KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH LINDA B. AKANBI

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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TS: This is an interview today with Linda Akanbi, a long-time faculty member and department chair, among other things at Kennesaw State, and, she has had a long career before Kennesaw as well. I want to start with a little about your background. I'm assuming that you grew up in West Virginia, but maybe not. Why don't you talk about where you're from and when you were growing up and your parents and influences on you in general?

LA: Well I grew up in Newport News, Virginia.

TS: Oh, really? Okay.

LA: Yes, and it's interesting, because, of course, West Virginia and Virginia used to be all one state. When I went to West Virginia State, my roommate, who was from Buffalo, New York, says, "Oh, they don't like me here in Virginia." I said, "You're not in Virginia. You're in West Virginia" [laughs]. So, I grew up in Newport News, Virginia, and my parents had two children. I have a younger sister, Sandra, who is an attorney. I spent a lot of time in North Carolina with my maternal grandparents. Every summer, I went to North Carolina, and my grandparents had thirty-three grandchildren! I was somewhere in the middle.

Of course, all of us were not there at the same time, but I did get to spend time with a lot of my cousins, and we have all of these memories now when we get together for reunions. Our next reunion is next month for my mother's 100th birthday. She's lived longer than anybody else in the whole family. In May she'll be 100, but still in good health. The schools were segregated because when I started school, it was in the early 1950s. The way I can keep up is that in 1951, I was in first grade, 1952, second grade, and so on. It was Booker T Washington Elementary School. My first-grade teacher was a very elderly woman to the point that she had actually seen Booker T Washington in the flesh when she was a little girl.

TS: Oh, how about that?

LA: Yes, and I remember my first-grade experience like it was yesterday. My teachers were all very good role models. They all seemed to have a lot of confidence in what I could do, and, of course, my grandparents and the family did, as well. I just felt like, I guess, the Joseph of the family because everybody, for some reason, had all of these high expectations of me. I don't know why. So, I felt like I could not let the family down. I did have one aunt who was a schoolteacher, one of my mother's seven sisters.

Both of my parents came from large families. My mother used to say, "You're so much like my sister, Essie, the schoolteacher, her personality, her ways, all of that. So, my aunts were very influential in my upbringing. They were all very strict. They all had very high expectations of all of us.

I remember when we were celebrating our grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary in North Carolina, and not too many of us were in attendance. I was the only teenager there. And I knew that it would be a lot of dishes to wash. Of course, no dishwasher or anything like that. You had to pump the water, and everything was very basic. And I'm thinking, "This is going to be a lot of work!" So, I said to my aunt, "I have a good idea. Why don't we use paper plates? She says, "Linda Barbara, I am surprised at you, a high school girl, are talking about using paper plates at a 50th wedding anniversary? Of course not!" So, I had to wash all those dishes.

TS: Your name is Linda Barbara?

LA: Linda Barbara. And the way I got that name, my mother liked both names, Linda and Barbara. She could not decide which one she liked better. So, she just put them together, Linda Barbara. That kind of name. And, of course, my aunts would shorten it and call me Linda Barb for short. So, I spent summers in North Carolina. My grandparents were farmers. They had free range chickens. They had mules. They had cows and pigs and everything. So, everything was fresh from the farm, the eggs and…

TS: Now did they own their land?

LA: No. They did not own any land. My grandfather was a sharecropper. My grandfather wore many hats. He was a barber. He was a farmer. He was a carpenter. He was also the head deacon at his church. And then he was well respected in the community. He even served on a jury. Of course, these were days of the real, real Jim Crow.

TS: Do you know when he was born?

LA: Granddaddy was born in the eighteen something, the late 1890s. He and my grandmother were both 18 when they got married. He was not afraid to stand up for his family. I remember hearing that my mother got in trouble at school. The teacher claimed she had cheated on something, so the teacher spanked my mother. My mother was sort of like my grandfather's pet. But he would've done it for any of his daughters. So, he went to the school superintendent and got the teacher fired because he thought it was unfair for her to make up this tale on his daughter.

He was just a person that really stood up. I had such high regard for my grandfather. As a matter of fact, I used to tell a family story about how that I pictured God as looking like Granddaddy, and I can see the hands praying because he prayed so fervently every night. So, he was a big influence. My grandmother was a big influence because of her strictness and her penchant for order and for detail and for

everybody having some chores to do. If you were bored, you kept it a secret because she always has something for you to do. So, growing up, I don't have any complaints about my childhood.

TS: What were your grandparents' names?

LA: My grandfather's name was Isaac Bynum, and my grandmother's name was Dossie Bynum.

TS: So, you say no complaints growing up?

LA: No. No complaints growing up. My mother tells me that I was always very spoiled. I can't picture myself as being spoiled, but she uses this one illustration. She says, "Linda, as a toddler, you were so spoiled you'd just stay on the floor after falling, knowing someone would come pick you up. You wouldn't even try to get up. You just waited for somebody to come pick you up." Being an older child, I was responsible for my sister. And I think my mother was very smart because when a new child is born, sometimes the older child feels jealous. You know, everybody's coming to bring presents and talk about how pretty the baby is. So, my mother said, "Well, this is your baby too, so you can help take care of her." I'm seven years older than my sister, although, she acts like she's the older one now [laughs]. But she's tall, so most people think she's older because she's taller. At any rate, I was responsible for my sister, and I had to take care of her if my parents went anywhere, and I always had a lot of responsibility. So, that part was good.

I excelled in school, in elementary school. As a matter of fact, all my teachers would get me to help other children in the classroom. And I guess that's why I wanted to be a teacher. I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I never thought about being a nurse or a lawyer or banker or anything like that. I always wanted to be a teacher. Yes, that's what I used to play when I was a little girl, teaching [laughs]. And so, I was given a lot of responsibility. I remember we were going to the Virginia Teachers' Conference. I was only in, I think, the sixth or seventh grade. I didn't know what I was getting ready for, but the teacher wanted me to write a letter to the General Assembly in Virginia to let them know that the school group was coming.

And then another moment I had a particular teacher, Mrs. Carrie Brown, who was from Georgia, actually. She was always my role model for teachers. I had one in college too. But Mrs. Brown would always go beyond the curriculum. For example, most of the kids in fourth or fifth grade had to learn their times tables to twelve. Oh, we had to learn ours to twenty. That's why, now, I know, 3 times 15 is 45. Then everybody had to have a hobby. Then the Queen Mother of England came to Williamsburg. I lived in that area, you know, Newport News and Williamsburg are all in the Tidewater area, basically. This was in the 1950s, and the Queen Mother of England came, and we went on a field trip to see her, and there was a parade.

Then Mrs. Brown had us as fifth graders listening to the State of the Union address on the radio. We had to write a composition about that. So, like I said, she went beyond the curriculum all the way around. And so, she was a role model as to what a good teacher is. Then she had high expectations too. You had to keep a notebook for the whole year. And then at the end of the school year, she wanted to see what you had. And then, for vocabulary, she had us learn all these words, and we had to use them. She was, I guess, a portly built woman. She said, "If anybody calls me fat, you must pay 5 cents. You must use the word portly." So, we had to use all these other words. And then she had us learn all these adages every day. And so, she just did so much to build your vocabulary, to build your confidence, to expose you to things like the Queen Mother of England, and then to talk about the State of the Union address. And most fifth grade teachers weren't doing these things. They were just following the curriculum. Mrs. Brown had high expectations, and you didn't want to disappoint her, at least I didn't. So, I had all of these role models of excellence.

And then skipping way ahead, when I was in college, same thing, role models, just like Dr. [Betty L.] Siegel used to say, "Sometimes you don't remember maybe the contents of what you were taught, but there's something about the professor that you remember." And so, I had Mrs. Haley, who was Alex Haley's stepmother, teach me at West Virginia State College where I matriculated for my undergraduate degree. I can picture her now. She had these little bangs like Mamie Eisenhower, and she always had this collar and a suit and the cufflinks coming over, and the ruffles, and she was petite. She would say, "If you're going to teach anything, always try to think of some novel way to introduce the lesson."

