

Annie Mae Wilson Vines Phillips
Interview Summary

Interviewee: Annie Mae Phillips

Interviewer: Jessica Shaw and Teresa Sellar

Interview Date: October 24, 2016

Location: Meeting Room, Main Street Library at Hilton Village, Newport News, Virginia

Length: 62:36

THE INTERVIEWEE: Annie Mae Wilson Vines Phillips was born in 1932 in Newport News, Virginia to Willie Mae Hamlin Wilson and Sidney Wilson. Her mother passed away when she was two years old, and her father worked in the Newport News Shipyard for more than thirty years before retiring. After her mother's passing, she spent several years with other relatives until she moved in with her father in the Newsome Park development, which the federal government had recently constructed during World War II. She attended Newsome Park Elementary School and Morrison High School. She did not graduate high school immediately, but took some time off for her family. Later in life she returned to complete her education and become a registered nurse assistant. Currently, she is involved in the Newsome Park Reunion Committee and local political efforts. She was married to Ralph Vines, another Newsome Park resident. She later married Sergeant First Class James L. Phillips (retired).

THE INTERVIEWERS: Jessica Shaw and Teresa Sellar are students at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. They have been working as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project, in an attempt to further public knowledge of the ways in which the Civil Rights Movement affected Hampton Roads.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: Phillips remembers her childhood at Newsome Park fondly, and happily describes the community she was surrounded by growing up. She also describes both segregation and discrimination, which she experienced growing up, and the changes since then. Phillips also discusses her experience in the workforce as a domestic worker and as a nurse.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Jessica Shaw: Okay, so this is Jessica Shaw speaking and my partner is Teresa Sellar. Today is October 24th, 2014.

Teresa Sellar: '16.

JS: 2016. And we are interviewing Ms. Annie Mae Phillips. This interview is taking place at Main Street Library in Hilton Village, Newport News, Virginia. This interview is being carried out as part of Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. We're talking about what is called a "life history." So, we would like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood.

Annie Mae Phillips: About my childhood days?

JS: Yes, ma'am.

AMP: Did you say your last name was Sellars?

TS: Sellar.

AMP: Okay, my daughter's last name is Sellar. Okay, I was born in Newport News, Virginia.

You don't need the date of my birthday?

JS: Unless you want to give it. You don't have to.

AMP: [laughter] Will that be put in there?

JS: You don't have to say it if you don't want to.

AMP: [laughter]

JS: Don't worry, okay. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.

AMP: I may say it later on.

JS: Okay.

AMP: I'm in my eighties.

JS: Oh, okay. Well, you look good for eighty.

AMP: Well, thank you so much. I have a birthday coming up November the 13th.

JS: November 13th? Okay, awesome. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

AMP: No, I don't have any brothers or sisters. I was raised up with some cousins and we called each other sisters and brothers.

JS: Oh, okay.

AMP: But they have deceased.

JS: Okay, well were they older than you then? Or younger?

TS: Or was it a mix of older and younger?

AMP: They were--. Two was older than me and one was younger. We had one gentleman, he was older than me. Then I had a cousin, she was older than I. Then the youngest one was younger than me. She was a young lady too. I was between the ages.

JS: Okay.

TS: What did your parents do for a living?

AMP: My father worked in the Newport News Shipyard.

JS: Oh, Okay. Did your mother do anything?

AMP: And my mother, she deceased when I was two years old.

JS: Oh, really.

AMP: Yes.

JS: I'm sorry to hear that.

AMP: It's been a long time ago, and the Lord has blessed me to live to the age that I am, eighty-three.

JS: Was your father involved in any church or community organizations?

AMP: Yes, he belonged to First Baptist Church, Newport News. The church was located on 23rd Street and Jefferson Avenue.

JS: Did he like working at the shipyard?

AMP: Yes, he did. He worked there for almost forty years and retired there.

JS: Did they treat him well there?

AMP: Off and on. Sometimes they laid him off and he had to go back to work.

JS: Did he ever participate in any protests or strikes, like organized?

AMP: No, he didn't go into the strikes. He just stayed off until they called him back to work.

JS: Oh, okay.

AMP: He loved the shipyard. He retired there. He worked in the machine department, (ship? 3:38).

JS: Awesome.

TS: What were race relations like in Newport News?

JS: When you grew up? When you were a--

AMP: Segregated.

JS: Segregated?

AMP: Yes.

TS: We kinda figured that.

AMP: That's exactly right. When we were at an early age, we had no car, so we rode the bus. We had to sit in the back of the bus. We could not sit up to the front, no. Sad. But that's the way we were treated. Yes. And we went to the segregated school. It was segregated schools at that time that I was going. Yes.

