

AL 68

Interviewee: Emily Brinkley and Lucretia Thomson

Interviewer: Emily Ring

Date: January 20, 1979

R: This is an interview, by Emily Ring, of Mrs. Harry Brinkley and Mrs. Hugh Thomson, sisters, on January 20, 1979. I am sitting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Brinkley, located at 1922 Northwest Seventh Lane. With us today is Emily's sister, Mrs. Lucretia Thomson. Emily and Lucretia were Dorsey girls and they both grew up in Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida. So we are going to make a recording today of the history of their lives.

Lucretia, since you are the senior sister on this team, tell us who the parents were for you and Emily, and how big your family was, and where you lived in Gainesville.

L: Well, I am trying to remember that far back, seventy-seven years ago. My mother was Emily Robb. Her parents came to Florida in the early 1880s. They were doctors, and they found the climate of Alachua County very, very much to their liking for health reasons. They thought it was much better than any other part of the state. My father was William S. Dorsey from Kentucky. His mother or grandmother, and I will have to check that carefully, was one of the first people buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in Gainesville. The cemetery belongs to the city now, and the city keeps it up. Those people who already have loved ones buried there can use that cemetery.

R: You mean it is closed to newcomers to Gainesville?

L: That is right. We lived on what was called First Avenue. It was named Mechanic Street in those days, much to our horror, because there was nothing mechanical on the street from one end to the other. We had open spaces around us, and horses, and we lived a pretty good life right behind our grandmother doctor, who saw to it that we made ourselves healthy. We had a little stream that ran through the horse pasture called Sweetwater Branch. The old-timers know all about that lake, and on the Boulevard in East Gainesville. It is part of the same creek. We played up and down that creek, and on University Avenue which was called Liberty Street when I was a little girl.

R: Oh, I did not know that.

L: There was a big tabernacle there that had chautauquas.

R: Was the tabernacle eight-sided or was it round?

L: Well, in my memory, it seems to be gigantic, and the sides were round.

R: Many of those were round.

L: We had wonderful people coming down. The chautauqua had a good circuit. The university was just beginning then, so we attracted a good many people.

R: Now the tabernacle was located on what--East University?

L: East University Avenue on the side of the branch.

R: Which was then called Liberty?

L: It was called Liberty Street because the university had not yet been built. I remember running up and down on the walls of Buckman and Thomas while they were being constructed.

R: You don't say.

L: I told you I was an antique. (Laughter) One memory that I love to talk about and tell about is the time we dammed up the Sweetwater Branch right by the culvert. My father had a grocery store, as everybody remembers who was here for any length of time. We dammed the branch up and made a little lake. We then took a sugar barrel or a syrup barrel, I think it was because it was sticky inside from the store, and cut the top of it out and made a pontoon-type boat. We stood there advertising rides across the lake. Our first and probably our only customer was a young dentist named C. G. Mixon and his bride from South Carolina. He dared her to take a ride in the boat. Then she did, and we collected our nickel. We got her safely across the lake, which was about the size of a good-sized living room. The only school for whites in Gainesville was located in that area.

R: The Kirby School?

L: It is now called Kirby Smith School. It was Gainesville's high school and Gainesville Elementary. It was everything from first grade through twelfth. That is where I went to school, under just two principals--Professor Castle and Professor Buchhotz. We had what we called trolley cars. So often on television I watch the cars going back and forth on the highways, and I say, "It makes me think of the time when we had our little trolley cars." We used to take a shoe box and cut holes in the side of it, and past colored tissue paper on the sides, put a candle in it and a very long string and run up and down in front of that chautauqua building.

R: Well, now, we did that in Jackson, Mississippi, but only on Halloween evening.

L: Oh, this was any night we could all gather together. Sometimes we would gather under the arc lights and catch the big old pincher bugs that migrate back and forth from the north. In our neighborhood, we had a gentleman named Hobey Bell, who was quite a naturalist.

R: What was his name?

L: Hobey Bell. He was the assistant postmaster to the post office ever since I can remember. He walked miles and miles studying birds and he would come when he saw a gathering of children. He would come around, and in his wonderful way, teach us all he could in a quiet way.

R: Well, now, did you have more birds in Gainesville in those days, or a wider variety of birds?

L: We had all the wildlife you can think of. My mother was a student really, all her life, and she studied the migratory birds and migratory butterflies. We had a lot of migratory butterflies.

R: What was her maiden name before she married?

L: Emily Robb. She had taught school at a school that was located across from her home at the opposite end of the block towards town from the Tabernacle. Her first grade students were Sam Mixon and Oscar Thomas. Oh, I forget all of them, but they were all local Gainesville names. There is a picture of the school when she was teaching, and the teachers were my sister and Miss Carrie Farmer.

R: Yes, I remember Miss Carrie Farmer.

L: Aunt Carrie as everybody calls her.

R: Yes.

L: She was my Aunt Alice also because my father's brother married her sister. The old people will remember forever Miss Beaner Shannon, who also taught.

R: Well, now, what grade did your mother teach?

L: First.

R: Were you the eldest of four sisters?

L: No, I have an older sister who taught in St. Petersburg for about forty years.

R: Well, suppose you list the sisters in order now for us, Lucretia.

L: Ann Elizabeth, Laura Lucretia...

R: Well, I did not know you were Laura Lucretia.

L: My brother was William Sydney Dorsey, Jr., and then Emily Alice Dorsey.

R: Who was named for her mother?

L: Yes. And Roberta Lee Dorsey, named for her grandfather, Robert Lee Robb. She had to have a feminine name instead of a masculine name when she arrived. The family thought they were complete, but later on Margaret Cuning Dorsey was born. That is the family.

R: Are they all living today?

L: All of them except the boy are living. We lost him. He has a granddaughter and a daughter in Gainesville, and a great-granddaughter now. His daughter is Mary Ann Barber, the wife of Henry Barber.

R: Your father, Mr. Dorsey, had a grocery store?

