Interview with Nettie Holliday Thompson

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Irmo (S.C.)

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Houston: So, if we could, I'd like to start by getting you to state your name, your birth day, or date, and where you were born, please.

Thompson: Yes. My name is Nettie, N-e-t-t-i-e, Nettie Holiday Thompson. I was born in Brunswick, Georgia January the 24th, 1912. I'm the fourth of twelve children. I have ... I had seven sisters, seven girls -- six sisters, and five brothers. Of those now, five girls and one boy is alive. All the rest have passed on.

Houston: Do you know whether your grandparents came from the area of Brunswick, Georgia? Is your family ...

Thompson: My grandparents ... well, that's why ... We didn't have too much of a problem during segregation because we was so tied up and mixed up. [chuckles] My ... My father came from Federal, North Carolina in Roberson County. He's a Cherokee Indian. And my mother was from Darien, Georgia. Her background is kind of mixed too. Her father was Irish. Her mother was part Indian and part black.
Houston: And you said there were ... that they were very mixed up and there were no racial problems. Was there ... Were the people in the area generally pretty mixed up? I mean, in terms of heritage, ethnic heritage.

Thompson: Well, the communities that we lived in ... I didn't live in but one community then. There were ... In Brunswick, Georgia, to my estimation everybody was congenial to everybody else. The whites and blacks all lived together in mixed neighborhoods. Of course, the extremely wealthy whites had their little corner by themselves. But other than that, the whites and the blacks were all mixed together. And my father, on his job -- he was a cooper. And they worked in a large building making barrels. So each person had his own little station. They always ... [laughs] they always stationed my father with the whites. And he didn't say he was white or black or anything. He was just a person. But wherever he went, he had no problems because the whites always gave him the same respect as the blacks.

Houston: Okay. Were there other mixed families in the area? I mean, did you have ... was your ... Since your family ... It sounds like your grand ... your parents were from that area.

Thompson: M-hm.

Houston: And their parents may have been from that area. I mean, did you have lots of relatives -- aunts and uncles, cousins and so on around?
Thompson: We had only one … my father's uncle lived there because he owned the barrel factory. My father was a barrel maker, cooper, and his uncle owned a barrel factory there.

Houston: Your great-uncle?

Thompson: Yes. That would be my great-uncle. But there were no mixed families that I … that I knew of. My father and … my father and his father and uncle came from North Carolina and they were looking around. They just established this business there. And my uncle took it over. My father wasn't … wasn't in the business. He just worked.

Houston: He worked at the barrel factory?

Thompson: Not at that factory. He worked at another factory in Brunswick. And just every once in awhile he'd go and help my uncle out. But he worked at … oh, I forgot the name of it.

Houston: So this was your father or grandfather?

Thompson: This was my father I'm talking about.

Houston: Okay. Did your grandfather work with your uncle in his barrel factory?

Thompson: I don't know. He was … I don't remember that because he was
dead by the time I was big enough to know anything about it. But my uncle still lived there. My father's uncle stayed there. He was the only ... My father's uncle was the only one that stayed in Brunswick. And my father. Those were the only members of the family.

Houston: I was in Georgia before coming here and I talked to people. Obviously I interviewed people in Georgia. And one of the things I learned is that in those days, which is to say in the early twentieth century -- first half of the twentieth century, when agriculture ... I guess before the Depression when agriculture was still practiced widely by a large number of people on small farms that various towns had reputations for supplying various things for agricultural purposes. Some towns provided ... were known for selling mules and buggies. And some towns were noted for being ... having a turpentine still. And some towns were noted for, I guess, barrels. Was Brunswick, Georgia a barrel town?

Thompson: Yes, that's right. It was probably a barrel town. I don't know of anything else.

Houston: And what did most of the people ... now, was it ... What was the town like? Was it a ... was it a big town? Was it a ... Well, I mean, from your recollection of it as a ... as a child, maybe an older child.

Thompson: Well, I'd never been anywhere but Brunswick until I came here to live. But, it was a small town. I guess it would be considered a small
Houston: So aside from the barrel factory, there was no other major employer?

Thompson: Yes, there was a ... a crude oil company.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: I've forgotten the name now it went by, but it was a ... they had big oil tanks and all.

Houston: Okay. Storage tanks?

Thompson: Storage tanks for the oil and stuff, crude oil.

Houston: And was there a railroad there in Brunswick at the time? Do you know if there was a railroad that came through?

Thompson: Yes. The train came through there.

Houston: Okay. And what did most of the people do who lived around you? I mean, did you live in the town itself?

Thompson: Yes, we lived in the little town. What did the people do? Frankly, I left there when I was seventeen years old, so I don't have any
idea what they did.

Houston: Okay. Now, in the countryside outside of Brunswick, were there farms?

Thompson: Yes, there was ... I guess. Not large farms. Not that I know of. Everybody in the town had their own little gardens. But so far as farms, I don't remember any farmland.

Houston: So your family had a garden?

Thompson: Yes, Momma always had her garden that she liked to work, supplied all our vegetables and she always had chickens. So she ... she supplied the family with vegetables and eggs.

Houston: When you say "supplied the family" you mean your immediate family? The household you lived in? Or other relatives?

Thompson: Yes, just ... no. Just our family. Those twelve kids were enough.

Houston: Twelve kids?

Thompson: [chuckles] Yes.

Houston: That's right. You were the fourth of twelve. And was anybody
else in the house? Or just your parents, your mother and father and twelve kids?

**Thompson:** That's right.

**Houston:** No ... your uncle lived somewhere else.

**Thompson:** Yes.

**Houston:** And did the kids help out in the garden?

**Thompson:** Oh, it was just a garden that Momma worked by herself. No, we didn’t do anything. We went to school every day. She just saw to it that we stayed in school.

**Houston:** Now as the fourth of twelve, were you the oldest girl?

**Thompson:** No. I was ... There was one girl. My brother was the oldest and sister and then another sister and then me. I was the fourth.

**Houston:** The third girl.

**Thompson:** I was the third girl, fourth child.

**Houston:** My ... My mother was the second eldest child and the second girl, but she had responsibility for the family. She did a lot of the cooking and
Thompson: Peculiarly, no. My mother said that she could take care of her own. That we didn't have to mind the babies even though there were a lot of babies. We didn't have to do anything. She just saw to it that we went to school and just led a pleasant child life. And I loved to cook. I used to cook because I wanted to. I was the only daughter in the family that would cook. And I did it because I wanted to and not that Momma wanted me to do it. I was just one of those ... as my ... I remember my aunt saying, "You follow me foot to foot." I was one of those kids that just followed behind whoever was in the house. My sisters and brothers would go out and right across the way to a sand lot and climb trees and play and have fun. I'd stick home around Momma. I always wanted to hold Momma's babies and all but she wouldn't let me hold them. Every once in awhile she would.

Houston: Your parents placed a lot of emphasis on ... on education.

Thompson: Yes, they did.

Houston: And do you have a sense of ... I mean, of why that was? Of why ... Because, you know, with a large family, obviously you kids could have been a lot of help to your mom.

Thompson: Yes, I guess ... I don't know. Momma just wanted to see us up and able to take care of ourselves she said. And we needed an education to do it. So she kept us in school.
Houston: Do you know if your parents were educated?

Thompson: They were educated not as we do now but my father had beautiful handwriting. And he could tell you a little bit of anything about history and all. But it wasn't that he went to school that much. And I think Momma went to about seventh or eighth grade. She didn't go very far in school. But they ... To me, they seemed to ... seemed as well as any well educated person.

Houston: Right.

Thompson: I guess they just had high hopes and high aims or something. I don't know.

Houston: What about your neighbors? Were your ... Did you live in a ... In the neighborhood you lived in, were there both blacks and whites?

Thompson: Blacks and whites. That's right.

Houston: Okay. And did they live next door to one another?

Thompson: Yes. Visited around as women do with each other and the children played together and all.

Houston: So they came ... they visited each other inside their ... inside
Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And did the children continue to play together after they got older?

Thompson: Well, as I told you, I left there when I was seventeen years old.

Houston: Okay. But up until you were seventeen, did the children that you know play together across racial lines, say after they reached puberty? After say the age of twelve or thirteen?

Thompson: Well, we attended different schools, naturally. We had what we called ... there were two schools -- We had Color Memorial and White Memorial. And I remember the name of ... across the school, at the top was Color Memorial spelled out. And White Memorial was a few blocks away. So we didn't ... just ordinary home life we spent with each other but we didn't' go out socially or anything like that.

Houston: Okay. But in terms in playing in the neighborhood, you played ...

Thompson: Just neighborhood kids, we played. Yes.

Houston: Okay. But frequently that ... people say they did but often it
seems that once kids reach puberty, particularly once ... once white girls reach thirteen or so, they were no longer allowed to play with black children, and little black kids had to start calling them, you know, "Master" and ... you know and ... "Miss".

Thompson: No, it was nothing like that. It was just that they just didn't mix. But nobody called anybody "master" or anything like that. We weren't ...

Houston: Or "Miss" or "Miss Anne" or ...

Thompson: No, no. We didn't call them "miss".

Houston: But nobody mixed. You mean they didn't date each other?

Thompson: No.

Houston: But they did play together at say fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old?

Thompson: Yes, I guess so. Maybe when they got up ... I don't know about sixteen, seventeen. As I told you ... I married when I was seventeen and I was attending a private school then.

Houston: So the Colored Memorial School was a public school?
Thompson: Yes, it was a public school. But after we got up in high school, there was a Reverend Mitchell, a Presbyterian minister, that was President of Selden Industrial Institute. That was a Presbyterian school. And he would go around and recruit children to attend this Presbyterian school.

Houston: Selden, you said?

Thompson: Selden, S-e-l-d-e-n. Selden Normal Industrial Institute. They called it Selden N and I.

Houston: Where was that?

Thompson: Brunswick, Georgia. Now, Selden has closed but it's now a state park in Brunswick.

Houston: Okay, so the buildings are gone but the grounds are still there.

Thompson: The grounds still there and they built a ... they have another ... what they built was a recreation building there. It's a state park for ...

Houston: And you went to the Colored Memorial School through what grade?

Thompson: Through ninth grade.

Houston: Is that as far as it went?
Thompson: It ... Yes, for awhile. Well, by the time I left there, they had extended to the twelfth grade but ... but Reverend Mitchell had asked Momma to allow us to attend there so usually when my older brothers and sisters ... when you finished ninth grade, we went to the Presbyterian school. But after ... I was the last one. There was just four of us went to the Presbyterian school. The others, as ... when they came along, the school was extended on to twelve grades. And so they just stayed at the public school.

Houston: And your parents had to pay for you to go to the Presbyterian school?

Thompson: Yes. Well, we was supposed to pay but Reverend Mitchell recruited us and we were smart kids and so he gave us scholarships.

Houston: What was the ... the difference, as you remember, between the two schools? Could you describe them?

Thompson: Between who?

Houston: Between the Colored Memorial School and the

Thompson: and the White Mem...