JS: What elementary school did you go to?

AMP: I went to Newsome Park Elementary School.

JS: What was that like for you? What was that like, your experience at Newsome Park Elementary?

AMP: It was a nice school. We had nice teachers, and they served us well.

JS: You liked your teachers then?

AMP: Yes, I did. They treated me very well.

TS: Do you remember any teachers who were particularly influential?

AMP: Yes. One teacher, she loved me, and I loved her. Her name was Mrs. Goode, she taught me fifth, I think. Mrs. Yancey. Mrs. Tan. I remember my teachers, and they were very nice to me. They wanted me to get my lesson, and come to school on time. My father raised me.

[Actually,] my grandmother raised me. And then my aunt raised me. Then my daddy took me.

He was living on 19th Street and Madison Avenue before we moved to Newsome Park. We moved to Newsome Park in 1943. And we were the first one to move in the house of Newsome Park. We took the papers off the floor.

TS: Really?

JS: What was the house like? Do you remember what it looked like?

AMP: I'm gonna show you that, I brought a picture.

JS: Awesome!

AMP: 'Cause I belongs to the Newsome Park Reunion. We have a Newsome Park Reunion every year, and we celebrate at Lincoln and Martin Luther King Park. I thought maybe you all might want to take a picture of that.

JS: Yes.

AMP: I brought two books. Yes, two of them. And we're still having Newsome Park reunions every year. The gentleman that organized this was named, Mr. Enoch, but he has deceased. And so we are still continuing, as long as we can.

JS: So what was the community like in Newsome Park growing up?

AMP: The community was just like a family. People looked out for each other's children. If we needed something we could run next door and borrow it. We could leave our doors open, and nobody would go in the house but as of nowadays you can't do that. We had electricity. We had a coal stove, that we burnt coal. We had like a box, and we would put the coal inside the box. And we'd have to go outdoors, and put the coal into a bucket, a shallow bucket, then carry it into the house to heat the house up. That's the way we lived. We had nice floors. My father, we lived in a two bedroom apartment. We had a bathroom, running water, and a sink, and it was a nice, nice, apartment. Shower, to take showers in. I thought we lived very well. Yes, we did.

JS: Sounds like it.

TS: What kind of businesses were housed in Newsome Park?

AMP: What kind of business?

TS: Yeah.

AMP: We had a drug store. We had a grocery store. We had a cleaners. We had a barber shop. We had a beer garden. All that was in one building.

JS: Wow.

AMP: You go to the grocery store first, and next door is the drug store. Next door is the beer garden, and next door is the cleaners. All that was one spot. Everybody was nice enough.

Caucasian, white man ran the grocery store. He ran the drug store with different people running different places, and we had a black man ran the barbershop. And we had a black man to run the cleaners there.

JS: Did you ever have much interaction with Copeland Park, which was the neighboring development right next to you?

AMP: Copeland Park?

JS: Copeland Park.

AMP: Copeland Park was for the white people. Blacks didn't live there. But the whole buildings was just like them. Their buildings was painted different colors from our buildings, but the whites lived in Copeland Park. And we lived in Newsome Park.

JS: Did you ever talk to anyone from other there, or was it just completely-

TS: Ignoring?

AMP: [laughter] No. Now if you worked for them you could go out there and work for them, but you didn't go visit them. Period. And we had a skating rink for the blacks to go and skate and have dances. Socializing, right? And we had a recreation center. That was called Recreation Center and the Skating Rink. And we would go skate and dancing there. Was good times.

[laughter] That's what you called good times.

JS: How would you characterize your childhood growing up?

AMP: Well, I think I had a pretty good childhood. I was an only child, and my daddy just spoiled me and let me do whatever I wanted to do. [laughter]

JS: Good.

AMP: And I had to cook dinner, 'cause he was working and I would go to school and come home. I had to prepare food. And that's what I did, and kept the house clean. Did the best I could.

JS: So, when you were growing up, did you notice that you were different from the white people? Did you just notice it when you were younger?

AMP: Did I notice the difference in the white and the black? Of course I did, you know that! Yes, indeed.

JS: How did you notice it? Where could you see it the most?

Amp: Where could I what?

JS: Where could you see the differences the most?

TS: The differences in how you were treated--.

