First Session, 2/5/99

Tapes I-III

JR  February 5, 1999. This is an oral history interview with Gertrude S. Williams
by Jo Ann O. Robinson.

    Well, Miss Williams, thank you for agreeing to engage in this project

GW  It's exciting.

JR  Good. Let's just start from the beginning and learn a little bit about you and then
we'll move right on into the education focus that's so much the center of your life.

GW  Ok.

JR  So can you tell us where you were born and where and a little bit about
    the beginning?

GW  Ok. Well, I was really born in Orange, Virginia, instead of Philadelphia, and my
parents moved to Philadelphia when I was 3 years old. Consequently I would go back
and forth to Va. during my early years to stay with my grandmother and my aunt. I didn't
like it much because it was out on the farm and it got so dark at night, you know, and then
you had to go to the outhouse (laughter) and {inaudible} ...now they have a room in the
house. After I moved to Philadelphia, I did not, I was three years old and the only thing I
can remember when I was very young was that my mother used to ~ when she'd cook,
bake cakes in this round big crock, we had chances on taking a round and licking
(laughter) that part. Well, I'd had mine and so the next cake, my sister Sarah, it was hers,
but I asked her could I have one lick and she said "NO!". Well I bonked her. And of
course I got a spanking. And then the next day Sarah ended up in the hospital and I
thought I had put her in the hospital, and that worried me for so long. But Sarah had gone
in because she had appendicts, appendicitis, and I could not. No, she had pneumonia,
that's what sent her. And she had appendicitis later on, but she had pneumonia then. And
it worried me so much. And one day Mom said, "what is your problem?" because I was just sick, you know, I'm thinking "Oh, God, I've killed my sister!" (laughter) And I told her and she said, "No." And she said, "No, [unclear]

she has pneumonia." So I got over that first horror, and Sarah and I became close.

Uh, the house was full, because there were 8 of us. The oldest was my sister Elizabeth who I call "Princess Di" now because she rules from the throne. Then was my sister, Lottie and my brother Charles, and my sister Marjorie, and then after Marjorie was Horace, my brother Horace and then my brother Moses, then me, then Sarah. And uh, so I was next to the youngest child and that time being, well having all those sisters; and as we grew up my brothers died after the war, my brother Horace -- something happened to him in the war, and then

JR World War II?

GW Yeah, World War II. And my brother Charles moved to Florida and he was just found dead in his apartment, so they don't know, and then my brother Larry just died a few years ago. He was brain damaged from someone jumping him on the way from work and, but even though he was brain damaged he lived [inaudible]

JR And his name was Moses?

GW Moses, yeah, and I called him Larry, but it's Moses. And the house was full and most of the time we had a lot of fun. We would squabble, but it was really hard on my sister Sarah and me, because we always got the dresses after Margie and Lottie.

(Laughter) My sister Elizabeth was always -- well, I saw a picture of her -- she was small when she got married but then, she's huge. Well, she's smaller now. But we always got -- you know, the clothes were always passed down -- and

JR Hand-me-downs
GW That's right, hand-me-downs, and the only thing you got new most of the time -- because if the shoes were pretty good, and if they fit you, you put those on too -- the only... usually you got a pair of black pattens. And they were the joy of your life, you know button pattens, and on Sunday you wore those. We just, Mom made our panties, and at that time, Mom used to get the big bags of flour. And the flour [bags] were different colors, like floral blue and yellow and red, and when Mom used the flour out of it, then she would make a dress. And then the white ones she used to make our little panties out of. And you can't say she wasn't frugal. (laughter) But she made our panties and our little dresses. And Mom used to sew by hand for awhile, and then Deke -- we called my father Deke because he's a Deacon at the church -- then when finally my father brought home this sewing machine, the kind that you pedal. I don't know why I didn't keep that, but I didn't. But she used to pedal that machine and sew, you know. So and then she had these irons. You know the iron you put on the stove? You remember those kinds of irons that you put on the stove? And she'd wash and iron late at night. 'Cause we were always crisp going to school. My mother said, "you don't have much, but you're going to be clean." So every night she'd be ironing, and those little panties used to shoot out in the back (laughter), but any how, they were like George Washington, Martha Washington pants. Uh, we went, so we would wear those to school. We were always clean. But we didn't have much, but you didn't realize then, because Mom baked the buns on Saturday night. She would make rolls and buns and all of these different -- and the house smelled so good. And Deke had built a separate section on to the back and Mom got another woodstove, because in the regular kitchen we had an electric stove, but Mom didn't like cooking on the electric stove. She wanted her wood stove. So she bought one, and we stayed back there most of the time, because it was always yummy, you know. She
would be cooking. She would have something on the stove and it would be boiling and we'd come right in from school and sit down-- go right back there. So we never went in the living room. It was back there. But Mom could cook anything. We ate -- I couldn't gain any weight when I was little, but after I was 30 I started gaining. (laughter)

Anyhow, I started in Emlen School, which was the Elementary School. And Emlen School is still functional today. But we enjoyed it, although I never had a black teacher.

JR  Was it a segregated school as far as students were concerned?

GW  No, you had black and white students there. But there were -- and I don't know the ratio; I can't remember the ratio -- but I do remember that it was black; there were black and white. Because there was this little white boy. And once we got a student teacher -- student teachers would come in -- and her name was "White" and that was the first black person who came and I remember Patrick, a little blond-haired boy, who was pretty nice, and we had to write these stories. And he was writing -- we would write letters home to our mother. And we would have to tell them what we did that day. And anything exciting about class. And he said, "we have a new teacher. Her name is Miss White. She should be named Miss Black." (laughter) And you know everybody clapped; nobody got upset. And I remember that but

JR  The teacher didn't get upset either?

GW  Well she did, but, and I wondered, "why is she mad?" Because, you know, she's not white. You know? It wasn't that sense of... I didn't feel the sense of prejudice then. In our community at home it was black and white. We had little white friends that we played with on the street. One family all they had was red and we called them the reds and all. But you didn't feel

JR  What part of Philadelphia was this?
GW   In Germantown.

JR   Germantown.

GW   And Germantown is very historical. But we weren't aware of that either, you know. We just knew that we had this house and that house over there and we would look at the different symbols on the house, and we would talk about it in history, but it didn't mean anything to us until we got older that it was so historical. But we lived in Germantown. And I was named after a German lady that my mother used to work for. That's how I got my name Gertrude. And her name was Gertrude Luck. And that's how I got my name. But we were comfortable at home, and I was very comfortable in school. And at school you would have, you would bring your lunch, or you could eat in the lunchroom. And if you bought your lunch over in the lunchroom you'd eat upstairs. If you brought your package lunch you would go downstairs. You'd walk down the steps in this great big room which was used for gym after lunch (but they put up all the chairs) and after you ate you'd throw away your paper and you went out in the yard. We never had teachers on duty. When the bell rang you knew where your line was, because there was a number. You'd get in line. When the second bell rang you passed in. And there wasn't, it wasn't that we were angels. It was just expected of us. And we just passed into the building and passed to our class. I imagine the school yard today without somebody on duty! (laughter)

JR   I don't want to imagine it!

GW   But anyhow

JR   Can you say a little bit more about your mom and dad -- how they felt about education,

GW   Right
JR Were they interested in the political climate of the time; that kind of thing about them.

GW My father was a Deacon in church. And, which made my mother a Deaconness. She used to fuss all the time about... but he took it seriously, you know about Deacon. Uh, there wasn't-- and we went to an all-Black church. When my mother and Dad went out. We went out to friends. They were all Black. There wasn't a sense, although we went to integrated schools. We had mixed people on the street where we lived. And my mother and dad and all, they'd go out and sit on the porch. They'd laugh and talk in the evening. So there wasn't that, uh, sense. Yet sometimes when my mother would talk, she would talk about the things that would happened to them when they were younger, and how her mother was in slavery. And her father -- she said he looked just like an Indian. And her sister, only sister, looks just like (well, she died; Aunt Mattie died) but her daughter, Willa May, who's here [in Baltimore] looks just like an Indian. But she would talk about how they couldn't do certain things. And she'd talk about when we'd be on the road that we always, when we were going to Virginia, that she would not stop at places. They always made sure the gas was, the car -- Deke always had this great big (He would buy Packards and things like that). And I, now I see why. Because the whole family could be in the car. Or he just loved big cars.

JR But they also hold a lot of gas.

