

Now, that was one way we experienced segregation. I do not imagine white teachers had to do that, but black teachers did. I have known the time when we have given plays, had children in the play, and then the parent would come and tell you: "Well, if she is going to get to school [for rehearsal or the performance], you are going to have to come and get her. I am not able to buy her a uniform, a paper dress, [or] whatever to be in the play." So the school had to take that responsibility if they really needed the child.

G: Or wanted to help her.

H: Yes. So you had to take the child, buy his costume, [and] transport him to and from the play. But they did get a chance to develop talents.

G: Those things can be so important to young people.

H: Right. And [they can also] contribute to the financial aid of the school. You know, to this day I believe that is one thing black people miss in the school system, because the children do not get a chance to participate. About the only time the children participate is in a group, like singing.

G: I see that now. There is this curriculum that has been mandated by the county, and there is not a lot of room for individuality nor creative expression.

H: That is right, and I think that is one of the things – there may be others that I cannot think of right at this minute – that parents miss, because they do not get to see their own children in action. The children do not get a chance to develop their talent, so they cannot have an appreciation for these things because they do not know anything about them. They cannot appreciate anything that they do not know anything about.

Another thing black schools used to do when they were segregated [was] we had those times in school when somebody sat down – even though I said earlier we did not have a home economics department – and taught etiquette to the children. You know, different things: how to dress, how to act, how to talk, how to say "excuse me" or "thank you" or something like that. You know, children now do not speak. They step on your toes [and] do not [even] say excuse me. In other words, what they are saying is your toes should not have been there in the first place. That is the way it seems.

G: Yes, I am appalled.

H: Right.

G: They are not being taught.

H: Right. Maybe the male teachers would get in an assembly or something and tell boys what would be acceptable. You did not hear of all of this delinquency and all these kind of problems we are having until integration. There has always been some bad and some good, but it seems that most of the general, massive problems like we have now started with integration. Because [before integration] they had somebody to talk to them. Girls had people to talk to them; boys had people to talk to them. There was this integrated group of boys and girls and they would talk to them in general about how you should act and how you should speak to Ms. Patterson and things you should not let Ms. Patterson see you do or hear you say. And they did not do it. But now they have no respect for anybody. They do not have any respect. They just walk by you. They just do anything.

Your graduating sponsors would get these children in a group and tell them the etiquette of sending invitations or the etiquette of going to the [commencement] exercise and things like that. They do not do that now. Kids will bring you an invitation in their hand and hand it to you, and you know that means "I want you to buy me a present." You buy them a present, which you do not mind at all; you are glad to do that. But some kids never take time to say thank you, and they never, ever write a note. Well, that was taboo even in my day of going to school. You had to know how to treat these kinds of things, and those kinds of things I think black kids are missing out on. They have nobody to train them in these kinds of things.

G: Well, the white kids too. This [kind of behavior] is [typical with] kids, period. It is scary right now.

H: I know, but what I often think about is [that] the average middle-class [white people] and you know the upper class and a lot of what we call the working class,

the lower middle-class white people, have a degree of some kind from college. They have been taught, they have been to college, and they know these things and pass them down to their children. But you would be surprised at the number of black people – though, now, we have a host of intelligence – that do not have this training. So they may not know it to teach their children. If I do not know it, I cannot teach it to my children. I think that plays a big part in it. But I also think black people are getting to the point that they see now the importance of going to school. You know, there has been a time in small towns like High Springs [when] you were looked down on if you went to school because everybody always thought you were trying to elevate yourself above everybody else. So we will just ignore that person [who goes to school]. See, that is not right. Now they are beginning to know the importance of going to school, so more people are sending their children to school.

We were talking about that this week, too. The year my oldest daughter went to college, we had five black children going from High Springs that year. And we were proud because five had never gone before. We would have like one child going this year. Maybe next year nobody went. The year after next there may have been two people. That year we had five, and we thought that was just great. And all five of those children did finish college.

G: Did they come back to High Springs?

