



Interview with Daisy Thomas Livingston

August 3, 1995

Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Greenwood (Miss.)

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ID: btvct03031

Interview Number: 480

SUGGESTED CITATION

Interview with Daisy Thomas Livingston (btvct03031), interviewed by Doris Dixon, Greenwood (Miss.), August 3, 1995, Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South Digital Collection, John Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries.

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ORIGINAL PROJECT

Center for Documentary Studies at Duke
University (1993-1995)

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Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University
Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life
in the Jim Crow South

Interview
with
DAISY LIVINGSTON
[DOB 3/25/26]

Greenwood, Mississippi
August 3, 1995
Doris Dixon,
Interviewer

Dixon: Could you please state your full name and date of birth.

Livingston: Daisy Thomas Livingston, March 25, 1926.

Dixon: Mrs. Livingston, where were you born?

Livingston: In Leflore County, Greenwood, Mississippi.

Dixon: In the town of Greenwood or the surrounding area?

Livingston: I guess we'd call it the suburbs now. It was not
in the city proper.

Dixon: Did you grow up on a farm?

Livingston: No.

Dixon: Would you explain to me the neighborhood or the community?

Livingston: The neighborhood that we lived in was a subdivision, and it was the work place of the Buckeye Oil Mill. The oil mill made cottonseed oil, extracted the seeds from the cotton and made oil and other things, and it was one of the places of employment for the people of the community, the town, and surrounding towns. Black and white worked there, and it was probably one of the best jobs at that time in the community. Of course, other jobs were in the cotton fields surrounding the town of Greenwood, and the people worked there. And, of course, blacks worked in the homes as cooks, maids, baby-sitters. The men would do the yard. They worked in the stores, the grocery stores as porters, bus boys, or what have you. So those were the jobs mostly. There were a few who were independently employed, like barbers, cafe owners, beauticians, as now. There were some who might--I know Miss Rosebud [phonetic]. She had a grocery store across from the school, where we would leave school and go at the break and spend our pennies or nickels or whatever we had.

Dixon: Did your parents work at the Buckeye Mill?

Livingston: My father did. My mother worked in a home. She

was a housekeeper.

Dixon: What is some of your earliest memories--how many years, first, did you live in that part?

Livingston: Live in that part? Until I got married, until I was eighteen. I got married when I was eighteen years old, so I lived there until I was eighteen.

Dixon: What are some of your earliest memories of growing up?

Livingston: Where we lived?

Dixon: Yes.

Livingston: Beautiful. Everybody, every grown-up and adult of my friends, everybody was your mama, really. Wherever you played, if it was dinnertime, that's where you ate. Everybody was just like one big family, and we really all loved each other. Then it was not as it is today. Everybody knew each other very well, just like family really, extended family, I would say.

There were a school out there with one teacher, but I didn't attend that school. I walked about five or six miles, maybe farther, to school. I walked first to McLaurin Street

School for elementary, and then you passed by Nicholson Elementary. That was a high school when I was going. I walked from out there to go to high school right over there on Stone Street, so you can imagine. This is down where you came from Valley. You crossed at a river bridge way down there. Right in there was where we lived at that time, and we walked from there to Stone Street School over here at the school every day.

Of course, we went to the movie up here and everything, went to the grocery stores. We would come from down there with our moms, and we didn't have any transportation. My brothers and I would come with Mom, and we would get the groceries and take them to and back, you know, like home.

Dixon: Did you know your grandparents?

Livingston: Oh, yes, yes. My grandmama did live out on a farm with some more nieces and aunts and things, and she would be there during the time of picking cotton, planting the cotton and picking cotton. She would only come home to live with us whenever--they called it laid by. When everything was done, she'd come home for the winter, and we would be glad to have her. Our grandfather would stay on, because they had livestock out there that he had to help look after. So, yes, I knew my grandmother and grandfather.

Dixon: Did they ever tell you about any of their experiences, about their youth, about some of the things they had to go through?

Livingston: Yes. My grandfather, my grandmother never talked too much about it, but my grandfather owned a lot of land in Yazoo County, his people did, you know. Some of it was taken from him, and, of course, he had a fight about that. Some he retained, but some he didn't. He lost it through the courts, but I forget how it was lost through the courts. But some was left, some of the land was left.