GW They do! She always carried everything we needed in the car. And she used to talk -- she told -- and I'd say, "Well why can't we stop and eat?", you know. And then she would say, "because, you know, we cannot eat in these places." I think even though those things had happened to them, at that time probably they resented it, but they never said anything. You know, it was a different world. And just like you talk about Clinton
being able to compartmentalize. I think at that time Black Americans, once they could move into freedom, and moved away from going to the , drinking out of "black" fountains, going to the back of the store, going around to buy things ---. And in Virginia, Mr. Johnson is still the undertaker. But his father, who was an undertaker, before; and he is. But he would work on black bodies and white bodies. And at that time, because my father worked for him for awhile. And my mother wouldn't let him get in the bed because he worked on dead bodies (laugher). But he had funerals; in fact he funerlized my Aunt Mattie. But I think at that time by living out on the farms and all. And having your own, your chickens and your pigs; and Mom used to season the hams, cure the hams and all those -- raise their potatoes and all. They were secure within themselves. By the time I was aware in Virginia, people were going into town, you know. And I don't remember ever going to a "black"; to a fountain that was marked "black." But Mom did, and so did Deke. And in fact one night Mom was talking about the fact that something had happened in Virginia, and my father was so angry that she thought he was going to kill this man. He must have said something. And they moved to Pittsburgh, and they stayed there for, in fact one of my sisters and brothers was born in Pittsburgh, and they moved to Pittsburgh for awhile, and stayed up there. But they didn't talk that much about .uh, they would say "Well that's how it had to be be."

But as far as education was concerned, my mother was a zealot. And I brought home a "D" one time, and my father kept me in the house for two months.

JR  Oh!

GW  (Laughter) Wait a minute! Wait minute! But there were certain expectations of you as far as going to school everyday, doing your work. And when you came in from school you sat down, and my mother might be cooking or something. When you finished
she wants to see what you had done. Even though she did not finish high school. I guess she finished the equivalent of 7th or -- 6th or 7th grade. Their...they learned so much more...I'm telling you, my aunt, who lived in the house with us and came up from Virginia with us, she would help us with our geometry and all, and she just had very little education. And we used to say, "if Emma had a chance to get her education, she would be a college professor or something, because she was just, just that sharp, you know. Mom wasn't as sharp as Emma, but she was just wise about things. And was very frugal. She always...although Deke didn't make that much money. He was a contractor who did not know how to charge, you know? And then sometimes he became a carpenter working with a group, but he always gave her the same amount of money. My mother said even if he made a million dollars, going back [inaudible] he would just give her the same twenty five dollars. But she knew how to spread that money and save and deal with making sure we had food all the time, and that we ate and always had clothes. You know, she was thrifty. In fact, she stopped me from using ..I had ten thousand charge plates. And she stopped me from using 'em, and I don't charge anymore, you know, which gives me a little more money.

JR  Good

GW  Good strategy

JR  Good strategy; I wish she'd stopped me awhile ago.

GW  But she always had a dollar if you needed it, you know.

JR  Was your dad equally adamant about education? How far through school did he go?

GW  He, Deke, went through... you know, at that time he went through Manassas, which was a trade school, and that's how he learned his trade, so he was sent off to trade
school and learned the crafts that he... He could make anything, could do anything. And my brother Larry was the same way, or Moses. I don't know what grade; I know he completed internship which gave... He had a little certificate which allowed him to go right on to work, and he worked from the time he was very young. Actual age I don't know. But the temper... Deke was... Mom would get angry sometimes. But I never saw my father get angry. But once, at me. And he had a very calm temper. But he would look at you and you would understand what he meant.

JR  Is that where you got your loook?

GW   (Laughter)

JR  The look you used as a principal? We all know that look.

GW   (Laughter) We had a lot of fun in our family so it was fun growing up. And then my sisters got married and my brothers died afterwards. No, my sister Elizabeth and Lottie got married and Margie got married, my brother Horace died and then my brother Charlie died afterwards.

JR  Your parents really outlived a number of their children.

GW   All except the girls. All the girls are alive.

JR  They outlived their sons.

GW   Yeah, well, no. Deke died before Moses did. Mom would have been 95 in two months...

But religion was a very important thing in house as we grew up. We went to Sunady School and then to church and then back to Baptist Evening Fellowship and so Sunday was your whole day in church, you know. Your parents would take you down there. Well, Deke and them would be upstairs while we would be down in Sunday School, Deke and my mother. And then at church the young people sat in the back rows...
and one Sunday we were laughing and talking back there, and all of a sudden here comes Deke back there and he goes like this: he hooks his finger and oh I was so upset. And I walked all the way down to the Deacons’ Bench with my head down and I just sat there. I

never talked again. But he was that way, you know. He was steaming! You could see. He was so angry. But he never said a word [inaudible], and he never said a word to me after that. I guess I was punished enough sitting on that bench. (Laughter) But religion

really—I guess it influenced the whole way we lived and were brought up, because we read the Bible; sometime Mom would discuss it with us. And we really—whatever good that’s in us came from the beliefs that were developed through my mother and father. What we should do that was right. If you going to do something, do it well.

And I know I wanted to—I did not want to be a principal at Barclay, because the people in the system were so ugly, you know, had said ugly things and I called my mother and my mother said, "you’re not important unless people talk about you." That was one thing. The other thing is she said, "you’re going to have to put your mouth where your money—money where your mouth is, and you’re going to have to do what you’re supposed to do." And she did not give me any sympathy. She really didn’t. She just felt that it was something I was supposed to do and that she expected me to do it. And she’s really funny. When I got the presidential medal [from Johns Hopkins University], mom was telling everybody, "well the President of the United States came up and gave my daughter a medal." I said, "Mom,..." So it was that kind of thinking you know, you say "presidential..."

All of us started in church when we were little. And really was a social place, too. I still see friends I knew in church who weren’t in school. But for many black families
that's a social place. They leave early in the morning. They stay there most of the day. And then come home. And Mom always cooked a full meal. She was a good cook.

(Laughter) But I don't know, my father and I were the closest of the two. But as far as sticktoitiveness, I think I got that too from my mother. Because, you know, Deke and I were rogues together, you know. He would watch the fights and laugh and he had to go up to the store and get a pound of hot peanuts and sit there and eat it. And mom would get so mad, you know. "People can hear you all over the city when you laugh!" But Mom was the one insisted that you do, you know. If she told you to do something and you didn't do it—to clean the bathroom or this or that—on Saturday when you wanted to go to movies you'd be there cleaning and doing. So everybody else had gone off with their little lunches, you know. You were too young to remember that. But on Saturdays they used to have comics and westerns all day long at the movies. So we would pack our lunch and go to the movies and watch until Mom gave us a time to go home. She was strict, but it was needed to develop and understand what "yes" means and what "no" means and to complete the tasks that you're supposed to complete. Wherein I feel sorry for kids today.

JR They don't have that kind of direction, structure.

GW They don't have any structure. And so we were poor but we weren't destitute. And just because you're poor, you don't have to be...well, I'll let that go.

JR Maybe we can come back to that?

GW Yeah.

JR Did you stay in public school after Emlyn?

GW I went to Emlyn, then I left Emlyn and then I went...

JR That was like Kindergarten to?
GW  To sixth. And then from seventh to ninth you were, I was at Roosevelt Junior High School and there after ninth grade—well, when you go in eighth grade, cause you took the (what do they call them?) the Regionals. You took the Regionals in eighth grade and that decided what you were going to do, and I remember Mrs. Coil saying, "I think you should be a teacher," and I would say, "I'm not being any teacher."

JR  Mrs. Coil was your teacher or your principal?

GW  She was one of my teachers in high school. Let me think of my principals. I know Dr. Nichols was in Germantown High, was my principal. I'm trying to think of the principal for elementary. He was a little short man. I'll have to think of his name later. But I've lost track. What were you asking me?

JR  Well, you went on to Roosevelt High School?

GW  Roosevelt. And then you took the Regionals and that was like to see what you'd be better in, what you should go, where you should go in school. And really, it wasn't a tracking, but it was to get some insight on where you were going and so forth. Something like you do here in the seventh and eighth grade to try to [unclear] grading and everything. But anyhow, and the school you could go to. And I went to Germantown High School. At that time, now, I guess that's the first time I really started seeing prejudice in teachers, because there were very few black students in Germantown High when I went in, so you had to get to be on a certain scale and grading, and when I went in—I graduated—there were only ten blacks out of four hundred and sixty some students. So you know the ratio of blacks there. There were some teachers who were fantastic there in Germantown High School. And what you did you got the grade for. But then were some others that you just couldn't get above a "C" if you were black. And that was rather disturbing. I know one time Mom came up to school because Mr.
Gelfman (I'll never forget him) was teaching a class and he had history. And he was talking about the Civil War. But then he was talking about how inferior blacks were and I went off on him. Because I'm the only black sitting up in the classroom, you know. I got in it, advanced (but they didn't call it advanced, it was some other kind of class) for history, because at first I didn't like history, and so every night I did history first. I always threw more time into history, and then I started liking it. So I got into, well I was in the advanced academic courses, but I was in advanced math, history. And when he started talking that way I felt like two cents, and then I just, before I knew it (you know how I do) off I went. And the kids clapped, you know. And I got sent to the office. That's the only time in my life I was sent home. And Mr. Nicholas. Dr. Nicholas sent me home, and Mom came up and I said "well, she's going to beat me." Because you did not bring notes into Mama's house; you did not bring notes from teachers, you did not bring anything in, because you got it. And so she said to him, "you know I teach my children to respect you, not only you but all adults," she said. "But I never brought up any child to bow their head and shuffle their feet. So Gertrude's going to apologize for being rude, but she's not going to apologize for what she said." So he accepted that and let me back in school. So I could have hugged her. Because mom usually kill you! If you got -- you just came home...