AMP: You go into the shopping centers, you go into the clothing stores, they would wait on the whites first before they would wait on you. So that's the way it was. We just had to stand back. Yes, we've had a hard time. But the Lord makes a way for us all to live and do better. That's right. Praise the Lord. We were black and they used to call you "colored." We had all kinds of names. We were called--let me stop. [laughter] We were called all kinds of names. "Nigras." "Negroes." "Colored." And now we're called "Black." I'm just gonna tell the truth. That's right. But the Lord prepared us so that we could live better, and do better. And respect each other. That's right. And I love you. I love you as well as my own color, because we're supposed to love one another and treat each other with respect. That's what we're supposed to do.

JS: Yes, ma'am.

AMP: But there's still some prejudice around. Yes, and I know that. But I just ignore it and keep on walking, and hold my head up. That's the way we supposed to live. And treat people right.

JS: Agreed.

TS: Very eloquently put.

AMP: Thank you.

TS: So if we could just backtrack again to your school experiences. Did you attend middle school after Newsome Park Elementary, and if so, where?

AMP: I went to Newsome Park [Elementary] School, up to the seventh grade. Then we moved up to a school in Morrison, it was called Morrison, which was the eighth grade. And that was a house, and we went to school in that house. It was just like a big house and we all went to school there. That was from the eighth to the eleventh grade.

JS: So what was that experience like there? Were those good teachers too?

AMP: Yes, they were nice. They were nice teachers. Just some were mean. [laughter] Some was very mean, but they wanted you to do your work. And that was it. Yes.

JS: How many rooms did that building have? Do you remember?

AMP: It was a upstairs and downstairs. Then they had a ground out for you to go out and play and do physical therapy. You had to go outdoors to take physical therapy. I would say about ten rooms. I don't know. It was up and down the stairs.

JS: So your dad worked at the shipbuilding? So did World War II affect, like his job or Newport News in general? Do you remember?

AMP: What, his jobs?

JS: Yeah, World War II. Did the war affect your dad's job?

AMP: I'm not too familiar with that. I know people was working there and they had jobs.

JS: Okay. That's fine.

AMP: 'Cause my daddy was working in the shipyard. And when the work got slack they would lay him off, and call him back. And then women, during that time, they did domestic work. You know what that is? That's what they did. When they went into white people's homes and cleaned up for them. And they paid them little or nothing. Five dollars a day if you worked that long. Yes, I know about it. That's right. And then a lot of people were working restaurants. And they paid them little money, but they had to work. They had to work to make ends meet, and live the best way that they could. And rent in Newsome Park was twenty-six dollars a month. Very reasonable. It was sad, but we made it. And as far as my family, we ate what we wanted. We had food all the time on our table. Thank the Lord for that. We didn't have to beg or do nothing. My dad prepared for us.

JS: So, what year did you graduate high school?

AMP: Well, I dropped out, and then I went back and finished.

JS: Okay.

AMP: [My husband and] I had three daughters, which I love, and then I went back to school. But before then, I used to do domestic work, too. Yes, I know all about that. I know that they didn't pay you but a little bit of money. And they wanted you to stay all day long. I go there and stay four hours and I leave. That was me. I knew how to take care of my business.

JS: Did you work for a white family?

AMP: Yes, I did.

JS: How did they treat you?

AMP: Very well, very well. They was nice to me, and one of the ladies I worked for she--. My baby got sick, and she would bring me home. And she'd come and pick me up. I had nice people

to work for. And when I left them they were very upset, 'cause I found me another job. You got to reach out and do better for yourself. That's right.

JS: So what caused you to drop out of high school?

TS: Or not finish until a later point?

AMP: [laughter] What caused me to drop out?

JS: Yeah. If you don't mind sharing.

AMP: [laughter]

JS: You don't have to share if you don't want to. Okay. So, when you went back to school, you went to Carver?

AMP: No, I went to an adult school. But in between that time, I got married. And I did traveling. I went overseas. This is all years ago. And I traveled overseas. I went overseas and stayed three years. And when I came back home, that's when I went back to school. I went to nursing school, and I finished that. And I retired from a nursing system. I've been a busy lady. And I worked in the church. But before then, let me see, I'm trying to think. Going back to when I was a child, we had nice neighbors in Newsome Park. And they would look after each other's children and the people out there would have a nice time in their homes, and enjoy life. That's the way they did it, and they do it together. And they would have parlors, if they wanted to, in their home, you know? And people would go in and visit. We rode a bus. They had buses to come out to Newsome Park to pick us up and carry us downtown or carry us to the grocery store. So we would have had bus stops for you to stand at and wait for the bus. So all that's it. And that's when I was growing up. And now, I got grown--. So we moved from there in 1962, bought a home. After then, my children, they graduated from Carver High School too, where their mama went. Yes, all three of my daughters graduated from Carver High School. They did very well,

and they got married. They are married and they have children, and they been to college and got degrees. And I have grandchildren that have degrees. And before then I went overseas and stayed three years. My husband, my first husband, he deceased and then I married the second time. And I married this man. We been married thirty something years. Praise the Lord for that.

