Interview with Johnny Allen and Ida Belle Allen

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Summerton (S.C.)

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An oral history project to record and preserve the living memory of African American life during the age of legal segregation in the American South, from the 1890s to the 1950s.

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1. **Murphy**: Both of you state your full names and your date of birth and where you were born.

2. **Ida Allen**: My name is Ida Belle. Sumter is my maiden name. I was born 1914 the twelfth day of September.

3. **Murphy**: Where were you born?

4. **Ida Allen**: I will say Kantsalvania out in a country section, kind of a crossroad.

5. **Murphy**: And you?

6. **Johnny Allen**: My name is Johnny Allen. I was born June 29, 1905. It was in (    ) a section they call it (    ).

7. **Murphy**: And if you could, could you just tell me a little bit about your home when you were young?

8. **Ida Allen**: Yes. My mother I remember her well. She was Henrietta and my father – Henrietta Sumter now, she was a McCoy but she was a Sumter when I was born and he was (    ) Sumter. There were twelve children.

9. **Murphy**: And what was it like growing up? You lived way out in the country?
10. **Ida Allen:** Yes it out in the country, fully country life.

Country life with no city at all, fully country life where I was raised out on a farm. We raised our food, raised most of that, worked on the farm.

11. **Murphy:** What did you grow?

12. **Ida Allen:** We'd grow cotton, corn, peas, sweet potatoes, butterbeans, string beans, mostly everything. Cows, we got our milk and butter and stuff. We had our hogs, our pigs and stuff, and that was our meat. That's why I think we lived fully country. We didn't go to the store for many things no more than sugar and coffee. Most other things we raised there.

13. **Murphy:** Did your family own that land?

14. **Ida Allen:** No, he was renting. He was renting and he used to raise sugar cane and millet. You don't see much of that growing now, to make different syrups. And we used to have a lot of different things like that. Like where a lot of times these children drink kool-aid and soda now, we drank which was molasses water and that would taste real good. We had a well, a deep well, had two bucket draws, pull it up and whatnot. And that water was cool and we'd pour a little molasses and stir it up. It tastes just like the kool-aid tastes now and I
liked it. Because we won’t used to this real cold stuff. And we were healthy. Twelve children grew up. We had six boys and six girls.

15. **Murphy:** Where were you in the order?

16. **Ida Allen:** Let me see. It was Benjamin, James, Mary, Mariah, Samuel, Gertrude, LeRoy, Lou Ethel, then I come.

17. **Murphy:** So you were very young?

18. **Ida Allen:** Yes. I mostly used to stay to the house to cook. Probably around thirteen, mostly to cook. The rest was working on the farm. The younger ones was like my baby brother and sister which is Willamena and ( ), Jr. I used to take care of them at the house and cook, have the meals ready when they come in at twelve. So I had an all day routine there to do.

19. **Murphy:** And your mother worked on the farm as well?

20. **Ida Allen:** Now my mother, she worked on the farm some but she mostly used to be home. Because she was a heavy woman, near three hundred pounds and whatnot. She used to be home but most of the children and the father would be working the farm, keep that up.
21. **Murphy:** And what about you? Where did you grow up?

22. **Johnny Allen:** I grewed up a little bit on my grandfather's place with my grandfather. That's where I ( ) I was probably born there. And then we moved, come up to ( ). Stayed there awhile. We moved around. See my parents died real young. My father died in 1919 and my mother died in 1926. There were six of us, three boys and three girls. I was the next oldest, then three girls and one younger brother. My oldest brother leave home about a year, maybe a couple of years before my mother died. When she died then I go stay with my ( ) where the rest of them stayed. We grew up pretty good. We moved in with a family who was very good to us, partly raised us. Of course we had to work on the farm to be able to ( ). So we had to work on the farm. They was very good to us and that's what help us to grow up and be men and women see. We worked hard. (Tape too low to understand.) We got along alright. I don't have any complaints growing up. We made it alright. I leave the farm in 1928 and come to Sumter and got a job because you couldn't make it on the farm. I never had to ( ). ( ) and I didn't know nothing but work. One job coming to a close, somebody else would be sending for me. I worked hard. I think I worked for two companies from 1928 to 1969 I retired.
23. Murphy: That's a blessing.