Houston: Well, and Selden. But also, yeah! Maybe the difference ... maybe first the difference between the colored school and the white school.
Thompson: The white school was larger. They had a nice fence around it. I never went on the inside but it was a much larger school. But from the outside, it looked the same. And we ... we had the same education. Evidently it was the same ... I didn't know anything about curriculums then. But evidently the curriculum was the same because in order to graduate, we had to pass an exam and the exam was given to the white and colored kids. It seems like to me even during the ... all the way up, in order to pass from grade to grade, you had to pass the exam. And this exam that they gave us was given to the white and the colored at the same time. And we were graded on that exam.

Houston: So this was a ... these were ... both schools were public schools.

Thompson: Public schools.

Houston: And paid for, I guess, by the ... by the city or by the state or something like that.

Thompson: Yes, m-hm.

Houston: Maybe by the county. And ... But they had segre ... The teachers were segregated too, yes?

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: Black teachers, white teachers.

Thompson: Yes, that's right. The schools were segregated.

Houston: Okay. Now, inside the Colored Memorial School, at the time you were there, there were nine grades?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Was there a separate room for each grade?

Thompson: Oh yes.

Houston: Okay. So it was a big school.

Thompson: It was a large school, I suppose so.

Houston: But more than one story?

Thompson: Two stories. In fact, one of the buildings is still there. They've added more buildings, I noticed. But I was back there a few years ago and the building that I attended and graduated from was still sitting there.

Houston: Is that right?
Thompson: Yes.

Houston: So was there more than one building when you were there?

Thompson: Yes. Well, what happened was there was one ... one building called Risly and then they decided they needed a larger school and on the same grounds -- it was ... It took up an entire block. On the same grounds, they built this brick school and that was the Colored Memorial, making it more like the white school.

Houston: Okay. I'm not sure I follow. But Risly was the name of the building

Thompson: Risly was the name of the first little wooden school.

Houston: And it took up an entire block?

Thompson: The entire block was grounds for the school. And I guess ... I'm saying this now because when I think about it, I guess they decided it was time to upgrade as they built this large brick school. And they named that building "Colored Memorial".

Houston: Okay. And it was just like the white building.

Thompson: It was just like the white building but I realized since I left
there, in later years, they called it all Risly. I guess they had to take that Colored Memorial off of it.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: So it ...  

Houston: But it used to be Colored Memorial.

Thompson: It used to be Colored Memorial.

Houston: Right. And what grade were you in when they built the school? Was that ... When they tore down the wooden building and built the all brick building?

Thompson: They didn't tear it down. They used it. They still used that. They just made another building.

Houston: I see. Okay.

Thompson: And I was in fifth grade.

Houston: Okay. You were in fifth grade when they built the brick building?

Thompson: Yes. And they used it ... I guess maybe they needed more room.
I don't know. But when I think about it now, maybe they needed more room and all, because the children. They still used the old building. Let me see. I could tell you almost how many rooms they had. [whispering] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. [normal voice] There were about eight, probably nine buildings ... They went to ninth grade so I suppose that's why there were nine rooms. Because the children attended in nine. But then when they built the brick building, I don't know how they divided us but they still used ... children were in both buildings.

Houston: Okay. Well, yeah, and at some point, then they expanded the grades too.

Thompson: Yes, could have.

Houston: The year you left, they expanded the grades to go up to grade eleven or twelve.

Thompson: Yes, they did.

Houston: They added two or three grades.

Thompson: I attended this new building in fifth, sixth and seventh grade. No, it wasn't. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade. I think I was in ninth grade when I went to Selden.

Houston: Okay. So if the building ... the building was built when you
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Thompson: Yes, something like that.

Houston: Okay. What about teachers? Were there ... I guess there was one teacher for each grade, is that right?

Thompson: Yes, yes. One teacher.

Houston:

Thompson: One teacher for each grade. We had a principal and then we had the home ec. That was a different building there on the campus too. The home ec building.

Houston: Okay. Now I guess in a town that big -- it sounds like it was ... I mean it had a big school. Actually, I ... did any of the students come in from the countryside to go to school there?

Thompson: No.

Houston: So it was only town children?

Thompson: Only town, yes.

Houston: And there were a lot of kids, right?
Thompson: M-hm.

Houston: And were all the teachers from Brunswick?

Thompson: No. They weren't. Because I remember they'd be away during the summer and they'd come back to school during the winter.

Houston: Okay. So they may have come from out of town, other cities.

Thompson: Probably so.

Houston: And when they were there, I suppose they boarded with families?

Thompson: Yes. Or they ... they lived ... they lived with other teachers. Now, when I remember it, I remember there was a group of teachers that lived in one house. One of the teachers and her sister owned the house and some more teachers boarded with them. And there were one or two teachers from Brunswick and they had their own homes. And, in fact, I was there about four or five years ago and my first grade teacher there, she's in her nineties. And she was still living in the little house that she lived in when I was there.

Houston: What was it like to see her? That must have been something.

Thompson: Yes, it was. So they lived with each other. And oh, I ... we
had several teachers that lived in Brunswick, come to think about it. Because there was Mrs. Wright. Her husband was a taxi driver and she had her own home. The Bird sisters. They lived together. They had their own home. And then, this other group of teachers.

Houston: What was the ... What was it like going ... switching to Selden? How was Selden different other than the fact that ... How many grades did it have? Did it have twelve grades?

Thompson: Yes. It had ... let me see. They didn't ... It was just a high school. It didn't have any elementary grades. It was just high school.

Houston: Okay. What about ... If it was a normal industrial school, it must have had at least two years of college too.

Thompson: Yes. M-hm. Four years of high school and two years of college. That's what it was. M-hm.

Houston: And if it had two years of college, I assume there were boarding students there. There were students ...

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: who came and lived there.

Thompson: Yes, they had boarding students. In fact, most of the students
were boarding. They gradually ... when Reverend Mitchell came in, he gradually recruited students from the city. But until he came in, I think they were mostly students from out of town.

Houston: And it was a Presbyterian school?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: What was it like going to school at Selden? Did you like that better? Was it ... Did it seem different somehow? Harder? Better education? Better teachers?

Thompson: I don’t know. I guess it was about the same. Because as I see it now, we had very good teachers both places. And Reverend Mitchell -- we never had any problems even though we passed through white neighborhoods going out to Selden. Selden was about two miles from the center of town. And so we had quite distance to walk. But we never had any problems with white kids along the road or anything because Reverend Mitchell was well respected in his ... among the whites as well as the blacks.

Houston: Did Reverend Mitchell have a ... have a church? He was a Presbyterian minister?

Thompson: No, he didn't have a church. He had ... he had chapel services right on the campus with the students there. And sometimes people from the city would come but there weren't many Presbyterians there because we didn't
have a Presbyterian church in Brunswick.

**Houston:** Oh, is that right? So where did you go to church?

**Thompson:** We were Episcopalians.

**Houston:** Oh, okay. Sorry. I just assumed you were ... just assumed you were Presbyterians.

**Thompson:** No. I'm a member of St. Luke's here in Columbia now.

**Houston:** Okay. But you grew up Episcopalian?

**Thompson:** In Episcopalian ... St. Athanasius. That was another school too.

Like the private Presbyterian school, there was a private Episcopal school but because we were Episcopalians, we ... Momma was criticized for sending us to Selden, to the ... to the Presbyterian school. But Momma's point was we belonged to the Episcopal church. We were smart kids. And we made good grades. And Momma said she didn't want anybody to say they gave us good grades because we were Episcopalians, because they would do that. And we behaved ourselves. We had to behave when we went to school. And so ... and because we were pretty smart academically, whatever programs they had or anything and leading parts, we were always in the leads and so on. And Momma and those were criticized for that because people said they thought more of us because we were so fair [laughs] ... and all those things. But that was kind of under cover.
Houston: So you got criticized no matter what.

Thompson: Yes, we got criticized no matter what.

Houston: But there was ... there was an Episcopalian school in town ... in Brunswick for blacks?

Thompson: Yes. Yes, St. Athanasius.

Houston: St. ... I'm sorry. What was it?

Thompson: St. Athanasius. Now don't tell me to spell it.

Houston: That's okay. It's just not a name I know.

Thompson: We call it St. A.

Houston: Okay. And did it also have twelve grades?

Thompson: Yes. It started in the first grade.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: And it had twelve grades. It wasn't very large because the students that came there, most of them came from out of town. They had a few
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boarding students and a few others. I don't have any idea about the size of it. But it wasn't very large.

**Houston:** Was it ... was it also a normal and industrial school?

**Thompson:** No.

**Houston:** So no two years of college.

**Thompson:** No.

**Houston:** And I guess it would have had small grounds. The Presbyterian school, if it was a ... if it was an industrial school, probably had a farm attached to it?

**Thompson:** Yes, it did have a farm. They had an agricultural teacher there, Mr. Baldwin.

**Houston:** So was there then one black Episcopal church in town?

**Thompson:** Yes, that was the only one.

**Houston:** And that was the church you went to.

**Thompson:** M-hm.
Houston: And what was it's name?

Thompson: St. Alphonasius.

Houston: Oh, it was the same name.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: So was the school attached to the church?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: The same location.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: But the school is there ... I mean the church is still there but the school, of course, is gone. But the church is still there. And I was so surprised when I went there ... I think it was about five ... five or six years ago when I first went there. And went in the church and it was the same church. Everything was the same. But it looked like to me it was a doll house.

Houston: It was so small.
Thompson: So small. [chuckles] I didn't remember it being that small. To me it was a large church.

Houston: Right. But that's because you were small when you went there.

Thompson: I guess that's so. But it's still there. Just like it was when we were there. The only trouble was it had ivy covering it. Instead of the ivy, now they have the bricks painted white. They took all the ivy off of it. But the inside of the church is just like it was when we were there.

Houston: And how has the neighborhood around the church changed? How did it look then?

Thompson: It hasn't changed at all. It's just like it was. I was very surprised to find that Brunswick hadn't expanded like we did here in Irmo and all. But, of course, industry did that. Even the houses and all that the people lived in that ... the houses that I thought were large houses. [chuckles] I discovered they weren't so large after all.

Houston: So if I went to Brunswick today, I would see it pretty much as you saw it when you were living there?

Thompson: Yes, that's right. Pretty much.

Houston: That's interesting. You can't say that of too many places. Now
what other ... denominations were there for blacks in Brunswick at this time? Say in the twenties.

**Thompson:** There was the Baptists and the Methodists because ... and the Holy Rollers, I remember those. Because right around the corner from us was ... I don't remember the ... it probably was a Methodist church. We attended our church, our Sunday school was in the morning. And around the corner from us was this Methodist church, I guess, and we belonged to that Sunday school just so we could have somewhere to go in the afternoons because our church was out in the afternoon. And so Momma let us go to that church. And we ran ... we pretty much ran the Sunday school! [laughs] We ran it on the same scale as we did our Sunday school. As ... we didn't run our Sunday school but I mean we had it set up like that. We weren't anything but kids but we were secretary and president and ... all of the Sunday school. We just ...