So, when I first started teaching, I was up late at night. I said, "What is the most creative way that I can present this lesson?" [laughs] So, when I started teaching teachers, including my work here, I would always tell the teachers in training, "You must be creative. You're going to get some points on how creative it is." I said, "Get it up off the paper. I don't want to see you going to the TRAC [Teacher Resource and Activity Corner] Center], doing a poster with some stencils. No, I want to see some drama. I want to see some singing. I want to see this, I want to see that. It must be creative." That's Mrs. Haley's influence to think of a novel way to introduce any lesson, to make it interesting.

TS: Do you know what her first name was?

LA: Zeona [Estelle Eubanks Hatcher Haley]. Then another important role model I had at West Virginia State was my Social Science 101 teacher. He was chair of the Psychology Department, but he taught freshmen, the orientation course.

TS: That's unusual.

LA: Yes. And so, we were in this big lecture hall, and the first day he came in there, he was kind of intimidating to look at, you know, suit and all, but the big bulging eyes

and the thick eyeglasses and the bald head and just very intimidating. And then the first thing he said to us, he says, "Two things I hate—a freshman and a fly."

TS: No, no!

LA: And so we all felt hated because we were freshmen. Okay. And then he would come up to you right in your face, and you were scared to death already. He said, "Are you a moon woman or a sun woman?" And he would go to a guy, "Are you a moon man or a sun man? We thought, "What is he talking about?" So, one day he explained; he said, "Well, the moon has no light of its own. It reflects the light of the sun. So, if you are a moon person, you are trying to be around everybody else who's popular, hoping that you can bask in some of their glory. But if you are a sun person, you make your own light." So, right away, I decided that I was going to be a sun person. Okay? So, that was the lesson I learned from him. And then, my mother had always taught me—forgive me if I'm rambling—

TS: It's all right.

LA: That whoever is in charge of anything, there's somebody above that person. So, I was never intimidated by anybody because of what she had taught me. So, here I am a lowly freshman. Right? And I'm in this English class, English 103. It was an advanced English placement class my freshman year. And the teacher, who was an esteemed professor in the English Department, reminded you of Ichabod Crane. She bragged about how she'd been the first Black woman to get a PhD from the University of Chicago. She had traveled to Iraq, and she brought some students back. She really thought very highly of herself. So, we had to do a research paper, and I asked her a question. She said, "Don't ask me. Ask one of the students."

I said, "Well, what is the teacher for?" Oh, why did I say that? So, she put me out of her class, right? So, here I am, a lowly freshman, I go to the Dean of Faculty, Dr. Harrison Ferrell, for this professor. I told him what had happened; so the dean sent me to another faculty member who was chair of the Speech Department, Dr. [Fanin] Belcher, saying that he was a good friend of my English professor, and he would tell me how to handle her and what to do. So, I find Dr. Belcher and introduce myself to him. He said, "You need to write her a letter. Don't admit that you did anything wrong but say. 'If I offended you…", and so on and so on and so on. So, I wrote this letter. She had me read it in front of the class. Okay? Okay.

TS: I thought she'd kicked you out of the class.

LA: Yes, but then I went back. I wrote the letter. Then she let me come back to the class, but she wanted me to just stand in front of the class and read this letter.

TS: Oh, no.

LA: But then she said, she liked what I did, and she even invited me to go to England with her. She was taking some students. Of course, I didn't go. I didn't have any money to go to England, and I didn't want to travel with her anyway. So, that really taught me to be fearless. Here I am still a freshman. "Be fearless. I'm a sun woman," okay?

TS: I've got a feeling you always were that way.

LA: Maybe so. Then I learned the art of perfection from my biology professor. We had to do an insect collection. It had to be thirty different species, and she said it better not be anything missing on them, not an antenna or anything. So here I am at 02:00 in the morning, and the antenna falls off this cockroach. Right? So, what am I going to do?

TS: Glue it back?

LA: So, I found some glue. You know, I could've been a surgeon. I put that antenna back perfectly, and it passed. She really was kind of intimidating too. I mean, she told us you could not miss any classes. It's a three-hour course. You could miss three times. Not in her class. Then she would always give an exam when it's time to go home for a holiday. So, if you missed the class, you got a double F, one for missing the class and one for missing the test. That was Mrs. [Dr. Barbara J.], my biology professor. I took her both semesters, and she told me, "Atkinson!" That was my maiden name. "Most people don't have the nerve to take me twice."

LA: I said, "Yeah, I guess I'm a little crazy," thinking to myself.

TS: Okay.

LA: And then I had these teachers that would do these unusual things. An example was Mrs. Oden again. She said, "You know about birds singing? They're not singing because they're happy. It's because their hormones are hurting." And so, we had to get up at 06:00 in the morning, meet her behind the Science Building, and go watch the birds. This was back in the 1960s. This is what my teachers did. But these teachers had an impact on me.

TS: I wanted to ask you about West Virginia State College, because it's got an interesting history. I think it was undergoing a major transformation about the time that you were there. This is what I wanted to find out about. I know it's a Historically Black College.

LA: Supposedly.

TS: Well, as I understand it at least, it was a Black college from 1891, I believe, up until after the Brown decision [1954]. Then, somehow or other, it became an integrated school. So, I've checked, and it looks like minority enrollment is something like 7 percent at West Virginia State today.

LA: Yes, I do know a little bit about their history. As a matter of fact, I'm currently the recording secretary for the West Virginia State University National Alumni Association, and I was president of the Atlanta Alumni Chapter for West Virginia State University last year. But at any rate, going back historically, back in 1954, that's when the president of West Virginia State decided to follow *Brown v. Board of Education*, because, like you said, it was a predominantly Black school. It's still categorized that way even though that does not reflect the student population.

TS: It still is categorized as an HBCU?

LA: Yes, it's still an HBCU, and even when I was there, it didn't reflect it. Just to digress a little, when I got ready to go to college, I was in the top 10 of my high school as far as grade point average and all that. I told my guidance counselor that I wanted to go to an integrated college, and she said, "I have the perfect school for you, West Virginia State College [as it was known then]," which I had never heard of before. At first, I was thinking about going to Howard University. I didn't want to go to Hampton University because it was right there in my backyard.

TS: Too close?

LA: You know, you have a good school nearby, but you want to go somewhere else. My mother didn't want to pick the school for me to go to because she said, "If I choose the school and you don't like it, you'll say, 'I wouldn't have gone here if you hadn't made me go here.'" So, she let me choose my own school. And so, I went to West Virginia State. Even then, the way the college was—and its still kind of like that—it was like Black at night and on weekends, and during the daytime it was predominantly white because the white students did not live on campus; they commuted. President [William J. L.] Wallace is the one who desegregated the school. West Virginia is considered to be a very poor state economically, and a lot of the people in the state didn't have anywhere to go to college. And so, by him opening the doors, then the population became predominantly white. That has never changed. It's still like that now even though it's a land grant institution.

It's still an HBCU. It's interesting now with all of the anti-DEI how to classify West Virginia State because it's kind of like reverse integration. As a matter of fact, I think during the 1950s, when they had *Ebony* magazine as a print magazine, I think they highlighted West Virginia State and I think Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, two schools where it was reverse integration. And so, it's still like that now, even with the faculty. The faculty was very diverse when I was there. It's even more diverse now. But at homecoming, you get there, and its mostly Black students at homecoming. The white students there rarely participate in alumni activities. The past three presidents we've had—they've done a lot to try to bring in more of the alumni in the Charleston, West Virginia area. The university now has a downtown center in Charleston aimed at attracting more white students who matriculated at West Virginia State, but alumni support from these students remains limited. So, it's still that case where it's an HBCU, but the student population is predominantly white. Even the sororities are

integrated now. The historically Black sororities like Alpha Kappa Alpha, which I'm a member of….

TS: Is integrated?

LA: Yes, but to a very limited extent.

TS: That's interesting.

LA: Yes.

TS: But when you were there, what would you say was the percentage of African-Americans and the percentage of whites?

LA: Like I said, during the daytime, I mean…

TS: So, even while you were there, it's Black at night and the weekends and…

LA: Yes, and the reason is because a lot of the Black students were from out of state, and they lived in the dormitory. There were some Black students from West Virginia also who lived in the dormitory. But the white students did not live on campus. We had, I think, two white girls who lived in a dormitory, Martha and somebody else. Then we had two girls that Dr. Kemp had brought from Iraq who lived in the dormitory. However, all the student government officers were Black. I think, one year, there was one of the white guys who became president of the student council. So, some of them were active in some of the different organizations, but for the most part, they were not.

