

Atlanta Student Movement Project
Marilyn Pryce Hoytt Interview
Conducted by Jeanne Law Bohannon
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[Begins with Ms. Hoytt taking off her glasses]

Hoytt: I'm not sure, don't let me forget where I put them.

Interviewer: I forget they're on my head half the time. So what we'll do is kind of start at the beginning, and then you just free flow and tell me what you want to know and what you think is important, because that's the focus of this whole project is to tell the story through the eyes of the people who have not told that story. To me, it's about the heroes and the heroines of the movement because you have not done it for the fame or the glory or for financial fame or any type of fame. You have described yourself as a foot soldier.

Hoytt: Yeah, that's what I am to this day.

Interviewer: So let's start back- are you rolling? So let's start back from the beginning and talk to us about where you were born and where you grew up and how that might have influenced how you ended up at Spelman.

Hoytt: I was born in Los Angeles, California and my parents moved to Springfield, Ohio when I was two years old. I still claim California as my birthplace but I spent my formative years in Springfield, and my grandmother had a kindergarten in her home, and she taught me to read by the age of four, and I have been reading ever since. And in second grade my parents took a position at the Tuskegee Institute, and we moved to Alabama, and I went to elementary school and high school here in Tuskegee, but when I finished high school, I went to Spelman College. I had a scholarship to Fisk and one to Spelman but, the recruiters, Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Brazil came from Spelman, and they showed a film, and on this film there was this pretty girl who was on a ladder, she was in a play on a stage and I said, "that's where I want to go." So my parents took me to Spelman to visit, and the campus was very small compared to the Tuskegee Institute which is 5,500 acres, Spelman was just a little oval. But I liked the atmosphere, I liked the young ladies that were there, and I especially liked the theatre which was about half the size of this room but still they produced wonderful plays. Once I got to Spelman, I made three very close friends- Blondean Orbert, Betty Darden, and Phyllis Umpstead.

And we remained friends throughout our years at Spelman, and they called us the "Four Queens," why I don't know, but hey we accepted that. And on this particular day we were sophomores, it was October, and I had just turned 19, and we were sitting in the cafeteria, and we were having one of those meals we called mystery meat, we didn't know what it was, and we had one of those pink chiffon pies, we call it air pies, and we were just laughing and talking about our day in class and through the door comes Herschelle Sullivan, I'm pretty sure it was Herschelle. But she was tall and elegant, she had just come back from Paris, and oh we just thought the world of her. To this day I can remember her fingernail polish, it was just so beautiful. So she came in, and she made this announcement, she said, "there's a campus-wide meeting this evening, all university centers in Giles Auditorium, six o'clock, be there." And so we looked at one another and immediately, and this is just to show you how silly we were, we immediately thought, ok "University-wide, that means cute guys," so we said, "we are going to this meeting. We went back to our dormitory, we had a suite in Packard Hall, with two bedrooms and our own bath, we were just living the life that year. And so we got all dressed up, we'd say all gussied up, we put on our makeup and earrings and everything. We exchanged clothes, "let me wear this," "No, I'm going to wear that." And we went to this meeting, but I think we were late because, by the time we got there, there were no seats, everybody was just standing around. And in my book, I say we said we saw some cute guys, but before we could get to them, the meeting started so there we were. And they said, "We have assembled you here." Now, these were the student leaders, Lonnie King, Herschelle, Rosalyn, and probably, I guess Amos Brown, I don't remember who the other guys were, but I do remember Lonnie King. And they were serious, oh they just had these expressions on their faces, and so we were thinking, "mhmm, what is this about?" And they told us, they said, "We're going," and there had been a sit-in April in the previous semester, but the people were handpicked and was not very successful. When they told us that this was going to be a sit-in the next day and it was open for anyone who was willing to participate, oh that's good. So they said, "Now if you want to go to jail for six months go to the right side of the room." And the library in Giles Hall was not very large, but there were not that many students in our schools in those days. "And if you want to help but you are not willing to go to jail, you go to the left side." So my roommates, two of my roommates and myself we went to the right side. And we looked around, and our other roommate was over there on the left, and we just kind of filed that in our brains for later. And so they explained to us what was going to happen and told us to go back to the dorm and pack. We had great, big purses back in those days, kind of like what we have today. And they said, "You pack everything you are going to need in your purse. Put your books