**Houston:** So the ... both your church and the ... both St. Alphonasius and the Methodist church had service every Sunday?

**Thompson:** Yes.

**Houston:** And the Baptist church did too, I guess?

**Thompson:** I guess so. Yes, they all had services every Sunday.

**Houston:** Because a lot of churches didn't. I mean, a lot of churches had ... had service ... the ministers traveled and they had churches ...
Thompson: No, we had ministers right there.

Houston: Was there ... I mean, did the leadership in town ... Did the better families in town tend to go to one church and the working class people to another? I mean, you know, did the elites tend to ... Were there ... I guess what I'm asking is ... is ... were the ... Did working class blacks go to St. Alphonasius? And did they tend to go to the Baptist or Methodist church?

Thompson: Mostly they attended the Baptist and Methodist. The ... well, some of them attended the other churches too. But I remember now as I remember, our church, St. Alphonasius, had mostly professionals.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: You see, Momma was brought up in a ... in an Episcopal church in the little town she came from, Darien, Georgia.

Houston: Right.

Thompson: And so that's why we were all Presby ... I mean Episcopalians. I don't know what Poppa was. But he ... I know he went to our church.

Houston: Right. Yeah, my understanding is that Episcopalians frequently were racially mixed people too. That ... that frequently in the south, black
Episcopal churches were ... were ... were ... that the congregations were made up of racially mixed people rather than racially unmixed African-Americans.

**Thompson:** Ours wasn't mixed. We didn't have any racially mixed people right there.

**Houston:** Well, I mean, in the same sense that you're racially mixed. I mean, if your family's racially mixed.

**Thompson:** Yes. Oh, I see what you mean.

**Houston:** I don't mean white people and black people together. I mean black people who had white relatives ... 

**Thompson:** Well, yes. Because we carried some children to ... We would go to their Sunday school but they weren't particular about coming to ours. We'd take them to our Sunday school. They'd see nothing but white people in there. [chuckles] They didn't want to go ...

**Houston:** The Methodist kids?

**Thompson:** Yes. They were uncomfortable in our church because they said that we were all too white.

**Houston:** Okay. Now, you mentioned that St. Alphonasius had ...
okay. Let me ask you a question about that before we leave that. Although the Methodist kids didn't like to come to your church because they found the people there too white, did you ... did you socialize outside of church, outside of Sunday school?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: So these were ... these were your regular playmates. They just didn't like being in church.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: Okay. You mentioned that St. Alphonasius had mostly professional people, most of the professional people in town. Who were some of the professions? I mean, you know, who would you have included in that group? And it may not be the same professions that we consider professions today.

Thompson: Well, I don't know. I know we had doctors. Medical doctors and dentists.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: Several of the men were barbers.

Houston: Okay.
Thompson: And, of course, my father was a cooper. I don't remember any other coopers belonging there though.

Houston: Your uncle belonged to a different church?

Thompson: No. They were ... I don't know whether that was a Methodist or a Baptist church they attended. It was Baptist, I believe.

Houston: What about a funeral director? Did you have a funeral parlor, a black funeral parlor?

Thompson: Yes, we had a black funeral parlor.

Houston: Did he come to church at St. A's?

Thompson: I don't remember.

Houston: What about the school teachers?

Thompson: They attended ... come to think about it, I don't remember any of them attending St. A. But they did attend the Methodist and Baptist, I know.

Houston: Were there any black stores in town?

Thompson: No.
Houston: Okay. So, no grocery stores. No ... 

Thompson: Not that I knew of.

Houston: Can you describe for us ... was there a commercial section? I mean, was there a place where ... Well, I guess if there were no black business people, there probably wasn't a black commercial section.

Thompson: No, there wasn't. It was Norwich Street and Newcastle Street. But they were all white stores. I remember there was a black drug store.

Houston: Okay. And it was in a white neighborhood, I guess?

Thompson: No. It was ... I don't know whether you could call this street ... There was a street ... they nicknamed it ... that wasn't the name of it but it was a two sections ... two blocks of that street. They called it ... the kids called it "Wall Street" because that's where all the business was. And so ... but it was ... Norwich ... I don't know whether it was Norwich, Newcastle. I don't remember the name of it. But anyway, it wasn't Wall Street but they called it Wall Street. And that's where the few black businesses ... They did have some black businesses there because that's where they had several barber shops. They had a cafe. And the doctor's office was one block from there. But all the businesses were centered in that ... in those two block areas and that was also the area that our church, our Episcopal church, was in. But remember, I was just seventeen years old when
I was there.

**Houston:** Sure.

**Thompson:** And I didn't know too much about ... 

**Houston:** Actually, you know quite a bit. I mean, I'm getting a real good idea of what it was like. Who would you say ... Who did the leaders of the community seem to be? I mean, do you remember ever that ... that ... that the black community as a group addressed the white community? Or did ... you know, was there somebody that white people came to talk to when there was an issue involving black people? Or was there no such ...

**Thompson:** There were no such issues, come to think about it, that I know of. I never knew of any conflict or anything around there between white and black.

**Houston:** Was there evidence ... [phone rings]. I'll stop this for a second. ... What evidence was there when you were a girl in Brunswick of Jim Crowe, of segregation? Were there signs up saying "White Only," "Black Only"? Or "Colored Only"?

**Thompson:** Well, I remember in the dime stores, they had the fountains that said "White" and "Colored" -- fountains that you drink from. That was about all. I don't know of any other ...
Houston: What about ... was there an ice cream parlor in town? Some place you'd go for ice cream on Saturdays or Sundays?

Thompson: Well, we had our own drug store.

Houston: Okay. So that's where you went for ice cream.

Thompson: Yeah. There was a white ... There was a colored drug store there.

Houston: Now what about when you went to buy clothes? Could you try clothes on in the white stores?

Thompson: Well, to tell you the truth, we didn't try on any clothes. My mother was a dressmaker. She made all of our clothes. So we didn't have to go to try them on. But I remember our father would take us to buy our shoes because he always wanted to be sure the shoes fitted and was just right. And I can see him now, kneeling down in front of us, feeling the shoes to see how they fit and everything. But I didn't see any differences made as to where we sat or what they did for us. We just went in there and bought shoes. But so far as trying on clothes and all, I never had to go in the store to try on any clothes. So we did have two large stores run by Jews. But I don't know what they did in there about ... We'd go and buy some articles that you didn't try on. But I didn't have to try on anything. So I don't know what happened.
Houston: So the two large stores run by Jews were clothing stores?

Thompson: Yes. One was A.J. Gordon and the other one was Zelminovich. Both Jews.

Houston: In the 1920s, as I understand it, was the heyday of the Klan in the south -- the Ku Klux Klan. Was there evidence in ... in and around Brunswick of the Ku Klux Klan? Did they ever march in town? Or ... 

Thompson: No! We lived in a little ideal town I think. Because we had nothing like that. No racial incidents or anything I remember happening around there at all. Before nor since.

Houston: Okay. Were there ... In your family, or did you know of families, where whites ... blacks were related to whites? I mean, you obviously were related to some whites, but ... but were they local whites? And was the ... was there a relationship between you? I know there wouldn't have been a legally recognized relationship. But was there, you know, any kind of family relationship? Visiting back and forth, that kind of thing?

Thompson: I don't know of any. And, of course, my family wasn't from Brunswick. And so we wouldn't have had anybody around there that was related to us. But there was no ... the families ... the people that we were related from, related to was ... my mother was Darien, Georgia. That was about twenty or thirty miles away. Now, in that little town of Darien, Georgia, that was a smaller town. It was a little seaport town where ships came in,
boats came in and brought fish and prawns and things like that.

**Houston:** Right.

**Thompson:** I know there was one family there ... a fine yacht would pull up there. And he had a lady friend, I guess you'd call her ... I don't know what she was. Anyway, she was ... she was definitely colored. And she had two beautiful children. And he used to come in, pull his yacht in to see those kids. And he sent them off to school. And the boy was okay but the girl was deaf and dumb. And he had to send her to a ... to an institution. That deaf and dumb institution. But she was a smart kid. And she wanted to ... I remember she wanted to marry a guy at the school, a black guy. And her father came and took her on his yacht. And he kept her off ... [End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

**Thompson:** I mean grocery ... what shall I say? His store was the most expensive store in Brunswick and he had a son that attended church and Sunday school and all and school with us. He was my classmate. In fact, I saw him when I went to Brunswick not so long ago to the reunion. He's several years older than I am. I think he's probably dead now. But when you look at him, you knew he had to be a Jew. And Zelminovich took care of him. And back in '26 and '27, you knew nobody owned ... kids owned cars. But his daddy bought him a car. He was the one student in town that ... that had ... a young boy that had a car of his own, that his daddy bought for him.
Houston: So his ... his relationship with blacks was that he went to school with them?

Thompson: Yes. His mother was black and he just associated with blacks all his ...

Houston: His mother was black?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: He just associated with blacks all around. But his father took care of him and it wasn't a hidden affair. Everybody knew it.

Houston: Oh, I see. So his father and his mother were not married

Thompson: No. They weren't married.

Houston: Okay. Just an open relationship.

Thompson: Just an open relationship.

Houston: He had a car. Okay.

Thompson: He was laughing about it not so long ago, several years ago when
we met. Because we were ... we were ... He was bringing me home one day. We were just friends, but he had picked me up and was bringing home. And a policeman stopped us. The policeman ... You look at him and even though he was fair and all, you could tell he was Negro. But you couldn't tell about me. [chuckles] And the policeman stopped us and he was laughing about it. I didn't remember the incident until he told me and then I remembered. I don't know what he said to him but I know one thing. He couldn't do anything but tell us to go on. Because Leroy being Zelminovich's son, he knew he better not bother him. [laughs]

Houston: So ... so Leroy had the same name as his father?

Thompson: No. Leroy Harmon. But everybody knew he was Zelminovich's son.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: But there was no incident. The policeman stopped us. I don't know what he said to Leroy but he just said something insignificant just to look us over. But he didn't do anything.

Houston: Well, it sounds ... I mean, did you get up to ... did you get up to Darien to visit your mother's relatives there?

Thompson: We went there once or twice. You had to have a car to get there. Darien was between Brunswick and Savannah and you had to have ... We went there once or twice.
Houston: And you didn't have a car when you were growing up?

Thompson: No. My mother eventually moved there, after I married and was living in South Carolina. My mother's mother had left her a piece of property there. And during the ... during the Depression, that would have been ... that would have been in the early thirties, huh?

Houston: Yeah. The Depression started in '29.

Thompson: Well, that was the time that Momma built her home over in ... and moved over to Brunswick.

Houston: Okay. Her mother left her land?

Thompson: Her mother left her land, yes.

Houston: Did your dad ... Was your dad still living when she moved back?