JS: So, when your daughters went to Carver High School, was it segregated or desegregated?

AMP: It was not [de]segregated then, no. Never was [de]segregated. No, no.

JS: Did they enjoy high school?

AMP: Yes. They was very active in school. Yes. They were honor students. One of them was a majorette. One was in drama. She liked acting, and the other girl, she did pom-pom on the football field.

TS: So, what else did you do for work? You said you worked as a nurse. Can you tell us more about that?

AMP: About when I was a nurse?

TS: Yeah.

AMP: Okay, I was a nurse assistant. I went to school and graduated from there. I went to a career development center. It was on Warwick Boulevard, and I graduated with honors. And that's when I started going to and working in hospitals. I worked in nursing homes, and I did private duty, until I retired. I really enjoyed working with people. I love people.

JS: Did they treat you well at--. Did you work at a hospital?

AMP: I worked at a hospital in private duty.

JS: Okay.

AMP: I would go in and take care of the person, and then I would go into homes and take care of people in their homes, too. And I worked into a nursing home with private people. See, families

liked to have nurses to come in and take care of their families when they're in nursing homes, so they get better treatments. And that's what I did.

JS: What nursing home did you work at? What was the name-

AMP: I worked at Riverside Hospital. I worked at St. Francis, which is a Catholic--. It's up there on Denbigh Boulevard. You might have heard [of it]. It's still there. I worked there for a private patients, and I worked at Sentara Hospital with private patients. And I'm trying to think now, of nursing homes. They were nursing homes. Then I went into people's homes and took care of them.

JS: So what year did you start being a nurse's assistant?

AMP: 1985 was when I started my nursing career.

JS: What were race relations like in the 1980s? Had they improved from--.

AMP: [laughter]

JS: Had they improved from--.

AMP: Not really. No.

JS: Were you treated poorly by your white colleagues?

AMP: No. I was treated well.

JS: Okay.

AMP: I think it's the way within yourself. The way you being treated. You got to treat people nice to be treated well yourself.

JS: Did anyone ever discriminate against you, in your entire time in the workforce?

AMP: Well, I would say yes and no. 'Cause a lot of places you go people will look at you, and I would say yes and no to this one. I say yes and no.

TS: [pause] Sorry, we're just trying to make sure we cover everything.

AMP: That's alright, take your time. Did you pull that up?

JS: What?

AMP: Is that a--. [laughter] I'm asking can you pull that up, you see anything there about me.

What is that? What's that? An ePad, iPad?

JS: Oh, this is just a laptop.

AMP: Okay, okay, okay. I have something here you might want to look at, you don't have to put it in your resume. My daughter wrote this up for me when I was going up to be elected for the Missionary of the Year. And she wrote up a little something for me. And if y'all would like to look at it you can. You don't have to put it in your notes or whatever, but I did bring it. I was a missionary, and I was President of the Missionary First Church of Newport News, my traveling, and--.

JS: So, when you traveled abroad to South America and then other European countries, did you feel that you were treated differently there than you were here in the United States?

AMP: They treated you very well, 'cause you was from another country. They looked up to you. Yes, they respect you. Yes, indeed. I really did enjoy myself when I stayed in Germany three years. We had good food. The Germans were very nice to us. I did a lot of traveling when I was there to different little countries. We used to go to the club and have a little fun. Yes, indeed. [laughter] Yes, indeed. We had a good time. And I enjoy flying from here to--. I flew the first time to Germany by myself. I was scared to death, but I got on that plane and sat there. And enjoyed myself when I got into Germany. I flew into Frankfurt, Germany, and my son-in-law met me at the airport. When I first got there, they put us off in a little station, so we had to get a bus to go to Frankfurt airport. I was scared to death but I had to follow the people because I didn't know where I was going. And when I got to the airport, I saw my son-in-law and my

grandson. I was happy. It was just experience. Never been on a plane before in my life, but I got on there. The Lord was just with me. And I sat between the German women, and they just talked. And I didn't know what they was talking about. But I sat between them, and they was nice to me. And I was nice to them. You have to respect people, don't care what color they are. You supposed to respect them. That's right.

AMP: Where you all from? [recording device is turned off then turned on again]

JS: So going back to your high school times, so what happened to Morrison High School?

AMP: All we did was went to school and study and ate our lunch and left. We had no activities there. But to go outside and do some physical exercise. There was a small building. And we didn't do nothing but walk around and chat. And that's it and go to your classes.