He and his brothers, Uncle Woody, all of them, the land was handed down to them. Uncle Woody had some land left when he died not too long ago, and my grandfather had some land. Now, my grandmama--not my maternal grandmother, because she died a long time ago. Now, my grandmother, my grandfather married her lately, she's still living, but she lives down in Eden, Mississippi. That's in Yazoo County.

Dixon: This is your--

Livingston: Grandfather's wife, but not my mother's [mother], because she's dead. She died early. Yeah, she died early. But Mama Clara is down there.

Dixon: Do you ever have much occasion to go down to the farm?

Livingston: All the time, all the time. When I was a child I would go down there all the time, and I would go down there and work. Sometimes I would take my sisters and brothers with me. We didn't know much about working, but we would try to do like my aunts and things were doing.

When we would get ready to come home, since we didn't live on the farm, Mama Clara would--the train would run then. We don't have a train running through here now, but then we did, on the same route Amtrak will take when they come back. I think they're supposed to start the trip back again soon. But anyway, she would put the cornmeal. They would ground the corn and make cornmeal, and she would put up all kind of vegetables and things and put them in jars and these baskets and boxes and things. We would just have everything, bringing it home. They would put us on the train, and when we would get down here in Greenwood at the train station, we had one black person who had a car. He called it his taxi cab. His name was Kind Friend. That's all I ever knew.

Dixon: Kind Friend?

Livingston: Kind Friend. I don't know if that was his real name or just what they called him. He was a little humpback

fellow. But anyway, I remember he charged a quarter if you had packages and it was 15 cents if you didn't. He would just pile his car up with all that I told you we would bring from the farm, and he would take me back down to the Buckeye, where we lived. Yes, I used to go down there to the farm. Yeah, I sure did.

Dixon: Where was the Buckeye?

Livingston: It's where I told you, where you come across the--

Dixon: Right.

Livingston: See, the Buckeye Oil Mill, and they called where we lived the Buckeye Quarters. The name of the thing was the Buckeye Oil Mill, and where we lived they called that the Buckeye Quarters, because there were homes there and we lived there. We lived there, in front of us some whites lived. They had where they lived, right in front of us. The only thing that separated the two divisions, it was a cotton field running through there, in rows, of course, but it was a cotton field down there, right where you came across coming from Value today.

Dixon: So you would bring food and other things from the country?

Livingston: Yes, I would.

Dixon: Did your parents share this with their neighbors?

Livingston: Oh, yes, yes. I remember when I was young, if one had flour and the other one didn't have any flour, they would swap. Like my grandmama or mother would give flour to them, and she'd say, "Well, I've got cornmeal." And then they would give cornmeal. Yes, they shared. They shared everything. If somebody had a cow, they would give milk and then they would give butter. Give, not sell, give milk or give butter. Maybe somebody come from the country and maybe bring my mom what they called a bushel of potatoes or sweet potatoes, then we would go with little bags, in paper, whatever, all around they would be giving it out, dividing it.

And then a few people might would have a pig down there, but not many. Everybody would save the scraps and they would feed the pig, and in the wintertime when the time come to kill the pig, everybody got a portion of the pig. So, yes, it was sharing. I call it loving and sharing. Now I look back and I think it was a very good time, a very good time.

Dixon: Were there those who didn't want to share?

Livingston: I didn't know them. I didn't know them. I didn't know them.

Dixon: You say you look back now and see that it was a good time.

Livingston: I think it was a good time as far as people getting along and loving each other and trusting each other.

Dixon: Did you think it was a good time when you were experiencing it?

Livingston: I thought that was good. Naturally, what I didn't like, I didn't like walking by a school to come way over here to a black school. I didn't like that. I didn't like my mama having to work for low wages. Those things I didn't like. But as far as being neighborly and loving and trusting and whatnot, I'm sure there must have been stealing, but I don't know nobody stealing anything. We didn't even have keys to lock the door. The door was always open. That's what I think was good compared to now. Here we're all barred up now. We might have a little money, but we're all barred up and we're afraid to trust anybody. So that's what I mean about some things, I think, were good. But I never liked being made to feel like a second-class citizen. Of course, I never liked that.

Dixon: You did feel sometimes that you were treated like--

Livingston: Of course, of course. There was a theater, and there was a part for colored and there was a part for whites. There were water fountains, and there were white and there were colored. There were bathrooms. There were white and then there was colored. And sometimes there were places where you couldn't go at all, like maybe a country club or a nice cafe, unless you worked in there. So, yes, those things I didn't like.