Thompson: Yes, Momma and Daddy were still together. And Momma's mother ... Momma's mother died when she was six months old. But she left the property to Momma through her ... through Momma's ... through my grandmother's sister.

Houston: Ah. So she had a life estate.

Thompson: Yes, so she had that. And she wasn't taking care of it. They
were ... Momma didn't think much of it. She hadn't bothered about it. But Ma Mary's ... that was Momma's aunt that raised her ... Ma Mary's son wasn't paying the taxes. He was supposed to be paying it and it was up for sale. And some of the people there knew it was supposed to be for Momma and they came over to Brunswick and brought her the notice showing that the property was up for sale. And Momma went and had it bought in. Then she took it over. And then she built ... she kept it for several years. Then she built this house there. About '31 or '32, Momma built this house the place and she moved over there. And they stayed there until the war was over. When the war ended, Momma and Poppa moved ... the kids were all grown then. They moved into York. And that's where they stayed.

Houston: So was '31 or '32 when your mother built the house and your father left ... stopped being a cooper?

Thompson: Brunswick.

Houston: and moved over to

Thompson: Brunswick. Moved over to Darien.

Houston: And moved over to Darien.

Thompson: He still went back and forth to the cooper shop for awhile. But then he stopped because they opened up an airport there somewhere.
Houston: In Brunswick? Or in Darien?

Thompson: Somewhere between Darien and Brunswick. I never knew ...

Houston: He started working at the airport?

Thompson: M-hm. He started working there.

Houston: Okay. And this was during the Depression then ... in the thirties?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: All right.

Thompson: And he stayed there until the war ended.

Houston: Was it a military airport? Or a ...

Thompson: Yes, it was military.

Houston: And do you know what he did at the airport?

Thompson: I don't know.

Houston: So was it like a military air field?
Thompson: Yes, something like that.

Houston: Okay. So you got married fairly early. I mean, for ... I mean, I would guess. You said you got married at age seventeen.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And so you ... you had just finished at the Selden School?

Thompson: Yes. I was two or three months from finishing when I married but, of course, since ... since I married the Dean of the School ... [chuckles] ... the President allowed me to stay there and graduate.

Houston: Could you ... Would you care to talk a little bit about, you know, how you ... how you ... well, obviously, I know how you met. If he was the Dean of the School, he was probably teaching there too.

Thompson: Yes. He was from Johnson C. ... He had just graduated from Johnson C. Smith. And he came to Brunswick to teach. And he declared that he saw me walk in the gate of the campus and decided right then and there that he was going to marry me. I teased him awful ... I teased him awful about that. I told him he'd just told me that, I would have known better than to marry him.

Houston: So he bided his time.
Thompson: Yep. We stayed there two years and then we moved. We married in '29 and we moved here in '31.

Houston: So where did you live when you first got married?

Thompson: On the campus. See, it was a boarding school.

Houston: Okay. So he had quarters on the campus.

Thompson: He had quarters on the campus. In fact, Reverend Mitchell built quarters for us there. Built a two room apartment over the ... over the lab in the ... His science lab and the school dining room and kitchen were all on one floor and he built a ... an apartment over there for us to live in.

Houston: What was it ... I mean, how was it ... you know, being courted by your future husband when you were living at home with your parents? I mean, would they ...

Thompson: I wasn't courted by him. He just decided he wanted to marry me and started begging me to marry him. [laughs]

Houston: Oh, I see. He didn't have to beg your parents?

Thompson: Well, naturally ... he eventually asked Momma. And Momma said she didn't know what to do. And said, "Evidently you all had talked it over
and know what you want to do," so she couldn't say anything but consent to it.

Houston: So ... [phone rings] ...

Thompson: ... yet. And she said one thing she must finish high school. And he said, "Yes, she'll finish." So I finished high school there and took the two years of college that they had there.

Houston: Okay. Before you moved away?

Thompson: Before we moved away.

Houston: How did your father react?

Thompson: Anything Momma said, it was right. He would say, "Ask your momma. Go to your momma for that."

Houston: So was your mother really ... as far as the kids were concerned, the head of the household? Did she do all the disciplining and everything?

Thompson: Yes. My daddy would tell us, "You see these hands? I'll knock you down and it'll bust your head open." His hands were rough. And he'd say that real quiet. And we knew we better sit down. He never hit us or anything. We were ... Well, we said to Momma the same to my sister. I have a sister that lives over here in Columbia. And she said the same thing.
That Momma said that she never had any trouble with us because we were all good kids. Well, our idea was Momma must have brought us up right for us to all be good kids.

Houston: She must have done an excellent job if she never had any trouble with you.

Thompson: M-hm. You know, if you want a racial incident ... [chuckles]. I was teaching when this happened. This was during the time they had all these sit-ins and things. I don't know which year it was.

Houston: Well, it would have been after 1965.

Thompson: Yes. I was teaching in Columbia. And a teacher and I had to leave school to go to another school to a meeting. And there was a ... Has John taken you by to see where Benedict College is?

Houston: We talked about it. _______ know it's here.

Thompson: Benedict and Allen. Well, there was a little shop there, a cafe like, you go in and get sandwiches and things. So this teacher and I went in and we sat at the counter for sandwiches. Then I saw them whispering behind their hands. And I heard one of them went in the back and say, "What should we do?" And it occurred to me to say, I said, "I'm supposed to be here." [laughs] I said, "You can feed me. You can serve me." In other words, they were about to put me out because I was white.
Houston: Right. That's funny. In a way, you... you know, you're kind of betwixt and between because you... I mean, you... I mean, people wouldn't know unless you told them.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: You're in that middle ground.

Thompson: And believe it or not, that's the way I took it. I'm on the middle ground. Whenever I had to go to... When my family moved to New York and I had to go up there to see them, they put me in a white car and I rode in the white car. [laughs]

Houston: On the train?

Thompson: Yep.

Houston: So... so, you're talking... Your family moved up there right after the war you said.

Thompson: In '45.

Houston: Okay. So you would have been going up on the... on the train to visit your family in the late forties?
Thompson: M-hm.

Houston: And, of course, there was still Jim Crowe cars in those days.

Thompson: Yes, that's right.

Houston: So, tell me now, you said you ... you married at age seventeen in 1929. And you ... you continued ... you finished high school and you did two years of college. And so you moved away in 1931.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And you came here?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And what ... what brought you here in 1931?

Thompson: My husband came here to teach at Selden ... at Harberson. See, Harberson was a school just like Selden -- a Presbyterian school. And he had attended Harberson. He was from Rawkins, South Carolina, in Fairfield County. And he attended school at Harberson and kept in touch with them. And they asked him to come here to teach. And so that's why we moved here.

Houston: Okay. So you moved actually onto this property?
Thompson: No. First we moved on the campus and we stayed there. We moved there in '31 and we stayed there ... When were you born, Shirley?

Shirley: I was born in '35.

Thompson: In '35? Well, it was about '37 or '38, I guess, that we moved in a house in Irmo and stayed there until my husband through up this shack here for us to live in. And he left Harberson in the meantime and went to ... went to teach ... He created a job. He wrote Governor Williams, I believe it was, of South Carolina, and told him that the boys' reform school out there needed a school and they didn't have any school out there for ... And so he ... So he created a school so he'd have a position to go to. And he started working there. Oh, the reason we left Harberson campus [laughs] ... this is a long story. He was from Fairfield County and just like Reverend Mitchell went out in Brunswick and recruited students to go to Harberson ... I mean, to Selden, Dr. Young went out in the community and ... and recruited students there to go to Harberson. And my husband was one of those. He was down in the lower grades somewhere. I don't know what grade he was in. But anyway, he came from the country in Fairfield County and moved ... and he lived on the campus summer and winter, going to school at Harberson. So naturally, he was brought up with Dr. Young's children. He had daughters and sons and all. And he stayed on the campus until he graduated from high school. And he was real smart. I have his program where he graduated tops in his class at Harberson. And he went on to Selden ... to Johnson C. Smith for four years. And then he left Smith and came down to Selden. And that's when he saw me and decided to marry me. So when he brought me here, his friends and all at
Harberson decided he belonged to them and he had no business coming and bringing a wife. So they immediately put thumbs down on me. They wanted no parts of me one way shape or form. [laughing]

**Houston:** Because you were from some place else?

**Thompson:** Because I was from some place else, and I was a little white girl with ... I was platinum blond. I was a little white girl with blond hair almost down to my waist. And my husband loved the ground I walked on. He would go to school and teach and come straight back home and clean up and cook and help take care of the children. [chuckles] And they just couldn't take that. And so, with them heading up the school -- Dr. Young and those, they had the upper hand on everything. So he ... somehow or another, that's why he didn't stay there. He lost his job. I don't know what ... the reason they had for not hiring him back one year. And that's how he created this job to live here.

**Houston:** Was it ... Is it your feeling that it was pretty common for ... for schools to have a geographic bias based on ... on the county of the head of that school? Because you said ... you said ... you said Selden was the same way. That Reverend Mitchell?

**Thompson:** M-hm.

**Houston:** went back to his home county to kind of recruit people into his school
Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And that here at Selden ... I mean at Harberson, that Dr. Young went back to his home county

Thompson: Yes. In Fairfield County.

Houston: But was that ... was that kind of ... was that typical? Was that common? For the headmasters of schools to go back to the areas that they came from?

Thompson: I really don't know.

Houston: Okay. I mean, it's interesting.

Thompson: Yes. M-hm. You know, I had never thought about it.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: But, yes.

Houston: And ... and ... and that kind of loyalty to home county people must have been fairly strong.

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: Maybe they were rejecting you on the basis that you were from a different county but they may ... they were also perhaps rejecting you because of your skin color. I mean, because ... because ... for racial reasons. I mean,

Thompson: Yeah.

Houston: Or as we would say today "intra-racial" reasons.

Thompson: Yes. Well, you know,

Houston: How did you feel about that? Did you ... I mean, ...

Thompson: Do you know I didn't know about it until I grew up later and looked back and saw all these things.

Houston: So you didn't ...

Thompson: I didn't ... It just didn't phase me. I was too ... I don't know. I guess I was too naive or something.

Houston: Well, you were very young.

Thompson: Yes, I was. [chuckling]
Houston: But did you have friends here? Did you and your husband have a circle of friends in Irmo? Or ...

Thompson: Well, actually, when we moved over here it was ... I had then started going back to school at Benedict. And I met friends in school at Benedict at Columbia and all. And all of my close friends were from Columbia because I started going to school there. And then later I started teaching in the area there.

Houston: When did you start going to school at Benedict?

Thompson: Hmmm.

Houston: When you moved here, now, and ...

Thompson: When was Adell born?

Shirley: Adell had to have been born summer of '41.

Thompson: Well, it was about '39 or '40 I started going to school at Benedict. I took afternoon classes and summer school. And I continued that until I graduated from Benedict.

Houston: And you ... what degree did you take? You took a B.A.?

Thompson: I took a B.A. and when I left Benedict, then I ... for awhile I
Thompson didn’t go back. And I started back to State and I got my master's at State.