H: One of them did, and she taught here for a long time until she got married. Then she moved away. My daughter got married her senior year in college, so she never served in the High Springs community. The other girls [that went to college that year] went to other communities also. But one girl did [stay]; she stayed here and taught. She stayed here until after we integrated to High Springs Elementary. But when she finally decided to get married, then she left.

G: Do you think integration was a good thing or maybe not? Separate but equal was not a true thing – the *Plessy v. Ferguson* [decision]. Separate they were, but equal they were not, and integration was another whole can of worms.

H: I do not have anything against integration. As I said before when I talked with Mrs. Richardson, that is how I felt then, because I thought everybody was for everybody else, and it was just going to be advance, advance, advance. But then after we got into integration [I was somewhat disappointed]. You know, at first at Santa Fe High School we had quite a bit of trouble between the black students and the white students. That bothered me a lot, because I knew if there was trouble between black students and white students, that meant there was going to be trouble between black parents and white parents eventually. So that bothered me.

And I have been fortunate, personally, with my own children. I have not had any trouble with integration, even [with] this little grandchild I am keeping now. I [have] had her since she was [in] first grade. There was more than one black teacher at the school, but I was the black teacher who had a little girl the same age as some of the other white teachers up there now. And those kids started playing together then after school, because they had to stay after school just like my little girl. She has always gotten along with both kinds. But she is an easy person to get along with. Now, I am not saying all children will do that. But I, personally, have not had any trouble with either one of my girls.

A boy told me here about three or four years ago [that] when they first went to Santa Fe they were afraid to get off the bus because they thought the white children were going to fight them. He said, "I never will forget Ronald Kent." He is my son. He said, "He would come out to the bus and say, 'Y'all get off! Nobody is going to bother you.'" And some of them were afraid to get off the bus until Ronald Kent was there. I remember one time they sent Ronald Kent home after a riot, but the principal told me this. He said: "Ms. Wilson, Ronald Kent did not do anything. I will tell you that to your face." But he said, "Do you know why we are sending him home?" I wanted to know why, naturally, you know. He said: "Because I think, or we think, Ronald Kent directs all of this that is going on. He sits back and tells people what to do." He was the leader, so to speak. And he said, "We think if we send Ronald home two or three days, they will not have a leader, and they will know where to go." Now, how he got that impression, I do not know. But that is what he told me. And he told me: "Ronald Kent had not done one thing. Really, we cannot say he has done one thing. But he sits up there, and he does the planning."

Now, they probably had a reason [for sending Ronald home]. I did not like it, you know, because I did not like them sending my child home for three days, but I could not help it. There was nothing I could do. So I told him then when they sent him home those three days, "Now, I am going to tell you something." (I think that was the year he was in twelfth grade, too.) I said: "I am not going to work every day for them to be sending you home every two or three days, because I am not going to work all your life sending you to school when you should be out this year. I do not want you to come home another day." See, at that time they were limiting them to five days [of unexcused absence]. He had been sent home three of them. I said, "That means you have two more days to be sent home, and [if you miss more than that] you will not graduate." I said, "Ron, I do not want to hear that any more, because I am not working to send you to school an extra year just for foolishness that you are not even guilty of because they think you are leading." So I do not know how he worked it out that year, but he did not get sent home [any more].

G: Was he the leader of his peers?

H: I believe so. I think so.

G: Was he well respected by [his friends]?

H: I think so. I think a lot of kids looked up to him during that period of time. I have thought about it. He told me, "We have not seen Ronald do a thing, but we have just got a feeling that he is the one that is directing it."

So I thought about it when he went to the army. He went to the army right after high school. Then he went to community college in Tacoma, Washington. Then he came home. He was in the reserves and just went on and did his last two years at the University of Florida. He said: "I cannot do it just going to school a piece at a time. I want to do it and get through with it."

