

Fannie Brown—Interview Summary

Interviewee: Fannie Brown

Interviewers: Lee Martin and Maria Scaptura

Interview Date: October 19, 2016

Location: Tribble Library, Group Study Room Blechman 214

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 71:00

THE INTERVIEWEE. Fannie Brown was born on May 8th, 1929 in Newport News, Virginia. She was active in her church and community growing up, and she was also a gifted athlete. She received her Bachelor's from Virginia State University, and later earned her Master's at Indiana University. She is known as a devoted school teacher who served before, during, and after integration. For most of her career, she taught at Carver High School and later, she taught at Menchville High School.

THE INTERVIEWERS. Lee Martin and Maria Scaptura are both current seniors at Christopher Newport University. Lee is majoring in Communication Studies, while Maria is earning her Bachelor's in Sociology. They were able to interview Mrs. Fannie Brown through their Oral History class centered on the Civil Rights Movement, as taught by Dr. Laura Puaca.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place in a quiet study room within Christopher Newport University's library. The interviewers walked with Mrs. Brown from the parking lot to the room and explained how they would be conducting the interview and gave Ms. Brown a copy of the question so she could use them as a reference. The interview was recorded on a microphone attached to a laptop through USB, and no significant background noise was heard in the recording or during the interview. Much of the interview focuses on Brown's upbringing and time teaching in Newport News.

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START OF INTERVIEW:

Maria Scaptura: This is Maria Scaptura.

Lee Martin: And Lee Martin.

MS: The time is 3:16 [p.m.] on Wednesday, October 19th. We're in Tribble Library doing an interview with Mrs. Fannie Brown. Do you want me to ask the questions first?

LM: Yep.

MS: Okay. As she explained, we're doing a life history approach, so we're going to start off with just a lot of basic questions about your childhood. So, first: where and when were you born?

Fannie Brown: I was born in Newport News, Virginia, on 16th Street and Madison Avenue. Newport News, Virginia.

MS: Okay.

LM: And then how long did you live there?

FB: I lived in that area--. We moved to Ivy Avenue. From Ivy Avenue, we moved to, I guess you might want to call it Booker T. Washington Elementary School, in the fourth grade.

LM: Perfect. Can you tell us a little about what your parents did for a living?

FB: My dad worked at the shipyard. He also worked for the C&O [Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad]. When the war came he was an individual working with getting the trains from Fort Eustis area down to the water so they could go overseas and fight. And that's about it. And he also was a barber.

MS: Alright.

FB: My mother worked at the school as a, I guess you call it, a person who took care of the classrooms and things of that sort.

LM: What school was this? What school did she work at?

FB: She worked at Huntington High School.

LM: At Huntington?

MS: Okay. What was it like growing up during the Great Depression?

FB: What number is that? [referring to the list of interview questions]

MS: Three. What was it like growing up during the Great Depression?

FB: Actually, you want to know the truth?

MS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

FB: I couldn't tell [if] it was the Depression or not because we did whatever was necessary for having fun and playing games and all that stuff. So [I] was not seeing any Depression because most of the people were coming to Newport News for jobs, especially ones at the shipyard. And most of them were coming from South and North Carolina.

LM: We wondered, what were race relations like in Newport News during the time that you were growing up?

FB: You really want to know the truth?

LM: Mm-hmm.

FB: Our city was--. I guess you want to say certain areas was African American and others were, I guess you might want to call them, mixed: white individuals. And we were in one section of Newport News. We were on the peninsula and individuals were what we called "downtown"--the African Americans. And on the above part of Newport News, that was the 39th Street and Jefferson Avenue. [That] was as far as Newport News went at that time. And those individuals were either living in Hampton or Newport News and they were the Caucasians.

LM: So did you experience growing up in a segregated area? What were your thoughts on that?

FB: You really want to know the truth? We couldn't tell the difference because everybody was working. We went to our school, and they went to their school, closest to where you lived. And that's the way that worked.

MS: We saw that you went to Dunbar Elementary?

FB: I did. I said we moved into the East End section of Newport News, but we started at the Dunbar Elementary School on 18th Street. And they moved and built on 16th Street, and I went to the 16th Street [School] as well. When I was little and young, [I was] at 18th Street, but when they built the other, I had to go to Dunbar. I went to Dunbar until I finished up and went to Booker T. [Washington] in the fourth grade. And that was in East End section of Newport News. One was uptown and one was East End section. That was where the area was growing. They were building more houses. And we were on 30th Street and Booker T. [Washington] Elementary School was, I guess, it must have been about 36th Street and Chestnut Avenue.

MS: Mm-hmm. Okay. Can you describe some of your experiences in school? Can you describe your experiences in school?

FB: No, we just went to school and came home. Wasn't much to do at that time.

MS: What were you like when you were young, a young student?

FB: What was I like? I don't know, we just did things in the neighborhood. Wasn't too many things to do really. When I finished elementary school, I went to Huntington and that was in '42. And I played basketball and we had a city pool. I swam a lot. And that was about it. And of course, we went to church. And I played the piano as a 9th grader and from there until I finished college and all that. But that's about it for activity. We enjoyed basketball, going to games and things of that sort.

LM: What church was this?

FB: Saint Timothy, 18th and Madison.

LM: So church was like a large part of growing up or it was really important to you?

FB: Well, we went to church all the time. As we said Saturday--not Saturday, but Sunday--you know, whatever activities the church was sponsoring, you were participating in.

LM: And what denomination is that?

FB: Church of Christ, oldest in the USA.

LM: Okay.

FB: Originating in Mississippi.

LM: Oh. Okay.

LM: So, looking at school again, what grade were you when you started at Booker T. Washington?

FB: I went there in the 4th grade.

LM: In the 4th grade?

FB: Mm-hmm.

