

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH DAPHNE D. DELK

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Interview with Daphne D. Delk
Conducted by Jessica Drysdale and Jay Lutz
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JD: To begin, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background, where you grew up, where you went to school?

DD: My name is Daphne Darnell Delk, and I grew up in Marietta, Georgia, a suburb of the great metropolitan Atlanta. Now, at that time we didn't know Atlanta as we know it today. I grew up in a city that I thought was pretty, not sleepy, but comfortable. There was an atmosphere that was aptly apparent based on the black population and the white population. Growing up we knew the differences. We were aware of the differences and I think early on through those that came before me that were educated in my family, they always reiterated to me what was important and what was going to make me successful in life. I thank God for having those guides coming along because it sort of prepared me for what was ahead. Growing up in the community that was sort of, at that particular time, very rural and there wasn't a lot of, as they say now, citified attempts at getting information.

I will start with where I started out and that was in elementary. We had some very good teachers and at that time the black population of teachers would either go off to universities and colleges close by and they were educated and would come back to the community and share whatever it was that they had specialized in. We had those who were very proud of what they had accomplished, because at that particular time, that was like a prominent position for blacks, being schoolteachers and being able to give back to the community, I think in some respects, besides the Sunday morning preacher. The teachers were pretty high profile, especially for us aspiring blacks, that was one of the positions that we looked forward to doing. The other one was in the nursing field. The nurses were pretty high profile.

There was only one black doctor in the community and that was Dr. [Wilburn] Weddington. He came to us from somewhere else. I'm not very sure of his origin, but he was the only black doctor at that time in Marietta proper. I went to school with his daughter, and he was one of those who didn't accept less than the best. His daughter's name was Patricia and we often played together and talked about what we wanted to aspire to be.

I remember some of the other community members who were involved in organizations in the black community and we would look to that as moving forward. Never, I think as I was coming through, I never really thought anything about, as we called it the "white community" at that time, other than we were two different entities operating individually. Being a part of where I was, I was trying to get on with the business of doing better. I wanted knowledge, I wanted more and as I grew in school and went from elementary

level to the junior level and then finally getting to high school, in the ninth grade I realized that our books were not enough for me. It didn't matter if it was enough for the next person. I was reading these books and I would look at the years and I would go, "This information is not going to get it for me." I don't know where that came from in me, but it was something that touched off a different direction life-wise. I wanted information; I wanted to be the best person I could be. It had nothing to do with who I was as an individual but inwardly I wanted to be the best that I could be. I knew that at that moment I needed to get what I needed. Now, where that was coming from I don't know. When we're called to do a thing there's an inward drive and that drive was letting me know that, "Yes, you can do things but you're going to have to reach for them." I began questioning. I began to ask questions about our resources. I began to ask questions about the books from the teachers, from the principals, "Were we getting the best? Was it comparable to the schools that were in the white communities? Were we getting the same books?" That's when I was told "no," and I said, "Why can't we?" I began to ask my mother to make sure she went to the PTA meetings because I wanted her to be my spokesperson. I wanted her to know that there was something that we needed that we weren't getting and to ask these questions in their meetings. That's when it started.

There was a lady in our community who, at that particular time, was considered what they call today a hairdresser. She was working out of her home. She had a portion in the back of her house, Mrs. Katherine Grady. When we would go over to her she got all the news in the community because she was talking to all the different people that would come through her to get their hair done. The conversations in that room were always so interesting. I would go to visit her daughter just to hear those conversations. As I was sitting in there one evening I asked her, I said, "How is it that we can get the same books in our school that they have in the white communities?" I think her answers may have been, "Well, baby, you know this is a different time. That's a huge challenge. It ain't going to happen." I said, "Hm, okay." I went away and her daughter and I, Treville Grady, who was the other young lady who went in with me in that first year, we started talking. I said, "You know, why can't we apply to that school? Why can't we go there and get what we want?" She said, "You know, you always dream big." I said, "Always. But I think we can get this accomplished if we stick together." So, we kept pushing and we went to her mother and we said, "Look, is there a way that you can get information as to how we can attend this school?" She said, "Yes, I think I can." So, she asked around and, of course that's when we found out about the qualifications. We had to have a letter to apply, we couldn't participate in any of the activities the first year, and we had to have a physical exam. I thought, "Okay, we accomplished all of those things, at that particular time, and it took a while." As we started to make noise, different people in our community began to question and they wanted to know why we even wanted to think about going. There were a couple of people who were very uncomfortable with the idea and they began to express this to Mrs. Grady. I think when I went and I finally said something to my mom and my dad, I said, "I want to go to Marietta High School." They said, "Why?" I said, "Because I think that I'm getting an inferior education at Lemon Street." They said, "How do you know?" I said, "Well, because I think our books are outdated, number one. Number two, I think our resources are not up-to-date and I'm not sure if our teachers are getting the same education as their teachers." They thought about

