

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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

**AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE HIST 4425 (ORAL HISTORY) CLASS AT
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL SEMESTER 2009**

**INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JOHN C. WOODS
CONDUCTED BY D. CLAY ANDERSON
TUESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2009**

And

**INTERVIEW WITH MARJORIE BEAVERS-WOODS
CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM TRAVIS FRIED
WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2009**

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 9

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 9
Interview with Pastor John C. Woods
Conducted by D. Clay Anderson
Tuesday, 13 October 2009
Location: New Hope United Methodist Church, Mableton, Georgia

CA: Pastor Woods, if you don't mind telling me when you were born and where you grew up?

JW: I was born and educated in Austell, Georgia.

CA: What year?

JW: In 1950.

CA: What high school did you go to?

JW: I attended South Cobb High School and graduated from South Cobb High School.

CA: What was your family life? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

JW: There were actually five brothers and one sister. I was located in the middle. I had four that was older than I was and the sister was the baby and one brother underneath.

CA: How was it like growing up in Cobb County?

JW: For me it was good. Even as I reflect on it now I think I had a real good time, and I enjoyed it. The first high school I attended was Lemon Street High School because we didn't have integration back then, so I attended Lemon Street High School. The school bus would pick us up every morning and transport us to Marietta, Georgia, on Lemon Street's campus. That was different because it allowed us to know everybody in Powder Springs, Clarkdale, Mableton and Smyrna, but the bus made those stops in Clarksdale, Austell and Powder Springs and over near Macland Road we picked up a few from over that way off Robertson Road. We picked them up and went on to Marietta for Lemon Street High School.

CA: How was the transition from Lemon Street to South Cobb?

JW: It was totally different. We didn't like it. I say "we"; the whole class, because we couldn't get used to being in the environment that we were in at that time. I never had been around any whites, that large a group of white people in my life before so it was totally different.

CA: How was the reaction walking in, from the students and the teachers?

JW: It was the same way, I think, a lot of the students and quite a few of them were hostile. As a matter of fact, I can remember that there were a couple of people that wore jackets that had KKK on them. They would shout obscenities when we changed classes, and we would turn around and wouldn't know who did it. A lot of times we would wait to be the last one to walk out of the classroom, so that would give the crowd an opportunity to die down while we was changing classes, so that we wouldn't be attacked or anything.

CA: Was there any physical violence or just verbal violence?

JW: There was sometimes, there were fights, not that many, and sometimes I remember tires were cut on. One of the guys had a car, and all four of his tires were cut on the car. He literally had to pick it up himself to change the tire. We found out about it. Four or five of us came together a lot of times in PE, well, not a lot of times, maybe two or three times, our clothes were taken. We didn't have any clothes to change back into. Other than that there was nothing. Now, I say it was nothing; it was really nothing, because times have gotten so much better.

CA: How were the teachers reacting?

JW: I can't recall any teachers being evil or envious of us or mischievous; they were all pretty nice. One of our teachers was my advisor I remember and we still talk, Ms. Betty Gray, she was really nice to us, she was nice to me and she still lives and I really enjoyed her.

CA: Did you do any extracurricular activities such as sports?

JW: I did football and ran track but after awhile it was totally different. I couldn't get used to it, baseball, couldn't get used to it. A lot of my friends did. They played and enjoyed it but I just couldn't get used to it.

CA: Did the team come together or was there a lot of, do you remember if there was any hostility between the races?

JW: There was a lot of hostility, it was just, I can't explain it; it was totally different than anything I can say I ever experienced, totally different.

CA: How was the community, your personal community?

JW: My personal community was that you grew up in an area where after you cross the branch, that's where we lived, and up the hill were white families, but we always communicated, we always talked to each other. They would come to my house and sit at the table and eat; I would go to their house and sit at the table and eat. We were just like family, and we talk about it now because some of those families that come and worship with me are white families. Some of us got along, and it was a very close-knit community in Austell. A lot of us got along with just about all the white families there. We never experienced anything, any hostility there but every now and then you would hear people having gang fights and things like that, but I never experienced that.

CA: So if there was hostility it was from outside?

JW: Usually it was outside and nobody in the inside of Austell ever—we were always accepting.

CA: Did any of your brothers or sisters have any issues?

JW: As far as I know they didn't because actually I was the first to attend, I was the oldest one that attended integrated schools, so I was the one that started first, and my brothers after me had no problems. As a matter of fact, my sister, she went on and I think she was top of her class, and she attended, so she didn't have any problems. She graduated and she went on to Spelman College, it was accepting, and then went on to Duke University so . . . she teaches at Duke now.

CA: Did you grow up Methodist, was your family Methodist?

JW: Grew up Methodist, interesting thing about this is my great-grandfather founded this church. This church was the only place in Cobb County, I'm told, where a black man could get an education. This was the school. Out of this school and another church known as Little Bethel Baptist Church, they formed the Austell Consolidated School, which was the elementary school. When they formed that school it went on to become Austell Consolidated School, then Washington Street School, then it was torn down. People went to the Austell Elementary School [Washington Street School]. From there we went on to Lemon Street. Then from there we went to South Cobb. Austell Elementary School, allowed kids from Powder Springs, Clarksdale, Austell, Mableton, to attend Austell Elementary School, Austell Consolidated School, those two names, Washington Street School so that's the three names it was given. So, yes, this church was very instrumental in starting that. One of the teachers that was here was a lady by the name of Mrs. Hattie Gaines Wilson, and Hattie Gaines Wilson has a library in Marietta that's named after her. She was also a Cobb County librarian, and she was an African American out at Zion Baptist Church. Her husband is still living, and he's the chairman of the finance committee here, chairman of the trustees here. He's been here eighty years, he's ninety-something years old and still walks and talks and is very active and can take care of himself. He's a widower now.

CA: You said you bought this building in 2004. Where was the New Hope Methodist Church before?

JW: In 1962 or '64, somewhere thereabouts, the church was located right here at the intersection of Strickland Road and Veteran's Memorial Highway, right down below the Krystal there. You turn behind there, and there's a junkyard. The church was down there. They had a meeting and decided that an African American Church wouldn't grow in this area. So they moved the church to Atlanta, and it stayed there for forty years, and it didn't grow, it did nothing. It was in a house. In 2005, I'll have to check the dates, we moved here, we bought this property and moved here and started to grow.

CA: So when you grew up you mostly were at the one located near Strickland.

JW: Yes, yes. I think they call it 700 Rear Bankhead Highway, I'm not sure, but that's where I served at. I was about twelve or thirteen years old, and I went to church there with my parents. When I turned nineteen I didn't have to go to church, so I didn't go. I went on into the Air Force. After leaving the Air Force I went to join the police department in Atlanta. Well, I joined first in Austell. I joined the police force in Austell. It was interesting after I got out of the Air Force in '72 or '73—I think that's when I got out—they had had other black Austell police officers, but these police officers were older men. They hadn't been through the police academy, which was an academy which gave them accreditation and law enforcement training. So when I was hired in, I think it was '72, maybe '73, I was the first one hired as a radio dispatcher and later went on to the police academy and actually went out and was a full time police officer in Austell. I came out of school, and I worked forty hours. These other people were like part-time, and I was full time police officer. I worked for about two years, rose to the rank of sergeant, and received numerous accommodations. It was a very hostile town back then because Austell had a police chief that had been arrested and convicted of stealing money and was fired. We had a lady that had been burned in the jail and killed, a black female, named Lovejoy. There was a lot of anger and hostility around what had happened in the community, and so when I joined the police force I lost a lot of friends, but I always felt like it was something that I needed to do because I felt like now God was calling me for that position, and I took it. I worked for about two and a half years; maybe a year, maybe two years I left and went to the Atlanta police department. I kept my residence out here in Cobb County

CA: If you don't mind us backtracking a little, what year did you enter the Air Force?

JW: I think it was, must have been around '70; it was actually the National Guard. What I did was I was getting ready to be drafted, I believe it was '72, I'm not sure, '70. It was right after I graduated Shorter, after '69, '70, somewhere around in there. I entered because I was getting ready to be drafted and sent to Vietnam, and I already had two other brothers serving in Vietnam, and my mother didn't want to go through having another one, so I just joined the Air National Guard. When I did, that was a branch of the Air Force. I went over to San Antonio and started training and did everything that I was supposed to do and stayed for seven years. But it allowed me to work when I got out of my basic training after full training for six years, five and a half years or more I served at the 129th, which is up, it used to be near Kennesaw on McCollum Road.

CA: So you were stationed in Cobb County?

JW: Yes, I was stationed there in Cobb County, and I stayed there for the rest of my time.

CA: That's good so you could be near your family, that's lucky.

JW: Yes, so I stayed there and did my whole entire tour right there and came on out after I finished my tour of duty. It also allowed me to stay on the Atlanta police department because I was serving on the Atlanta Police department.

CA: So you did the two simultaneously?

JW: Right. Exactly. I sure did.

CA: How was the military when you went in, or the guard, being in Cobb County?

JW: It was totally different. I remember I went in in November. One of the things that happened when I went in, I found out that I was in an all-white outfit. I was the only black there, so it really sort of bothered me at first. After about two days there I was appointed as the dorm chief, so that meant I was in charge of all my fellow officers there and led them in and out. That's when, after I got out of that, I decided—when I was growing up in Austell I worked for a print shop, I was working as a printer, I got that far. It was known as the *Austell Enterprise*, and the *Austell Enterprise* was owned by a guy by the name of Sid Williams, not the Sid Williams that's the chiropractor, the other one. He wrote a lot of racist articles within his newspaper about blacks and about the community and especially about people like Martin Luther King and Hosea Williams and all those guys. He used to write a lot of editorials about that. I enjoyed working for him because I started when I was about ten years old, working for that company. I only worked maybe three or four hours a day, but when I was in high school they gave me an opportunity because they thought I was going to be a pressman, to work, get out of school about one o'clock in my junior year, and go there to train to be their pressman. I'd be doing a vocational training and that's what I did and graduated and went from there into the Air Force.

CA: Did your vocational training help you when it came to getting in the guard? Were you promoted?

JW: No, what happened was when I got in the guard, and that's how the law enforcement came in, after a series of tests it was determined that I had police skills. That's when I was training as a military police officer in the Guard. After training as a military police officer in the guard and being a military police officer I got out and got the job at Austell as a police officer. That's the reason they hired me full time. Then I went on and got my training there and trained, and then I left and went to Atlanta.