L: Yes, it makes me so happy that you asked that because that was my hangout. I think I must have been a little troublemaker at home with all the people, or got on my mother's nerves, or something.

R: Where was the store located?

L: Right downtown in front of the courthouse. One of the stores there was Wilson's Men Store, which was in what they called the Graham Building, and it was owned by the Graham family. We sold White Rose labeled groceries that were brought down from New York by boat to Jacksonville. They also had a store in Jacksonville. They would come twice a year with their canned goods. White Rose were quality goods.

R: That was the brand.

L: So I was trained and had champagne taste and it has been hard on me ever since.

R: Well, now, did the store also sell meats?

L: No. In Gainesville, we had a beautiful meat market run by a black man named

Lum Brown. He had the best meat. I wish I could get meat from his market now. The nearest approach to his store that I can explain to the people who would remember Gainesville in later days would be George Dell's store.

R: Yes, I remember that store.

L: He handled beautiful grapes that came from Spain and Cork, as well as all kinds of gourmet foods.

R: Yes.

L: When the labels on these gourmet foods would get soiled, the little grocery children had to eat them. So we thought nothing of having caviar and anchovies, and extra fine groceries. The first month I was married I charged my groceries at my father's store. I charged five dollars more than my husband made. My father just smiled and said, "Well, you will just have to pay for it little by little, or work it out." I worked there, from the time I was old enough to work until I was married. I enjoyed it. I like to meet people.

R: Yes. Going back to the black man who ran the meat market, I believe Emily told me that at one time all the barber shops in Gainesville were run by black people.

L: Yes. They were very – I hate to use the word – aristocratic. No, I don't want to say that. But there were certain...Gainesville has been very fortunate in having very fine colored or black families and white families.

R: Yes. All families that have been here a long time.

L: Yes. They also had an academy here for the, I will have to say blacks, but I like to say colored. They were educated and refined gentlemen, and respected people.

R: Yes.

L: All the people who delivered the mail, the barbers, the market-men, and the shoe repair people were highly respected black people.

R: Eventually, many of those trades went to white people. I believe we still have one or two black men who have shoe repair shops. But otherwise, the barber shops were all taken over by whites weren't they?

L: Yes.

R: Do you remember about what period that happened?

- L: Yes, it probably was during the Depression.
- R: Yes, when jobs were so hard to get.
- L: And then there was another – the post office was the exclusive property of Republicans for a long time.
- R: Yes.
- L: From the Civil War on for a long time. I remember my mother telling me that there were black people in the courthouse who had charge of the court.
- R: If you go back far enough, yes.
- L: And, oh, I remember the people. They were older people when I was young, but I was taught to respect them but not...Gainesville was a small town. You knew everybody, black and white. The black people kept off to themselves because they had their own organizations, and they preferred it that way.
- R: Yes, their own churches.
- L: During World War II, we had to ride bicycles when we could not get gasoline during the rationing, and I was teaching at Kirby Smith. I rode a bicycle from Seventeenth Avenue to Kirby Smith where I was teaching. People used to say, "Aren't you afraid to ride through all that?" And I said, "No, because I have so many black friends on Pleasant Street and so many white friends on Main Street, if I had any trouble I could just call on either one of them."
- R: Well, now, you told us that the store was located on what is now University Avenue across from the courthouse.
- L: Across from the bandstand. We had a little bandstand on the courthouse square. It was like all good Southern towns; the politicians addressed the people there, and they had bands.
- R: Well, now, in relation to the corner where Wilson's Department Store was located, until very recently, it was to the east of Wilson's or the west of Wilson's.
- L: It would be on the third from the corner from what was East Main Street.
- R: West of Wilson's?
- L: We had two streets: East Main and West Main.

R: Yes.

L: Wilson's company occupied two sections of the building, and the Dorsey Grocery Store.

R: So it would have been between the two Main Streets, then, wouldn't it?

L: Yes. And then the main hangout was the Miller's Confectionary Store, and...

E: It was called an ice cream parlor.

L: Oh, it was Miller's Ice Cream Parlor.

R: Well, now, did the groceries come on the train?

L: They came by boat from Seaman Brothers in New York City.

R: To Jacksonville?

L: On the merchant marine boats to Jacksonville, and then by train from Jacksonville.

R: That train came right close to your store then, didn't it?

L: No, the train was on what they called West Main Street; it was on the northwest corner. We were nearer the northeast corner of East Main.

R: Yes, but you did not have to transport them very far to get them off the train, did you?

L: Oh, no. They had horse-bound drays. That was also a respected trade for black people in Gainesville. They delivered the groceries. In our case and in Dell's case, Fagan was the grocery man. Chestnut was another one.

R: And Fagan's later became a shoe store, and Chestnut's later became a stationery?

L: Sure, Fagan had a shoe store. Chestnut's moved out of the mercantile business for quite a while, and then came back as a stationery store. His son was one of the Chestnuts. I better not tell you all that because that is such a long story, and there are several branches of the family. One of the Chestnut grocery man's grandchildren is a city commissioner of Clearwater now. I see him on the television quite often. His name is John Chestnut. He was the grandson of the grocery man.

R: Right.

L: But now, I am rambling. I just love to ramble about Gainesville. They try to get me to say something about it all the time.

R: Well, this is the kind of history we want of the way Gainesville was way back in those days. Now, of course, the street was not paved, was it?

L: No, it was not paved.

R: Was it graveled, or was it just mud?

L: It was not mushy. It was sand and shell, I think.

R: Probably put some shell on it.

L: Yes, it was shell-based, but you got in ruts and you could not get out.

R: Well, did people have telephones, or did people telephone for their groceries?

L: Oh, yes. We had telephones.

R: Would people call their grocery order in by telephone?

L: Well, it was a high-class job for the black people because they would go to the different homes, and ask the cooks. They would go to the back doors, and they had a good social relationship with the cooks of the family. They would take the orders and then come back to the store, and fill them and then deliver them. There were telephones, yes. I cannot remember when we did not have a telephone. In fact, my husband gave Peggy Lou a 1910 Gainesville directory the other day, and all the people who were living and at least twenty-one years of age, at that time, are in that directory.

