

## **Vivian Ashlock—Interview Summary**

Interviewee: Vivian Ashlock

Interviewers: Regan Draschner and Connor Jones

Interview Date: October 27, 2016

Location: Newsome House, Newport News, Virginia

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 85:04

**THE INTERVIEWEE:** Vivian Ashlock is a resident of Hampton Roads and has lived in both Newport News and Hampton. She attended Thomas Jefferson Elementary School and then went on to Walter Reed Middle School. She attended and graduated from Huntington High School in 1968 and then went on to attend Norfolk State for one year. She then went on to attend Christopher Newport College before taking a break from her studies. She held a number of jobs that revolved around bookkeeping and accounting as well as substitute teaching. She finished her undergraduate degree at Strayer Online and then went on to work for the police department. She is a member of many organizations such as various Neighborhood Watch Coalitions and is now the chairperson at the Newsome House, where she is working to expand the house to include other historical houses next to it.

**THE INTERVIEWERS:** Connor Jones and Regan Draschner are both seniors at Christopher Newport University and are currently enrolled in a class about the Civil Rights Movement. This class has a focus on oral history and the professor is the director of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW:** The interview took place in the upstairs room of the Newsome House. The room was filled with paintings of Martin Luther King and President Obama as well as many other leaders of African-American culture and the Civil Rights Movement. Ms. Ashlock seemed a little nervous at first but once the interview began she had a lot to share. Ms. Ashlock focused on her community as a child as well as the importance of education. She continually stressed how she pushed education onto her children and many others within her community. She did not have much to say about white people in Newport News as she did not interact with them often. She did recount a few stories of experiencing discrimination because of her race as well as not receiving a number of jobs because of her race. She did not take part in civil rights protests but rather focused on making her life better through work and education. She stressed the importance of her church life and how that affected her and helped her get through tough times.

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### Start of Interview

Regan Draschner: This is Regan Draschner and my partner is Connor Jones. Today is October 27, 2016. We are interviewing Ms. Vivian Ashlock. This interview is taking place at the Newsome House in Newport News, Virginia. This interview is being carried out as a part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. Good morning, Ms. Vivian Ashlock. We are taking what is called a life history and would like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood. Where and when were you born?

VA: I was born September the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1950 in Elizabeth County, Virginia, which is now Hampton, Virginia.

RD: Alright. How many children were in your family growing up?

VA: Six. My mother had six children.

RD: Where were you in the lineup?

VA: I'm the knee baby, which is the next to the last child.

RD: What did your parents do for a living?

VA: Well, my father was in the Air Force, as is my understanding from the pictures and whatever. He was a Tuskegee Airmen. My mother was a laundry worker for--at one time

it was called Dixie Hospital, but then ended up becoming Hampton General, and is now called Sentara.

RD: Were you involved in any community organizations or churches?

VA: Mm-hmm, all my life. At the age of, I guess, eight or maybe younger, my parents were in the Church of God and Christ, which is called St. John's Church of God and Christ, located 1129 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. My family had two groups: the grown folks had a group called the Faithful Jubilee and my cousins and I had a group called the (Braxton's Children? 0:01:57.8). So, we sang a lot. Then as we got older, and as I got older and got married, I was in functions like the Southeast Neighborhood Watch Coalition, the Neighborhood Watch Coalition, which I was the secretary for for six years. I'm involved in a lot of community activities in this city. I do a lot of community work. I have performed a lot of stuff for the city. And right now I'm the chairperson for the Newsome House. I was the secretary for the Tax Advisory Board for six years.

RD: Wow. What were race relations like in Newport News during this time?

VA: Well, it's kind of hard to say 'cause growing up, really, you know the white folks lived in a certain part of town which is like back by Christopher [Newport], your way, and we lived--where I lived at--I lived on 32<sup>nd</sup> and Madison. And, in the area I lived in, it was a lot of teachers, police officers--so I was in that vicinity--and doctors. I had (stuff? 0:03:04.0) like Dr. Scott, Dr. Ross, Dr. Reed and teachers that taught me in Huntington. And then I had, on the corner of my house, it was a lieutenant police officer who then, as he became the chief, he moved. But they were down on one end and we were down another. Then as people start migrating from the Newsome Park area to this particular area--because at one time it was called Warwick County and then it stretched out a little

farther--so they started moving out. But I always went to a black school. All the schools we attended were black, until--I'm not sure what grade I was in when they integrated the schools. But we didn't have much to do with the whites and they didn't have nothing to do with us. Now we went over town, you know, we'd mingle with them over town when it was flourishing with all the stores. When I say "over town" I mean on Washington Avenue. When we're talking "downtown," we're talking Jefferson Avenue with the stores, in case people don't understand what I'm saying.

RD: Alright. To go off that question, what was the integration of the schools like?

VA: When we got integrated, we didn't get that many white people down in our end of town. We really got a lot of white teachers, you know, so it was still, to me, not really integrated but it was. See, because Newport News High across over on Huntington Avenue, you know, ended up getting a little bit more black students, but they still was more white and we were still more black. So, it was still--. The comparison was not great, it just was teacher-wise. Now, as the years went down further, once I got out in '68, things started getting different. When they really started putting more kids, more white people with the black people, then you had a lot of fights and violence and whatever.

RD: There wasn't any fights or violence with just the white teachers?

VA: No, we just looked at them and kept on going and did what we had to do. We wondered why, you know, they did that and then when they started the busing part, you know, it really got carried away at the end.

RD: Alright. What was it like growing up in a segregated area? I guess we already covered that a little bit.

VA: Segregated? Oh, in my area when I was growing up, oh, it was fantastic. In my area, in the Newport News part that I lived in, you got to know everybody. On the street I lived on, not only did I know people in my street, on my blocks and up and down, but I know folks all the other ways because all of us went to schools together. So therefore you knew everybody from one end of Newport News to the other end. Then you knew people across the track, which was called the Newsome Park area and whatever. So, if I have a family on that side over there, it was like family. I mean, you know, we would get out--. The boys and the men would out there and argue, stand on the corner, sing and whatever. Or they shoot the crap or they fight a little bit. But then, you know, within the next two hours, they still friends and buddies. It was not a violent thought that "I'm gonna kill you and do all this other stuff" that's going on now, so. Growing up, it was a village raising the family. It's 'cause if there was something wrong, your mother got the news. So the people corrected you, as you come down. Even going to school. If I got in trouble in school--believe everybody on 32<sup>nd</sup> Street or whatever knew what was going on down at the end. You understand what I'm saying? So it was like everybody was in everybody's--well, I wouldn't say business. But it was a concern and we don't have that now.

RD: No, there is not that sense of community.

VA: No. We don't have that anywhere, nowhere.

RD: Where did you attend elementary school?

VA: I attended elementary school at Thomas Jefferson and that was like--. I lived on 32<sup>nd</sup> Street. Thomas Jefferson was on 31<sup>st</sup> Street and the next block, which is now First Baptist Church, on Jefferson Ave and 30<sup>th</sup> Street. So that's where I attended elementary from the first grade to the fifth grade. Ok.

RD: So how big was the school?

VA: It was a nice size school but it--. How can you put it? Maybe two or three first grader classes and maybe two or three second grades or whatever all the way up to fifth grade but you had--. You stayed in that school until you got through the fifth grade. So it was pretty for that area we were in. Because in the area I was in, they had like James Lee Elementary, they had two or three other elementary schools that--from my area--that kids could go to. So I guess they put enough folks in there that could allow for that particular school. And then, as we got out of that school and into the sixth grade, they sent us to different other schools, which meant everybody in my area from 35<sup>th</sup> Street or whatever attended the school I attended, that's Thomas Jefferson. And everybody from like maybe 32<sup>nd</sup> Street or whatever, 29<sup>th</sup> and back the other way, went to like James Lee, which is down there on--. But they tore that down so. Like I said, schools were all over for them to go from different areas, but once they got out of that we all went to different middle schools, as ya'll put it. Then we went to the regular high school.

RD: What were your experiences like there?

VA: At school? Oh we loved it, we--. Oh shoot, well, to grow up, really, to be first (8:35) you know? I did have it pretty good 'cause I grew up sucking my thumb and you know how we go through those changes. And the people put the hot sauce on it but it didn't do no good. You understand what I'm saying? But you know I used to (rip? 0:08:47.9) a little girl because she used to wet on herself in the first grade, you know? And I said, "Don't you do that no more!" You know how we do stuff when we get young but it's all in love and fun. But everybody I grew up with I still know in my life because I grew up

with them [and] we lived in, we stayed in the same city. So I enjoyed growing up 'cause I knew everybody, you know.

RD: Right, again that like sense of community

VA: Mm-hmm

RD: That's incredible. What were you like as a young student? Like a description.