JR  How did the teacher treat you after that?

GW  Mr. Gelfman was kind of distant. But the kids liked me, you know. So I didn't care then. I did my work. I made sure everything was in. But he didn't like me and, but, I got along with the kids and it didn't make that much difference. And from German town Highschool, there you took, no you took another set of tests -- Orals at
Germantown. You took those. You were over in a side of the building when you were seniors. And then from Germantown High School you went down to take your Nationals.

JR  Now were the Orals what they sound like? Did you actually have to stand up and answer questions?

GW  No, no you answered questions for part of the questions. The other part was writing and one section you had to answer questions orally. Not exactly like the orals that go with the Nationals; because there's a different kind of Orals that go with the Nationals. You do the Nationals, the writing. Have you ever taken the Nationals; it's a teachers' exam?

JR  I've taken, never taken the teacher's exam but the Graduate Record Exam, things like that.

GW  Right, things like that. Right, well they even ask you about O'Henry. All comics and things like that. You have to know so much general knowledge. But then when you went in for your Orals, they would select two topics. You never knew what it was going to be. And then they would talk to you about it. And you would have to respond.

JR  Do you remember what topics you had to speak to on yours?

GW  I don't remember. Well you had to select. I think I talked about school, what I got out of school; what I wanted to be. I'm not quite sure, but it ended up, turned out that teaching was the profession that was pinpointed. Of course I thought that they were crazy. I was not going to be a teacher. I really don't remember what I was going to be.

But my experiences with elementary, junior high -- it was called junior high at that time -- and Germantown High School was very good, basically. You learned a lot. You were prepared for college when you came out. The teachers were exacting but helpful. They knew what they were doing. They were prepared, and they made sure that you were
prepared. It was a difference, the expectations then. They never watered down the
curriculum for you at that time. You had to reach that curriculum and I -- it's a lot
different from what it is today. So I enjoyed my, I enjoyed school. I really did. I went
everyday and only missed the days for sickness, and that was seldom. I remember I had
to get my tonsils out, and that was when I had all those white spots on my throat. And
they used to give me headaches. That's when I first starting having migraines.

JR    So from highschool you moved on to a college program.

G    College. I really wanted to go away and I wanted to go to Morgan, because I have
a aunt who lives here. And I wanted to get that distance away from home, and to grow
up. Because as long as you're a girl in a house, you never really grow up totally. In my
house. No some houses you can. But no matter how old you are, you're timed. And even
though my mother would say, "I never tell you what to do," she would say "If I were
doing it..." (Laughter) And so forth. But anyhow, I really wanted to go to Morgan or
some other school away. I hadn't decided. But my mother and my father said I had the
choice of going to Morgan or to Cheyney because aunt Sarah was here and could tattle to
them or to Cheyney where they could drive up there in an hour. So I took the Nationals.
And then I came to Baltimore and stayed with Aunt Sarah and took the Baltimore, the
test that they were giving here, and took the Nationals in Philadelphia, and took the
others, it's the Locals, that's what they were called. Took the Local for Philadelphia and
the Local for Baltimore, and the one from Philadelphia came in and I'd say, "Oh, God,"
and then the one from Baltimore came in. You know what? I'm mixed up on that.
I'm mixed up on that. That was when I came to teach.

JR    Oh, Ok.
GW  That's when I came to teach. When I went to Cheyney. My father said, "No." I couldn't come.

JR  You couldn't come to Morgan?

GW  And he wanted me up there so he could drive up there every Sunday. (laughter) which he did for awhile until, you know, I really got upset and said that the kids were teasing me-- which they were, "here come your parents." So I got a scholarship to Cheyney, because my father said he just couldn't afford to pay for Morgan. And Cheyney was a state teacher's college and so I got full scholarship there. And they didn't have to pay for me going to school. What they did, they had to help me get my clothes to go school. But Marion Brey, a former teacher (she's dead now) lived on Burbidge Street. That was straight up across, like it was straight -- just like my house is from the Rotunda, that's how

JOR  Ok.

GW  And their, those homes, they had really average and above average salaries of those people. The Brey's lived there and in one of the houses there. And I used to go each night and wash the dishes and on Saturdays do the, scrub the floors and the bathroom and the kitchen and any other little something that she'd want me to do and that's how I got my change.

JR  Were they white or black?

GW  They were white. They were white. So there was Marion Brey and her mother and father, and Marion had been a teacher, too, and her mother was a teacher. So when I got ready to go to college, they bought my outfits, you know my clothes to go to college. Which was very good, you know; they were very nice to me. And those clothes I wore the whole time I was there, you know. (Laugh). Well you wore them. You were clean,
you know. You wore them. And now and then I would get something. My sister Sarah had gotten a job and I remember she brought me this little short navy blue coat. I just gave that away the other year. (Laughter) It was one of those little coats. But it was nice and she -- And then I had a brother-in-law who was in the service, Richard, who used to get little packages of things at the -- what do you call the place where the servicemen get

JR The commissary?

GW The commissary, yeah. And he would buy those and bring them up to school. Because you would starve at the school. The food was not good.

JR It wasn't your mother's cooking.

GW No it wasn't. And they used to put salt peter in the food, and that was terrible, too. But they said you couldn't taste it. I only have fond memories really, basically, of being in school. I never -- as the kids said, "when were you in a fight? How many times were you in a fight, Miss Williams?" I said, "I was never in a fight; I never had to be in a fight." "What do you mean? Oh, I don't believe that." But I never had to be in a fight, because children then weren't-- if you minded your business, no one bothered you, you know. But --

JR Now your best friend from Cheyney spilled the beans that your nickname from those days was "Guts".

GW Yes.

JR What did you do to deserve that nickname?

GW My father used to call me "Guts."

JR Oh, your father did it to you.
GW  And see, they heard my father calling me "Guts" and that's when they started
    calling me "Guts." I... he just started calling me "Guts"; I don't know why. (Laughter)
    Mom called me "Trudy," and see that's where I get "Trudy," and most people-- but my
    father used to call me "Guts." And in those days, still today, people nicknamed children,
you know. But why he started calling me Guts? But he called me "Guts" till he died.
    And why he called me "Guts" I do not know. I wasn't fat. But he would call me "Guts"
    and I think it was just an endearment, you know?
JR  Well it also suggests that you stand up for yourself--
GW  For I was gutsy. Now I used to fuss, now; maybe that's why. But I used to, and
    he'd get after me for that. 'Cause I would take no stuff when I was little, and that's
    terrible, 'cause I would just respond back, and my mother and father used to get after me
    so much about that. If someone said something that I didn't think was right, I'd let 'em
    have it, and then I'd get it you know. (Laughter) So, I don't know, maybe that's why, but
    he always called me "Guts" and I know if people called or said something --I didn't like
    them calling my father "Horace," 'cause I felt he was too old for them to call him
    "Horace," you know. And I would say "His name is Mr. Williams," and my father would
    say, "That's alright." "No it isn't". And then it would get into that debate. And...but I
    would say, "His name is Mr. Williams," you know. And Deke said, "You have to stop
    that!" "But he doesn't have the right to call you Horace," you know? "I don't call you
    Horace." I would call him Deke. I called him Pop. I started calling him Deke after he
    went in and became a Deacon in the church, and then he became a Mason. You know,
    that....But then I asked them at the funeral, "please don't..." because Mom was going
    through so much when he died not to go through that whole ritual. And they understood,
    and they did well.
JR  So what was the faculty and the student body at Cheyney like?