24. Johnny Allen: That's a blessing by the Lord. By me being smart and do my work, not ( ) around and just looking for payday. A white guy told me that when I was ( ). Said ( ) keep a job ( ) what you're getting paid for.

25. Murphy: They'd think well of you.

26. Johnny Allen: Yeah, so I got along real good. I had a good life coming up by the help of the Lord.

27. Murphy: Do you remember, either one of you, going to school when you were little?

28. Ida Allen: Yes, I'd go to school at Pine Hill, used to go four months. That's all the long because we were farmers. Because we'd start planting and then we didn't go to school until it was about the last part of October or November until the crops were just about gathered, especially the cotton. Then we'd go to school on through there until time to plant. Well, in March you had to start for the farm, we'd go to school along. Well, the brothers would plow and till the soil and all that, we girls could go on to school until first things that they used to do. A lot of things you had to do by hand then. You didn't have machines to do it like scatter which is called
compost now. Call it compost now but we used to call it manure because we used to take it out of the stable. We had to scatter that up and down the row. And then the fertilizer, we'd start that to plant the crops. Well, we girls then, we had to stay home from school then to help put that down. After that then we'd go back to school again. And then school closed out about the first of May because you'd start then to chopping cotton and whatnot and go on, that's how you'd do it.

29. Murphy: So you had to walk to school?

30. Ida Allen: Yeah, walk about three or four miles, be there by nine o'clock. Leave home about seven in the morning to get there by nine. We'd enjoy it because it was just a road full of black children. We enjoyed each other. We'd look for the different roads where they're coming in because they get on that one highway to go on to the school then we'd get together and go. And we had fun.

31. Murphy: So it was like a big group of you walking?

32. Ida Allen: Yeah, go together, we didn't fight, we'd get along good. There was no fighting and carrying on like children now. We was glad to see each other. Tried to help each other, help them carry their books. The little ones had to walk too. We helped along with the little ones, took them by
the hand. It was a good life and I learned well. Because see my real mother died when I was in school two years and she died. Then after, then my father married the second time and she was just like my mother. Now she learned me everything mostly I know. This is my step-mother. She'd teach me how to do my domestic work and stuff like that and take care of children and stuff. Now she'd teach me that. I always give her that praise. She was just as good as any mother. She wouldn't, all the little bad things we'd do, she was so good, she wouldn't tell our father we need to get a whipping. She was kind of a young woman and, you know, she went right along with us. We got along fine. Had a good life. Then after I married and she still was a mother to me. When I give birth to my children she would come and stay with me a month. Wash, keep house and cook for me and then she would go back. She would put me on my own and then she would go back. So I had a good life. The worse I would say suffering through segregation and whatnot was in World War II, really when the war lasted so long. But that was about twelve years and I had children. I had four children along in that time and food was scarce. There wasn't no big farms. Then I had to go to the store for a lot of things that we couldn't raise on the farm because he just started, my husband just started over again, put a little farm there after he come from the factory. So it
was a little tougher on me then because a lot of things they'd put on the shelf and they'd say they were going to have it on there tomorrow and you get there and they're all off the shelf, it's just a clean shelf. Then you had a family that you had to feed. So that was about the toughest time going through that and segregation didn't make that, just the economy made that because they'd feed the soldiers. They'd feed the soldiers. So but somehow or another I raised our children, they were healthy. We did the best with what we had and they stayed fat and happy.

33. **Murphy:** So did they only have certain kinds of food available during the war?

34. **Ida Allen:** Well, you see the same food now what's on the shelf but it might not be the different variety what they've got on the shelf now. Just common things, salt meat, you couldn't find that. Certain ( ) they'd sell that. And you'd go up there and a lot of things they'd keep it underneath the counter.