CA: Now, you said that there were several African American police officers already working part-time in Austell. In you being the first full timer, was there any animosity between the other officers and you or was it

JW: They weren't there at the force at that time; they were already gone. I was the only one that was there then. As a matter of fact, one of the guys that was there, he left Austell forces part-time and went to Cobb County sheriff's office, and he was, I believe, one of the first African American sheriffs with the Cobb County that was hiring. His name was

Horace Hill. Horace Hill worked there for a long time. He was the only black deputy, and he worked on the midnight shift, and they called him Captain Midnight. I worked on the shift down here in Austell, and I worked the midnight shift. We always worked the midnight shift. Nobody, very seldom, ever saw us because we worked the midnight shift. Now, I thought about this, one of the main reasons was because we were black, and you didn't see us. But occasionally they may be short of help, and they would bring me in. I remember one day very clearly being brought in on the day shift, and when I got off from work I was met by two white males and one black male. They followed me home, and a fight ensued. It was a pretty nasty fight, and when all the officers came down, because somebody called and said an officer needed help, and when they all got down there I had the guys, all three of them subdued in custody, and they took them away. That was my first case that was tried in Cobb Superior Court.

CA: Messing with the wrong police officer.

JW: And I was young and I was energetic. I worked out a lot then, so I was real strong, I was probably twenty-two or twenty-three years old.

CA: Did they give a reason for following you?

JW: Well, the one reason they said was they didn't want no nigger on the police force, and I was so smart that they had heard about it. It wasn't anything for them. At that time I would go to places like Bill's Steakhouse, which is in Austell, which is an all-white bar. I'd have a lot of bar fights that I'd have to break up a lot of times, and they would sometimes turn on me, and I didn't think anything about it.

CA: You obliged them.

JW: I had those, and I remember I received accommodations for because, like I say, I was young, and I was pretty well physically conditioned, and I could handle most anything. I had a chase one day; they called and they said this store had been robbed just inside Austell, and they were giving a description of the guy. I came from behind the desk and got in the police car and went to the scene, came back up the street, and met the guy and arrested him. They wrote an article, "Police officer who works the desk, leaves the desk and gets back on the road and catches the robber before he could get away."

CA: Really, wow. Was that in the *Marietta Daily Journal*?

JW: It's in the Marietta paper, and I've got that article at home, I'll have to get it and share it with you. It might have been the Austell paper too and the Atlanta paper as well. They had a picture of me in there, I was a sergeant then. There were so many things, heroic things that I was able to do, I didn't even think about it. This guy one night, I was able to help him. He was trying to jump start his car, and the battery blew up in his face. I don't know where I got this from, but something told me to put water on his eyes. I did and it saved his eyes. Just some of the things that I did when I was at Austell. I left the police

force, it must have been around September of '73 that I left because in October of '73 I was hired in Atlanta.

CA: Did you like working in Atlanta better than you liked working in Austell?

JW: Oh, yes, I did. What probably inspired me to go to Atlanta was I had a chase one morning. It started about 2:00 A.M., and the chase went all the way from Austell into Atlanta. I apprehended the person that I was chasing, but I called for assistance from Atlanta because we were crossing the river chasing him. About seven or eight Atlanta Police officers met me and said that they didn't know that they had a black police officer. The way I handled things, they said, well, you need to get your superior officer before you can take the person back. I looked at them and said, "I am my superior officer." Nobody knew, and there was nobody but me, so because that was a small police force, so I took the guy and took him back.

CA: So you were the only officer on duty at the midnight shift?

JW: Oh, yes, a lot of times I would be the only one. Sometimes they might have someone who would float in and come in later on, maybe four, but most of the time I would be the only one that was working. We had a dispatcher, and sometimes we might not have a dispatcher, but if we had a dispatcher, then it would be two of us working.

CA: Was it busy, did you get a lot of calls?

JW: No, you didn't get no calls; it was nothing happening. Cobb County would have a lot of calls because, see, that was the county. You could listen and monitor their radio. They'd have a lot of calls, but we very seldom had anything. We might get somebody burglarizing a building; you apprehended them and whatever.

CA: You said that you would have to go in and break up bar fights, and a lot of times they would turn on you. Was it the racial aspect that caused those problems?

JW: I think it was a lot of that and alcohol.

CA: Mix alcohol with anything and it's a bad idea.

JW: There were a couple of police officers that lived in Austell that worked for the Atlanta police force. They would be there drinking, and they knew me. They would usually probably instigate a lot of those fights. Then when I'd come in people thought I was by myself, and they didn't realize that there were two other Atlanta police officers that always would assist me in getting them out of there and doing whatever I needed to do. It was crazy.

CA: What about family, are you married, were you married?

JW: Yes, I was married, still am, and at that time I only had one daughter, so it wasn't really that bad working in Austell. I probably was gone a long, long time when the first police officer was killed there. I remember it very well. I road on the motorcycle squad, so I escorted a lot of funerals of officers that were either killed or died through the city of Austell, so it was always good to come back through Austell. Other than that, that's it.

CA: I don't remember, did you say you lived in Austell?

JW: I lived in Austell and then later moved to Powder Springs when I started policing. I remember one Halloween night, before I had been on the police force, I had parked my car in the yard. I lived over near Lewis Road, and it was shot. There was a shotgun blast, and I never did find out who did that. It was just one night my car was sitting in the yard, and I heard a shot. When I got up the next morning my car had been sprayed with bullets. It was a very fancy light blue Ford Tureno, '72, and it was baby blue, and it had a big stripe down the side. It was just a beautiful car, so somebody shot it. I never did figure out why. I think it was because I was a police officer. Just about everybody in the community again knew that I was a police officer. Other than that I can't remember of any incidents. Again, I think it was due to a lot of ignorance and not racial. This church in 1964, and you probably need to retell this, because in 1964, I remember when I was in elementary school there was a house that was bombed over here on South Cobb Road, I believe it was, and the family was not killed, but they said it was the Klan that did it. I don't know if they ever found out who did it, but the house was bombed, and it was tore all up. One of the guys that was in that house was in my class. I didn't know that until a few years ago that one of the members of this church, she's still living, and that was her cousins, and she remembers it well.

CA: No one was injured?

JW: No one was injured, but that bombing made a lot of attention around here because it was in 1964, I think it was '64, somewhere around '64 or probably before then. But I remember the bombing and the incident.

CA: So you said you liked working in the Atlanta more than you liked working in Austell. Was there, were there any other reasons besides the fellowship of the officers that you met?

JW: It was a more professional police department, and you didn't have to put up with a lot of racism and other stuff that went on within the department. You could work there in Atlanta and be appreciated, I felt like then. I was on the motorcycle squad there, and I escorted—well, while I as there I met six presidents, I believe it was six of them. I got a picture of me and Rosalyn Carter when she was there, and that was my job occasionally whenever Air Force One came to Atlanta with the President I was the one that met them and escorted them to Atlanta or wherever they needed to go. When Carter was doing his transaction team, he did all that at the Governor's Mansion so I stayed there working with them, moving them back and forth, people like Bert Lance, Andrew Young, all those people, all those organizations, all those things I worked on with all the dignitaries.

When the Organization of American States came here, I did that, and I worked there with them. I was part of the Fulton County delegation. I met all—Governor Busbee, as a matter of fact, rode my motorcycle, and that caused him to probably go ahead and buy the motorcycles for the Georgia State Patrol. It was a different police force, and I enjoyed working with them.

CA: Of course it was probably much more active crime-wise.

JW: It was and the pay was better.

CA: Were there any close calls, any interesting stories about while you were working in Atlanta?

JW: Yes, I know I remember three shootouts in a month's time and my last shootout that I was in, I remember the bullets. I remember the incident very well because I received a call, and a lot of my officers that called me thought I was dead when they called the bank. I was inside the bank. I was working as an off-duty security guard. As a police officer you know, we worked off-duty. They thought I was dead. The bank got robbed, and the guy threw the gun down and ran, and he took my gun. As a result of that it was suggested that I give my life to Christ. I needed to get into somebody's church, and I did, and that was in 1981.

CA: So you weren't; did you go to church a lot in-between those time periods?

JW: In 1981, I went back in February of 1981. I had stopped going to church, it must have been around 1970, maybe before then, and so what I did was I went back to church. It was on a Monday that shootout occurred, and on that next Sunday I went to New Hope Church. I went down to Mableton looking for the church, and it had moved. Rather than getting along about it I went on over there because I liked it. I think I got in touch with Mama, and she said it's over in Atlanta. I went over there and got there just in time for Sunday school. The late Dr. C. S. Stetson was the pastor. He welcomed me—that was '81—I worked there until—in 1987 he died, and we got another pastor by the name of Gather Bonner. In 1992 I accepted my call and was assigned supervising pastor by the name of Jim Laury who is now in the Atlanta-Marietta district. He was pastoring McEachern United Methodist Church, and so he became my supervising pastor. I worked through my process and went on to theology school and graduated from there. In 1999 I was assigned pastor of this church, the senior pastor.

CA: When did you retire from police work?

JW: I retired right after the Olympics in 1997. That was my last time working as a police officer. August 3, 1997, I retired.

CA: Was it difficult balancing those two very important jobs?

JW: No, because really I feel like a lot of the skills that I had learned as a police officer helped me as a pastor, and I think it makes me a more effective pastor. I went on and retired and became pastor, and one of the things that I did after becoming pastor was to seek a place to have worship because when I started as pastor of New Hope, we had gotten down to probably about 12 in worship. I started working in the community and pursuing different things, and we got the worship attendance up to probably around 45 or 50. There were so many people coming, and there were so many children around the church that we needed to get a space because that was like a house. It just wouldn't hold what we were doing, so we found this property, bought it, and bought the church home.

CA: Was this a Methodist denomination before you came?

JW: It was nothing, this building—we were getting ready to build in Atlanta; we had secured everything that we needed, permits and everything; but we started running into snares. They wouldn't allow us to really get that church off the ground in Atlanta. So I was on the way to the church to pastor that Sunday morning, and one of the members, a little lady by the name of Ms. Carrie Oliver, she said, "There's a church right there. Why don't we just buy that church, pastor, and worship there?" I said, "No. God got something bigger for us." She said, "Well, you could look." We came in and got permission to look at the church, and when I came inside, after persuading the real estate agent to let us do that, the ceiling in there and the ceiling in the fellowship hall was exactly what God had shown me in a vision. From there we went ahead and made an offer to try to get the church bought.

CA: Was that a smooth operation or were there snags? Did you feel the Lord had a lot to do with it?

JW: The Lord had a lot to do with it. The day we met at a Bible study, I'll never forget it, on Wednesday night, and we were going to decide right after that with the officers if we were going to buy the church or what we were going to do. After Bible study we decided we were going to buy it. We didn't have the money, and we did something that we never had done before. We passed a collection plate. I said, "We can start right now. Let's take the money out because we will not write a check if we don't have the money in the bank." I never will forget Emmanuel Wilson. He said, "I don't know, let's pass the offering plate, and let's see." We passed it, and it went around, and we came up with \$1,200. I said, "That's good; we'll get the rest of it up later." Brother Wilson said, "I don't think so. Let's pass it again." We passed it again, and we came up with \$3,200 with eight of us in Bible study to get this down payment to get this church up. We bought it, and it's been a blessing to us ever since. We came in 2005. If everything goes well on October 16, 2009, we'll be fully licensed for our daycare doing school and education here.