JS: How did it compare to other schools in Newport News and around the Hampton Roads area?

AMP: How you compare the schools then and now?

JS: Then those schools around in that time? Maybe the other white schools?

AMP: When we were in Newsome Park, we had a lunch room. But when we was up there, we had no lunch room. It was just a school. You carried your lunch. And we didn't have too much activities. (30:24?) It was a big house that they let us go to and have classes.

JS: Was there a white school in Newport News?

AMP: Yes, you know that. Plenty of whites. There were plenty of white schools in Newport News. They were segregated too.

JS: Were their schools nicer than yours, the white schools?

AMP: And you know that too. Yes, you know that. [laughter] And do you know we had Carver High School? They took Carver High School from us. We had Huntington High School. They took Huntington High School from us. I know you know all that. So now the schools are

integrated. So that's that, but years before, you went to the white school, and they went to the black school.

JS: Do you remember when the schools became integrated?

AMP: That was after my time, you know?

JS: Do you remember hearing about it in the community?

AMP: Yes.

JS: People talking about it--

AMP: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

JS: What were they saying? How did they react to schools being integrated?

AMP: Surprised. Because when my kids was going to school, the schools were still [segregated].

That was 1969, mmm-hmm, [or] '70. I think they integrated after then. It had to be after then.

1970. The last year of Carver High School was 1971. That's right.

JS: Do you remember when buses became integrated in Newport News and Virginia? And public places? Do you remember like any dramatic change?

AMP: Buses?

JS: Buses or public transportation in general?

AMP: I can't remember that 'cause it's been so long. It had to be after 1970, 1971. It had to be after then.

JS: So in general, how do you feel like the Newport News community was affected by segregation?

AMP: [pause] There was so much going on, I just--. It was a lot going on when they started [integrating]. People fighting, turning on and turning up, whatever. I'm sure you all heard about it. Yes, it was sad. I wasn't out there in it. My children was not.

JS: Did you have any friends that was, was out there protesting or anything?

AMP: [laughter] If they were, I wasn't with them. I don't believe in fighting. Peace. Get away from it.

JS: Did you want the schools to be integrated?

AMP: Yes, I was for it. Yes, we should be together. Togetherness, that's right. Yes, I was for it and I don't dislike nobody. Any color don't bother me. Nope. You can come to my house and sit down and eat at my table and spend the night. That's alright with me. I've never been a racist person. When I was doing domestic work, the people I worked for, they treated me nice. I went in their front door. I did not go around to no back door. The only reason I went around to the back door was if they was working and I was going in the house. They gave me a key to go in their house. Yes, that's right. I was treated very well. That's the way--. During that time, that's how I learned how to cook a lot of food. She taught me, Mrs. (Wheeler? 35:06) taught me how to cook a lot of food and make fruit cakes. Yes, she's a nice lady and her husband worked for the Chevrolet company, the car dealer.

JS: Do you remember their names?

AMP: Yes, (Ed Wheeler and Mary Wheeler? 0:35:29.9). They had three sons. Stan, David, and Bill. I remember them well. And then, I worked for Mrs. Ellis. She was a nurse, and she had two boys right next door to each other. That's the house I had the key to go in the house because she worked when I went there. I had the key to go in that house and lock it up. I would eat at their kitchen table. Fix me food. I was not segregated. [They were] nice people, but some of them people you worked for they don't want you to come [in the front door.] They want you to come in the back door and go out the back door when you leave. I went in the front door, and I left out the front door. That's right. You had some nasty people, honey.

JS: Did you ever hear any stories about people who weren't treated very nicely in--.

AMP: Yes, I did. And I would tell them I would not ride in their car, and I would not work for them. Yes, I have.

JS: How did they treat you? They treated you that way?

AMP: Say what?

JS: People treated you like--. Were discriminatory towards you? That wanted you to work for them? Sorry, I'm not phrasing that right.

AMP: No, people didn't treat me like they treated some people.

JS: Oh, okay.

AMP: That's what I'm saying.

JS: So it was towards other people--.

AMP: Some of [the] ladies I knew worked for people who treated them very rude. I told them I would not work for them. They'd get in the car, and they'd have to sit in the back seat. When I got in the car with (Mrs. Wheeler? 0:37:05.8), I sat in the front seat with her. That's right. That's the way you (stopped 37:10) for people. That's right.

JS: Was there any time in your lifetime where you were discriminated against or not treated well?

AMP: I would say so.

JS: Do you have any specific stories or examples?