it, they talked about it; they talked with some of the other family members. I remember my father coming back to me and he said, "Baby, is this something that you really want to do? Because there's a huge wall out there that you're going to run into." I said, "Well, I want to try." So with that being said, he said, "Okay, I'm with you." I think my mother was afraid but she said, "If this is something you want to do we'll be with you." It was almost as if it was a destination that was already predestined. The way that things came together, I couldn't have imagined, I couldn't have known that, at that particular time, I would be doing this and I would be going to this school in the white community. We got everything together that we needed, we submitted it to the principal at that time, I remember Mrs. Edna Lee was the counselor. She talked a lot with us, she gave us information on how we were to conduct ourselves coming in, because we were considered transfer students. There were a lot of rules that you could not participate in activities, you couldn't get in any trouble, and there was something else that she told me and I said to her . . .

JL: Do you know who came up with these rules?

DD: It came from the school, that's all we knew. We never knew who actually enforced them. As I look back, I remember that there were rules around the physical education, football area, basketball, to keep kids from transferring because they were better or being recruited by different schools. So, I'm assuming we came in under those guidelines. As I look back on things and I'm thinking, "Well, you know, they weren't really out of line doing that." I think the biggest obstacles that we faced were in our own community. I remember going to the principal at that time, who was Mr. Woods and he called me in the office and he said, "You sure you want to do this? What's wrong with our school?" I said, "Mr. Woods, nothing. There is absolutely nothing wrong with Lemon Street except I feel that we can be a better school if we have better materials. I feel if our books are updated we can produce better students and if I can make that difference then I'll do it. This is all me. This has nothing to do with my parents. It has nothing to do with anybody in the school. This was a decision that Treville Grady and I came up with and this is what we want to do." They just assumed that somebody was putting us up to it. That wasn't the case at all. It was a dream that we put into action.

After we got going and we started rolling toward it, before we knew it the first day of school was upon us and my father took me to the school. I can remember before then there were meetings and my pastor, Reverend R.L. Johnson at Zion Baptist Church, he came and met with my family. We prayed and he said that "Whatever it is that you need, if you are afraid." I said, "I'm not afraid. You guys, I don't know what it is, but this is something I've got to do. I don't know where it's coming from but trust me, I'm not afraid." So, I'm in the first day of school and I'm sitting, I go into the school, I was given an entrance by the school personnel. "You will come this way." And I'm assuming that was because there was security in terms of police and detectives at the school. In fact, the first day of school, as I was told, never knew, there were undercover cops sitting to the left, right and the back of me. I never knew that until maybe a year later. I was talking to Mrs. Lee and she said, "You know, there really wasn't anything that was going

to happen to you in the classroom. Now, past the classroom, we were a little skittish but in the classroom you were sitting surrounded by cops.” I said, “Wow.”

JL: What was your emotion the first day? Were you afraid?

DD: Apprehension. I was frightful. I’m not going to say I wasn’t. This was a whole new world for me. It was different but it was one in which I felt I had to go into. I wasn’t even afraid in the sense that I thought people would harm me. I was more afraid of how I would measure up. “Will I be able to keep up? Will I be able to deal with them in terms of how much they already know, how far ahead of me are they? They’re getting magazines in their homes; we don’t get that, so I will be behind.” That was my greatest fear.

I talked to Treville and we discussed some things and we had our funny moments. We had moments where we said, “Well, we do know how to run, so we can run real fast if something really happens.” We would break up over a little situation like that and her mother was very supportive. I have to give my hat off to her and I went to her many times and told her how very appreciative I was of her backing because she stood up for us when others in the community didn’t want to touch it because they were afraid of the repercussions. So, Mrs. Katherine Grady was a real proponent to making sure that we made it in. What I didn’t know was that my friend and playmate, Treville was not going to be there with me the whole school year. After we had our physical exams, within the second week of being in school, she had to bow out because she was pregnant. So, Mrs. Lee called me in and she said, “Do you still want to do this?” I told her, “Yes.” I said, “I have no intentions. I’m even more determined now.” She would call me in every so often and say, “How are things going?” “Doing fine.” She said, “I just don’t get you.” I said, “I’m going to be fine. This is going to be.”