CA: That's excellent.

- JW: And we're going to continue to build on the reputation that the church had in the early 1800s of teaching of excellence, but this time it will not only be African Americans. It will reach all, so whoever comes, they'll work on the school of excellence.
- CA: That's great. How large is your church—you said that your . . .
- JW: On the roll we have 152 I think it is on the roll. Avid worship attendance is somewhere around 55 to 65, fluctuating and depending on if it's raining or not.
- CA: Nowadays it's been opening up. I always make the joke, you know Governor Perdue prayed for rain when we had that drought, and I just keep thinking he needs to stop doing that now; we've had enough.
- JW: On September 20 we had our church conference. They have church conferences in the Methodist churches, and the musician sang the song, "Let it Rain," and in that song the theology of the song says "open up the floodgates, let it rain." All of a sudden on that day it started to pour down, and it was the 20th of September. You know the rest of the story of how far it rained and how many days it rained.
- CA: I remember we got two days off of school for that.
- JW: It rained and it flooded all. As a matter of fact there was so much rain I went down to where my old elementary school is located, Austell Elementary, and it rose all the way up. I remember that creek when we used to look out the window and see it rise up and saw the fish jumping out in the playground area. This time it damaged all the—the [old] school was already gone, but it tore up all that [new] school [Austell Primary], that church that had just bought down there for \$1.5 million it just flooded all that. For the first time in my life it flooded my home place, my dad's house that he had given us, it flooded and it totally destroyed it. So that's the first time that we've ever seen water that came up that high. My brother, he went down to check on the house, and he said that you couldn't even see the top of the house there was so much water. I remember flooding in Austell because the Perkinson Creek would flood all the time, but I had never seen as much water from Sweetwater Creek, well, it wasn't Perkinson Creek it was at Sweetwater Creek but it ran near, there used to be Perkinson right there so it would always flood but this time it just flooded because there was so much water. I ain't never seen so much water. I remember that day I was going down to camp ministries in Mableton on Austell Road, and I couldn't get there. I sat on the board of directors, and I was going to help feed the homeless and take care of their needs, but I couldn't get there because there was so much water. That was over near Food Depot where it flooded over there, so it was awful. Never seen that much.
- CA: How many of your congregation that was in Atlanta, when you moved up here came with you? All of them?
- JW: All of them, every one of them. They all came; we didn't have not one that left. They all came, and all of them are very excited about what's going on in the church and the

ministries. We have an outreach ministry here; we pick up from the different shelters and feed the homeless and work closely with the schools in the area and feed the athletes and doing Bible studies away and in different off-site locations.

CA: So you all do the lunches for South Cobb High

JW: We never did them for South Cobb; we did them for Pebblebrook High School occasionally. Before the game we would feed them, and that's something we enjoy doing, and we look forward to doing that again. We do carnivals out here on the grounds. My wife was actually my high school sweetheart, and she is the first African American to attend and graduate from Pebblebrook High School. So we're in ministry together here. I'm from South Cobb and she's from Pebblebrook, and those are two rivals.

CA: I played football at Wheeler High school so we had the dinners before and people would bring them in, so I remember it. I remember getting beaten bad by South Cobb. Of course, we were beat by everyone.

JW: All my kids graduated from McEachern. As a matter of fact, my son was on that final four. He was on that team that went to the final four, and I think that's the closest they ever got to getting a championship. He was there when they had that big turnaround.

CA: How receptive was the community for you to come back after all those years?

JW: You know I don't think anybody really knows but the little Baptist church down there. We talked to them, and it was right across the street from them because there's a cemetery over there where my grandparents are buried. We were very instrumental in working with them, and we still work with them. Right after we got here or maybe two years after we'd been here, their church was broken into, and it was vandalized and all kind of graffiti painted on the wall and racial stuff. That sort of bothered me but I think it was just kids that laid out of school and just wanted somewhere to be and so just broke into this church and vandalized it. We lived through that. The community has been very good to us as far as being here and supporting us. We've met a lot of business people, and we've finally become a multicultural church now because we have a lot of Hispanics that worship with us. We had one church that came, and they stayed with us for two or three years, and they grew from 70 to 300. When they got up to 300, we sent them out, and they moved up to the shopping center, and they're doing about 1400 now in worship.

CA: Was that a Methodist?

JW: No, it was Assembly of God church.

CA: And they would, y'all would do different times?

JW: Different times and sometimes occasionally worship together, and it was very good, I enjoyed it. We had some beautiful Christmas programs and Easter programs, it was just totally different. Totally different. The first day we walked in the building, they came,

that first Sunday, they were here. I didn't expect them to be here, but they came, and they said they needed a place to worship. We said okay, and they came in and worshiped with us, and the rest is history.

CA: It seems like the community has been good to you, but this church has also been very good to the community.

JW: I hope so. One of the questions that I always ask the congregation is if this church left this community what would they say. So we want to make sure that they say they miss us, they love being with us, so we're working closely with this school, a new charter school. We will do a breakfast for the teacher prayer breakfast with them. On Monday morning, I think sometime this month, maybe next week sometime, we'll have a prayer breakfast for every month, prayer and breakfast following for all the teachers and even the students who want to be a part of it. We're looking for a way to fund that right now, but it's going to happen. We're going to do that.

CA: How much demand is there for this new early childhood school was there? I mean, was that a blessing as well, of course?

JW: It was a blessing, and it was something that God had given to me from day one when we came that we were going to do that because when this church was founded that's what was in the church was a school, so we figured that this is what God had in mind for it then, and He still has that in mind for it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JW: We're going to start with K-2 through K-4 and then we'll start with grades one through five hopefully and move on up eventually to do high school I hope.

CA: Oh wow, that would be great.

JW: So we're going to have just a private school here, a Christian school.

CA: There are a lot of Christian schools around that have really just blossomed; they help out with church attendance and with lots of things. It's rare to see a church that doesn't have it.

JW: I haven't seen any African American churches in Cobb County that do have it. We definitely want to be one that will have. So far we're making a little history saying we're going to be the first. We hope to do that and do it well.

CA: I think that it's a wonderful thing that you're coming back full circle from the beginning. The education, coming back to education, I think that's really neat, I did not know that.

JW: I'm excited about it also because my wife is involved in this, and she does the Christian education. She's graduating probably in May of next year. She'll be graduating with her masters in Christian education, so that helps us write a Christian education curriculum for the church that starts with those young children and work their way all the up until their collegiate years, into the church and Christianity. That's what this school is going to be doing; it's strictly Christian. I tell people everybody is welcome to this Christian school. If you're Muslim and you come in, it's a Christian school. We still welcome you, but it's a Christian school. We had a summer camp that was really good this past year. We had about 42 students and they all enjoyed it, it was great. We did a lot of sightseeing and a lot of traveling, the Governor's Mansion and touring and seeing different things and just keeping kids involved in some things. Especially with the crime rate that's down in this area, we try to work closely with the community and do stuff that will help the kids to grow. So we work with that, but taking a summer camp on and probably keep the summer camp that it is because we charge \$60.00 a week, and that's a full twelve hours a day and breakfast and lunch.

CA: Wow, that is very inexpensive.

JW: But that's what we do.

CA: Wrapping everything up, Cobb County has changed so much, and you've lived here most of your whole life, except for a couple of stints.

JW: My whole entire life.

CA: Yes, which is great that you've been able to stay in this one county but tell me some of your ideas about how it's changed?

JW: Oh, it's changed in the transportation; the road ways through here have changed. The mindset of the county has changed, leadership has changed. It's just, in my opinion and it's a great place to live and a great place to raise kids. It's very family oriented. I love the commissioners and work closely with Woody Thompson, and I worked with the previous commissioner also, and I like the leadership. I've had the opportunity to have Congressman David Scott to come here and be a part of the services, and I also welcome my brothers, any political person that wants to have an agenda and wants to speak, I let them speak. We want to be that church to where all the leaders meet here and they talk about things, community oriented. I had an opportunity to meet with Doug Stoner; he's the state Senator. I haven't met him but I talked to his office about getting some work done out on the road and had a great response from him. I can't think of his last name, he's the Senator for this district. Also, Sam Olens, he's the Cobb County commissioner. One of the greatest is our county manager, David Hankerson. I think he's done just a great job at what he does as the county manager over the years, and he's been there about twenty years having the county's A+ bond rating and excellent credit rating. His leadership is just impeccable. We got a great sheriff here, Neil Warren is just great. I've had an opportunity to be with those people. And Ms. Betty Gray who is now, Ms. Betty Gray was my class advisor when I was in high school. I was her first African American

president when she was in the school system. We've just had a beautiful relationship over the years, and she's been here to worship with me as well as sit in different committees. She lives in this area, so we work very close with each other, making sure that the kind of change that we're going to have in the community is positive. It's just been beautiful, the change. I love it. Kennesaw State University, I like what's going on there. My wife was a graduate from Kennesaw, and I can't say enough about the county, I love it. I really love it. I can't see myself living anywhere else and I've been to four foreign countries and just about every state in the United States. This is my place.

CA: That's excellent. Thank you so much for letting me interview you today and this will conclude the interview.

JW: Thank you sir.

END OF INTERVIEW

INDEX

- Austell, Georgia
 - Race relations in, 2
- Bonner, Gather, 9
- Busbee, George, 9
- Carter, Rosalyn, 8
- Gray, Betty, 2, 14-15
- Hankerson, David, 14
- Hill, Horace, 6
- Kennesaw State University, 15
- King, Martin Luther, 5
- Lance, Bert, 8
- Laury, Jim, 9
- Lemon Street High School
 - Attending, 1
 - Advantages of, 1
- Little Bethel Baptist Church, 3
- McEachern United Methodist Church, 9
- New Hope Methodist Church
 - Early role in educating African Americans, 3
 - As a member of Austell Consolidated Schools, 3
 - Reason for move to Atlanta, 3
 - Reason for moving back to Austell, 3, 10
 - Size of congregation, 11
 - Size of congregation that moved to Austell with, 11-12
 - Public outreach, 12-13
 - Austell community's response to the return of, 12
 - Beginning a school program at, 13
 - Children's summer program at, 14
- Olens, Sam, 14
- Scott, David, 14
- South Cobb High School
 - Graduation from, 1
 - Integration of, 1

Stetson, C.S., 9
Stoner, Doug (state senator), 14

Thompson, Woody, 14

Warren, Neil, 15

Williams, Hosea, 5

Williams, Sid, 5

Wilson, Emmanuel, 3, 10

Wilson, Hattie Gaines, 3

Woods, Pastor John C.