Dixon: It seems to me that white people constructed barriers to make black people feel inferior. Among other things, they were trying to instill a certain inferiority. But did you ever internalize--I mean, it's one thing to be treated like a second-class citizen, but did you ever feel that?

Livingston: No, I really didn't. I never did feel like it, because I had a wise grandmama and mama, and like I told you, my granddaddy had land, and we were always taught that we were as good as anybody, and that's the way I felt. My grandmama and grandpapa had a real, real sense of worth. They talked about Africa and Heliselassi [phonetic] all the time, and they talked about he was descended from the queen of long time ago. I can't do it, but they could trace his ancestry way back to biblical

days, and they said that was where we came from.

Then we had a teacher, Mrs. Brooks, who taught us that--she said, "What goes around come around." She told us that the Egyptians and whatnot were our brothers and there were a time when they had like we were in slavery and made like second-class citizens, that we had done that to a Caucasian race at one time in history, and, I don't know, that we came from queens and kings. A lot of us--I wasn't the only one. There were more of us. Yes, we felt like we was as good as anybody. We sure did.

Dixon: So you were taught black history in the home.

Livingston: That's right. You're exactly right. We were.

Dixon: Can you tell me some more about what you were taught?

Livingston: Well, we were taught about, of course, the Negro spirituals and we were told, which I wouldn't know, that in the hot sun and the backbreaking work that the blacks would do all day from sunup until sundown, they would sing these songs and how they would make them up, and everybody might would put in a verse. They would do it long enough till sometime it would make the whole song, with the different verses, you know. They taught us that. What else did they teach us? I think we had some very good teachers. They taught us about a lot of things.

They also taught us that the South needed the slaves to feel inferior, because we made the money for them with the cotton fields and everything, and we were also taught that there were blacks in Africa and the Caribbean and everything who sold blacks to these whites to bring to South Carolina or to Natchez, Mississippi, or New Orleans, to bring us here as slaves. We were taught that, too.

Dixon: Do you know where your people came from before Mississippi? Were they from South Carolina?

Livingston: No. I don't know where they came from before Mississippi. I sure don't. I don't know that. But I do know early on my mother's mother went to Pittsburgh. Now, why she went, I've forgotten why she went. But my mother didn't like it up there, and they came back, they came back to Mississippi.

Dixon: Your mother's mother?

Livingston: Yes, and my mother didn't like it. I think she was a teenager. I'm not sure how old she was, but they came back. My grandmom was a very good cook, so that might have been one reason why she went, I don't know. But I know my mama didn't like it, and my grandmama brought her back. My mother was an only child by my grandma, my maternal grandmother. My mother

was an only child. But my grandfather had many children.

Dixon: Were any of your people involved in politics?

Livingston: No, not when I was a child, no.

Dixon: [Question unclear] Reconstruction [unclear] or anything like that?

Livingston: No. I don't know if anybody was in the Reconstruction part of it. I really don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I know my grandfather was a very progressive fellow. Now, I don't know if he tried to pay his poll tax, and I think he did. I think he paid poll tax, and I think he voted, if I remember, in Yazoo County. I kind of remember a little bit about the poll tax, but I think he paid poll tax or whatever you call that.

Dixon: Did your parents or you pay poll tax?

Livingston: No, I didn't pay no poll tax.

Dixon: So did you first start voting in the sixties?

Livingston: Yeah, I started voting in the sixties. Yeah, I

started voting in the sixties.

Dixon: How many years did your father work at Buckeye?
Approximately how long?

Livingston: Let me see. Until about 1940, I believe, about 1940. He took sick and he died after that. About 1940.

Dixon: At that time, where were the families living?

Livingston: We were still living down there--I call it the Buckeye Quarters. We were still living there. We were still living there. My mother only moved up to Greenwood Proper when I was already married, when I was already married. When I was married, that's when she moved--I call it up here in the city. From out of the suburbs, she moved to where she could walk to town, where it's easy to walk to town and all, and I was already married then, because I got married at eighteen, when I was eighteen years old.

Dixon: You finished school at [unclear] Street?

Livingston: Stone Street. No, I didn't finish school at Stone Street. I was in the twelfth grade and I was pregnant, and I didn't go back. But I took the GED test, and I took nursing at

Valley State in 1951, when they had the first nursing class over there.

Dixon: Did you go on to become a nurse?

Livingston: Yes.