VA: Young student? Ok, I guess. How would you put it? Well, when you got family that's church-orientated, there is not a whole lot you can really be different from. You either try and do what you can do and keep on going and, you know, go out and play with the kids and whatever. But I did my work and what I had to do and that was it. But we weren't home that much by the time we went to school. I would come home, it was time to go to church. We ate dinner or whatever with the church. Then we would have a church service or something. Back in the days, they had a radio then they had the TVs where you put the quarter in. In my household, we were poor, you know, and I ain't mad but we used to have to get the quarters in, fight to get to the TV. They put the quarter in so we could see our shows on TV. A lot of folks don't know back in the day you had to put a quarter in them TVs to look at movies. You don't remember that?

RD: I've never heard of that.

VA: Yes, ma'am, we had to--. Well, to afford a TV, you had to put the quarter in so you pay for TV, too. But you could look at your shows and whoever got their dollars-- quarters or dollars--in there could see their shows that they wanted to see, so. But, getting back to growing up, I grew up in a household with my grandmother and maybe about-- people say I exaggerate when I say that--but I say maybe about twenty to twenty-six people in our house. My mother had six kids and another aunt had four kids. I had an aunt

that had one kid. I had another aunt that had like six kids. Then I had a grandmother and I had like an Aunt Peggy and an Aunt (Riah? 0:11:10.4), an Aunt Eva and, you know, all of us kind of like lived in this house with the children. It was--. And to this day, the house is called "the Family House." It's still sitting on 32<sup>nd</sup> and Madison so, you know, here it is. I am sixty-six, and we moved in when I was three, so, you know--. Growing in that [house], you know, it's just--. It was never a dull moment in the house. Don't get me wrong, you know. We had a ball. [laughter]

RD: So, where did you attend middle school?

VA: I attended middle school [in what] is now called the Downing-Gross building. It was [then] called Walter Reed. So that was sixth and seventh grade. Oh, and getting back to the other schools, the elementary schools--I loved the May Days. I don't know if they do them now. The maypole days? Like at the end of the school year, they had like a May Day like in May sometimes (and you're almost ready to get out of school? 0:12:04.3). We had these programs to go in and go outside to the field and you play ball, kickball or whatever. We had the poles where you go around and do all this, like the maypole. It was really awesome.

RD: Yeah, we don't have that anymore.

VA: No?

Connor Jones: We call it field day.

VA: Yeah, field day. But we used to call it the maypole, May Day. Right.

RD: Were you ever aware of any differences between the black schools in the area and the white schools?



VA: There were differences and there are still differences. Their educational purposes and--. Okay, we'll put it this way, and I look at some things now 'cause I sub. There was a difference in the white schools and in the black schools. The teachings are different, and even though they still had the same books, but the learning is a lot different. And I've noticed, when I sub now, that there was a difference in the books they're using in the schools. You know, all I did was sit, [thinking] "I'm here to get education, whatever I get I work at it," whatever. But I look at now sometimes and what they're doing with the kids, I think it's unfair because they're not getting what the white people are getting. You understand what I'm saying? Therefore, they're getting frustrated, and we're not pushing the issue that you know we need be on, compelled to do the same thing, 'cause our kids will be still out on the streets, doing what they're doing because they are not getting what they need to get. It was a difference but, like I said, in my time, I didn't argue with it. You understand what I'm saying? 'Cause I'm like if you going to teach me phonics, "See Dick Run, See Spot (0:13:33.3), I will learn to do what I got to do. It might take me a little longer to get it, but I'll get it. And when I got older [I] realized, you know, I've got to defeat the way they're treating me. And if I want to make something out of my life, I've got to do a little better. You see, that was me back in that day. Sometimes you can't instill that into the generation of this day because you're dealing with a whole new--. They got parents that don't and didn't and really don't care. But yeah, I did notice a difference there but, you know, you don't knock the system, you just work with it. But you try to inform your kids or people, that you know, "try to do better." Now, I don't make them go to the white schools. I didn't--. You understand what I'm saying? But I told them whatever you learn at the black schools, you learn it, and learn it well.

RD: We see that you attended Huntington High School during the 1960s. How would you describe your experiences there?

VA: Oh, that was awesome. Off the chain, wonderful. That's what made me, to a point (0:14:38.9), the person I am today. See, the young people don't understand that, back in the day when I was there, (DeVita? 0:14:43.8) Owens, which was one of the members of my board, her father was the principal of that school. His name was W.D. Scales. W.D. Scales was a no-nonsense principal and he had a vice principal, I think his name was Mr. Johnson. That school--and I will not say strict--but it was a professional school [in] that if you walked down the hall and even touched or whatever your sister or your brother, you can get in trouble. I'm serious. That school was so tight on you getting what you came here for. It was not a thing that you come here to lollygag and play and joke. You know you here for to do this, you're gonna do this. You're not gonna be in this hallway, dadada, and you know it was like--. Today, kids might say, "Oh ya'll was in a prison or something." No, but it was instructional, it was disciplined, and it makes you what you are today. And I loved Huntington. And when I sub and look at Huntington now I'm like, "I am disgraced at you all because this is my alma mater. I came out in '68 and the way ya'll doing my school and the way ya'll act there is no way that we could've gotten away with any of the stuff that they do in school nowadays." You understand what I'm saying? Here's the thing: even with the dressing--I mean I'm not mocking folk but there was a way, I know what the fad is, but there was still a way to come to school in a decent fashion and look presentable and not act ghettoish. I mean, you know, don't get me wrong. I mean, I'm for people--you dress the way you want, but you've got to look decent in it. And some of the stuff you wear with the holes in the shirts and the holes in

the pants and hanging off your--it's just unacceptable and it would not have been acceptable in my school. But I loved Huntington. I learned a lot. When I got into the-- what was it?--10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was going to school a half a day 'cause I was working half a day. So I got into other programs like VOT, and COP, and YES and all the stuff that helped me to be the person I am. See 'cause when the OHA had different things out in the summertime for jobs, I applied for summer and fall jobs so it made me. And I guess it was the desire and the wanting and then realizing I grew up in a poor family. I grew up with hand-me-downs so, if I wanted to do something with my life, I had to go forward. So I went out I started working at sixteen and I tried to push people to do that, you know. So it was a great inspiration to me. I wouldn't have traded my education for nothing, even though--I mean I was in the black segregated schools--I wouldn't have traded it for nothing because I had the ability and I wanted to learn and I did. But then when I went to college, you'll probably ask the next question, when I went to college my first school was Norfolk State. I was like, "Oh my God." They started integrating--I think we had one or two white boys on the football team. But the school was not like I thought because, going to the school I was in [Huntington] with the discipline and the hands up [for] being excused and, when I got into that college, it was like I'm raising my hand [to ask] "Can I use the restroom?" and the people like, "Nah, you don't raise hand in here. You just get up and go out." I'm like, "Oh no!" And you saw kids going out and in and then sometimes they don't come back. Then I start seeing kids coming to school with hair rollers on and pajamas and I'm like, "Oh no, this is not for me." So after that first year, that was not for me. Then the second year I went to CNU. [laughter] So I went there and there was only sixteen of us blacks there. At that time it was just Christopher Newport

College and, you know, it was behind Ferguson. It was just that little building behind Ferguson. Now that was nice, I enjoyed that but I'm like, "Oh God, ain't but sixteen of us." [laughter] But it was, you know, the experience was nice 'cause mostly everything in my class were white but they were nice and most of them were men 'cause I was in business field and public speaking. So, you know, I had no problems with none of them, you know, 'cause they would help me. So I guess my life going through was pretty good and it changed so--.

RD: So you didn't experience any kind of like discrimination while at Christopher Newport College?

VA: Not me, not really, nuh uh [no]. I was like, "I did my work" and if you gave me an assignment or whatever a couple of white guys would help me if I didn't know or whatever. But other than that, I guess--. And I was like a loner. I just went to what I had to do and I booked it off the campus, you know, when I'm finished, I'm done. So people look at me say--'cause I'm talking now--that I'm an extravert but I'm really introvert. You know, on the outside I can talk but when I'm done what I got to do it's like I'm in my little shell so it don't bother me.

RD: Going back to Huntington, do you remember any particular teachers that influenced you?

VA: Oh yeah, all of my teachers. You don't be telling on people's names but some of the names was that influenced me were really my business teachers like Ms. Hines, Ms. Rhoda Haltiwanger, which is now Mrs. Holt. And that young lady, right now I still see her every Sunday or wherever I go. She and her sisters are the ones that--and it's so amazing that they have a daycare which is on Warwick Boulevard. She and her sisters

taught my grandkids in there. And see, they have a religious daycare as well as whatever and they still had it going on. But she taught me in Huntington in the business field. But they still do that and my grandkid's mom is fifteen now the other one is eighteen.