Anyway, when he went back to the army, he always worked in intelligence. And I thought about what the principal had told me. But he always worked in intelligence. I visited him at Fort Bragg one day. He just carried me by the building. He said, "Mama, that is the building I work in." He did not stop. You know how you stop and show people sights? He did not stop to show me anything. He just showed me the building. So I said, "Well, the people knew what they were talking about," because he stayed in intelligence until he had to retire a few years ago. He developed multiple sclerosis, so he had to retire. He had intended to make the army a career. He stayed in about fifteen years.

G: You said there was a riot at Santa Fe?

H: Well, at first when those kids first went down there, that is what they were calling them in those days: riots.

G: Yes, I remember when I was in high school. I grew up in Miami, and we did not have integration, as I recollect. We always went to school together. They were black/white schools. There were the Cubans. The whites and the blacks got together, and they did not like the Cubans, and we would all mix it up in high school.

H: Well, I think the reason they did not bother Ronald, as I started to tell you before (I am so forgetful), [was] he went to Santa Fe before integration. He was down there just about two semesters before integration was [instituted].

G: So he was all by himself as a black person?

H: I do not know whether he was the only black person down there or not, but I know there were very few blacks. That is when we were trying to talk him out of

going, and he decided to go anyway. He went anyway, and he stuck there. So by the time integration came along, he had already been there one year. So he knew the population, and that may have been one reason why the children had more confidence in him. They thought he knew his way around.

G: [He was] a little bit of a pioneer.

H: Yes. So that is why: he was there. I heard that boy say: "We were afraid to get off the bus. We did not know whether to get off the bus or stay on the bus, but Ronald would come out there and say: 'Come. Nobody is going to bother you. Come on!'" And they would stay on the bus until he went out there to let them off. So you do not know what your children [will do]. You do not know what is happening. When children are in school they are in two worlds.

G: Yes, I have found that to be true. We have a hard time finding out. [We often ask], "Zachary, what did you do in school today?" "Nothing."

H: Nothing! That is right. [laughter] One teacher called here one day and said, "May I speak to Apache?" So I said: "Oh, I am sorry. I think you have the wrong number. This is the Wilson residence." And I started to hang up. He said: "Oh, no, no. Wait, Ms. Wilson. Wait, wait!" I could hear him like that. So I stopped and listened. He said: "I am sorry. We call Ronald 'Apache' at school."

G: That was his nickname?

H: That was his nickname. I said, "Oh." Because I had never even heard of Apache. They called him Apache down there, and I often wondered, why did they call him Apache? He must have been raising some kind of sand. He must have been doing something. But that was altogether a different world, you know. But they all seemed to like Apache, and the black children, later on – you know, we always shorten everything – and they started calling him Patches. So that was his [new] nickname. [He was called] Apache by the white kids and Patches by the black kids. That is the way he got through. But he went down before integration.

I was trying to think of something very special, [and] I imagine if you questioned me it would come to mind, but I do forget quite a bit now.

G: Well, I have a hard time remembering what I did in high school. Are any of your students that you taught living here in High Springs?

H: Everywhere. Black and white.

G: So you have students everywhere.

H: Everywhere. And when I go uptown sometimes I am so embarrassed. You can tell the ones I taught a long time ago, because they will say, "Hi, Ms. Wilson." And I will have to remember [who they are]. I will say, "Hi!" And they bring their wives and their babies and introduce me to them. And believe it or not, these are white children, now. They do it more often than the black children. The black children just know you. They will say, "Hi, Ms. Wilson" or "Hi, Ms. Hill." If it were later years, they will say Ms. Hill, and if it were the early years they will say Ms. Wilson. But I mean the white ones come up to you. They will say something [like], "I bet you do not remember me, do you?" And I am saying to myself: "I really do not remember your name. I know your face." And I am so glad when they say their name, you know. Then I can identify with them. But over the years and all the children I have taught – Great day! If I could remember their names, I would be really rich mentally. But I just cannot remember them.