Houston: So you ... you ... you moved to Orangeburg or ...

Thompson: No, no. I commuted. I was still teaching in Columbia when I commuted.

Houston: So ... So, at the time you were ... you were ... I guess during the thirties, when you were living in sort of three ... Actually, during the thirties you lived in three different places here. You lived on the campus. You lived in Irmo. And then you moved

Thompson: here.

Houston: you moved here. You were on campus a couple of years and then you moved to Irmo for how long?

Thompson: One year.

Houston: One year. And then you moved ... then you built ... the third year. So you built a place here and moved onto this property.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: What was this area like? I mean, could you describe it? Was this countryside, all farm land?
Thompson: All farm land. And since this place where my house is now, all this was farm land. This whole block. It belongs to me now. But, then it was just a field all across ... They recently took the trees and things from across the way here. All that was farm land. And ...

Houston: Where the shopping center is now, where the strip malls are.

Thompson: No, right in front of me. Right across the street from me here.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: And it eventually grew up in pine trees. But it was a cotton field. All down ... Have you been down around Allied and ...?

Houston: I went down today just down across the tracks and then up and down that little strip there where ... parallel to the railroad tracks. But that's the only place I've been. I didn't see Allied. What is Allied?

Thompson: Allied Chemicals is a little further down and all the high school and junior high school and everything ... all that was all farm land.

Houston: Okay. And who owned the ... were they big farms? Small farms? Black or white?

Thompson: They were white. They were all owned by white.
Houston: Okay. And were they like family farms? I mean, these were farms that families owned and operated? I mean, ...

Thompson: I just knew they were farm lands.

Houston: I guess you're like, as a city person, you know: a farm is a farm is a farm -- unless it's really huge.

Thompson: It wasn't share croppers though.

Houston: Okay. Okay. Were there blacks living in the area off campus?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Was there a black ... was there a black community here?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: What was that like? Can you describe that?

Thompson: They just kept to themselves.

Houston: And were they college people? Were they people going to Harberson?
Thompson: No.

Houston: What did ... Do you know what they did?

Thompson: Farmed.

Houston: Did they farm on their own land?

Thompson: Yes, most of them had their own land.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: Most of the people around here owned their own places.

Houston: Okay. And the black families that farmed here, did they ... I mean, did they kind of live together or did they live interspersed among whites?

Thompson: Mostly together. They had some whites. In fact, they had some ... they had some ... If you check the names, you'll find they all the same names -- black and whites. They've intermarried and everything. And some of them went so far as to say, "Oh, that's the ..." The blacks would say ... I mean the whites. The blacks never said. The whites looked like they were the ones who would say, "Do you know so-and-so-and-so? Well, you know, that's my cousin." [chuckles]
Houston: So ... that's interesting. So this ...

Thompson: They were Geigers and ... I can't call the other names. I can't recall the names now but they're all black and white all mixed.

Houston: Okay.

Shirley: What about the Richardsons?

Thompson: The Richardsons, yes.

Houston: Now when you moved here in the early 1930s from Brunswick ... I mean, it probably was like you were moving from the city to the country.

Thompson: Yes, it was.

Houston: And how did that seem, you know, in terms of your social life, in terms of contacts, in terms of ...

Thompson: Well you see, you must remember I married out of my age class. I married from a student to a teacher, see. And so, I was just considered a child when I was in Brunswick. The teachers on the campus, I was ... I had my friends on the campus who attended school and all. They were my friends. And when I moved here, then these people ... I wasn't used to having a whole lot of friends so it just didn't bother me.
Houston: Okay.

Thompson: I mean, they were friendly with me but I wasn't like close women friends and all. I wasn't like that because they considered me a child.

Houston: Yeah. I hadn't thought of that. So ... I mean, so not only was there the outsider aspect and the ... and the skin color aspect

Thompson: It was the child

Houston: there was also the age ... the age aspect. Were ... were ... I guess most of ... Did most people at Harberson live on the campus?

Thompson: They all lived on campus.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: All the teachers. In the time that we came here, the teachers had cottages. They had what they called a campus row. They had Dr. Young's campus home and then they had one, two, three ... three cottages over there. And the single teachers who came in lived in the dormitories.

Houston: Okay. And in with the students?

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: So, when you moved to Irmo, your husband was still working at the campus but you moved off ... He continued to work at the campus.

Thompson: No.

Houston: Oh, he didn't.

Thompson: When we moved off the campus, we moved off because ...

Houston: Okay. Because you weren't working there any more.

Thompson: Yes. And that's when he started working at Richards Industrial School. John G. Richards.

Houston: He started working at John ... Was that the school that the governor formed for the reformatory?

Thompson: Yes, that's right. It was the reformatory. They called it John G. Richards but it was a boys reformatory.

Houston: And where was it located?

Thompson: It's right down on ... Shirley, where is it?

Shirley: Right down where River Road ... about maybe ... I think ...
Thompson: Five miles.

Shirley: Five miles down the road.

Thompson: It's five miles. I remember gauging it on the car.

Houston: 1930s. Was there ... was there more evidence in this area -- and by this area, I mean Columbia generally. I mean, you were living ... I suppose Irmo ... Did you consider yourself when you moved here in 1931, during the early ... say during the 1930s, did you consider yourself to live in Columbia or in Irmo?

Thompson: In Irmo.

Houston: So they were really very different places?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Okay. And was there ... was there more evidence of discrimination in Irmo than there had been in Brunswick? Was there more ... Or was it about the same in terms of ... in terms of race relations? It sounds like ... I don't know. How did it seem?

Thompson: I imagine it was about the same.

Houston: Okay. What about Irmo compared to Columbia?
Thompson: I don't know because I don't know anything about life in Irmo except for I live here and I go to Columbia and back here. [laughs]

Houston: But did Columbia seem about the same as Irmo or was there more segregation? I mean, did black people tend to live among themselves and less ... with less contact with whites than black people in Irmo and Brunswick had? It sounds like black people in Irmo and Brunswick had fairly extensive interaction with whites and very amicable. Was that also true in Columbia?

Thompson: No. Columbia had the definite ... it seemed like to me they have a definitely white area and a black area.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: Because the blacks lived out in the Waverly section, out around where Benedict and Allen is now. But at one time, whites were out there too. I don't know too much about it except what I heard them say.

Houston: I know that ... that in the late 1930s, about the time you were teaching and began to commute over to Orangeburg ... I guess you began to commute over to Orangeburg during the war to work on your master's degree?

Thompson: No. I didn't work on my master's degree until after 1950. In fact, it was 1950 when I graduated from Benedict as a college student because I just took ... I had children and I just took a class now and then. Finally
I started teaching. I started teaching as a rule when Catherine was a baby. That was when, Shirley?

Shirley: Well, Catherine was born in '43, January of '43.

Thompson: Well, it was around about that time that I started taking a class here and there. And I had been teaching. Oh yes, I had been teaching in a two-teacher school for four or five years. And when Catherine was born, I stopped teaching all together. And I worked at Ft. Jackson during the first two years of the war.

Houston: What did you do there?

Thompson: I worked in the ... issuing clothing for the soldiers overseas. It was ... It was a base but it was like a store. We would fill orders with ... We would fill the orders for the different organizations, groups, or ... what do you call them? units, as they were going overseas.

Houston: Right. So you did that in 1942, 1943?

Thompson: Yes, I guess so.

Houston: Because the war started during late '41.

Thompson: And then I came ... I discovered that ... All of a sudden, I discovered that they were giving a teachers exam and if you passed the exam,
your salary ... you got a decent salary for it. So I quit the job in the middle of the summer and went to Benedict to brush up on my education so I could pass the teachers exam and start teaching. And that's when I started working on my education. I put more time on it. That's when I really started working for a degree. And I worked a regular then and I got my degree in '50. And then later, I went to teach in Columbia, in the Columbia city system. And that's when I started on my master's. Some time there.

**Houston:**

**Thompson:** I probably started on my master's in about '61 or '62 because I ... I went ... I studied regularly and I finished in '67. I got my master's in May of '67. Yes, because my husband died in June a year after I ... a month after I had my master's.

**Houston:** Okay. It's generally recognized that ... that ... that World War II was a ... a kind of a turning point for African-Americans in many ways. Actually, things started happening in the thirties. But the war itself was a turning point for lots of reasons. But, did it seem to you that ... that ... that the war was changing things? What changes did the war bring to your life in that ... during that time? And not necessarily racially but ... but maybe you can just talk a little bit about how things were different for you and your family during the war. I mean, there was, for example, the job at Ft. Jackson which I assume in and of itself was unusual. But I don't know. Were there ... were there African-Americans working at ... at ... at
Thompson: At Ft. Jackson? Yes.

Houston: before the war?

Thompson: I don't know. I don't know whether they worked there before the war or not.

Houston: They certainly did work there during the war?

Thompson: Oh yes. All during the war, there was ... yes.

Houston: And were they getting jobs in the fort that blacks customarily were denied prior to the war?

Thompson: Well, the jobs that they did at the fort, I don't know whether they had them before the war.

Houston: Right. Okay. You mean, they were new jobs?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Didn't exist before?

Thompson: M-hm. That's right.

Houston: Okay. Were there other ladies ... Do you remember what some of
those jobs were?

**Thompson:** It was ... They had the large laundry there. And they had the sewing area where they sewed and took care of uniforms. That's what it was, a matter of taking care of uniforms and things like that.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Thompson:** It was taking care of the soldiers in general.

**Houston:** Okay. And I know that ... that during the war things like gasoline and butter were in short supply. People have told me about getting white ... this white stuff that you had to

**Thompson:** margarine.

**Houston:** Yeah. You had to put ...

**Thompson:** put coloring in. Yes.

**Houston:** to make it palatable.

**Thompson:** Yes.

**Houston:** Were there other ... other changes? I mean, other things that were rationed? Other ... You know, what were some of the ... You know, and I
know that ... that ... that ... that black men were ... were being drafted into the military and were volunteering. Were there ... were there other changes that, you know, just as you think back about what it was like during the war time? Even little things like ... did you ride public accommodations here? Did you ride street cars here during that period? During the war? Were they segregated like they had been before the war?

Thompson: I think they were. I didn't ever have to have public transportation because I always had my own car. But the buses, I know, in Columbia were segregated. Blacks had to ride in the back and the whites in the front. And, of course, they had the black taxi companies and the white taxi companies.

Houston: What about the business community? Did you have any contact with the black business community in this area? In Columbia? Did you know people who had their own businesses?

Thompson: Let me see. There were people ... because they were all around Assembly Street and Washington Street ... They had businesses up and down Washington Street. They had tailor shops and drug store. What is it?

Houston: No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you. You were describing what Assembly Street was like.

Thompson: Oh.
Houston: Tailor shops and drug stores.

Thompson: That was on Washington Street.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: The tailor shops and the drug stores. All the businesses, all the black businesses were on ... a cafe and the lawyer's offices and dentists offices and all were on ... they were in about a two block area from Main Street to Assembly to Park. That's where most of the black businesses were.