together, and we will come and get them later because you are going to be in jail for six months, and you will still be responsible for your coursework." And so that night, in my book I tell about how we had a marathon hair doing session because we didn't know when we were going to the hairdresser again. And so we got our hair washed and fried and curled up and laid our clothes out for the next day and packed our little bags, and we were excited, but I think we all said our prayers before we went to sleep, because we didn't know what the next day was going to involve. So we got up early that morning, got dressed, and primped, and made up, and combed our hair, went to breakfast, and then went over to the AU Center and we assembled in front of Trevor Arnett Library. And they told us to join hands and form a big circle I think. It must have been Amos Brown who prayed, and then we sang "We Shall Overcome." And Lonnie told us, "Marilyn, you and Blondean get in that car," and we got in the car in the back seat. And the next thing I remember, I don't remember riding to Rich's, I don't remember getting out of the car, I don't remember that we went to Snack Bar, all I remember is when we went up to the sixth floor, the Magnolia Tea Room, and stood in front of that place that I had passed by numerous times when my dear mother and my Great Aunt Cora would take me to Rich's because that's where you bought your evening gowns if you were a queen and I was always some kind of a queen. And pass by this Magnolia Tea Room, and there were these little ladies in with their hats and whatnot, and we wore our hats and gloves too, but that day we did not. I think we decided that we were not going to be ladies today, we were going to be women, we're not wearing hats and gloves. But we would see them sitting there with the tablecloths and the china, and it may not have been real, but to us, it just seemed like a fantasy, and we wanted to be in there too. So we stood at the door and one of the waitresses I imagine, came to the door and she said, "What do ya'll want?" I remember this very well. And one of us, I don't know if it were me or someone else, said, "We just want to be served."

"Well you know we can't serve ya'll, we don't serve negros in here."

And someone, later on, made a joke and said, "Well I don't want a negro, I just want a meal." But we didn't say that we were not comedians, we didn't say that. And she said, "Well I'm going to have to call the police." And she did, and in the twinkling of an eye the policeman was there, the Chief of Police and a uniformed cop, and they told us to go to the elevator. They escorted us to the elevator, I do remember the ride down because we were cramped in the elevator. And then the doors opened to the street. And I saw the camera; I admit I saw the camera. And I'm a theater student, and Dr. Burrows said, "If you see a light go to the light, and if you see a camera, Marilyn, go to the camera." So I saw the camera,

but the look on my face, that was not acting, that was real. And Blondean was short, and she was behind Reverend King but her purse is still a testimony to her having been there, and there are other pictures of her in the car. I don't remember the ride, but I do remember waiting in the, it was the city jail that they took us to first and we were packed into a little room, and everybody had a dime, and everyone had to call a parent. And so I called home, and it must have been lunchtime because my dad would come home for lunch twelve o'clock every day, "Let's eat!" So he was at home, and I said, "Daddy, guess what? And he said, "What is it, Patty?" I said, "I'm in jail." "In jail? For what?" I said, "Well, I've been arrested in the sit-in movement." "Oh, oh that's okay." And then he said, "talk to your mama." I said uh oh. And she burst out in tears. And that was my one phone call.

Interviewer: Why do you think she burst out in tears?

Hoytt: Because in those days when a black girl went to jail you were exposed to any and everything. You could be raped; you could be beaten, you could be tortured, they had no idea what to expect and that was I think what was going through her mind. Her best friend later told me that she went over to her house, they lived two doors apart, and she had to be consoled by her friend, she said "I just, I just don't know what to say about Patty, she just has a mind of her own, she's in jail, what am I going to do?" So her friend Aunt Bill (12:04) consoled her, and she did survive.

Interviewer: So that very famous photo of Lonnie King and you and Dr. Martin Luther King and then Blondean behind him. You mention the look on your face, and some of my students have interpreted that look as just steely determinism, and some of my students have interpreted that look as just righteous indignation.

Hoytt: Both.

Interviewer: Both.