I remember walking down the halls and sometimes the halls would separate, people would just fly up against the wall to let me pass. In my mind I was thinking, “Hm, at least they’re acknowledging that I’m coming through and they’re not doing other things to me.” I used to get the occasional paper ball or people would spit in my path. They would move away if I sat down at a table in the lunchroom. In the classroom they would move if . . . [show of emotion]

JL: Do you want a second ma’am? [tape off]

I think when you’re in an environment that you’re not used to and people are treating you differently, you don’t realize the difference until you understand the motives. I had to understand that it wasn’t all about me. It was about the differences that they were not used to. I wasn’t used to a lot of things that I saw but I had to deal with it. That was their way of dealing with it. I understood that. I shared that with Mrs. Lee and I told her, she said, “Well, how is that affecting your school work?” I said, “It doesn’t affect my school work. It lets me understand in my mind that it’s not the socialization I’m seeking, I’m seeking the education which is more important and I’ve got to get that message to them

that I'm not so much wanting to be them or be a part of them as much as I want to be able to compete with them in a world that may not give me the same opportunities as they have." I think once I got that down in my mind I was able to deal with the little things that came along. I would smile and I would go on amazingly there were students who would see that and knew that it was real and they would come to me and say, "Don't worry about them." They would sit with me in the cafeteria. They would come after school or if there was something to discuss with the schoolwork, they would come and say, "Hey, let me show you this." Or "Do you understand?" Or, "You did a good job." Or, "I like the comments you made in class." I began to win people based on that. It was purely based on how I gravitated toward the education portion of being there and how convicted I was to get an education and not the socialization. I think those two things were very different and distinctive and when it was realized by the masses, "She's real, she's here for a reason and this is not to be a part of us. She's not trying to come in and take over and be with us, she really came to get the book portion." I think once they got that they started to come around.

Diane Little, I'll never forget her, one of the smartest students I think in most of my classes. She was such a scholar that it didn't bother her to deal with me as a black person. She dealt with me on a scholarly level making sure that you're okay. She would walk with me to classes which you know, really, that really set a tone for me. I'll never forget her and I thanked her as we grew in school and I gravitated toward the senior year. We would often have conversations about that when I first got there and I let her know. I said, "I really appreciate what you did for me. You made me understand that people are people and I know where you're coming from." It was examples of random kindness like that that just gave me more momentum to be the best that I could be coming through. The teachers that wouldn't let up, that were relentless and didn't give in because I was the only one. They wanted me to do it. And in order for me to do that they had to stay tough and I realized that. Math teachers, history teachers, Mr. [Philip L.] Secrist, he would put stuff in front of me and say, "You know, this is what you're going to need out there and it's only going to make you better." Because of him I reached the heights I thought I never could reach.

JD: Do you think the education that you received at Marietta met your expectations?

DD: More than, more than. It prepared me for a whole world out there that I didn't know about. Getting to college I was able to run with the best. My areas of specialty in college became the sciences. Marietta opened up that mindset to reach for stuff that wasn't the norm and to try something different, think outside the box, the analytical skills expanded. It taught me not to fear and I think that was one of the biggest lessons that I learned that if you're going to achieve in life, you can't fear that which is unknown. You have to reach for it, try it on, if it fits, God Bless you. If it doesn't, you've got to try a little harder. Those were the things that got me through school and fueled me on to learn all that I possibly could.

JD: That's an experience you don't think you would have had had you stayed at Lemon Street?

DD: No, because I would have been in a group that they would have had expectations for me to do good. “That’s the Delk girl, she’s going to do good.” There would have been no challenges, no, nothing that I would have had to really stretch brain cells for. So, yes, I think this allowed me to compete in a world that’s diverse to understand how other people think, how they live. I mentioned in the article that I wrote for the Pitchfork that as the first in that classroom I try to realize how different were these students from me and how much difference was there that they were going to bring in the classroom. There was never the fear that I couldn’t do what they were doing, the fear was, “Will I be able to stay up with them because they’re ahead of me?”

JL: Did you know any of them before that first day?

DD: Never. Nobody. Walked in just as blind as a bat, not knowing, never having seen. We were not active in the different communities. We stayed our distance; they stayed their distance. We didn’t play together; we grew up knowing that there were barriers. Back during those years, there were different jobs that were available for Blacks, and my mother worked for a family and that family was the Colquitts. He was an insurance broker and very prominent in the community. He had two daughters, and I think, in fact, one of his daughters is in the insurance business today, Cathy Colquitt. But other than that, there was no connection. There was none. We knew them because occasionally, when they would bring my mother home, the girls would be in the car but that was it. We would see each other as different. I mean, kids do that now. They’re going to look on each other and say, “Oh, she’s different from me in some ways, but not really.” The classroom was the equalizer. I was able to make the classroom my, not necessarily war zone, but my zone to get in there and to just deal like they did. If it meant I had to read more, I read more. If it meant I had to study harder I did that. If I had to ask the teacher to stay after school, I would do that. Whatever it took to becoming what I felt was important for me to be that individual who was successful in life, which brings you to a point where you have no fear.

JD: After you integrated, what sort of reaction did you receive from the African-American community? Were they still hesitant?

DD: I think after the first year they realized that it really had occurred, it happened, I was still standing. I wasn’t shot, I wasn’t hanged, I was still going back to school. Some of the other parents then began to question, because they wanted their children to have the same education. Some I think in the second year, I think there were about four or five more that came over.