TS: So I guess you're starting there about 1963 or 1964?

LA: I started there in fall of 1962.

TS: Were your schools still segregated all the way in Virginia until you graduated?

LA: Yes, they were. My sister came along when the schools had desegregated. But my home high school was Huntington High School in Newport News, Virginia. The remarkable thing about my high school class is that I graduated in 1962, and our class remains organized even in 2025. I mean, the class still has meetings. I get a copy of the minutes every month from the class president. Every year we celebrate our birthdays. Like this year, we all turn 80. Okay? Those of us who are still alive. We've lost about half the class. We had about two hundred people in our class and now it's way down. A lot of them have passed away. But the class, I think last year was our 62nd reunion of the high school class. Since these events take place in Virginia and I live in Georgia, I cannot attend most of them. However, I did go back to our 50th high school reunion, and to our 70th birthday party, when we all were turning 70 that year. I still stay in touch with some of my high school classmates. We

also get notifications every time somebody passes away or somebody's family member passes away.

I'm all about reunions. I'm nostalgic. I like reunions and all those special moments and things like that. And so, I stay connected with my high school class, with my West Virginia State University class, and even with the State University of New York at Buffalo (known as simply the University at Buffalo, or UB). I'm active with their alumni association and I am also a member of their Loyal Blues Book Club. The University at Buffalo also interviewed me for an oral history project. That must have been about two years ago. What else do I do with the University of Buffalo? When representatives from the alumni affairs office visit the Atlanta area, they typically reach out to me. We have lunch together, during which they provide updates about the institution and inquire about my current activities. So, I try to stay connected with all the different schools that I have been a part of. Of course, I stay connected with Kennesaw State, which is right around the corner from where I live. So, I try to keep these ties going.

TS: Okay, so you graduate in May of 1966.

LA: Yes.

TS: And then you start teaching in Newport News.

LA: Yes.

TS: And you were a reading teacher. Maybe you could explain this. You were working with the Title 1 program. Explain what Title 1 was about.

LA: Okay. That was a reading program to try to help kids from underserved populations achieve reading competency. This was really a reading readiness program for the primary grades. When I graduated from West Virginia State, my degree was in elementary education. Because of Mrs. Brown, I always wanted to have a fifth-grade class somewhere. But I started out basically as a reading specialist, and I think what helped me was the teaching and mentoring that I had when I was at West Virginia State, under my reading professor, Dr. Mary Hall, a white woman, who said she started college at age 33. Being taught by Dr. Hall was a very interesting and unique experience. She did something that was unusual. She had us buy books that you would typically use in a graduate program. We had to get two or three different books.

Then she would argue with the textbook based on what she was teaching us. She would say, "The author says so and so. That's not true, is it?" So, we're thinking, "Who are we to argue with the textbook? We don't know anything." She would say, "Oh, no, that's not true," and she would give us the reason. Her criticism of one textbook author made me doubt his work. What I learned from this experience was that you do not have to believe everything you read, just because it is in a textbook. It

is good to consult multiple sources and do your research. So, when I graduated, I was doing things that I guess they were doing in reading clinics with kids who were not performing well in reading, based on Dr. Hall's teachings. She also had us going to the village school, which was near the campus, to work with those kids in reading. We're thinking, "We don't know enough to help anybody with reading." "Oh, no, yes you do. You go ahead and you do so and so." Because of that, I had a certain expertise in reading coming out. I graduated in May, and in June I got this job with Title 1 in Newport News, Virginia.

I was trying to go to Detroit. I wanted to teach there. I had been given a job offer. My boyfriend was there. [But] my grandmother influenced me to stay close to home. Some of the teachers who were working with that Title 1 program, a new program from the federal government, were surprised that I was in that program because most of the time you start out as a classroom teacher, and then maybe later on, you get a promotion—you get to work with something special like this. But I started out as a reading teacher with this program, and it was wonderful. I worked with children in a non-graded primary setting. I had kids from first, second, and third grade, who had not learned to read by whatever materials or methods the teachers were using, and had been pulled from their regular classrooms and placed in this program for all their instruction, with the primary focus being on reading. So, we had to be creative. We had different supervisors. We had so many different materials to choose from. We didn't have to follow a particular curriculum. Before IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] became popular where you have these individual lesson plans for kids who have disabilities, we had to do it for each child. We had to do an individual lesson plan. So, if I thought about being out one day, I said, "Oh, no, I don't have all these lesson plans. I guess I can go in today" [laughs]. And it was a good way to start teaching because you didn't depend on the teacher's manual.

This is why even when I taught here at Kennesaw State, I would tell the students, "No, you need to know how to teach reading without the teacher's manual, because if all you're going to do is to follow the teacher's manual, what separates you from the man in the street who can read? You need to know how to teach any way. You need to know how to teach using several different methods. You do not need to be bound by a particular curriculum or a particular textbook. No. You're supposed to be able to go out on the beach, no materials, teaching the child how to read. You know, you write the word in the sand, and they're feeling the word with their fingers. That's kinesthetic. You get a shell. You can teach the /sh/ sound. You know what I mean? You don't have to just follow somebody else's script. You're supposed to be better than that." You know?

And I used to tell the teachers in training, "You need to be prepared to teach wherever you go. Don't just think about getting prepared to teach in Cobb County. You might wind up in Utah. You might wind up in France. You might wind up somewhere else." So, I would always go beyond whatever the current trend was. I said, "Oh, no, you still need to know the findings. You still need to know so and so. You still need to do this so that you can be prepared, wherever you go." They said, "Well, they're

not doing this in any other section of the course." I said, "You're in the gifted section." I just believe in educating teachers to be their best and to strive for the best. Even though I never really read the book, I always heard the quote from Eldridge Cleaver's book, *Soul on Ice* [McGraw-Hill, 1968]: "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." And so, I would tell the teachers in training, "If you're not part of the solution, you're what? Part of the problem. Yes, you need to be down at the school board, and you need to have a voice. You need to let your voice be heard. You need to be strong. You need to be forward thinking. You need to be creative." So, that's my soapbox speech.

So, with Title 1, I think it was a very good program. I was with that program for two years. Every year in the contract, it would indicate that it may not receive funding for the next year. I said, "Oh, I have to leave this situation, try to find a fourth-grade class or a fifth-grade class somewhere." That didn't happen. Instead…

TS: When did you go to Hampton?

LA: Here again, I'm thinking, "Oh, boy, I can get a fourth-grade class or a fifth-grade class." No! They found out I had taught reading. "Oh, we need you as a reading teacher in the Hampton (Virginia) School system." Their Title 1 program was different. I was an itinerant teacher assigned to two different schools, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Instead of working with just the primary grade kids, I had kids in the third through the fifth grade. I would have to organize reading groups pulled from different classrooms. I would diagnose the reading problems and then try to help them move forward with their reading skills. Then on the side, I said, "You know what? I am doing the work of a reading specialist. I'm not getting paid for that. So, I need to get a master's degree in reading." Okay? "Because I'm already doing all this stuff." So, that's what motivated me to go to graduate school.

TS: Okay. Before we get to graduate school, tell me about Upward Bound.

LA: Okay. Upward Bound—another federal program. This was for high school students who were from underprivileged families, which most Black kids were. You would provide courses in communication skills, math, and then there were field trips.

TS: This is for first-generation college students?

LA: Probably in most instances, this was the case, but that was not a criterion for getting into the program. This was at Hampton University. I worked with the program there. I was there on Saturdays and in the summertime. It was a very good program. It's funny because my sister was in the program, and she would complain to my mom. She said, "Linda is asking me about some homework, and she's not telling the other kids. Why do I have to listen to her?" My mother was a secretary to the program. That was her second job. She worked in the school system as an administrative secretary as her primary job in addition to working on the campus of Hampton Institute. It was called Hampton Institute before it became Hampton University. At

first, she worked in the Speech and Language Department. She was secretary to that chair, and then with Upward Bound. She got us all involved in this Upward Bound program. That was the first year of the program.

TS: I've got between 1969 and 1970.

LA: I taught the reading skills in the program. I also had the students develop a newspaper, *The Bounders' Spotlight*. We had reading; we had English; we had math; and I think there was something else. The students lived on the campus during the summer, so they got a whole range of campus experiences. And they really liked that a lot. We took the students on a field trip to Washington, D.C.