- Family life of, 1

- Remembering integrating South Cobb High School, 1-2

- On the reactions of teachers at South Cobb High School to integration, 2

- On the New Hope Methodist Church's move to Atlanta, 3

- On the return of New Hope Methodist Church to Austell, 3, 10, 11-12

- Service in Air National Guard, 4, 5

- Career as a police officer

 - Austell Police Department, 4, 5-8

 - Atlanta Police Department, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9

- On providing security for notable individuals, 8-9

- Working for racist newspaper publisher (Sid Williams), 5

- On a house bombing on South Cobb Road in 1964, 8

- On returning to a religious lifestyle and reasoning, 9

- On mixing his professional training with pastoring, 10

- On the floods of 2009 in Cobb County, 11

- On the desired perception of New Hope Methodist Church in Austell, 13

- On the changes in Cobb County, 14

Young, Andrew, 8

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 9
Interview with Marjorie Beavers-Woods
Conducted by William Travis Fried
Wednesday, 4 November 2009
Location: New Hope United Methodist Church, Mableton, Georgia

WF: Ms. Woods, let's get started with your background? Did you grow up here in Mableton?

MW: Actually I grew up, well, we moved to Mableton when I was about twelve years old, about the early '60s, I think I was in the fifth grade. I would say I'm a citizen of Mableton.

WF: Where were you before then?

MW: I live prior to moving to Cobb County in Northwest Atlanta.

WF: Tell me about the original neighborhood.

MW: Oh, the original neighborhood was northwest Atlanta, it was an African-American neighborhood, I grew up in that community, a very close-knit community, it was like, as I was remembering I was thinking that it was kind of like where everybody took care of everybody else, we all knew each other and all the parents were like parents to everyone. It was kind of like what they call the village type community so everybody knew everybody and everybody took care of everybody else. I went to school which was probably about ten miles and of course, we were transported, we didn't have to walk, we were transported by the bus, I do remember a couple of things growing up in that community, it was right about the time of desegregation. I remember as a child getting on the bus with my mother to go downtown Atlanta in the area where most Blacks shopped in a little part of town called Bellwood. We got on the trolley and I remember my mom directing us to go to the back of the bus. I was very young then but I do remember us sitting in the back of the bus.

WF: This is city transportation?

MW: Yes. It wasn't MARTA then but it was the city transportation for metropolitan Atlanta- in fact it was not really called a bus but it was called a trolley at that time. I remember, that and that is probably all I can recall in from my early childhood that stuck in my mind as a child growing up in Atlanta during the desegregation era. But the community, like I said early, was an African-American community and we were very close knit like a family.

WF: You say you had a hard time remembering it but do you remember any sort of feelings, or conversations that your parents were having about integration?

MW: About integration? I do remember, once we moved to Cobb County that I experienced the desegregation and integration of the Cobb County School System. I was about eleven or twelve years old.

WF: About what year was that?

MW: I was born in '53 so twelve; that would be '65? So about that time it was, they were beginning the civil rights it was very prevalent.

WF: The Civil Right Act had just passed.

MW: Right, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. As a result, they began to integrate the school systems in Cobb County. Initially when we moved here, like I said, I was eleven or twelve; we were bused all the way to Austell. I lived right here in Mableton, really about one mile on a dirt road [Ivey Road] from here in this area. So we were bused from this area all the way up to Austell, just a little bit past downtown Austell. It is Joe Jerkins Boulevard now, it used to be Washington Street and the name of the school was Washington Street Elementary School. I can't calculate the miles but at that time the bus picked us up and took us all the way there. There was only a few of us in that community that the school bus transported to Washington Street School.

Later when the schools were integrated we had to attend the closest school within a certain radius of where we lived. Well, even before that, when they integrated the schools, the first school I went to was a middle school. The middle school was Austell Middle School. It was a predominately white and of course the blacks from the black elementary school which was Washington Street, we were all sent to the middle school which was Austell Middle School. After middle school I had to attend to the closest high school to my home. Which happen to be Pebblebrook High School in this area, and at that time it was predominately white.

WF: Is Pebblebrook where you graduated?

MW: Yes, I graduated from Pebblebrook in 1971.

WF: So from Washington Street Elementary to Austell Middle School to Pebblebrook High School.

MW: Yes.

WF: Washington Street Elementary was an African-American school, correct?

MW: Yes, predominately African-American school and of course that's what, you know, from Atlanta, when I moved from Atlanta coming from a predominately African-American elementary School and I went to Washington Street also an African American school I guess maybe one or two years prior to going to Austell Middle school. Those two,

actually I went to two African-American schools for a total of six or seven years in my initial years of school. I think it was through sixth or seventh grade.

WF: This is in Atlanta?

MW: I went from Atlanta, I think I might have been in the fourth or fifth grade when I went to Atlanta schools and then when we moved to Cobb County I think I was probably the sixth or seventh, something like that. I attended two African-American schools in the elementary years and then the middle school I went to was an integrated school.

WF: And that was Austell?

MW: Austell Middle School they called it, no it was Austell Junior High, I think they called it junior high and not middle school at that time so it was junior high. Then from Austell Junior High I went to Pebblebrook for high school.

WF: Before Washington Street when you were in school in Atlanta you said it was predominately black. Was it integrated as well?

MW: No, it was all black and the neighborhood was predominately black.

WF: What do you remember about that school?

MW: I was very young and so I do remember the classes were large and I guess because of the community and of course, you've got all African-Americans going to the African-American schools and then they put us in, I remember specifically the fourth grade that they had so many of us that they put several of us in one classroom and they had to bring in other teachers. They had to have other teachers to help with the classes. I remember that. And the reason why I guess the schools were larger is because you had several different African-American communities but only one elementary school. They weren't building a lot of African-American schools, and so we were all going to these one or two centrally located schools for several African-American communities, so the classrooms were very large.

WF: Was the school large?

MW: No. It wasn't. Today of course, they've built and add on to it - but no, the school, I can't remember how large or how many classrooms but no. You can imagine it went through the sixth or seventh grade so you can imagine that's a lot of students.

WF: That's definitely a packed house.

MW: Yes. It had a lot of students coming from a lot of different communities that surrounded it. And I only remember maybe three elementary schools at that time because I had friends that went to them so you're talking about three elementary schools and multiple African-American communities in northwest Atlanta that we went to.

WF: I'm assuming that the teachers at that school were all African-Americans?

MW: Yes, they were all African-American; the administrators were predominately African-American.

WF: Did anybody in particular stand out to you that you can remember?

MW: I had one teacher, and this was in the fourth grade, that was probably my last grade before I left there, but I remember one teacher and my sisters and brothers had the same teacher, her name was Mrs. McCormick and everybody was terrified of her because she was very mean. When I went to the fourth grade and people had talked about her, my sisters and brothers who had had her in prior years who were older than I had talked about her and everybody knew Mrs. McCormick and nobody wanted Mrs. McCormick. What happened - when I went to the fourth grade they put me in Mrs. McCormick's class, that's why I remember this so well, they put me in Mrs. McCormick's classroom, I cried the whole day first day. The next day there were so many of us in that classroom and when they came in and pulled some of us out and divided the class because there was so many and so they came in and they just started pointed out people and I was looking at the person, the administrator that was pointing people out to say, you, you, you, and I was looking with such pitiful eyes and she said you, and I was the happiest person at that point - because I was terrified, I guess they could see that too, I was terrified of Mrs. McCormick. They pulled me from her and put me in Mrs. Hall's room and this was a fourth grade class. Mrs. Hall was a very, very sweet person as I remember totally opposite from Mrs. McCormick. She was my last teacher at that school, I think that was about fourth grade.

WF: Mrs. McCormick, was she just a real disciplinarian?

MW: Yes, just mean.

WF: You were upset because of reputation more than anything else.

MW: I don't know, she was an angry person. She had, and I remember she was short, feisty, probably she had the short people's syndrome but yes, she was and I think even over the years and people have said and I think I did see her, she used to walk a lot in downtown Atlanta and at that time we didn't know if it was dementia, walking around downtown, just kind of, and people would say, "That's Mrs. McCormick." That's very strange you know, of course now know it to be some form of dementia but I think that's what kind of happened to Mrs. McCormick before she left here.

WF: You said you moved when you were around eleven or twelve. What was the reason for the move?

MW: My dad, my family is very large, my family has twelve, like Mary Cater, I think her family was as large as fourteen I think. My dad purchased some land over here in Cobb

County. He must have purchased it back in the early '60s and he purchased four acres of land for about \$400.00; \$100.00 an acre in Cobb county. For \$400.00 he purchased four acres of land one mile from here on Ivey Road. It was a little isolated dirt road.

WF: It was off Ivey Road?

MW: Yes. It was on Ivey Road.

WF: Mary Cater lived there.

MW: Yes, we were neighbors, right there in walking distance because we had to walk about a mile to get to each other's houses but that's where we were. He purchased that land and he farmed the land at first, you know, he had a garden and he farmed the land and he traveled from Atlanta—my dad worked two jobs, I've always known my dad to work two jobs, he worked at Southern Railway and then he worked for some picture framing company on a second job.

WF: Is that what he was doing when you all were living in Atlanta, working for Southern Rail?

MW: Yes, he worked for Southern Railway all of my life I remember him working for Southern Railway. He would come home after working all week and would spend the late nights and all weekends, he spent all the weekends working on the property on Ivey Rd. On his day job, he worked mostly during the night shift so he was mostly home during the day and went to work at 3:00 in the afternoon.

WF: At Southern Rail?

MW: Yes. The times that he was off from work he would come over here, grow and tend to his garden basically. I think he had chickens and pigs on Ivey Road and he built our home there on the four acres of land, he built a home a five bedroom home on the four acres of land and he continued to grow in his garden, I say farm, it was close to farming. So we moved over here, I think he must have purchased it in early '60 but we moved over here probably like I mentioned earlier about '65 to '68. We moved over here at that particular time into the house that he built.

WF: He was back and forth the whole time after you moved in?

MW: After we moved here of course, we moved into the house but before we moved here and after we moved here my father spent most of his weekends taking care of the garden, tending the pigs and the chickens and the things that he enjoyed. We had a huge garden and I don't have fond memories of that garden because I had to work it; it paid off, it kept me alive and healthy. It took me a while after I left home as an adult to get used to eating processed food because my mom always canned vegetables, like green beans and turnip greens and things like that always come fresh from the garden, tomatoes, corn and all that. My mom picked the vegetables and she canned them and stored them in a pantry in

the basement of our home. My mom never worked, she have twelve kids of course, so she never worked so she always took care of everything that the garden harvested, my mom always took it, canned it and put it up for us. At the time of the season that it was harvested such as green beans, she would take it and I remember as a child us having to go and pick the green beans and then we'd break them, she cooked them in a pressure cooker, put them in jars and she would store them in a pantry down in the basement. So we always had fresh vegetables. It took a while for me when I got married to get used to not having fresh vegetables like that.