Graduated, you know, good grades, you know. And they told her "smart as a whip." You understand what I'm saying? So you know, it's the pride you take in people. So, like I said, I had Ms. Hines in business. Some of the other teachers I had were my gym teachers like Mrs. Francis and all them. They were nice, they were my neighbors and stuff. So I thought all my teachers were great. They were great influences on me. I had a little issue with my little math teachers and stuff but I loved my little Spanish teacher, Mr.

Lawrence. You know, he was good. But [at] Huntington, the teachers there were really great. They had a concern, even though we weren't integrated at the time, they had a concern that you get it. And one of the other English teachers and math teachers that go to my church--name was Bramblett, her name was Ricks then--but they had a concern 'cause they even tutored if we needed tutoring. And to this day, some of them I do know. One's dead now, Ms. Inetta Edwards. But they would tutor and still was tutoring the younger kids that's here so. They were really great.

RD: Really great. For Christopher Newport College were there any professors that directly influenced you?

VA: Well, not really, I mean, I was just there to get the lesson. You know? There was no one on one with me. You understand what I'm saying? They were like they did their assignment or whatever and that was it.

RD: So, high school was a lot more personal?

VA: Mm-hmm

RD: So, we're curious to learn more about the process of integration. You would have been quite young when the Brown decision was handed down. *Brown vs. Board*.

VA: *Of Education*. Right, I was very young

RD: Do you remember hearing about it?

VA: Yeah, I heard about it, about the black girl that went to school. But, you know, I'm like, "Ok, she made it, you know, whatever." But I'm like this: that went on like that because of segregation or whatever but I wasn't pressed. If they didn't want me in there, I didn't have to be there. As long as I get educated that's fine with me. I didn't understand why we were like that, you know. Even when we used to go to Richmond to different things with our church and different things, we had signs saying "colored" and we had to go in the back doors. And even when I was working back in the '70s, '80s--I used to work for this company. We used to go up to this place where this man had this business and I used to work with this business. We used to go into some restaurants up in the like Lightfoot-Toano area, up in that area. They the little signs still saying, "Black, colored people, back door" and whatever. So I mean I just look at it [and] keep on rolling 'cause I'm like "okay?" I've always been the person, I ain't got to go in there. I don't need you like that. But I can say that--not during this time--but as I was pregnant with my first child, back in '73, I did encounter a gentleman in West Point that would not let me in his building. Yes, and my car broke down, we were going to visit a relative that became my aunt. My husband and I was getting an aunt to, at that time (a dependent prison?

0:23:38.5) up on Spring Street, 5 and Spring Street. And my car broke down, and I was pregnant. We were at West Point (0:23:44.3), up on near Anderson's Corner He would not let us in the building. I had to call my father-in-law in the rain. We had to sit in the

car in the rain until they came all the way back from Newport News to get us that night. Now that was integration, that was mean. You know? But you know, I look at it like this, "Okay, whatever." But see, I ain't got to give you nothing, I don't got to do nothing for you, you understand what I'm saying? So you look at it and [think] like "okay." You don't like it, but what can we do about it? What could we have done about that? I couldn't force the man to let me in to use the bathroom or nothing else. That's your business, so you know, I just don't--. I'm like this, I don't frequent places. If you don't like me, I don't have to deal with you. If you show me that you've got an issue with me-- that goes for black and white, don't get me wrong--I don't got to deal with you. I stay away. I know how to find somewhere else to go to do what I need to do. So that was me. I have been around with that kind of stuff but I just shut it off. I don't like it, but it's not something I'm going to fight you about. It's not something I'm going to argue with you about. You understand what I'm saying?

RD: Yes.

VA: See, 'cause I'm like this: I feel like I can get along with anybody. And if we human beings we should be able to speak and love one another. I might not like some of your ways, you might not like my ways, but that don't mean I'm your enemy. You understand what I'm saying? But when you blatantly don't want me in your building, and you know apparently my color did something to you, then I have a problem with that. You will get none of my money, and nothing else. That's the bottom line.

RD: What was the process of integration like in Newport News? I think you've already gone over this.

VA: It was fine. To me, I had no problem with it. I mean, they didn't do anything. But I did have work with the police department. You know, some of the white folk didn't want to be bothered with you, some did. But then I had a police officer I work with, you know, that lied on me. I tried to help her. She was a detective. I was just getting to the police department, just started, and you know, I'm the type of person--. You know, the guys picked on her, chewed her, you know, 'cause she'd never come to work. And I was trying to defend the young lady, and she carried me to internal affairs and I'm like, "Oh no you didn't." So, I'm gonna tell you what I told her. I said, "I just got here." I said, "And I don't know [what you got against me] but they were picking on you and roughing you up [and] I stood up for you and you filed a complaint on me." I said, "If I ever see you in eastern Newport News where I live at, I'm gonna sic my boys on you and stand there and watch them." That's exactly what I told her. So she asked for a transfer and they put her on the other end of town. See, don't mistreat me 'cause I don't do nothing to you and I'm not a violent person. But when you do stuff like that to me--and all the officers had to go in and write letters that I was the one trying to help her out and you filed a complaint against me. So, I mean, I don't threaten you with people but you know when you want to do me some harm I was, excuse my French, but black folk (that had? 0:26:50.8) beat your butt if come on that corner. If you wrong me--. I ain't gonna do nothing to you but you get in the wrong spat back down here and something happen I'm going to stand there and watch them whip you and going to act like I don't know what happened I'm being honest. [laughter]

RD: You're being honest.



VA: I'm being honest and that's what I tell people. I will watch them whip you and say I ain't see nothing because you don't do people that way. I wouldn't do you that way so don't you do me that way. You understand what I'm saying?

RD: So, again when did integration kind of begin for you?

VA: For me? I really didn't really meet, deal with people 'till I got older. I was about maybe in my 20s or something. So basically before then we all were the same. You would see people moving out of areas because we would move in areas but, never thought about it 'cause even my friends were going to (Penninsula? 0:27:54.9) Catholic which was black and white. But, see, I didn't have to mingle with that, with everybody. I just dealt with the black people. But as I got older, as I said, in the jobs and different things, that's when it did to me 'cause when one lady told me about a job at certain company and she says, "Well, you have to come through the back door" and I'm like, "Excuse me?" I'm like, "Then I don't need this job." And then when I apply for a job-- you know when you talk on the phone, "Hello, dadada"--and then when I got to the place the lady looked at me and said, "Oh that job is filled." So you know--'cause my friends would say, "You sound like you're white on the phone." 'Cause when I say, "Good evening, dadadadada." they say "you sound like you're white." But when I got in person all of a sudden--. Yesterday the job wasn't filled. [I] come for the interview, [and] when I hit the door the job was filled. You understand what I'm saying? So, to me, that was integration but like I said, that's fine. And I always felt that you don't do people that way. You don't tell people to come through a back door. You understand what I'm saying? 'Cause one girl said, "Y'all don't come through the front door." I'm like, "Y'all don't come through what front door? I ain't coming through the backdoor. If I [have to] come

through a backdoor, I don't need no job. So, it's a whole lot of (job? 0:29:02.5). And then I had one job where the men--. This is when I was twenty-six, in Hampton, at a probation office, and I was doing transcription 'cause I was a steno. And I was doing it and they hired this other little girl, nineteen years old, white. Says, "Ms. Ashlock, we want you to train her and we want you to make sure her dictation is right." I'm like, "You have lost your freaking mind. I'm not training anybody to take a job that I'm doing." So that day I left. I said, "Let the backdoor hit what God gave me" and walked out the door. I'm not going to train you--don't get me wrong--to take my job and I need to work too. Now that is (prejudice? 0:29:52.1) So, like I said, you know, I look at it and keep on going. I said, "You know, when I found one I found another." And a lot of times even though, you know--I work for bookkeeping accounting and I have a degree in accounting and a masters in resource management--when I apply [and] they find out I'm black, you know, it's like whatever. So, I don't get discouraged, you know, 'cause I've gotten old enough now to understand. Okay, whatever God's will is for me and whatever's destined for me to be is going to be. But I'm not going to show them that I'm mad or nothing, you know. But I always said, and don't get me wrong, I'm going to say it, but all dogs or everybody got their day 'cause somewhere down the line you going to regret, but something is going to happen that you should have done what you should have done. You understand what I'm saying? So I'm not going to sit there and retaliate on you. No, I'm not, I will not do that. So basically--.

RD: So, you said you lived in a black community?

VA: Yes, strictly black.

RD: What was the response to integration? I know you said it wasn't like a big effect.

