Transcript of OH-00128

Alcena Modesta Key Clark

Interviewed by

John Wearmouth

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Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non-verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses … is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

Subjects

African American teachers
Education
Rural schools
School integration
Segregation
Segregation in education

Tags

Key store
One room school house
Pomonkey (Md.)

Transcript

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Alcena Key Clark at her home on Route 2 Box 120 E near Bryans Road in Maryland. She's on Maryland Route 227 between Bryans Road and Marshall Hall. She's just about at her birth place now. How far away are you from the spot you were born?

Alcena Modesta Key Clark [A]: About 25.

J: About 25 feet that way?

A: Better say 50 feet.

J: Is that a comfortable feeling to be here? It's like being home?

A: Yeah. I like it.

J: That's great. Okay and she's been a teacher in Charles County, a professional teacher, all her teaching life except for what four years?

A: Yes and I was still teaching. I was still teaching when I was in Washington.

J: Okay so how many years of teaching did you have when you retired?

A: 43.

J: 43.

A: Was that a question on there [how long]?

J: No. Okay and Alcena was born March 15, 1907. She has been retired quite some time now.

A: 18 years in fact.

J: 18 years okay. Her mother was born and raised near here down at Green Way on the Potomac right next to Marshall Hall. Her father was born over at Doncaster toward the south western part of the county not far from Nanjemoy really. Fortunately she's able to give us the birth dates of both of her parents which is rather unusual believe it or not. Okay how many brothers and sisters did you have Alcena?

A: Nine, 10. I had 10 brothers and sisters.

J: And what was the split? How many of each?

A: There were three brothers and we always said seven sisters because the other sister died before I was born. So I always say I had three brothers and seven sisters.

J: And were all of you born right here on this site next door?

A: Yeah. Perhaps my oldest brother was born someplace else but—

J: But in Charles County would you say?

A: Oh yes just over there in the woods somewhere.

J: Okay. Did your mother ever tell you when you were old enough to be told such things. [Coughs] Did your mother ever relate to you any of her experiences giving birth to the children? Were they all born at home? Was there ever a doctor or a midwife? What problems did she as a mother experience?

A: Well my mother had all her children at home. She had a doctor for two or three of them.

J: Did she mention any doctor's names?

A: A Dr. Lynch...let's see Dr. Lynch was one.

J: Would these have been black or white doctors?

A: White.

J: Okay did she ever mention a Dr. Mitchell? He was from Indian Head.

A: Well I knew Dr. Mitchell but they weren't here when any of us were born I don't think.

J: Was she attended by a midwife during some of the birthings as they say?

A: Yes always. All of them. Had midwives and midwives and a doctor for some.

J: And all of those children were born alive and healthy?

A: Yes.

J: That was a remarkable thing in those days too. So your mother must have been a strong healthy woman.

A: She seemed to be. My grandmother was a very stately kind of an Indian like.

J: Oh on your father's side?

A: On my mother's side.

J: On your mother's side. How long did you know your grandmother?

A: I was grown and knew both of my grandmothers. I was—I wasn't married.

J: So you really were able to get acquainted with your grandmother as an adult?

A: Oh yes.

J: What did she ever say about your ethnic background? Did she have much to say about the Indian part of her?

A: No I don't know whether it was so much Indian in there but she just looked like an Indian but I don't know anything about it.

J: Do you have any photographs of her? Not now but we might look at some time.

A: Yes I have a picture of my mother and a picture of my grandmother somewhere.

J: Okay well maybe later we can—

A: I have a picture of my mother right here. Right up here.

J: How many brothers and sisters are still living?

A: Let's see all my brothers—five sisters including me.

J: Five girls are still alive?

A: Yeah.

J: And any of the brothers?

A: None of the brothers.

J: Life seems to be harder on us men.

A: Well one of my brothers met with a terrible accident. He was killed in a robbery out here at the store.

J: I remember that what 15 years ago?

A: About that. Yeah.

J: Growing up what did your father do to keep the family going?

A: Well in his early life he worked at Indian Head and he met with an accident and he didn't continue working at—

J: Did he ever tell you what kind of work he did at Indian Head?

A: No. All I knew he worked in the powder factory. Then in his late years he worked at Indian Head until he retired. But the really we were brought up from the store. That's where he made a living he was a merchant and had a general store.

J: I see. Where was that located?

A: Right out front there.

J: On the right in front of this house or across the road?

A: Right no—

J: Between us and the road?

A: Yeah. He kept this store as long as his health was good and this other store here was built after. He died [disabled] and my brother took it over and that's where he was killed.

J: Was your father's old store a wood structure? A frame?

A: Yeah two story.

J: Did the family live in the building? No you lived down separate building right here.

A: No we lived [inaudible].

J: That's right. Who took care of the store during those ears your father was working? Was it a family affair?

A: Well Mama took—all of us helped but that is my brothers help. See my brothers were all grown when they died and when they were younger they helped in the store with my dad.

J: What kinds of work did you do in the house helping your mother? What were your responsibilities as a youngster?

A: In the house? Well I just helped. We had a seven room house and we had to help to keep it clean and help to wash.

J: So with your father having the store and working part time at Indian Head—

A: Well he didn't work all those years. He kept the store himself.

J: Most of the time it was just the store that kept the family?

A: Just the store and then you know during the Depression business went bad and he went back to Indian Head and finished out his time. But when we were reared he was working in the store.

J: Okay what sort of business arrangements were there for allowing people to purchase on credit? Did he allow credit to people that he knew?

A: Oh yes.

J: How did this effect his income? Was it something that gave him a lot of irritation?

A: Yes he didn't seem to be so upset about it but there were many, many people who owed him. I guess some never did pay. Just like when my brother died a lot of people came in to pay and others never did pay him.

J: And you haven't seen them to this day?

A: No.

J: What was the source of income for most of the people in this neighborhood who came into the store? Most of them farm people?

A: Farm yes they were farmers and they worked at Indian Head. I guess most of them worked at Indian Head and some were farmers. Like my uncle was a farmer but my uncle over across the road worked at Indian Head ever since I knew him.

J: Is he still alive?

A: Uncle Will no. He lived to be 97 but he's been dead a long time.

J: How was life for the Key children? Do you look back on it as being something generally pleasant happy times or was there some especially hard times that you remember too?

A: Well hard times came I guess when I started teaching. That was about the hardest time that I ever knew. Now I—we were poor but we didn't know it.

J: So you weren't really poor.

A: Because we were better off than a lot of the kids and we didn't even realize that we were poor. I guess we thought that we were well to do.