Dixon: What were the prospects for black women in nursing during those days, before the fifties?

Livingston: Well, before the fifties, we had the midwives who delivered the babies and whatnot. We had quite a few of those. We had a hospital, but I remember we had one black R.N. Her name was Mrs. Neva B. Jackson [phonetic], and she trained ladies. I wasn't one of them. They were older than I am, you know. She trained those ladies to work in the hospital with her. A doctor owned this hospital, and it was where the colored people went, as they call. But she trained the help that she had.

In the fifties, when this big hospital where you passed down there, Greenwood Leflore, it wasn't as big then as it is now, came into being. Those nurses had to go to a school and be certified, so they were to be certified. Of course, when Valley came, then new people would go over there and take the course and pass the state board, and then they started working in

there. But before that, we didn't have that. You might would have to go out--I think they had to leave Mississippi.

Dixon: Leave the whole state?

Livingston: I believe Miss Jackson did. I believe Miss Jackson did. Now, I don't know if she went--I won't say where I think she went. I don't know if she went to Alabama, because I think the Seventh Day Adventist people had a nursing school even then, but I'm not sure. So I won't say where Miss Jackson went, but I know she was the only R.N. that I knew. Her husband was an elder in the Methodist church, so I guess I can see why she might have been able to go off to school.

Dixon: After these nurses were certified, were they able to come back and practice at Greenwood Leflore?

Livingston: Yes, they worked there.

Dixon: Were they R.N.s or LPNs?

Livingston: LPNs and R.N.s. Valley had a LPN school and then they had a school for R.N.s.

Dixon: Was nursing your first job?

Livingston: No. When I was in high school, I was a baby-sitter, and I worked a little in the fields. I picked cotton a little bit, but not much. I didn't like it. I didn't like the outdoors, and I still don't. I would rather baby-sit. But now, some of my friends didn't want to baby-sit. They would rather pick cotton, chop cotton, but I didn't.

Dixon: So you would baby-sit?

Livingston: Yes.

Dixon: How much were you getting paid?

Livingston: I might would get 50 cents a week and then I might would get 75 cents if the people went out more often than usual. Sometimes the man of the house, at the end of the day he might would tip you something, but the wives usually took care of paying the help. So sometimes you would make maybe as much as a dollar and a quarter for the whole week. But see, I could take that quarter and buy so much with it. I could buy so much with a quarter.

Dixon: Did you have particular families or one family that you worked for?

Livingston: I had one or two families, one or two families, and one special family that I always worked for, really up until I married.

Dixon: Were there some places that you liked working more or less than others?

Livingston: Yeah. I liked the Smith family very much. She's still my friend. She's still living, and she's a friend of mine, and the children, they respect me. Yeah, they respect me. Of course, the husband's been long dead, but she's still living. I see her sometimes and I call her sometimes.

Dixon: Were there other places that you liked working less?

Livingston: No, because really and truly, if I didn't like them, I didn't work for them. Then, of course, when I worked in the hospital we had what you call a section for colored people, and that's where we worked. And then we had black people working in the operating room and central supply, where the supplies would go out to the whole hospital, and we had them who worked in the kitchen and the laundry and places like that. But I was down there in a nursing capacity, because I went to Valley State in '51.

Dixon: They had you work in the colored section of the hospital?

Livingston: Oh, yes, that's where we worked, the nurses worked. But now they work everywhere, of course, in the hospital.

Dixon: What were the differences between the colored section and the rest of the hospital?

Livingston: None, just that this was where you were. It wasn't any, because you were operated on in the same operating room and everybody's food came out of the same kitchen. It wasn't any. It was just like the theater. You could see the same picture, but you're just sitting here and then they are sitting over on the other side of the partition, just separation. That was the difference. You were separated.

Dixon: Were there any differences, say, in supplies or conditions?

Livingston: No. They had the same food and whatever and had the same Ace bandage or whatever you needed, you know. No, no difference in that. Medication was the same. All of that was the same.

But now, there was a difference at the schools. When we had a football team, our boys would get the togs that the boys wore from the white high school. Then we would get those. We had a little band. We would get the instruments, and when they got new instruments, we might would get the old instruments, things like that. Now, that was a difference. Of course, you know, books, in the early days we might not have had, before the state started giving books, we might not have had the new books like they had. We probably had the books that, when they got some new books, we got some old books. Now, that was different.