R: Wonderful. Peggy Lou is your daughter.

L: Yes. We had to go through a central. You rang a bell and the central answered and asked you what number you wanted. My brother had a lisp when he was a little boy. He was rather spoiled, and he did not care whether he learned to talk or not.

R: I guess all those sisters spoiled him.

L: Yes, we did, and so did all the people in the store. They called him "High Man,"

and that was all he needed, you know [laughter]. So High Man would phone central and say he wanted to speak to his daddy at the grocery store. The operators knew his voice so well that they did not even ask him what number he wanted. They just connected him [laughter]. Those days are gone forever now.

R: Yes.

L: But these days are pretty nice, too.

R: Oh, well, I am glad you think so. Lucretia, you were always an optimist.

L: Well, they said that I was. My mother used to say that I could not take anyone being unhappy around me.

R: Yes.

L: That I would cut up and do something to make them get over being unhappy.

R: Yes. Well, now, let's go back just a little bit. Did your father come here and start this business from some other location?

L: My father was born in Hodgenville, Kentucky, in the same county as the Lincolns. In fact, the genealogy of the two families are mixed occasionally. They had migrated from Maryland. The Dorseys were one of the first pioneer families of Anne Arundel County in Maryland. From Maryland they migrated to Virginia, and then some went to Kentucky, and some went to Louisiana.

R: What was your father's father's name?

L: John Dorsey.

R: He was in Kentucky?

L: Yes. But my father was orphaned when he was about eleven or twelve years old because his mother died. They had to carry her in a covered wagon to Cincinnati for an operation, and she never did return home. So my father, when he was about fourteen years of age, and his elder brother, Tom S. Dorsey, came down here to be with their uncle, Nelson Smith. That was a very unusual name. My father and his Uncle Nelson built some of the original houses in Gainesville. In fact, they just tore down one of the houses in the last few years that they had built.

R: Well, did your father build the house that he lived in?

L: Oh, no. He was...

R: Where was the house located in which you girls lived?

L: It was at 505 East Mechanic Street. The savings and loan that Mr. Zefrouer is connected with gave away placemats when they opened their new bank. One of those is a picture of our house, though the artist has taken liberties.

R: Yes.

L: You can still see the old Dr. McMillan office.

R: Well, now, Lucretia, when I look at that old picture of Mechanic Street, I am trying to figure out what is that red brick building at the end of the street?

L: That is the Kirby Smith School. Our house was the very next house and the only house in that block. Then there was no one in the next block, and that was the backyard of a family by the name of Avery who lived there. The wooden building on the right-hand side, on the north side of Mechanic Street, is the office of Dr. McMillen. And the little old lady walking up the street with a clothes basket on her head is named Aunt Lou.

R: With a clothes basket on her head. Aunt Lou.

L: Aunt Lou.

R: Was she the washer woman?

L: She was a washer woman, and she was a very, very proud woman. She was part Indian.

R: Well, by this time there must be hundreds of customers of the bank who have that picture on a placemat.

L: The round glass that you see in our house is a Tiffany stained-glass window.

R: You don't say?

L: The front door was also Tiffany glass.

R: Well, whatever became of that glass?

L: The window is still there, but the door has been removed.

R: Is the house still there?

L: The house is still there in good condition.

R: Oh, I will have to go look at it.

L: I have not been by there since my mother died.

R: What street is that called now?

L: It is called Northeast First Avenue.

R: Emily wants to say something.

E: We were talking last night. I asked Lucretia what day it was that the firemen let us ride on the trucks, and she said it was any day that they did not have many fires. It was a small town so part of their amusement was, "Well, let's take the children to ride." So they would have to exercise their horses, and the horses were named Charlie, Mac, and Arthur, for Charlie McArthur, who was the first firechief in Gainesville.

R: Oh. Charlie McArthur became the name of a famous puppet later on.

E: So they would let us ride when they were exercising the horses. They would also let us go in the fire station and slide down the pole. That was a lot of fun.

R: That must have been fun.

E: We also remembered when the monkey man came to town. The monkey man was a man who had a grind organ, and a monkey. I have forgotten the monkey's name. But the same man came each year. The monkey would come and tip his hat and you would put a penny in it. When you heard the monkey man, then you took off for Liberty Street to watch the monkey man.

R: Was there also an ice cream wagon?

E: No.

L: No. We did not have refrigeration to take care of that.

E: No, Miller's ice cream parlor was the advent of ice cream. One other thing that I remember was when the chautauqua building burned.

R: Oh my gosh.

E: There was a huge fire and it burned to the ground in one night.

R: Oh dear.

L: It was, of course, made of hard pine lumber.

R: Yes. Well, do you remember any of the chautauqua events of people who might have come and given lectures? There were lectures and concerts, weren't there?

L: Oh yes. All these young people talk about nature foods and everything, you know, how it is the newest thing?

R: Yes.

L: Well, there was a Dr. Gissell, who was a nature enthusiast, and she would be called a vegetarian now.

R: Well, I understand that the reason we speak of graham flour today is that a Dr. Graham was the one who advocated the whole-grain flours.

L: I do not remember that.

R: Then there was another doctor who recommended that you chew each bite fifty times, or something like that.

L: I am afraid there was, and I have a brother-in-law who does that [laughter]. Sometimes we have to wait a great deal for the last course to be served because of him.

R: My mother was a health food nut. We always had whole grain breads, and she was one of these women who believed in jumping in a tub of ice cold water immediately on arising in the morning, no matter what the weather outside.

L: You could not beat the southern people for stability and ability.

R: Did you sleep on a sleeping porch?

L: Oh, the whole family slept on an open-air sleeping porch.

R: That was considered good for you, with a hot water bottle at your feet or a hot brick.