But black children live around you. Those that stay in town you see all the time, so you can kind of remember them. And now it is getting to the point that I only know them if they are church attenders, because that is my biggest activity: the church. But if they are people that do not go to church very much [I cannot recall who they are]. Well, when I meet them I am the same way. I cannot remember their names. I know their faces, I know who their parents are a lot of times and maybe their grandparents, but I do not remember their names.

But there are a lot of them. The town is just full of them now. I really do not remember what year I started teaching here, but it was sometime in the 1960s. Anyway, I taught in this county for thirty-two years and six months. I retired in 1981, so if you can count that back then you can kind of see. There are a lot of them around.

G: [Do] any particular students stick out in your mind?

H: Yes. I have one boy, and I have one girl, but the boy [stands out] more so than the girl. The boy is still in the army. I guess he is something like a major or a colonel or something by now. He was a very smart little boy, a very, very smart little boy. His parents were Seventh-Day Adventist, and you know Seventh-Day Adventists seem to have been a little more strict on their children than some other people. So he was a nice little boy.

I remember the year he was in either seventh or eighth grade – those are the two class years that I taught English – this little boy was in my English class. During that time the county used to have essay contests every year, and they would also send a poem to every school. You would teach it to your students, and the students who said the poem with the most emphasis and [had] the punctuation

marks in the right place and just overall gave a good performance of the poem would get a county trophy.

I remember this particular year this little boy won the trophy for the whole county of Alachua, and I was so proud because there was Gainesville High School and all the big schools in Gainesville, and he won it. I was proud of that, so he always sticks out in my mind. He does not live here now.

I had a little girl that was his understudy, [as] I called her. I had this little girl studying; in case something happened to him this little girl could take over. They were in seventh or eighth grade or something like that. But she did not have to take over. But she was a smart little girl, too – very smart. And those two kids stick out in my mind more than anyone else.

Another thing that makes it stick out in my mind with this little boy is when he got to be an adolescent – it was around seventh or eighth grade – he kind of wanted to be like the other boys, which means [being] obnoxious and that sort of thing. He wanted to be like that so he could be accepted by his peers in school. So he was beginning to be a little problem in my class. I did not say anything to him because I knew that was out of character for him, but I went to his mother. I told her what I thought was happening. I do not know what they said to him or anything, but he came back to himself. I think when he graduated from high school he graduated with the highest marks in his class. I mean, he just always did excel. I still think he is in the army. I think his mom said he is something higher than a major, maybe a colonel or something like that.

G: I do not know all the different ranks.

H: I know major is next after captain, because my son retired a captain. I remember when he came home a few years ago to a class reunion they were having, somebody asked him what was his next goal – what did he plan to do next – and he told them to become a major. But before he became a major he had developed multiple sclerosis, and that kind of stopped that. So that is the way it is.

I remember the opposite of that. I remember one little bad boy I had in class. He was just so disagreeable. Have you ever seen children that did not agree with anything?

G: Yes.

H: I do not care what you tried to do – he did not [go along]. I knew him the year before he got to me. I was teaching fourth grade then. This was after integration. This case I just told you about was before integration. This [one I am about to relate to you] was after integration.

When he was in third grade I used to see his teacher dragging him down the hall all the time to the principal's office. And he would have pinched that lady. She was a white lady, and he would have kicked her maybe in the shins. She would be just trying to pull him down there [to the principal's office]. I was thinking to myself, but I am not going to put that on tape what I would be thinking to myself.

But the next year he was assigned to my fourth-grade classroom. So I said, "Now, I cannot have this boy kicking and pinching on me. My patience is not that long." Number one, the little white teacher was a young teacher and probably was just getting established in a job good, [she] did not want him to cause her to lose it. But I went to his mother and father and talked to his mother and father. I told them how he had been acting in school and what he was doing. I said: "Now, I would really like to help him, but I cannot help him if he is going to be kicking and biting and pinching on me. I do not think I would be able to take that." You know, [I was] trying to sound as calm as possible.