TS: So, how do you get to Buffalo?

LA: Here again, I've decided I want to go to graduate school, and I started applying. I had become a member of the International Reading Association, and as a member, I received the journals. I wanted to go to a school where these authors were. So, I applied to Indiana University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Maryland. I had not applied to the University at Buffalo at all. How I got to Buffalo was when I started taking graduate courses at Hampton University, I asked my professor to write a letter of recommendation for me to go to some of the schools where I was applying. She said, "You need to think about the University of Buffalo." She said, "Dr. Barrien is there who used to be on the faculty at Hampton University." He was an administrator at the University of Buffalo. She said, "They are trying to recruit more graduate students from the South." In the meantime, I had already accepted an assistantship to go to the University of Minnesota. I was going to be working with a social studies professor, and I was going to start in September.

TS: You're going to freeze whichever place you went.

LA: I know, I was going to go to an iceberg. At any rate, I contacted the University of Buffalo, and they offered me an assistantship right away, and I could start in the summer. I went there with my trench coat and everything in June, and walking around the campus, I saw people lying on the campus in bathing suits and on the blanket. I said, "One of us looks crazy. I have on a coat; these people are here in swimsuits. And so, somebody told me, "There are two seasons in Buffalo. There is the 4th of July, and then there's the rest of the year. It's always hot the 4th of July.

But Buffalo, that was a whole new experience. It was during the 1970s. I think the Women's Liberation Movement was going on, along with so many other things in our country. I met my husband there. He was a doctoral student. I was active with the Graduate Student Association. I became president of that for my department. I had some good role models there too. I had three younger cousins who followed me there. One of these cousins ultimately became the president of Buffalo State College. Then her brother came as a freshman. I had written a test for incoming freshmen on reading skills. This cousin said, "Linda, I took your test this morning." I said, "Really?" He

eventually became an Admissions officer at Buffalo State College and a basketball coach. The third cousin earned all her degrees at the University at Buffalo, including a Ph.D. She became an administrator at the University of Arkansas.

After I got my master's degree, one of my professors said, "Linda, what are you going to do next?" I said, "I don't know, Dr. Edwards." He said, "Well since you're right here…" and Dr. Barrien had said the same thing—"you might as well work on your doctorate." I said, "Well, I don't know about all that. I think I might want to get married. I think I might want to go back home." "You're here, Linda. You might as well go ahead and work on it." So, I stayed in Buffalo, and I had a full-time job at the university. If you're a full-time faculty member, you can take courses at least six hours free every semester. So, it took me a while.

TS: Okay. I've got 1971 to 1976, you were coordinator of Reading Instruction at the Learning Center.

LA: Yes. It's funny because a student passed by a hall one day and said, "This freaks me out! I thought the whole university was a learning center." But it was a program designed to help some of the incoming freshmen who did not have good communication skills. The way the program worked, we used teaching assistants. I would interview students every year. There were mostly white students coming to get a master's degree or doctoral degree. They were looking for assistantships, and we had them available in the Learning Center. I would organize workshops every week to make sure they knew the skills they were going to teach. I developed all the reading courses for the Learning Center. I had one course called Critical Thinking Skills. I had a course that I developed called Study Skills and Techniques, and I had one called Advanced College Reading. I would do the in-service workshops. The Teaching Assistants (TAs) were getting their advanced degrees in Linguistics or in English, and some in Reading Education.

We were kind of like a whole family. I was in that position for, I guess, five or six years. One of my former professors, Dr. Thomas [J.] Edwards, organized the Learning Center [in 1971]. I was the reading coordinator. He was my first doctoral advisor. I went through three. He died [after a long battle with cancer in 1976].

TS: So, the Learning Center was mainly for incoming students?

LA: Yes, the incoming students who needed more work on their communication skills to be prepared to do well in college courses. One course I taught, I had all Hispanic students. I did not know one word of Spanish. So, that was a bit of a challenge there. Buffalo, to me, was like the pot that never melted. You had the Polish community. You had the African American community. You had the Puerto Rican community. You had the Italian community.

TS: My wife spent her first ten years in Buffalo.

LA: Really? Did she like it?

TS: I guess so, but when she was 10-years-old they moved to Marietta.

LA: Oh, wow, a big change in temperature for sure.

TS: Oh, for sure. A big change in culture and in a lot of other ways too.

LA: Yes. I have some family members who are still in Buffalo.

TS: You say your future husband was a doctoral student?

LA: Yes.

TS: So, that's where the Akanbi comes from?

LA: Yes.

TS: Did he have an African background? Where did the name Akanbi come from?

LA: He was 100 percent African. He was from Nigeria, the Yoruba ethnic group. As a matter of fact, Dr. Edwards introduced us at a party at his house. His field of specialization was Educational Technology.

TS: What's his first name?

LA: Well, he went by David because a lot of Africans have Christian first names, but he taught me to call him Ade. It looks like Aid. As a matter of fact, when we got ready to leave Buffalo and go to Illinois because he had a job offer at Southern Illinois University, my new department chair—because the other one had died, made us a cake and said, "I hope you and Ade have a good future." However, he pronounced it Aid, and it's really pronounced A Day, but it is spelled A-d-e. Of course, my kids have African names and my grandchildren. So, usually the first reading lesson in my class is for the teachers to pronounce my name correctly because it's the easiest African name you can find. It really is very easy.

TS: Yes.

LA: But you'd be surprised at how it's been spelled and what I've been called. I won't go into that [laughs]. But, yes, we met and shortly after we got married—he was working at the university, also, in the Department of Nursing—but we moved to Carbondale, Illinois, because he'd gotten a job at Southern Illinois University.

TS: Did you have your doctorate by that time?

LA: Well, I was working on my dissertation at that time.

TS: Okay. You finished your dissertation, and I think you got your degree in August of 1978.

LA: Yes. I really finished it in June, but since the next graduation was later on [the degree was officially awarded] in August rather than June.

TS: Okay. So, when you were a visiting instructor at Southern Illinois University, you were ABD [all but dissertation] at that time.

LA: Right. I did my dissertation study there. I always have these challenges. So, when I was working on my dissertation, I was teaching at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. I had five classes, I was big and pregnant, I was on several different campus committees, and I was trying to finish an incomplete.

TS: You had more than you could handle.

LA: I had a lot going on. I really did. But I was determined that I was going to go ahead and do this anyway, especially after I got a letter from my doctoral adviser telling me that "the committee has met, and if you're planning to go to Africa, then you might as well give up on your doctorate." I thought, "Is he crazy?" First, I did not say I was getting ready to go to Africa. They knew I was married to an African and might go eventually. I said, "I'm still working on it." I did my study in a class in the Psychology Department. My students were very, very, helpful. A lot of the students in my class were football players, and they were very protective of me even when I couldn't find my husband on the campus. At that time, the Computer Center took up a whole room. You had these little punch cards you had to do your study.

TS: That's what I did for my dissertation.

LA: Yes. So, you can relate to the punch cards and all of that. So, I had that going on, and I had a stepdaughter who was about five. We had her in preschool. And then I was expecting my first child.

TS: You had your hands full.

LA: Yes, I was doing a lot, but I was determined. I said, "I did not come this far not to finish this program. So, of course, I'm going to finish."

TS: I've got a title for your dissertation, "The Influence of Additional Supportive Context upon the Reader's Ability to Identify the Main Idea of a Paragraph." Talk about that. You say you had punch cards.

LA: Oh, yes. I designed everything in my study, all the materials. The idea came from the point that if you are reading a paragraph, you might get one idea of what is going on. But if it's taken from a larger work, it's like you hear people talking, and they say,

"Well, he took it out of context." And so, if you don't have the whole context, you really don't get the correct main idea.

TS: Sure.

LA: I wrote all the paragraphs myself. Some were where that main idea was implied, some the main idea was stated. In some cases, the main idea was at the beginning of the paragraph, sometimes at the end. I had these different conditions going on. Then my dissertation adviser, who used to be on the committee of the International Reading Association to select the outstanding dissertations, told me that I should submit my dissertation. But I didn't do that because I got caught up in moving. We were getting ready to move to Africa and expecting a child. So, all that opportunity just vanished. It just vanished. So, that's what my dissertation was about.

TS: Okay, I've got 1979 when you go to Nigeria.

LA: Yes.