JL: Had any of them approached you for advice?

DD: Yes. One was my neighbor up the street, John Patterson. His father, we used to gather at his house and his father had musical instruments and we used to play. I played clarinet when I was at Lemon Street and John played a trumpet and his father played a trumpet. His grandmother played the piano, so we would get up in the evenings and gather

together and play these musical instruments. His daddy would ask me, "How are you doing? Are you holding up okay? Are you afraid or are you more comfortable now?" We would talk about it in people's living rooms, we would talk about it because they had, that was during that time that King was still very active in the Civil Rights Movement in different areas and he would say, "I think John is wanting to come." I said, "Well, I want everybody to come. It's not that I'm feeling that lonely but I think there's a lot that they can gain from the information." I would talk about the things that we did in class, what I was learning and he made the decision to let John go that next year. John was just a natural when it came to mathematic wonders. He scored so high on the SAT that it made me jealous because I thought, "I got you over here, guy." But he did real good and he earned his acceptance with his group that he eventually befriended and the respect came from the fact that they saw the ability of the students that came over and myself making it happen, doing good in school, getting the A's and the B's and competing on the same level. I think that was more important to us, the competitive edge than anything. We used to get together at lunchtime and I said, "Guys, this is where we are. This is what we want to do. We just want to be able to compete and to go out there in life and be good productive human beings." So it was comradeship. It was staying focused to getting the best that we could get to reaching heights in different areas. We weren't always in the same classes, we were in different niches. I would see them blossom with different student and different areas and I mean, it would just give you a good feeling to know that we were doing something that was going to help people. They knew that if I stayed at Lemon Street I may have been a statistic here in Marietta at that particular time.

JL: After you started attending Marietta High School, did you ever speak to Professor Woods at Lemon Street again or was that the last contact?

DD: That was the last contact I had when I first went. After I finished school I did get a chance to speak to him again. He congratulated me, he thanked me. He realized that times bring changes that sometimes people can't control. It's inevitable, it's something that's going to be and I think his idea was that if we were trying to move from Lemon Street to Marietta High school he wasn't doing a good job. And I had to let him know, I had to say, "Mr. Woods, it wasn't about you and the kind of job you were doing here as principal. It was about my dreams in life. I want you to understand that it wasn't an affront to the school or the black school. But now it's one school and these kids will have opportunities to do whatever they want to. If they don't, it's because they don't want to." He looked at me and he said, "You know, at that particular time I didn't really know what to think. I didn't think anyone was brave enough to do that. When I saw you, I just knew we were getting ready to go through pure hell and I didn't know if I was ready for it or if you were ready for it." I said, "Look at us now." So, yes, you do come across people from time to time who will thank you and say, "We're so proud of you." And I said, "No, I'm proud to know that others will be able to get whatever they need in this life." And so on and so on, the gift that keeps on giving.

JL: When you leave, the end of your senior year, how many other students had begun transferring from Lemon Street to Marietta High School?

DD: Oh, wow. There were many students that came over and completed, actually graduated from Marietta High School. In fact, I was named “Girl of the Year” in my senior year and I became quite the jokester in school. It’s how I actually accommodated some of what was going on. I tried to soften the fact that there was a difference there, not a physical difference, but a skin difference and because of that when I heard students around me laughing at what I said it made me feel good to know that there is something that we can use to bring together unity. It was nothing in my senior year to walk down the hall and get comments from students as they were passing or we were changing classes. Or, “What did you make on this test” Or, “How did you do this?” It was a whole different world. I was in this world now. There were no differences. I was a student, they’re students. It’s not about color any more. It’s about what you’re doing and how you’re making a difference.

JL: When do you think that change took place?

DD: I think it took place after my sophomore year. I think going into my junior year, because of the grades, because of the impact in some of the classrooms, just staying focused and showing up and being the best that I could be, the other students were looking at that and they were saying, “Well, she’s real, she’s not just here just because. She is trying to make something out of herself.” I think it happened after the sophomore year; going into the junior year was a little more comfortable for me. There was a point at which during the first year I was sort of afraid on some days to go to school based on some things that I had seen or heard the day before. I had to realize that this kind of stuff is going to happen and I would talk to people in and around the community. I said, “This is silly. That would have happened at Lemon Street. You have to get past that now. You’re already in too deep, you’re doing great, you’ve got to find a way.” And I would talk to people about it.

JD: Were you receiving threats or bullying? Is that what you’re referring to?

DD: Oh, that was a daily thing. There was a bomb threat every day, every day at 2:00 o’clock I could expect a bomb threat and the police would be there.

JD: Was it from the students or was it from someone else?

DD: No, it was from outside. That got to be the joke of the student body after a point they would come in, especially in the junior year, they’d say, “Okay, we need bomb threats today so we can be out of school. It’s pretty outside.”