L: Well, we did not have a hot water bottle then because there were so many people on our sleeping porch that it would have taken a whole lot of hot water bottles. So we put bricks on the stove and got them good and hot. Then we wrapped them in a flannel cloth, and put them in the bed before we got in, and let the bed get warm before we got in. But, oh, it was wonderful, really. I do not like to drop names, but when I was going to high school, World War I was on, and we could not get help. I had to drive to the grocery store in a Ford touring car. My best friend was Martha Murphree Roberts, who recently passed away. We used to have a lot of fun. We had a little colored boy who did the actual work for us, but we had a chance to drive the car around town, and it was more fun.

E: Did you deliver groceries?

L: Occasionally.

R: Did you ever pick up your friends and ride them, too?

L: Well no, Martha and I had so much to talk about, and we also did not have any room because the back seat was full of groceries.

R: Martha was the daughter of the first president of the university?

L: The second president. Dr. Sledd (Andrew Sledd, president, University of Florida, 1904-1909) was the first president.

R: Well, did the Murphrees live nearby? I guess everybody lived pretty close.

L: Well, they came to Gainesville much later. I think Martha was in about the fourth or fifth grade when I was in the fourth or fifth grade, and when the Murphrees moved to town.

R: Well, did you happen to go to the first grade that your mother taught, or did you have a different teacher?

L: Oh no. Mama stopped teaching as soon as she was married. She had taught in various schools around the county, and even down near Micanopy. She had even taught in Cedar Key before the railroad was completed to Cedar Key.

R: Well, I guess you had a black cook in the kitchen.

L: Oh yes indeed. We had one that we adored, and we had a gardener who remembered slavery days from South Carolina. He was patient to a certain

extent, but if we got in his way then he would say, "You hard-headed, soft-headed young 'uns, get out of my way. I'll go in there and tell your ma on you."

R: Yes, black servants could be very bossy, as I remember it.

L: They had to take care of us.

R: Oh, yes. My black nurse would tell my mother where to get off if I wanted to play in the mud. My black nurse would let me do it and my mother would complain that I was dirtying my clothes. My black nurse would say, "Miss Stevens, I'm the one that has to wash 'em. Let her do it."

L: Well, I should not say this about my own daughter, but it is very hard for her to keep house now because she was not allowed to clean by her black nurse. She says she had two mothers. One was black with pink palms that made wonderful apple pies, and the other was white and had white hands and pink palms. But she was busy grading school papers, and she did not have time to do all the things that my black mother did for me.

R: Yes. Well now, Emily, do you want to add anything to the story of the childhood days, or shall we go on now to your schooling after you got older?

L: I wish she would tell about Hogtown Creek.

R: Yes, tell about Hogtown Creek, Emily.

E: Oh, that was quite a long trip out of town to Hogtown Creek, and we used to go out there on picnics. That was an event when we were allowed to go out there.

R: Were these family picnics, or church picnics?

E: Family picnics. The church picnic, held once a year, was at Worthington Springs. Everybody got on the train, and went to Worthington Springs for the day. We had lemonade in a barrel. Mr. Saunders, who had one of the stores in town, stirred the lemonade.

R: Now which church was this?

E: First Presbyterian. One of the memories I have is of the old Davis livery stable, and I have a crop that was given to me by Mr. Davis.

R: Well, now, was that the Presbyterian Church that used to have the big round window on University Avenue?

E: Yes.

R: It was quite close to town, and then was torn down?

L: It was where the Florida National Bank is now. It was across the street from the home of Mr. H. F. Dutton, who was a banker, although he had a phosphate business, too.

R: How about the Baird Hardware Store on University Avenue?

E: It was on the corner of Liberty and East Main, but it was a fairly new building. I can remember when it was built.

R: Well, now, what was at the corner where Woolworth's is located?

E: That was called the Endel Building, and it was a bank underneath, and professional offices of dentists, lawyers, and doctors above it. On the west side of the square was the Thomas Hardware store, and a drugstore, Johnson's Drugstore. At the other end was Phifer Dry Goods Store, which became a department store. Dry goods was the old name.

R: The Pfeifer State Bank was on the other side of the square, on the opposite corner, south of Baird's?

L: South. It would be on the southeast corner of East Main and Union Street.

E: On the opposite corner was the opera house, and we had some very good operas and minstrel shows.

R: Oh.

E: We had the Copen Minstrels. Gainesville and Ocala have always catered to cultural events, and music and theater.

R: Now Cox's Furniture was there, wasn't it?

E: Cox's was there.

L: Is it there now?

R: Yes, in the same building, yes.

L: It is just renovated.

- R: Well, when did Mr. and Mrs. Rudderman come in with their general store?
- E: Oh, after I was married.
- R: Yes, that was a later period.
- L: It belonged to the Greenbergs before the Ruddermands had it. It was the store of Dr. Greenberg's grandfather.
- R: Well, what about Chitty's Men Store?
- E: Chitty's was always there on that corner, across from the Davis Livery Stable. Henry Chitty's father had that store.
- R: Well, now, let's go on to the time when you went to high school. You went to high school here in Gainesville, and then what happened? Did you go to Tallahassee, Lucretia?
- L: Oh, no. We were sent out of the state so that we could get a change of climate.
- R: Oh, I see.
- L: Emily and I went to Maryville College in Tennessee. But now Alcoa, the aluminum company of America, has swallowed Maryville up. It is still there; in fact, I saw it this summer.
- R: Was it a church school?
- L: Oh yes. One of the oldest Presbyterian schools in the South.
- R: Presbyterian. For girls only?
- L: No. No. It was co-educational, and they even had high school in it. It was started by well-meaning Northerners who felt sorry for the blacks in the South.
- E: Why blacks in the South? It was not started as a black school.
- L: No, it was not started as a black school. However, it had black people who were runaway slaves, long before the Civil War. But after the Civil War it was strictly white.
- R: That is what I think of as the missionary schools that the Northerners started in the South. They were kind of missionary schools that were put down here to

teach us better ways, I think.

E: I think they were, yes. They were established to go out into all the world and preach the gospel, and they were very strict.

R: To try to knit together the North and the South after the Civil War?