Hoytt: And that's because of my background, in my book, I think my working title is Daughter of the Revolution. I come from a long line of revolutionaries and black activists in their own realm. And growing up in Tuskegee during the civil rights days that people don't know that much about the fact that we fought against gerrymandering and because of the legal battles that were fought with the Tuskegee Civic Association and the mass meetings I used to attend as a child and Martin Luther King was one of our speakers, the legal documentation led to the Supreme Court's decision on the Voting Rights Act. It was not just the march across the

bridge in Selma; it was the legwork and the brains and skill of Tuskegee people. So that was in my background, the Montgomery Boycott was going on pretty much at the same time. And my parents would take my sister and me to Springfield, Ohio in the summer and we'd spend the whole summer with our grandparents, Reverend and Mrs. Smith. My granddaddy was a Choir Director and a minister, so we had activities all summer long and had a good time. But, on the trip, if we didn't take the train, well if we took the train it was segregated, but if my parents drove... there were no facilities for black people until you got maybe up the Cincinnati if even then. It was a long trip. It was quite embarrassing and humiliating, and I'm just going to say this, to have to open both doors and squat down and relieve yourself. And inevitably you got a drop on your socks or on your tennis shoes or whatever you were wearing, but that's what we had to endure. And I just didn't like that. And then the idea of these signs that said, "Whites Only," and I remember the Montgomery Train Station because we did take the train sometimes going to Springfield or coming back. And the train station just appeared to be so beautiful, I look at it now, and it was not, but it appeared that way. There were marble floors and chandeliers and gold looking trimmings, but we couldn't go in there. It was a spacious facility, but on the other side, there was a very little place where people were cramped in because it seems like there were more black folks on the train than white. The benches were hard, the water fountains were dirty, the toilets were nasty, and it just left you with an impression that, "this is good and you were bad." And I would not accept that -- and our teachers, our parents, our churches all instilled in us that, "you are as good, probably better than, anyone else and don't you forget it." And so we had that spirit here in Tuskegee and when the opportunity came to do something, and being in jail for six months seemed like a small price to pay if it was going to move us toward freedom. And so that was the look on my face, and I mean that to this day, I would not change that for anything.

Interviewer: So you were in jail I think through the 24th, so you were not at Sister's Chapel the night they had that big prayer service for you all. Do you remember anything about that or hearing anything about that at all? I know that there were several ministers and Spelman students who had not gone to the sit-in, and at Sister's Chapel they gathered and had this big prayer service and sang songs and called out your names and really were.

Hoytt: What?

Interviewer: And so you weren't there, you were one of the last ones released I think on the 24th. And so, do you have any thoughts or experiences with

friends who may be supported you in that way who maybe didn't go to jail but maybe supported you in other ways?

Hoytt: Well, my friend Blondean, well she was in jail with me. But Betty told me recently because I just started asking people, "Where were you, what did you do," because I thought everyone was like me but they were not. So Betty said she came down the next day, she had volunteered but she was not arrested until the next day. And of course, Phyllis stayed at the school, and she helped, she worked. And I spoke with some classmates at our 55th reunion, and I said, "Well, did you all, what did you all do during the sit-ins?" And one girl said, "I prayed for y'all," and I said, "You did what?" And she said, "I prayed for y'all because my daddy told me that he would lose his job if I went down there and got arrested." And these were girls from the city and they evidently, the group that I was with, that was what they did. They were very supportive, but they were not going to jail.

Interviewer: And Herschelle said something very similar when she was talking with us. Because what she, she said it was harder for the Spelman students who were from the city of Atlanta to openly participate because their parents would lose their jobs.

Hoytt: That's right. And those who did... I think they were braver than we were because they had to fight their parents and do what they felt was right. But now when we got to jail, we were moved from the city to the Fulton County jail, that was an experience I will never forget.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Hoytt: Oh goodness, I can still hear the clanging of those doors. I could still hear that. They would just clang shut with such a loud, brutal noise that let you know that you aren't getting out of here until we say so and they would clang shut, and there were bells that would ring. But the most humiliating thing was the toilets. There were no partitions. The showers, there were no partitions. So you have to do everything in front of everybody. In my book I kind of tweaked things to say that Blondean just freaked out, she could not take a shower with everybody looking at her. And so my roommate and I we kind of formed a barrier around her so that she could do that. But I mean it was still, I mean for a Spelman girl you're standing there totally nude in front of other people, and we were just sophomores, we were very pure and dainty, we were virgins. We had never shown our bodies to anybody, much less another woman.

Interviewer: Right. And there were other; it wasn't just the Spelmanites who were in there.

Hoytt: No, they were regular inmates.

Interviewer: You were in with regular inmates, you were in with people who were in there for violent crimes I would imagine.