J: Did you find out later in life that you had some white neighbors who were even poorer than you were and kind of tried to cover it up or perhaps it didn't occur to you to even think of it?

A: It didn't bother me until my late years. Even when I taught school a while I didn't realize that prejudice was so bad in this county until I went out from home and started teaching because Mr. Alec Bryan lived back two miles there. He owned Strawberry Hill. It wasn't called Strawberry Hill then.

J: What was it called? Did it have a name at all?

A: I don't think it had a name as far as I can remember. No because [Tick Harbor] was over there and I don't—

J: Who lived there?

A: Old man Bryan owned it. But the Myers own it now. Back then I don't think it had a name.

J: When you were growing up I gather that there were many black families in your neighborhood?

A: Exactly just like it is now.

J: Oh and you really hadn't come much in contact with the white community?

A: Not too much but Mr. Bryan as I was gonna tell you he would go down and bring the mail from the post office which was four miles down—

J: At Pomonkey?

A: In Pomonkey. And he would bring our mail and we didn't associate with him like going in their homes or anything but outside we were friendly. That's the way it was with all the white people in this area.

J: There was a certain point at which you did not do things together.

A: That's right, That's right.

J: You mentioned something earlier about Marshall Hall. Were you children free to go to Marshall Hall and take part in the rides the entertainment?

A: No, no, no.

J: No? When did that change? Did it ever change at Marshall Hall?

A: It changed because black people went down there and they had a good time in later years. I don't remember the year. But well when segregation—I mean integration was brought about—

J: Maybe in mid—60's? Mid 1960's would you say?

A: Yeah, yeah and the cars were so thick going by here because the road wasn't as wide then as it is now.

J: What was this road like between Bryans Road and Marshall Hall when you were say 15 years old about World War I period?

A: Yeah it was narrow and muddy.

J: Gravel or mostly dirt?

A: Well they graveled it. When I was going to high school they graveled it. But it was a muddy mess. Children nowadays don't know what they have.

J: I think you're right. You couldn't go from here to Marshall Hall without getting pretty darn dirty could you?

A: That's right.

J: You either had mud on you or dust or a little of both. Mud on your feet and dust all over the rest of you. How old were you when your father got the first family automobile? Or did one of your brothers get one first?

A: No my father got one first. I think he had a 1914 Ford. I think that's the first one I remember.
J: About that year or was it second hand?

A: It was new and he had an old international truck and he bought that new. And he used to haul school children in the truck. We didn't have transportation.

J: To what school?

A: Well to Pomonkey High School.

J: At about what age Alcena did you start seriously thinking about teaching as a career?

A: I guess when I was in...Jr. High.

J: What brought this about? Some particular teacher that inspired you, advised you?

A: At first I wanted to be a nurse and then when I realized some of the things that nurses had to do as a teenager I didn't want to do that. So I said I would like to be a teacher because it was a known fact we were going to school. That was my father's high ambition.

J: How did he feel about education for his children?

A: Oh he thought that…

J: He had some strong feelings about it?

A: Very strong feelings. Now you see I didn't always go to Pomonkey. We went down to a little one room school Sims Hill.

J: Oh I've heard about it. This was the elementary school?

A: The elementary and my oldest sister finished in the sixth grade down there and he sent her to Washington to go to school. And she finished seventh—sixth, seventh, and eight grade and then she went to—

J: In Jr. high school or middle school?

A: Yeah and then she went to Dunbar High School.

J: So she had a pretty good background.

A: Yes she did. She's—

J: What did she do with the rest of her life?

A: I think she taught school one year and got married and had seven children.

J: Did she come back here to Charles County?

A: Yeah she lives right over there. Well I—one sister lives down there and another of them lives.

J: And one of them taught quite a few years?

A: Oh yes she taught 38 years.

J: Here in Charles County?

A: Yeah.

J: Well I will talk to her a little later. Okay what—where did you finish elementary school? This one down—

A: I finished down there.

J: And how do we spell the name of that school for the record?

A: Simms: S-I-M-M-S Simms Hill.

J: Simms Hill. Okay where did you go after Simms Hill?

A: I went to Pomonkey High School.

J: Okay. Was Pomonkey High School rather new then?

A: Absolutely I was the first graduate. I was one of the first.

J: How did the colored community feel about having that high school after all of those years? Were they proud of it?

A: Yes very proud. They worked hard. Their organization gave the land for that high school of course.

J: What organization played the major role in getting Pomonkey High School started?

A: The Good Samaritan Lodge.

J: Which one?

A: The Good Samaritan Lodge.

J: Is that connected with a church or is it complete in itself? The Good Samaritan Lodge.

A: It was complete within itself.

J: And it was located where? Its meeting place.

A: It was—I can see the place. It was in Pomonkey.

J: Okay there's another one there the Beehive?

A: Oh yes that's now. That's real—that came about in 1918, 1919.

J: So what was—what year was this when you enrolled in the new high school?

A: Wait a minute I have to look [inaudible]. I went...I guess I must have been 14 years old when I entered high school and I finished when I was 18.

J: So you must have gotten out what about 1923?

A: 1925. And I went to Bowie two years and I finished in 1927.

J: How well did you do academically at Pomonkey? What was your average grade there?

A: I did well at Pomonkey. I didn't do so well [inaudible].

J: Who were some of your teachers at the grade school at Simms Hill?

A: Harry Griffin and Florence Johnson and Mrs. Annie Butler.

J: Florence Johnson I know her daughter. [Inaudible] from Ripley. Her husband is Charles Jones Woodland. She is now Mrs. Woodland.

A: Woodland. That's right.

J: So I know her. I've seen a picture of her mother Florence.

A: She was a very attractive lady.

J: Good looking lady let me tell you. And then she later taught at La Plata, Florence Johnson?

A: Yes, yes.

J: So she apparently from what I gather was a rather highly refined woman. Well educated and articulate.

A: And a very good teacher. Who Mrs.?

J: Florence.

A: Yes.

J: Yeah spoke well and was a real professional in her day.

A: Yes she was.

J: Who were some of your most inspiring teachers at Pomonkey? People that really sort of set you apart to learn and to teach?

A: Mr. [Dowling] was one. He inspired me more than any of the rest of them.

J: Was he from Southern Maryland?

A: No he was from Ohio. And Ms.—a lady by the name of Ms. Morris was another.

J: And what was her background geographic?

A: I don't know where she was from even but she wasn't from Maryland and she wasn't from Charles County. Then there was another teacher Ms. Monroe. But they didn't teach us so much. It was a new school. I mean they didn't teach us any extra things. I mean what they did was well done. And we had you see Pomonkey was called an industrial school. They didn't want it to be a high school. And then—

J: Who turned that around?