Houston: Did you shop there? Or was it too far away?

Thompson: Well, there wasn't anything to go there for except ... They didn't have anything like department stores and things. They just had the shoe shop, barbershop, drug store. We went to those areas. But for the main, main shopping, you had to shop at the white stores. I never had any problems with them.

Houston: And I guess you got credit at the white stores?

Thompson: Got what?

Houston: Credit.
Thompson: No. We didn't have credit. I guess ... Yeah, they did. I remember ... I remember the teachers had credits at the ... at Berries and Bilks and ... yes, they could have gotten credit there. I didn't bother with credit though. I wasn't much of a person for charging stuff. I got that from my momma.

Houston: The 1940s too was a time in which the civil ... the NAACP became more active. Do you recall, you know, hearing anything or being involved in any way in any of those issues which included the school teachers' salary equalization issue?

Thompson: They ... they ... They ... I think there was a question somewhere on some blank or another that you had to declare whether or not you were a member of subversive organizations or something like that.

Houston: in the forties?

Thompson: Yes. And we knew about the NAACP but you didn't talk about it too much. Not if you wanted to keep your job. People didn't bother about it.

Houston: Do you remember where you were working at the time that you had to be clandestine in your membership in the NAACP?

Thompson: Yes, I was teaching in Columbia.
Thompson: Okay. So this was actually after 1950 because you took your degree in 1950?

Thompson: Yes. It was soon after 1950.

Houston: Right. And, ... I know over in Orangeburg ... I'm not sure of the year, I think maybe '57, that after the Brown decision in '54 ... oh, no, it was '55 in Orangeburg after the Brown decision, blacks signed a petition to integrate the schools over there. And that led to protests and boycotts and student demonstrations. Were there ... were there ... were there ... In the wake of the Brown decision, were there things going on here in Columbia?

Thompson: Yes, they had some ... they had what was it? The lunch counter sit-ins and things like that. Yes, they had several of those. I wasn't involved in it in any way and I didn't know anybody ... well, I lived out in Irmo and, as I said, I had a few friends that were teachers and all in Columbia. But I don't know any ... I couldn't give any example of any of them but we knew that they were because at that time, Adell I think was going to school in Columbia.

Houston: You may ... That may be a little bit later than ... than '55.

Thompson: Yes, it was.

Houston: Because the sit-ins really began after 1960
Thompson: Oh yes.

Houston: ... went off by the ....

Thompson: That's when I knew about the sit-ins. That's right. But before that, I don't know too much. And as I say, being out here, I guess we weren't involved that much.

Houston: Right. Right. I guess one last question. Was there ... during this time in Columbia that you can recall, either in Irmo or in Columbia, do you recall any ... any racial conflict or racial incidents or any problems at all, say before 1960, during the fifties? And this would be say around the time of the Emmett Till case or the Montgomery bus boycott or the Little Rock school desegregation issue?

Thompson: No, I don't remember any incidents at all. There may have been some that I didn't know about.

Houston: Right.

Thompson: But I don't remember. I can't recall any incidents.

Houston: Any police brutality?

Thompson: Uh-um [no].
Thompson: Is there ... is there anything else you ... I mean, I may not have asked all the things that you want to talk about. Is there anything else that you can think of that ... that perhaps should be commented on?

Thompson: No, I don't guess so. I think I've about ... taken up everything.

Houston: Okay. Well, this has been very, very interesting and very useful for me, very helpful.

Thompson: Well, I hope I did tell you something that was helpful.

Houston: You did. I mean, it was all very useful. And I really appreciate it. Thank you very much. I ... I would like though to take a bit more of your time to ask you questions so that I can fill out the family biography form, if you don't mind.

Thompson: Okay.

Houston: Okay. I'll just leave the recorder running. Some of this is going to be fairly tedious.

Thompson: This is my daughter.

Houston: How are you?
Thompson: Shirley.

Houston: Nice to meet you Shirley. I don't remember your middle name. The first is N-e-t-t-i-e.

Thompson: Yes. And Holliday is my maiden name. H-o-l-l-i-d-a-y.

Houston: And do you have a middle name?

Thompson: Yes, C. Nettie C.

Houston: You don't use the whole thing?

Thompson: Carlethia. No. When they told us to use just three names on documents, they always wanted my maiden name. So I use my maiden name.

Houston: And you just do the initial for your middle name?

Thompson: Yes. I just ... Nettie H. Thompson is the way I write my name. The H for Holliday.

Houston: Okay. What's the street address here?

Thompson: 1030 Newberry Avenue.
Houston: Okay. N-e-w-b-e-r-r-y?

Thompson: That's right. Irmo. 29063.

Houston: Okay. And your date of birth is 1912. It's ... I've got it right here. It's January 24th.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: And your place of birth is Brunswick. Do you know what county that is?

Thompson: Yes, Glynn, G-l-y-n-n.

Houston: And your principal occupations? We begin with school teacher.

Thompson: Yes. I taught for thirty-five years.

Houston: Okay. And ... and I suppose otherwise it's housewife, homemaker?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And your phone number, please? It's 803 ...

Thompson: 781-2825.
Houston: 781-2825. And you're widowed. Your husband's first and middle names?

Thompson: Roy W., Roy Walker Thompson, Senior. Because I have a junior up there on the hill.

Houston: Okay. And when was he born, the year and the month and day if you remember?

Thompson: June 21, 1898.

Houston: Okay. And when did he die?

Thompson: June 8, 1967.

Houston: And he was born in Fairfield County, South Carolina?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Was he born in the county or in the city?

Thompson: In the county.

Houston: And his occupation was educator, right?

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: And your mother's first, middle, last and spouse names?

Thompson: My mother?

Houston: M-hm.

Thompson: Catherine. She spelled it with a C. Catherine Barnwell

Houston: This is her maiden name?

Thompson: Yes. [End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Thompson: She said that was her family name and Barnwell, South Carolina was named for her family.

Houston: Is that right? Well, there's probably an interesting story there.

Thompson: Yes, it is.

Houston: Do you know it?

Thompson: Her mother was part Indian and part Negro and her father was this Irishman from Barnwell, South ... from somewhere anyway. He never married.
The only wife he ever had was my mother's mother. I guess ... I don't know whether they were married or not. But anyway, he had four ... He had one, two, three, four ... four children by her. And then when my mother's mother died, he married again and had two other children. But he owned a plantation in Darien, Georgia. And that's where my mother was born. And her mother died when she was six months old and her two older sisters took her away from ... from my grandfather and brought her to Brunswick, Georgia. He told them he'd take care of them as long as they stayed with him. But they decided they didn't want to stay with him because then ... you know, it was a difference between the white and black. And in order to get spending change, Momma said they used to dress up in boys clothes and go out in the field and work and get in line and get a paycheck from him. And then when they got old enough, they took her and came to Brunswick. And he wouldn't ... he wouldn't ... As I said, he didn't take care of them. They just went to Brunswick and they just left him and forgot about him. I remember when he died and his estate was up for settlement or something and my mother's half-brother lived in Ohio at the time, I think. And he told Momma they needed to go together and claim the estate. But Momma said no. She wasn't going to drag her kids through any courts. And she wouldn't bother about it. So I don't know what happened to his fortune.

Houston: So you actually knew your ... your grandfather?

Thompson: I didn't know him.

Houston: You just knew of him?
Thompson: Just knew of him. Momma told us this.

Houston: But Barnwell was very close to Brunswick?

Thompson: Barnwell, South Carolina.

Houston: Okay, so it wasn't close?

Thompson: I don't know.

Houston: But your older ... aunts, your mother's older sisters, took her from ... from Barnwell

Thompson: From Darien. They were living in Darien and that's why he owned a plantation in Darien.

Houston: Oh, I thought ... I'm sorry.

Thompson: No. He owned an island there in Darien. There's a whole island. And he ... what did he raise? Rice and something else on that island.

Houston: This is the Irishman?

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: Okay. And this was the man who ... who had four children with your grandmother?

Thompson: M-hm.

Houston: And then she died and then he married another woman and had two more children.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And then your ... your mother's older sisters ... she must have been the last of the four.

Thompson: She was the last of the four.

Houston: Then her mother died when she was a baby.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: Then her father was looking after her. But then the sisters wanted to move out of the father's house.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: And then they moved to
Thompson: to Brunswick.

Houston: They took the baby. How old was your mother when they took her?

Thompson: I don't know. I don't know.

Houston: She must no longer have been an infant. I mean, she must have been a little girl.

Thompson: Yes, she was.

Houston: Of six or seven or eight or something like that.

Thompson: They came over to Brunswick to live and went back and got her.

Houston: Okay. But how are they connected with ... And Brunswick we know is about thirty miles from Darien.

Thompson: Yes, something like that.

Houston: But where's the connection with Barnwell, South Carolina? You said Barnwell was named after ... I thought you said Barnwell was ...

Thompson: Oh, that was her father's name. That was the white man.

Houston: The Irishman.
Thompson: The Irishman.

Houston: So ...

Thompson: His name was Barnwell.

Houston: Okay. But his property was in Darien.

Thompson: But he also had ... I don’t know how it happened but he had ... His name is George Barnwell. His family's from up in that area.

Houston: Oh, okay. So he originally ... He may have been born in Barnwell and even though it wasn't named after him, but after one of his ...

Thompson: His family, yes.

Houston: Okay. Okay. Okay. So you've got deep roots in this area, even all around the area. Georgia and South Carolina. Let's see. Oh, your mother's date of birth -- do you know that?

Thompson: No. Well, let me see.

Houston: Do you know when she died and how old she was?

Thompson: What year did she die?
Shirley: '72, February of '72.

Thompson: And she was eighty-three years old.

Houston: 1972 and she was eighty-three. So that means she was born in 1891. She was born in '72, you say?

Shirley: She died in '72.

Houston: '72. She was eighty-three. So that's ... Yeah, she was born in 1891. And she was born in Darien?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Darien and what county is Darien in?

Thompson: I don't know. MacIntosh County.

Houston: MacIntosh, thank you. And what was her occupation? She was a teacher?

Thompson: No, no. She was just a housewife. Twelve kids -- that's all she could do. Take care of us.

Houston: Right, right.
Thompson: My daddy declared that every time he saw her she was washing.


Houston: And your dad was a cooper?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And what were his first and middle names?

Thompson: Edward Desero Holliday.

Houston: Desero?


Houston: And do you know when he was born?

Thompson: No, I don't ...

Houston: When he died, how old was he?

Thompson: I'll tell you. He was nine years older than Momma.

Houston: Okay. So he was born in 1882.
Thompson: I guess so.

Houston: And when did he die?

Thompson: 1950.

Houston: Okay. And where was he born?

Thompson: Fayetteville, Roberson County.

Houston: Fedville. F-e-d-v-i-l-l-e?

Thompson: Yes. F-a-y. Fayetteville.