WF: Did you want to go back to that.

MW: I did as much as possible.

WF: Do you remember what your father did when he was working for Southern Rail?

MW: He was, I remember when my mom completed various documents that I had to have completed for schools and other things – that she put on the document that he did some type of maintenance on the train and I think it said engine cleaner, he cleaned the engines. I remember him being very dirty, you know, he always wore these overall, coveralls and now that you mention it, I never thought about it, but he always kind of smelled like oil, so I think what he did was work with a pressure washer and he probably, now that I think about it, he probably stood there and just kind of cleaned the main engine of the train. That's interesting, maybe I need to go back and find out what he actually did. I think I'll do that.

WF: Was Southern Rail an integrated work force?

MW: Yes, it probably was. The blacks probably had maintenance jobs like that.

WF: He wasn't a lineman or anything like that?

MW: No, no, nothing like that. So they probably had very menial, I'm not going to say menial, just minimum jobs, nothing like you would see on the corporate side or the administrative side of course, but probably something like more or less the maintenance side of it.

WF: Okay. You said your mother just tended to the family.

MW: I never knew my mom to work. I don't think she ever worked while she was married at least.

WF: You turned eleven or twelve and you moved up here to Mableton and that's where you started attending Washington Street Elementary?

MW: Yes, we attended Washington Street and at Washington Street it was kind of different for me coming from Atlanta. It was like coming from, Atlanta to me, somebody would say if you were from the north - they would call it – say – like the country, but when I went to

Washington and came from Atlanta to Washington Street it was a totally different culture. Some of the things, it was funny, we were all still in the metropolitan Atlanta area but we all had different values and sort of different morals I would say. One thing was that my mom always stressed education and make sure you get your education. Then I saw some of the students there that their moms and dads didn't put as much time into them and sometimes it may come from being a single family home, but they didn't value, some things their values and their morals I guess were a little bit different than the way my mom and dad brought me up. Sometimes, like I said, it may have resulted as a result of a lot of my classmates came from single family homes. The education part of it, I didn't understand because the teachers sometimes were, the teachers really didn't encourage the students; sometimes they were very discouraging.

WF: How so? Can you give me an example?

MW: I really hate to say this but, sometimes they would say things like, "I got mine; you better get yours." Education. "I know your mom or your dad and you're never going to be anything." Those type of things. And I had never even in the environment I had come from in Atlanta I didn't understand why the teachers would say such things. My husband often talked about that too, why would a teacher say that to a child. Now as I reflect back on those statements - my mom and dad would never have said anything like that to really discourage me, so when you go to school and you hear something like that.

WF: And this is at Washington Street?

MW: Yes. So instead of inspiring the students at Washington Street I think sometimes they discouraged because it was a close knit community and I think the teachers knew some of the parents so when they made remarks like that it's because they knew the parents and they would say, some unkind things, some things were very negative.

WF: Were they more judgmental than should have been?

MW: Perhaps, because they knew the parents and I guess they assumed that if they knew the parent they were comfortable making statement like that to the child. It was kind of a very uncomfortable experience now that I reflect back on it.

WF: Do you remember anything else about Washington Street? The building itself, the classrooms the class sizes?

MW: I can't remember the class sizes. They were smaller.

WF: Smaller than in Atlanta?

MW: The school, and I think I only really went there the last half—we moved in April of '68, I think '68 so I went to Washington Street the last of my sixth grade year and the seventh grade so maybe one year or nine months, probably a total of twelve months prior to attending Austell Junior High. I'm trying to remember a lot about it. I remember we

had, the teachers disciplined the students. I don't remember that too much of that in the previous elementary school, in the school in Atlanta, but the teacher physically disciplined the students at Washington Street.

WF: Like paddling the hands?

MW: Yes, and that was allowed then. They paddled on the hand, the butt, wherever and that was allowed. I probably remember getting a paddling too and they make you hold your hand out and one of the teachers, and it's probably for talking—I didn't talk very much, I was very quiet in school—but you had your friends and they catch you whispering, which I'm sure was the case and they would paddle you. They paddled you for, if you were talking or out of order in class in any way and they paddled if you didn't get your homework done. It probably seems strange to you, coming from a more, contemporary society, but at that time they did paddle you - just like you'd get a paddling at home, they would paddle you at school. They would make you hold your hands out and hit you with a ruler and in some cases they had belts and they would spank the kids with the belts. The teachers, most of the time boys, they would spank the boys.

WF: While you were at Washington Street school integration was going on at that time, do you remember your parents talking about it or anybody in general being concerned?

MW: I don't remember a whole lot of the conversation but what I remember specifically, when I got to Austell Junior High. When I went to the middle school it wasn't a hard transition and because it wasn't, because a lot of my friends from the predominately Washington Street came with me so I had the support of them when we made that transition from African-American school to the integrated schools, to the white schools. So it wasn't as hard of an adjustment because I had the companionship of my classmates that came with us so it was more of us in number. But when I made the transition to Pebblebrook from the middle school, which I went to the middle school in the eighth and the ninth grade—the junior high so it was junior high, I went to the eighth and ninth grade but when I went to the tenth grade and went to Pebblebrook, the predominately white school, it was only maybe three or four at the most African-Americans that attended that predominately white school. That was where culture shock really set in. There was fear of being intimidated, not being accepted and just being new to that type of environment. One of the things that took place with integration was the busing. They would not allow the bus to come down, from the white school, from Pebblebrook, they would not allow the yellow bus to come down in on Ivey Road - it was a dirt road at the time, they wouldn't allow it to come down to pick us up. So they had one of the buses from the African-American school, which the African-American school no longer existed, but they had some bus drivers still, so they sent the bus down to pick us up and take us, it took us up to a point - probably about three miles up the road to catch the white bus to school.

WF: They didn't even get a bus that could come all the way to your street; you had to split up the ride.

MW: Yes, they had an African-American bus driver and I guess he was with Cobb County, to come down the dirt road to pick us up and take us up to meet the white bus.

WF: Do you remember when the county or the state first announced it to you?

MW: I don't recall, being young, I guess, you know, my parents probably would have, it was probably more on the news than anything - that I heard about the integration but did not fully understand in some respect. But what I did understand and over hear in my conversations - that she did not like that we had to be bused. She didn't understand—this is one conversation that went on—she didn't understand why the white bus couldn't come down and pick us up. My mother wasn't a very vocal person, like taking it to the county to find why - but I think one of the neighbor's moms, like Mary Ward's mom and some of the other neighbors got together and eventually they had the buses to come down and pick us up. But prior to that, if the black driver didn't pick us up, for some reason he didn't pick us up, we had to walk those one or two miles from our home up to the white bus. Of course, my mom didn't like that. She just wasn't very vocal about it. Another thing too, the adjustment period, when we first integrated the school, I had a very hard time and I would come home every day and cry and my mom tried to talk to my dad. I remember her talking to my dad because she was very upset because I was upset every day. Really and truly she didn't like the integration part of it, but my dad pushed it because he said that we had to pave the way for the others. So he saw that. My dad's from Alabama. My mom didn't. My mom was kind of like a sheltered person and she wanted the best for us and she wanted us to be comfortable and happy.

WF: Was she from northwest Atlanta?

MW: Yes, she was from Atlanta born in Villa Rica, Georgia.

WF: She grew up in an African-American close-knit community and you say your father was from Alabama?

MW: My father is from Alabama and my father had more exposure working with whites and my mother didn't. So he knew the importance of everybody integrating in a society that's integrated so my father knew that. My mom tried to talk him into allowing us to go up to the, they still had the African-American high school which was Lemon Street, they still had that high school so she tried to talk my dad into allowing me to go there because I was so miserable. And he wouldn't have it.

WF: So he was more about progress than he was about easy transition.

MW: Yes, exactly. Absolutely! He saw the real need in it, in us doing it, he understood it more so than she did so that was one of the conversation that I remember them having. She was very upset about the situation that we had to go, either walk to the bus or the bus driver had to come get us and take us up there and then me not adjusting very well to the school.

WF: Austell Junior High was the first integrated school you went to. What was that like going from a school that the staff and faculty were African-American to one where it was predominately white?

MW: It was, it was predominately white. It was a better transition than my experience at the high school. It was an adjustment.

WF: Did you find yourself getting treated differently than you had before?

MW: Yes, we were treated differently. Of course, we were exposed to a lot more than we were in the African-American school. One thing, I remember in the African-American school, we used to get books and the books came from the white schools. They were most of the time already written in and sometimes pages were torn and sometimes the backing and the binding was off of the books.

WF: It was hand-me-downs.

MW: Hand-me-downs. But when we went to the white school we had new books. I remember that as a child.

WF: That must have been exciting.

MW: Yes, brand new books. We rarely had that. We didn't have brand new books at the black school but even they made us take care of them, in the black school they made us take care of the books, we would have to, you probably never had to do this but we had to wrap the books, even the raggedy books that were torn up and pages worn and we had to wrap our books in the African-American schools. In the white school, from each grade, I remember eight, ninth, tenth, eleventh twelfth had new books, brand new books and of course if they had been used they had been used a year or two by the previous student. But I do remember we had new books in most of my classes - we changed the different classes for the different subjects. The teaching and the learning style was different than what I experience in the black school.

WF: How so?

MW: I think just the style and method of teaching was different than I had experienced. I'm trying to see how it was so I can give you specifics.

WF: Was it more institutionalized?

MW: Probably more so.

WF: Because it wasn't that close-knit?

MW: Yes, maybe more disciplined - more work, heavier work loads, they expected more from you, I guess. The workload definitely was different. I adjusted very well, I think I don't

remember, I'll tell you about the high school, but I adjusted very well. I remember an incident in one of my English classes and I've always done well in English, my teacher's name was Mrs. Goodman; you can strike the name if you want to, but she and one of the other teachers didn't adjust too well to the black community, coming to the school and it was like she was one of these teachers that kind of ran the school, kind of like the person who . . .

WF: Like a senior teacher?

MW: Right, yes. She had seniority and she had influence. So she didn't adjust too well but she taught English and in the English class I made very good grades, I have always like English and grammar and I made very good grades. As a matter of fact, I made all A's and B's on my tests and all the assignments. One day what she did was she called out the grades of each student, she went down and it was the letter grade, she'd say, "97," "98," "99," "100," etc. and she went down and she called out all my grades. She called out everybody's for that quarter. Then she brought to the attention of the class that me and one other guy—his name was Michael (white student); I don't remember his last name—were the two top students in the class because of our grades and we had the highest grades. I can't remember whether it was a letter grade or whether it was like 98 or 99 but anyway, it was like all A's. But anyway, when I got my report card I had a C. She called out all the grades . . .