A: I don't know. Board of Education I guess.

J: Maybe J. C. Parks played a role.

A: Well maybe he could have. He was quite an inspiration. If he wanted it you know he would get it.

J: Was it a comfortable convenient clean new building?

A: It was fairly comfortable. It was a great big square building. It didn't have any style to it you know.

J: Do you have any photographs of it? If you do well later we'll take a look at them.

A: I think we could find one but I don't have one. Because all of my pictures and all went somewhere. I don't know.

J: Well that's too bad. So did your teachers give you any counseling about your career? Did anyone sit down with you once in a while and say, "Now Alcena where do you want to go next?"

A: No.

J: "What do you want to do?"

A: Not teachers. I don't remember any of my teachers doing that. My father did.

J: Oh your father did. What did he have in mind for you? What were his hopes for you?

A: He had us be something. He didn't care whether it was teaching or nursing or what not. That's all we could be. If you weren't a nurse you were a teacher and that's all you got. And he said he didn't care which one but be something. And he just pound that and there wasn't any question did you want to go. You were going. You were going to college or higher education in those days.

J: What were the man motivations in his thinking this way?

A: Well he thought that someday times were going to get better.

J: This is where I'm trying.

A: For us and that we would be ready to fill in.

J: There you go and he was right. He was right. it hasn't all come about but there have been some changes that would surprise him.

A: Yeah and all of them. All of my sisters were teachers except one and she was a nurse down in Salisbury Maryland for 37 years. He was her adopted son. He turned out like it and she worked hard. She had to take the whole county over of Wicomico.

J: Wicomico County good Lord.

A: But that isn't much about my teaching career.

J: Well no we're gonna get into that now. I'm setting the stage. I want people who listen to this tape in years to come to first get acquainted with you. I want to ask you a question I have never asked before. To what extent did the black teachers coming into Charles County from other states impress the teaching community here? How do you feel about the teachers who came in from Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New York? What did they contribute to the structure of the black schools?

A: Well they acted as though they believed in advancement. And they—well I don't want to talk about my friends. They felt that we were so down in what would you call it?

J: The boondocks. Out in the sticks. Yeah right.

A: Yeah out in the boondocks that they felt that they could knock something into us.

J: Did they have some missionary zeal about it in their approach to teaching?

A: Well I think so. See something a lot of them that I knew who came they were along with me. You see I was teaching too. And course I was [inaudible phrase] because I was one of the county girls and I was proud of my heritage see.

J: See I run into this already.

A: Yeah but sometimes they would talk and I had never seen what they said was here. You see we were just a little community and where the people lived in our community they didn't live like that down in Nanjemoy. And then I just told them that I didn't believe that people lived like that down there.

J: I'm beginning to think that the black families of the Pomonkey Bryans Road Marshall Hall area were definitely a cut above and better off.

A: I think so.

J: Let me tell you. And part of it may be due to the presence of the community of Indian Head. Some of that rubbed off.

A: But you take now this one lady that I wish was here for you to interview is married and gone to Ohio. But her parents—

J: Any chance of ever getting her back for an interview?

A: No she's married. And I think she'll be there indefinitely. But over there my uncle lived and he sent his daughter to college. We went along together, Pearl Furey, she used to live over there until recently when she moved out. Then the Mrs. Annie Butler and her children see she sent her daughters to Bowie.

J: Where did the Butler's live now?

A: They live right at the top of what we call the hill. This little knoll up here. But Georgia is not there anymore she got married and went to Ohio.

J: How old is she now?

A: She's about 83, 2.

J: She got married again? Or for the first time?

A: No this was the second time.

J: If she ever comes back for a visit let me know I'd like to talk to her. And Minnie Hill too I'm hoping she will come back

A: Okay. Yeah because Minnie's gone home. Pittsburgh was Minnie's home and she had an attitude that she was doing more help. She may have helped those people but she didn't help any of my folks. We didn't need her.

J: Was Minnie a progressive forceful teacher?

A: Oh yeah.

J: Competent as a teacher or professional would you say?

A: I suppose so. As far as I know you see being of the old teaching. We have our opinion but we don't know how—nobody knows how what was going on in my classroom but my supervisor.

J: When you were teaching let us say in the 30's and 40's about what percentage of Charles County's black teachers were not from Southern Maryland?

A: I guess it was a good percentage. I guess over 50 percent were not from Southern Maryland.

J: That squares with what I've been finding out yeah. Well now so we've got you almost into teaching. When you left Bowie this was with a teacher's certificate?

A: That's right.

J: Which qualified you to teach what grades?

A: Grades from one through seven.

J: Okay did you immediately come back to Charles County? What was your first school?

A: Newtown over in La Plata six miles.

J: Alright I was through there this morning. I don't think it's changed a great deal.

A: No.

J: So there was a school there. Was there also not a Methodist church there not too far?

A: Yes the school and church were very close together.

J: Okay now St. Mathews is still there?

A: That's right.

J: How far was the school from St. Mathews?

A: They were lots and they were just about a lot apart. One was right next to the other.

J: Okay did you ever go to St. Mathews while teaching?

A: Oh yes we were required to attend church and visit our parish oh yes.

J: What was the first year for you teaching? When did you begin?

A: What year? I started in the fall of 1927 around October. That's when our school opened. And I stayed with a family who had the lady had just lost her husband. They were very nice to me. They took me in as if I was one of the family.

J: What was their name?

A: Johnson.

J: Was this part of Phillip Levoy's family.

A: No. Hildegard Adams. You know about the Adams?

J: No I don't.

A: Hildegard got married and moved to Aquasco. But I stayed with her mother and she was attending high school over in Pomonkey. So we never came in contact with each other much because when I was coming home for weekends she was going home.

J: So you were able to get back over here only weekends?

A: Yes.

J: Was that a pretty rough road between Newtown and Pomonkey in those years? What road was it? How did you get here?

A: It wasn't so bad.

J: Through La Plata?

A: Yeah. My father sent for me. And then till I got a car. I got a car in 1929 and I thought I was something special because I had a new Model A.

J: Oh wow. Where did you buy it?

A: From Carpenter's at Indian Head who is now [McMillen's]. I think I paid 18 dollars a month for my car.

J: Was it a Sedan?

A: Yeah.

J: Okay well that was a good automobile, would still be today. Were your parents proud of you that as a young lady you were able already to do that?