Shirley: Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Houston: I'm sorry.

Thompson: Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Houston: Fayetteville. And, I'm sorry, what county was that?

Thompson: Roberson.

Houston: Robeson. R-o-b-e-s-o-n?
Thompson: Yes, something like that. R-o-b-e-r-s-o-n, Roberson. I've seen it.

Houston: Roberson. Okay. And, if you could, I'd like to have the names of your brothers and sisters, all twelve ... all eleven of them, in order of birth.

Thompson: Okay. There was Albert. Albert Taylor Holliday. Della Minerva Holliday. Mary Barnwell Holliday. Then comes Nettie Carlethia, C-a-r-l-e-t-h-i-a, Holliday. Katherine

Houston: with a "c".

Thompson: No. She spells her with a K now.

Houston: That's right.

Thompson: Katherine ... what's her middle name? Rayette, R-a-y-e-t-t-e, Holliday. Then Edward Desero, Junior. Edward Desero Holliday, Junior.

Houston: D-e-s-a-r-o?

Thompson: D-e-s-e-r-o.

Houston: D-e-s-e-r-o. Okay.
Thompson: Eugene Augustus Holliday. Rhoderick, R-h-o-d-e-r-i-c-k. I don't know his middle name. [chuckles]

Houston: There probably weren't very many R-h-o-d-e-r-i-c-k's.

Thompson: Rhoderick Holliday.

Houston: Yeah, I like the name. Rhoderick. That's fine.

Thompson: After Rhoderick, Nellie.

Houston: Nellie, okay.

Thompson: I don't know her middle name either.

Shirley: Wasn't her middle name Rayette?

Thompson: Yes, I gave Katherine that name, didn't I? I gave you the wrong name.

Houston: Nellie Rayette.

Thompson: Nellie Rayette, R-a-y-e-t-t-e.

Houston: So it was the same as Katherine's or Katherine had a different
Thompson: Katherine had a different one. I gave you the wrong name.

Houston: Don't worry about it. First names are most important, anyway.

Thompson: Okay. Then ... who did you have last in there?

Houston: Well, now I've got: Albert ...

Thompson: Nellie was the last.

Houston: Yeah.

Thompson: Okay. After Nellie was Wyona, W-y-o-n-a. Wyona

Shirley: Cynthia.

Thompson: Cynthia, C-y-n-t-h-i-a. Then Carmen, C-a-r-m-e-n, Carmen ReNard, R-e - Capital N -a-r-d. And that's all. Oh, and Velma. Velma Venvernard. Momma gave her a fancy name since she's the last one.

Houston: It's Vendre ...?

Thompson: V-e-l-m-a, Velma. Then Venvernard, V-e-n-v-e-r-n-a-r-d. That should be twelve.
Houston: I think it is. Let's see. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. And, perfect. ... I mean, were they all like two years apart?

Thompson: Yes. Albert ... I'm 82 now so ...

Houston: So counting backwards then ...

Thompson: Counting backwards

Houston: And we know you were born in 1912. So, let's see, ...

Thompson: I'm 82.

Houston: So if you were born in 1912, that means that Mary would have been born in 1910, Della in 1908, and Albert in 1906.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Is that right?

Thompson: Like that. That'll do.

Houston: Okay. 1906, 1908, 1910. And then, on the other side, Katherine would have been born 1914
Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Edward '16, Eugene '18, Rhoderick '20, Nellie '22, Wyona

Thompson: Wyona is three years behind Nellie. There was a gap there.

Houston: Okay. So that would be '25. Then Carmen

Thompson: Same thing, two years.

Houston: '27.

Thompson: Yeah.

Houston: And Velma '29.

Shirley: Velma was '30.

Thompson: Velma was in '30 because she was born the same year Roy Junior was born.

Houston: Okay. Good. [whispering the names and years again] Are they all still living? Or ...

Thompson: No.
Houston: Okay. Can we put in the ... the years that ... that they deceased or do you not know those?

Thompson: Adell ... I mean, Della, the first one, is still living. No, Albert was the first one, huh?

Houston: Yes.

Thompson: What year did Albert die?

Shirley: Oh, Momma, I don't remember. I don't even remember if I was still in New York.

Thompson: When did you say Momma ... yeah, you were.

Shirley: Momma died in '72.

Thompson: And they started dying right after Momma died. Well, B

Shirley: B died earlier.

Thompson: the first one is ... Do you have a ... Yeah, you have Mary Barnwell, haven't you?

Shirley: ... it'd be just the four
Houston: Yeah. She was born in 1910. She died in 1973?

Thompson: No. She died earlier than that.

Houston: Before your mother?

Thompson: 1910 ... Yeah, she was just about twenty-two years old when she died.

Houston: Oh. So she died around 1932.

Thompson: Yeah, something like that.

Houston: Right after you got married.

Thompson: Yes. Right after I moved to South Carolina. That's right. She was ... About 1932. That's right.

Houston: Okay. And Della's still living?

Thompson: Della's still living, yes. I'm still living. Katherine's still living. Did we get Albert's date?

Shirley: Un-uh [no]. We didn't get it yet.
Houston: He died right after your mom?

Thompson: Yes. He died two or three years after Momma.

Houston: So that would be '73, '74.

Thompson: Something like that, uh-huh [yes].

Houston: Say '74.

Thompson: And everybody else is living until you get down to Edward.

Houston: He died back in the forties, didn't he?

Thompson: Yes. He died early. He died about '46, soon after the war ended. Momma had just moved to New York.

Houston: Eugene still living?

Thompson: No. He died after Momma. After Albert. What did you have Albert's for?

Houston: '74.

Thompson: '74. Well, Gene must have died about '75 or '76, something like that.
Houston: Okay.

Thompson: And Rhoderick about a year later.

Houston: I'll say Gene '75 and Rhoderick '76.

Thompson: Yes, about like that.

Houston: And is Nellie still alive?

Thompson: Nellie and Wyona and ... Velma's the only one that's dead. And when did she die? Two years ago?

Shirley: About two years ago.


Thompson: Yep. All the rest of us still here. That should leave about six.

Houston: Well, yeah. Let's see. One, two, three, four ... exactly.

Thompson: Yep.

Shirley:
Thompson: Most of them stayed around until Momma left. When Momma died, Momma came back and got all her boys because she loved the boys to death. [chuckles]

Houston: That's really hard on a parent, I think, to have children pre-decease you.

Thompson: I tell mine that all the time. I have one living in Charlotte now and he's just in an automobile accident the other day. And I told him that he must remember that he's not supposed to go before me.

Houston: It's got to be very hard. All of your children were born here?

Thompson: No, Roy Junior was born in Brunswick.

Houston: Oh, I'm sorry. These are your brothers and sisters.

Thompson: Yes. All those brothers and sisters were born in Brunswick, Georgia. Brunswick, Georgia, Glynn County.

Houston: Now, your children's next ... and birth order.

Thompson: Roy Junior. He's born August the 30th, 1930.

Houston: August 30, 1930.
Thompson: He was Roy W. Thompson, Junior. The next one was Fred Albert Thompson and he was born August 16, 1932. Then Shirley. What's your birth date? Don't make me guess it.


Houston: June 13th. That's my son's birthday.

Shirley: My middle name is Louise.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: Then Katherine.

Shirley: No, Adell is next.

Thompson: Oh, Adell. Adell Carlethia.

Houston: Okay. And she spells that with one "l"?

Shirley: Two "l"s.

Houston: She got your middle name?

Thompson: Yes.
Houston: Her birth date?

Thompson: July

Shirley: 29th.

Houston: Oh, so she's got a birthday coming up.

Thompson: Yeah. What's the date?

Houston: Today is the 20th.

Shirley: '41.

Houston: Oh, 1941. Are there four kids?

Shirley: Katheryne Rayette.

Houston: Okay. Katheryne with a "k".

Shirley: With a "k". K-a-t-h-e-r-y-n-e.

Houston: So she almost is a junior ... no, the other one is. Not Katheryne. And her birth date?
Shirley: January 15, 1943.

Houston: Okay. Is there another one?

Thompson: Edward.

Houston: Edward.

Thompson: Edward Desero Holliday Thompson -- he has it all.

Houston: D-e-s-e-r-o Holliday

Thompson: D-e-s-e-r-o, m-hm.

Houston: And his birth date?

Thompson: October 14, ... what year?

Shirley: I do not know, Momma.

Thompson: He's older than thirty-two.

Houston: Well, if he ... Is he forty ... in his forties?

Thompson: No, he's not forty yet. He's about thirty-five.
Houston: Okay. Well, if he's thirty-five, then he was ... take ... '64 ... '59?

Thompson: '58.

Houston: '58. Okay. So he was a late child.

Thompson: Yeah.

Houston: And the last.

Thompson: That's the last. That's the end.

Houston: Now you said they were all born here except Roy Junior.

Thompson: Except Roy Junior.

Houston: They were all born in Brunswick.

Thompson: M-hm. Now you can just put down sixteen grandchildren and fourteen great-grands. I'm not going to name them! [chuckles]

Houston: Well, actually, that number is ... is all that they ask for. So part of ... the other kids were born in Irmo.

Thompson: Well, we can say they were all born in Richland County because
some of them were born in the hospital in Columbia and some ...

Houston:    Well, yeah, but Irmo was your residence.

Thompson:   Yes, that's right.

Shirley:    Because Kathy and I were born in Lexington County.

Thompson:   Where were you born?

Shirley:    Over at Harberson campus.

Thompson:   That was Richland County.

Shirley:    I don't want to be born in Richland County.  [chuckles]  And Katheryne was born right here.

Thompson:   And this was Richland County at the time.

Shirley:    Really?!

Thompson:   Yeah.

Houston:    Was Richland County a bad county?

Shirley:    Now you see, I learned something.
Thompson: No.

Houston: It's just not where you thought you were born.

Thompson: They just had these lines all crooked and twisted and turned around.

Houston: This next question I think is an easy one. It says: List of places where the interviewee used to live and the dates. So I think you ... you lived in Brunswick until ... from 1912 until 1931.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: And let's see, just ... That was Glynn County, right? G-l-y-n-n?

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: 1912 to 1931. And then, from 1931 until the present, you lived in Irmo, Richland, South Carolina.

Thompson: That's right.

Houston: To the present.

Thompson: They consider this Lexington now.
Houston: Oh, is that right?

Thompson: Yes, yes.

Houston: Lexington County?

Thompson: Yes, they consider all of Irmo Lexington County.

Houston: Okay. And the next one says: List schools. So, Selden, you went to ... You graduated from the Selden High School and Selden Junior College. 
__________ And that was in Brunswick.

Thompson: Then Benedict.

Houston: And then ... now, you graduated from ... Wait a minute, you graduated ... Wait a minute, you graduated from there in 19 ... wait a minute. Let me think. 1912 ... _______. So you graduated from there in 1931.

Thompson: From where?

Houston: From high school.

Thompson: No, I graduated from high school in '29.
Houston: Oh, sorry. 1929.