L: No, before the Civil War, my dear.

R: Oh, this one was established before the Civil War?

L: Yes. After the Civil War it was strictly for the mountaineer people in East Tennessee and...Some of the finest doctors in the United States have come out of that school. In fact, the governor of Tennessee graduated from there, and his wife graduated from there.

R: Oh yes?

L: It was down near Sevierville, and you know what the history of that part of the state is.

R: No, I do not.

L: East Tennessee is strictly Republican and strictly religious.

R: Well, I knew that. Yes. The hilly part.

L: Episcopalians and Presbyterians predominate. It is a beautiful school. I send them \$10.00 when I am not too hungry once a year.

R: Now Emily, you also went to that college?

E: Yes, I went there for one year, but I graduated from Florida State College for Women. It just recently became co-educational, in 1947.

R: It was at the same time the university here became co-educational. What about the other sisters? Did they go to the same schools or different schools?

L: Ann went to Maryville, but got her degree from Columbia University.

R: You said that Emily was the third child?

L: Fourth.

R: Ann was the eldest, and then Lucretia and then High Man, the boy, who was kind

of spoiled by his sisters.

L: Yes.

R: And then came Emily. Was that a difficult location to be in the family?

E: I never thought so. It may have been when I was young because my brother was very, very ill when I was a baby. I was taken care of by my mammy. My mother was busy taking care of Bill, but I never found it difficult. If it was, it was while I was little.

R: Now there was another girl younger still?

E: Yes.

R: So you were the next to the youngest?

E: No, there are two more.

R: Two more. You were really the middle child.

E: I am the middle child.

R: I see.

L: Emily White Ring, she did not find it difficult, but we made it difficult for her. I do not remember saying anything unkind, but we have been told that we said some pretty difficult things to her, especially when she had to come along with us when we were –

R: Tagging along, yes.

L: – climbing trees and doing things that she could not do.

R: Well now, there was no gap in the family. So often, a mother will have three or four children, and then there will be a hiatus and then finally she will very quickly have two more.

L: Well, I was way up in my teens when the youngest one was born. That is about seven or eight year's difference, isn't it?

E: Yes.

R: Now between you two girls there are seven years?

- L: Six years. We came along quite regularly in three-year periods. Then mother did not have any more children, but I was a teenager and well up in my teens, I think, when I began to think that our family was big enough without getting another one. I had been having young ones around long enough. Then Margaret came along, but we adored her. We would not trade her for anything in the world.
- R: Well, I think you are very lucky to have each other.
- E: Margaret was secretary when the School of Forestry was first formed. And your friend, Mr. –
- R: Warner Frazer?
- E: Warner Frazer.
- L: Percy Warner Frazer.
- E: Said that her name should be on the front of the new forestry building. She was the one who held the Forestry School together.
- R: The mother superior of the Forestry School.
- E: That is about right.
- R: What is her married name now?
- E: Toddson. Her husband is Dr. Thomas Toddson. The doctor is a Ph.D.
- R: Is he in forestry?
- E: No, he is in chemistry. He graduated and got his Ph.D. in chemistry here at the University of Florida. He has recently retired from White Sands, where he was in charge of all of the missile work.
- R: Now this is the husband of Margaret, next to the youngest?
- E: She is the youngest.
- R: She is the youngest, and next to the youngest is...
- E: Roberta.
- R: Now who did she marry?

- E: She married Harry Collar, and they live in Ocala.
- R: Now Lucretia, tell us who you married.
- L: Oh, I married Hugh Allen Blair Thomson.
- R: Is that spelled with a "p"?
- L: No.
- R: The "p" is left out.
- L: T-h-o-m-s-o-n. There are enough relatives with the T-h-o-m-s-o-n without putting the English spelling in.
- R: Yes.
- L: And we correct them when they do, very forcefully.
- R: Yes.
- L: But his family is an old, old Southern family, too. He likes to say that his family were buccaneers. However, they were the Howards, who were English nobility, and who operated up and down the coast of the outer banks of North Carolina.
- R: We won't call them pirates.
- L: The French people were also operating up and down the outer banks.
- R: Called them pirates?
- L: No. They worked for the Queen of England, against the King of France, before the revolution. The Howards are still in that area of North Carolina, and they are still seafaring people.
- R: Did his father come here from North Carolina?
- L: They are originally from Tennessee, Lebanon, Tennessee. There are old families of Blairs and Howards located there.
- R: Lucretia, when did you start teaching at J. J. Finley School, and did you teach at another school first?
- L: During the Depression, I started teaching school. I stayed with my daughter

until she was three years old because...

R: This is Peggy, your daughter.

L: Yes.

R: What year was she born?

L: She was born in 192-.

R: Well, you can fill that in later. She probably does not want you to tell the year she was born, anyway. Does Peggy go by the name of Thomson or Shonbrun?

L: Shonbrun.

R: She married Mr. Shonbrun, who taught at Gainesville High School.

L: Yes.

R: Peggy is back in Gainesville now writing a very popular column for the Gainesville Sun. What is the name of her column?

L: They use any name they want to, but she has the freedom to write anything she cares to write about, because she is essentially a writer.

R: Yes.

L: A poet and a writer. And she loves Gainesville so much that she finds plenty to write about.

R: So when she was three you started teaching. Was that at Kirby Smith first?

L: I taught for eighteen years at Kirby Smith.

R: What grade?

L: And eighteen years at J.J. Finley.

R: Was it always the same grade?

L: Well, I started off taking the rejects in the fifth and sixth grade. It was a combination of fifth and sixth grades. They were all larger than I was. Then Professor Buchholtz, under whom I graduated, came in to watch me teach one time, and he offered me the chance of teaching fast learners in the third grade.

R: You jumped at the chance, I am sure.

L: I have always taught since then. Now do not misunderstand me. Some of those fifth and sixth graders I had were marvelous people; they just were a little bit slow learning.

R: This is the first I have ever known, Lucretia, that we ever had a special class for gifted children.