Hoytt: Yes, the lady whose bunk was, whose bed was next to me had killed her husband. And she had become friends with one of the trustees, which was nice to know because a trustee would come and get her in the middle of the night and I guess they would go to wherever and she could get anything she had wanted. There was a wagon that would come around with snacks. And you had to have money. That's why when you said Norma, she had a receipt. She had money because the rest of us we didn't have much money to buy snacks we had to eat the food.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Hoytt: It was horrible. I think it was like oatmeal for breakfast and beans for lunch. It was not good food. But the inmates, the inmates had a nice attitude. They wanted to know why we were in jail. "What are nice college girls doing in here with us?" And we explained to them what we were doing, and they said, "oh." I know they were thinking that it didn't make much sense but if that's what you want to do and that's why you're in here, okay.

And there was one magazine in the day room, they had some tables and chairs, one magazine with no cover, I think it was a "true romance" kind of magazine, and it had been read so many times that it was quite ragged. And there was a jigsaw puzzle with two or three pieces left, and that was it for their entertainment, they had absolutely nothing. And by this time our books had been brought to us and so some of us tried to help inmates learn how to read better; they had rudimentary reading skills. And others of us taught them how to dance the Madison, and we kind of passed away the time. And then we talked, and we asked them about their lives and got to know them better. And there was one woman in particular that I remember because she had on some house shoes that were obviously not hers, she had a small foot in a large shoe and she just kind of shuffled along and I thought of it as a metaphor for her life, she was a small person in a big mess. But we were there for three nights and four days, and we thought we would be there much longer, and then the call came, they asked the leaders to go out to another room, and they had a meeting. We didn't know what the meeting was about, and of

course, we were interested. And when they came back, they said, "Well, they are going to let us out of jail." And they were very disappointed; they were very sorry about this. We were not. So they told us to pack up our things, and they opened the clanging doors, and there were buses waiting for us. We got on the busses, and they took us to Paschal's Restaurant.

Now if you know what Paschal's Restaurant used to be, I don't know what it is today. But that's where my parents would take me when they would come to pick me up at the end of school, or they would come to see me in a play, and you would have a shrimp cocktail, and then you'd have a steak and oh, boy. So we got to Paschal's Restaurant, and they had us in a big dining room and the fried chicken, the best in the world, was already on the table. Wow, we were so excited. But the leaders, they said, "You see there they tricked us, they knew that we were going to accept to leave jail, and they already had this prepared for us." And they were very upset. And that's why I say I was a foot soldier because I was happy to see that fried chicken.

Interviewer: But so, what was that like? It's hard for people in my generation especially to understand what that would have been like. To do what you did that one day at Rich's and that night in jail and then jail, jail, jail, and then expected them to just go back to being a college student.

Hoytt: We didn't think about it like that. In fact, we didn't start thinking about this until later. I think it was a traumatic event that we kind of pushed to the side of our minds and the more we thought about it, the more we thought, "You know what, we were young and very foolish." But if we had to do it again, I think we would.

Interview: Did you realize at the time how that one day at Rich's and what you did changed the whole presidential election and changed the course of history?

Hoytt: No. We did not realize that until we went to that reunion and Lonnie showed a video of one of the gentlemen who had worked with President Kennedy and he explained how that process brought about the election of JFK. We had no idea. And for, it, I already had great respect for Dr. King but when I realized that he knowingly put himself in jeopardy because he had some kind of a ticket and this was two strikes against him, and they sent him to Reidsville work farm and they probably planned to work him to death or kill him. And his wife called Robert Kennedy, and he convinced his brother to speak out and let Martin out of jail. And as a

result, the black folks voted for him, and he became the president. But no, we never knew that until quite recently.

Interviewer: And that's one of the things that's so interesting to me about that one pivotal act of nonviolence. To feel included, to say that we just want to be served just like any other human being, we just want to be here, how that one act changed history. And you were so young. And that one act.

Hoytt: We were young, but we were old souls. And we carried the struggles of our parents; we had seen them humiliated. I had seen my mother stopped by a policeman, for really nothing, usually on the trip to Montgomery. A state trooper would stop her and ask for her license. And on her license, she had to have her full name, and so her name was Woodia. And he would look at the license, and he would call her by her first name, "Now, Woodia, don't you know you ran that red light, that you ran that stop sign?" And he continued to call her by her first name which back in those days was very humiliating. And on her cards that she used to shop at Rich's or at Montgomery Fair which is now Dillard's, she would use the initials of my daddy, E.L Pryce, so that they could not call her by her first name.