WF: So she had changed your grade?

MW: Yes, she changed my grade. I had a C but in the classroom me and Michael were A students, I would say A, B students and we were the highest in the class - the two of us. But when I got my report card I had a C. That's stuck with me for years, even today because I'm sharing it with you and I never could understand why she would give me a C when all my grades were A's in that class.

WF: It was obviously not just an error.

MW: Right, it was no error at all.

WF: Did you ever take it to her?

MW: No, I was still a teenager and just didn't, I thought about it as an adult but as a teenager I wasn't very vocal and I never did say anything about it, I just accepted it very passively I guess. I look back at it now and I say if I had to do it all over again it would be different, but definitely, she read—this is like the end of the quarter, I guess it was then, and she told us all about our grades and my grade was no lower than an A- at least and she gave me a C and I'll never forget that. I attribute that to being something more than, her not dealing with integration. I always thought about it.

WF: She didn't want it to succeed.

MW: Yes. I also remember a time when I went to the bathroom and the teacher, she and one other teacher.

WF: This is Ms. Goodwin?

MW: Yes, Mrs. Goodwin. I went to the restroom and she and one other teacher were in the girls' restroom talking and I came in and I was kind of startled when I came in and they looked at me, they were in the midst of a deep conversation in the girl bathroom – which I thought was odd; they looked at me and I can't remember what her response was but she said something like, "You need to hurry and get back to class." Something like that. But I think I interrupted their conversation and I had the strangest feeling that it wasn't anything positive to build anybody up.

WF: Did you find yourself noticing a lot of that after the transition? I'm assuming you're talking mostly about Pebblebrook.

MW: No, this is Austell. I haven't gotten to Pebblebrook. I'll tell you about Pebblebrook. That's Austell Junior High. That's all I can remember, those specific things, I don't remember a lot of racism, just, I don't remember a lot of racism at Austell.

WF: I was talking to Suzanne Henry and she was mentioning how she noticed once she made it to the integrated school it would still be like you had to stand last in line, you never got your chance to move to the front of the line to be like the line leader, of course, she was talking about elementary school.

MW: Okay, perhaps.

WF: She was a little bit behind you.

MW: Exactly. That may have been the case with the line separation. I don't remember in blatant racism other than Ms. Goodwin.

WF: Austell Junior High wasn't too bad.

MW: No, it wasn't traumatic for me. It was a very good experience. I just remember I think, even with like I said, I had the support and the surrounding of my other African-American friends from school so I don't remember a whole lot. I'm sure there might have been some issues but I can't remember other than Mrs. Goodwin that will stick with me, and the other teacher, but I don't remember the teachers actually being very racist at all other than her.

WF: What do you remember about being able to mix with the white students? Did you actually talk to them or was it more they kept to themselves, we kept to ourselves, kind of thing?

MW: I'm trying to remember. It is so strange that I don't remember a lot about Austell because I guess I went maybe two years but I do remember maybe one class and I don't know which one it was, maybe a class that maybe mostly blacks were in, and I don't know if that was every, I don't remember any remedial classes but seems like mostly blacks were in that class. It was maybe a history or science class or something. I'm wondering if they had certain classes that we went to and it may have been a remedial class but I just don't remember details but I remember a class that only blacks were in that classroom. So I don't know what class that was. I don't remember anything, any blatant racism, too much of it in Austell.

WF: Austell Junior High must have been more of a quiet experience.

MW: It was.

WF: Tell me about Pebblebrook.

MW: At Pebblebrook there were only just a few of us there. In my class I went there when I was in the tenth grade. It was maybe five blacks African-Americans, and late on that first year, that was the first year, the second year it may be one or two more came so it ended up being maybe in my class it was two—me and one other black girl that graduated with me.

WF: When did you graduate?

MW: We graduated in '71. There was just two in the class of '71. Her name was Janice Daniel and she might be able to share some things too but I would say I experienced more racism in the high school from the principal, not a lot from the teachers, I don't remember a whole lot from the teachers, they kept it hidden, but from of the students. A lot of the students tried to befriend you, especially the girls, and these were the white students, they would befriend you but then what was really strange was when we were amongst ourselves in a setting where I remember one girl, I thought she was my friend but when we were amongst ourselves she would talk and we would laugh and we were just like best friends. But in the presence of others then she acted like she didn't know me. I never understood that, being in the tenth grade. I said, "How can you be my friend when we're alone, but when others come around you totally ignore me like I'm not there. I remember one girl, her name was Wendy Bagwell, she was captain of the cheer leaders, very, very, nice -her dad, you know Wendy Bagwell, Thornton Road, it's named for her dad and the furniture store located on Veteran Memorial Hwy- but she was very popular in school and she kind of embraced us and I think that because she did it a lot of other people began to accept us.

So she kind of laid the way for a lot of them to open up to us. The teachers were okay. The principal, the first year principal was, I'm just going to put it out there, he was very racist. Mr. McQuary. I don't think he lasted there maybe a year that I was there - but Mr. McQuary was a in your face racist and I'll tell you what, we didn't go to the pep

rallies, sometimes we didn't feel comfortable in the pep rallies - you know how you have pep rallies on Friday.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

WF: You were telling me about the pep rally?

MW: At the pep rallies we didn't feel comfortable going to the pep rallies because some of the more rowdy kids would throw paper and throw things at you at the pep rallies so we stopped going to the pep rallies. What we would do is we found a classroom and we would assemble in the little classroom so the principal found us in there one day and he came in and he blessed us out for not attending the pep rallies. It was obvious that he was very angry – red faced angry - yelling at us. I had an incident, this guy, his name was Adrian West, red-headed guy, and he would call me the “n” word; he would see me walking down the hall and I'm drinking the water and he would call me the “n” word. So I went to the office to report it and of course the secretary said, “Well, okay, I'll tell Mr. McQuary.” Well, I don't think that ever happened. But he was one of the ones that instigated or stirred up or attempt to intimidate us racially.

WF: The principal didn't stop it?

MW: The principal didn't do much to stop it. He wasn't very supportive and he wasn't helping the transition at all, the principal didn't. But that's the negative side of it. The very positive part of it was I had a teacher, her name was Mrs. Griffin. Mrs. Griffin taught computers; it was a computer class. Pebblebrook at that time was one of the first schools to have the computer system classes and she was the one that taught it, taught computer classes, to have a computer class. She taught computers. I took the class. Mrs. Griffin embraced me and she kind of took me under her wings and she trained me. It was a key punch machine then, I don't know if you know anything about a key punch machine but she trained me on the key punch machine, she would take me places and show me actual computers, Cobb County Board of Education to show me the big main frame computer, so she exposed me a lot to computers. During the summer because Pebblebrook had the key punch machines, they were just machines where you sit there and you type and it was a card that you typed in, you typed in the cards and the cards were digital. Are you familiar with the key punch machine?

WF: Not very actually.

MW: When you type it had all numbers on it so it was digital and then there was a machine that read the cards and then when it read the cards it took the information to a tape, anyway, if you ever study computers you'll hear about that, the antiquated way of computerizing things. So I used to sit and do the key punch machine and she taught me how to, of course, I learned to type prior to taking computers because that was a requirement so what she did was she exposed me to the key punch machine and she exposed me to the

main frame computers. She got me my first job, one of my first jobs with Cobb County Board of Education during the summer typing all of the students' schedules of all the schools in Cobb County for the high schools and I would sit there all summer long and type those keys of the students' schedules.

WF: What year was that?

MW: It must have been, I'm going to say—I graduated in '71 so I'm going to say like '69 or '70, between '69 and '71. I typed all those schedules for Mrs. Griffin. Mrs. Griffin also used to just take me places as a student; she just kind of embraced me like her own.

WF: Was she an African-American teacher?

MW: No. She was white. She just treated me like I was her daughter. She was very loving and she didn't mind, I mean, when she would take me places, she would proudly tell people, "This is Marjorie." She data entered all of the student schedules for Cobb County and she is very smart. My mom liked Mrs. Griffin too, Mrs. Griffin would take me into her home and spend time with me and then she would take me back home and my mom and her developed a close relationship. Mrs. Griffin was the reason I survived Pebblebrook High School. I remember an algebra teacher, I can't remember her name, very young teacher, very. I thought she was a very beautiful lady, dark hair, I struggled very hard with algebra and it was kind of the reverse situation as it was at junior high with the English class where I made all good grades. In algebra I made all bad grades but I remember the teacher giving me an overall grade of a B+ and I thought no way in the world did all my grades, failing grades in algebra add up to a B+ but at Pebblebrook it was the reverse of what happened at Austell Junior High. I guess you can say that I received reparation at Pebblebrook....

WF: I've been to Pebblebrook, I've seen the school and the hallways . . .

MW: Which one did you go to? The one where we went was over off of Buckner Road.

The one on Buckner Road, even at that time was an old school. I really wanted to attend - I wanted to go to South Cobb. South Cobb at the time was, most of the kids from Austell Middle School and some of the others coming from the African-American High School went to South Cobb so it was more blacks going to South Cobb so I wanted to go to South Cobb because that would have the transition of integration easier for me because I still had my friends. But at Pebblebrook, because it was predominately white and maybe just five of us it was kind of like I got kind of lost in the integration thing. But the high school was old, Pebblebrook was old, the building was old, and I'm not sure how old it was. We didn't have a lot of the things like South Cobb did and some of the others schools, like Wheeler and Sprayberry and McEachern -those were our competitors. We didn't have, we had a poor football team, didn't have a track team. I used to run so they used to, one of the PE teachers wanted to start a track team and she wanted to use me but that never materialized so they never had a track team. I think that sometimes they didn't have some of the same things to offer us because I think maybe we were more traditional,

for lack of a better word, kind of rural setting as opposed to South Cobb, Sprayberry, and McEachern. It was very country. In fact, some of the students that came there chewed tobacco, spit tobacco and stuff so that will give you some idea of how country it was. But they didn't have some of the same resources to offer us as some of the other schools - it was an older school.

WF: Do you remember walking through the halls there, when you first started going to Pebblebrook, what was the attitude overall? Were you given an escort to school the first day?

MW: No escorts. No protesting. I think we had, I didn't encounter any of that. None. I do remember walking down the hallways and sometimes people acted like that you were, if you touch them in some type of way that they would, you know, catch something. So the reactions from some of the students, it wasn't the whole student body but a few of them, they see you coming and they draw back but no protests or things like that. I think that probably happened maybe, it was happening in the South, I think, but I think we had reached a state in the '60s where the protesting, at that particular point when I went through desegregation all the protesting part of it had taken place. At that point it's like okay, it's happening, desegregation.

WF: So when you started going to Pebblebrook everybody was learning to deal with it.