GW  Now, that was another story. I think I really learned prejudice more at Cheyney than I had learned in Germantown Highschool. Cheyney was all black at that time; it's mixed now, but it was black. And it was more the color basis. You had the very fair, and Dr. Hill [Leslie Pinkney Hill] was very fair, too. And in fact he was the first, among the first blacks to go to Harvard, but they wouldn't have known he was black if he ...(Laughter)

JR  And this was the President of Cheyney

GW  This was the President of Cheyney -- brilliant man, though. Brilliant man and used to be in charge of the choir, but he was a brilliant man. And you respected him highly for his brilliance and his dignity. You know, he'd walk across the campus and everybody would know it. But you had a different kind of prejudice at Cheyney, and it was by color, you know. And although I had so fantastic teachers there -- Mrs. Robinson our English teacher was just so, so demanding, and would take ten points off if you left a period off, and things like that. She was such a lady, though. Such a lady. And then you had Estelle Scott Johnson, and she taught history. She was great, too. But now she, she's not doing well. Wade Wilson. I got into industrial arts class. Girls couldn't get in there, and I demanded that I get in there, and Wade Wilson said, "you cannot." And then I said, "I'm going to protest." So he let me in. (Laughter)

JR  Why did you want to?

GW  I wanted to learn how to make things. I thought girls needed to know how to build things just as well as boys, you know. It was like being prejudiced about what you could learn, you know. And most of all I wanted to be in there because they said I couldn't be in there! And I guess that's the main thing. But, anyhow, and Wade used to
call me "Guts" after he heard my father call me "Guts." But Mr. Hare, who wasn't much of a teacher, but a neat person.

JR     What did he teach?

GW     He taught science. And we used to call him [unclear] He wasn't much of a teacher but he was a nice person, and we did learn science. And Mrs. Ghoul. She was another science teacher we had. And she would take us on these nature walks, and we'd be talkin' comin' out the door. She'd go, "Number One!" and we'd have to write it down. (Laughter) And --- [mimicking students:] "What? What?" [mimicking teacher's voice:] "It just flew by!" (Laughter) You know, she'd find a bird. She was horrible. But we knew, we knew science, we knew science. But she was horrible. And she would say, she'd point to a plant. You'd have to tell what it was, and you'd have to smell it. You know, like sassafrass and different other things and you'd have to write it down. All of us used to fail all of her walking tests, but it was ok. I enjoyed Cheney, because -- well, I worked in the office because I needed money to do things. But -- Lord, I know I have to know her name -- the person in the, in the -- I'll think of her name, who worked in the, who was in charge of the office. And she hired me because I knew how to type. And I worked on books. I had to be bonded because I took the students' money, you know. And I checked those in. And so people knew me. Clara was a trip. Clara came in from Danover.

JR     This is your friend Clara Jones?

GW     Yeah. Clara's a trip. Always has been. Would curse like a sailor. Oh, God! She'd sneak out, off the campus and we had to wait up to try to get her back in. She was a trip, I'm gonna' tell you! But she has a heart of gold. She will do anything for anybody. Right now she goes shopping for three people on her street who are seniors and can't get out.
She does their marketing; takes them to the bank. But she'd do anything in the world. But she's a pistol. Still a pistol. (laughter)

JR: You lived in the dormitory?

GW: I lived in the dormitory. We lived in two, Burleigh Hall and Stately Hall. Burleigh Hall -- the boys were downstairs and we were upstairs. And they raised so much Cain, there was so much stuff going on, they moved the boys out of Burleigh Hall. They changed -- they moved them up into Burleigh Woods, and then we were on the campus. But you had to -- one day out of every year was Cheyney Day. And you had to scrub the campus clean. I mean everybody had duties. You scrubbed and cleaned and the campus really sparkled. Today I don't know what they do. It's very large. And then it was just a rectangle, and you could walk around the whole campus in five minutes or less. But now it has spread so, but the type of student is different, so different. But it was so beautiful. You could sit out on the campus and just read. And it was very peaceful because it was off to itself. And Cheyney was, well, is the oldest institution for Black youth. And now you have a mixture on the campus. You have not many, but you have some. You have -- the faculty mixed while I was there.

And I enjoyed -- I think Cheyney -- I know Cheyne was the backbone of whatever I do in education. Miss Hall was our instructor for education. She, we had to write the lesson plans and take them to her. She got sick, and we had to go to the hospital and take our plans up there before we could teach.

JR: It was a teacher training institution, so that was, so that the whole purpose --

GW: Yeah, it was a teacher training institution, but it was at the end, well no, at the second -- in your Sophomore year you went out for observation. And you went up on campus -- they had, what's the little school like they had, a lot of ----?
JR  A demonstration school?

GW  Demonstration school. We used to go there. And then in our Junior year we went into Philadelphia for participation. And then in our Senior year we then went to Philadelphia and we went into the schools. (Small laugh) My first year going into Philadelphia I was assigned to Ursala Curd, and Ursala Curd asked me what subject would I like to teach the least. Now I did not know Ursala Curd was a concert pianist. (Laughter) And she said, "Oh, well then, you will start with music." And you know how you have those little harps? Oh my lord. I learned how to teach it though! I learned how to teach it. And she would make me. But that's the kind of instruction you got at that time. There was nothing left unturned. You learned how to open a lesson, how to close it. How to motivate. You learned how to deal with a student who was having difficulty. You dealt with students who were way ahead and how to keep them motivated. You -- but most of all, you learned how to be a role model for the children. And you just didn't do anything that would make the children say, "Oh my god, this [unclear] did this or that, you know. It was just a -- you just -- When I started student teaching, they used to have the stockings with the seam up the back. (Laughter) Now, my legs have never been big. And it was so hard to try to get that seam straight. (Laughter) And you had to wear gloves and a little hat, like, something like Miss Lane [a Barclay teacher] I wore little hat and stocking with the seam up these little legs and gloves. And I wore those to work.

Um Hu!

JR  It's different from the dress today.

GW  Yes. You didn't wear pants. Well, at that time there weren't any pants that were decent pants to wear, you know. There were dresses, just below the knee [unclear phrase]

JR  Were you -- do you remember being scared as a student teacher?
GW  Oh, my lord! Oh, when I faced that class (laughter). Ursala Curd, I haven't heard from her in the last few years. I don’t know what has happened. But she used to keep in touch with me. But she would sit there and look at you. She was a little woman, too. But so bright. And could play that piano.

[end of tape 1]

JR  So facing students for the first time was a daunting experience.

GW  Oh yeah. You look at them and they're looking at you, and everything that you've prepared, because you had to have everything prepared; every word written out; every question that you would want to ask, and every answer that you would expect. You had all that ready. You had set up all night. You had gotten the pictures together. And you walked -- stood up in front of the class, and you -- and your mind would go just blank. (Laughter) and you just, just stood there! And finally. Well, Miss. Curd had my papers and she -- with everything there, what I was supposed to do, so she started me off. 'Cause I had frozen. I had absolutely -- I would just look at the children and they were looking at me (Laughter). So she started off and then I picked up and went on. I apologized to here afterwards. And she said, "I did the same thing when I started teaching." She said, "there is somthing about meeting children for the first time and having them look at you like 'what are you going to do?.." And that's the truth. They are, they are going to size you up the minute you walk in that classroom, and you're either going to be someone who's going to teach them and not have any foolishness or you're going to be a push over, you know. While I was teaching --- I'm scared of mice. I am so afraid of mice I could almost die. And they had a white mouse in the classroom. And Miss Curd knew how scared I was. So I was helping a student. I was like this [bending over] And this. One of the students had put that mouse on my shoulder. And it ... I almost went out! I was, I
couldn't scream, I just...[mimes not being able to make a sound] And she saw. Well, she went off on the kid, you know. But he said [in a teeny voice mimicking the child] "I was just-- I was just playing; I was just playing!" I could not believe... And I, I really, when I got home I couldn't [unclear]...I saw that mouse coming down. I just froze, you know. But that's children. That's children. And I should never have let him know I was afraid of 'em. And so you have to kind of puff up. I used to be afraid of thunderstorms until I started teaching, student teaching. And one day we were in the classroom, and it got real dark. And she saw me freezing. And she walked up and she says, "Continue. The storm will not come in." She saw me, like, shaking. (Laughter). But after that I got over it, you know. I could deal with it.

JR  Do you remember the name of the school where you were student teaching?

GW  Let me see. It was on Wharton Street. It may have been Wharton Elementary. I'll have to...I'll check that for you. But I think it was on; it was on Wharton Street. I think it was Wharton Elementary, if I'm not mistaken. They didn't go by numbers in Philadelphia. They don't go by numbers now. But I think it's Wharton. I'll check that out for you, though.

JR  Did you student teach a whole year?