TS: So, you're in Carbondale 1977-1978, and then Norfolk State University for a year, and then you go to, Nigeria?

LA: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, you go there because your husband was going there. I was going to ask you why you decided to take a job in Nigeria.

LA: Because that's where my husband moved to. As a matter of fact, he didn't even know that I had this job at Norfolk State. What happened, the reason I started working at Norfolk State while I'm waiting to go join him, one of my friends who became a president of the International Reading Association would tell everybody, "Linda was my teacher." But what happened is that when she was working on her doctorate at the University of Buffalo, she had an assistantship in the Learning Center, and I was her supervisor. But, anyway, she was going to Washington, D.C., and she needed someone to take over her teaching load at Norfolk State. She was a chairperson there, and I wasn't going to be a chairperson, just teach the classes. So, I went over there and met with the president and got a good salary agreement and everything. I didn't tell him I probably wouldn't be there that long. And so, I'm doing fine. My husband is writing me, asking me, "When are you coming over here? [laughs]"

At any rate, I knew I was going to have to go to Nigeria, and I wasn't dreading it. It was just that I guess I was enjoying teaching over at Norfolk State and driving the [Chesapeake Bay Bridge]-Tunnel every day. And so, my husband ultimately came to pick me up and the baby, so we would go with him. Since I was not going to rise to the occasion and go on my own, he came to collect us, as they say. So, when I got over there, I wanted to teach. And here again, I'm in a family way. Okay [laughs]? So, I was able to get a position with the Department of English Language Arts. The

chairperson was also the Dean of Faculty there, Professor Afolayan. He did a study that's well recognized on the comparative effects of teaching school subjects in the native language versus teaching them in English. He thought that if you test children based on their learning the English language and test them on the content, they might know the content, but they may not know it in English. They may know it in their own language. If you assess them just based on their being able to express it in English, then the child is not being assessed properly. (This is close to my current research interest on the challenges involved in teaching reading in a multilingual environment, including the effects of language of education policies on literacy instruction)

TS: That makes sense.

LA: In his department, the way the department was set up, you had certain courses that you taught and other courses where you were a tutor and had to hold study sessions for other instructors' classes. This meant that you must attend their classes too to follow up on or further expand what they were teaching. It was a very different experience. Everything was different about teaching over there. First, with the two semesters, you had rain semester, and you had *harmattan semester*. I thought that was odd, but I said, "We name our semesters after the seasons." *Harmattan* marks the dry season. It was hot during both seasons.

The way examinations are done, you couldn't just write your own exam and give it to the students. It had to be approved by an outside examiner and then go before a committee, all this kind of stuff, before your questions could be approved to give the exam. Then when you give the exam, you have monitors. All the exams were essays, no such thing as multiple choice, or fill in the blank. No, it was essay. Then as a professor of record, you could not be the only one reading the answers. It had to be passed to other readers, other professors (I guess these added protocols were to ensure some measures of validity and reliability since the test questions were subjective.)

TS: Really?

LA: Yes. So, they even had greeting cards saying, "Congratulations on passing the exam!" You had to go through something to pass it because it had to be read by these different people. Then the results had to be approved. I was in the hospital and had just given birth to my son, and my husband brought me all these exams. I said, "What is the professor thinking about? I can't read these because I've just had my child." Of course, over there, women get three months maternity leave. So, you have plenty of time. Still, I was expected to grade these essay exams even though I was on maternity leave. Like I said, they had to go before other readers too. At any rate, it was a different experience. I learned a lot about it and got a chance to go back over years later to train primary teachers to teach literacy as part of a research project funded by the International Reading Association and the World Bank. I was teaching at Kennesaw State at the time.

TS: Let me botch an African name: Is it University of Ife [pronounced E-FAY]?

LA: Yes, Ife. It's a different name now [Obafemi Awolowo University]. It's named after the founder [Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of the Western Region of Nigeria, who first championed the idea of founding the university].

TS: Doesn't Dr. [Akanmu G.] Adebayo have some connection to that?

LA: Yes. He's from that same part of the country that my husband is from and the same ethnic group.

TS: Okay. So, you were there for two years?

LA: Two years.

TS: And then, how do you get back to the United States?

LA: Okay. I came back here on vacation supposedly. But then the kids got sick. As a matter of fact, one of them got sick before we even left Nigeria. So, when we came over here, we had some medical issues to attend to. I guess I listened to my family, and I guess they were just horrified that I was in a culture that was so different from over here. I probably did too much talking. And so, the next thing I knew I was writing a letter to my husband: "Maybe you need to come back over here." He said, "We didn't talk about that," which was true. So long story short, I just stayed over here, which led to the demise of our marriage even though we remained friends forever.

TS: He stayed [in Nigeria] and you came back here?

LA: Yes, I stayed back here.

TS: And that was to Virginia State University at that time?

LA: Yes, I went to Virginia State.

TS: And so, you're there for a year, and then you end up in Georgia?

LA: Yes.

TS: And that had to be a culture shock too, didn't it?

LA: Not so much. My dad says, "Linda, Albany, Georgia! I never heard of that place." Most people just know Atlanta, right?

TS: Yes. How did you pronounce it? We just did an interview with Ron Newcomb [retired president of Chattahoochee Technical College] who grew up in Albany [pronounced ALL-BENNY], Georgia.

LA: That's perfect. I never learned to say it correctly. As a matter of fact, I had a friend coming to visit me from New Hampshire, and he drove, and he said he got lost. That was before they had MapQuest and the other systems. He stopped to ask somebody how to get to Albany [pronounced ALL-BA-KNEE], and they didn't know what he was talking about. Finally, they said, "Oh, you mean ALL-BENNY. Oh, you take this road." It's just like Newport News, Virginia. Now people who are born there don't say NEW-PORT News. They said [NU-PERT] News.

TS: Oh, really?

LA: Yes, NU-PERT NEWS, Virginia.

TS: Okay, how in the world did you get to Albany State College?

LA: Well, I was looking. I knew the job that I had at Virginia State was temporary. It was like a transitional reading program on soft money. So, I started applying, and, I guess I must have used the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. I saw that they had an opening. I had gone to some other interviews in Texas, in Houston, but the cost of living was going to be too high with childcare and parking and all of that. And so, I went to the interview in Albany, and I liked what I found there. So, I wound up going there, and that's where the kids were raised, pretty much in Albany. They were two and four years old when I went to work at Albany State.

TS: So, you were there for ten years. That's about the longest you have been anywhere in a long time.

LA: Yes, because I was on the move a lot. Of course, during that time, it was interesting. I was at Armstrong [State College] for a year because the University System of Georgia came up with this program called the Regents Development Program.

TS: I missed out on Armstrong.

LA: Yes, I don't know if I put that down there. It was supposed to have been the university system's way of diversifying the administrative staff at different institutions without hiring people from the outside. They decided to "grow" their own. So, they had the presidents to recommend faculty to go to the Board of Regents to be interviewed. What they wanted to do was to send you to another institution where you would be working under another president and learn all about administration of higher education. All of them were minority faculty from different schools. If you were already at a predominantly white institution, like some who were from Georgia College or Georgia State or the University of Georgia—as a matter of fact, a woman in our group who was from the University of Georgia was sent here to Kennesaw

State. [Joseph H.] "Pete" Silver was in that program, too, and Pete was sent to the Board of Regents. He was in our group.

TS: Oh, really?

LA: Yes. He was the youngest one. I told a story somewhere. I said Pete was like the baby of the group, but he was really our daddy [laughs] because he would tell us what we needed to do.

TS: Pete started teaching here when he was 22 years old.

LA: Yes. At any rate, I was from Albany State, and I got sent to Armstrong in Savannah. The president of my school sent six people up to be interviewed. I was the only one selected. But then he told me that I should have said no. He said, "We didn't want to go along with the chancellor's program, and you were supposed to say no." I said, "Well, I like the opportunity." Okay? And so, I was sent to Armstrong, and I had a great experience there because I was determined that, "Okay, if I'm going to be an administrator, I have to do all these administrative things." My counterparts were not getting the same kind of experience that I was getting. So, I was assigned to the president, and I worked alongside the Vice President and Dean of Faculty, Frank [A.] Butler. He was here [at Kennesaw State] for a while [as interim dean].

TS: Yes.