35. **Murphy:** My mother would say that they didn't have butter during the war. They had like margarine.

36. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, had a lot of margarine. But see, one thing what always I was blessed with after I married, we owned cows. So
we had butter and milk for our children. So we didn't have to buy that. We always had that until all of them got grown. The toughest time along was the six boys was in school at one time. It was a little rough then. Boys is rough on clothes and whatnot. And then you couldn't buy clothes for little boys in the store. I had to learn to sew, to make pants and shirts for them to go to school.

37. Murphy: Because it wasn't available?

38. Ida Allen: No, they didn't make them. No help, no way. No way you could get out of this ( ) work and the knowledge you had to learn to do things. It was a little rough but I didn't give up. I didn't give up. I always had hope for different changes, there was going to be changes. And sure enough it was and after that then they said there was peace, declared that. Then my baby started to school and he was six years old then that gives me a chance I could do some domestic work. I worked at Shaw Field. It wasn't Shaw then. It was an Army base then out there. I worked there about ten years to kind of help because the children was in school and I didn't have to stay home. I'd be back and then he was working at night. When I was at work he was home. He'd go to work in the evenings and at that time I was on my way back. So that's the only way to keep them together, the six boys together. So it
wasn’t so tough. So I would say we was wonderful blessed. I know many friends of mine cannot say that.

39. Murphy: So how many children do you have?

40. Ida Allen: I had six boys and I have five living now.

41. Murphy: What do you remember about World War II?

42. Johnny Allen: Well, World War II began December 7, 1941. That’s when the United States went in the war. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president then. I think you’ve heard of him. And the eleventh of December they closed everything down. Closed the automobile factories down, Ford, General Motors. Stopped them from making cars and started them to building the airplanes. They issued stamps according to how large your family was, you’d get different stamps. You’d get cheese.

43. Murphy: You’d only get a certain amount?

44. Johnny Allen: Get a certain amount and the only time you’d get it is when it’s available see. But I was fortunate by working, there was a big group of men, anywhere from eight hundred to twelve hundred. Some of the men, some of the black men had a little privilege you know. He was working in grocery stores and places on the weekends.
45. **Murphy:** Why would they have privilege?

46. **Johnny Allen:** What I mean they had privilege because they could work in the stores, work behind the counter. See what I'm talking about? So we had a little privilege. Sometimes in talking to them and they'd go there Saturday morning and start working. Some of them was in the meat market and some of them was other places. And they would fix up a little ( ). And then when I'd go in there to pick it up they'd have one or two black people at the checkout counter and then they had some whites. They'd tell me don't go to the whites, go to the blacks because the whites were going to look at us, you know, this ought to be more than this. They'd put the price on it see. So I got along real good. I used to go out to the farm, people were raising hogs and things before I started farming and pick up meat, stuff like that.

47. **Murphy:** They'd just give it to you?

48. **Johnny Allen:** No, I had to buy it but it wasn't like you'd go into the store.

49. **Murphy:** It wasn't expensive?

50. **Johnny Allen:** No. And you know, to me a lot of hard times people put on the white man that didn't belong to the white man.
Just like now. People put a lot of hard times but see people are sitting down depending on the government to feed them, to pay their rent. Young women, you know, having babies just to get on welfare. See what I'm talking about?

51. **Murphy**: People didn't do that then?

52. **Johnny Allen**: No! We didn't have no welfare or nothing back then. President Roosevelt established something and if it's a white man here in the community farming they would give the stuff to him and give him privilege to issue it out see.

53. **Murphy**: Oh, so he'd be in charge of the program?

54. **Johnny Allen**: Yeah, he'd be in charge. And he would sometimes have people to work for him in order to get it. See what I'm talking about? That's why I say people blame the white man for everything but see, they just depend on the white man. See what I'm talking about? Just like the children depends on the parents. When they get grown if the parents kick them out then they ought to say well I'm grown, I need my own place, I need to manage my own money and I need to learn how to protect myself. So they ought to be glad to get out. If it's me now, I'd say well alright, I know I had stamps, I know I couldn't get nothing without stamps and they would issue stamps for gas. Just like you would tell them how far you lived from
your work and they would give you extra stamps if you had to go back and forth to work. Things wasn't bad as people think it was.