GW  No, just six weeks and then we did six weeks on campus, up in West Chester. All of us did it in West Chester for six weeks. And the other six weeks we did in Philadelphia. And we would come in to Market Street (and that's the coldest corner!) The bus would put us off. And then we'd take our sub and go to the other places where we were going to go and then we would meet back at Market Street and the bus would take us back. But it was, it was, what should I say-- Cheyney, I think at that time -- I don't know what happened. If you went to Cheyney, you came out a good teacher. If you
weren't a good teacher, they stopped you -- weren't going to be a good teacher, they would stop you after your Sophomore year. They wouldn't let you stay on the campus.

There were a few kids, they just dropped off of the campus that came out there for -- not for business but for pleasure, you know. To get a husband. And we only had three men on campus when I started at Cheyney (Laughter)

JR They must have been popular.

GW Oh My! Yes they were! And Marcus -- what's Marcus' last name who got killed in Oakland? Marcus Foster was my big brother. Finally when they came back, they assigned a big sister and a big brother. They assigned me to Marcus. And he was such a great person, you know. That was a horrible thing. Marcus was a brilliant, caring man. That was, that was a loss, you know, when he was killed. I don't know whether they ever caught the people who killed him or not.

JR I don't remember the details anymore.

GW But he turned [unclear] around in Philadelphia when he went there. He changed that school. But he really was a big brother. I mean he would talk to you and help you out and do things like that. We all cried when we left Cheyney. I sang on the chorus at Cheyney. And we traveled with Dr. Hill, all up in the New England states and everything. And one day we were there at one place. And Dr. Hill would say anything. You know he was up there and he's talking and we were just sittin' there and he said, "One day the Blacks' ll rule the world." And the people started looking at him. (Laughter) And then we were looking. And then he says, "I mean, there're more Blacks in the world than...", and he corrected himself. And he was taking like the Arabs, and the Africans and all. But he would say. And he would get -- I know, one day we acted up in practice. And he came over to our building and got us up at 5:30 (laughter) and we had to go to practice.
at 5:30. But all those experiences go to make you a better person, you know? He was ok. He was prejudiced, but he was ok. Does that sound right? He was.

His daughter married a dark fellow, and he had nothing to do with her after that. He was just that prejudiced.

[exchange about room temperature between JR and GW]

JR So the end of Cheyney is when you started taking the exams.

GW Yeah. We took the exams, the Nationals, while we were at Cheyney, so you really got an answer back by --you knew you had passed the Nationals and the Orals. But then you had to do the Locals. And you had to get... Then you would do the Locals, you would apply to the places; that's when I applied to Baltimore and applied in Philadelphia. I really didn't want to teach in Philadelphia. I really didn't. So I was very upset when I heard from Philadelphia first. But when I heard from Baltimore -- "Yipee!" (Laughter)

And I really chose Baltimore-- I had been in Baltimore several times to visit Aunt Sarah. And I got to like it; the place with the white steps. Scrubbing those steps in the morning and in the evening (Laughter) But

JR What part of Baltimore did your Aunt Sarah live in?

GW She lived over on Edmondson, where they have destroyed it. Around Harlem, around there, you know. They have just... She lived on Edmondson Avenue; upper Edmondson, over near where Harlem School, Harlem Park -- but they've just destroyed those places. It's sad. And Aunt Sarah was a very haughty lady, but very nice. She really was. But she was no nonsense, but she was a really *nice* person. And when she went to the hospital. I had started teaching then. She went in the hospital, so I used to go by, because she wasn't eating. So I would come by from school, go to the hospital -- and that
was Providence Hospital, which is now Liberty? -- and would feed her and make her take her medicine.

[comments directed to JR's dog who is trying to get GW's attention]

GW    Ok. Go ahead.

JR    So you got your response from Baltimore.

GW    And then I got the Ok from my mother and father. And I came to Baltimore and lived with Billy and Becky Griggs, also teachers. How did I get with them? I used to belong to the YWCA, and through them they had, they could place you in, with families in different cities, you know, and states. So they placed me with Billy and Becky Griggs, 'cause they were teaching; both of them were teachers, and their father was a teacher, too. And that's -- I enjoyed it there. I see them now and then.

JR    And where did they live?

GW    They lived on Pulaski Street, the 1500 block of Pulaski. And that whole block, that whole block was made up of teachers. And we would come out and sit on the porch at night and have a lot of fun. But it was nice over there. A lot of them still live in that block, but there's so much danger over there now, so many sad things happen.

JR    Besides taking tests, did you have to interview in Baltimore?

GW    We had to interview. And that's --- (Laughter) Well, I started to go home, because when I came to interview, you were over in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." That's what named it -- the Black Department of Education was called "Uncle Tom's Cabin." We named it "Uncle Tom's Cabin." (Laughter)

JR    Where was it located?

GW    It was located on -- gosh -- I'll tell you that, too. Because Dr. Henderson was the Superintendent of Black, uh, Negro Schools. Colored Schools, I think it was called. And
was that on Madison? I think it was on Madison. I'll get the exact street. But you went over there and they had different people in different rooms, and you walked through and you would talk to one person who would talk on one subject and you'd go to the next person and they'd talk on different subjects. And then you'd go on around. But it just so happened there were people outside when we were waiting, and they asked me where did I come from: "Where are you from, where do you live?" And I said I came from Philadelphia. [caustic tone of voice mimicking questioners] "You came from Philadelphia? You come down here to take this test? Girl, it's going to be hard!" [quoting her own reply] "Oh, ok." Some of those failed. (Laughter)

But that's when I went on around and passed. Then I went back. I didn't know whether I'd passed or not. I got a letter back in Philadelphia, and I was assigned to 139. And George Simms was there, and George Simms was one of the best principals in the whole wide world.

JR     Now this is Charles Carroll

GW     Charles Carroll of Carrollton. I cry when I go by it now. That was one school. He did not play. I mean he was there. He was around. The school -- you taught or you didn't stay there. You did your, you wrote your plans for the week. A skeleton plan, a schedule, and you had that on your door every week, so anybody coming to your door would see what you were supposed to be teaching and when you were teaching. Every week, every year you had to make a long-range plan. Well, I had to do that up until the time I finished teaching -- the long range plans. And they really should go on still. You made the long range plan, and then monthly you turned in what you're going to do for that month. And weekly would be on your door. And then they were collected at the end of each month and gone over. (Laugh) But it was -- 139 was like a big family.
JR    And it was all Black at that point?

GW    All black. All black. And what happened was, they were beginning to integrate
       schools, and they pulled out people who had worked--

JR    This was '49 and in the early fifties?

GW    Right. They had pulled out people who had worked in interracial schools, and I
       was pulled out to go to Mordecai Gist, number 69.

JR    What were the kids like before the integration?

GW    They were good. The first kids I had? Well, wait a minute. The first class --
       when I came there -- Mr. Simms had said, "Make a classs." I was scheduled to take sixth
       grade, but then I was weighing like 85 pounds, and I was really five feet then. I'm 4' 11"
       now. And he said, "Make a class." Told the teachers. And they gave me the worst kids
       in the world. I was ready-- two weeks after I started I packed my things up and I said to
       Mr. Simms, "I came here because I wanted to teach. But I did not come here to lose my
       mind." I said, "I'm like being in a prison" The kids were so...He came into the class.....

JR    And these were little first-graders.

GW    No, these were third graders.

JR    Oh, these were third graders, ok.

GW    See, the first class I had was a class of third-graders.

JR    They wouldn't let you teach sixth grade because you were too small.

GW    I was too small, so he gave me third grade. And so he came to see the kids. And
       then he met with all the third grade teachers, and he laid them out. He said, "How would
       you do that to a new person and blah, blah". So he said, "I will make up a class." So I
       had a great class. (Laughter) He took -- of course they didn't like me much then. But he
       made up a class, and he was the type of principal, when you started he was going to do
everything to make sure that you succeeded. He made sure that the class you got was a class that was teachable. He made sure that you had the materials and things you needed. But most of all, once a week he would sit down and talk with you: "How're things going? Are you keeping in touch with your parents?" All these kinds of things that were really necessary to make a new person comfortable. And during that time my parents were about to lose their home, because in -- there was a scandal in Philadelphia.