VA: Well, I guess they--. It really didn't matter to them, either. You understand what I'm saying? Because, as I said before, I lived in a black neighborhood with just doctors, black doctors, black teachers, police officers and people that had status you know, in the quota in the city and that had a little clout or whatever you call it. So, as things start moving, but as they started making a little bit more money and getting a little whatever, they started moving out--you understand what I'm saying?--to different areas. But we just stayed in a little--up here. So, even when I worked with the police department and some of the officers used to say, "You live down there, in that part of town?" I didn't have a problem. This is my home, these are my people. I don't have to move. I don't think I'm better than they are. We have, you know, white folks that come into my neighborhood and people that's coming in, moving in, in houses next door or whatever because they're trying to get back down this end of town. So you know, I don't know what they realized-- a change was made or whatever. Or maybe they realized that they really weren't raised that way. There were those that felt like they were better than the other people [who] stayed away. See, you know, I don't need to go up in Denbigh. I know they don't really even want us up there. They really don't even like us up there. So why am I gonna put myself in a position to be upset with people that don't like me? You understand what I'm saying? If I'm content in my little cubby hole making my minimum wage and doing whatever, let me be content right there. Let me make the best of my life that way. That way, I don't got worry about nobody arguing with me, me fighting with anybody over stupid stuff. It's bad enough we fight against ourselves but for me to fight against the white person, that's even stupider. You understand what I'm saying? So, I don't have a lot against--. I don't really have [anything] against white people but, if a white person

mistreat me, you have an enemy for life 'cause I don't have any dealings with you. But if you treat me with some respect and I--. When I worked for the police department, I had a lot of white friends. You understand what I'm saying? I had some that, you know, had that (under low-key stuff? 0:33:10.7), but the other ones to me were like brothers. I would feed them on Thanksgiving. I would feed them on Christmas. I had sergeants and lieutenants that I would invite to my house and I lived in the gh--you call it ghetto-- Southeast. I lived on 36<sup>th</sup> Street, one of the worst places in town. And on Christmas time and on Thanksgiving, I'd invite them and they park them black and white cars in front of my door. And I'd feed them. I didn't--. You know, I had no problem with that. You understand what I'm saying? I work with you. You treat me like I was human and I'll treat you like you're human. I had a few that came in there that wanted to act like whatever. But, you know, they had to be taken down a tad. Not [by] me, but the folks on the street took them down a tad. But, you understand what I'm saying? So, that's my philosophy on that. Integration is fine. Segregation was fine, but it was sad that we had to be amongst ourselves all the time but when you've grown through your life that way then you have to accept what you got when you're mistreated. See, our parents didn't really teach us about hate or whatever 'cause it was not a norm thing. It may have happened and they may have seen it but they shut it off as, "Ok, whatever." So growing up you just took it as it was. So hanging with my family and friends of the street and my other family on the other side of the track, that was all we had. You understand what I'm saying? So when they did start bussing the kids, it was not in my league. My kids did go to the white schools like--. I was a little upset because I lived on Ash Avenue and they bussed my little third and fourth grader all the way to Palmer which is up there in Oyster Point. You

know, right there off of Oyster Point Drive? The Palmer Elementary School. And I couldn't understand why you bus my child, no more than seven, eight years old from that end of town with all the trees and the creek, way over there, all the way up there. That was unnecessary. You understand what I'm saying? And then they took my son and carried him from over there all the way up to Menchville when you had a Warwick High School here and you had some other schools before they tore them down. You understand what I'm saying? So, you took my kids seventeen to twenty miles away just to integrate them. So, don't get me wrong, every school when I lived in Hampton for a while (35:41), every school my son went to, he was one of them chocolate boys [and] all the white girls liked him. Even when he was in the military. I ain't mad but I was scared that the (0:35:52.0)--. You know how when you go with white people--. Don't get me wrong, sometimes parents don't like their daughters mingling with people. So I'm like, "Honey, are you sure that's what you gonna do?" You understand what I'm saying? 'Cause you're looking up at them and yourself. And I'm not trying to make no waves. So, you know, he would just laugh and talk with them on the phone and stuff but that faded away 'cause, see, parents don't do that. But that's just me. I get leery 'cause I don't know what folk will try to do to me and I'm not gonna let you hurt me. So, as far as integration, to me, I had no problems, like I said. I can get along with you but I ain't got to never speak to you if you don't want to be bothered with me.

RD: Do you remember any kind of response from the white community? I know you said you weren't very involved.

VA: No, we didn't have no white communities around here. [laughter] The white people were just like--. Ok, when they were on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, nobody dealt with them 'cause, at that

time, a certain area was just black up in here, you know. And then they started moving out and the black folks started moving in. But, you see, the people from Newsome Park started buying houses over this way. That's when my uncle and them started moving from Newsome Park over this way and then they started going up to the Denbigh area. But everything around here was black except for over town at Huntington Avenue and different things like that. That was white--what you call the Huntington Heights--and all that stuff that was strictly white. We didn't go over there. You understand what I'm saying? We didn't go. We didn't go to Main Street. We didn't go to Lion's Edge and whatever. You may have went there. I had a family go there and clean house, babysit, and cook. I had a grandmother, when she lived in Hampton, she would, you know, cook, you know for the white folks and she used to iron their clothes and stuff like that. I had a grandma down here that had a white lady and man that she would do stuff for them, sew and whatever. But you know, they were good as gold to her. Whatever she needed and whatever, when my grandmother got sick and whatever--. They were very good to her 'cause my grandmother, you know, did their house work and did whatever until she couldn't do it anymore. Cooked, fed, washed, did whatever. So, I didn't have anything against them. They treat my family right. We treat them right so--. But some people didn't. But, like I said, over town was the white people so we didn't go there. And it's almost like you know what area to not to really go in. You understand what I'm saying? Growing up they talked about Fox Hill. Even though you know, they said, "Don't go into Fox Hill after six o'clock, KKKs. They would do you in." Fox Hill, Grandview. So nobody went that way after a certain time. Still to this day they say that but--. You know, I got relatives up in Fox Hill but they don't know the part of Fox Hill I go in. But that

was the thing so if you were told about a certain area you don't go in that area. So, and as I told you before, there are certain parts of Denbigh and whatever I don't even go in. And I have family up in Denbigh but I told them I can't stand Denbigh. You understand what I'm saying? It's too crowded, too clustered or whatever but then the white folks move from down here to be [not] around me so why am I gonna go up there and follow them? You understand what I'm saying? And then they're upset now that the housing authority are tearing down the stuff down here instead of the folk up there and they're complaining. You understand what I'm saying? So, why am I gonna go where I'm not wanted? Why am I gonna put myself in that position? Unnecessary. I hope I'm answering your questions the way you want them answered.

RD: Oh no, you're doing great. Very informative, thank you. So, in our class, we learned a little bit about the court-ordered busing that took place in the 1970s. This would have been shortly after you graduated.

VA: Mm-hmm.

RD: So you kind of touched on that.

VA: Yeah, see that came after me. I came out in '68 so that wouldn't--. The bussing didn't affect me. It affected everybody behind me and the only time it affected me was when my kids were born. So, you understand what I'm saying?

RD: So, were any of the members of your family affected? And you talked about your children.

VA: Mm-hmm, my children, mm-hmm.

RD: How did community members, white and black regard it?

VA: They didn't like it.

RD: They didn't like it?

VA: Like I said they were mad 'cause their kids were going so far away. You know? And when the bussing really started, you had mega-fights and I'm serious. You had--. When they started bringing the white kids down here and whatever you had a whole lot of fights. You had a whole lot of fights between the black and whites. That they were mad, the black guys--. I don't know if the white boys said something to the black guys, [or] the black guys said [something to the white guys]--. It was just, it was on. And it should not have been. I mean, don't get me wrong, all of us should have been trained to do better than that. You know? But when you have that animosity and you haven't been taught and you know like yadadada and they get the mouth and the what not, that's it. You know, we didn't have as much fighting in the segregated schools as we had in the integrated schools. We're having it now, but we didn't have it then. You understand what I'm saying? So, and I don't know if they really adjusted to that yet and now and whatever. But I think there is still some issues with that integration.

RD: Definitely. Was there any kind of resistance to bussing?