I do not know what they said to him, but he never tried that in my class, that kicking. But I will tell you what he did do one day. Number one, he had not done what he was supposed to do. So when I went around to take up the papers, he handed it to me in such a fashion that it dropped on the floor. I thought he was going to reach down and pick it up and give it to me, but he did not. So I asked him if he would do that, and he gave me all of this big pout and everything. He never did pick it up. Well, I was going to be the modern teacher then. I said, "Well, we are getting ready to go to lunch." It was time to go to lunch. "When you get ready to pick up your paper and hand it to me, we will be glad for you to join us." In the meantime I told the other boys and girls to line up so we could go to lunch. I thought sure he was going to just jump up and give it to me. He did not, so I had to walk out and leave him in that room [while we went] for lunch.

Well, I was conscious of two things: I had left him in the room, and, number two, he refused to obey me. [He had] refused to cooperate. I was not even asking him to do anything but just to hand me his paper. He did not want to do that. He did not choose to do that.

So I left him in the room, and the principal saw him in the room. She went by there to talk to him to find out why he was still in the room alone and we were gone to lunch. I do not know what he told her, but then she came down to the lunchroom where I was, and I explained to her what had happened. So she said, "Nothing was wrong with that. I will see that he has something to do while you all are in lunch." So when we were coming back from lunch we saw him outdoors with a wastepaper basket picking up paper off the campus.

But do you know to this day that child has still not picked up that paper and handed it to me? He just did not feel like doing it that day. But I would rather that than have him kicking and biting me. The poor old lady would be all purple. You know how you turn purple.

G: [I wonder] what makes a little child so angry so young.

H: But I told his mother: "I would like very much to help him, but I cannot have him kicking me like that [or] pinching me. And I am not going to be able to pull him down the hall, either." You know, he was a sturdy boy for his size, and I was not this big at that time. I said, "I cannot do it." I do not know what they told him, but he did not give me that kind of trouble.

I had one little girl to speak out of turn at school to me one day. But outside of those [I had few problems]. Those are two negative things and two very positive things I kind of remember.

G: I know my mother was a school teacher, and she always had a couple of kids that she remembers even now. [Some stick out in her mind for being very good], and, yes, she has a couple memories of a couple of kids who were particularly difficult to work with. I think we are about to wind this up. Do you know Johnny Jordan?

H: Yes.

G: Who is he?

H: Well, Johnny right now is about one of the oldest citizens living in High Springs. I have a tape of Johnny. You know when we were going around making the pictures of the old buildings in High Springs?

G: Yes.

H: All right. I took Murray Laurie to Johnny's house and introduced her to Johnny and got Johnny to talk with us because Johnny, so far as I know, is about the oldest living black man in this community. And his brother. His brother is maybe a year or two younger than he is, but Johnny is about the oldest that has lived in High Springs [his whole life]. Now, there are a few older men, but I mean they came into High Springs. But Johnny is about the oldest person here.

G: Apparently, he is a wealth of knowledge, because Murray Laurie recommended that I also do an interview with him.

H: I have a tape of Johnny because she put on a tape that day, but I do not know

exactly where it is now. I put it up, and I would have to find it because I doubt whether I wrote [his name on the tape]. Just let me check something a minute. I might could let you use his tape. I have a machine, but it is back there in my granddaughter's room. You know how they are always recording something and have all those tapes thrown about?

I would have to find the tape, but we taped Johnny. He was giving us some information about the community, and he gave me a lot of information. I was trying to get some black history of the community to present on a Martin Luther King day program that we had one time. So I scratched down a lot of notes because he was telling us [some stories]. For instance, he told me about right along in here where my house is or a little further up used to be a blacksmith's shop. Well, see, nobody else here would have known that. Now, I might can find that. Let me see if I can put my hand on that. If I do not, I am not going to offer you anything else unless I get it first. It is funny how you think you have everything right at your fingertips. But Johnnie told us things. You see my church you were talking about?

G: Yes.

H: He told us where it was located before it was located in this spot, and he also told us that the men made those stones that you see, and they built the church. They designed [it], made the stones, and built the church.