LM: Okay. And then would you describe your experiences there as any different from where you were before then?

FB: I'm sorry?

LM: Were your experiences there similar to your other school experiences or was it just--?

FB: Yeah there wasn't much, there wasn't much activity because we just stayed in the classroom and we went outside for a little exercise and went home. Now there were little bullies like they are now and that's about it. They would kind of do little silly stuff all the time but that's it.

LM: Did you ever notice if there was any difference between the black schools in the area versus the white schools in the area?

FB: We didn't know because we didn't live near them. They lived in another section of the city. One lived in East End and one lived uptown and they went to the schools that were built in that area. And we went to where we were living, in that area.

MS: We saw you attended Huntington High School during the 1940s, could you describe your experiences in high school?

FB: What it's like in high school?

MS: Mm-hmm.

FB: Well, I played basketball as an 8th grader. I was in gymnastics in that as a regular person. And I was the only 8th grader on the, I guess you might want to call it, on the senior's basketball team, which was interesting. And then of course I didn't do any track and field but that was it. And then during high school, they had built two swimming pools: one for Caucasians and one for the African Americans, and I worked at the pool and I swam at the pool and I was very successful every time we had a meet. I was competing with the same person all the time because she was at the pool and, of course, the pools were separated at that time. Caucasian one--one of them 28th Street and the other one was on 31st Street. So that was during the war time and they named the pool Dorie Miller and that is on Wickham Avenue now. Well, that's it. And I got a job working at the pool in the summer time. And then, when I graduated from high school, I went to Virginia State in Petersburg, Virginia and as a result I did come back and work all my sophomore, junior, and senior year at the swimming pool and got a full time scholarship (9:28) and didn't have to pay any more money for the first semester at Virginia State because whatever I earned took care of all the expenses. My parents only had to pay the second semester.

LM: Wow.

FB: Mm-hmm.

MS: Very nice. Back to Huntington, do you have any teachers that were an influence on you when you were in school?

FB: Not in elementary school. I had one. The health and physical education teacher was very good and I enjoyed her and I wanted to be just like her and I went away to school so that was it.

MS: What was her name?

FB: Geneva Taylor. Mm-hmm.

MS: We learned a little about Dr. Palmer and we were wondering what, he was like: Dr. Luttrell Palmer.

FB: I'm sorry, am I missing something? What number is that? [referring to the list of interview questions]

MS: Seven, but C. C under seven.

FB: How would I describe the experience--. I've done that one right there: athletics, the basketball team we talked about. We see that you attended Huntington High School during the forties and I stayed there. I started there in '42 and graduated in '46.

LM: Yeah, she's referring to--

FB: What number?

LM: --seven, but this one, C. Did you know Dr.--

FB: C?

LM: Yeah.

FB: Yes, I knew him but as a young person. I don't know how long, I think I must have been a sophomore when he left because Mr. Scales was there the last two years I was in high school and I think that was it. But he was very good, very industrious, very smart. Everybody liked him. I don't know if he went to Hampton Institute or not but he left there and went to Hampton Institute so I'm not too sure. Now see, you all said how long did he say there, I have no idea because we didn't really know when he left because he left when we were probably in the summertime.

MS: Okay.

FB: [Referring to the list of interview questions] "And how aware were you of the efforts to equalize teacher salaries?" Not one bit. From the time I thought about it when I came back to Carver High School to work and we realized that our salaries were not the same as the Caucasians. So things changed quite a bit.

MS: Do you remember when Newport News school board refused to renew his contract? Was there a lot of backlash at the school over his nonrenewal?

FB: You know, I have no idea about that because I don't think that was discussed with the children and probably in the community. What was the response? I have no idea.

LM: Okay, so looking at the time period that you were in during World War II, how did World War II affect your experiences in high school and did it affect Newport News?

FB: Actually, it's been so long I can't even think about it. My dad worked, and he had to work with the government, getting those people [who were] going overseas from Fort Eustis all the way down to the end of the peninsula. And that's basically what he did most of the time. We were spending a lot of time with him at his barber shop because you only went from, we say about, 16th Street to 25th Street, every Saturday because that was the time where all of the stores were on Jefferson Avenue. We never went over to Washington Avenue so we didn't know what was going on at that time and as for how we were treated, just like we were. We didn't have any problem with that.

MS: After graduation you went to Virginia State University, what year did you enroll? What year did you start at Virginia State?

FB: What year did I do what?

MS: What year did you start at Virginia State?

FB: In '42.

MS: '42?

FB: Mm-hmm, right after I finished high school.

MS: Okay.

FB: Stayed there until '46, then I graduated. Mm-hmm.

MS: What did you study when you were there?

FB: I was a health and physical education major.

MS: Oh, okay. Can you describe your college experience?

FB: Did what?

MS: Can you describe your college experience?

FB: Oh, I had a ball in college.

LM: [laughs]

FB: There were four of us. Let's see, four or five of us, who hung out together, and whatever we did, we did it together. What classes we had, we did [them] together and all of us graduated but one at the same time. And the only reason that was, was because she didn't want to do what the four of us, the five of us wanted to do. But we wanted to compete all the time and if we did, all of us worked together. We got into--I don't want to say trouble--but we did things to have fun, you know, one of those numbers. And one thing I can remember we did, we would always go downstairs and get some sodas and whatever the lady had down there. That was the lady--I forget her name now--but anyway, she was the one who would give things to the students, you know, one of those numbers. And she used to go get what you need and we'd go get what she [needed] sometimes and get two or three cases of sodas and bring them upstairs, you know, things like that. Mostly getting into trouble and just being troublesome.

MS and LM: [laughter]

FB: And if we competed with anybody, we always won. And we were, of all of the thirty-one majors [who] went to school at that time, we were the only ones that graduated all four of us at one time because we kind of stuck together and did what was necessary, even though we competed with the seniors and all that type of thing. But that was it.