JL: Half a day!

DD: “Half a day, compliments of you Daphne!” But that used to be the soup of the day.

JD: Did that continue throughout your high school career?

DD: That continued for about the first year and a half and then it just sort of faded away. The first year and the first couple of months it was really strong but after then it was like it just got to be habit. You would think that that would have been enough to make me skittish or to say “I don’t want to do this any more,” but it wasn’t because I knew it wasn’t real. There was always something in my psyche that would say, “Don’t worry about that, I got you.” I think it was that guiding force that kept me going because it wasn’t even about the principal’s office, the guidance counselor’s office. They were constantly trying to make sure everything was okay and it was almost like at one point they were saying to me, “You don’t need us. You got this thing. You’re okay. We’re in your way.” I said, “No, I understand what you’re trying to do but I’m good. I’m good to go.” Because in my mind this force was always saying, “You’re going to be all right. There’s nothing that’s going to happen to you, just keep it going.” I think because of that I was able to just focus. I think the biggest shock came with not being able to have my co-partner with me. I think once I got past that I was okay. That scared me. Not the fact that I was going to school but her not being there with me. Once I got past that it was move forward.

JL: How close during that period did you come to saying, “I’ve had enough?”

DD: I think my mother asked me that one evening. She said, “We can stop this any time.” I said, “No. I’m going to do this now for me and Treville. If I quit at this point then it would have been for naught.” I don’t know what she was thinking about, I had no idea she was ever that close to a boy, I don’t know any of this but right now I know I’ve got to continue. I’ve got to make this happen.” They tried to pull me at that point but that was just the second week into the school year.

JL: Did she continue to support you through that first year?

DD: Treville?

JL: Yes.

DD: She would often ask me “Was everything going okay?” She constantly apologized and I said, “Life happens. It was meant to be this way.” Then she kind of bowed out. I haven’t seen her in years. I will call her mother and ask about her. We saw each other maybe after college, I saw her then and I asked how things were going and I think she was trying to do something career-wise but I didn’t get too much into it because she still would have faced the shame. I told her, “You’ve got to get past that. Get on with your life and get past that.” I haven’t seen or heard from her in years.

JD: When you graduated, how did it feel to be the first?

DD: It was awesome. The other students that came over with me, it was like it was unreal. I mean, you could see the tears, you could see the parents in the audience and it was like a feeling that you think back from this point to the graduation cap and as all that was happening. Mr. Secrist was a big part of that. He says, “Okay, now that you’re going to

be wearing the blue and the white and you're going to be marching down the aisles we'll probably never see you again." I said, "Well, maybe you'll hear about me." So, it was something. A lot of the people in my community, it was like one whole episode of congratulations, parties, they wanted to let me know how much they appreciated my efforts and that they were glad that their kids came along and went on and completed. It was just the fuel that you needed, it was that rocket force that you constantly want to hear about in life, making an impact, making something different, helping people who can't help themselves, giving back when you know you've had the opportunity for something. It's just the fact that you can give and help somebody else. That has kind of been my philosophy in life.

JL: In 1966, while you were at Marietta, you started to get African-American teachers there.

DD: Yes.

JL: And I'm assuming one of them was Mr. Walker?

DD: Yes.

JL: Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with him?

DD: I can't remember a whole lot but I do know that there was just so much pride and he was like, "We finally made it, we've got some teachers over here." There were several that stand out and I think just being able to watch them in the classrooms. I think the biggest excitement was to be able to walk past a classroom, look in and see Mr. Walker and I think there was the home economics teacher, Mrs. Ruby Williams, but to see her over there and to know that I was feeling homey; I was feeling like I was back in my environment to a degree, but yet I was being reinforced in the new environment because they had come to join me. I think that was amazing.

JL: Did they ever come to you and just talk about your role as being the first African American student and then maybe their role as being the first African American teachers?

DD: No, that was done in church. A lot of times there would be groups of people that would gather and discuss what occurred, what happened during that time, how was it talking to the students who were coming after me to get them to understand the necessity for an education, the need to focus and to want something badly enough that you'll stay no matter what the circumstances. Reaching heights that you never thought you could reach.

JL: Was there anyone, in particular, who supported you during your journey through Marietta High School?

DD: There were students and teachers that were very important to me, like I say, Mrs. Lee was very important. The principal at that time, I can't remember his name, but he was very supportive. I go back to the ones who are so very prominent in my mind: Diane Little, very inspiring.

JL: Mr. Secrist?