55. **Ida Allen:** It's one thing, it was more safer. You didn't have to worry. You could have left your children home and your children was safe there. It was a community and neighbor children. You didn't have to worry. That child ( ) your mama said for you to stay home. Those children stayed and played right around in their yards because their parents if they were working somewhere, they'd come back. You didn't have to lock up the doors and whatnot. It was no such thing as no screen doors then. Wasn't nothing but doors and window panes you had to open. It was more free, I'll tell you the truth. It was a better life than it is now. There's more suffering now. Because I can't walk out and go to the next door there ( ). And I could go to church and just sort of pull the door. Or go to the store and pull the door and the door was going to stay. Had a latch on the door, had a string through there, had a hole to go through there and you'd pull that latch up and it would drop back down behind something like that. And that would hold the lock on that door. When you come back you pull this string and that come up, you go on
in the house and everything was there. People were honest. And love, love was back then. Yeah, love.

56. **Johnny Allen:** I didn't get a chance to talk about ( ), and you know what I mean going to school.

57. **Murphy:** I want to hear about that too.

58. **Johnny Allen:** My parents were real educated. My father graduated from, you know when they talk about Allen University? My father graduated from Allen University. My mother lacked a year from graduating. I think they got married before she finished that other year. And it was a great help to us in trying to learn. I went to school until I got up in maybe the fifth or sixth grade. I did well. I could write. I could read. I can read but mathematics was my thing. I can do about as much adding up and subtracting in my head as I could with a pencil. Sometimes at church we'll be figuring up something and somebody might ask me how many was that. Before the ones with the pencil, book and pencil could figure it up I could tell them out of my head how much it was.

59. **Murphy:** That's not me. (Laughter)

60. **Johnny Allen:** But like I said, the Lord was good to me. I got along good at work. Most everywhere I work they respect me
because I had a little knowledge you know. And you know there's one thing you have to do is to learn how to get along with people. Just because maybe they put you over four or five men you don't have to be kicking them around and roughing them up and things like that. You can get what you want done done. So I got along real good. I didn't have a chance to finish school after my father died but I took advantage of what chance I had, I'll put it that way.

61. Murphy: So when desegregation and everything started happening, was there some positive aspects to that?

62. Ida Allen: Yeah it was because you see you go in a store to buy anything or whatnot you could be there standing with your stuff there if the white come in they'd wait on the white first.

63. Murphy: They still do sometimes.

64. Ida Allen: Yeah and you can see it coming back. You can see it coming back now gradually. So that didn't worry me because see I've done been through it. A lot of people throw their stuff down and walk on out of the store, right out the door. But I say well, change is going to come. I didn't know I was going to live this long to be eighty-one, you know, near about
to see the changes. I enjoy the integration, I enjoy it. But our children went wild.

65. **Murphy:** Do you think it was just people in general or just the black children?

66. **Ida Allen:** Look like our black children got more wild because they started mixing with the whites and they learn so much. They learn so much of the different low, dirty things that black people didn't do when we was coming up. Because see I work around them and I know their children are mischievious. Yeah I work among them and I know this is true and I see it then. But it happened most of my children was just about grown. I could talk to them and how and what. But the younger children here now they just think what the white child says is right. It's a lot of them, they're brainwashed. A lot of our kids I've talked to. I have some to say I wish I was white. I say don't ever say that!

67. **Murphy:** People didn't think like that before?

68. **Ida Allen:** I say don't ever say that. When we were coming up we didn't think nothing like that. We loved the black. When the white come, whether it was the insurance man or the white doctor or whatnot, and that was that. We didn't see them no more.
69. Murphy: You kind of lived just separately?