L: Well, at Kirby Smith we had to have that because there were so many children there who learned at different levels. You could not mix them in a grade in those days. We did not have the equipment to do it. You had to have a mass-teaching situation. You did not even have enough teachers who could handle the numbers.

R: So you were the lucky one that got the third-grade fast learners?

L: Yes, because I am a little offbeat. I like to be creative.

R: Well, I will never forget the way your classroom always looked at Finley with all those fish and plants, and you had your own rocking chair. Oh, it looked like a very cozy home.

L: Well, I remember your son. I was privileged to have Alan when he lost his father. He was upset.

R: He was eleven, yes.

L: I had had him a year or two ahead of that, I guess.

R: Yes.

L: But he came over so much, and he and I became very good friends. Well, we marched to the same drummer somewhat.

R: Well, we were lucky to have Finley School back of us at that time, his brothers and I, because Alan did not really know what was happening to him. He was too young to know it, but it hurt him.

L: He was upset, and I guess you were teaching, weren't you? You had gone back to work.

R: I had just taken my first job of teaching, and I was commuting to the Newberry

School – going out very early in the morning. His grandmother came in the afternoons to take care of him.

L: Well, yes, but in the meantime he would stay with me.

R: Yes, I know. Right. He very often came to your classroom after school to help you.

L: We were good friends.

R: Yes, you certainly were. Well, now going back to the careers of both of you girls. Emily, what did you do when you got out of college?

L: May I interrupt to tell something, Emily?

R: Yes.

L: She is one of my brighter sisters. She loved to learn. I guess if she were in a modern school, she would have been one of the kinds that was put in the class for the gifted children. She would run away to go to school when she was four years old, and she could do first grade work before she was five years old.

R: My goodness.

L: She was always at the top of her class – always was a student. We were very, very proud of Emily. She was ambitious and worked hard. I always bragged on her. She completed her nurse's training and her college training before she was twenty-one.

R: My goodness, before she was twenty-one.

L: This was kind of hard on her physically, but...

R: Emily, I did not know you were such a prodigy, and here I have been living as your neighbor all these years. Of course, you were gone from this house for a long time.

E: Yes.

R: Now tell us who you married, Emily, and the date. And tell us about Harry, and who his folks were.

E: Well, I am married to Harry John Brinkley, who is a graduate of the University of Florida. He got his masters degree in horticulture. He was a county agent for twenty-five years, and when he retired from that he took as a second career

teaching biology in junior college. He is now retired from that.

R: He built this house that we are sitting in the same year that we built ours, next door, which was the summer of 1940.

E: Yes, it must have been because I remember we had not been in the house long, about nine months, when Pearl Harbor came along.

R: Right.

E: And weren't the Virginia pines in this area beautiful?

R: Oh, they were marvelous trees. Now we are losing them one by one.

L: It was the long-leaf pine.

R: Of course, a great many of those tremendous pines were cut down when they put Nineteenth Street through. And they had just cut the Nineteenth Street through and J.J. Finley School had only been there for about one year when we built our homes on this street, which was then called, as you recall, Broome Street, and we were way out on the edge of town, of course.

E: That is right. In fact, our backyard is on Seventh Place now, and that was out of the city limits.

R: Yes, we were right on the edge of the city limits, and there was a creek back there. We were talking, Emily, about your marriage to Harry Brinkley. Let's go back to before you married Harry, and fill in the gap about what you did after you graduated at age twenty-one from the woman's college in Tallahassee.

E: I went down to Tampa and finished my nursing course which I had started at Riverside in Jacksonville. My health made me take a vacation and go to Maryville College. Then I finished at Tallahassee and from there went to Tampa, in what now is Tampa Municipal Hospital. It was called Gordon Keller then. I got my degree in nursing from there, and came back to Gainesville. The first person I worked for was Dr. W. C. Thomas in his office.

R: Ah yes. Uh huh.

E: His office nurse was taking a vacation, and he asked me to come in and work with him.

R: Was Pixie working for him then?

- E: No, not at that time. That was one of the highlights of my nursing career because he was a wonderful person to work for.
- R: Of course he was.
- E: I never heard him say a cross word to anyone in all the years I was with him. Later, I was operating room supervisor at the old Gainesville Hospital, after I finished working with Dr. Thomas.
- R: Was that located where Alachua General is now located?
- E: Yes, it is the old hospital building that they are tearing down now.
- R: You were the nurse in the operating room?
- E: I was the supervisor in the operating room. After that, I did private duty nursing for a short period, and then Dr. Thomas asked me to go on a case in Melrose where he had been called in consultation. It was for a northern family who spent their winters in Melrose. I was with them for four years. I went back to Connecticut with them.
- R: What was their name?
- E: Tolles.
- R: Will you spell that for us?
- E: Colonel Tolles, T-o-l-l-e-s. He was a banker in Naugatuck, Connecticut. They were a lovely couple. He was in his late eighties and she was in her seventies. I never heard them say a cross word to each other in all the circumstances of illness. She was paralyzed when I took over the case, and I stayed with her until she died.
- R: How long was that?
- E: Four years.
- R: Well, your sister tells me that you had been planning to go to medical school.
- E: Well, after I came back from Connecticut, I did go to medical school.
- R: Oh, you did?
- E: I went to the University of Chicago and to Rush Medical. In the meantime, I had

been singing in the choir at First Presbyterian Church here, and Harry Brinkley was also singing in the choir at the First Presbyterian Church.

R: Was he a university student?

E: He was then getting his master's at the university. I was torn between getting an M.D. from Rush Medical and getting an Mrs. in Florida [laughter]. The Florida finally won out.

R: He persuaded you.

E: Rush Medical was a very interesting place. I was privileged to work with the obstetrical clinic, which was run by Dr. Lee, who is one of the most eminent obstetricians in America, or was at that time. We learned a great deal.

R: Yes.

E: Then after I got my Mrs., my –

R: Harry got his master's degree in agriculture?

E: In horticulture.