AMP: Well, going into these grocery stores and clothing stores, they would ignore you. They would wait on the white people before they would wait on you. And we were spending our money. I buy nice clothes and I went to the nice stores. And I want to be respected just like the white woman. Thinking I get some kind of mad. I'm gonna tell you just like I feel. If they

overlook me, and I wonder what's wrong. I'm here to be waited on too. Why you hate me? Oh, yes, you find that now in some stores. Yes, that's right. And when you find it, just move on from them and tell them you don't want to [be waited on.] That's the thing.

JS: Is that where you feel discrimination was the worst, like, in stores?

AMP: Yes. And as far as what would upset me when I was a child, getting on the bus, you had to sit in the back of the bus. Put your money in that little box up there, but you had to go all the way to the back to sit down. You could not sit in the front, so that's why now--. I'm gonna tell you just like how I feel. When I go anywhere, I sit up front. I'm not gonna sit in the back. I've been in the back long enough. Now you write that down. [laughter] I've been in the back long enough, and I'm not gonna sit--. My children are the same way. Not gonna sit in the back.

JS: Do you remember hearing about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

AMP: Yes, I do remember that. Yes, she was a brave woman. Very brave. They took her off that bus and put her in jail, didn't they? And she didn't stop, did she? No. And Martin Luther King. Whew, Lord have mercy. And then John F. Kennedy--. All of them were good people. Yes. I cried when they got killed. I was on my way home from work. When John F. Kennedy got killed, I was on my way home. I was on the bus. and I had stopped on Washington Avenue. And they announced John F. Kennedy was killed, and it hit me so bad, I cried. It's just sad, sad.

JS: How did it affect the Newport News community?

AMP: It was very upsetting to people, heard him being shot down like that. It was very (0:40:06.1) upsetting. Yes, and when Bobby Kennedy got killed, I was upset too.

TS: Did these stories of violence and hearing about how people were being shot or hurt, did they ever make you feel unsafe personally? Or did it not affect you?

AMP: Yes, it affected me 'cause it was scary. You don't know what people gonna be shooting or whatever. Just like now. It's frightening. People killing up each other, and you just don't know what to do, you don't know where to go. And riding up and down the street you don't know what people might do. Just like we're sitting in here, somebody could come in here and hurt us. And we don't know. It's sad. It's just sad. The way people get shot down and your own color's killing you. It's sad. The only thing we can do now is pray, and ask God to help up and show us the way.

TS: That's fine.

AMP: [Talking about the Newsome Park Reunion] Labor day weekend and we have a live band. Disc jockey who come out and play. And it's down at the park, Martin Luther King Park. And people that lived in Newsome Park, they would come and bring food and sit down and enjoy each other. And we had a raffle to raise a little money to keep what we're doing. You know? And we have about 10 members now [in the Newsome Park Reunion Committee]. And they bring food, as I said. We have tables that you can sit down and eat. Shelters and shade. And a lot of people bring their own chairs and umbrellas and cookout. And they be out there from twelve until six o' clock.

JS: So yeah, that shows how close you guys were at Newsome Park.

AMP: That's right, that's right. That's exactly right.

JS: Why do you think everyone was so close at Newsome Park?

AMP: Well, I guess because they like people. Some people wasn't close. They didn't wanna be bothered. They were staying down. They didn't want to socialize. So let them stay with it, but the ones that did want to socialize, they socialized. And visit people next door and sit out in their yard and chairs. And eat and talk and drink and do whatever they want. And we had all different

kinds of people living in Newsome Park. We had lawyers, doctors, insurance people. All different people were living there until they could do better.

JS: When you were growing up, were you close with the other children that lived there?

AMP: I just was close to my neighbor children, close around us, 'cause my father didn't allow us to go from one place to the other. We had to stay put. When he would come home from the shipyard, we had to be in the house, I had to be in the house. Yes, he didn't allow me to run everywhere. [recorder is turned off then on again]

AMP: Newport News, Virginia in East End. I don't know if you ever heard talk of East End and the house is [still] there where I was born in. 1133 33rd Street. The house is still there. They have remodeled it and put some brick around it. Make it look better, but the house is still there.

JS: Do you remember living in that house before you moved to Newsome Park?

AMP: No, because I was 2 years old when my mother died. No. My father told me where I was born at, and I was two years old when my mother passed.

JS: So right after you lived at that house, then you moved to Newsome Park?

AMP: No, my father lived on 19th Street at Madison Avenue. 1905 Madison Avenue.

JS: And you lived there with him?

AMP: Off and on. I stayed with my grandmother a while, and then he brought me back up here.

And then we moved to Newsome Park. My grandmother was living in North Carolina.