VA: I didn't like it. But you know--. Like I said, I didn't like it but I accepted it 'cause I had no choice. My child had to have an education. I worked and I wasn't gonna--. Only thing I fought the school system on was the education they were getting and the teaching and the stuff they were doing the assignments [on] or whatever. As far as the bussing, I would get up and say, "Honeys, ya'll got to get up and go out there five o'clock, six o'clock and get them buses." I didn't like that 'cause it was dark out there for my children to go out there. But then it was like half the folks down this end of town don't have cars. You got my kids up here in Menchville, you got my kids up here in Palmer. You got my



kids up here in this other school, Macintosh or whatever. How you expect us to get to their conferences? How you expect us to get to their programs they have? We have no transportation and we don't got the money. You understand what I'm saying? So then you act like we don't care and--they don't really care now--but [it was] because of the fact that this happened. My thing would've been that had they did the bussing, they should've looked at the school system, looked at whatever was hired and whatever, and put them in the area that was suitable so the parents would get there back and forth or get somebody to take them. Seventeen miles is a long ways to go when you don't have a car. It just so happened I had a car but a lot of folks down here don't have. A lot of folk depend on taxis or busses and a lot of folk didn't have them tokens or the money for the bus. You following what I'm saying? Then when got four or five children in different schools, you can't maneuver like that. I thank God I only had two. See, 'cause my mother-in-law had eleven. Two sets of twins and I was not determined to have that many children 'cause I had a sister-in-law that had a set of twins. So, you know, that was just too many. So two, and five years apart, was all I needed. So, I was fortunate, that's what I'm saying. I was fortunate, whereby other people may not have been as fortunate as me. Some folks had three, four, five, six, and seven kids. Then, I was a little ticked because I had a parent that she tried to blame the school board, the school, 'cause her daughter got pregnant when it was in Palmer. You understand what I'm saying? And she wanted to raise cane with the school 'cause they were gonna send the daughter to Deer Park. You know, 'cause that's where unwed mothers was going at that time. But I'm like then you should have took care of your child, but, she wanted to raise cane about that. But she lived down there where I lived as well. But that's what I'm saying: it's kind of hard but,

you know we suffer the consequences of what we do and our actions. But, I just look at the fact that it was just too far to have to have kids to go to go to school. Now, I look at it--. My daughter now, they're closer, see. My daughter lives out here where I used to live at in the trees or the creek, as you put it, but her daughter went to Heritage. The other one go to Achievable Dream, which is right here. You understand what I'm saying? The difference from the timespan [from when] my kids in the '70s went, we're looking at the difference of seventeen miles versus what? Three miles? Four miles? Yeah ok, you know, and the elementary kids are not being bussed that far away. You understand what I'm saying? 'Cause I had one of my kids I raised they were bussed all the way down to (44:33-35) but that's not really that far. That's at Main Street. But [in comparison to] down here when you had Hines and you had John Marshall and different other schools that was great. You understand what I'm saying? So, it was--. I just looked at it, but you know, I had transportation, some folks don't. And it really was a problem but when you don't really push an issue, you just want to get mad, and it's not whatever, that's what you get it. And those that's really concerned will push. But that was a problem, the bussing was a problem. I mean sending them kids that far away. I didn't like it but, like I said, I wasn't going to argue with them.

RD: Why do you think there was more of an emphasis on getting a good education than there is now?

VA: To me, it should be still that. But you're looking at--. And I guess people look at me and they always say, "You're just always Santa." I look at when we train our kids. You have, nowadays, children having children [who] didn't really have the training when they were growing up that they should have had. Okay, for instance, me: my parents, even

though they were the word strictly, they believed in the education (you gonna gone? 0:45:48.9). Going back in their days, my mother stopped in the seventh grade. I had an aunt that took her to [the age of] thirty-five, forty to go back and get her GED. But my mother never got her high school nothing. But, they went as far as they could go before they had to work. Back in those days--back in the what? the '30s, the '23s, the '40s--you didn't get the education, but it was for your children. And it was desired. So my desire, once I got married and I realized how the system worked and how the world was today that we have to work for what we need in life--. So therefore, we had to put forth an extra effort not to say nothing about the white people. Sometimes they get better breaks than we get. Therefore, you have to go the extra mile. So as I grew up and got my kids and all my kids' friends, I said, "You need to get that high school education. Then you need to get that college education." I said, ""Cause this world is not going to give you nothing. That white man or that white boy may slide 'cause his daddy made no Charlie-who and boobooboo and whatever. I don't know them people so I'd rather you get this." So I pushed the education for my children. I pushed for everybody that I knew. When these young mothers start having babies at the age of fifteen or fourteen and whatever--. When you out there doing what you want to do in the streets, you don't have that time for your children. Then you can't push it. I raised a niece's kids. I left and went to Jersey and came back in '94 'cause my sister was sick. So I had a niece's kids. I have a seven year old, a six year old and a one and a half. And I had another niece that had an infant child 'cause at that time my sister had it but she was on the verge of dying and she died before I could go back. So I raised these three kids. I had all kinds of problems because the seven year old was LD [learning disability]. The six year old [was] smart as a whip, but

had no common sense. And the little boy was like--they had him ADHD and some of everything under the sun. You following what I'm saying? So, therefore, I had to stay on the school board and stay because my thing was education, education, education. And, with these problems you got, I don't care what you do when you get out of school, my house or whatever, but you're gonna learn and stay in school while you're with me. So I raised them 'till they got to whatever. The one with the LD, borderline retarded, she managed to get out with the GAP diploma, you know? I wasn't happy with that but you know--. 'Cause she had a third grade reading level and couldn't go no higher. You understand what I'm saying? But I did have people and teachers, especially white ones that worked with her, who would come and get her, would take her places to try to help her. You understand what I'm saying? The one that was the smart one, she tried to diss her sister and brother because she was smarter than them but she had no common sense. You understand? I'm being awfully frank. And when parents don't train the children and help them get along and when you have all those babies and stuff, you're not pushing that education. And then when you start letting your kids start hitting on you, pushing on you, you're afraid of your children. See, when they came out with this "you can't whip the child," then--. See, my Bible said, "Train up a child in the way he go, and when he get old [he] will not depart [from it] but it also say, "Spare the rod, you spoil that child." And I understand there is a difference in an abusive beating and a corrective beating. When I was in school, if the teacher wanted to spank me she took that ruler, and spanked my hand or spanked my leg. And when they did away with all that craziness for the children, that lost the sight of the education and the respect and the children and what you can do. So, therefore, the parents can't control and do nothing with the children. So therefore,

your education is gone down the tube 'cause that parent at sixteen had a child and that child had gone on and started making babies at fourteen and thirteen and you don't have that care and that concern is gone. So, I keep telling people we trying to push. I've substituted and I substitute now and each time I go to school I keep telling the kids--I said, "The way you're acting, it's not going to get you a job." I said, "The way you're trying to be smart and nasty. I got mine, you got yours to get. But if I get out of my bed at five-thirty, six o' clock in the morning--and I'm retired--to try to help you then you should want to learn." See, I have a heart for the people 'cause I know we need to get out here and get the education and we need to go to college. And if you're slow and need help, we're here to work. But if you want to stand on the corner and your parents don't care and--. I said I was gonna try and, you know, see about the school board and get some preachers to work with me you know 'cause we need to do a better job. And then some of the teachers don't have the concern that they should have for the students. They don't have that push and the drive. And [if] you want to be a teacher, it's about making sure that you teaching them and helping them to understand. And, if you got a little problem, take them on the side or whatever and work with that individual, you know. 'Cause when I go to school, now all I'm looking at is SPED, LDs, ADHDs. I mean you got too many special education students. You got too many LD students. You got too many DDL students. I mean, you know, they're human but we still got to push it in them and if we don't push the education and work with them then they feel like there is nothing to it. There is no life, you know? I can go stand on the corner and standing on the corner is not gonna get you not any dollar. And robbing and getting on this crazy mess that you're getting on, it's stupid. So I'm an advocate, you know. I try to tell the people it's about the

education. You got to have it. You ain't going to get no job nowadays without education. And with, sitting down, you got to have a degree (even in the garbage truck? 0:51:43.0). You understand what I'm saying? So you need that education. But if the people would push it, it will work. You just got to get enough people like me. (51:58)

RD: What did you do after graduating from high school. You said--.