The deeds that were registered in City Hall somehow, they all disappeared. You know how these -- just like this crazy State's Attorney that we have that shouldn't be in there. Well, Mr. Simms said, "I don't sign for loans for anyone, but if you're helping your mother and father -- so he signed, and that's what helped me help my mother and father keep their home. Because he signed. I didn't have any money. I'd just started teaching. And so I paid for getting their property straight and borrowed the money. But Mr. Simms -- the children respected him. The parents respected him. He respected the parents and the children. But most of all, he knew what you were teaching. I mean, if he walked into the room, you couldn't goof, you know. He knew what you were doing, and he would talk to you about it. So it was, if you became a poor teacher, it was because you were lazy. Because he would do everything to help you. And he made sure that -- then you called them Vice Principals -- and that was Mrs. Davis. She married a man named Booker, so before she died she was Booker. But now she taught me a lot of the management skills that helped me to move, you know, from day to day. And so when, in sixty -- oh, I started taking courses at Loyola to really -- counseling courses -- to really understand some of the children. Now they were peaches compared to some of the children [today]. (Laughter) But they had problems. And I -- we were poor, but you know, we never -- there were standards and some of the children were just having
problems and I wanted to understand them better. So consequently I took a series of
courses at Loyola and after that time Dr. Stern, who was the, in charge of counselors at
that time -- Herbert Stern -- and he married a black woman and he got fired. Do you
remember. Do you remember her?
JR    I don't. No.
GW    'Cause he married right just before Bob [Lloyd] married Iris.
JR    Oh, ok.
GW    But it was a different deal. But anyhow, he sent, he called me one day at school
and said he would like to talk with me. I didn't know who he was, so I said, "fine." And
he said, "can you leave school early?" So Mr. Watts was the principal, Reggie Watts.
You know Reggie?
JR    Yes.
GW    He was the principal then. He was not --
JR    He didn't [unclear] Mr. Simms?
GW    No, he did not measure up to Mr Simms. But he was so much better, because he
came there after Mr. Owens. You remember Sam Owens?
JR    The name--
GW    Yeah, he had -- see, Mr. Owens came in. No. Let me be truthful. Mr. Simms,
then Mr. Giddings, Clarence Giddings. Now he was magnificent. Right? Then Mr.
Owens and then Reggie Watts. Ok. And Reggie Watts, when I came back -- I said I had
to go meet Mr. St., Dr. Stern. But anyhow. He said, "you're not going." And I said,
"yes I am. Yes I am", and he said "why are you going?" I said, "I don't know; he just
wants to meet with me." "He just wants to take you out of this building!" Said I don't
care what [inaudible] saying, I'm going." So I met with Dr. Stern, and he said they were
starting counseling for children in the lower grades, because they found that they were waiting too late. In fact Baltimore City were the pioneers for counseling in the early -- for elementary grades. And he asked would I be willing to. And I said no, I didn't want to leave my class. Well, Mr. Watts kept worrying me so. So I said to Dr. Stern, "I'm coming at the end of the year. I will not leave the children but I will come at the end of the year."

Well, Watts carried on. Oh, he carried on: [mimicking accusatory tone of the principal] "You're just leaving and you're just..." Oh (Laughter) and he said somethin' and Audrey and Fay and all, we were in the hall and he came up [mimicking the principal] "Here she comes, the traitor". I took -- I had my lunch tray in there. I slammed it on the wall. I said [angry tone] "I'm sick of your rabid shit! If you don't [inaudible]." Audrey and them said, "wait a minute, wait a minute." He flew! (Laughter) I tell you he had gotten on my nerves and was just grinding. I would have never gone into counseling if he hadn't bugged me and said I couldn't go. But counseling was wonderful. I really enjoyed it.

JR Well, you'd been at Charles Carrollton from '49 to '65 so, that was a long time.

GW Right, yeah. And I went to, I was at counseling. I went up to Mordecai Gist where Carolyn Machala, and -- you remember Stan Curtain?

JR Umhu.

GW He was the assistant principal there. Though Grace Hall was there first, (Laughter) and Carolyn put her out because Grace used to curse so much. And then Stan came. Now Stan was very good. I always liked Stan. He was excellent.

JR Going back to your little episode with Mr. Watts, what did he do after everything calmed down? Did you have a conference with him? Or did he reprimand you? Or --
GW  No. Well then they gave me a going away. No, he knew better than that, because I used to lay him out all the time. Because he was a poor principal, you know. And he would get on my nerves, you know. He was -- I hate someone to be in charge and be nothing. And he wasn't. I don't know how he got there, whether somebody knew him. Someone said he was related to Mrs. Jones who used to be one of the assistant superintendents at the -- over there on the hill. I don't know. But how he became principal-- and that was a big school. We had like 1500 children in that school. But he used to get on my nerves; I used to lay him out all the time. (Laughter) Because he would say dumb things, you know? And Audrey and them would say, "now you know better. You should leave him alone." "No! He don't leave me alone." Laughter. But anyhow, to make a long story short, after, you know, it was sad when he died. You liked him as a person, but he was a poor principal.

And so Carolyn was --Carolyn Machila-- was smart, but she had a drinking problem. And Stan and I would end up taking care of the school. And so one day she was going to the drug store. (And she went three and four times in a day) So one day I said to her, I said, "Look, you don't have, you can't be that sick. Why do you keep going out of this building?". So Stan told me, "Come in here." And that's when he told me what her problem was. I really didn't know she had that problem, but she would go out, and she'd be loopy when she'd come back. But she was, she was bright, she was an excellent. She was a better one drunk than whatshisname was sober. I'll tell you that! She knew what was happening.

JR  Now is this school where it got overcrowded and some of the kids had to go to another school.
GW    Yes. That's when at Mordecai Gist 69, our school became extremely crowded, and we had double shifts. So I would come early in the morning and see the kids off on the bus. And they were going to Fallstaff. Well, we had a strong PTO there, too -- PTA. And in one of the meetings one of the parents -- you know Bill Parent, and who else were there? A number of middle class blacks lived up there. And they were saying, "something's wrong." uh oh. What's her name, who used to be on the Board. That's how I met him. His daughter was at Mordecai Gist. Who's the one I couldn't stand on the Board? Mr. Marshall

JR    Oh.

GW    On the Board. He was up there too, see. That's how I knew him.

[end of side one, tape 2]

I said to him about [referring to later period, when Mr. Marshall was on the School Board and GW was Principal of Barclay School] "you talking about not caring about other people children, when you came and had me go up there to take care of your child."
The principal was putting all the Black kids into one classroom, you know. It may have been two classrooms, but they were all Black. And here were parents whose children were bright; they were really bright. And they had signed for their children to go to Fallstaff, so only children who went were the parents who had signed. So they were very upset, because the children were not getting what was going on. It was totally impossible for all Black children to be on the same level. So I asked Carolyn -- I went to her and told her what the parents were concerned about; asked could I go up. And she said, "sure," you know. She wasn't drunk yet. (Laughter) She said "sure." And I went up and asked the principal -- think she quit after that [inaudible] -- asked could I, may I see the children, see how they are adjusting. "Oh, they're doing fine." And I said, "I'd like to see
how they are doing and passing to class." Well, she hemmed and hawed, but I wasn't
going to be changed, so I went to the classrooms. And I asked her, [very soft voice]
"is there a reason why all the Black children are in one class?" I didn't say "Black" then. I
said, I think it was either "colored" or "Negro". One or the other term was in the vogue
then. And I said, "is there any reason why they're all in one class?" And she says, "Oh,
we, we tested them and we [inaudible]" Well, I was so upset. I went back to Carolyn,
and of course Carolyn cursed her out, too. And that's when she left. She would not stay
in that school. They put another -- I don't know who the other principal came there. And
that was at Fallstaff. And they regrouped the children. And then the next year -- I don't
know what happened, because they only went up there -- they went one year. One or two
years they went up there. But the kids were spread around according to their level --
reading level, math level, and so forth. But she quit. Can't think of her name. Red hair.
I'll think of it. But that was a great experience, because you had parents like the parents
in this [Barclay] community who were pro-education, and they were willing to do
anything to help the school. And they worked well with me. Because as a counselor-- I
don't know how and why I was in charge -- but I was in charge of the PTA-- and so I
worked with the parents with the PTA. And we did a lot of things together, and it was
alot of fun. And until one day Carolyn and -- I'm trying to think of the Area Director for
this area here, at that time-- I remember who was the Area Director in our area, Mrs.
Goetz. They met with me and asked me to come and they said, "Well we looked at your
record and you haven't taken the administrative exam." And I said, "No." And "Why
not?" 'Cause I don't want to." And, by this time I was working as an assistant to Miss
Inez Pearson. I got a note from her for Christmas. I'm going to send her a note. She lives
somewhere out west... I was working as an assistant to Inez Pearson at that time, because I had been longest in the counseling at that time. And you remember Edith Walker?

JR    Umhuh.

GW    Ok. In that time Edith Walker used me to sell using the filming in school. I forgot what you call --

JR    Video-taping.

GW    Video-taping. And she bugged my office several times. That's how I met King Bennett. 'Cause he had just come in the system, and he bugged up the office and that's how they started taking the video-taping in the schools, to use for helping teachers to see themselves and improve the quality of their teaching. But anyhow, after --

JR    Did you use video-taping in your counseling sessions, too?