MW: They were beginning to accept it. So the protest part of it wasn't the part of that. It was just being accepted by the teachers and the students. I think the students probably didn't have as much of a problem with it as probably the parents did - because of the era that they grew up in - and that just was - you just didn't integrate. They just didn't integrate; they didn't do things with blacks. Everything was labeled colored and black. As a matter of fact, for my husband, in Austell, he went to Austell, he grew up in Austell and I don't remember this happening as a young child growing up in Atlanta. It may have been more prevalent in Cobb County. I remember my husband talks about the times when he would go to Austell and there were signs that said for colored and for whites only, going to a restaurant, water fountains. I don't recall that. I don't recall seeing signs like that at all when I grew up but they were probably there - but when I grew up in the '60s I don't recall seeing them. But it just depends on where you grew up. He grew up in Austell as a child so he saw a lot of that. I grew up in Atlanta and because Atlanta was a central place for civil rights and Martin Luther King was doing the, you know, he was the activist for civil rights, then I think Atlanta was the model city for civil rights and I was living in Atlanta as a child so I didn't see, that was not acceptable to see signs for whites only, blacks only in Atlanta because we were the model city. And I think it was a city too busy to hate. So I didn't notice signs like that that, growing up as a child, I didn't see that but my husband talks about it. It was happening, it was still prevalent and right in the metropolitan areas of Atlanta because my husband grew up in Austell and he saw thing and experienced things that I never experienced. The only thing I remember as a child, and it was earlier, like maybe five years old, getting on the bus and going to the back of the bus. However, I don't know if that was just a thing going with my mom and that was a thing she was accustomed to doing (going to the back of the bus).

WF: Like a habit?

MW: Yes, a habit, right, or that it was still, they were still pushing it at that time and that's where blacks had to sit at the back of the bus.

WF: So it could have been a social norm and not mandatory.

MW: Exactly. But I remember at five years old that's the only thing I remember- socially about that particular era, the civil rights era.

WF: You said mainly the problem with integration at that point was less with the students and more with the parents. Do you remember your parents going to PTA meetings?

MW: My mother didn't. My mother didn't and my dad didn't because he worked. Remember he worked two jobs and my mother didn't drive so she didn't have transportation. I think if she did, if I was in something like one or two times in the chorus and she came to hear me sing, she would come with my neighbor, Mrs. Ward, Mary Cater and her sister or someone else who were in the same performance at school and my mother would have the transportation to come. But no, she didn't attend regular PTA meetings.

WF: She wasn't very active?

MW: No, not at all. She didn't get around too much other than the time that she had transportation or wherever my dad took her.

WF: Do you remember ever being outside the classroom with your friends and co-mingling in groups or was it as soon as the final bell ended everybody went back to their perspective areas?

MW: No, I don't remember, I remember being alone a lot even in the classroom I didn't feel comfortable going to the lunchroom because I had to sit by myself so often I would bring my lunch or bring something in my purse to snack on, not necessarily lunch and sit in the classroom and I hate lunch period because, and I never will forget that most of the time I sat in the classroom by myself after everybody went to lunch. Then at first I didn't want to go to the lunch room because I had to sit at a table by myself in the lunch period so what I did first and that was part of the time- I was very sad about, the adjustment part of the school, I would go and sit in the bathroom, at first I started sitting in the bathroom instead of going to the lunchroom because I didn't want to sit by myself. Nobody befriended me enough to sit with me. You've - have a whole table in the lunchroom and you're sitting there by yourself.

WF: Were you the only African-American at that lunch period?

MW: Yes, at that lunch period. I was very uncomfortable with that so I would go and sit in the bathroom. Then I think maybe the next year or so I had a classroom and I think the

teacher knew it and I asked them can I sit in there and he allowed me to sit, I think it was a history class, and I sat in the history class, during the history period I think we went to lunch and then after lunch we came back to that class. So I sat in that classroom and probably ate my lunch. Sometimes I didn't eat a lunch if I didn't bring my lunch I would go a whole day without eating a lunch. Rarely do I remember going to the lunchroom for the entire time I was there because I didn't want to, I didn't have any friend and my other black classmate who was in the grade with me, we had different lunch times but I think she adjusted better than I did.

WF: So you were a little more apprehensive?

MW: Yes.

WF: Friday night is a high school football night, do you remember going to any games?

MW: No games.

WF: Any sort of school functions, club meetings?

MW: No, and I missed that during high school. I remember they talked me into entering the Ms. Pebblebrook beauty pageant and it was kind of like a pageant and I entered that. I got up to the last, the ten finalists, because there's a process of elimination and I got up to the ten finalists. I think I was a senior then and the captain of the football was my escort, I can't remember his name, he was a nice-looking guy too, but he was the captain of the football team.

WF: Was he white?

MW: Yes, he was white. He was my escort as they escorted us out, I think probably in the beginning it was the number of girls, probably thirty or forty, I'm going to say thirty that was in that pageant and I got down to the ten finalists and I remember him walking out, escorting me and when he escorted me he said, "You look beautiful." I never will forget that. I was scared to death! But when I walked out onto the little stage in my little yellow dress, the same dress I wore to the prom and I could hear like the audience was like very pleased, they made sounds like "Ohh, ahh!" kind of things. But of course I walked out with the captain of the football team, but he was very kind, I remember that. Prom, going to the prom, the prom, I didn't want to go to the prom but my friend, Janice the other classmate, African-American classmate, she talked me into going, she said, "Listen, let's go." We went to the prom and it turned out to be a very nice experience.

WF: Did you go with a date?

MW: Yes. I went with actually, with who is my husband now. We were dating then so he took me. I don't remember dancing because he didn't dance! But I remember it was a very nice experience, the hotel was nice.

WF: You were accepted the whole way through?

MW: Yes. Everybody was very nice.

WF: Nobody questioned why you were at the prom?

MW: No, the prom was very nice. Everybody was I guess in a different setting, everybody was just really nice and cordial. We didn't of course, stay the whole while, we stayed there sitting and socializing and then we left. And I think we sat at a table with whites and they were very nice. But no, I don't remember, they were very receptive at the prom.

WF: So really it was just the pep rallies.

MW: The pep rallies and even in the midst of it, I don't know how many students were at pep rallies, I think in my class graduation, maybe 200 or 300 but it was only just a handful of students that caused trouble; the Adrian Wests and maybe his few little friends. But other than that, I don't remember - maybe some, when you're going down the hall, I guess when you first there and they had to get used to you and some of them were afraid, I can't be next to you, I'm afraid you might touch me. I don't remember too much racism other than maybe a few students.

WF: After school, did you always go home and help with the family? I know you had a large family.

MW: Yes, just basically I'd catch the bus—oh, let me tell you an experience on the bus and this is when we were being transported from the African-American bus driver taking us up to meet the white bus.

WF: Was that all four years?

MW: For my high school years, that was, I went to high school for tenth, eleventh and twelfth because they had the middle school and the middle school was eighth and ninth.

WF: Was the busing like that the whole time?

MW: The busing, yes, through the tenth grade. Wait a minute, let me think. No, as a matter of fact, it wasn't, because remember I told you it wasn't. The busing, after some of the parents began protesting about it and us having to walk, I think that happened the first year, maybe the tenth grade and then maybe the last two years then the bus started coming down to pick us up. I don't know if it was just because it was a dirt road but no, if the "black" bus could come then that "white" bus should have been able to come down as well too. But I remember an experience on the "white" bus, they had, the bus driver had us sit on the first front seats and I don't know why, maybe so she can watch us.

Keep a close eye, and make sure maybe that we didn't get in trouble or anybody didn't say or do anything to us. But I remember an incident on the bus with the bus driver and

something happened, I'm not sure what it was, it was something between a student but I think it was a conflict between me and this student and of course she took the side of the student. She called me a name and I never will forget the bus driver, she called me the "n" word. So needless to say, I hated that bus. But no, other than just a few minor details because I was very quiet, real passive and I guess I made the friends that I made were some of them were very nice. I remember some of them specifically reaching out to us.

WF: Like Wendy Bagwell?

MW: Wendy Bagwell.

WF: Do you still talk to them today?

MW: Wendy. I still see her occasionally. There's another girl named Amy, my sisters ran into her and she said, "Tell Marjorie to call me." We get e-mails for class reunions because they combined Pebblebrook and—because the classes were small and the class reunions and some of them had died off and some of them had moved away and some of them got lost in the midst, but they combined a lot of the classes during that time together and so I get e-mails just staying in touch, keeping in touch. I haven't been—they had this year, they had like a class reunion- they had a revisit to the school, the Pebblebrook School and my sister wanted to go and she said, "Let's go." They wanted us to the school; this was this past summer saying we can go and revisit the campus for the Pebblebrook School. I said, "No, I don't really have a lot of fond memories and I don't want to go back to revisit that." Probably I should have just to remember and go back and see the hallways and see how I felt and I probably can do that if I want to. Right now I think it's Lindley sixth grade and it's over off of Buckner Road; this was the class reunion for this year.

WF: So the Lindley school now is actually . . .

MW: It was Pebblebrook.

WF: You pass right by it so I've seen it.

MW: Yes. So they had the opportunity for us to go back and revisit the campus and I told my sister, my sister wanted to go and I said "No, I don't think I want to go and revisit that past."

WF: Which sister is that?

MW: Her name is Cynthia Zachary. She might have some more stories to tell too. I wish I could have had her here. She might help. Another person too is, you said Suzanne Henry but my baby sister . . .

WF: Carol?

MW: Carol. Did you talk to her?

WF: No, Mrs. Henry had quite a bit to say about Carol and how they were basically attached at the hip.

MW: They were. They were militant! That's who you need to talk to. She's very vocal and she was very like radical! Suzanne and her both but I know Carol was very radical and out spoken.

WF: Suzanne seemed to think that she was very quiet and laid back.

MW: Who Carol?

WF: No, Suzanne was and Carol was the instigator.

MW: Oh right, exactly! That's who you need to talk to. She could tell you some stories and I think that's what made her today and she's still radical. [laughter] She would be a very interesting person. She has some stories to tell. They experience it from elementary school all the way to high school so her story would be totally different from mine.

WF: Instead of just being a couple of years.

MW: Exactly.

WF: After high school what did do? You had been working with the Board of Education in the summers; did you go to work with them full-time?

MW: Right. What I did after high school I had made an application to go to an African-American college, Morris Brown, but what happened was I wanted to find a summer job in the meantime and when I found the summer job and I used Mrs. Griffin, our computer teacher as a reference and when I did she gave me a very good reference and they gave me what I thought was very good pay for that. What happened was, in lieu of going on to college during the summer I got used to the income.

WF: Where were you working?

MW: At the time it was Fulton National Bank and then the name changed to Bank South and then it went to Nations Bank of America. Bank America bought them out but it was one of the bigger banks, it was one of the first banks in downtown Atlanta. So I went and started working for the bank. I was the youngest person because I had come right out of high school and everybody else was older than I was but I had the experience and all of them had gone to trade school to get it but I came right out of high school.