LM: What were their names? If you recall.

FB: Oh Lord. I can't even remember. Maybe I'll put them together, I don't know. It's been so long. And that's been since '46 and I'm eighty-seven, I'm eighty-seven now so that makes a world of difference as to whether you remember stuff. I don't know what it was. Hmm. I'm trying to think of the names right now.

LM: That's fine. We can move on.

MS: Did you always know you wanted to become a teacher?

FB: Did what?

MS: Did you always know you wanted to become a teacher?

FB: No, I wanted to be like my gym teacher, my physical education teacher. She was very good, very smart and we were [close], and so that's what I did when I graduated, to major.

LM: So how did you end up at Carver?

FB: My chemistry teacher became the principal of Carver High School and when we graduated, I went to him. And that was in 1949. The school opened--Carver opened--in '49 and I said, "I'm getting ready to graduate, and I want to work here." He said, "Well, the only reason--." Only problem he had was Ms. Crittenden, Flora Crittenden, and that was one of the students that had finished a year ahead of me and she, in turn, got the job. So he said, "Whenever something opens up, I'll hire you," and that's what he did. And I stayed there until integration and that was it.

LM: So when something opened up, he hired you. Did you teach health and physical education or did you teach other subjects?

FB: I taught health and physical education and I also was the department chairman for the girls. And then later on I was a department chairman for both the boys and girls. And when the principals and things had to go to meetings and that sort, I'd always take their places, you know, until they came back. And all things like that. And then I was responsible for all of the pep rallies that they had and whatever they had. I guess you might want to call it, when boys had their basketball season [and it] was over, they'd always give them whatever they called it and I'd always be responsible for that. And I really had a pretty little time with that and they enjoyed it.

LM: Are there any other responsibilities that you remember having? Besides those--or were those the bulk of your duties?

FB: You talking about at Carver?

LM: Yeah.

FB: No more than teaching, and whatever's necessary. I didn't do anything different. Pep rallies, and planning for the activity when they would get their awards and things of that sort.

LM: And then you coached as well?

FB: I did, but I didn't coach that too much. I did basketball, track and field, and that's it. I didn't do no more than those.

MS: I was going to say--what was your experience like as department chair?

FB: Well, you could've been a principal because you did everything they did, basically.

MS: [laughs]

FB: [You] had to do your objectives, your goals and all of that kind of stuff, and you had to make sure they got that. And in September, you planned to do for the whole year. All that was there, had to be done and everything. And they had whatever was necessary, was right there, [that was] all they had to do.

LM: So at what point did you end up going to IU [Indiana University] for your master's degree?

FB: When I finished--. I guess I must've gone--I don't even know what the year was--. At that time, I wanted to go to get a master's degree, but I did not want to go to New York--that's where everybody else was going--because they, in turn, did not have a master's in health and physical education. You had to get something else and include that. So anyway, the Newport News school system, they did not--. I don't know how you want to put this: they did not want you to go to--. [They] wanted you to go to New York but I didn't want to go so I told them, "I'm going to transfer and go to Indiana University where you got your master's in health and physical education," and that was that. And then they said that they would pay for me to go since they was not sending anybody to New York. So I didn't have to pay for the master's program. They paid for me to go to Indiana University. So I flew every time out there in the summer. I did four summers, rather than go there out of the whole year, and I drove back with one of my friends [who] was out there [at] the same time. But most of the time you out there, you flew back home--flew there and back home.

LM: So when did you end up? Well, I guess you stayed at Carver the whole time while you were getting your master's?

FB: Yep. Mm-hmm, at Carver the whole time.

LM: Wow.

MS: Okay, what year did you start getting your master's?

FB: What year? I don't even remember now. I can't tell you because I've forgotten. And I guess I must've been about--. Maybe '54. I think about '54.

MS: How was your school experience when teaching different from when you were a student?

FB: Say what?

MS: How was your experience different when you were a teacher versus when you were a student?

FB: How was my experience as a teacher at Carver? Is that what you're saying? Number ten?

MS: Number eleven. How was your school experience when teaching different from your time as a student?

LM: Do you think your students had a different experience than you did when you were a student?

FB: The setup was different. [pause] Well, I'm trying to figure out what you mean by this. Most of the time, we were not bussed. That's one of the situations. Going to high school, we walked, and if you had to walk uptown, you had to walk uptown. If you had to walk East End, you had to walk. There were no buses. But at Carver, the kids were bussed in, and Carver was a school that was in Warwick. Newport News came to 39th Street and from 39th Street up it was Warwick County. So, it stayed that way for quite a while, and I think [after] maybe a couple of years, as they combined and integrated, we got a lot of kids from Carver, upper Carver, upper Newport News. And then we got a lot from the East End section of Newport News. So it was good. We had to make the kids from upper Newport News a little more motivated, a little quieter--the ones coming from Newport News and going up that way. And there were not too many because most of them stayed at Huntington High School. That was all from 39th Street this way, and Carver was from 39th Street that way on Jefferson, both of them. So that was the situation there. Kids from Carver were a little more quieter, didn't get into too much trouble. But the kids from that end-

downtown where I call it--the kids were just more active. And this is the way they were a little more country, you know. And of course I remember one time, one girl came from Huntington to Carver and she had had a baby and I could tell because all the kids were around her and of course she was telling them about stuff like that so I told her, I told her and the kids, I said, "That's something you don't want to be too much about because that's not what your high school is all about" and I told her, I said, "Keep your mouth closed even if you have two or three children. Don't be trying to influence other children to do what you did." I know those numbers. But that was it.

LM: Are there moments from your teaching career that stand out to you or maybe you think back on and remember?

FB: Say that again?

LM: Moments in your teaching career that may have stood out to you?