The books that we had were different. But we had teachers who, even though they weren't making much money, if there was something they thought we needed to know, they would buy the book and teach us out of that book on their own. We had really dedicated, I call them, really good teachers when we were coming along, because they didn't have all that they needed, but they made do with what they had and they were good at it.

Dixon: Were you ever disciplined by any of your teachers?

Livingston: Disappointed?

Dixon: Disciplined.

Livingston: Yes, especially Mr. Threadgear [phonetic]. Yes!

Yes, we were disciplined. He was our principal, and if we were late, he would be standing in that door with that switch, and as the girls would go by they got it on their legs. You couldn't be late. Of course, there would always be a long freight train that would cut us off coming. We couldn't come across. We had to wait till it passed. Of course, he'd say, "Leave home early enough and you wouldn't have to wait on the train."

And another thing. He was our father and everything, and he had us to know that our parents were working. They did not have time to come run to school to see about us. When we came to school, we were in his care.

I never will forget "Gone With the Wind" came to the Paramount Theater. I was in high school. I think it was a dollar and a quarter, and that was a lot of money. All of us got together, boys and girls, because we know we couldn't go at night to see it because it was too long. We were going to have to cut class to go in the daytime. Whatever you had over your fare, you passed this out to the next one so we could all have enough to get the ticket to get in.

I could say it was fifty, I could say it was seventy-five. It might have been 100 of us in the theater. Of course, naturally for the black, they had--Miss Helen Wright was my neighbor, and I got to love her once I got married and lived in front of her, you know. I loved her very much. Then I didn't like her too much. But anyway, she was selling the tickets.

She sold us a ticket and let us all go up there. We had Miss Glover. She was the one to see that you were seated and to see that you would be quiet when you got in the theater. She was black. They let us all go up there. Then they called Mr. Threadgear. [Laughter]

The only way I was saved, I was sitting between two of our football boys. Naturally, we were up in the balcony, the blacks were up in the balcony, and down in the orchestra, that's where the whites sat. We were up in the balcony, and it was way high up here and then way down here, you know, as you come through the door behind us. So we were sitting here, and a football player was sitting on the side of me and another was sitting over here, and they were big guys, so I could see. We said, "Oh, here comes Mr. Threadgear."

He started upstairs and I could see all the children coming down, marching out. When he got to us down here, he peeped around, and the big fellow pulled his cap on his head. He said, "Mister, will you get out of my face? I paid too much money."

He said, "Please excuse me, Sir."

That made him go to the next row. That's how I got to see all of the picture. A few of us got to stay in because he thought we were adults. You couldn't see too good in there because the movie was going on. But that was the type of principal he was.

There was a place where we used to call it Osie Speed's

Cafe [phonetic], and we would leave school, and instead of going home, we might would go around to Osie Speed's Cafe. You could look up anytime and Mr. Threadgear would walk in the door and you'd have to get out and go home. That was the type of principal we had. Of course, we didn't like it then, but I know now it was very good, very good, very good.

Dixon: What did you like and dislike about school?

Livingston: Home ec, especially the sewing.

Dixon: You disliked it?

Livingston: Oh, I couldn't stand that sewing. I was impatient. I have a F on my record right now for sewing and home ec. I didn't mind cooking. I liked to cook. And I liked school just fine. I liked school just fine. I just didn't like sewing. It was boring to me. It's too slow.

Dixon: What did you like?

Livingston: History. I liked history most of all. I liked the activities. I was a cheerleader and all of that. I liked the football games and stuff. I liked that. I could tolerate English and the rest of the stuff, but I really did like

history.

Dixon: Were you still being taught black history?

Livingston: We were taught about everything, but our teachers taught us mostly about black history with their own books or their own knowledge and with the Bible, and with the Bible.

Dixon: I want to ask you a few more questions about Buckeye. What was most important to the people in that community?

Livingston: I guess the most important thing was them trying to make enough money to feed the children, because there were eight, ten, twelve, there were a lot of children in the family.

I guess that might have been the most important thing was trying to feed and clothe the children and keep them in school, you know, and get them off to school. And then they liked church. They would go to church. They liked church. Church was important to them.

Dixon: Did you like going to church?

Livingston: Yes, I liked going to church, until I was about eighth grade. We went to the Baptist church, and I had a teacher named Miss Brooks. Miss Brooks played music, too. She

was a good pianist. She would teach us the Sunday school lesson on a Friday, and this particular Friday she taught us the Sunday school lesson, and when I went to church on Sunday and when the superintendent asked us to explain the lesson, and then I explained it how Miss Brooks had taught us, and it was really John speaking. The superintendent said, before the whole thing, "No, no, that was Jesus speaking. That wasn't John, that was Jesus."