VA: After graduating from high school, I still worked. I got married. Like I said, I went to college. Like I said, I went to Norfolk State the first year. I went to Christopher Newport the next year. And, before Newport News High shut down and made it that military whatever, I subbed over there. Well, you know, I--. You know even though I was doing bookkeeping in the county [and] stuff like that, I was teaching different classes but I was subbing one day for a--I think it was a business class. And one boy was in this English class with this lady. And I knew the lady. And she was telling him to do something or another and he told her, "I would take you and throw you out that window." When he threatened that teacher that day I ain't substituting another day. See, 'cause there was not gonna be a student that was going to throw me out a window. You understand what I'm saying? You're trying to teach them and correct them and whatever and you threaten to throw me out of a window? No. When he said that to her I'm like, "I will not be back." So you know how you just go on and you just work different jobs--. And I got married. Well, I used to work for the housing authority, then I got married. Still worked with them when I had my first child. Then, like I said, when you're young, you're working all kinds of jobs 'cause you had to be out for so many months and then you come back. And then I ended up working--. Well, I worked like (53:32) and whatever I worked for the temporary services 'till whatever. Then in the end, I worked for this

company called, (Sesams? 0:53:42.3), which I was a coordinator. I started out as just a regular bookkeeper, a receptionist. But you know how you have to do stuff to find different things for taxes or whatever, but it was an (0:53:51.3) company which had business in Boeing, Air Force base, and different other places. So I got to travel and do a whole lot of that. So, I worked that for years had real contracts and bids for the government. I worked Fort Lee for three years, traveling back and forth from here. My kids, you know, were still growing up and going to school and back and forth. And then, I worked for OHA. And then, as I said, I worked summer jobs with them. I ended up going to New Jersey. Ended up coming back when my sister got sick in '94. Ended up with the police department, you know. But everywhere I went I have always advocated that education is what you needed. So, even though when I was married with my children, I would try to get a little bit more college in. So, like I said, I went back to Thomas Nelson and, at that time, they were doing the computer programming with the COBOL [and] Pascal and all that stuff. And I got into my last year, whatever, then all of a sudden they came up with this Word Perfect stuff. And I'm like, "I did all this stuff with writing these programs and stuff and ya'll just got rid of this system?" You know I was a hot sister 'cause I had gone three years through all that even though I was doing-- that was my minor and accounting was my major--but I'm like, "I can't believe." You know? So, then I'm like ya'll talking about Word Perfect and that's the word whatever and ya'll did away with--. I got hot. [laughter] So I wouldn't go to school for a while. Then, as I got back in the city in '94, '95 whatever it was, I decided--. Eventually the girls say, "Well, you need to go back and get your degrees." Yeah, I went to Norfolk State, I went to Christopher Newport. I didn't graduate from neither one of them. I said

the city sent me to CNU for administrative assistant for like two years or whatever. So I said, "I need to finish." So I decided on Strayer. I went to Strayer online and I got my bachelor's online. Then I looked at-- The girl said, "What you going to do now?" And I'm like, "Well you know--me: I've had a business license since 1999." My business license was, you know, bookkeeping, accounting, consulting, whatever 'cause I've done it all my life and when people used to call my house-- And then I did the janitorial company work so I knew how to (write business? 0:56.00.1) for janitorial. I knew how to clean. I did Boeing Air Force Base. I did NAB and different other places. And the people call my house and my kids tell them, "We don't know what you're talking about." I'm like, "Did somebody call me for a job?" [laughter] And they're like, "They said something about bookkeeping and whatever." I'm like, "Don't you answer none of the phones in my house. If you don't how to answer, take a message. Don't you--." So you know how that fades away so I'm still working saying, "Well, you know, eventually I'll get off the floor." So I put my daughter in a beauty shop business in 2005 up in Denbigh. You know, she had gone to school in hair design and was doing hair and dadadada. See, 'cause I'm like, "If I can get you out of my pocket, I can save a little bit of money and do whatever, so." It was called Klassy Kutz and Styles. You know? I'm working at the police department but you got the business and I'm like--I say, "Please let me hire the people" and dadada. But, you know, "dadada." You know how kids can be and I ain't got time to argue with them. But anyway, you know, my TV, my stuff, and all the stuff that was in there-- Oh, she would go and interview people and folk would work my booth and stuff and I ain't see no booth rent. So for a year and a half I'm like, "Oh no!" I'm losing money paying all this rent money, light, gas, and water, and all this stuff, you know, and



ain't no money coming up in here! So then, my son, by him doing tower work and he was working for a (color? 57:19) tower. He worked for the tower shop and whatever. So he had seventeen years of that so I said, "Okay." They had new houses being built over across the water and I got hooked up with some people over there so you know how you do the licensing. We subcontract, we send workers to dry wall and tile or whatever. So he was doing that. Then, in the interim, he would go in the night time and do the work--.

They need some work done, so he got some of his friends and they would go out in the day time. So when the man would write the check, you know, give me the check, and they fill up an envelope, his friends--. [He] say, "Can y'all pick up the check and give it to my mama?" And then they would open up my check and then they said, "Well, you owe me such such such," and I'm like, "Oh no, we ain't working like that." So after two or three months, I'm like, "Oh no, we going to shut this right on down 'cause, see, I'm not doing this for your friends to get money." No ma'am, uh uh, no. So that was two businesses that went defunct. I mean, you know, trying to help the children. So I just went on, kept on working and so. Like I was swore, I'm certified with the state of Virginia, you know under janitor, book keeping and whatever. And when people call me and my CPA said, "Well, do you charge folk?" When they called me, I told them my fee for consulting and whatever. They're like, "Oh well, you know, let me call you back 'cause you know we just--." No, no. See they don't want to pay me so I'm like, "I don't have time for this foolishness." So I be trying not to talk to people on my phone. You understand what I'm saying? Or they come and they start out with a question then, you know, dada dada, and like whatever. So, finally when I retired from the police department, you know, I'd had my Master's and everything else so. It's like, "Man, I'm

just holding the license.” The business license, it’s just there. And, you know, so I sub every now. But I go to the meetings with the VHDC and all them, that they send me to different things. So I’m active in stuff like that. I’ve done a couple of these but, when I look at the janitorial part, you got like a hundred million people that’s out there doing janitorial work so, you know. I’m just saying I wait my time, but it is important you know, to do stuff that way, ‘cause education is what it does. That’s what led me to do what I want to do. So I have not given up on my own business ‘cause I want to be an entrepreneur, you know so. And I had a man who was going to put me in the restaurant business and he died, you know, [after] two months. He’d given me the key to the building, he’d taken me over to the restaurant place, you know. We were talking about some stuff in there and he died and I’m like, “Oh well.” That one didn’t (phase? 0:59:44.1) but I’ve never given up hope. ‘Cause I said, you know, if it’s going to be for me--even I’ve had dreams about trying to do something with the homeless. So it’s the fact of it, I have to get myself together and my head together. I don’t want to work. Don’t get me wrong now. I mean I don’t mind helping, like I substitute every now and then ‘cause I know I’m sixty-six years old. I spent my life working. But I want to have something and have jobs for other people, you know. I want them to say, “I got this job, I got this position, I got this thing,” that those of you who keep saying “I can’t get a job,” you get a job. And so, my brain still ticks so I’m still working on trying to find way to do what I need to do, ‘cause my goal is to help somebody else that say they can’t get jobs and need jobs, so. That’s me. I’ve talked you to death.

RD: Let’s see, so we went over what you studied. What was your first job?

VA: Oh, my first job, was--. Was it Langley? I'm thinking I was sixteen. I worked at an agency, like a travel agency where, you know, people get stranded here with the (1:01:00) and that was over town, when I was sixteen. People, you know, like travelers' aid. It was a fund that, if they needed help, some people were stranded here from other cities and whatever--. We worked at that agency to do stuff, to help them get back and forth--home--so.

RD: Were most of the people employed there black or white?

VA: It was a white company but there were a few blacks, mm-hmm. See, 'cause to get back to that part, YES or (1:01:30.9) Office of Affairs, they gave jobs in the summer. So it didn't matter what company it was. They tried to place the black folks into jobs for the summer. See, 'cause they gave us several jobs: that job at the white folks', then they sent us to the Langley Air Force Base. I worked at (1:01:48). I mean, you know. So I had a variety. Most everything they sent me [to] was a white company. So. And they treated me fair. You know, like I said, it was just only some people in certain areas that mistreat you. But I enjoyed it. Mm-hmm.

RD: So just kind of going back, did you experience discrimination in the work place? You said you didn't really--.

VA: Mm-mmm [no], not there. Mm-mmm [no]. None of the things in (OSA? 1:02:10) I had any problems with. You understand what I'm saying? In the summertime, when I went to school, during school sessions and during after school programs in the summertime--. And I've had problems with that. See, the companies they sent us to were strictly white companies. You know, and we were just there for like--. They were paying us to do the job and whatever. I had no problems with none of that. Even when I went to

(Bendix? 1:02:30) I had no problems. My problems came on the own, on your own, in the outness when you doing for yourself. See, if they were prejudiced against me, I didn't see it. And then again, I wasn't no more than sixteen, seventeen years old so I wouldn't have really recognized and paid much attention to it. I was there to make that dollar twenty-five cent or that sixty-two cent an hour. You understand what I'm saying. At that time, money (was pretty small? 1:02:54), you understand what I'm saying? So you didn't really--. At that time, I really didn't think about, you know, whether they were prejudiced against me or not, you know. Not to say it wasn't there.

RD: Right. So were you involved in any protests or anything like that?

VA: No, ma'am.

RD: Do you remember any of that took place?