So we had experienced that, and we had a kind of a rage that was controlled. And then at Spelman, we sang songs in chapel, that I realize now, and I use excerpts from some of these songs that they gave us the spiritual courage to take this action. "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide." And we sang those songs, and they became a part of us. And, but like I said, I did not realize the significance until, well I noticed that my father kept that picture up on the baby grand piano in his living room and every time someone came to visit him or to come to buy a piece of his art, he would point to that picture and brag about his daughter who was arrested in the Atlanta Student Sit-ins. So I said, "That must have been important to him, let me do more research about what really happened."

And that's when I started writing my book because I remember some things very vividly and other things I forgot. But then Blondean would fill me in, or Betty would tell me about, Blondean told me about going first to the snack bar, I had blanked that out. And the more we talked, but there are so few of us left now that what you're doing is very important. I really, really appreciate this because I would tell my students and they would be amazed because they thought that the world as it is today, well as it was prior to 2016, they thought it had always been that way, and they wondered why our generation hadn't done more.

Interviewer: They didn't know, they didn't know what you did.

Hoytt: They didn't know. And we didn't validate what we had done because we didn't know how important it was. And being in Tuskegee, people don't, we know about Tuskegee's history and contributions but not too much about Atlanta and the student sit-ins there.

Interviewer: So tell me a little bit more about your book. I'm interested, what are you writing?

Hoytt: I'm writing a story of my life and making connections between the lives of my grandparents, and my parents, and my Great Aunt Cora and showing how I'm trying to show how what some of their actions led to my actions and on the cover I hope to use that iconic photograph.

Because they told stories. I'm from a family of storytellers, and all of their experiences were transformed, were transferred to me. My grandmother would tell me about her father and his history, and I didn't know much about my paternal grandparents until my father was pretty much on his deathbed and he began to talk. And all of this information came forth, and I knew nothing about it, and still, I knew very little about my paternal grandmother. I knew she was a Creole from Burdenville, Louisiana and that his father had started a pharmacy in Lake Charles. And we still have family in Lake Charles. And then he moved his family from Lake Charles, his younger children to Los Angeles, and opened up two pharmacies in South Central L.A. And at the time was a very nice place to live so there were three Pryce's Pharmacies and that's quite a heritage.

I took my grandson back to Lake Charles a couple of weeks ago; we visited our cousin Dr. Frank Pryce. And he and his organizations and his friends were instrumental in getting a street named Pryce. And it goes from where the drugstore used to be, well the facility, the building is still there, all the way down to the lake. So when you go to Lake Charles, you can drive up the street named for my family, and it's a wonderful feeling. I love Lake Charles, and I have only been there three times in life. So that is part of the research, and I told you about my grandfather who was considered white but chose to be black. So I decided to reconstruct the history of why he would make such a decision, and I'm happy that he did because I wouldn't be here otherwise. But on my grandmother's side, there's quite a, in those backwoods of Louisiana, there was a lot of race mixing. So I had DNA and my daughter who is a WORD, she said, "Mother, you should have never had given them your DNA." And I said, "Now you tell me." And she said, "Now they can tailor make a disease just for you." I said, "okay." But in my DNA I am fifty, fifty-one percent

African and a few points uh, American, Native American, and the rest is Caucasian. And so I said, "Wait a minute, you mean, you mean I'm half-white?" I told my physician that, he just laughed. He's Nigerian; he said, "Mrs. Hoytt are you kidding me?" I said, "No."

Interviewer: Oh I love, that's funny.

Hoytt: It's very funny. And the way I had to tell him, I would not have said that, but I'm a cancer survivor. I am going into my third year, so I had shared that with him. And he said, "you have" whatever it is, "this is not the form that black women get," I said, "Well that's because I'm half-white."

But you know I think about things, I have become, well I've always been a religious person ever since I was a child. Because my grandmother, Mrs. Josie WORD Smith, would speak in Springfield. She was educated, and people would call on her as a speaker for their organizations. And she would take me with her, and I would open up, I would recite, I was four or five years old, I would recite a poem or Bible verses. And so they, my grandfather and mother taught me the books of the Bible and Bible verses. I grew up in the Sunday School up there. So I had been searching for God all my life, and I've been through various religions and denominations, and now I'm back in the Baptist Church. So I guess you could say I was looking for God in all the wrong places but He always had me. And one time my mother was driving in Springfield and her car stopped at a red light. And the light turned green, and the car would not start, and all the people were honking their horns, and I was still four years old. And I said, "momma, let us pray." And I said, "I will lift up thine eyes up to the hills for whilst cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord who made Heaven and Earth." And I said, "Momma, now start your car." And she did, and of course, the car took off.