DD: Mr. Secrist will always stick out. But just an amazing cast of characters who don't actually know how much they mean to me at this point in life, even now because of what they did. They went out on a limb. Now, trust and know that at that particular time in history there were controversial groups all around Cobb County. The Klan was stationed in Cobb County. David Dukes had a headquarters in a house not too far from the school, down from the hospital on, I can't think of the name, it's a thoroughfare there right now. Church Street, it was Church Street. The danger that existed in other's minds was not the danger in my mind. I saw them, knew what the possibilities were but it never occurred to me that they would ever come, that we would ever clash. It was never there. They showed up, they came by the school, they would drive by. They were there on the days when the bomb threats were called in to the school. But there was never actual contact on the school campus or at my house or at any point when I was in an area that could have been considered unsafe. What happened at that time I'm not sure, but the fact that this thing was going to happen was moving away any adversity that might have been out there in the air because universally things happen and sometimes they're not always good things that happen but the negativity that could have been embedded in my mind never came. I was always positive about my direction, I always knew what I wanted, where I was going with this and how I was going to get there and I knew I had to reach the end point. Past that, the other stuff didn't matter. The Klan never mattered. The marches never mattered. Me coming on the campus at any time and maybe students wanting to have contact, never happened. I never gave them the opportunity to be combative, I think that was one thing. I never was in any controversial situations, I didn't allow myself. I was too busy trying to get the written word. What was important to me was important and for some reason there was this barrier that was around that kept me protected and that is why it is so important to thank those people who were there for me because I know they were part of it.

JD: After high school, were you involved in any civil rights activities?

DD: I talked about this with some student groups on the college campus. I left and went to school in Tennessee at Fisk University and there were a couple of groups that were, and I'm a real stickler about how things are formed and put together and if I don't feel that they have a positive outcome I don't want to be a part of it. Well, we were on a campus at Fisk during the time of when King was assassinated and that was in my freshman year at college. There was a hamburger stand that was not too far from our dormitory and on the night that he was assassinated some of the students were involved with outsiders who burned this hamburger stand down. I think when I heard about the students who did that it was very painful because I gave them a little bit more respect than they showed me in forming union with something that I didn't approve of. There were moments when I wouldn't participate because I knew better and when you know better you're supposed to do better. There were times when I felt that how they were going about something was the wrong way. They would always call me the median. At school I was the median. If they wanted to know what was the right thing to do or if they should go further they

would always come and consult with me in my dormitory room. “Well, what do you think about this?” Even if I gave my opinion and they didn’t like it they would say, “We knew you were going to say that anyway.”

JL: When you went to college did you meet anybody who had the same type of background, same history of being the first to integrate?

DD: There were some who went maybe in northern schools but it was different. They never had barriers. Let me put it like this, they broke the barriers based on them moving into a neighborhood but it wasn’t because they couldn’t. The doors were always opened, it’s just that they moved in a neighborhood that once was all white because of their parents making more money and they were able to enroll in the school, no constraints, no qualifications, nothing. You’re in the neighborhood then you can go to the school. I never met any one who was the first not in my class that would say that.

JL: Where did you live, when you lived in Marietta?

DD: I lived on Montgomery Street. I lived in a house and I had four brothers and a sister. I am next to the baby boy so I was the baby girl and I had a younger brother who went to Marietta High School. We’re all old now! We’re all still living but we’re all old now and we’ve all done things. I was talking to my oldest brother this morning and I said, “You’re the historian.” He’s doing our tree. “You’re the historian, so what is it that you think I can remember or you can tell me that I can’t remember that I did back then?” He said, “Well, you know, there were people who you didn’t even know about that were making sure that you were okay. People in the white community that were saying, ‘nobody needs to touch this little girl’ because they knew your daddy and your daddy worked with them in different capacities or he drove for them or he did certain things and they were just out there. You need to understand that there was a group of supporters that you will never really know that made sure you were safe at the high school.” I said, “Wow, you’re just now telling me.” He said, “Yes. They promised your dad that they would make sure you were okay.”

JL: Can you tell us a little bit about your dad?

DD: My father was a father figure for me, he was with the family. He and my mother stayed together, they separated for a couple of years and realized that wasn’t a good thing and then got back together but he was there most of my growing up years. My father went to Stanford; he did two years at Stanford. He was in World War II, he fought in the Battle of the Bulge, a very intelligent black man who I felt in a different time, given different circumstances, he would have aspired to greater levels. But in my mind he was bigger than life to me and part of why I was able to do this. He was very proud of me and both times he was able to see me graduate, high school and college. I think that just seeing that pride on his face was more than any gift I could have ever given him and he knew then that I was going to be all right in the world. He drowned, unfortunately, in Dallas, Georgia at a lake. He was fishing and he went out one Saturday evening. In fact, my company was having a picnic and I saw the company nurse walking toward me and she

said, "I need to talk to you." I found out she was telling me I needed to go home, that my father had drowned. He was a very intuitive man, very knowledgeable. He was raised by his mother's sister. His mother died at childbirth and he was raised with a cousin who went on to live in Japan. She set up a stenography school in Japan and, listen to this, my sister got an opportunity to visit because she married a service man and they moved to Japan and she was able to go and see the school. It's a small world when you think about things that occur. So, we've had some great backing coming through life that has allowed us to be good, productive human beings. Out of four brothers, three of them, all of them were married at one time, have produced children, my sister has two, and they were able to make good livings. My oldest brother is service retiree. Next to him, my brother was an entrepreneur; he had a club at one time and was in the insurance business. My third brother is to this day has his own air conditioning business.