FB: No, I had none of them. The only one that I could really talk with, and the rest of them really didn't know as much as I knew. You know, they just were not up to date. And I put this out, the Caucasian teachers didn't have a Bachelor's degree in Newport News. And the reason why is because they had two year certificates and that was it. But most of the African-American teachers had a Bachelor's degree and that was on the elementary school and on up. That's it. And we found out, I did find out about that, when we integrated and we went into the elementary and high schools. A lot of them just had two year degrees, you know, which was unusual.

MS: Did you have any moments from your teaching career that stood out to you? Any fond memories that you think back on?

FB: The one that I really like was we did a pep rally, and I was friendly with O. H. Smith Funeral Home, so I decided [that at the] pep rally [we would] put a body in the casket and roll it down the aisle, and do a regular service and at the end of it open the casket and we had beat the [opposing] team. And of course we had groups to sing as if we were at a funeral and that was the most fun. They loved it, the children loved it. They [were] just jumping the whole time. But anyway, it was

very nice. That was one of the things that I thought was pretty good for, you know. And then when we had extra activities, we would compete sometimes in the spring or latter part of the summer, going [into the] latter part, getting ready going into school. And they enjoyed that. Of course ,when the boys had their activity for completing and finishing up their activity, we would always give them things they could wear and stuff like that. So that was it, I don't know any more.

MS: Okay. How do you think you impacted the lives of your students?

FB: How much what?

MS: How do you think you impacted the lives of your students?

FB: You gotta tell me that louder so I can--.

MS: It's number twelve underneath. How do you think you impacted the lives of your students?

FB: Oh, well, I tell you one thing, the easy one to tell you: I do get a call from a lot of them [and] three or four different times, they come by to see me. And most of the time they come, they want to spend the night and go back and that type of thing. So I think the impact [on] their lives was very good.

LM: As a faculty member, for you, did you see if Carver was different from the local white schools? Could you compare maybe?

FB: No, we didn't make any comparison. I know that the Caucasian teachers were not up to date. The high school ones that were so (29:25)--. Most of the times, we didn't have anybody without a degree at Carver High School.

LM: Did the segregation of the schools affect funding and resources that you were given?

FB: You don't know whether or not, what the other schools got. You just knew how much you got and that was when, I guess you call it the pay salary, became the same as the Caucasians. Prior to that, they were not [the same]. And we didn't know that until we got together.

MS: Let's see. Do you remember when you first heard about the *Brown* decision? The *Brown* versus *Board* decision?

FB: Hmm. I really don't know. It's been so long. I wouldn't even give you a response on that because I don't recall.

LM: Let's see. So when it came to integration in Newport News, do you remember your thoughts on that or how people around you felt?

FB: Well, when we were integrated everybody had to go somewhere and they had assigned everybody to various schools. And, of course, the master degree individuals went to upper Carver and all of the kids' teachers went on the other end. I mean, going down that way. I guess you call it going up to Huntington area. And one other thing that they did [was] teachers were assigned to go certain places and some of them wanted--. I was assigned to go to Ferguson High School but, at that time, my son was going to Ferguson and I really didn't want to go there. Plus, I was a parent [in] a parent-teacher association. That meant parents always had things to do. And I did not particularly care for the principal at that time because he was prejudiced and I didn't want to have to be bothered with that. So when I was assigned to go to Ferguson, I decided--[because] my kids, Carver kids, were assigned to go to Menchville--I went to the superintendent and told him I did not want to go there [or] stay at Carver--because I was assigned to stay at Carver or go to Ferguson. And my rationale was the principal that was there wanted me to stay so I would help him do what's necessary there 'cause he felt like I knew everything about the school. You know, one of those numbers. So anyway I went to the administration building and talked with the assistant superintendent and told him what I wanted so he told me, "Mrs. Brown, with your record you can go anywhere you want to." So whoever was sent to Menchville, they had to go somewhere else because I was assigned to go to Menchville. And I did not want to get into trouble with whoever was department [chair] up there so I said, "Well, don't make me," and they kept asking me [to be department chair]. I said, "No, I don't want to be that." So I was assigned to what they call those things you put outside when you got too many inside [the school].

MS: Trailer.

FB: Trailer. I was assigned to a trailer. Stayed there one year and, the next year, I was given a room inside of the main building and [was] still asked about being the department chairperson. I said [no]. So I had a classroom right across from the gym area and that's the way it was until I graduated. Mm-hmm. Until I retired. [laughter]

LM: Do you remember around the time that integration began, what year that might have been or?

FB: What's that?

LM: The process of integration, when it began?

FB: No, I don't remember the date, the year. It's been--. [Integration] was in the late 70's, but I can't tell you the exact date. Anybody else tell you? Have you talked to anybody else?

LM: We've done a little bit of research but we can look into more exact dates. I know that there's always, you know, there's dates that things were handed down, like you need to start. But then that didn't necessarily mean that people did. Were there a lot of challenges for the students in schools? Because I know you said people were told where to go.

FB: We didn't have a lot of things that were not proper. I just felt like sometimes the principal, [the] one that was assigned to us at the time of integration, he really wasn't into the job. And he just didn't do what he [was] supposed to do. You know, one of those numbers. And he messed around with doing, I call it, stupid stuff. It was good for him to have--. When he left there and we all moved, he had to go because he just wasn't a good person to do the job. He did not do a good job. But when the other people came, they were good. No problems, they worked well with each other and that was good.

MS: Was he in charge of everyone deciding where to integrate or was he the head of the public schools?

FB: He was [not]. I'm referring to the principal that came to Carver.

MS: To Carver, okay.

FB: When they integrated.

LM: Okay. Do you recall other teachers' experiences? Maybe what they said about it or how they were affected by integration?