GW    In my counseling sessions. But we had to get ok from -- we couldn't get the ok until after we had taped them, because then the children would know. And I had a big plant in the middle of the table. And they had the tape down in there. Only one child, only one child discovered that tape. And this one kept goin' "Now what's down in there? " you know. (Laughter) And we knew he had discovered it, so. But the others never paid any attention. They just went on talking and answered the questions, went on with the little dolls, or went on talking about the different things they wanted to talk about. And after that I worked -- while I was still counseling -- I worked with Dr. -- what's his name? Think of it in a minute. I'll say "Dr. J". He was putting on these bites on T.V., where you would have sessions and then the children would have to provide the answers. They set up the props and children had the answers. And that went on for a year or so. And then one parent complained, because her daughter was on, and she said hadn't signed. But she
had signed, because we had the slip. But she said she didn't know. So then that stopped.

Dr. J....Oh, I'll think of it. Anyhow--

JR    Now somewhere along the line here you've gone also to Temple, started doing
your Masters at Temple?

GW    Yes. I started my Masters at Temple, because at that time Blacks could not go
past [unclear]   You know getting your B.S. degree. You couldn't go further for your
Masters or Doctorate. So we were paid to take from -- I went to Temple. A lot went to
New York; used to have time up there -- N.Y. --what is it? NYU. But I went to Temple.
And got my Masters in Reading and with my minor in Education. My major was Reading
and the minor was -- I think it was Education. I don't even remember what my minor
was; but it was something. But the Reading --I really wanted to deal with Dr. Beck.
And I really had thought I would go into Reading; into a Reading Center, because I really,
I really love Reading. And when I -- during that same time, after I finished getting my
Masters, then I worked at -- went to Loyola and worked on my Counseling; not
business -- and even now -- they offer you jobs when you come out. You can make a lot
Counseling I worked on; I took some classes and then after I became a counselor, then I
of money in counseling. Because on those big jobs they ask for the instructors to
finished my work as a -- my certificate as a counselor there. And during that time
recommend and to -- someone who can work on the job. Course I said "no, I want to stay
in Education." And also during that time-- while I was at teaching -- I lost my train of
thought.; I'll stop. Ask me another question. I was getting ready to add something on
there.
JR Well, while you were a counselor -- I remember you telling this story once about a little boy -- I think it was when you were counseling; maybe it's when you were teaching-- about a little boy who came running into your office--

GW (Laughter) Right. Jack. Ok. Where I was -- when I went to Mordecai Gist, 69, as a counselor, I was the -- there were only two other Black instructors. And one they didn't know was Black, Edgar Lancey's sister was the physical ed, teacher. And she's Black but she looks white. And they're related to -- what's the Simpson woman's name. They're related to her. Ok. Anyhow, you started having Black families moving like in the forty hundred block of that, there. Because they were mostly white children when I went there. So you started having them move into the forty hundred block of Coldstream. And at that time they started doing the contract-- selling or renting where several families moved in at one time. So there you started getting some kids who were really tough and Jack had moved in, too. And Jack was this little white boy whose mother -- they didn't have any money because they were always out of something. So I used to talk to Jack because he would always be gettin' in trouble or something. So this day there's this bang -- and I would have after school -- I'd be there in case there was a need -- banging on my door! And I open it and there's Jack running in: "close it! close it! close the door!" And he says, "Those nigger's gonna get me!" (Laughter) So I said, "ok." We closed the door. And I said "what is it? " "Those niggers!" And still never looking at me! And I said, "well, what is a nigger, Jack?" And he said, "Must be somethin' bad cause my mother said when the niggers come here were gonna have some trouble!" (Laughter) So anyhow, he stayed, and I went out and got Aubrey, 'cause Aubrey was the boy and his group chasing him. Brought them in and talked. And Aubrey said, "Well he needs to stop calling us names!", which Jack was
calling, using the word "nigger" to them. So I talked to the mother and told her that Jack was having a lot of problems because he was using this language to the other children. He could get away, before, because they were all white children. But now you have Black children -- you know, I said "colored" children -- in the school. And she cried and went on. But she really changed. Because she really needed and I helped her get things she needed. She didn't have any, really, electricity in the home. So she needed a stove, and we worked with her. And so she started working in the school. But I wouldn't say she became an angel but she stopped -- Jack stopped using that word. And he looked right at me and never even figured. And I said, well you see sometimes children say things and repeat things because parents have dealt with it like that. But to him, he just, it never bothered, it just bother--. When I was the assistant principal, there was this little boy; he was very handsome, and he didn't know how handsome he was. And the girls were looking at him, but they didn't bother him there at the school, because he was goin' to sixth grade and he went to high school, junior high school [pause to pour and drink water]. He went to junior high school and the girls started after him and he would run home and they would run after him. So he came in the school one day and he said, "Miss Williams," he said, "the girls are just chasing me and", he said,"the girls,"he said, "these women get on my nerves, the girls and all"; and I kept looking at him (Laughter) and he said, "I don't like women. Women don't even know how to talk to you, don't know how to deal." So I looked at him and I said to him, "what am I?" He said, "but you're not one of them." (Laughter) So I helped him to understand that the girls liked him, and they really weren't going to beat him up. But he really didn't understand. He was a handsome little boy. Did not understand. But children really are very innocent, and adults are their problems. They really -- they don't care what you look like. How tall or short or fat or
thin, as long you -- you're there for them. As long as you're understanding. I don't know --
- you have to -- I've learned from in the classroom: those teachers who have high
expectations for children but care, who are demanding but care, who understand and deal
with them, really don't have any problem. And the kids care. I know, which surprised
me for most of the years-- the teacher that the children in [Barclay] Middle School rated
as the most important teacher was Bossard, and Bossard never played, you know. You
know the more I got to know her and be around her, she really cares for those kids, and
she's there every day until around six o'clock. She'll work with any kid in the afternoon.
And she gets upset when the parents don't do their work or when -- she -- the other
teachers. Now she'll go off with the teachers upstairs. But yet she has some friends who
don't do their work and she doesn't go off with them, you know? I got off track.

JR  Well, you were saying that Mrs. Getz had started bugging you about taking
administrative tests.

GW. Right. Yes. She said, "You don't have to; you don't have to take a job. You
don't have to; just have it as part of your doc.... (laughter), part of your record." I said,
"ok."

So finally I took the test, and then it wasn't even a whole-- it was -- I took that test, and in
the summer I met with Miss Walker and ---oh [inaudible] who was our district
superintendent. Well anyhow, I'll think of her name. Met with them and they -- Miss
Getz had bargained with, with Carolyn and Miss Walker to send me to Barclay, because
Helen Natoski] as having such a hard time that each year 50 to 75 percent of the teachers
were asking for transfers, and that the parents weren't even going in the school. So I
went, "Oh my God." I said, "I thought I could take it without going in -- "Well, just
two years." (What is her name?) Anyhow, "two years, just give us two years." Well, two
years went on and on. But finally I came to Barclay. And it was -- they had some of the
brightest teachers there.... But they weren't, they really weren't satisfied.

JR  What was she doing wrong that was turning them off so?

GW  She was strange. It was like a sense of "me and them", like it wasn't a total
school. Teachers did not know that there were different sets of rating. Everybody was
rated the same. Helen was very cold. And yet, yet she - well she had gone through so
much, I guess. But she was very cold. And the parents wouldn't come in to the school.
So it was just a, just serious. I know one day when Barbara had seen me go into Dr.
Patterson's office and had called Helen and said that I was over at Dr. Patterson and so
forth and so on. Well that became a big stew and I said, "Helen, I'm not taking your job.
I don't want it. I don't even like this job," you know. I did. I did like the teachers, I
liked the kids, and most of the time I just worked with the children, and I seldom came in
the office. And she said, "You use a word that I never use." And I said, "what word was
that?" "You said you liked them." [inaudible] something wrong. She really, she was
really odd. I'm telling you, the parents refused to come in to the school. It was
something. And that's how I -- why I decided just to visit all the homes in the
community and that's how I got to going down and talking to them. Of course, she didn't
like it. She said, "You--that's my responsibility." "Fine, Helen, but you have to have
parents coming to the school." And -- but then the teachers started coming around. Most
of them stayed for awhile until they started getting promoted. You remember how what's-
her-name --just-- because they were good. They were bright teachers, and knew how to
teach. You didn't have -- Helen didn't have any problems. The teachers came to school.
You have a few over there [now] who stay out, like Banks. Banks out all the time. But
she -- I just think she just never had any kind of love herself at home, no -- or just didn't know how-- but she had a fantastic staff.