A: Yeah well you see although [Pop tried] my oldest brother had to come back from Washington to help in the store. My sister she didn't have a teacher certificate but she taught one year and she got married. So I was the only one so they were proud of me. See I was next in line. I had another brother too, but anyway I was the one that finished. At that time it was finished in two years college. And again they helped me as much as they could. You know you couldn't help much with all those children.

J: That's true. I just sort of glossed over this but what kind of merchandise did the store handle? Food primarily?

A: He had food, and he had clothes, he had shoes, and he had what do you call it? Feed for cattle.

J: Okay yeah chicken feed. Hay?

A: Hay and sacks of [mill feed].

J: Oh yeah ground corn?

A: Yeah.

J: For poultry and things like that okay.

A: He had for the time he had everything.

J: It was a small general store wasn't it?

A: That's right.

J: Did he sell buckets and washtubs and things like that brooms and mops?

A: Yeah sometimes.

J: Could one person handle the store pretty well?

A: Oh yes he handled it.

J: How often did your mother have to help out?

A: My mother helped in later years and my oldest brother helped but he left home I guess soon after my sister got married.

J: So the Key Store was an institution here for a long time?

A: For quite a while yes. People used to come from Accokeek. He had white and black customers.

J: When did Bryans Road begin to assume a great importance than Pomonkey? Bryans Road wasn't much was it when you were growing up?

A: Well I remember—and see all of this was Pomonkey. And they decided to put a post office in this area. And they decided to call it Bryans Road and I think that the reason they called it Bryans Road was because Mr. Bryan. You know the old fellow that lived back there?

J: The Strawberry Hill Bryan.

A: Yeah he used to bring the mail from down in Pomonkey up here. And I guess he—I don't know whether he was dead or not but they decided to call it Bryans Road.

J: I see. About what year would this be? 19 what 35?

A: Before then because it was Bryans Road when I was at Bowie and it was 27 then. So it may have been 1925.

J: So there wasn't very much there then was there?

A: No and we said that my father put in for the post office but he didn't get it you know for reasons and the old man up on the corner got the store. And Mrs. Butler they said named it Bryans Road. And they got arguing about whether my father named it Bryans Road or Mrs. Butler named it Bryans Road so I said the only way to settle it I said it was a dumb name I don't care who named it.

J: Well that's funny.

A: So we settled it and we didn't fuss about it anymore.

J: Where was the post office in Pomonkey? The building in terms of what's there today.

A: Did you ever remember Jameson's store?

J: No but I've been told where it was on the right side of the road going towards Mason Springs.

A: Well that's where the post office was at one time. Before then it was a McDaniel's store. Just as you get going to Pomfret. You know going down in the turn that you make to go to Pomfret.

J: Right, present day 227.

A: And up on that little knoll like it was a McDaniel's store.

J: On the left as you go around that corner making a left turn?

A: Yeah that's right.

J: Okay well what were some of the realities of life that came to hit you between the eyes during that first year of teaching? What did not square with what you had been taught at Bowie? Anything?

A: Well when we got to the school we didn't have anything to work with but a bucket and a broom.

J: Was this an old building?

A: Compared with some of them mine was fairly good. It was comfortable. It was an old frame building but it was comfortable and I had 34 children. And I enjoyed it immensely until the supervisors came around and it seemed like I couldn't do anything.

J: Who did they send around? Did Mr. Parks himself ever come?

A: Mr. Parks came and then the State Supervisor would come Mr. Huffington. And I made out alright with Mr. Parks. [I imagine you meeting him face to face.] But when Mr. Huffington would come around it looked like he would stand back and say, "[snicker]."

J: How'd you like him? Huffington.

A: You're not supposed to love everybody I guess.

J: He wasn't the lovable type though.

A: He wasn't a lovable type.

J: How long did you stay there at Newtown?

A: Newtown I only stayed at Newtown two years. Then on it was two years here and two years and two years because I got along fine in Newtown and the parents liked me. And you know those were bootlegging days you remember.

J: Some of it going on out there?

A: You taking this down?

J: Sure this is history. I've taken it down before. It's the truth. Oh it happened.

A: Somebody told my father that some of the people around were bootlegging. Out there I had to come out [inaudible] but I enjoyed those two years at Newtown.

J: Who were some of the prominent black families in your school area?

A: Well the Johnson's, the Stone's, the [Gant's], and the [Lyon's]. That's all I can remember right now.

J: Which of those families produced the brightest children? The most promising?

A: Oh the Johnson's. See Hildegard went on to teach and she became the principal of a school over in Aquasco.

J: Where did she go to high school?

A: Pomonkey.

J: Pomonkey okay and she lived just east of La Plata.

A: Yes. Is that east or southeast?

J: The other side of La Plata. Going through La Plata from here you'd be heading pretty much east. Going from La Plata to Newtown you'd be going in an easterly direction.

A: That's right.

J: So what was school number two?

A: Where did I go? I must've gone to [inaudible] down on the Charlotte Hall line.

J: But still in Charles County?

A: It was still in Charles County. I didn't enjoy that much but the kids were nice.

J: What made it less attractive than Newtown?

A: I didn't get the cooperation I don't think from the parents in the beginning but the second year I did. And I didn't transfer from there because I asked to. I was taken there and I was brought back to Glymont. I think that's all. Now Glymont it really was the children were unmanageable. At that time I weighed—of course it doesn't matter how much you weigh when you're teaching you've got to have the ability. But the children were the worst that I had seen.

J: Where was the school at Glymont?

A: It was a one room school. What can I tell you? The whole building is partly up there now but it's a house or a store.

J: What road would it be on?

A: It's on the old road.

J: That short stretch?

A: Yes.

J: Okay.

A: I don't know I can't explain where it is but it's in Glymont. Well when I passed it I passed it so fast.

J: Is it near that Vincent de Paul clothing place?

A: Yes, yes, yes. If you come out onto the old road from 210 and your turn right I think yeah. It's back up in those hills. And then I got sick that year and that wasn't so pleasant. I stayed there two years and then I went to Pisgah and taught one year and it was understood that when the teacher who went to get her certificate came back that I was supposed to move and then I went to Jacksontown.

J: Way out in the Nanjemoy area.

A: Yea way down there in an old house across the field but you talking about sweet children. Posey's and most of them were Posey's. I can't think of anybody—

J: Jackson's

A: Yeah.

J: Ross's.

A: I didn't have any Ross's.

J: Really? When did you get married? How old were you?

A: I was 26 yeah.

J: Where did you meet your husband?

A: Oh we sort of—my sister had married one Clark and he was the oldest in the family and I married the youngest brother, Clark brother.

J: Where were the Clark's from? What part—

A: They live in Pomonkey. They live in Pomonkey. You see we didn't get around much at that time we didn't meet many people.