Interviewer: And you were how old?

Hoytt: Four.

Interviewer: Four. So what you said earlier about you were an old soul?

Hoytt: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's so interesting.

Hoytt: And we are having a family reunion two weeks from today, and I'm very excited. When I go, they ask me to tell them the stories of the old folks, and now, of course, I'm one of them. But these were the ancestors, and

these stories were transferred to me by my maternal grandmother. And those stories are very dear to me because they go all the way back to the time of our enslavement. Even though, neither of my great grandfathers was enslaved. And I just kind of put that together recently because that makes a difference. And especially in Louisiana, they had WORD “free people of color,” and there were some of those in my family. And that gives them a certain spirit of independence and a continued thirst for freedom and that’s in me till this day. Because I tried to transmit that to my children and they say, “Momma, yes you did.”

Interviewer: That’s wonderful. So I think too that the importance of your book is that the research that you’re doing is keeping those stories alive for your great-grandmother, for your grandmother, for your mother, for all the women who transmitted those stories to you and you are keeping those stories alive in your book. That’s got to be wonderful.

Hoytt: And I have a cousin, I call her my baby cousin, in Los Angeles, we share our grandmother. That’s my grandmother, that’s her great-grandmother. And she’s on the same kind of mission, so we met at Lake Charles. We had never met before, just communicated online and we just had a wonderful time. We went to Franklin where our grandfather started a drugstore, and where he met my grandmother and her great-grandmother. And we were looking for the block of building that they used to own, but they were demolished. But I took pictures of some old buildings that looked like what they might have been. And she has the same kind of spirit that I have. And she’s more of an ancestry.com person than I am. And I have other relatives who I’m very; they’re the kind that go to the records rooms. We went in Franklin looking for property transactions. She could have started there all day but it was lunchtime, and I said, “We got to go, my grandson is hungry.” But yeah, I think it is important. And all of the work that my father has done and the fact that he taught us from an early age that Egypt was African and we should never forget the grandeur that our people once had. And that when you travel over there, you can still see and don’t let anyone let you think that you are inferior or that you have no history. And I remember coming back from Paris the first time at Spelman, and we had a philosophy teacher who was brand new, and she was scared of us. She would go into the classroom, and she would pull her desk all the way up to the chalkboard.

Interviewer: Oh no.

Hoytt: Oh yes. And so she stood there, and she was quite petite as we would say and she would just look at us, and she would say, “What’s wrong with you Negroes, you haven’t contributed anything to society!” Well, she said

that to the wrong person. And the other girls just kind of hung their heads in agreement, that's what we were taught.

I had went to Paris, and I had met the Great Cheikh Anta Diop, and I didn't know who he was. He was in this little cafe, and African students were just all around him. "Professor, would you sign this?" And I said, "Who is that old man?" And they told me, "That is Cheikh Anta Diop." Now if you don't know who that is, if you've never heard of him, oh you need to look him up. He, his research was designed to prove that the Ancient Egyptians migrated from Egypt and went to other parts of Africa and they brought with them some of their language, some of their skills. And so we are all descended from the ancient Egyptians, and therefore we can claim all of their marvels that they constructed and all of their science, all of their literature. He was trying to get his doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1941 I believe, and he was denied. They said, "We can't support this. You are not about to tell us, and we are the French, and we have those colonies over there, that y'all are Egyptians? Oh no, Egyptians are white, and that is the end of it." So they did not give him his degree. He went back, and it must have been in '61 or '62 when I was there the first time. He went back, and they did accept his dissertation, but they did not give him a high enough grade so that he could become a college professor. But his works, my father had one of his books, and he believed that. And so, in his paintings he has the symbolism from Egypt, he visited Egypt at least twice in his lifetime, and all of that was put in. So you did not have a sense of inferiority even though it was enforced upon you knew within yourself that "uh-uh." And other classmates didn't know all that, but still, they all had the same feeling of worth.

Interviewer: And just to talk about your father for a sec. The artwork that I have seen in your home really draws on that Egyptian iconography but also Ethiopian iconography. Which I noticed in that beautiful copper plate where it had St. Marks, I think?

Hoytt: Yes, and you saw?

Interview: Yes and that was inspired by the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia he visited.