FB: [No]. Everybody did what they needed to do. You know, I wasn't out in the hallway seeing them, but I could tell that sometimes things did not go [well]. But there was never a fight or nothing like that. We never had that type of stuff going on. You know.

MS: Do you recall a response from the black community on integration in Newport News?

FB: On integration?

MS: Mm-hmm.

FB: I think they accepted it but they did not want to leave Huntington and go someplace else. You know.

MS: How about the white community?

FB: How about what?

MS: [phone beeps] The white community?

FB: Oh, I don't know. I couldn't tell you really because I didn't live in that area at the time. I lived in the area that you all are sitting there now. I came here—we bought property on Moores Lane--in well, I say about '62, '63, because we moved in '64. And Christopher Newport wasn't here. They had not--. There were homes, African-American homes in the area. And I don't know how they was able to get the property because it was farming people, families farming in the area and all of them were African Americans. So some kind of way, they sold property enough to get one building here and from that they bought houses because I can recall several. Miss Taylor, when I was telling you about my teacher, she was on Moores, she was on Moores Lane, and they offered her 300,000 dollars for her house. Wasn't very big but that's a whole lot of money for that house. And they paid her to stay there for a year so she could get out and get everything she wanted and then used the payment [to] buy a new house. And other ones the same way. I don't know whether or not they got as much out of that, but they really wanted to buy the property so they could build and from that they have [acquired] all but about maybe five houses from Prince

Drew to Moores Lane to Shoe Lane and Warwick Boulevard. All of that's basically now Christopher Newport. But when we moved here, wasn't anything up here. Not even any Christopher Newport up here at all. They started and that was it.

LM: Do you remember how the community felt when Christopher Newport--.

FB: We took 'em to court.

LM: Yeah? Can you tell us more about it?

FB: Huh?

LM: Can you tell us more about it maybe?

FB: Well, I can only tell you what they--. Well, we were concerned about having to move. And we took 'em to court and they argued about it and they said that we did not have [to move], they could not make you move, but they could ask you to move and that is the same situation now. We got letters where it states that if you want to sell, you can sell to them, but you don't have to move. So the five homes that are up there now are the same thing. They just refuse to move. Because they built the homes and--. They didn't--. Most of them, their parents built the homes, and they're still here. So I go with the idea, we have letters from the state department stating that they cannot ask us to move but if we want to we can sell.

LM: So you've been sent these letters personally?

FB: I'm sorry?

LM: So have you received the letters personally? Like they want to buy your house too or just your neighbors?

FB: No, we knew that from the court situation that we did, when we took 'em to court about it. So now it's just there. They know it and we know it, I'm quite sure. Because they haven't come up, they cannot ask us. And if we want to we can do it. It'll be a while, quite sure. My children are not here, my daughter's not in the area. [Back then] my brother and my husband went out looking for property. And we bought houses and they bought property next door. So he [my brother] just

passed and my husband passed, so we two ladies [myself and my sister-in-law are] living next door to each other and that's about it.

LM: So you live next to your sister-in-law?

FB: Uh-huh.

LM: And what's your sister-in-law's name?

FB: Minerva Douglas. You heard that right?

MS: Mm-hmm.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

FB: You wrote a letter, huh?

LM: [laughter]

FB: You wrote her a letter, right? Because I took mine over there so she could see it, and she said she could not [be interviewed at this time]--. She was busy, because I told her, come on over here, and we do it all at one time. She said she just too busy and she has been quite busy since her husband has passed.

LM: And that was your brother?

FB: Mm-hmm.

LM: And what was his name?

FB: Walter.

LM: Walter?

FB: Mm-hmm.

MS: Are you two very close?

FB: Hmm?

MS: Are you two very close-- you and your sister-in-law? Are you guys close?

FB: Yeah, because she worked at Carver, too. She went to Hampton Institute. And they got married quite a while after. But my brother--the two of them--and my husband were kind of close and they went out riding, and they decided to come up in the area, and that's when they decided

to buy property, and that's how that happened. And then, of course, my brother was in the service, and when he came home, he said, "I'm want to build me a house." And I said--this is what I told my husband, too--I said, "How are you going to build a house? You don't know how." He said, "I'm going to come home and work for a construction company." And sure enough, he worked a year for a construction company and built his house.

LM: [laughter]

FB: And that was it.

LM: What year did you and your husband meet?

FB: Meet?

LM: Mm-hmm.

FB: We met--. I must've been about a junior in high school. But we used to come and swim a lot, and I was working there at the pool. I was the person collecting the funds, and ten cents--you had to pay ten cents in the little machine--and that was it. And you could go swimming--and he did a lot of swimming. He was in [the] service, you know. After he finished high school, he went to Howard.

LM: Then when did you all get married?

FB: In '52.

LM: And what was his name again?

FB: Huh?

LM: His name--?

FB: Lawrence Walker Brown.

MS: Okay. We're going to go back to integration, just back a little bit, and so, on question sixteen, what was the process--

FB: What number is that?

MS: Sixteen.

FB: Sixteen.

MS: Yeah. What was the process of busing like? After--

FB: You want to know the truth? I have no idea because I didn't have anything to do with the busing, the bussing process. Our kids--my daughter was bussed, she bussed to the third grade, and the buses came to pick her up and take her to Riverside, but André walked because he was at Carver, and he went with me when I went. And then of course when they changed from Carver and integrated, he went to Ferguson. And that was about it.

MS: What year did he start at Ferguson?

FB: I don't know, don't remember. Well, I started, let me see, when he graduated. I can't tell you because I don't remember.

LM: Well, do you remember if other people have reactions to busing, like if people were pro-busing or if they were like, "Oh, I don't like this."