JL: Tell us a little bit about graduation day. What were your parents like that day?

DD: It was crazy because everybody wanted to bombard the house and be there. They wanted to go to the graduation. Friends and family were calling and everybody wanted a piece of graduation and I just wanted to be done with it. There was a lot of jubilant people, just happy. Even in the neighborhood people had planned parties. They were so happy for me and for the other students who had come and completed their education at Marietta High School. In fact, there was a program that they had at church that was recognition to honor us and I thought that was so wonderful. All of the students were invited and, you know, I'm not a big person for any of that, I'm very shy. I know I may seem different but I'm not a person that likes a lot of attention put upon me. I just like to do my thing and get out of the way and let the chips fall where they may but graduation was awesome. There were other kids that were graduating from other schools that said, "We want to be at your graduation." I think there were about 300 of us that graduated from Marietta and after they named me "Girl of the Year," I think you couldn't take the smile off my face. I think I cried most of the ceremony but it was like, "This is probably something I'll never forget." I think our class song was "The Unreachable Star" and I can't get through that song now today because it just brings back so many memories. It was just amazing. We were signing yearbooks and everybody was saying, "Where are you going to school? Blah, blah, blah, blah." It was just one of those times that any child should relish and remember as a good day in life, when you graduated. You've completed that first stage of education and now you're prequalified to go out there and see if you can make it through the other stage. It was a wonderful time. Of course, I can't get past the gift giving. I mean, that was always a wonderful time to go home and know that people have dropped by and they were giving gifts and here's some money for school and that kind of stuff, but it was a wonderful time.

JD: Changing tracks just a little bit, I know Lettie Williams, your aunt, was a librarian at Ft. Hill with Hattie Wilson. Do you want to talk a little bit about her?

DD: Aunt Lettie? Oh, yes! Aunt Lettie was sort of what I've become now in our family. If I think about the legacy that she left, she was one who did a lot of letter writing, that's where I got my powerful ability to write letters. She would often write letters during the

time I was in school encouraging and I wish I had some of them. In fact, my brother and I were talking about the letters that she used to write. She was very powerful in her own way because we saw her as someone totally different from us who was doing things that we thought, "Will we ever be able to do this?" She lived in Washington, D.C. after she got out of the service. She worked for, I think it was called General Service something at that time, but she was a government worker and she was bigger than life. When she came home it was like we had to stop the world and just be at her beck and call because she would talk to us in such a way that would allow us to know that, "Yes, you can do this. There is a price." She would tell us the stories about her being in the WAC, she would tell us about the traveling and at that time Aunt Lettie was, her parents, there was a lot of mixed relations long years ago and here was almost a point at which people thought she was more white than she was black therefore her abilities to maneuver around were a lot greater than the relatives. If you see the pictures, to see her in person, she was not my aunt. If we called her aunt in public people would turn around and look at us and say, "Are those kids crazy, what's going on?" That's how much whiter she was than we were. Her sister, the same way. And my grandfather was the same way, my mother's father, which was Aunt Lettie's brother. He was a traveling musician and Aunt Lettie and Aunt Lula lived in Marietta long after he left. They never talk and coming through we never thought to ask about their mother or their father and we would often ask our parents, "Who were they?" They would tell us about their mother but we never knew her per se. In fact, we didn't know our grandparents because they were dead when we got up to a certain age. Aunt Lettie was a whipper snapper.

JD: How did she become involved with library?

DD: I think it was after she got out of service because it used to be located in Lyman Homes, the project area. It was down under and they needed someone to run the library and that's how she got started. I don't know too much past that other than what I read also in her story and some of which she would tell me as I would sit and listen to her. She was very stoic in her manner, rigid, we were always at attention when we were in her company. It was like she was a little general and she wielded a long stick and it was sit up, we had to make sure the fork and the knife were on the right side, manners everything to her. We didn't talk back to adults in her company. She would ask Mother, "How are they doing? What are they doing?" She would do stuff like this at Christmastime, depending on what mother said about us, we wouldn't get anything from her. She would send boxes and it was nothing like getting a box from Aunt Lettie. It was like, "Oh my God, if I don't get this box!" She would send good stuff. It was like, there's no box for me or whatever and it was like, "Woe is the world." When she came home, she would always bring stuff from Washington. Bergdorf and Goodman's. I remember the stores because I remember the boxes and I knew she was going to bring something, if it wasn't anything but a scarf. It was just the fact that she would come home with all this stuff and she would sit in a chair and we would have to wait on her as she pointed out which box went to this person, which box went to that person. I mean, it was amazing. But quite a lady. As she grew older she ended up moving back to Georgia in the early '80s and she was much older, she ended up with emphysema because she smoked like a fool. I mean, it was one cigarette after the other. We would try to convince her that they were killing her but she didn't

want to have any of that. She eventually died at Crawford Long hospital from just, I think it was, I thought it would have been cancer but they were saying that the emphysema had really just taken her out. There are people in the community with history. Now, I'll tell you somebody who, as I sit here and I think, and that was Mr. Scott. I don't know if y'all have had him.