LA: We were joined at the hip when I was there. So, I would have to attend the Board of Regents meetings. I was a member of the president's cabinet while I was there. So, I would be in all the meetings with the deans, and anything he was planning, I was already part of that. My colleagues used to laugh at me when I would tell them about my experiences. We were at this new baseball field that Armstrong had. The chancellor had come to Savannah. He came to the college, and I think the mayor was at this event too. So, I rode over to the baseball field with President [Robert A.] Burnett and his wife. I was in the back seat. Then I got out of the car, and a lot of people were milling around. Some guy was trying to talk to me, and I wanted to meet the mayor, but I didn't get a chance to. So, we got back in the car, and I said to the president, "Dr. Burnett, I had expected to meet the mayor." He said, "Okay, Linda. I'm sorry."

So, when we went to the Chamber of Commerce meeting, they had an education meeting that he was in. He says, "Linda, I'm telling you before we go in, I don't know all these people to introduce you to individually." I said, "That's okay, Dr. Burnett." But at least he knew what I expected. And then I think the chancellor came on the ride somewhere, and I was sitting in the front as the chancellor kept leaning forward to talk to the president. Some of my colleagues told me, "Linda, you know the chancellor should have been sitting up there in the front. Why did you [sit there]?" I said, "Because I'm a lady, I'm sitting in the front [laughs]."

TS: For sure.

LA: But I learned a lot about how the administrative process works, and I learned a lot of it is politics, and the people who have the most influence are not necessarily the ones with the title. What they would do at these meetings, the president and the deans and vice presidents would say, "Okay, we need to put this before the faculty senate, but we need to talk to this other faculty person first because he has more influence. Then we can put it before the faculty senate." And then they will strategize and see whom they need to meet with of different people coming to the campus. But always, we learned how politics worked in all decision making. This is not the way you would think it would work. A lot of times, I would feel kind of left out because mostly men were there, and I couldn't go with them where they'd be making some of their decisions. But it was a very interesting learning experience. And based on that, it's how I wound up applying for a job at Kennesaw State.

TS: Okay. You had a paper I saw that looked like an evaluation of something at Armstrong.

LA: Oh, yes, I think something about the administration, yes. I forgot about it. You did a lot of research.

TS: Well, we've got to get to Kennesaw pretty quickly. But …

LA: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. You have to cut me off because I do too much talking.

TS: Oh, no, no. An oral history is not worth doing if you don't talk.

LA: But I go off on tangents.

TS: You just keep talking. I was just going to say, I knew [history professor] Lee [W.] Formwalt at Albany State. Did you ever have any encounters with him there?

LA: Yes, I remember him. Oh, one other thing about Armstrong, that was the year that the [Space Shuttle] Challenger exploded in the air [January 28, 1986]. I was there that year. I remember exactly when it happened. You know, certain things, you remember where you were.

TS: Yes. Well, we can date it from there.

LA: Yes.

TS: Well, you were involved in a ton of stuff in Albany, including an advisory council for staff development for the public school system, the Dougherty County School System.

LA: Yes.

TS: You were on an educational task force for the Albany Chamber of Commerce as well, an equal opportunity task force.

LA: Yes.

TS: I think we can understand what that was about.

LA: Yes.

TS: So, you were doing a lot of things there. And there was a group that had an unusual name. It had a historic name, let's put it that way—the Albany Federation of Colored Women's Club. You were on a panel there, it sounds like.

LA: Well, you know what? Okay. This makes me think about these women who just came back from out of space, I saw in the news today. Okay. Albany had a lot of women's clubs, white women's club and Black women's club. So, they all decided to get together at a special meeting, a summit, if you will. This was for the whole city. And the most interesting thing I remember about that meeting was the way it began. They said everybody had to check their egos at the door. We were all given these large sheets of paper, and we had to pretty much write things about our lives, the ups the downs, and then you had to present it. And the whole point was, I guess, to show that everybody had different things that had happened to them in their lives. At the end of that exercise, the facilitator said, "So, if you can shed all the masks that you're wearing, then we can really get to work as women and do something for the city. It was quite impactful. I had forgotten about all those clubs.

TS: Okay.

LA: You must have done some extra research. I know I didn't have all that in my resume.

TS: You just never know. But, anyway, I want to ask you how you got to Kennesaw State, and you are kind of leading into that already. You have a long history of HBCUs in your background. Kennesaw obviously wasn't. Why did you want to come to Kennesaw?

LA: Well, it wasn't my first PWI [predominantly white institution], because I had taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo and at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale before teaching at any of the HBCUs.

TS: Sure.

LA: Those were predominantly white institutions. And then, of course, I had international experience. I taught at a university in Nigeria. Here again, I was looking in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. I saw this opening for a department head at Kennesaw State. So, I said, "I think I'm going to apply for that." And I did, and I

came up for my interview. The interview went well. And so, I wound up getting the position.

TS: I wanted to ask you too, I may have my chronology a little bit off, but this is right about the time that the School of Education lost its NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education] accreditation, isn't it?

LA: It was just before that. As a matter of fact, just when I came…

TS: So, after you came it lost its NCATE accreditation.

LA: Yes. That wasn't the cause of it, but yes [laughs].

TS: No, no, I'm not implying that [laughs].

LA: No, I know. But the interesting thing about that, I came and then they were going through this NCATE process. As a matter of fact, before we got the results, I had already written a letter to the school principals all around introducing myself as a new department head and all that. Then we got this notification that we did not pass. I said, "Oh, I can't send a letter out because they might think I caused it [laughs]." But at any rate, it was about that time when Dean [John A.] Beineke, the one that hired me and…

TS: Yes, I was going to say he didn't stay long after that.

LA: Yes. He was a wonderful person.

TS: Yes.

LA: As a matter of fact, one of the first things I had to do after taking the job, they had this retreat for administrators. I didn't know anybody here really. And so, he said his wife would keep my kids that weekend for me to go on the retreat. I think my daughter was probably ninth grade. I think my son must have been in seventh grade. And so, they stayed…[with Mrs. Beineke].

TS: Well, I noticed that you were on the Awtrey Middle School's PTA.

LA: PTA. Yes, I was on that. So, Dr. Beineke is the one that sent me to talk to Dr. Crim—you know, they named the high school after Dr. Crim—to be a part of that consortium, the Ford grant. They wanted Kennesaw to be in it to replace Agnes Scott College, which was no longer in the consortium. The other schools in the consortium were HBCUs (Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Paine College).

TS: Are you talking about Harlon [D.] Crimm? Which Crim?

LA: No, [Alonzo A.] Crim. He was the first Black superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools [1973-1988], and then [in 1988] they named the high school after him [Alonzo A. Crim Comprehensive High School, formerly Murphy High School, Kirkwood neighborhood, Atlanta]. He was at Spelman [College, and he got this grant from the Ford Foundation and formed this consortium, the Ford Teacher-Scholar Consortium of Georgia. It was part of a nation-wide initiative designed to interest minority students in becoming teachers. So, Dr. Beineke sent me to represent Kennesaw State, so I became the site coordinator for the Ford program at Kennesaw State.

TS: Is that the Ford Foundation?

LA: Ford Foundation, yes.

TS: And the purpose of it was to recruit minority teachers?

LA: Yes, they were trying to get more minority teachers into the pipeline. The program was designed for high school students. It started out with a one-week residency in the summer with the female students staying in the dormitories at Spelman College and the male high school students staying at Morehouse College. After that one week of orientation, the students would go back to their home counties, and the site coordinators at the various colleges would design a program for them for the rest of the summer and the school year. I worked with the school personnel in Cobb County, Marietta City and in Cartersville to select students for the program and counselors from these school systems who would work as liaisons to the program. The program included, in addition to specially designed courses for academic enrichment, KSU staff presentations about admissions and different aspects of campus life as well as the services provided. I hired campus faculty to teach the summer enrichment courses.

I didn't just want regular courses, like math and English, although these courses were also part of the program. I wanted conflict management. I wanted critical thinking. I wanted argumentation and debate, and persuasive writing taught. I wanted all these different skills added to the program. I liked to give the academic enrichment part of the program more flavor, not just have basic reading, writing, and math, and I was able to do that. I had a playwright who was teaching one of the courses, and she wrote a play for the program. We had a program at the end of the year for parents and faculty, and anybody else who wanted to come. It was an excellent play. I enjoyed my role as site coordinator, and it also gave me an opportunity to be creative, especially in designing the program.