FB: I think they did pretty good. Well, one thing that I thought I didn't particularly care for [was] the way they integrated. They closed the high schools and made them middle schools [in the] downtown area. And then of course the high schools were up this way, and of course the Caucasians stayed up there. But the African Americans had to come up this way and the middle school kids and the elementary kids had to go down the other end, which was to me the wrong way to integrate. And they started on the senior high and down. They should've started integrating kids from the elementary school, the lowest grade you could go. Kids could adjust to each other like that, but you don't start high school and integrate. And that's my thing about it, I don't know whose idea that was, but I thought that was kind of--not [how] things needed to have been [done].

LM: Were you familiar with resistance to busing as far as Save Our Neighborhood Schools goes?

FB: Was I what?

LM: Familiar with Save Our Neighborhood Schools, [it] was [a] resistance to busing, people that got--.

FB: I don't think they did that because I don't remember anywhere that they did Save Our Neighborhood, because it was done and they did all they had to do. You know, and they did it in board meetings I'm quite sure--school board meetings.

MS: You mentioned that they started integrating with the high schools. And they did elementary--

FB: Come down. And the high school kids stayed up this way and the elementary kids, the middle school kids, had to move downtown, you know, which was kind of hard on them--and that was it. And really it's still like that, the middle school kids are on the other end and the high schools [are] up this way.

LM: So, when you were at Menchville, what were your experiences like with integration there or just in general?

FB: I didn't have a problem with that, and I think if there were [problems], I didn't give into any other, I didn't know what was going on.

MS: You taught health and physical fitness at Menchville?

FB: I taught health at Menchville. I did not want to get into [a] situation where someone's already in charge and reassigned that job, and you have to be real careful about stuff like that because that create[s] more things going on, you know, one of those numbers. So that was it for me, I just told them "Give me a room, and that's all I need," you know. I didn't teach physical education at all, I did all health.

MS: How long were you there before you retired?

FB: From integration until I retired, I retired in '83, I believe.

LM: Were you active in the community outside of teaching?

FB: Well, not too much. I can't do all of that and teach too, now, and [I] had two children. I was church musician for quite a while. That was a busy time for me. I played for five different choirs and one for the children's choir, the teenagers, the men's choir--male, female and the women's chorus, and then the combined choirs. I played for those, start[ing] when I was nine, and finished about--I guess about seven or eight, maybe ten years. And that's about it.

LM: Can you tell us a little bit more about your children, like their names and--?

FB: My son is Lawrence André Brown, he went to Southern University in Louisiana, I believe, and my daughter went to school up in Richmond and in Maryland. She works for the government in [the] Maryland, Washington area. And that's about it.

LM: And what is her name?

FB: Millicent Brown. And we have one granddaughter, Diamond Brown, and no children with the son. That's about it.

LM: Would you say that their experiences growing up were different--a lot different--than yours?

FB: I'm quite sure because they were exposed to much more than we were. He [André] played basketball, like me. He was on the senior basketball team as an eighth grader but played basketball for high school, and went away to college on scholarship. But my daughter wasn't into [basketball]--she was more [of a] track person. She ran track, she was quite, pretty good, you know, and that's about it for her.

LM: And you said--she works in the D.C. area--?

FB: No, she works--

LM: --Maryland?

FB: What you call that? Organization that works with storms and all that?

LM: FEMA?

FB: FEMA. She works with FEMA. Sometimes she has to go places to assess what's going on, but she hadn't had to go yet. Things going on I guess. Probably males were going, I don't know. But she does that.

LM: So does she live out of state then or--?

FB: Oh yes, she lives in Maryland.

LM: She lives in Maryland, okay.

FB: She was trying to get on--. Well actually, she was working for the government here, but they told her that wasn't anything permanent, and if she would move to [the] Washington area, she

could get a job. And sure enough, when she went up there--and my sister was up there, she lived there--she got a job less than a week almost, and she'd been there ever since.

LM: Wow.

FB: Mm-hmm.

LM: And then, is your son in the area still, or--?

FB: Yeah he's still, he lives in the area.

LM: Okay, in Newport News?

FB: Mm-hmm, yeah.

LM: Oh, awesome. Where does he live?

FB: On 33rd Street, 11th block.

LM: Hmm.

FB: Yep, yep. My granddaughter's in Chicago. She just graduated in May. She was in journalism. And now she's working at her, where she did her--. She called it, you know when you have to do, can't think of it right now. But anyway, you know when you have to--. Can't even think of the name of the thing. This is what happens when you get older. [laughter]

LM: It's like an internship or a fellowship maybe? Or?

FB: What was that?

LM: Like when you have to do an internship in college.

FB: Internship, intern. She'd been working with an internship. In her first journalism project, she's had over a million, fifteen million replies to whatever she had written. I told her, "You are really good at it." And they were surprised and all. So she's been working there since that time. I think she wanted [to] stay. I don't know whether it's the best place for her but anyway that's what she wants to do. Mm-hmm.

LM: Okay. Were you yourself ever involved in any civil rights work or did you witness friends that were involved?

FB: Civil rights? I never got into all that. [No].

LM: Did you have family or friends who were active in it at all?

FB: We didn't have a whole lot of civil rights going on here in Newport News. I don't know about other places. But I didn't get involved in anything like that because I had so much other stuff to do. And you said, [referring to interview questions,] "We noticed from your address that you live right near Christopher Newport. Were you living here at the time that CNU decided to move here?" Christopher Newport is in my backyard, and I say in my backyard, my swimming pool, and some shrubbery--. They're over here, and I'm over here. I could walk right in where they're building those two alumni buildings--. [points] I'm here, they're here, my brother's house here, and the other building is here, the alumni building's right there. So you can walk from one yard to the other one, that's how close it is.