70. Johnny Allen: Right. We were living completely separate, separate. And the white children, the school they was going to they used to drive on buggies and they'd ride to school. We always been walking to school unless our parents take us on the wagon or something like that rainy days, too wet for them to do any field work. We didn't worry about the whites. How the children now just come down on there about, I'll tell you the truth that's why a lot of our children are in trouble.

71. Murphy: Because they're so worried about...?

72. Ida Allen: Un-huh. Think they're above. I say you just be thankful for who you are and your parents. Look at your parents. There's a lot of them don't look after their parents.

73. Johnny Allen: I didn't have that problem.

74. Ida Allen: A lot of these children don't look after their parents.

75. Johnny Allen: I didn't have that problem. Just like if I was in a store buying something and they go over there to wait on the white I tell them hey, I've been here waiting before them. I never was afraid and I always would speak up to them. I never
did have that problem. And you see just like the black children and the white children, you see them ( ). The whites are just as bad as the blacks. You see what I'm talking about? Ain't no different than me. You can go out to the prison and find just as many whites out there as it is blacks. Or maybe more whites than it is blacks. See what I'm talking about? I didn't have any trouble. I know my wife and I went in a store one time and some little white punk called me a boy.

76. **Murphy**: I want to hear about it.

77. **Johnny Allen**: When I got through with him he didn't call me a boy. When I come out my wife said I made her ashamed. I tell her you better be glad you're with me. I would have knocked that punk in the mouth if you wasn't with me. See what I'm talking about? One thing about me, I wasn't afraid of white people. They didn't look no different to me. On my job I didn't pay white people no attention. If they talk to me negative I might curse them out. See what I'm talking about? A white guy told me one time he said the best way to get along on a job is don't give a so-and-so-and-so. Once people find out you don't care and you will speak your mind, they'll handle you with gloves.
78. Murphy: Give you respect.

79. Johnny Allen: They'll respect you. They might not like you but they'll respect you.

80. Ida Allen: They always have respected me because I've always carried myself in a position for them to respect me. I always let them know I was proud of who I was. I didn't want to be nobody else but who I was.

81. Murphy: You were raised like that.

82. Ida Allen: Yeah, that's how I was raised. I didn't care what you have, didn't worry me. Only what I had. The only thing I was jealous over, you couldn't beat me working or you couldn't beat me doing domestic work, keeping my place clean, keeping my children clean and healthy to go to school.

83. Murphy: You had pride.

84. Ida Allen: I had that pride and I've still got it. I've still got it. I've still got it. And a lot of them says Mrs. Allen, I don't know why you've got so ( ). I say well it's just in me. God just helps me to keep it because He knows that's me. That's just me. And I pray God just keeps me this way until I die. I don't have nothing burdening me down. I sit out there on that front porch and I feel just as free as I
can be. I tell them I'm blessed with my six boys and I ain't never had to went down to the courthouse, you know, court. They didn't get into nothing. When they finished Lincoln High School, there was six. Our family now was real poor. You can't send anybody to college. Five went in service. And that's how when they come back then they went to different techs and got their career in electricity and working for the telephone company and different things. And supervisor at the grocery store. They went to school and learned that after they, on their own. ( ) mama said so and so. I let them know when they finished we wasn't able to send them because we couldn't send six. We knowed that.

85. Murphy: They were real close in age?

86. Ida Allen: Yeah. The first ones was very close. The three was about three years apart but the other ones was very close. So today they've got a clear conscious toward us. We didn't do no more for one than we did for the others. So you know that was the only thing I was concerned about. You know sometimes you can put one child a little further because you know he probably is a little smarter. Then you make the other ones back up. But we didn't do that.

87. Murphy: You tried to be fair?
88. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, they all was on the level. You know every fellah had a different mind, had different knowledge. And that was just it. Because see I grewed up in a large family and I was well educated to that.

89. **Murphy:** Your father and step mother were fair?

90. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, un-huh, yeah. And they took care of us. We didn't have to worry about it. They'd see that we had food and shelter over our head, a place to stay. And prepared for it to be warm through the winter and whatnot, making quilts and cutting wood and having a good, big fire. Father had a chimney, mostly a fireplace then.