JL: Lewis Scott. We're trying.

DD: He has a lot of history about Marietta. He knew my mother and her sisters when they were young. They grew up together. He'd always talk about the William girls. He has been a pillar of society for years. He still looks the same, still going strong. Amazing man. I think during the Civil Rights Movement Mr. Scott was visible, not very vocal, but supportive and he always would tell me, "I'm so proud of you. If there's anything that you need don't hesitate to come and see me. I will help you out, you know I will, you know I will." He always talked fast, walked fast, it was just amazing to see Mr. Scott. Even to this day, if he's in the company of myself, we always go back and talk about during that time, how things went and how he thought that there was going to be more than there was. He said, "Just knowing where you were, I knew you were going to be able to carry it off. I knew you were." He was so funny. He was a very funny man. It's just amazing as you look around the community at the support and the non-support. You'd be surprised. People were scared, they were just scared. Now that I think about it and look back at it when you're young you have no fear, you're just as gullible as you can be. I wasn't really made to be fearful, I grew up with four boys, my sister was older, so we had to be tough. My daddy would not take sides. He didn't make me any lesser than he did the boys so I didn't know how to be afraid. If I wanted to survive with them I had to do what they did.

JL: Let me ask you this, if you had to do it again, would you do it?

DD: Do it again. No regrets. I would do it all over again. I would absolutely not hesitate. Yes, I would. There's something about a purpose in life, you are destined for something that you don't quite understand at the time but you know that it is a part of who you are and because of the predestined attitude it is difficult for you to get past it. It is almost like there is a higher being saying "If you're obedient to this the rest of your life will be just fine and wonderful," and I knew that was part of how I was operating. I was operating under this whatever and because of that things did work out. I can truthfully say because of the ability to stand while the wind was blowing real hard, it has helped me to stand even now. Once you come past a certain age you begin to be fretful of where you are in life. My thing with age now is I don't know if I have enough time to do everything else I want to do. There are so many more things that I'm looking forward to doing. I was a first in internal sales to generate a million dollars. A first in being manager at the company, at Quest. So, there were a lot of firsts that were not really marketed because that's just who I am. But because I wanted to open doors for others, that's just me and life and that's what I'll put on my epitaph or the book that I want to write and I do want to write a book.

JL: You should. How long did you work for Quest Diagnostics?

DD: Would you believe about thirty years?

JL: Wow. So you started in the '70s?

DD: Yes.

JL: Were you still living in Marietta?

DD: At the time no, I was living in Atlanta.

JL: What was it like working for them?

DD: At the time they were Smith Upjohn Laboratories and it was one of those where I used headhunters because I thought, maybe let them work for me, and they found the job and I interviewed and got it working as a medical technologist. I learned a lot of stuff from Upjohn and through different acquisitions it changed to Smith-Kline and then finally to Quest. They're the largest laboratory in the country. I had a chemistry set when I was a young girl for Christmas and one of the things that I told my mom was that I was going to work for the largest laboratory in the world. How prophetic. I did. And she reminded me of it. She said, "You know, you used to always say you were going to work for the largest laboratory." Ultimately, Quest is overseas and everywhere.

JL: What's the title of your book going to be?

DD: Funny you should ask that, because I was talking to one of my colleagues at work. She does a lot of writing and I was letting her preview the article that I sent to the Pitchfork and she said, "You never let us know this at Quest. Why not?" I said, "Because that's just my personality." She said, "As I sit here and I listen to you I was just crying." She was actually crying as I went through the little preview of what had transpired and she said, "What is it that you want to write about?" I said, "I'm not sure but I do know that this was a thing that I had to do." She said, "That's what your title should be, based around that. 'What you had to do.'" So, some kind of way out of that it will blossom. And my other really love is to do children's books. I have pieces.

JD: I was just about to ask if there was anything else on your to-do list.

DD: Yes. I have pieces of children's books that I want to get together and I want to get free to do that and I think I am. There's a lot this old girl wants to do.

JD: Well, you're really inspirational and you've accomplished a tremendous amount in your life. We thank you for your time today.

DD: Well, I thank you guys for allowing me to share.

JL: Thank you for everything you did.

DD: That's all I can say. Thank you so much.

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