J: Course you had your own car which gave you a bit of freedom and independence that very few young woman had in your day.

A: That's right.

J: How—did you take any trips in it?

A: No.

J: Did you ever drive it down to Hampton?

A: No. We went to Hampton on the bus. I don't remember going to Hampton in that car.

J: Washington once in a while?

A: Oh yes we'd go to Washington quite a bit. Baltimore sometimes but that is about as far as we would go.

J: Did you ever during your first ten years have any regrets at all about taking on teaching as a career?

A: I've never regretted it. Only when I would have problems with you know someone that was trying to get back at my father through me. But other than that so far as the children were concerned I never regretted teaching. I never wished I had been something else like a hair dresser or anything like that.

J: Did you gain a new perspective, a new understanding of the significance of segregation when you became a teacher? What became apparent to you then that you had not been terribly aware of as a youngster?

A: When I became aware that segregation was as bad as it was in this county—

J: How old were you when this began to really hit you?

A: I was about 22 because I didn't have any trouble when I was over at Newtown because when I went to the store in La Plata I was treated you know okay.

J: By what stores?

A: Bowling's. You know and I didn't have any occasion to go anywhere else because my father had the store you see. All I wanted to go to Bowling's for was a dress or pair of shoes and they seemed to be very nice. I was the Newtown teacher and they were very nice.

J: Do you think they respected you more as a teacher?

A: I think so. And what—

J: I would hope so.

A: Oh we got respect then. The teachers don't get it now but we were somebody then. And we felt like we were somebody. You have to prove yourself.

J: And didn't that compensate for a lot of things that you didn't have?

A: Yeah but over across the track there was a place—

J: Near Farrell's? Farrell's Store?

A: Yeah it wasn't Farrell's though. That we wanted to get ice cream in there.

J: Oh Bowie's.

A: That's it. And you would have to go around the back. So we wouldn't go around the back. We didn't go. You know we wouldn't go in.

J: Bertha tells an interesting story about that. She went inside and I guess really shook them up a little bit. A later though, a little later about 1940.

A: Yeah I guess it was. Yeah it was much later then because see this was 27, 28, and 29, and 30. Then we would go to Washington you know and it was just as bad up there. We couldn't sit down to eat. We'd have to stand at the counter and eat a hot dog if we wanted. Course and there was no place that you could go that was decent enough to—but it's better now.

J: What about Hampton?

A: I had so much fun at Hampton I don't know. It was so nice and I made very good marks at Hampton too. Only one class I was at Hampton and I would go to sleep every time I would sit down in that class. I got a low mark in that and I didn't deserve that because I just couldn't help to save my life going to sleep. But I was taking 12 credits.

J: And teaching?

A: Well that was summer.

J: Oh this was the summer okay. You stayed there at Hampton?

A: Yes nine weeks.

J: Okay and you got your bachelor's degree through Hampton?

A: Yeah.

J: What major was this now? What did they call it? Education?

A: Elementary Ed.

J: Okay alright. Which looking back now, which was your favorite elementary school?

A: Marbury.

J: Marbury.

A: I didn't get to that. I stayed in Marbury five years and that was my favorite. When I left Marbury I went to Newburgh and I stayed three years. And I was I guess promoted then and I went to Bel Alton and I stayed 25 years.

J: At Bel Alton?

A: Yeah. And I just knew that I was gonna retire from Bel Alton but I didn't because integration came and when integration came somebody had to leave the school you know to mix. Well I

didn't have to leave but I thought I would so I went to Waldorf. And I worked under Mr. Berry and that was enjoyable. Over at Dr. Mudd's school.

J: Oh that's a new school. Quite a new school.

A: Very nice school.

J: Where was the school at Marbury? Near the main intersection?

A: It was—they burned that school down. That school was up from Mason Springs. It's hard for me to tell where a place is now.

J: Yeah things have changed. What did you start doing at Bel Alton? Did you go into the elementary school part of it?

A: At fifth grade.

J: Okay who was your supervisor there?

A: Parks but Mrs. Neal was my principal.

J: Oh okay how did you get along with her? What'd you think?

A: We were—she was alright. She was very strict but she was okay. We are good friends now.

J: I suspect you are. Did you ever think you would end up this close? Isn't that something. Well it's a good thing you weren't too mean to each other. That's great.

A: No you're right. You're right. So I would say she was strict but she was fair and friendship didn't mean anything in her classroom. I liked that she was business like. Her job was something and then she became my supervisor after that.

J: During the 30's and 40's did you harbor any real strong hope for any breakdown of segregation?

A: I always felt that things were going to get better. I didn't see how but I knew that—when we went to Philadelphia and we could go in different places I said it's got to you know come down to the south.

J: Yeah and it did.

A: And it did.

J: In doing this and getting through this kind of uncomfortable period the ending of segregation and the beginning of integration and it was like that, like that. Were you ready for it? What problems were there? How did you feel? The pressures, the frustrations, the tension?

A: I was shaking. I knew I wouldn't lose my job but people can make you miserable you know. But I was fortunate enough to get in with Mr. Berry. I mean he was my principal when I said to get in with.

J: Was he a Charles County boy?

A: No he was from West Virginia and he seemed to be a very nice person to the extent that when they transferred him over to Indian Head I asked to come too. But after I got over there I kept feeling, getting sick. See it was two or three years actually. Three years with Mr. Berry.

J: At the Mudd school?

A: Yeah two years at the Mudd and one at Indian Head. I was feeling bad one day and my brother came over and said, "Why don't you retire?" And I said, "Retire? I wasn't thinking about retiring." He said, "I'm gonna retire in June." And I said, "Well I believe I will." But I wasn't ready to retire I'll tell you. I hadn't thought about retiring. I thought I was gonna teach as long as I lived I guess.

J: Were there any fears among the black teachers that you knew that maybe integration would leave them out in the cold somehow and that their futures wouldn't be as secure?

A: No but that's the way it is but I didn't feel it then. I felt that if we could get in there and hold our own that we could swing with them. Now that's the way I felt but you know it doesn't always work that way. And you can see till this day going the other way.

J: Is that right?

A: We had a certain percentage that had to be under—who was the president? Kennedy and after Kennedy was Johnson. And Johnson and then the man from Georgia.

J: Carter.

A: Who was the man?

J: Jimmy Carter.

A: Carter that's right. What's the matter with me. Well those were the good years and they kept the balance but now you can see them fading out

J: Would you say the past eight years have been bad?