Hoytt: Yes, that's right. And when he saw the icons and the paintings on the walls, where all of the apostles, I'm not sure that they would make pictures of Jesus himself, but everyone had an Afro, and everyone had brown skin, and he said, "Oh, I like that!" And it doesn't really matter but some cases it does.

Interwar: Yes. And that was the inspiration for his art and in turn, especially the Egyptian iconography, and as a child you were inspired by that.

Hoytt: To my detriment. Because I was not good in math and so I would go to my dad, and I would say, "Dad, can you solve this problem?" And he was not good at math either so he would start going back talking about the ancient Egyptians who invented this and did that in mathematics. I still didn't learn anything. I tell my grandchildren to this day, I can multiply up to five, and that's it, and I say, "But you are going to multiply up to your fifteen's," and they just say, "Oh grandma." But I'm serious about that; you need to have a good background in math, science, and the arts.

Interviewer: And you taught French though, you were a French professor, yes?

Hoytt: Until a couple of weeks ago. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, at Tuskegee.

Hoytt: Yes, thirteen years. At the university, two years at the high school. The amazing thing is I still don't understand how I remembered the French I was speaking in Paris. Because there was a long hiatus where I was a stay at home mom, I was blessed to be able to raise my children; I homeschooled some of them. And then when we moved to Tuskegee, it was a situation where I had to get a job. So I found a job at the campus, and I heard about a program where they were teaching French to the faculty and staff who were going overseas. So I volunteered, I said, "hey, I can do this." And they gave me a little job, and at lunchtime, I would go and teach French. And I just continued, now I have French stations on my television so I could watch the movies and just listen. I let them play while I'm asleep so I can just absorb the French, and I just have a good time with that. And what I did which I think is just really amazing, I got one master's from Nova Southeastern, it was a distance program, it was an MBA. And I am not really an MBA. But it did turn out to be beneficial because when I married David he had this business and I had sense enough to keep good records so that he was able to do well when it came to Tuskegee. And one day in August of 2005 this is what happened. I had been a consultant for a head start, I've done all kinds of jobs. I was in between jobs, and I had my own school, I had an after school program for six years where I taught students how to pass the Alabama Exit Exam. Without that you didn't get a high school diploma, you couldn't go into the military, you couldn't go to college, you couldn't get a job. And I thought that was unfair so I had organized a school with students on the campus to teach young people to pass this exam, to do the ACT, the SAT, to read, write, compute. And I had to close that down because I wasn't

able to make enough money to pay the rent on the building that my husband owned. But in August of 2005, the phone rang. I'm unemployed now, and I was depressed. About as depressed as I could get because I'm an optimist, I'm in the Optimist Club too. The phone rang and said, "Mrs. Hoytt, can you come up here and teach French on the campus? Our teacher just left, and school opens in two weeks." I said, "Sure." Scared to death, I said, "Sure." And I took the job, and I loved it. I'm like, wow four classes and you teach two a day, and you have office hours, and then you can go home, oh I love this. So I took it, and it was just temporary, and I asked the department head, "What do I need to do to stay in this job?" And she said, "Well, Mrs. Hoytt you would at least need a master's in French or French Education." So I went to Auburn University, I was 65 years old when we had to go to Paris. I needed 18 hours in French. I took all of the undergraduate classes that I needed; I worked on my master's degree. Went to Paris, I remember standing at the consulate in Atlanta. And the clerk said, "Madame, (FRENCH PHRASES 47:40) Because they put your birthdate on everything on there. So she saw my birthday and wanted to know why I was going over there as a student because at 65 you had already retired years ago. And so she was not going to give me a visa. So I looked her in the eye and said, "Madame, do you speak English. She said, "FRENCH PHRASE." I said, "I'm going to keep my job." She said, "FRENCH PHRASE." I got my visa. We went to the Catholic Institute; I took three classes and one independent study. I got my 18 hours and made very high grades, which are 16, 17, 18, those are high grades in French- you don't get those, but I did. So that was a great achievement for me.

Interviewer: Absolutely it was. And it allowed you to have this amazing job where you were teaching French.

Hoytt: And my research was on the general **Thomas-Alexandre Dumas**, who was the father of Alexander Dumas who I had admired for a long time. But I didn't know that his father had been a general along with Napoleon. And in the books they will tell you that he served under Napoleon but not at first, he was of Haitian origin. And in my research, I learned a lot about the general and about the contribution of the black soldiers to the French Revolution. And that is part of what I do. And in my father's library, there are these books by J.A Rogers; you know who that is? The historian. And I asked my sister, "Why don't they consider him a historian," and she said, "Patty because everyone couldn't be black."