**JR** What was the school like then? Was it as high a percentage of poverty students as we have now?

**GW** No. No, back then you had -- I guess you had about 40 to 50 percent of the students who were at the poverty level. Because, you remember, when we started doing the lunch applications I couldn't even get 75 percent of the students. And then as Lynch and I went through the community and counted all the number of 4-year olds --

**JR** She was the parent liaison?

**GW** Yes. The four-year olds-- to see how many of them would be able -- if we could start a Pre-Kindergarten, because we felt as though that if we started them in Pre-Kindergarten, that the children in Kindergarten would be ready to go to first grade. And we had noticed the difference. Each year you added a little more of the children into that poverty level.

**JR** So, in terms of changing from becoming Assistant Principal to becoming Principal: what really precipitated that? Was it the community asking for you? Was it the staff asking for you? Was it --an administrative decision from above, or --

**GW** Well, it was finally. But, but a group of parents led by Miss King. (She's still down there; I saw her the other day; I was driving down there; she's like a little butter ball.) But Miss King, living down at Remington, and a group of the parents had come to me and asked would I be willing to be the principal. And I said, "No, I don't do things like that." However, they had gone over and -- to talk with Dr. Patterson, and Dr. Patterson said to Miss King, "Why are you interested in having her there?" She says, "Well, she doesn't care whether you're green, purple or black. (Laughter) She's going to
get you if you're wrong. But she's fair." So he told me that. But I said, "well, Miss King, I got along with her; she was a trip." But when I started--

JR She was black or white?

GW She's white. But when I started there the parents from Hampden and all -- they stayed at the school; they never left the school. They stood there. And I said, "Helen, why are these parents out there?" They never left those kids. They stayed right there at the school. (Laughter) And it took a long time to get them to trust their kids coming into the school, and now most of them

JR That was a racial thing?

GW Yeah, it was a racial thing. Not really always racial. It's that Helen, Helen did not get along with parents. And I would wonder "what is going on?" But then I would meet them, talk with them. "Come in. Let's talk. Come in. Why are you out here? Let's come in. Let's talk." And they would come in; we would talk. Then Vinetta was very good with that. She worked with them. Finally some of them started -- some moved away -- like the Foxes. Used to call them the Hatfields and the McCoys. They used to fight.

And one of the Foxes, one of the boys; I took him home because he wasn't well. And I noticed that all his windows were broken out. So I said, "Oh, my!" I said "your mother's going to have to get the windows fixed. All the heats going to go." He said, "there's no heat in the house." I said to him, "Oh, no. Why?" He said "cause it was turned off."

And I said, "well why are your windows broken?" And he said, "because" -- what was the name of the other family -- "they throw the rocks and break our windows out." So the other family was in school. So I called them down the next day. (I can't think of their names) And: "why are you breaking the windows out of the Foxes' house?" "Well, we play this game." And I said, "what game?" "Niggahs." (Laughter) So I said, :how do
you play 'Niggahs'?"  (Laughter) And he said, "well, we get up on the hill, and when they come and we say, 'run, niggah, run', and we throw rocks at them" And that's how they -- And I'm lookin' at them --- It never fazed them. So, you know kids are innocent in what they do; and they pick it up. But anyhow, they finally moved away. I think the Foxes' mother and father got locked up and the children got taken away; but the others finally moved.

JR    How were the academic standards at Barclay when you were there as Assistant Principal?

GW    When I was there as Assistant Principal the children did well, because the parents that lived -- you didn't have the drugs down there And the kids that were living down in Harford -- isn't that Harford? Down the street--

JR    Oh, Harwood.

GW    Harwood. Harwood, were from parents who cared, you know. And the kids did their work. And most of those kids, black and white, did well, you know? I would see them, and they'd moved on. And then your group came and there was a greater demand for advanced academic. And that's when -- the Kindergarten group -- well, the Red Wagon and the Kindergarten group started working toward the advancement. But you really didn't have the kinds of difficult problems that you have today, where you have parent brutality with the children, children without food, without clothes. All kinds of abuse on children and children -- and parents who move in and out. You started having the in and out movement, I would say, when the drugs started down there. You had parents who lived down the street--

[end of side two, tape two]

JR    As we closed off -- the parents
GW  The parents, yeah. When I first started as, at Barclay, I was assistant, you see. And when I became Principal there were things that I noticed that weren't going on that I wanted to institute. But I didn't answer your question earlier, about the fact of how I became Principal. Dr. Patterson had called me over. Well, before Dr. Patterson called me over, Mrs. Coil (I'll say, Coil, but I'm not -- I don't think that's her name) came and met with Helen and me and said to Helen, "You know, you do not have all your credits; you're going to have to go back to get your credits." And Helen said, "Yes." And thinking that someone else was going to come in and hold the place. Then Dr. Patterson called me over and said that some of the parents and -- were requesting that I become Principal. And that I had done a good job as assistant principal. And that some of the community people had been there. I told him, "NO." I really did not want to be Principal. And he just looked at me. And one night as I do, sometimes, when you have two phones, I left the phone off the hook between the dining room and the kitchen; I left the phone off the hook. And the next morning I noticed it and hung it up and went on to work. And then people were saying, "congratulations." And I said, "for what?" And they said, "You're now the Principal of the school." And I said, "no I'm not. No I'm not." And they said "Yes." So they had put me in anyhow. Dr. Patterson had submitted my name anyhow. And that's how I became Principal. Now, I did have problems, because people were very ugly. Some of the other Principals. And Eliot Epstein had put in for Barclay School, and he wanted Barclay School. He did not want to stay at Margaret Brent. And he became very angry about that. Because we used to work together. You remember, Eliot used to come up to the school and work. Well, he stopped. Because -- well, anyhow. He wasn't very happy Margaret Brent, he said. I don't know why. But anyhow, I became the Principal there at Barclay. At first I was very upset, because
people were saying very ugly things. And that disturbed me, because it wasn't right. And then after I had simmered down and called my mother, and my mother said, "Yes you will, because you have to put your money where your mouth is and that people will talk about you if you're doing something." And I decided that it wouldn't be my school, because that's what I saw, what I saw happening with Helen: it was her school. And you can't, it can't be a person's school and get movement and get cooperation and get change. And that's when I decided that the staff and parents had to be a part of whatever decision that was made for the school. And that's when -- I knew that the students were doing, but toward the time you all had come in, the system had become ragged, because every six months they were changing the curriculum and you had books that were used for 6 months and then they were tossed onto the side. It really wasn't until the Kindergarten parents -- that was you, Jo Ann, and the other Joanne-- Giza-- and that whole total group came in -- that you really -- we were able to start the kind of structure that needed to lead toward pushing in the right direction. And that's when the Steering Committee started, which had the curriculum committee, the legislative committee and everything else. So the goal was really to make sure that each child left that school capable of reaching his or her dreams. But--

JR Did you have inklings, when you agreed to stay on as Principal, of all of the drama that would --

GW (Laughter) No. No, you could not dream of what we went through after starting, become Principal. But the one thing that was really exciting that you had parents and staff willing to change when you saw a need. And willing to fight. We didn't know how often we were going to fight. But at least at Barclay you couldn't be dead. I never, I never imagined going through the battles that we had to go through, all because we just

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wanted to improve the quality in the schools. Now that didn't happen when you had people -- now Rebecca was a trip. But you didn't have that kind of problem with them. Because when we started. Remember when we -- were you there when we tried to get the Gifted and Talented? When Gail was there?

JR No. That was just before me.

GW Ok. And, well, when we proved to Rebecca that we had these bright children--

JR This was Rebecca Carroll, who was an assistant superintendent?

GW Yeah. She still looks the same! Oh, My God. She does. It's scary. (Laughter) But she accepted it. You know, well we planned it, and then you had Gail Levy and that group who planned it and showed where it would help. But you didn't have that problem until you got superintendents who were unsure of themselves. You know? Even. Even though we had battles with Dr. Crew -- he would answer. He would do. I mean, I know I got on his nerves, but I'd never get over the day of that letter! (Laughter) I would never get over the day of that letter!

But that was-- at least there was growth. And you had a united front, where you had the staff and parents and community working together. Now that's healthy, you know. And you had parents understanding what school is all about. Because in so many communities parents don't know what's happening unless they look at the homework book, and they can't tell from that. But parents were really involved in, in just helping to decide the educational future of their children. And that is slipping away today. And that bothers me. But I'll leave that alone.

JR We'll talk about that on another day.

GW On another day. (Laughter)

JR Ok. Thank you very much. We'll meet again and continue.
GW  Ok.

[end of first session: Feb. 5, 1999]