LM: Well, I guess, we talked a little bit about how they took it to court when they decided that they were going to put the college here--

FB: That had to have started, that had to have been going on prior to--. I just can't imagine, when they started buying up the property--. Because there wasn't anything here. But African Americans were here and they had--I know they had farms, you know--one of those numbers, and that's it. And I can imagine they would want to get rid of that farm because, with that area, all that other stuff across the street--Hidenwood and all of those neighborhoods right over there, you know-- they started building. The church and people that were there, they thought they bought--. This church was there on Prince Drew, right at the corner, not at the corner but the first area you turn to go back in that area where the houses are and buildings are. He got a lot of money to move also, paid to go, and I guess enough to build a church on Denbigh Boulevard. And also, they put out some funds, but it kind of like, was not the [best] thing to do, they should've put it where--. Center, what do you call it? Center, center--

MS: City Center?

FB: Huh?

MS: City Center?

FB: City Center. Because I mean over there [was] nothing but trees and all they had to do was build it over there. Now they're building other stuff. [But] that's where they should've gone, right there. I don't think people should've been moved like that but, that's my belief.

MS: Mm-hmm. Do you remember any other backlash from the community that were here--?

FB: If they did, I don't know because I lived on Orcutt Avenue in downtown Newport News. I don't know whether or not you all been to that area. Do you know where the "Y"--the (0:55:33.2) Y.W.C.A. is?

LM: Wait the--the Y.W.C.A. or the Y.M.C.A.?

FB: The Y.W.C.A.

LM: I haven't--. I know where the Y.M.C.A. is.

FB: (0:55:41.0) Y. It's between 27th and 28th Street on Orcutt Avenue.

LM: Okay, I'm not very familiar, but I kind of have a sense of what you're talking about.

FB: Well, that's the only thing I can say about [that]. They might've had stuff going on but I don't know too much. But anyway, I lived right across the street on the Y. When I first came home and tried to get work and Mr. Hines, as I told you, was my chemistry teacher. He said, "I'll hire you when something comes up." Well, I tried to find a job here in the area, and nothing came up, so I said, "Well, I'm going to work with the Y," and I did. And then that summer, Y teens were going to Virginia Beach and I was offered the job to teach the Y teens how to swim on the beach. So I went over there. I met a young lady from Camden, South Carolina, and she was working over there with children like I was. So she said, "Are you looking for a job?" I said, "I sure am." She said, "Are you interested?" I said, "Sure, teaching." She said, "Let me just call my superintendent and see." So she did, and the lady told me--the principal told her he would hire me if I wanted to job. So, I left Virginia Beach and caught the train to Camden, South Carolina, didn't go home to get anything. I drove from there, caught the train from Virginia Beach, all the way to Camden, South Carolina. Stayed there one year, taught health and physical education, coached basketball, coached track and field. My basketball team won state championship, one

they had never had in all the time the school was there. So I told them, "I'm not coming back 'cause, I wasn't making any money." I was making 90 dollars a month, which was nothing, absolutely nothing. It may have been a long time [ago] but that's not no money. So anyway, I came home and some kind of way I met a person who had some interest in Eastern Shore. I'm trying to think of where he was, now. But anyway, I got a job over there and I stayed over there a year, and my husband and I got married after that, and I came back home and [was] stuck back working at the Y, trying to get my job up there at Carver. So I ran into--at that time, I was staying with my mother, trying to find some place to stay--the lady was across the street from the Y and I saw her out front in the yard. I went over just to speak to her. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm putting out a sign; I'm getting ready to sell my house." She said, "Do you want to buy it?" I said, "Are you kidding?" She said, "Yeah. [I'm serious.]" I said, "For real?" She said, "Yep, give me a hundred dollars and then you let me know that you are really interested." So I said, "Okay." Now mind you, we had just gotten married, and we were living with my parents because nobody else was home, just me and him. So anyway, I told him about it. At that time he was at Hampton Institute trying to finish up his work. And he said, "Yup, I'm interested, and you're interested." I said "Yeah." So anyway, it must've been about maybe a week or so later, the lady called, and she said, "If you're interested, we can go over to town and sign the papers." I said, "Are you kidding?" She said, "Yes I am. [I'm serious.]" And she got the loan and everything for us, and that's the way we bought that house.

MS: Wow.

FB: And no children [yet]. We'd just gotten married in '52 and that was about--yeah, in '52. And we didn't have anything, to tell you the truth, because we were staying with my mother. You know, so we got the house, started from one thing to another 'til we put furniture in and I worked at the Y, and he was at that time working at the shipyard [and was attending] Hampton Institute. He had two more years because him when the war broke out, he had to go overseas, and stayed over there 'til it was over. [He] came back and finished up his two years he had to do at Hampton,

and then he got a job out at NASA, N-A-S-A, and he stayed there. He was an aerospace engineer.

And that was it. Mm-hmm.

MS: How many years before you were hired at Carver? How many years did you work before you were hired at Carver--?

FB: Two years. Just two.

LM: Then your husband, he worked at NASA for how long?

FB: He actually did a lot of work on the--this happens all the time--the Apollo. He had to do all the writing and printing and whatever it was they did on it, and that's what his interest was. He was a math major, physics minor.

LM: Okay. Let's see, we had something about the Morrison Property Owners Association. We briefly learned about that, and we were wondering--

FB: What number is that?

LM: Nineteen, B.

MS: Yeah, we were learning about the Shoe Lane area that CNU was buying up and the Morrison Property Owners Association was the one that--

FB: The Morrison Property Owners. Oh, that's who actually, who those homes were, the houses were bought from.

LM: Exactly.

FB: No, I wasn't involved in any of that because I wasn't living up here at that time.

LM: Did you know Philip S. Walker or W. Hale Thompson?

FB: I knew both of them.

LM: Can you tell us a little about them--?

FB: Both of them were lawyers.

LM: Lawyers?

FB: Mm-hmm.

LM: Do you know anything else about them, like could you describe them?