R: No wonder he has had a green thumb around this house all these years.

E: Yes, he loves it.

R: You were married in what year?

E: 1936.

R: When were your children born?

E: My first daughter was born in 1937.

R: Harriet Emily?

E: Yes, Harriet Emily, and Marsha was born three years later, when we moved into this house. Our son was born five years later in Brooksville, Florida, where Harry was county agent at the time.

R: How many grandchildren do you have?

E: I have four grandchildren.

R: When we built our houses here, as I recall, Harry was our assistant county agent.

E: That is right. He had a career as a county agent. He went from here to Lake Butler and to Brooksville, where we lived for fifteen years, and then to Pinellas County. He finished out his work as a county agent in Pinellas County.

R: Somewhere along the way, I believe, you bought an orange grove down there.

E: That is right.

R: Was that at Brooker?

E: Brooksville.

R: Which you still have?

E: That is right. We have a little farm in north Georgia where we are raising a few apples. Harry always wanted a place where he could have oranges and apples on the same place, and until they imported Israeli apples, it was impossible here in Florida.

R: I did not know you could raise apples in Florida.

E: I have an apple tree in the backyard. It had apples on it last year.

R: I want to see your apples the next time the tree has apples on it. So at least he can have his oranges from his grove in south Florida and his apples from his north Georgia farm.

E: That is right.

R: And you are building a vacation house up there now, aren't you?

E: Yes.

R: Well, did we talk about Harry's teaching at the junior college in Jacksonville? How long did he teach there?

E: I mentioned that he taught for thirteen years. He taught biology, which was his minor.

R: So he is now retired from the agricultural extension service of the state of Florida, and from the junior college at Jacksonville.

E: That is right.

R: Well, I know you and Harry are very interested in growing things, and you also are members of the Audubon Society and very interested in birds.

E: That is right.

R: I was going to ask both you and Anne Little, when I do a history of Anne, what in the world has happened to our birds? We do not seem to have the birds this year that we had last year.

E: Well, at the Christmas bird count, according to the Alachua Audubon Society, it was not cold enough for the birds to come south. They were on their way south, but because of the warm weather before Christmas, they had not migrated as far as they normally do at that time.

R: But now that we are getting all this cold weather, will we get the birds in the spring?

E: We are hoping.

R: Well, let's hope so. Lucretia, I know Gainesville has always been your home, and you still think of it as your home, but it just so happens that you are physically living now in Port Richey, are you not?

L: In a little community called Holiday, that has grown to 75,000 people in the last thirteen years. You all were talking about birds a while ago and it is interesting to see just how the migratory birds here are different from the birds on the coast. I am only a mile from the Gulf, and this year the parakeets have not branched off and gone their own separate ways to the little parakeet houses that all the Northerners put up for them to come to.

R: You mean the parakeets are wild?

L: Oh my goodness, yes, they are wild. I counted 300 on one telephone pole the other day.

R: I always thought of parakeets as something that you bought in a pet store and put in a cage.

L: Audubon found them here when he came through.

R: Audubon found them here?

L: Yes. But these parakeets are feral.

R: You mean they are wild?

L: They have escaped and have become wild. They fly with the starlings. Birds of a feather flock together, so when they light on the telephone wire, all the parakeets line up on the lower line and the starlings line up on the top line.

R: Well, that is segregation. Well, now, the parakeets are much more beautiful, aren't they.

L: Blacks on top.

R: They are all those gay colors.

L: The majority of the parakeets are green, but in the big flocks you find yellow ones and blue ones.

R: Oh, they must make a beautiful sight. I never knew we had wild flocks of parakeets down there.

L: When Harry was the county agent in Pinellas County, there was a tree down there near Largo they call the parakeet tree. It was denuded and no leaves at all on it because all the foliage has been taken off by the parakeets that roost there every night. People come around to watch this tree that is full of parakeets.

R: Well, I do not want to introduce a false note on this beautiful picture, but is this one of the birds which has carried some kind of disease?

L: They thought so for awhile, but it is a mosquito that has it. I am not up on it entirely, but you mean encephalitis.

R: That might be a carrier.

L: It is carried by the mosquitoes to the birds, and people were infected around Newport Richey years and years ago. But I am a member of Defenders of the Environment, and if I have any soapbox lectures to give, I stand up for them because the way these people are treating our state, Florida, is just perfectly terrible.

R: You mean the industrial development?

L: No, I mean the clearing of land one day, building the house the next, and selling

it to northern families the next. They work at night with these big bulldozers. They have torn down the pretty area of Newport Richey near the Pithlachascotte River. It was a beautiful river. A man came down here to develop it. He leveled all the sand dunes that protected that area. He has leveled everything. And now he has leveled right up to the graves of an old cemetery that has been there ever since Florida had white people living in it. There is a family named Bailey which...The courthouse in Gainesville, Florida, was given to Gainesville by one of the members of the Bailey family. There is a little place near Tarpon Springs called Bailey's Bluff. That old family cemetery now sits on a hill, and thirty feet below it all the land has been taken away. The man works at night because he gets too much gaff through the day if people see him destroying all the trees.

R: Well, I guess the only reason he has not bulldozed the cemetery is that there is a law in Florida that says you cannot touch graves.

L: But he did move some of those in the front of the cemetery and put his offices there. He moved them to the back because there were not families. Speaking of the Brinkleys, this modest sister of mine won't tell you that Harry's people are original settlers of Scotland Neck, North Carolina. One time when we were going to New York, we went through Scotland Neck. Their cemetery is right in front of the oldest Episcopal Church in that area.

R: Now what part of North Carolina?

L: Scotland Neck, North Carolina.

R: Is it on the eastern shore?

L: Well, it is below Norfolk.

R: Oh yes. It is on the eastern coast.

L: Well, not on the coast.

R: The coastal plains or part of the Piedmont?

L: Yes. What is the name of the other town in that area?

E: Enfield.

L: Yes, Enfield and Scotland Neck, and then before long you are in Sussex, Virginia.