VA: Mm-hmm. [laughter]

RD: Could you describe some of those for us?

VA: You see, well you know the Black Power--. You know that had their movements, we'd just sit there and look at them. See, 'cause they demonstrated all the time so. But I just was not (into? 1:03:35) "I say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud" and whatever. That's you. We might buy the little black, red, and green hats and the dashikis but my family would never participate in none of that. We just didn't.

RD: So did you know about the Black Panthers and all that that was going on?

VA: Mm-hmm. They were down here, they formed down here. Mm-hmm. But we weren't in it.

RD: You weren't in it.

VA: We weren't in it, no. We were people (in another house? 1:04:06.5) on our corner. You understand what I'm saying? Well, that went on but, as I go back and said, we're the kind of people that were so church-orientated that it didn't bother. You understand what I'm saying? So we just went to church and went home. Now, we had encounters with white folks at night time at one or two o'clock in the morning chasing us and following us, you know, from our church to our house. But we used to duck in woods and stuff and trees but, you know--. And then when we thought they were gone, then we'd come out but, you know, that's about it. We couldn't tell you it was day. See, because when we used to go to church at night, we lived on the 32<sup>nd</sup> and Madison but our church was up on the (eleven? 1:04:47.1) block of 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. You had to go through the little street and come up through Huntington that way and go down, whatever. So when we'd leave church--. 'Cause we stayed in church [until] sometimes one o'clock, two o'clock. And, like I said, it was a bunch of us. So, if I said (there were? 1:04:59.4) maybe six, seven of us women, walking down the street and, you know, white men came in our our neighborhoods and they would chase, you know, follow us. So what we'd do is run behind people's houses that had the bushes and stuff and hide 'til the cars left. Then once we felt like they were gone, then we'd come out and walk home.

RD: That's terrifying.

VA: Well, you know, all we could do was just [to]do it, 'cause that was the only way of going and back and forth, so. My family is a praying family. So you understand what I'm saying? They was not going to let that stop them from doing what they had to do. So, you know, we're here today and the only person--. All the rest of my aunts, my mother, and

everything--. I got like three aunts living, out of like eleven so, we had a good life. Even though we went through all that, we had a good life.

RD: So you said--. You talked about your children.

VA: Mm-hmm.

RD: Did you establish any kind of family traditions?

VA: Like what? Going to church? But you can't make them go, you can take them there. When they get to a certain age, they start. You can take the grandkids there and, when the kids get old enough, they take the kids out and do whatever. But I've always believed as my family did me: they kept me in church. They trained--. They taught me the right way, to train me, so therefore I try to educate my children, whether they listen or not. My son learned when he went into the military, that I said, "You need to be able to go to college a year or two or whatever." But, you know, he's one of those homebodies or whatever but I had to end up putting him in the military. Then, you know, you know how you do that delayed reaction, and [he] got out. But then put him back in and then he served his time, you know, whatever. But the point, he said, "Ma, you know they don't need--. These people want all this and that." I said, "But I told you, all you need was a year or two of college, and you could have made officer when you went in the military. You understand what I'm saying? So you know you going to have to work towards--." And that's like my daughter. Now she subs and whatever but I told her she has her associate's degree or whatever. But I said, "I told y'all when y'all got out of high school. You need to pursue the education. You did hair but didn't want to do anything with the hair. You had the business and you wanted to be in King's Dominion [amusement park], and you want to hang in buddy buddy with the kids, doing hair and the nails and stuff. But you made me

no money. You understand what I'm saying? (It was on? 1:07:17) your time." So, they don't really think, even though you try to implant into them what needs to be done. So they had the legwork, guide work, you see. Had I known what I knew before--[what] I tell them--I think I probably would have been a better off person and whatever. But you have to learn from trial and error and mistakes. And my greatest mistake was--I keep telling my parents and myself--that when I was offered the job at the FBI, I was seventeen years old, and my parents would not let me go to DC. And I often times said, "Why? To get stuck in this hole here? That I had to make my life here." And I mean, I love my home, don't get me wrong. 'Cause I been to (New Jersey? 1:08:01.2), whatever. But it's just the fact that I don't know if I would have been a better person if I had went to the FBI thing or whatever. Or I just [would have] been a worse person than I am, so. But I tried to get them the leg work to help them improve so I can tell my granddaughters to go to school, get the education. Be the best. I said, "Y'all smart as whips." I say, "Your granddaddy, my ex-husband, didn't have to pick up a book. You don't have to pick up a book." You understand? When you got kids like that, you know, if you tell something and read you really got to pick a book almost to get stuff done or what you need to get done. I mean that's just pretty smart. So why mess up a life? But, to each his own. I can only tell you and guide you. You've got to make that decision. That's what I was saying about the other kids when we was talking about the education. If the parents have the stamina, and had the desire to find out, if my kids are not doing so well in the school, I need to go find out what's happening. What are they learning? What's causing them not to want to be there? Then I can, you know, project to go better.

RD: So we talked about the education and the church, are there other values you tried to raise your children with?

VA: Well, it's no more than the church and out here. 'Cause see, what you do in the church is what's going to affect what's out here in the street. If I mistreat you in the church, I mistreat you in the street. If I respect you in the church, I respect you. See the training is you respect your elders, you respect those who have (view of you? 1:09:27), you treat everybody like you want to be treated. It is not a halfway mark that you out here treating this one bad, no. I will respect you, you respect me. I respect you, you respect me. I respect your mother, whoever. You respect your elders. It's not in the way to be disobedient to nobody. You obey them, they have the rule over you. You respect that teacher. 'Cause if you don't respect that teacher or that person in church, you're going to have to hear from me. And that's not the wrath of God, that's the wrath of Vivian.

[laughter] You understand what I'm saying? I mean you know--. Like I keep saying, when I tell people, I say, "I'm really not a no-nonsense person. I don't play with you." You know? I can play sometimes when there's a playful time, but when it's time to get serious and stuff, there's certain things you have to do. Certain things I respect and require of you. So when you ask me that question, it's not just the church values. 'Cause, see, my church [and] church values--it's what relates to what you do out in the street. If I don't have any church values, if I don't have any home-bringing and whatever, then I'm a lost cause. You understand what I'm saying? See 'cause whatever that home value can (be? 1:10:32), that church can do at home. The teachers can train you how to bring up that child, how to respect that mother, that father, that uncle, that whoever, or the elderly person. Respect that babysitter if they older. You understand respect? Respect the outside



person out here. Respect that leader, wherever they may be. But when you don't have that, you ain't got none of that. You understand what I'm saying? So, to me, the church and home is almost one. 'Cause you got the training, you got to train the child. So regardless of what the church train them, you train them. The church can't do no more than you do 'cause you got that child from the infant on up. So you got to instruct, direct, and guide it.

RD: Right.

VA: So.

RD: So the civil rights movement, what do you think the most important accomplishments were?

VA: Well, in the civil rights you talking about, I feel like people need to have equal--. I feel like we need to have equal rights, as I said. Okay, what's good for you got to be good for me. It should not be that you get a better job than me with less education. You understand what I'm saying? I feel like if I'm qualified, and I got a 4.0 and you got a 4.0, then you give me the job, then you paid me the same amount that you pay her if my job is the same as yours. Now if I'm doing--. Now, I had an account at where I was working at a company that I got less money but I did all the work. I did three people's work. You follow what I'm saying? And what up? So that was not civil rights, that was not equal pay. So, my thing is equal pay, like they fighting for now in Congress. The right to do whatever, you understand what I'm saying? And it's just, be true to me like you do to everybody else. Treat me the same way you treat that person. Don't act like 'cause my skin is this color, that I'm going to have a different way, and your skin is that color and you can get away with murder. You understand what I'm saying? And on the same token,

grant you the black people, you know, do do things, and some of them I don't like, you know. But I look at some of the white folks [who] do some of the same crimes or whatever and I can say I've seen the black guys with the drugs and the white guys with the drugs. I seen the white guys get slapped on the wrist. I've seen the black guy get twenty-six years. That's unfair. And it ain't for me to say but I can say it at home. I can't tell the judge it's unfair, but it's unfair. So if you get caught with three tons of cocaine in your car then, when I get you to the hospital and there's still you got some in your pocket, and you bust me on the corner with cocaine that amounts to no more than twenty dollars. I'm getting five years and you ain't gotten a year. That's not fair play. So civil rights, if you going to be civil, going to be right, you going to be right to everybody. That movement has to be for everybody, not one single person. Don't single out the blacks and the whites. You know, so. When Martin Luther King marched that march he was for everybody and that's what it's to be, and that's what the Constitution said, you know. Everybody. Same rights, freedom, speech. You understand what I'm saying?

RD: Exactly. Are there any-- Do you think there are any unfinished legacies, things that can still be changed, and pressing problems with race relations today?