TS: So, you got here, and Beineke was here, and you liked Beineke, but he was gone, and whether he was responsible or not, there was an accreditation problem.

LA: There was.

TS: I can't remember what it was all about now, but it had something to do with our rapid growth, I think. But he was gone, and all of a sudden, the administrators that hired you were gone.

LA: Yes. What happened is that Deborah [S.] Wallace was sent in as acting dean. She had been the associate vice president for academic affairs, and she had the highest rank of any woman on the campus, Black or white, even though she was Black. She became dean, and then [Donald W.] Don Forrester replaced her. Don Forrester was also over the Leadership Kennesaw program. I was in that. So, Deborah became dean. She never did get back to being the associate vice president for academic affairs. She just stayed on as dean. Then, when she became dean, she decided to hire an assistant dean. Beineke didn't have an assistant dean. So, she hired Jane McHaney as the assistant. Then after Deborah left, Jane became the acting dean.

TS: Right.

LA: And, of course, when I was hired here, I was hired to replace Jane because Jane had been the department chair. As you probably know, they didn't have an Elementary and Early Childhood Education Department. I think it was just an Education Department. Then they split, and then Jane was chair of the Elementary and Early Childhood Education Department. Beineke demoted her, which allowed someone else to take the position. So, I came in.

TS: So, the person you replaced then becomes the dean later on?

LA: Yes.

TS: Okay. That's interesting.

LA: Very.

TS: Well, I don't know how much you want to talk about it, but I did look at a paper or, I guess, a chapter in a book that you wrote about undermining leadership effectiveness.

LA: Right.

TS: You want to say anything about that? I mean, you've written about it.

LA: Yes.

TS: You don't have to say anything if you don't want to.

LA: Okay. Yes, I did write about that because that was not a very comfortable experience. I felt that the whole move was politically motivated.

TS: And you had an all-white faculty that you were chair of.

LA: Yes, that is correct. I had an all-white faculty when I first became chair of the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Then, of course, I quickly diversified the faculty. I hired faculty from China, one from India, African American faculty, and Jewish faculty, in addition to other white faculty. So, it was a very diverse department. I aimed to hire faculty with expertise in needed areas of our curriculum. The department lacked anyone with expertise in early childhood education. So, the professor I hired from India, Dr. Ameeta Shah—that was her specialty, early childhood education. I hired her in1995. And Dr. Rhongua Ouyang of China had expertise in educational technology. So, he was able to fill that void, and he also taught math education courses. Dr. Loretta Howell's area of specialization was multicultural education. She was able to fill that position. She was African American. These are just a few of the new faculty that I hired when I was department chair. I served as department chair for seven years, from 1992-1999.

When I moved from department chair to director of the Reading Institute, the transition was sudden, and the institute lacked a clear mission or vision. It appeared that this entity had been put together overnight. The move was unexpected, and the explanation given for it seemed spurious at best. The reason I thought it was a political decision was because another department chair who was African American was given his marching orders too at the same time, and we were the only two African American department chairs on the campus. But he was smart. He'd already signed his contract. So, he said, "I've already signed mine." But I was so blindsided by this sudden move that I didn't even think to look at what my rights were, because I had already signed my contract to be department chair for the next year too, you know? So, I just went ahead and acquiesced to take on this different role. Although there was interference, I still succeeded in carrying out what I had been assigned to do. I decided I would not let that taint my whole experience at this institution. I could still do something positive, still make a difference, and I think I've been able to do that and still have a good relationship with the university.

TS: So, this is 1999 when you become director of the Reading Institute?

LA: Yes.

TS: Can I read you just one quote? It's an interview I did with Ann [D.] Smith.

LA: Okay.

TS: She says, "Dr. Linda Akanbi excelled in bringing in a strong representation of highly qualified Black faculty as well as Asian and other faculty and staff while she served as chair of the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education."

LA: Well, that was nice of her.

TS: Yes, that's what you just told us.

LA: Yes.

TS: And she also talked in her interview about the Ford program. I'd ask a question about did we have an initiative to recruit Black students back then? And she said, "We did, and the leader in the Bagwell College was Dr. Linda B. Akanbi through the Ford Scholars Program." Then she talked about what Army Lester was doing [in recruiting minority students through the Post-Secondary Readiness Enrichment Program.]

LA: Yes, thank you for sharing.

TS: I thought you might want to hear that. So, you basically are pushed out as department chair and move over to the Reading Institute. And so, you do that for four years?

LA: I think so. It's probably something like that.

TS: I had 1999-2003.

LA: Yes.

TS: Could you talk about what the Reading Institute was?

LA: Okay. I didn't have a strong blueprint. One of the things I was tasked to do was to get the Reading Endorsement program, get a proposal for that and get it approved through the University System of Georgia and through the State. I did that, and that was a program to prepare classroom teachers, pre-K through twelfth grade, to do a better job of teaching reading and diagnosing reading problems. Students got a certificate for that. It wasn't a master's degree, but it was a certificate. So, I did that. What I really wanted to do was try to work on some grants. I didn't get a chance to do that. I thought that I could probably work more with the public schools as a consultant. But here again, things were arranged in a different way.

What was the program that [K. Victoria] Vicki McLain was over working with the classroom teachers? At any rate, a lot of times I was pushed out from doing things that would have been in my bailiwick. You would think, "Okay, if you're doing outreach to public schools, then certainly the Reading Institute should be part of that." But I was not part of that. So, I complained about that in the program review that things could have been handled differently. So, when Dean [Yiping] Wan came in [2001], he thought that I probably was not doing enough. So, he gave me some extra duties. One of them was to do a program similar to the Ford program, and to get funding for it. So, I connected with the College of Humanities and Social Sciences with [Dean] Linda [M.] Noble and came up with a program.

But then he had asked me some things I wanted to do, so I came up somehow with an idea. And I guess I don't know if surprised would be the right word, but I put together the program proposal for the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree program. I

wrote the whole proposal. Then, it was handed to somebody in the middle grades to take the ball and run with it. So, I didn't think any more about it until, I think, Beverly Mitchell asked me to explain something that was in the proposal. It was at the Board of Regents. It made it that far. I say, "What? You mean the proposal I put together? That's at the Board of Regents, the one that I wrote, and then you're asking me!" [laughs] I couldn't get over it. Okay. But I said, "I made a contribution, so I'm glad I was able to do that."

But the Reading Institute, I think, had more potential, but we didn't have any staff. It was just me, and I had a secretary. That was it. A couple of times, some of the college faculty asked me to make a presentation in their classrooms about reading for their content area. And I think I worked with an adult reader who was having problems. He didn't know how to read. So, I wrote an article about helping him. I think he was a janitor here on the campus or something like that. But the vision I had was maybe to have what they have here now, a diagnostic reading center that parents could come in who were able to pay and bring their children to be screened. And then we would provide remedial training for them. I thought that it would be a good use for the Reading Institute to make it live up to its name. We basically had that one program, but I think it had a lot more potential. But here again, I did not have the administrative support to make it grow and be a beacon of light for the area, for the community.

TS: Yes, that would have been great if you could.

LA: Yes. And as a matter of fact, I think when I was department chair, at that time, we didn't have dorms, but a lot of the students had children. And we were looking at having some kind of childcare on the campus. We conducted site visits to several centers and reviewed their respective specifications. So, before we built Kennesaw Hall [1999], I think I worked with two or three different committees looking at the design of the building. One of the things we were looking at putting in is maybe a facility for young children. But that did not happen either. The building design went through so many changes, and I guess it went through different architectural firms. But the campus has continued to grow and to thrive. And now you have more traditional age students on the campus.

TS: Yes, big time change in the student population.

LA: Yes, but when I first started working here, I think the average age of the students was about 26 years old, and a lot of them were married and had families. But now with the dorms and all, you have a lot of traditional age students, and so it's not necessary to have a childcare center for the students.

TS: So, you do the Reading Institute for four years, and that brings you up to about 2003. And then, are you just teaching full time for the rest of your career and doing scholarship and all that?

LA: Yes, teaching full time and doing scholarship, but I decided I would start traveling. The first thing that I did was I went to South Africa with the Eisenhower program, People to People. I was able to get a lot of funding from the university to go there. I was a delegate, and we went to several universities to look at how literacy is taught there and the different challenges.