WF: Thanks to Mrs. Griffin.

MW: Yes. From Mrs. Griffin and with her recommendation so I went into corporate America and started working as a key punch operator among older adults, with older adults who

had gone to trade school and finished high school and military school, finished that and got a job. So the money was good and I forego going to college which was another thing, let me tell you, my father, the reason why is because my father tried to talk me out of going to an black college—remember I told you that he kind of pushed the integration thing of going to high school, make sure that we go to the all white high school to kind of pave the way for everyday else—when I chose to go to college I wanted to go to the black college because of my experience in the white school. My father tried to talk me out of going to Morris Brown and said that some of the co-workers on his job, some of their children had gone to Georgia State and they recommended Georgia State. He tried to influence me, encouraged me to go to Georgia State. I said, “If I have to go to Georgia State I’m not going to school at all.” Wrong choice! And I didn’t. So I didn’t go to college right out of high school. I went and started working. When I started making the money I didn’t go to Morris Brown, I just stayed there and continued to work. But if I had it to do all over again, I would listen to my father and went on to Georgia State.

WF: Your father was just progressive all the way.

MW: Yes, absolutely.

WF: What was his education?

MW: Ninth grade. My mother was eleventh grade, my mother dropped out of school to get married to my father but my father was—very smart too, very smart, very ambitious, come from Alabama, raised, I think maybe five kids, he grew up with siblings, but my father built the house, the five bedroom home that we moved into in Cobb County. I didn’t realize that until I was an adult how smart my dad was. Of course, when you’re kids and teenagers growing up you think that your parents don’t know anything but my dad was a very smart person, very wise. If I had it to do over again, I would definitely go the same route, even with the integration part of it I wouldn’t have been so resistant and then I would have transitioned, you know, come out of high school and go to Georgia State and continued on my way. But I didn’t and I continued to work and of course, I think at twenty-one I got married and I think maybe twenty-four had my first child and that’s when I decided to go back to school.

WF: Do you remember any problems in the work force early on?

MW: In the work force, yes. In the work force, most of that department was African-American but of course the administrative part was white. There was racism promotion-wise, pay-wise. We did the same job and of course, you know there were leads, team leads so to speak, but everybody, the pay scale was unbalanced even though we were doing the same job – data entry—you could have somebody that come in off the street and if they were white they would get paid twice as much as we would- we found out about it. We were treated differently; they were promoted faster, even with the same skill set. The blacks in that department some of them were, it was strange at the time, I didn’t notice it but most of the blacks were on the night shift and the whites were on the day shift.

WF: Did you work the night shift as well?

MW: No, I worked the day shift. But most of the blacks that were already there when I got there; and there were a few on the day shift. The ones that were on the day shift had seniority so I guess they moved but all the blacks worked the night shift mostly and the whites were on the day shifts. No whites unless it was a supervisor on the night shift.

WF: Do you attribute a lot of your getting the job to Mrs. Griffin's recommendation? Do you think a lot of that had to do with her actually being a teacher?

MW: Yes, and being white and with me being able to go straight to the day shift. She really gave me probably, I know she did, a very outstanding recommendation and I had to live up to it so I did. But my thing was when I first got there my intention was just to work during the summer. It was hard to find a part-time summer job, so when I got that job I said I'm going to just work during the summer and quit. But of course I got used to the money and I decided I didn't want to go to Georgia State after battling with my father and I just decided to stay there. But yes, I did stay. I think the reason why I did get the chance to go work on the day shift was because of Mrs. Griffin's recommendation.

WF: Did you experience any animosity from any of the other African-American co-workers because of it?

MW: Yes. Even with that I began to, and I did, and because of my age and some of them were older, at the time I didn't realize it but it was a lot of anger, jealousy, even with that and I think because I did not take part in a lot of the rebellion of my team members, teammates in the work force. Sometimes you will have certain groups that will always keep things stirred up and said things were racially motivated and the reason why some things happened was because of racism. Some people were very vocal about that and they just always had little groups, little cliques within the work force and I never took a part in that and I think that the management saw that, that I didn't take part in it and they treated me different so the African-American cohorts thought I was being a Tom basically and so when things would get back to management they would think that I would tell it because I would say that . . .

WF: Everybody was automatically suspicious of you?

MW: Yes.

WF: Obviously this project is based in part on the NAACP. Did you ever become a member; were you ever active?

MW: Not until recently. I just joined it and hadn't been really active.

WF: Did you hear about it when you were growing up in school?

MW: I heard a lot about it. Not growing up in school because I think growing up in school I always thought that that was, you know, my parents took part in it but no, I never joined it or took part in it until recently and have become very active in the community. I'm a member of it now but back then no.

WF: Looking back in the past and how you were treated and how everything was then and where you've gotten to today, how do you feel about the progress and what do you feel that we're still lacking and you still need to fix problems?

MW: That's a tough question. Still I think in the work force with the salary I still think that there's still some degree of salary not being equal, kind of more of a bias and I don't know if that's because some times it is not only attributed to race but gender, sex too. So as far as salary and promotions in the work force. So most of it I guess would be within corporate America I still think it's there's still somewhat of an imbalance on the pay scale.

WF: What about as far as everyday society, not just in the work force?

MW: Everyday in our society you still experience racism and I think I used to think it only happened in the South, but I think it's still prevalent throughout the country in some areas. Even going into the grocery store or going into a dress shop, in the South, even right here in Cobb County, going into an upscale dress shop I'd feel like I'm treated differently. Some stores and stuff if I walk into a store sometimes in Cobb County and I'm going to say Cobb County because most of the times, sometimes in certain areas of Cobb County, let's say Kennesaw, if I walk into a store as an African-American woman, an upscale dress shop I'm treated very differently. I'm not spoken to but if somebody else walks through the door they're greeted very cordially so there's still some racism that exists – we are still being treated differently because of the color of your skin.

WF: Status-wise there's still an imbalance.

MW: There's still some, yes. I think people, socially—sometimes we're still not accepted. Even though we grew up in Cobb County and begin to integrate the neighborhoods, you know, buying a home. At that time they were trying to push the integration at that time too, instead of moving here in a predominately African-American community in Cobb County -a lot of African-Americans were moving into all white neighborhoods.

WF: The Fair Housing Act?

MW: Yes. Exactly. I don't remember experiencing racism at that point. I do remember in DeKalb County when I bought my home in DeKalb County, because white flight began to happen in Lithonia, and I do remember moving into a predominately white community there - I woke up one morning and there was a cross out on my front lawn. It was laid flat on the ground – some one had taken pieces of wood and laid it out across the lawn. We were the first ones to move into that neighborhood. It wasn't a burned cross but it

was just the sign of, the symbol of a cross and they had taken some wood and just laid it out there. So that was like. . .

WF: So you were worried about some possible Klan activity?

MW: Yes, or they wanted you to think that. It may have been some children, teenagers that did it.

WF: Playing a practical joke?

MW: Exactly. It's like, you know, you're not accepted. But you know, I don't remember a whole lot of racism. I think what happened and you could probably go back to someone even before me that lived through the racism in Cobb County. I think most of mine occurred with the integration of the schools -now that I think about it, with integration in the school system, but in other areas you could probably find, even my husband and I think they talked to him, you could probably find some other areas where blacks were treated differently. But I think with my era, when I was growing up, they were beginning to accept us or at least be tolerant -because we were pushing integration. Mine wasn't quite as traumatic as some probably went through.

WF: I want to thank you very much. I really appreciate it. I got some really good information from you.

MW: I probably didn't have as much to offer as some, like I said, some others - but I hope this is helpful.

END OF INTERVIEW

INDEX

- Austell Middle School,
 - Demographics of student body, 20-21
 - Materials at, 28
 - Racist teacher at, 29

- Bagwell, Wendy, 31, 38
- Beavers, Carol, 38-39
- Beavers-Woods, Marjorie
 - On moving to Mableton, Georgia from Northeast Atlanta, 19, 24
 - Remembering segregation on public buses, 19
 - Attending segregated Washington Street elementary school, 20, 24-26
 - Attending integrated Austell Middle School, 20-21, 25-26, 30, 33
 - Attending Pebblebrook High School, 20, 32, 37
 - Father of, 22-24, 40
 - Mother of, 23-25, 40
 - Integrating Pebblebrook High School, 26, 31, 33
 - Parents' reaction to, 27
 - Relationship with other students after, 34
 - Lunch period during, 35
 - Remembering dealing with a racist teacher at Austell M.S., 29-30
 - Relationship with Mrs. Griffin of Pebblebrook High School, 32-33, 39, 41
 - Getting her first job at Fulton National Bank, 39
 - Huband of (John Woods), 34, 36-37, 40
 - As a finalist in Ms Pebblebrook Beauty Pageant, 36
 - Attending Pebblebrook H.S. prom, 36-37
 - On workplace discrimination, 40-41
 - On reverse racism, 41
 - On joining the NAACP, 42
 - On the changes need in modern America, 42
 - Finding a cross her lawn in DeKalb County, Georgia, 42
- Bellwood, Georgia, 19

- Cater, Mary Ward, 22, 35
- Cobb County, Georgia
 - Integration of school system, 20
 - Race relation in, 30, 33
 - Racial composition of the southern portion of, 33
 - Racism in, 42

- Daniel, Janice, 31, 36

- Griffin, Mrs. (computer teacher at Pebblebrook High School), 32-33, 39, 41

- Henry, Susanne, 30, 39

Ivey Road in Mableton, Georgia, 23, 26

King, Martin Luther, 20, 34

Lemon Street High School, 27

McQuary, Mr (principal at Pebblebrook High School), 31-32

Pebblebrook High School, 20

Integration at, 26

Student reactions to integration at, 31-32

Racist principal at, 31-32

Age of, 33

Prom at, 36-37

Race relations at, 37

Bussing at, 37

Reunion of students from, 38

Southern Railway, 23-24

Washington Street Elementary School

Segregation at, 20

Overcrowding at, 21

Teachers at, 22

Sub-standard material and “hand-me-down books” at, 28

West, Adrian, 32, 37

Woods, John, 34, 36-37, 40

Zachary, Cynthia, 38

This item is part of the following collection:
Thomas Allan Scott, 1943-
Kennesaw State University Oral history project, 1978-
KSU/45/05/001

The collection is held by:
Kennesaw State University
Dept. of Archives, Special Collections, & Records Management
1000 Chastain Rd
Sturgis Library Rooms 215-226
Kennesaw, Georgia 30144
(770) 423-6289
archives@kennesaw.edu

To request permission to publish, reproduce, publicly display, broadcast, or distribute this material in any format, you must contact the Dept. of Archives, Special Collections, and Records Management.