He told us [that] all along this street that you came in by that church just now, all up that street was like, the little colored block. That was colored town, you see. [He told us about] all of the little notion stores and ice cream parlors and things that used to be over there, and he told us what was up this street. And he told us about [what was] up there behind [the] Western Auto store. It used to be a fish market, but that is where they used to sell caskets also. All that block up there belonged to black people at first. Where the Western Auto store is now, that used to be owned by black people. There was a sewing shop there and different things like that.

Over there where Dr. Dowdy's office is, he said that was the first kind of open market where people sold vegetables. And he said he remembers the first job he had. He had a job, getting about a nickel a day, to fan the flies off the vegetables.

G: Did he end up working for the railroad?

H: Yes, he ended up working for the railroad. I almost want to say I will look for that tape and give it to you, but if I did not put the name on it I am not going to know it when I see it again.

G: Well, if you spot it – Does Murray have a copy of it?

H: She should have [a copy].

G: I can get a copy from Murray.

H: He thought there were two blacksmith's shops. See, all of this was, let us just say, colored town from about up there where the Western Auto store is back to this corner right here. And it went up that way, because he told us of some of the little kind of notion shops that were on that street. So he probably does know about [early High Springs], and, [as] I said, I wish I had gotten more. And his brother knows a lot, too, and I have been promising [myself] ever since then to ask his brother to take time and give me some information about High Springs, because they seem to be the oldest two black people here. Everybody else seems to have integrated in or come in since that time. But they seem to have a lot of knowledge of this town.

G: I love High Springs. Chuck (my husband) and I have been here eleven or twelve years, and we were in Gainesville before that.

H: I like the little town, too. Now, I will tell you, the only thing I kind of regret that High Springs is not a little larger [is] because of the educational advantages [that are offered in bigger places]. I sort of feel like, for instance, my grandchild does not have as many educational advantages as I had when I was growing up. I was so glad when we got a town library. For years we did not have a town library, but [for] my little girl they have [had] a library ever since I have had her. She has been able to go to the library. She can go to the library [anytime she wants]. When my little boy was growing up, I wanted a Boy Scout troop here so badly. They had a white Boy Scout troop, but, you see, you know how that was like: two different worlds.

G: Yes, that is what I have been told.

H: Right. It was like two different worlds, and I used to wonder. I said, "Goodness!" Now, my brother was a Boy Scout when he was growing up. Now here is my son, and I cannot even get Boy Scout training for him. And, you know, other little literary or cultural things that go on in a bigger community, we sort of missed that. Other than that, I have just loved living in High Springs. But I have often said I wish the town of High Springs had been just a little larger.

One thing, though, that just makes my blood curdle to hear people say is [that] black children did not have any role models to look up to, because I have always had role models all my life. In my time we had black doctors, black drug stores,

black insurance people, black business people, black meat markets, black grocery stores, black people in general that you always came in contact with. So they say, "Black children have no role models." But that is not true.

G: Here in High Springs they say that?

H: No, this is just a general statement. I know you have heard it a thousand times.

G: Yes.

H: But some black children did have role models. They have not always looked at the bushes all of the time. I know I have not. There have been some things that I know are lacking in High Springs because it is a small town. But, then, at those time you just have to try to compensate. When my oldest daughter was growing up, I had to send her to Gainesville to take music. We did not have any music teachers [in High Springs]. But when my granddaughter was growing up I could just take her to Alachua. We still do not have any music teachers [in High Springs]. [laughter] Except, there is a white lady that teaches music, and she does not mind teaching black children now. But here was my point: I did not know where the lady lived, I did not how to get to her house, I am one of these people that is afraid to go on new adventures, and that sort of thing. So that was my hang-up. I thought I would go out in the country and get lost. But she would have taught the black child music, and she teaches very well. But I had this black teacher here that I knew of, and I knew she was a good teacher, too, so I carried her to the black teacher. There have been times that I have wished the town had been a little larger, but for the most part I do not regret anything. Things have been good for us. If you wanted to go to another town for another reason, it was no big problem.