A: No not too bad but the only thing that our children have to get in there and study and pay attention. They can't be the class clown now. There's no time for it. Because I have a niece over here that she's doing well and the other kids can do it too if they study. But you can't go to school and bring your books home and throw them aside and then pick them up and go the next morning. You can't make it like that.

J: Are some of them doing that?

A: Absolutely.

J: Where are their parents?

A: Well that's the trouble, that's the trouble.

J: How could their parents have worked so hard to get somewhere and then drop the ball when it comes to the next generation?

A: That's right. That's it. It's sad.

J: It is. It really is considering—

A: Because I looked at the people [cutting] rather close and some of the teachers hadn't taught the grade that I was teaching and I would give them my ideas and then they would turn around and give the same ideas I had given them back to me. So you can't—you know you've got to stand on your own. You got to be strong. But integration has helped because there was a lot in our schools—now I'm not talking about the people up north and what they did because I don't know—but in our schools we had no business courses, no typewriters you see. And you asked for them they think you're crazy. "What're you gonna do with a type writer?"

J: How well off were the black schools for vocational training?

A: Good.

J: They were pretty good okay.

A: Good for vocational training. Well I don't want to be taped saying this but you could get what you wanted for industrial and vocational but anything above that you couldn't get it. But when they integrated you could get all those what do you call them—

J: Business and commercial courses.

A: Yeah.

J: Typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, and now computer science.

A: Yeah computer science that's the thing.

J: Have you been over to the Charles County Community College recently?

A: Not recently.

J: Well I think you should. Somebody should take you over there when the kids are coming in in the morning and notice the number of really great looking black students over there on that campus. You know that's the story. How many are going on for two more years. I don't know how many are going on for their bachelor’s degree after that—

A: But lots of them have. Lots of them have. I have a niece who finished community college. She lived right over here in a little brick house. And then go to Ohio State and made good.

J: That's not bad.

A: And she doesn't live there now. She's got a little apartment out in the suburbs.

J: Did she get her bachelor's at Ohio State?

A: Yes. Yeah and she's working. She's got a good job. A very good job.

J: That's great. What did she major in?

A: Communications.

J: And she started out right here in Charles County.

A: And then I have another niece that lives—well I have to talk about my family because they're the ones I know about. She finished Penn State and she has a good job in Washington. Of course she's married now. And then the Collins down there they have a son. I don't know whether he went—he didn't go to community college but he went south to Nashville, Tennessee. What was the name of that college? It was a black college.

J: Fisk?

A: Fisk University. Fisk University.

J: What is the highest grade you taught in school?

A: Fifth grade.

J: Okay did you find that challenging working with that age group?

A: Very much. Very much keep you on your toes all the time and you better know what you're talking about when you enter the door. They challenged me.

J: Did you ever have any desire to teach at a higher level?

A: No I liked the fifth grade. It's a hard grade but it's interesting.

J: Who were some of the prominent black families that you found very supportive at Bel Alton?

A: At Bel Alton? Let's see Mrs. [Coleson], Mrs. Mason.

J: Now who were the Wesort families down there?

A: Mrs. Mason was a Wesort.

J: Okay what was her first name?

A: Elizabeth.

J: Elizabeth okay.

A: Elizabeth Mason. And Mrs. [Coleson] was black. And who else—we had a nice—course people were more interested in the high school than they were the elementary. You see because that was something new.

J: Yeah I suppose a high school would overshadow.

A: Definitely and there were a lot of interested parents that I didn't come in contact down there that was interested. And then it branched out you know like the Butlers and all. And we were just little insignificant people but we enjoyed it. When I look back I really enjoyed my teaching years. I didn't know what I was gonna do with myself when I first retired but I found something. First thing I thought I was gonna do was sit down and rest myself.

J: For a week or two?

A: Yeah and my sister was a month or two. When my sister died I got up from here and I've been going ever since.

J: What were some of the big disappointments of your teaching career? Were there any at all that you found very upsetting that you can talk about?

A: Yeah I was very—let's see. I was very upset when they sent me to Jacksontown. And I was in that old dilapidated house?

J: Wasn't even a proper school building?

A: No, no and I stayed there from September until Christmas and I think Mr. Parks's conscience must've got him that time and he moved me. And I went to Marbury and it was a nice new building. Nothing compared to what they have today but it was so much better than—

J: No holes in the floor and the roof didn't leek.

A: Right. That's right.

J: Did you have—you still had oil heat or kerosene lamps and wood burning stoves?

A: Yeah but we had electric put in for the lights after I got in Marbury.

J: In Marbury?

A: I think so. I think so.

J: Who took your place at Jacksontown? What poor soul took your place there?

A: I think it was Robert Harris. I think it was Robert Harris that took my place at Jacksontown.

J: Do you know where he was from? What community? Was he from Southern Maryland?

A: He was from Indian Head. Down there used to be a colored section at Indian Head. See they had segregation.

J: Oh he was one of that family that Mary Neal taught. Starting in 1931 or 2.

A: Yeah I don't know whether he was there or not. But yes she taught down there.

J: She was telling me about some of the bright people in that community. What was it called Swan Circle?

A: I guess so. I guess I didn't know what they called it.

J: So anyway—

A: But that's where it was right down on the river. And they tore all those houses down.

J: I have a picture of them they were pretty nice houses.

A: Yeah. And when you come from the boondocks and you go down there and they have running water and lights. I mean you have gone a step higher.

J: And all weather roads and maybe even side walk.

A: Yeah yes sir.

J: Did you feel when you were teaching that your black youngsters were getting as god an education as the white youngsters of the same age?

A: I felt they were. I really felt they were.

J: What were they being denied that you would've liked to see them have?

A: The main thing that they were denied was the equipment. You need you know you need modern things to work with. As I told you in the beginning they gave me broom, a bucket, a box of crayons, and two erasers and that's all that I had to work with. And then we got 65 dollars a month. Retirement was taken out of that and you had to buy your construction paper and whatever else you needed.

J: What other equipment? Did you have any pull down maps to study geography?

A: No we had a globe.

J: You had a globe.

A: We had a globe but some of the schools did have pull down maps.

J: Did the board of education furnish the globe?

A: Yes.

J: What did they not furnish that by today's standards would be considered absolutely necessary?

A: Let's see they didn't—in the fifth grade in our schools that they have today. You [right] the absolutely necessary because covered floors is not necessary is it. I mean carpeting.

J: Not like this no not carpeted.

A: No but that's what they have in these schools now. But it wasn't comfortable. We didn't have central heat and we would have to sit up on the stove you know to keep warm.

J: So the colder the weather the tighter the group got around the stove?