FB: I don't. They probably were involved in a lot of, at that time, civil rights stuff, but I didn't get into that. And I think at that time, they were living, if my memory serves--Walker, on Marshall Avenue, around 18th and 19th Street. That's about it. Lawyer. And they probably [had an] office, but I don't know too much about them at all.

LM: Do you recall Walker's, Philip Walker's brother, William?

FB: I'm sorry?

LM: Do you recall William Walker?

MS: I think he lived on--. Did he live on Shoe Lane, I believe?

LM: Somewhere, yeah. Close.

FB: Walker? It might--. He might've been the brother, as far as I know. I don't have no idea.

LM: Do you know what ended up happening to the families that sold their houses and had to move?

FB: They moved [to] different places in Hampton, some of them further up, you know. I don't really know about--. Oh, there was another area, Campbell Lane. A lot of them moved in that area too. I'm not too sure about the others.

MS: How far away is Campbell Lane?

FB: Campbell? It's not very far from here. You know, if you go to Costco, and you come out on Warwick Boulevard, and you make a left-hand turn, you will go down and you're going to see Nettles Drive. You know where that is?

LM: Yeah.

FB: Okay, well that is Campbell Lane, has some homes that were African American. And Denbigh Baptist Church is right on Nettles. And a lot of them live in that area. A lot of our students came from that area.

MS: Do you remember when Warwick and Newport News became one--

FB: I don't--

MS: --county?

FB: --I remember but I don't know what the years were.

MS: Oh, okay.

FB: Go onto the internet.

MS: Yeah, do you remember, did that impact you in any way? Just the uniting--

FB: No. You want to know the truth? At that time, we were--I don't even know what years it was. We were interested in our kids from Carver--. No, from Huntington, because that meant you went to Huntington High School. And Newport News only went to 39th Street. You know, at 39th Street would be on Jefferson Avenue, and Jefferson from that would go all the way to Hampton, if you're going in that direction. And we didn't have any reason to go any further. We were always in Newport News, and Newport News was just a city by itself, and that was it. And from 39th Street all the way up was Warwick County, and I have no idea when they got together, but I do know that was when we started getting kids from [the] Newsome Park area--and they were going up there rather than going to Huntington. And that was it.

LM: Can you tell us anything about Newsome Park? What you might remember about it?

FB: That was built during the war, because a lot of people were coming from North Carolina, I mentioned that earlier, and they had to stay some place. So the city or state, and I'm quite sure the shipyard had a lot to do with it, they were building those houses in Newsome Park. That's how they got there. And a lot of people, a lot of students, I guess that's probably why [they] combined, because they were so close to 39th Street, and that's it.

LM: Do we want to move on to number twenty?

MS: Yeah, we can.

LM: In your mind, is there any unfinished legacy from the civil rights movement? I know you said you weren't very active in civil rights but perhaps you see where it wasn't completely [finished]. You know, there's still things that carry on today, or anything you see that's unfinished--?

FB: I can't remember too much stuff now.

LM: Do you have any thoughts on race relations today, and maybe where it's headed?

FB: There [were] race relations. You could tell it by the things that they would say and all, but I didn't get into stuff like that, you know. I didn't have time, you know, one of those numbers. But I could see how they responded and reacted, you know, one of those numbers. And of course, sometimes when you feel like you know what you're talking about they don't want to get there, because they don't want to have to listen. And I had a lot of that, you know, one of those numbers, but other than that, that's about it. I had quite a few--one, two, I guess about five, six people, ladies, in my department that I worked with, you know, one of those numbers. And during integration, we got about three or four at that time, you know. One of them was very good, the other one was not, she did not want to be there, you know. And of course, when we integrated, she didn't want to stay so that made a difference, but it was most enjoyable, had a good time.

LM: Do you think there's like a difference from how things were then, and now, like has it changed a lot?

FB: From now?

LM: Yeah, like modern day, like are race relations do you think similar or different, do you think it's changed a lot?

FB: I can't-- I've been retired since '03, '05, and that's a long time. So I can't compare me with, you know, some of that other things that they are doing. I don't know.

MS: What have you done since you've retired?

FB: Well I did more when I retired than I did when I was working.

MS and LM: [laughter]

FB: I haven't done too much except (1:08:36) for the music area, I was quite busy there. I did a lot of plays for Easter and Christmas. In the spring, we did Vacation Bible School, and a lot of things like that for the church and that kept you plenty busy. And one time I was working five choirs, I probably told you that, and that meant that you had to be doing things, and basically

that's about it, that kept me plenty busy, you know. I was working when I first came home, from another church, and then I said--after my son was born, my mom was taking him to church, and I was going to another church--so anyway, I said, "This doesn't make too much sense so how can I send my child to church with my mom and go somewhere else?" So I stopped playing there and went to my church. So it was a different story, you know, but it worked very well. We were with our church, and then of course we had diocese which is Eastern diocese, Northern, that type of thing, and they made a national convention and we had to get our kids ready for competition, Bible bowl, music contest, and things of that--. Oratory contest. And that's still kept me plenty busy. Minerva and I, she worked in a competition area and I did the music part but it all worked pretty good, and that's about it.

LM: So would you say that your faith has played a major role in your life?

FB: My faith?

LM: Mm-hmm.

FB: Yeah, quite a bit because my mom and my dad, we lived about three blocks from the church, and it's a matter of walking. But after we moved, we had to walk from home to church, unless my dad took us in the car, you know, one of those numbers. But we were quite busy, a lot of things going on. It worked for the children, kept them plenty busy, out of trouble.

LM: [laughter]

FB: And all that.

MS: Yeah we have a few more minutes, so I'm just trying to think of any follow up questions--do you have anything else you want to tell us about, that we didn't touch on?

FB: Not anything I can remember. You got most of it, and I probably don't remember too much more.

MS: Awesome.

END OF INTERVIEW.

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