And so when I went back and I told Miss Brooks, and we went over it again and he was wrong, and I didn't like Sunday school no more. I told my mama that I just could not go to somebody who didn't know as much as I did. Then I went to the Methodist church, and there was a difference.

Dixon: What was the difference?

Livingston: The difference was that they understood, the teachers understood the lesson as Miss Brooks was teaching it to us every Friday. I didn't have any problem. I guess they had more education, I'll put it like that.

Dixon: What was the difference between the church services then in those days? Or is there a difference?

Livingston: Yes, in some churches there are, because I remember

when Mama and them used to stay at church all day. But now I have friends--I'm Catholic now, but I have friends who go to the Baptist church. They might be gone two hours or an hour and a half. They don't stay all day anymore. I remember Mama and them, people used to stay at church all day long, and then they'd go back later in the evening and stay till late at night. But they don't do that anymore.

Dixon: Did you have much patience for that?

Livingston: No, I didn't not have, I didn't. It was too long for me. I thought it was just too long, and repetitious, too.

Dixon: What did you know about the NAACP, when you were younger and as you grew older?

Livingston: I knew that it was a good organization, because there was a chapter here in Greenwood and Reverend Louie Reed [phonetic] and Mr. Louis Golden [phonetic], they were heading up the NAACP. They would have meetings, and they would go downtown and talk to the officials about things that needed to be done in the neighborhood, like maybe the streets need paving or the sidewalk need something or whatever. I know they were always down there trying to do better things for the community. Mr. Louie Reed was a Boy Scout leader, and I think, I'm not sure, I

believe he got money from the national Boy Scout thing, wherever it was.

They were good community leaders that were in the NAACP. I don't remember them ever having a case where they needed a lawyer. I know they talked about that they could get lawyers if they needed them from the NAACP. So, yeah, there was a great following of the NAACP when I was in high school and when I first got married.

Dixon: This was in the forties?

Livingston: Yes, that's right. That is right, in the forties and the fifties. Sure was, in the forties, late forties, '45, '46, '47, like that. Yeah, had a good membership of the NAACP, the adults. I joined the NAACP, my husband and I, and was in it till Mr. Louis Golden died and it went down a while. I think it's going now. Attorney Willie Perkins [phonetic], I think, is heading it up now.

Dixon: You were born in '25?

Livingston: In '26.

Dixon: Do you have any memories of the president?

Livingston: I remember Herbert Hoover, when he was in there as the president, and I remember that there were people traveling from place to place. Sometimes they would ride on the freight trains and sometimes they would be walking, and they would be looking for jobs or looking for food during that time. And then I remember when Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president, and I remember I had friends, young men that I knew, who went to what they called a CC camp, and I remember the older men working on the roads, and they called it the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. I remember times getting better because there was money coming into the community, and with the men and boys working in these camps and on WPA, that put more jobs for the other people. They might would leave the cafe and maybe somebody else could go in there. I remember times getting better in our neighborhood, in our community, during that time.

Of course, you know World War II made things even better, because the fellows, a lot of them went to the service, and then the wives would get a check and they got paid. Then after that there was a provision made where the G.I.s could go to school, and I remember a lot of the fellows coming back, I know they are teachers and principals now. They're retired and whatnot. They came back to school, and whatever they needed was paid by the G.I. Bill. That's where in the South where all the educators--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Livingston: . . . during that time, those years, and that was, to me that was really the turning point for things to get better, you know.

Dixon: As far as your own life was concerned, could you see change, like in your family's life?

Livingston: Yes.

Dixon: What happened?

Livingston: My husband, he was eighteen and he went into the navy, and my brother, he went into the army. Then there were jobs, better jobs for the women, because sometimes the women took over the jobs that the men might have had. I remember some ladies going into the Buckeye to do jobs--I don't know what they did--because a lot of the men were gone. They had been drafted. So, yeah, things got better then.

Of course, my mama was still a housekeeper, because she was a very good housekeeper and the people she worked for was rich.

She was just paid more because they didn't want her to go. I don't know where they thought she was going, but they didn't want her to go anyplace and she was paid more. So things were just better all around. Yeah, things were better all around.