JS: Do you remember living in North Carolina?

AMP: For a while, yes I do.

JS: Was it different than--.

AMP: Yes. [laughter]

JS: How so? How so was it different?

AMP: Yes, it was different. It was different. I was a little kid then, you know? We lived in a nice house. And we ate very well, you know? They cooked good food. We always had good food to eat. I never been hungry in my life. Praise the Lord for that. Amen. That's right. Then my grandmother died, and my [momma's aunt?0:45:55.8] was there. And she took care of me, until my daddy came and got me. So, God has been good to me, yes. My mother died when, I think, she was about twenty-nine years old. My daddy remarried, but him and that lady couldn't get along. He told her, "You gone, bye." She didn't want to be bothered with children.

TS: Why do you continue to assist in Newsome Park reunions?

AMP: Say what, dear?

TS: Why do you continue to assist in Newsome Park reunions?

AMP: Oh, because I like working with people, and I like doing it. I just like the group that we're working with. We all work together, and it's just something I like doing. I like helping out. To me, it's a joy to just get together, and see the people coming out. And then the one's coming out now, their parents are dead. So, the young ones are coming out about my age, and we all socialize together and get together. It's a joy to me.

JS: Overall, what does Newsome Park mean to you?

AMP: What did Newsome Park mean to me?

JS: Yeah, what does it mean to you?

AMP: Well, as for me, I like living out there. I like the people that we lived around. And we could have fun, and go in your own house and tend to your own business. A lot of things--. When they live in places, and you just have to overlook them and tend to your own business.

JS: What kind of things, do you mean?

AMP: I mean people drinking and fighting and tearing up. That's what I mean. You know, you find that, but you just take care of your own self. And be careful who you associate with. I was taught that.

TS: [pause] So going back to your travels abroad, we got a thing on your life that says that you were in the USO?

AMP: I was where? I worked in the USO for a while. I was just working, trying to have a little change for myself. I worked there for a while, and sometime I'd answer the phone. The military men [came] in and [buy] food.

[Recorder is turned off then on again] We lived in the housing area. We lived in Haina, Germany. Nice, nice building. We saw a lot of snow. We had a commissary, and a PX and hospital. All that was there. We had all the convenience. Yes.

TS: Was there anything in particular that you liked about working in the USO?

AMP: I liked meeting the guys because they was from home, from the United States. And they would be overjoyed to come in, and see a black women in there helping and serving them. They was very nice to me, very respectable. Yes. You know when you meet somebody from the United States, you was happy to see them. Black and white: they were nice. I had no problems. They had a pool table in there, and they'd come and they'd shoot pool and sit around and talk. And we had something like a cafeteria that they could buy candy, and sodas, and food. And sometimes I would make chili for them to eat. They would be happy to get that country food. Make potato salads. [recording turning off and on again] The Newsome House was named for a lawyer. He was a black lawyer. Newsome. I think my family was Newsome. I think we was distant related to him.

JS: So is there anything else that you wanna say or contribute to this, specifically about race relations and what it was like in Newport News growing up?

TS: Or more about Newsome Park, if that's a nicer subject?

AMP: You want to know more about Newsome Park. Well, we [didn't have] whites living in Newsome Park. You know that. They didn't-- no. We didn't have that. And we rode the bus, and you could sit on the bus wherever you wanted to: front or back. Yes. And we played out there, we had mud and snow. You know, the snow, you run and play in the snow. And, some spots of the backyard, we would had dirt. We wouldn't have no grass. And some of the yard did have grass. It just had dirt, and when it rained, there were mud puddles. That's right. And when it was hot, we didn't have air condition. We would have fans in the windows and raised the windows up. We just tried to stay cool. And we made friends with the people across from us and we made a path from their house to our house. All the grass was gone, nothing but dirt. And we are still good friends. We're just like a family. They live not too far from me. And some of those buildings had four compartments and some had two. And some had four bedrooms. Some of them had two bedrooms and one bathroom. And we had a sink in the kitchen, and they furnished us refrigerators, stove. We didn't have to buy anything but you had to buy your own furniture, stuff for your house. They were wooden floors. So, if you wanted the floors covered, you had to put the carpet on yourself. And we had clotheslines. Did you see the clothesline?

TS: Um, no.