Thompson: In '30 and '31, I went to the Normal Industrial School. I was living on campus then. I was married.

Houston: And that was Selden?

Thompson: Selden Normal Industrial Institute.

Houston: Selden Normal Industrial Institute. In Brunswick, Georgia. And you went there 1929 to 1932?

Thompson: 19

Houston: to 1931?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: 1929 to 1931. And you finished with an Associate Degree in 19... with a teaching... You graduated in 1931 with what degree?

Thompson: They... They just gave us some little certificate saying "teachers" or something.

Houston: Teaching certificate?
Thompson: It was a teaching certificate, uh-huh [yes].

Houston: Then you went to Benedict.

Thompson: Benedict, uh-huh [yes].


Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And that was in Columbia.

Thompson: M-hm.

Houston: And you said you started taking courses. I'm trying to think of the years you were there.

Thompson: At Benedict?

Houston: Yeah. You started taking courses right after the war. You ... you heard ... during the war ... That's right. You said you worked in the ... at Ft. Jackson and you heard about the ... you heard about the teachers application. So you started taking courses. And that would have been ... what, that would have been 1944?
Thompson: I guess so. Somewhere in there.

Houston: Around 1944. And you graduated 1950. And what was your degree?

Thompson: Education.

Houston: So it was a B.A.?

Thompson: B.A., m-hm.

Houston: And then you were at State from 1950 to '57?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: That was still State College, wasn't it?

Thompson: Yes, it was State College. I got an M.E. there, Master of Education.

Houston: '57.

Thompson: I didn't got to Benedict all the ... I mean, State College, all that time.

Houston: Oh, no, no, no. It's just the years you were there.
Thompson: Yeah. I finished ... I got my degree

Houston: You were going part time too.

Thompson: I got my degree in '67 from Benedict ... from State College. About the last two years, I went there in earnest, diligently. Two summers and one winter.

Houston: Okay. I've actually put down '67 but it was '57? '67?

Thompson: '67, m-hm, that I got my master's.

Houston: Am I wearing you out?

Shirley: [chuckles]

Houston: It says: Your most important previous jobs. You taught for how many years? 38 years?

Thompson: Just about. Because I formally retired in ... in '75. But after I retired, I still taught six years. I called myself a sub teacher but they kept me in the classroom all the time. So, I gave that up because they were working me too hard.

Houston: You weren't getting ... Were you getting benefits? I mean, ...
Thompson: Oh, yeah! They were ... I was getting paid for it. But I just intended to go ... I was on the sub list just to help them out now and then. But every year, they had a place there that they couldn't find anybody to fill and called me at the beginning of the year. And I was there the rest of the year. I was paid for it all right. But I was ... wanted to retire.

Houston: Your employer was the Columbia, South Carolina School Board?

Thompson: Yes. City of Columbia.

Houston: School Board?

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: And what year did you start? You started 1950.

Thompson: Started what?

Houston: Teaching.

Thompson: I started ... Well, wait a minute now. I started teaching in Columbia in 1950. But I had already taught ten years out here in this area. I taught in one and two teacher schools up the road. I'd commute. In the County of Lexington.

Houston: So you were a teacher at County of Lexington School Board?
Thompson: Yes, yes. For eleven ... ten years.

Houston: From 1940 to 1950.

Thompson: Yeah, something like that. 1950 I began Columbia City Schools and that's where I stayed.

Houston: And would you say that was in Irmo or would you just say that was in Lexington County?

Thompson: That was Lexington County.

Houston: And were there any significant jobs before that? I guess not. You were a housewife before that, right?

Thompson: Yes, that's all.

Houston: Okay. Almost at the end. It gives a place to list here: awards and/or honors or offices that you've held.

Thompson: Well, I have a certificate in there saying that I worked at the ... with the Red Cross when I was in Columbia City Schools.

Houston: Okay. So Certificate of Merit, Red Cross Volunteer?
Thompson: Yes. That's about all. The other thing I have is some ... just a certificate from the City of Columbia for teaching twenty-five years. After my first twenty-five years.

Houston: Twenty-five years ... twenty-five year service award.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: Columbia ... City of Columbia

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: School Board. And that would have been 1975. Do you know when the Red Cross Volunteer award would be ... approximately?

Thompson: I started teaching in Columbia in '50, so I guess I was the representative from my school there until I left school. So

Houston: That would have been '75 also?

Thompson: Somewhere in there.

Houston: Okay. And your current religious denomination is Episcopalian?

Thompson: That's right.
Houston: And your current church?


Houston: And my family was Baptist but when I was old enough to ... Well, my family wasn't anything really. But when my mother went to church, she went to a Baptist church. And then I made myself Episcopalian. I started going to church with my friends.

Thompson: Oh.

Houston: Your church is in Irmo or is it in Columbia?

Thompson: It's in Columbia. Well, my children, naturally, were brought up in the Presbyterian church because we lived on a Presbyterian campus.

Houston: Right.

Thompson: But I always ... I used to ... In fact, I attended the Presbyterian church all the while with them. Because the Episcopal church was in Columbia. But I used to talk to them all the time about my church and the services and everything. So when we came over here, my baby daughter went to ... went in nurses training at Columbia Hospital and she came in contact with Father O'Neil, the Episcopal minister, and he was very friendly and was always recruiting people for his church. And she told me, she said, "Mother, it's time for you to go back to your own church now." So she'd get
on the telephone every Sunday morning and beg me to come on and pick her up; and let's go to church. So, that's how ... They all gradually followed me. I didn't take them; they followed me to the Episcopal church. Adell said ...
You met Adell.

Houston: Yes, I did.

Thompson: Adell was the last one and she said to me, "They can go where they want to but I'm a Presbyterian." I said, "Nobody said anything different." The next thing I knew, Father O'Neil had her in the church. [laughs]

Houston: Going up too, huh? He must be pretty persuasive.

Thompson: He was real nice and his wife murdered him.

Houston: Is that right?

Thompson: M-hm. Married a little street girl. I don't know how he got tied up with her.

Houston: And she killed him.

Thompson: And she killed him, m-hm. She's out of prison now. She served her time enough.
Houston: Well, that's unfortunate.

Thompson: It was. It was horrible.

Houston: Well, the next to the last question is to list civic, community, education, or political organizations to which you belonged. Things like, I guess, teachers associations or sororities or clubs or civil rights organizations or, you know ...

Thompson: No, I'm not like my daughter. I don't have all of the affiliations that she has.

Houston: She didn't make you take out a golden membership or something?

Thompson: No. [chuckles]

Shirley: You're a member of the NAACP, aren't you? Didn't you pay for it?

Thompson: Yes, but it's not a golden membership.

Houston: No, it doesn't have to be golden. I'm just teasing.

Thompson: Yes.

Houston: But you are a member of the NAACP?
Thompson: Yes, I'm a member of the NAACP and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority.

Houston: Okay, now you may have to spell that for me. Sigma?

Thompson: S-i-g-m-a.

Houston: Gamma, G-a-m-m-a.

Thompson: Yeah. R-h-o.

Houston: I needed help on that one. Okay. Sorority. S-o-r-o-r-i-t-y, okay. What about teach ... national or state teachers associations?

Thompson: Yes, I belong to both of the ... the national and the state teachers and the ... what am I trying to ... a lifetime membership in the NEA.

Houston: National Education Association?

Thompson: M-hm. And _____ other teaching organization that

Shirley: South Carolina Education Association -- I don't know. Or are you talking about this other national one?

Thompson: M-hm.
Shirley: American Federation of Teachers?

Thompson: No, no. Not that. We don't belong to that.

Houston: But you belong to the ... the state, regional?

Thompson: Yes.

Shirley: South Carolina Education Association.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: Episcopal Church Women. ECW.

Houston: Anything else?

Thompson: You don't know want no bridge clubs?

Houston: I'm sorry, what? What did you call it?

Thompson: You don't want any bridge clubs.

Houston: Sure. I do.

Thompson: At one time it was the Mr. and Mrs. Bridge Club but so many of
our members died, we finally dissolved it. And the SEBS, Sardine and Bridge Society.

Houston: Okay.

Thompson: I can't think of anything else.

Houston: That's plenty. The very last question is whether you ... well, I'll read it to you. It says: Please list below any other activities or affiliations, like the military, labor unions, hobbies or interests and publications, and/or include any comment that you would like to make such as a favorite saying, a phrase or a quotation or a motto, an aphorism, words to live by, words of wisdom, that kind of thing.

Thompson: No, I don't think I have anything to add.

Houston: Okay. Well, this has been very, very useful. Very helpful to me. I really appreciate your time in sharing your story. Thank you very much.

Thompson: I'm happy I could help you out. I hope it does do you some good.

Houston: Well, it's ... It did me a lot of good and I, you know, I ... I wish ... I wish I'd been listening a lot longer. But, thank you very much.

Thompson: You're welcome very.
Houston: I'm going to fill out ... there's a ... The last, very last thing is a ... an interview agreement. And I'd like to read to you what it says and then ask you to sign it and I have to sign it too. This is an agreement which allows this tape recorded interview to be collected at the Duke University Archives and for Duke to control it for research purposes. And I'll read it to you.

The purpose of the Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crowe South Project is to gather and preserve historical documents by means of tape recorded interviews. The tape recordings and transcripts resulting from such interviews become a part of the archives of the Behind the Veil Collection of Duke University. This material will be made available for historical and other academic research and public dissemination regulated according to the restrictions placed on its use by the interviewee. Duke University is assigned rights, title and interest to the interviews unless otherwise specified. Participation in Center for Documentary Studies Projects is entirely voluntary. We have read the above and we voluntarily offer the information contained in these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this research material, we hereby permit Duke University to retain it without any restrictions.

And then, in bold type just above your signature, it says: We the undersigned have read the above and voluntarily offer Duke University full use of the information contained on tapes and transcripts of these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this research, we hereby assign rights, title and interest pertaining to it to Duke University.
And then there's a place that says "Interviewee" and I'll print in your name and there's also a line here for address and the date. And I'll put in the date. And then ask you to sign it.

Thompson: Okay.

Houston: I'd like to get you to sign it right here. I put a little tick mark there.

Thompson: Okay.

Houston: Thank you.

Thompson: I've thought sometimes my writing goes to nothing. I haven't long enough. I have Parkinson's and my hand won't do what I want it to do all the time.

Houston: Right now, it looks very steady to me. I put your initial down here as Nettie C. but I should have said Nettie H. I guess.

Thompson: Yes, because that's what I use all the time.

Houston: All right. We'll just change this here. You did tell me that. I'm sorry. Okay. Well, again, thank you.

Thompson: Welcome.
Houston: I've really enjoyed it. Now, I didn't realize the connection between you and ... and Mr. Adams. I mean, I met your daughter. I just ...
At the time I met ... there were several other people in the room and I just didn't make the ... didn't make the connection. I met everybody on Saturday for the first time. So, I'm doing ... getting kind of a family history here.