Things were better.

Dixon: Do you remember your mother working for these people?

Livingston: Yes.

Dixon: Mostly the same people for quite a while?

Livingston: Yes, I do.

Dixon: Did you ever have occasion to go to work with her?

Livingston: Yes. I would go to the house, and if she had things she wanted us to come in and get, sometimes the lady would go to the grocery store and all and she would bring things back for the children, and if my mother had to stay on and she thought we needed it, she would call maybe the white people in front of us who had a phone and they would call us. Sometimes you could call across the field. They'd be standing out there calling, and they would say, "Lola said come to the house." And then we would go and get what she wanted and sometimes we would go and help her, I would because I was the oldest. I would go most of the time, but not often. Yes, I knew them. I knew them well.

Dixon: Did your mother ever tell you of any of her experiences working in a private home, like anything she saw or went through?

Livingston: No, not really. She would do everything. She cooked, she cleaned. She was just a housekeeper. Because the lady was a bridge player, and she'd be gone most of the time. My mama even planned the meals and would buy the grocery a lot of times. The lady would be gone. Her husband was a doctor.

Dixon: I have a few more questions. I want to ask you about what it was like to be a black woman in that time period. What kinds of things were you told about how you were supposed to conduct yourself, how you were supposed to behave?

Livingston: I would guess the same thing you would tell your daughter today, that you want them to get an education and no sex before marriage. All of those things we were told about, we were told. I would say the same things that you would tell your daughter today they told us then.

Dixon: So if someone were to say to you, "Behave like a young lady," what would that mean to you?

Livingston: Well, if we were in church, it would mean not

sitting up there talking out or chewing gum or eating or something like that. I guess if we were in a room with adults, it would mean not keeping up a lot of noise where they couldn't hear or talk what they were saying. I guess just common curtesy. I guess just staying in a child's place, I presume.

Dixon: What were the main associations, organizations, or other activities that women were involved in, black women were involved in.

Livingston: The black women had sewing clubs and they had just plain social clubs. They had friends where they would go out. They might go to a cafe and they might go to dances, because in those days every big band you could name traveled through the South, and all the best blues singers came from the South. So they would go from town to town, and if you liked the cafes and you liked the music and whatnot, you'll probably go there. A church would always have socials and plays. Sometimes they would write their own play, and what they called Tom Thumb weddings. Of course, they'd make that up, and maybe two little fellows get married or something like that. There were all kind of entertainments. Some of them played cards. They liked to play cards. If they liked to play cards, they would play cards. So there were all kinds of entertainment for them.

Dixon: What kind of things was your mother involved in?

Livingston: Clubs. She wasn't much for cafes and things, but clubs and the church clubs and she sang in the choir, things like that.

Dixon: Do you remember the name of some of the clubs?

Livingston: Yeah. I think one was called the Young Matrons Club and one was the Eastern Star, and then the choir. I think that's about the only clubs I can remember that she belonged to. She went to choir practice and she went to those clubs and things, and that's about all, that's about all. She visited her friends, but that's about all, because, see, they worked every day. She might not have but one day off, and that would be Sunday, and sometimes she wouldn't have Sunday off. If something that the lady was having a lot of people in or had guests or something, she might not even have Sunday off. That's about all. But there were ladies who partied a lot and had a lot of fun.

Dixon: What about you? What kinds of things did you do?

Livingston: Oh, I was interested in everything, dancing and we had a club we called the Les Elites [phonetic]. It was about

twenty of us, and we would go to big bands, say Buddy Johnson. If the Duke would be somewhere close like Jackson or Memphis, we'd all try to get together and go. And church, church clubs, and things like that.

Dixon: Were you involved in any volunteer associations, any civic clubs?

Livingston: The only civic club that I was at was later on, when I was a volunteer. I was a volunteer for the Golden Age. I was a candy striper for the Golden Age Nursing Home and volunteered my service for that. I haven't been too long stopped doing that. Just really when my husband retired and wasn't too well, then I stopped doing that. We belonged to the NAACP a while. We had a chamber of commerce when I was about nineteen or twenty, and it lasted for maybe about five years, not long. That's just about all I remember.

Dixon: Did you and your husband have children?

Livingston: Five daughters.

Dixon: What kinds of values did you try to instill in your children?

Livingston: Well, mostly that, the first thing was I wanted them to go to school and I wanted them to work hard. I told them that if one would always try to reach back to help the other one if they could, and I'm happy to say that I have seen them do that.