G: Gainesville is not that far away.

H: Right. Gainesville is not that far away.

G: Boy, it is getting big.

H: It is getting big.

G: Sometimes you lose things when you get big, but you get other things instead.

H: I will tell you what I think about integration sometimes when I try to sum it up in a picture. I went to a class reunion one time, and a man was making a speech. His theme that particular day was "We got what we wanted, but we lost what we had." And that is the way I feel about it. I feel like we got a lot of things that we had thought we wanted or [actually] wanted, but we lost a lot of the things we

had. By being integrated, we got to be more and more in the minority. There are so many less people in these different role model areas than there were when we were just in one little [tight]-knit group. See, it kind of stretched out.

I think about this sometimes, and it makes me kind of angry. I say, "Now, we do not have a black boy in our little community that has thought anything about taking a trade like electricity or plumbing or, until a few months ago, dry cleaning.

I asked this same man that we were talking about – Johnny's brother – I asked him, "Do you mean to tell me that out of all the years you have been here in this cleaners" – and he has been there since the early 1940s – "you have not had one black boy come in and say, 'Mr. Jordan, will you teach me how to clean clothes?' or 'Will you teach me how to press clothes?'" He said, "Not one!" Now, those kinds of things make me feel sad, because we are losing the little bit we had in a way in cases like that. If you wanted to go have your door straightened up, you do not know any young black men that you could go to their house or call them up on the phone and say: "I have a door that needs straightening up. Can you come down here and straighten it up for us, please?"

The only thing you can do that with is [to] get somebody to rake your yard. And then they do not [really] want to do that. They want the money, but they do not really want to rake the yard. You know what I mean?

H: Yes, ma'am.

H: Those are the kind of people that seem to be more prevalent in our community. Number one, if they do get training, the first thing they want to do is go somewhere where they can get a good job, so they leave. When they leave, we do not have much of a role model then. We lose those that were trained. And then when I look at it on the other hand, you cannot blame them because there is no room for expansion in High Springs. They do not have anything to stay here for. If they really want to press forward, they almost have to leave. So we are just left. It is a good old-folks town. It is a good town to retire in, or if you are good and settled down and everything, it is a fine town. But for opportunities and role models, there are very few.

G: I wish I did not have to commute to Gainesville.

H: I know.

G: I would love to stay home [in High Springs] and work.

H: But that is what most young people do. If they are anything like in life running, they have to go to Gainesville or some other place. What work [do they have here]? The only thing we have here is the Carlon [pipe] plant [Carlon-A Lamson & Session Company]. And everybody cannot work in the Carlon plant.

- G: Not everybody wants to work in the Carlon plant.
- H: That is right. They do have Gates [Energy Products] down there [just south of Alachua].
- G: And, I guess, there are the antique shops.
- H: What would we do in an antique shop?
- G: I know. That is just the owner.
- H: I think now in our town we have gotten to the place [where] we do not have one mediocre department store.
- G: We do have a T G & Y.
- H: What I mean by mediocre, I am not talking about like Ammalee's [Dress Shop]. I call that one extreme, and then the Dollar [General] store is the other extreme. But if you just wanted to go uptown and just buy a little tee shirt, you either got to pay the world for it at Ammalee's or go out there and take what they have at the Dollar [General] store. Well, that is not even a town. That is not even as good as High Springs was.
- G: Yes, I miss our T G & Y. I think everybody misses that T G & Y.
- H: Yes, and I often wondered why they moved it. About three or four weeks ago they put up a plant tent.
- G: Yes, in front of the Winn-Dixie.
- H: You know, it is gone. It is gone.
- G: I think that was just a temporary thing. They were selling plants and stuff.
- H: Well, I went to the store last weekend, and it looked like to me it was just filled with plants. I went out there again Wednesday, and it was gone. They put a lot of the plants over there on the side of Winn-Dixie like they have been doing all the time outside. But the little truck, the little tent, and everything [else] was gone. So that is the way it is. And look at the number of stores we have open out there.