But he, he gave you the story of all of these people who were European, who were black and had made all of these contributions. And I just began to dig and found out about the general, Dumas and the Chevalier de Saint-Georges I call both of them my boyfriends and my students laugh.

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Hoytt: So that's a part of being an old soul I guess.

Interviewer: So I wanted to ask you one final question. And feel free to share anything you want and if you don't want to share that's okay too. But I wanted really to know your thoughts since you were in your own words a foot soldier of this important movement. And it really, it was a Civil right, but it was a human movement as well. I really wanted to know your thoughts on the progress of civil rights since 1960. If you just have any general emotion or thoughts or feelings about it. I would love to hear them.

Hoytt: Well, as I said, I was an expatriate until 1966. In '66 my daughter was born in Ethiopia. I came back here in '68, in October. And so many things had happened. Malcolm had been killed, Martin, both of the Kennedys. And I said if things are happening back home, it's time for me to go. So I said, "I'm going back to get a Master's degree at Howard." And my husband provided the funds for my ticket, and I'm sitting in the air-in the airplane at the Ethiopian Airlines, and my daughter was two years old, and her seat was here, but she wanted to sit in my lap. So the plane waited on the tarmac for about an hour, they just packed people in there. And so the stewardess said, "Can I put someone in this seat?" She's speaking Amharic; I speak a little Amharic, kitchen Amharic. I said, "No, that's my daughter's seat. You can't put anyone in there." I was angry by that time I had had enough of being a foreigner, and I realized what it meant to be an American, and I was going home. And we flew back, and I spent time with my sister-in-law in New York City. She sent a limousine, she worked at the Organization of African Unity, and she sent a limousine to pick us up. And then I flew to Montgomery, and my parents met us at the airport, and coming from the airport, there was a Jack's Restaurant, and they said, "Oh, we are going to stop here and have a sandwich." And I said, "What? We can go in there?" And they said, "Yes, where have you been?" And that's when it dawned on me that everything had changed over here. And you know once you've been overseas for even a short time and you come back and try to explain what you have experienced to other people, they don't care. But you realize that you have missed things that happened while you were away and you have to reconstruct those six years, so it was a new experience for me to be in an integrated society. And it was wonderful. And that's when I began to think; I didn't know how much Atlanta had contributed at that time. I just knew I had done a little bit. But for everything to be integrated and even the schools and Tuskegee, it was, and it still is, a good thing. The problem is that we have allowed society to continue to impose the spirit of inferiority in our

young people. Inferiority in one sense and superiority in others and we've got to overcome that. And I think that with people like you and people like me and others, we will eventually, but it is an uphill climb now because the tables have turned. But they've turned before, and people my age look at these times and said, "Well, we've been through tough times before, we can get through this." But for young people it's different. They don't know hardship. And they think that everything is going to be alright but not necessarily. We know that things can change, the Supreme Court can make one decision that will change your entire life. We've been there, and it may happen again. And we have to be strong enough to help this young generation get through this and bring about another change in this nation. And I think we have to do it. So I'm very optimistic.

Interviewer: Such wonderful words.

Hoytt: Really?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hoytt: And I watch television.

Interviewer: And you're still an optimist!

Hoytt: I'm an MSNBC watcher in the morning when I wake up. And I'm a little bit upset because now they seem like they have to have a FOX News person on the MSNBC and I'm like, "look, if I wanted to watch them, I can flip to Fox News." And another thing that infuriates me is "Take a listen." No, I don't want to take a listen, so I flip the channel when it's time to hear our lovely President. But we will survive. And I want to say that you all are really impressive. I love you guys I don't want you to ever think about white, black anymore because we are human beings, we are in the human race, and that's what counts. So don't you feel bad about anything anymore and I won't feel bad about anything. So I just want to thank you, I'm so, I'm exhilarated to have met you.

Interviewer: I am blessed and honored to have met you, and I thank you so much for just sitting with us and just talking and telling us, and telling the world because this is going on KSU's digital archives, the HBCU's are partnering with us on this so this is something, your stories, they need to be told. So I'm just, I'm exhilarated about your book, I'm excited about your book, and I hope that when you come back when you come to Atlanta for homecoming that you will be a speaker on a panel for us and that you will be able to tell those stories again. Thank you so much.