R: Well, now, Lucretia, a while ago you mentioned the Philharmonic Society of the

early days of Gainesville?

L: Yes, there was an English settlement on the shores of the lake that is now Paynes Prairie. Do you know the lake disappeared into the sinkhole?

R: Yes.

L: But a group of English people came over to farm and have orchards. The ones I remember are the Bakers and the Crows and the Russells, and all of them were very talented musicians. We got acquainted with them some way, because my mother was very interested in music. She and Mrs. Crow and Mrs. Becker, who taught music here, and a Mrs. Smith organized the Philharmonic Society. The little Dorsey girls, and I think one of the little Smith girls, went around with invitations and helped get the thing started. Mother was an honorary member of that Philharmonic Society all of her life.

R: Now did they meet in people's homes or in the Chautauqua Hall or in the opera house?

L: I think it was more or less in the homes or at the university, or at the woman's club.

R: And they played instruments?

L: No, they brought musicians to Gainesville. Who was the violinist that was so popular?

E: Fritz Kriesler.

L: Rich Crysler.

R: And these concerts would be given in the opera house?

L: Yes, though I do not remember exactly. I was not a bit interested.

R: Did Geraldine Farrar come here? I remember hearing her in Jackson, Mississippi, when I was a little girl. I guess certain opera singers came from time to time.

L: Jenny Lynd came to Gainesville.

R: Did she really?

L: Yes.

R: Do you remember hearing her?

L: No, that was before my time, when I was very young.

R: But you heard about it.

L: Yes.

E: I remember there was no public library here, and my mother was also very much interested in reading. One of mother's friends, after mother died, said that there is no telling what mother might have done if she had lived in a more recent time.

R: Well, now, what were the popular novels in those days? Did everybody read Sir Walter Scott and Dickens?

L: Oh, yes.

R: And Trollope?

L: Mother had our house lined with books. There was the *Scarlet Pimpernel*.

R: Yes. There was a set of travel books called *Stoddard's Lectures*.

L: We had those.

R: Mrs. Walter Herbert said that recently at the public library book sale, she went in and saw a whole set of *Stoddard's Lectures* for \$5.00, and she immediately bought it for her son, Linton, who was very interested.

L: That is my third grader.

R: He was in your third grade? Well, I know in our house in Mississippi we had *Stoddard's Lectures*. I do not know which of my mother's children got it, but I do not have it.

L: Did you get it, Emily?

E: No, Margaret got it.

L: Margaret. We also had the complete history of the Civil War taken by that famous photographer, Matthew Brady, who did tin-types. Then we had a complete set of Shakespeare. We had to read those, too.

R: Well, now, maybe I should not bring up the subject of what we all think of what is

happening to Gainesville now. I saw in the paper last night that we now have about 130,000 people and no telling how many more we are going to have in the future. Lucretia, you said a while ago that Gainesville is still a good place to live. How do you feel about that?

L: Well, I will just have to tell you my trite little saying that I tell everybody. I was born in Gainesville, reared in Gainesville, and I will be here forever because I have my cemetery lot here.

R: So you are still loyal.

L: I will just say my ashes will be here forever.

R: Yes.

E: This is mother's set of Shakespeare, and she has things in here.

R: Well, this clipping says, "John Barrymore as Richard the III."

E: She made notes and this sort of thing.

R: Wonderful.

L: She was a wonderful Bible scholar. Some of her Bible notes are just wonderful and far ahead of the time.

R: Yes. Well, the love of reading certainly goes on from generation to generation, and I am wondering now about our grandchildren, and whether reading is going to be as meaningful in their lives with all this television, but we can only hope it will be.

L: Well, I was very distressed for awhile, but you know the old Southern saying we have, "That you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear?"

R: Right.

L: And it seems to me that watching my grandchildren, they are still interested in furthering themselves. They are going to succeed no matter what happens.

R: Yes. Tell me about Peggy's children.

L: Well, she has five children. One of them is getting her master's degree this year at the University of South Florida in Tampa as a speech pathologist. The other daughter is a poet, somewhat like her mother, and the little one has not quite decided yet. She wants to be an engineer. She was ahead of her time, and

they pushed her so fast, she graduated from the Bronx High School of Science. That is the one that the Russians sent their people over here to study. When she started off at Brooklyn College, they promoted her out of the freshman class and put her in the sophomore class right away. And of course, that put her in with a peer group she was not happy with. So she has dropped out and now she is starting back in engineering. The twelve-year-old grandson watched "Star Wars" – he was one of the "Star Wars" creatures – and he is very much interested in the future like all young people are.

R: It is a passion with them.

L: But he came to his mother the other day and said, "Mother, I want a radio – a good radio – because I do not want to watch those silly television shows any more."

R: Well, good for him. Well, the public radio has some wonderful things now for young people.

L: Yes.

R: Well, now, what about their father?

L: He is still in New York. He likes New York, but Peggy just could not stay there.

R: Now give us his first name.

L: Herman.

R: Herman Shonbrun, who used to teach drama at Gainesville High School. My son, Morgan, was a very bored student out there until he got hold of Herman Shonbrun and his drama class. Then he just got set on fire.

L: Herman should be a teacher now. He is a natural teacher.

R: Yes.

L: But teaching did not provide enough money to take care of his family.

R: So he went to New York?

L: He is in New York.

R: Emily, you were going to show us another one of your mother's books or set of books.

E: This is a set of Shakespeare. Mother studied it at home by herself, and other people from the university who were interested. This is *Hamlet*. And she says in here, "Shakespeare, in one line of his plays, portrayed the whole vast human farewell of the living to the dead. The words are from Horatio to Hamlet, his dying prince, 'And flights of angels send thee to thy rest.'"

R: "And flights of angels send thee to thy rest." Well, that is a good note to stop this delightful conversation. I would love to thank both of you so much for giving us the time. And as you know, this will be typed up by the students at the museum, and you will get your copy. And you can correct it or add anything and then it will go into the files for posterity. Thank you so much.

[End of the interview]