TS: Now Betty Siegel went down to South Africa, didn't she?

LA: She might have. She wasn't part of that delegation, but she went everywhere.

TS: That was probably after she retired as president.

LA: Yes. Almost any place you can go, if I tell them I'm from Kennesaw State, they knew Betty Siegel.

TS: Yes.

LA: So, I went to South Africa. Then, I think the very next month, I was part of a research project for teachers in Nigeria. They called us technical volunteers. The World Bank funded the program, an International Reading Association research project, to help the primary school teachers in Nigeria do a better job of teaching reading. In the year that I retired, I also presented a paper at the World Congress on Reading, which was held in 2008 in Costa Rica. I also traveled to European reading conferences after I became a regular teaching faculty member. I was interested in looking at reading education from a worldwide perspective.

I still had my graduate classes going over here. I had somebody teach them in my absence. So, I went to Nigeria, and then that next year, I got an invitation for the Oxford Round Table at Oxford University in England. I didn't have to present a proposal, but I did anyway, and it was accepted. So, I presented a paper at the Oxford Round Table [international symposium]. I enjoyed that. Then I think the next year, I went to Germany. I met up with one of my former professors from the University of Buffalo. I had seen him at some of the reading conferences, and he was telling me that he traveled with a group every year if I wanted to think about joining them. I didn't pay too much attention to him. And so, I heard from him again, and I decided I would go to the European reading conference [European Conference on Literacy], which happens every other year. What he would do was take a whole group, and then you would travel across the country for about a whole week because the conference only lasted about three or four days. So, I went to the European Reading Conference in Germany. I went to the one in Portugal. I went to the one in Belgium. One thing I said during my retirement reception was that I wanted to go on international trips, if not every year, maybe every other year. And so, I decided to go ahead and get a lot of professional development in to focus on Linda for a change and not worry about all the politics and stuff going on back here [laughs] that surrounded me and do

something that's going to move me forward, move my career forward. And so, I enjoyed doing that.

TS: Talk about your consulting business. When did that start, and how did that come about?

LA: Well, I guess, to me, once a teacher, always a teacher. I have one room in my basement that looks like a classroom. I can't help it. I have things up on the wall. Every country I go to, I collect materials, I get a book in that language, I have all these books, and things. So, I decided to put up a website showcasing my knowledge of reading education. Then my tax consultant talked me into doing an official business, to which I said, "Okay, I'll do that." But I really have not had the opportunity to work with it so much. It's interesting you bring it up now. I'm redoing the website because it's really out of date. And so, maybe I can attract some business too.

I want to provide services for parents, teachers, and day care providers on reading education, things they can do at home and just using very simple stuff. They don't have to go out and spend a lot of money buying expensive toys to teach the child. If you want the "m" sound, you can use macaroni [laughs]. Things like that; you make it fun. You know, make it exciting. You learn skills in this creative mode. I like to share some knowledge and share some techniques. Of course, with reading, there is so much competition out here. And so, I'm thinking, "Why even try?" I mean, they've got a million things on the Internet about that. Am I stressing myself out? Let me just write my stories about Nigeria and about my life. Why am I trying to get back into this mode? But I guess it's still in there. It's almost like a yin and a yang. I've always had this pull. I want to do creative writing, write my stories, write my novels, and then I feel like I still need to do some educational stuff, some academic writing, you know?

TS: Yes, but you wrote a book, *My Father's Daughter*?

LA: I did write a book, yes [Linda B. Akanbi, *My Father's Daughter: An Untold Story: A Personal Journey of Discovery* [ARS Educational Services, 2019, sold by Barnes & Noble].

TS: Talk about that.

LA: Yes, because I was raised by my stepfather, I did not meet my biological father until later in life. First, it was to my chagrin, but now I'm okay with it. I think I have a lot of ways like him. He was an educator, just as I am, and he also made history in his career. He became the first Black associate school superintendent in Cumberland County, North Carolina. He'd been a school principal for several years and very much a high achieving person and very much his own person. He didn't care too much what anybody thought about anything that he was doing. He would just go ahead and do it. He was very much a "sun" person in that regard. As a matter of fact, he said he worked on his doctorate, but he said he didn't complete it because the professor

wanted him to research a certain topic. He wanted to choose his own topic. I mean, he was very much like that.

He had two master's degrees and an education specialist degree, and all of that. So, it seems to me that I just followed in his footsteps without even knowing that much about him, but still being so much like him in a lot of ways. As a matter of fact, when I spoke at his funeral—he lived to be 95—and when I got up to speak, a lot of people didn't even know who I was. I said, "I'm his oldest daughter. And I did not grow up with my father, but his genes grew up in me." Then I went on to explain that, and then I said at the end, "Thank you, Dad, for siring me into the world." So, I'm appreciative of the genes I did inherit from him. And I look pretty much like him too. So, that's pretty much what that book was about, the kind of off and on relationship and being estranged and then becoming closer…

TS: Oh, that's good.

LA: Things like that.

TS: Well, in 2012, you got a Cobb NAACP Elder Award it was called for Outstanding Service and Dedication to Learning. Do you want to talk about that?

LA: Yes, that was because of Deane Bonner [former president of the Cobb NAACP].

TS: The KSU Archives has collections of her papers and Cobb NAACP papers.

LA: Yes, she called and said, "Linda, we have this banquet, and you are getting an award." I said, "An award for what?" And so, she told me that they had selected me for this Elder Award, I guess, for some things that I had done. We had some conversations that culminated in that. So, I was very honored to receive it.

TS: For sure. Well, you've also got a scholarship set up for an Education student here at Kennesaw.

LA: Yes, since 2012. Several students have benefited.

TS: The Dr. Linda B. Akanbi Annual Scholarship for Education, and this is for populations historically underrepresented in education preparatory programs?

LA: Yes. Two or three white students have received the scholarship as well, but predominantly African American students. One student received it two years in a row. One student received it who was a mother. And I think one young man received it who already had other scholarships. Several of the students used it for the Studies Abroad program. One thing I like about what the school does here, it asks the students to write a letter to the donor, thanking the donor, letting them know what they used the money for and how it helped them move ahead. So, I've gotten these nice letters and thank you notes, which I have kept in a file. I'm happy that I've been to most of the

scholarship receptions, although I've missed a few. Some of the recipients I met. Some I did not because they were student teaching at the time. When they have receptions in the evening, you're more likely to be able to meet the people, but during the daytime, most of the time your recipient is going to be out in the field.

I'm happy I was able to do that because so many students, you get them interested in the teaching, maybe, but then they get into a program, and they may not have the money to finish the program. So, I'm thinking this might be a drop in the bucket, but it might help defray some of the expenses while they're doing student teaching or something. At one time, I thought about trying to get it endowed, but I don't know if I can really do that at this point. When Ann [Smith] did hers, I think someone gave like a benefit for her, and people came. I guess I could have done something similar, but as long as I'm able, I will still at least provide the annual scholarship whereas I can at least help a few students go into the field.

TS: Yes. Well, Kennesaw has changed a little bit since 1992. Has it changed for the better or the worse, do you think?

LA: Oh, I guess I have to say for the better. It certainly has grown by leaps and bounds and is still making a tremendous impact in the community. I have met with Dean [Adrian] Epps a couple of times. We had dinner. He has a person, Kevin Soderman, who is Director of Development for the Bagwell College. He stays in touch with me all the time and keeps me informed.

TS: Well, Kennesaw is certainly a much more diverse place than it was in 1992.

LA: Oh, yes, much more.

TS: We're a majority minority student body now.

LA: Yes, my daughter and my granddaughter have a lot of friends here. I think my granddaughter is maybe thinking about transferring here. She's a freshman at Georgia State. She came to my retirement. I'll tell a funny story. I think she was about a year old or maybe two years old. She went into the department chair's office while he was present; then she slammed the door after she got in there [laughs].

TS: Well, is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like in the interview?

LA: I'm sure there will be so much to clean up because I've gone off on a million tangents. So, I don't know if you will be able to make sense of any of this.

TS: I think it has all made sense. But you'll have a chance to read it over.

LA: Well, is there anything you need more clarification on? Because I know I've been all over the place.

TS: I tell you what; I'll just send you an email or give you a call and ask you what in the world were you talking about [laughs]?

LA: I'll see if I can help you out.

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