A: Yeah and sometimes the old pipe would fall. See it was I can't explain to you because I have forgotten all that.

J: Lack of good lighting?

A: Brother it was tough. No lighting at all. There were many a cloudy days. And that was absolutely necessary. Now they can turn on the air conditioning and then they can turn on the heat and it's just wonderful. But I didn't get many years in that.

J: You had to see to keeping the wood supply there. What did the PTA's do for you normally? How supportive were they? How valuable to you?

A: They were most of my PTA's were very supportive. They would see that the board of education would give us wood. But they would see that the wood was cut. And so many things. I just can't think now that they would bring to us that we wouldn't have had?

J: Curtains for the windows? Did the PTA's raise money for curtains?

A: Yeah something like that yes.

J: Shades maybe a good kerosene lamp?

A: Right.

J: A decent water bucket? Dippers?

A: Yeah they would give us a dipper and a water bucket and the PTA would buy—what do you call those things you know with the spigot? Coolers. Water coolers.

J: Coolers. Yes a big cooler. One of those push button spigots. Okay three to five gallon size.

A: Yeah, yeah. If I had 10 days to think I would think about some of the things that really were important. And the children wouldn't have to drink out of glasses you know. They would have the individual glasses but you know how kids are. They would lend somebody their glass and all. And they would give us paper cups.

J: I suppose it's not a blessing but the thing—one of the things as I see it that made this tolerable was that most of those little kids came from homes that really weren't any better than the school.

A: Oh definitely.

J: So if they had come from a home like this then life would have been absolutely unbearable.

A: And another thing that the children respected their teacher. You know when I started I was somebody and when I finished they had begun to let me know that I was nobody. I mean you know if I wanted to feel that way about it because they had lost all respect. And they still—

J: What's the major reason for that? What brought this about?

A: I don't know and they're still losing. They're still losing but it's not all the children's fault.

J: It can't be. As I see it's probably society as a whole that's taking this broad peculiar view on the value of education.

A: Yeah and then one thing about it everybody's salary went up but teacher's still down at the bottom. I don't know why they didn't feel that they're sending their darlings to us and we're not getting any money.

J: Yeah think of that.

A: We're just getting along.

J: Well as you said earlier in your day as a young lady going to college there were really only two or three things you could do.

A: That's right.

J: But that's not true now. Young women your age now have a choice of how many careers?

A: Right and—

J: That all pay better than teaching.

A: Than teaching. They got to do something.

J: So in your day and quite a few years after teachers were among our better qualified bright young people.

A: That's right. There were so many people that couldn't read. And when you walked in there and they looked at you if you didn't have your heels run over you know and you were clean they thought they had somebody in their community but what now. They can out dress us by far.

J: That's true. What sort of advice would you give today to young black women and men who are just getting into high school? How would you admonish them?

A: I would tell them to study, study, and take advantage of everything that comes up. Music, everything. I mean they just go and take a few whatever is required but all those extracurricular activities, get in there and work hard and be qualified and be second to none. That's what I tell

my kids and some of them listen. The girls especially. And you do not have enough education when you finish high school. And when I finished high school what could I do? I didn't have any skills in typing.

J: Yeah that's true. And I guess it's even worse now today with a high school degree what can you do?

A: Oh definitely. I would tell them to work hard and take advantage of everything that's offered. Now I tell you one thing that I enjoyed seeing at the retired teachers meeting. Each year around Christmas they have a group to come over and sing you know give us the Christmas carols.

J: From one of the schools?

A: From one of the schools. The high school or the middle school. And when they would come you would have a whole group of white children and one black over there and one over there and one down here. But this year it made me so happy we had so many of our children that were taking part in it. That's just one little thing.

J: What school?

A: Matthew Hanson. Mathew Hanson Middle School. And I declare I like that because those children had been motivated to sing. Well just like they're motivated to sing they can be motivated to do other things. But you they always said that our folks our musical and then to see them up there not even taking part in something they could do I was disgusted.

J: Yeah that would be a real disappointment. What emphasis were you as an individual teacher with no encouragement able to put on the arts in school? Music, drawing, painting, how much time were you able to put on these things?

A: Oh we would just have about half an hour or an hour for music you know.

J: A day?

A: A day or three times a week. Music and then the other arts we would alternate. You know you one Monday, Wednesday, and Friday music. Tuesdays and Thursdays art and then you switch around the next week. But when you start working and you work with that reading a lot of times the arts would have to suffer.

J: Do you feel that today's teachers are putting too much or too little emphasis on communication skills? Speaking, writing?

A: They're putting everything on writing skills I know that. Our children need to communicate because a lot of the homes they don't get it. Nobody talks to them so they need a lot of communication skills, say all of them. I can't talk myself. I'll get all—

J: You know if these kids can be convinced that if they learn to write well, if their penmanship is reasonably neat, and their spelling and grammar are close to being correct then they can express themselves.

A: That's it.

J: They have got a big advantage in going out job hunting in society. Makes a big difference.

A: And forget about that slang. All they know is he's cool and then they cut it down to cool, you know that's the stuff.

J: Or amen you know.

A: Yeah. Don't forget the amen.

J: That upsets me considerably, considerably. Our teachers were very strict about that and I'm sure you teachers were too. And I just hope the teachers today realize how important it is.

A: Yes because we didn't—

J: And speaking get up in front of a group and learn how to say something. It's hard.

A: And kills me because I can't do it right now. I used to do it in church. My Daddy would have me up there making a speech. And if somebody asked me to make a speech today I would faint. I can't do it. I just get all confused.

J: Yeah but they need practice at that.

A: And then I'm old. I got old before I was ready for it. I really did. I turned around I said, "Well I'm old." My oldest sister over here reminds me every day, "You know you're in your 80's. You know you're in your 80's." And that just does something to me.

J: You don't really need that. You don't. Alcena what were you able to do with teaching black history? What did you have to work with? Other than nothing?

A: Nothing. Nothing.

J: How did you fill in? Did you make some real serious efforts?

A: Yes. We used the high school library over at Marbury and we would find a few pictures during Negro History Week. You know we had a week and we would save them from year to year to year. I guess Mayme didn't show you hers did she? She had a lot of them.

J: No, no. I wonder whatever happened to that material? She didn't have any close kin.

A: No she had nephews. But when they're young and they're not teaching they don't have any interest in it. But black history it really suffered and you know our handicap is we didn't have any libraries. We just had a library little corner with nothing in it hardly. And then the history books for the Negroes that they suffered.

J: I'm sure of it. How welcome were you in the public libraries in La Plata?