AMP: I think it's on that one. [points to picture] We had clotheslines. That's it. These are the clothesline, we had to hang the clothes up on. And if you wanted a different clothesline you had to--. You know, people had them clothes lines that spins around. You had to make your own clothes line for that. But this is what we used to hang our clothes on. Wash our clothes and hang

them on between the houses. And if you come through there--. Really don't want people touching our clothes. That's right. That was Newsome Park. The good ole days. Mmm-hmm. Good ole days. And this is the way some of the houses were built. See all that? All of that, that's one apartment there, and people stayed there in every one of those apartments. There was not no privacy. You sit on your porch, you see the next door person. [laughter] That's right. That's why we were so close together 'cause we lived like that. And if you live next door to a person that didn't want to be bothered, you didn't bother them. They stayed in their quarters, and you stayed in yours.

JS: So growing up did you have any interactions with other white children?

AMP: Nu-uh. [No] You know better than that. [laughter] No, no, no.

TS: We had to ask.

AMP: The only way you had interaction with white children is seeing them in the street.

JS: Did you talk to them?

AMP: No. Sometimes you in a store, you may see one. They look at you, as if to say "Who are you? Where you come from?" And you know that yourself, don't you? Thank you. That's right, and it was worse then than it is now. Yes. And just like you work for white people, Caucasians they call them, and they have children. They'll look at you as if to say, "Where you come from?" 'Cause they're not used to black, dark colors, you know? And you see, let me tell you. You see now, children look at you and say, "Where you--." You see some white kids now--the little babies in the strollers. They look at you and say, "Who are you and where you come from?" That's exactly right. And let me say what happened the other day. My grandson--. This is a great-grandson. They lives up in Maryland, out in the country-like. And he was going to the school, and this is integrated. Little white boy looked at him and called him a "nigger." My

grandson didn't know what he meant 'cause he's never heard that before. But just by happen, the aide heard it, and she went back and told the principal. The principal got the boy's parents and told them, "I'm not gonna have this in my school, and if you can't teach him better, you find somewhere else for him to go." 'Cause my little great grandson didn't know what he was talking about. He had never heard it before, and he's three years old and called him a "nigger."

JS: Wow.

AMP: Yes, see it's still there. Thank you. They live out in the country-like in Maryland. And my little grandson just ignored him, and didn't pay him no attention, and went about his business. I'm glad the aide heard it 'cause she was out there with the children, and she go on back and tell the principal. That's right. That's still there. That's right.

JS: Do you think that race relations have improved, specifically in Newport News?

AMP: I think it has, yes. Yes, yes, yes, indeed. Yes. You find a lot of nice white people. Yes, indeed. I'm not going to say no. And I've been used to white folks all of my life, since I was growing up. When I started going out, working. I've been used to them. They treat me nice. And I don't mess with their business. I got nothing to do with it. And when I was traveling, I was respected very well. Yes. And you have some prejudiced people in the military. Yes, I'm used to that. My husband retired from the military. And I'm used to it. But they treat you nice. They better though. I respect them and they respect us. And I met all types of people. I lived next door to the Koreans and Filipinos and Germans and all. If you treat them nice, they're gonna treat you nice. I had some ladies from Japan--. She'd cook and bring food to me. They're nice. You meet some nice ones. But then too you meet them, and they want to learn your culture and they go about their business. They want to learn how to cook your food. And then after they learn that,

you don't see them no more. That's right. What are you all majoring in? [recording is turned off then on again]

AMP: I worked in politics and this is the lady [named] Mamyé BaCote. Have you all heard of her? She was a delegate of Newport News. I used to work with her.

JS: When did you work with her?

AMP: Up until now.

JS: Oh, okay.

AMP: Do you know Bobby Scott? You talked with Bobby Scott?

JS: Yes. [We know of him.]

AMP: Well, I worked with him also. [Mamyé BaCote,] she retired and she don't know--. She's in a nursing home, which is very sad. She was my neighbor, which is very sad. And I've been working with her--. I work at the polls. On voting day, I sat out and worked at the polls. I've been doing that for some years. So I'm very busy. Yes. I'm a politician.

JS: Awesome.

AMP: Yes..

JS: Very cool.

AMP: And I'm going to continue working as long as I can, although she's unable. But I'm going to carry on what we were doing. Yes, Mamyé BaCote.

TS: What sort of things did you work on together?

AMP: Going to meetings and speeches and working on passing out flyers. And going around from house to house and asking people to vote. You know? They wants me to do that Saturday, but I told them I'm not gonna do it. I'm not gonna be going from house to house. I'm too old for that now.

TS: Let the young people do it.

AMP: Yes, let the young folks do it 'cause I'm tired. But I don't mind sitting and answering [phones]. They want me Saturday to come up to Denbigh and answer the phone. You know, call people, and see if they can come out to vote. They want me to--. I told them I'd try to get up there for about four hours. So that's that.

JS: Okay, well I think that's a wrap.

END OF INTERVIEW

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