So the young people really do not have a chance. You know, I have heard my daughter say this many times. She said, "It is true I got my degree from the

University of Florida, but I make my living from the degree I got from Santa Fe Community College." I often wonder why the young people will not go to Santa Fe Community College, because you can take most any trade you want to take, and then you will have the advantage of having your A.A. degree. If you decide to go on to a university later, the A.A. is not going to spoil. It is going to be there.

But they do not seem to [want to go to Santa Fe], so we really do not have a lot of role models of men around here. You do not have a barrel full of women, but there seem to be more women than men. As the statistics say, they [the men] leave for different reasons. They go out of town to make a living, or they get put in jail, or they get bogged down in some other undesirable thing. Maybe High Springs will grow one some day.

G: It is hard to say what the future of this town is.

H: I do not know what the future [is]. Because, as I said, if High Springs had allowed [Interstate Highway] 75 to come through here, all that growth you see on 75 probably would have been in High Springs. But I think the white citizens of High Springs did not want 75 to come through here because, as I said, they would have lost that grocery trading and the dry-good trading where all the people had to go directly to them. They were running the town. As long as they could see ahead of them that they were going to be making this money forever, [they did not want anything to change]. They did not look far enough or did not think that when 75 gets down there that all of these things are going to come. But 75 should have been run straight through High Springs out by the old railroad shop. That is where they first planned it to be, but they would not let them come here. So we lost that. Everything is going to Alachua now, and everything in High Springs seems to be drying up more, to me. You mentioned antique shops. How many people – and I am talking about black and white, now – frequent those antique shops? You might go there once in a lifetime.

G: Oh, it is the tourists coming through.

H: Yes.

G: High Springs is turning into a tourist [attraction]. I know that I do not go up there to buy antiques. [laughter] Maybe once a year around Christmas my folks will come visit, and I will take them up to Wisteria and Great Outdoors [Cafe].

H: That is right. That is what has happened. I have a bedroom set that belonged to my mother. It is over fifty years old, [and] now it is an heirloom. I want to have it sanded down and redone so badly. You know, just have it redone. But I know that if I took it up to the wood shop, they would charge me probably more

than the bedroom set itself cost fifty years ago. Twice more! It would cost me twice as much.

But I have a friend that lives in the country. We went to my grandmother's house about a year or so ago because I sold it [the house], and I had told my children and her that she could get anything out of it she wanted to. I was going to sell it, and I did not have a place to store all this stuff. So my point is [that] she picked this hall tree. She had been to a class in Lake City for refinishing furniture, and I wish you could see that hall tree now. She had to put a new glass in it. You know about how old it must have been if my grandparents probably bought it in the 1920s or something. She put a new glass in it, she took all the old stain off and refinished it, and moved it into her beautiful new home. You should see it. It is a beautiful thing. I had offered it to my daughter. She kept saying she was coming to get it, and I said: "Well, you know that you are welcome to it. I told you all to get anything out of the house you wanted."

Well, we lost a few pieces because I had another person in charge of it for me. That is another thing. You cannot manage two places, and I lost one or two pieces that I really hated [to lose]. But I was not getting them, and they were just setting there in the house. So when I sold the house I had to get them out, see. One dresser that I really wanted, the man told me he had just sold it to an antique shop store. He said it was just a few days before we went up there to get it, but when we got there the man had sold the dresser. Or he said he had sold it. We had no way of getting it back. So I could not blame the man for that because it was up there. So we are just full of antiques [here in High Springs], which we will probably never need, and the tourists will just have to come through and get them.

G: Well, there seem to be more and more coming through. Well, this has been a wonderful interview, and I have learned a great deal. I cannot thank you enough.

H: Well, I am glad, because it seemed to me that I was running on and on and was not saying important things.

G: No, ma'am. These are the things that are not in the books. They are the important things.

H: I was hoping you would just keep asking me questions, kind of like the interviewers do on television.