VA: You know, we're going to always have those. But if we--. You know, even if the young people--. Even though some of the older people still have that, even the young people can get a part away from that. That's what they did back in that day. We're in a new age. If we can pull together and then stand--maybe our forefathers believed in that and preached that. Just like sometimes this white supremacist stuff is still on there and whatever. So, of course, with these white supremacists, the black folks are going to have their little hatred for the white people. But if we could just get away from that and try to

come to some terms of agreement--. You understand what I'm saying? But I feel like it's always going to be there but it should not be. Just like, you know, with the shootings. I don't condone--the white cops and the black cops--. But sometimes we do do things and I can say I've seen things that should not have been done. You understand what I'm saying? But, you know, it's still a coming together and being truthful about stuff. And stuff like that. You said civil rights, yeah. But when you got that law for the whites and you got that law for the blacks, the blacks not going to tell you anything when it happens. You understand what I'm saying. But they're going to tell you when you wrong them because they're watching. But see, you know, they're not going to tell you if a--. If I saw a Mary Jane shoot a Sally Sue, I'm not telling you. But if I see the white Johnny Mae shoot which guy I'm going to take my picture and tell you. You understand what I'm saying? See, 'cause I don't trust you. See, 'cause you'll take me and put me in jail but won't put Johnny in jail. You follow what I'm saying? We have that different type of law, so. I would love to see us come together as one. I would love to see us work together. I would love to see the man that's talking about all the Latinos and the Muslims just coming here killing, you know? Everybody just killing these people are not the Muslims or whatever. And they're not coming over here. And some of these folks born here were killing people. You understand what I'm saying? So, we've always stereotyped the blacks, and the whites, and the Mexicans, and the "slant eyes," and we need to stop. That's a thing we have that we need to stop really.

RD: We do.

VA: 'Cause I have all kinds of friends. I have all kinds of friends, you know?

RD: Is there anything that you would like to contribute or something you feel like we might have missed over the course of the interview?

VA: Uh, uh no. You've covered everything. I mean from that movement and whatever. 'Cause, like I said, I enjoyed life, like I said. Certain things, like I said before, that I didn't like that was happening but I was a person who did not say [so]. I wouldn't say anything about it. I was just know not to go that route and not to deal with that because I'm not going to make any waves. But if somebody asks me a question I will give you an answer. I'm going to give you my opinion. But I got through it and, like I said, I try to get my kids to understand, you know, that we should treat the white folks no different than we do others. And I'm amazed 'cause when I look out on my street sometimes now, when I walk this morning, I was looking at the white young ladies with the young men carrying their kids to school. You know. There's nothing wrong with that. We treat them just like family. On my street I have whites, I have Mexicans, you know with black men, with their children. They speak to me, I speak to them. It's like a--. And we need to have that family-like orientated thing all over again. We shouldn't have that separation. That "I don't want my daughter with this black man; I don't want my son with that black woman." I mean, be for real. If that's their life, if that's what they choose, let us be happy for them, and not be negative about it. You know? That's old school. This is the new generation and everything is changed. It changes every generation.

RD: Right.

VA: So--.

RD: As a black woman do you feel like you experienced more discrimination than maybe black men because of your gender?

VA: I haven't. Now black men get lots of discrimination. But I haven't, uh uh. Now, black men going get discrimination. But no, I have not. Uh uh. But that needs to change too. But black men also need to try to--. And that's where the older black men and the mature black men need to come step to the plate. See, even though, you look at the situation then and look at the people then, a lot of them, and we learn every day, don't know about the Jim Crow. A lot of them don't know--they really don't even really know who Martin Luther King was, and I'm telling you. See 'cause some of the parents don't even know. A lot of them don't know their history, and until we can get people that can train some of these young folks out here as to what happened and what's going on--. Then we'd probably have it better. But now that the older guys have got older and whatever, we try to help to try catch the lil' younger ones at the six, seven, eight, nine year old age to help them better understand, you know. So we have as much as we having out here, but we don't--. Believe me, I have people here in this city that don't even know that this man [J. Thomas Newsome] was the first black lawyer. I'm serious. They don't know that this man, whose house you're sitting in, had found Huntington High School. They don't know anything about their history, of this city. Nothing about the famous people that were here, the famous musicians. Nothing about their city. You understand what I'm saying? So when you don't know, you can't react. And until somebody can come out and show them and tell them, that's where they are. You got the problems you have because you look on TV, or you're looking on Facebook, you're looking on Chatline, you're looking on this one, you looking on Kik, and this is happening. So I'm going to get in with this mix. Not really knowing what you're protesting or what you're fighting against, you follow what I'm saying? So we're just there. Now the ones with the

drugs and different other things, you understand, that's because they're trying to make that fast dollar. But it's still trying to learn the way to get educated, and keep up with it. They feel like that fast dollar but the fast dollar gonna kill you and that's it. And I say that so often to them in school. That fast dollar gonna kill you. Look at all your friends. My son had a whole lot of friends dead, and I'm glad he didn't go that road but behind that same stupidity on the corner, when you don't know, you don't know. You understand what I'm saying? They don't know about the history and whatever about over there and I keep telling people all the time that Stuart Gardens was Camp Stuart, the military place. People don't know that. A lot of these people in this city, in this area. Young folks do not know that. They don't know the history of the black people, the history of their city. They know nothing. So that's why your having--. And we have a lot of the problems that we do have, and they don't take the time. And when you don't have a parent or somebody that don't know--like these twenty-one year old mothers, these thirty year old mothers that didn't really get in having these babies and whatever--they can't teach what they don't know. So, my heart bleeds for them, and I hope one day they'll wake up and I'm hoping sometime, some one day, that somebody can explain to them. Now, you know--. And we had an empowerment festival the other day out here which is very instrumental 'cause the young men were talking about the history and civil rights and different things. And the people should have been here. We had a nice crowd, maybe 200, but it should have been more. You understand what I'm saying? So, you know they have to be taught, and they have to be eager to listen. So, I guess I talked your ears off.

RD: No, no. It's all--it's great. You briefly mentioned Martin Luther King.

VA: Mm-hmm.

RD: Were you--. Do you remember--?

VA: Mm-hmm, I was fourteen.

RD: You were fourteen?

VA: Mm-hmm. That was during the time my father died, during that time. Mm-hmm, when he was out there, we used to watch him on TV, you know, and the speeches he would have and whatever, you know. Like I said, at that time we did a lot of watching TV, between going to church. We were into that, trying to be--when they talked about the freedom, and the slavery and all the other stuff so--you know, we was concerned. We didn't really do a lot into it, but it was just you having your rights, you know, being a person. When they give the women the right to vote. When you have your rights, you know. And you know, I never did like history, you know, but I grew to love it when they said that Lincoln, you know, abolished the slavery and all the other stuff they did. You understand what I'm saying? And you know, when they would put those movies on TVs, I couldn't stand--. I, to this day, do not look at *Roots*. Have never. See, 'cause I could not stand the way we were treated, they say back in that day. I refuse to want to see that, that you used me like that. You understand what I'm saying? To me that was disheartening, so I'm not--. I don't even identify. I looked at *Amistad* and almost cried myself to death. 'Cause I'm not used to--. I have never had to encounter that even though they said it really happened, you understand what I'm saying. But, who could live a life like that? And for me to sit there and watch that, I couldn't. It's disheartening so anything that deals with the unnecessary roughness of [slavery], putting us in boiling pans of hot water, stuff like that. I can't. It just bothers me. I had to get up and walk out my room, of my house. 'Cause I refuse to look at anything that degrading, that you said that happened to

me. You understand what I'm saying? I just--. So, I'm the person that when you say civil rights, I didn't try to get into all that deeply stuff 'cause I don't really want to know that. You understand what I'm saying? That happened then and see, that may have made me angry and what they did to me, but I just don't want--. 'Cause see, it's just a hurt to know how I was treated. You understand what I'm saying? So, when you say Martin Luther King, I listened to what he's saying, but I never go back to anything deeper than that. I read the books about the Jim Crow when I was teaching history classes about the stuff back there, but that's just it. I ain't trying to find nothing no deeper than that. I just experienced only what happened to me, asked about that, when I see the colored signs on the bathroom doors or when they wouldn't let me in the bathroom. Other than that I'm just done with that. You understand what I'm saying? 'Cause that (affected me? 1:24:38) but the other stuff mm-hmm. So I don't like to hash out stuff like that, you know. Even though they said it was history, I--. It's just not me.

RD: Right. Well, thank you so much for meeting with us.

VA: Oh, I'm so okay. No, it was fun I enjoyed, I mean it was--. I was telling you guys my feelings.

### **END OF INTERVIEW**

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