That's one of my daughters right there. She is the commissioner of Health and Human Services in New York City. She works for Mayor Giuliani. She was in Denver at the same job, but two years ago when Giuliani won the mayorship of New York, they put out a search, and she was one of them. She was here at home and they called her to come for an interview, and she went and she got the job. That's my second daughter.

My oldest daughter is a nurse at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. She's been there over twenty-five years.

My third daughter, Rhonda, she lives here with us. She never left home, but she has two boys. One boy is a captain in the air force. He went to Mississippi State University and he has a couple of master's and he's working on his Ph.D., but he's still in the air force. He says he's getting everything he can before he get out. The other son graduated from Morehouse College two years ago.

My fourth daughter lives in Denver, Colorado. She has a daughter and a son. Now, she became pregnant when she was going to college, because she was out there with his daughter, and when the baby was born, she brought the baby home--her name is

Makeever [phonetic]--to stay with us until she could finish college. That's the fourth daughter. When she got a job and came for her, Makeever wouldn't stay, so we kept her. Now, she finished college two years ago--one year ago, because she'd been up to Old Miss, Mississippi State. She's working on her master's in social service, so she went to Mississippi State last year, and she'll be home soon, I hope next week. She's visiting her mama in Denver, because school starts on the 18th.

Then my fifth daughter, she lives in Peoria, Illinois. She graduated from Valley. She works in a home where there are people. They got houses where people--she's a social service person there, but she's head of that house in Peoria, Illinois. So that's all of my children. Those are my daughters.

Dixon: What were the differences in the educational opportunities your daughters had versus what you had?

Livingston: Well, they could get scholarships and things to go to college. In my day, if you got a scholarship, it was very little, and parents had to pay mostly, you know. But they all had good scholarships, so that was one difference. They were smart enough and kept the grades up.

My grandson, but now he's got plenty money. He became a Mason, a [unclear], and this and that and the other. He didn't have no job, so I guess it was from all the grants and whatever.

He knew how to get the money. And Makeever is getting her master's now at Old Miss, and she's not paying anything. So that's one great difference.

I'm sure it's going to change soon because of the people who don't want affirmative action and all that. I'm sure all of that's going to change. But right now it's no problem, and I hope it doesn't get to be like it was when we--there was so many just couldn't go. They had to work. I sincerely hope it don't get to be like that anymore. My feeling is that too many black children and people getting an education, higher education now, and my feeling is that the conservatives feel like it's time to kind of cut it down, you know. I want you out there in competition for the jobs.

Dixon: What was the difference between your education and your parents' education?

Livingston: I went to school longer than my mother did. I went to school longer than she did. I think the ones in those days who did get some education, and I don't know how they did it, but I think a lot was packed into the few years that they might have gone, because my grandmama was very smart, was a very smart person, and we learned a lot of history, and she kept up with what was going on. She lived long enough to enjoy television and everything, and Jackie Robinson was her favorite. But she

kept up with everything that was going on. So I think what they got was very good. Whoever taught them, taught them everything, and in those days that might not be but one person doing the teaching, just one person.

Dixon: One final question. When you think back of your life in Greenwood and the people that have had an impact on you or the community or both, what do you think should be remembered? What stands out in your mind?

Livingston: A teacher, Miss Brooks I told you about, she stands out as teaching beyond the textbook. In my mind, when I was young, I think about her. As an adult, I would think a great impact on the community, which made me proud, was when President White, J.H. White, came and started Mississippi Valley State, because I saw so many old teachers go back and get a degree, because at the time many of them was working with out a degree.

Then the next thing was, Father Nathaniel Machesky [phonetic] came to the Delta and opened up--they brought the Catholic school, St. Francis Center, and St. Francis Center had everything going on in it--typing classes, Girl Scouts, you name it, everything was going on in it. They brought in nurses, and pharmaceutical companies would send medication. And there was a doctor in town--he's still living--that could prescribe the medication because he had a license, and the medicine was given

to the ill or those who needed. So those things I look back on and it makes me proud and I think had a great impact on the community.

Of course, the boycott, we called it the Greenwood Movement. That opened up jobs, clerks in stores downtown and in the banks and things, and that started from St. Francis Center and Father Nathaniel. So now, I think those are the things.

Dixon: Thank you.

Livingston: You're certainly welcome.

[transcribed by TechniType]