A: I don't guess I went. You see a lot of this stuff we dodged. But you know in this new library you're welcome to go. But they also had one at Indian Head in our sections and that's where I went.

J: I see there's a pretty decent one that died. There was at Glymont and Bryans Road.

A: Yeah.

J: So it's a nice little library. So you weren't able to say to your youngsters now I want to do this homework and go to the library and pull out a couple of books. They couldn't do that right?

A: No our children were handicapped to the extent that when you would go in their homes which we were required to do—

J: How frequently were you required to go into their home?

A: Well we would have to make a list of the homes that we had visited each month and pass it in. And you had better have something on there.

J: And you did this sort of on your own time after school?

A: After school yeah. And the poor little children wouldn't have light? They wouldn't have lamps to go by.

J: Not even a kerosene?

A: I've been in one that had no shade. Course that didn't happen every day. I guess the shade was broken and they were sitting up there with the smoke you know from the flames lying all over the place. That wasn't—

J: No chimney on it?

A: No. That wasn't in every home.

J: And did you go into homes where the child wouldn't even have had a quiet little corner to retreat to to study?

A: Oh that was general.

J: Do you feel in looking back and evaluating all that's happened in the past 50 years we've made some progress?

A: Oh definitely. We haven't made enough but we've made progress.

J: In my life time and in yours it's visible.

A: Yes.

J: That's something. It'll continue.

A: I think I hope. But you know you've got to show a certain amount of interest yourself.

J: Yeah you do. I wish that teachers would maybe do a little better job of convincing the young people black and white that the more knowledge they have the more economic power they have. And that's the big thing. How comfortable they're going to be living. Some of these kids going to school today are not going to have this. They're not going to have this. No question about it.

A: Did you make the—light the fire?

J: I could smell the leaves burning.

A: Oh you did.

Unidentified Voice: [Yeah I burned a whole lot. All those out in front. All those over there and all that].

J: Have you had any desire to get into part time or substitute teaching since you retired?

A: I tried that.

J: What'd you think? What was your reaction to that?

A: Well when I first retired I said that I'd sub as long as they wanted me. But brother when I got there one or two days was nice and next thing the children turned lose on me and I couldn't manage them and I just gave up substituting. Now I substituted two months after I retired and that was continuation of my—

J: What year did you retire again?

A: 1970.

J: Now during the last four years of your teaching career you were teaching integrated classes?

A: Let's see three, last three.

J: The three last. What do you recall about that experience that sticks out in your mind? What are your feelings about it? What did you run into that was different if anything?

A: I ran into quite a bit that was different. The children thought a lot of me. The white children I'm talking about. I had all white children.

J: I'm getting the same story from most of these retired. Lena almost cries when she says that you know.

A: And the gifts that were brought to me of all of my 30 some years I hadn't—I received more that Christmas than I did the whole other 30 some years that I had been teaching. I just had so much to carry.

J: Was there a real affection there? Did you feel a real warmth?

A: Yes it wasn't I'm gonna give you this so you give me that. It wasn't that at all. And then another time.

J: And we're talking about the Mudd Elementary School now are we?

A: Yes. And another time they gave me a surprise birthday party. And I was surprised and embarrassed—

J: Your class did?

A: Yes. And my principal went—no not my principal but vice principal say, "How did they know it was your birthday?" And I just told him I told them. But it was like this. I was taking the role and a boy said he was born 15th of March and I said, "Oh it's my birthday." And those kids remembered and on the 15th of March they gave me a—and I have some things here yet that those children have given me.

J: Did you find that the—

A: And I told them when I went there I said, "I'm going to respect you and as long as you respect me." And when they found out that I really meant it I got respect from them.

J: How what was the attitude of the parents of these little white kids?

A: The parents that I met.

J: Were they with you?

A: Yeah. I had one little girl that was transferred from a private—a catholic school to my school and she didn't want to come to my school not me. She didn't want to come to public school so every day she cried and she cried and I would pet her you know and she'd cry. So after about a week and ten days I thought I had enough. And I told her, “I'm tired of this foolishness. You get in that bathroom and wash your face and you come back in here and you stop that foolishness.” And you know she stopped and we became good friends. But as long as I cuddled and petted she took advantage of me. And the mother said—

J: Did you find what was the racial mix of these classes over there at Mudd?

A: I had only three or four black children. You see all the children over there were white mostly. And I would have about six, seven black children and all the rest of them were white.

J: How did those black youngsters do in that class?

A: They did very well I thought but some of them as you see you could see they didn't get the homework and they weren't studying. And that would make them lag behind because this child with an encyclopedia would copy everything out of the book and bring it to you, you know, to read. [Well about] you know the fifth grade they didn't know how to [assimilate.] And they had

their—the kids had their problems and they would come to me you know. And I said I would tell them you know you and I we've got to overlook some of the things. And then I had a boy that knocked the devil out of another white boy and then that puts you in a predicament.

J: That's tough.

A: Because then you know I felt like I'd do the same thing. I felt like telling him I would do the same thing but I said you had no business hitting him regardless. Why didn't you come to me.

J: But that's part of the lesson.

A: His father came to school about that said no his son didn't say that. I said, "You don't know what your son says behind your back. So there's no needing you saying you know your son didn't say it." But that is just something that kind of it gets you, you know, and it puts you in bad light.

J: So your last three years were for the most part pleasing ones? Pleasant memories for you?

A: Yes, yes very pleasant.

J: Thank the lord there. After what 40 some years streak?

A: After 40 years I had these three last three years and they were. But in my school in Marbury—at my school in Marbury they were lovey. The parents were nice and we—and the girl that you know we had a principal and a teacher there and we were very. Nellie Carter have you seen Nellie?

J: No, no.

A: She was my principal. Very nice person, very intelligent.

J: She still living?

A: Yeah she lives in Marbury.

J: What's her name?

A: Nellie Carter.

J: Well I'll take down her name before I leave. I should see her.

A: She's not as old as I am but she's almost.

[Note: Nellie Carter is interviewed in OH—00127.]

J: So you did try to go back and help out and it was just a sad—

A: Yeah I tried two months and it was nice and then when I tried to do because I was same as the teachers that would last too much. But the very when I last—when they would call me when I'd be sleeping and I'd get up and go down there. Those kids I just couldn't handle them. I just said don't call me anymore.

J: What was the school?

A: Indian Head.

J: I suppose you've seen a few changes in the Indian Head area?

A: Oh yes you see they have built a new school there and I imagine it's very nice. I've been down through the school and it was very nice. Course Mr. Berry died.

J: Oh so he's gone now.

A: Yeah.

[Tape Ends]