91. **Murphy:** Could you tell me about making quilts?

92. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, I used to make a lot of them when I first married. The scraps were left off of material and whatnot, then used to buy it in bundles, scraps and things from the store. Then these ladies home's after we stopped having children, we'd piece up, put them together and put it in this long strip and then after that we sewed all of it together until we'd get it wide enough for a quilt. And then we would go to one house to visit and we'd put it down on the floor and we'd get to admiring it, get the cotton and pad it out and put the cotton down and pad it out then spread the top over it.
Then we'd get out and baste it. Get on our knees on the floor and baste it on like that. Then we'd roll it on an ironing board, a long board we used to have, a long ironing board. Then we'd be up there and we would start making a little, and we start sewing the quilt as we'd get it together. Go out to one another's house and help and do things like that. And just like the children, like one gets married, we knew what we had to do when we'd get an invitation and whatnot. We'd bake cakes, make quilts and give them, stuff like that. Buy dishes and stuff would go on like that. This is a family tie back then. You know what they need. So this was happy and now I'll tell you the truth, you see the mothers so far apart now. And that's some of the problem with the kids.

93. **Murphy:** There's no community link?

94. **Ida Allen:** No communication with mothers like that. I mind a lot of mother's children. They was working and I had children, I had to stay home. Those little children would come with their little sandwich and they'd stay with me until their mother would knock off of work, stay there and play with my children under the tree shade and whatnot and their mother would come and pick them up and go on. But now you can't get nobody to do that. So jealous. I never was jealous. I say I always feel good. What God intends for me to have I'm going to get
that and nobody else is going to get it but me. And sure enough.

95. Murphy: So people could depend on each other a lot?

96. Ida Allen: Oh yeah, and they're going to be cared for too, not ill treated. They'd treat those children just like how they'd treat their own. If they'd get sleepy, none of the kids didn't get in the bed. They'd get a big quilt and spread it out on the floor and everybody would lay down on this floor and sleep, have their nap. Then they'd wake up and whatnot, then they'd have their lunch and they'd go on back outdoors and play. Happy. I really, it hurts me now to see just how far our black race changed from their inheritance. That's what hurts me. Because really some of our race have really tried to be white.

97. Murphy: And you think that started with integration?

98. Ida Allen: After, yeah, and getting into jobs with a little pay a little more. They thought they were above others who didn't have the education or whatnot to get into these places and whatnot. Regardless what line of work they do, you ought to remember your inheritance. I'm a Negro. Always remember that. I don't care how bright you is, if one fellah's black and the other one's white, you're a Negro. I went to school
with a lot of them and I was raised with a lot of them. I was educated to that. That's why I know they think that they was more than I was.

99. Murphy: There were a lot of mixed children?

100. Ida Allen: Yeah, plenty of mixed children back then. Because you see they could take advantage of a lot of the women. They was the cook. Mostly when you bring that one out of the field as the cook, it was those people who were going to concubine or whatnot, that's their friend. And a lot of them back at that time wasn't married. Most of the white guys wouldn't marry. Wouldn't marry like they do now. So that's the reason why the races got so mixed up. That's really how it got mixed up back in there.

101. Murphy: They did that from slavery.

102. Ida Allen: Yeah, just come right straight on. It almost was just like slavery. They just didn't sell them. Just wasn't selling. But a lot of times if you had no place to stay you had to get a house on the place or whatnot, you had to dance by the music because you couldn't go nowhere yourself. A white over there got a plantation and land, he's got tenant houses and stuff over there, if you go and mess with this man he'd want to know your reason and he ain't ignoring his, just
like they is today. They always stick together. And our people can't say that.

103. **Murphy:** We'd do the same thing.

104. **Ida Allen:** Un-huh. We need to stick together and it would be a better community. I think our children would learn and respect education more. Because a lot of our parents, I was in the midst of a lot of telling well about the teacher, she was this and that, I know when she did this then. I say don't tell a child that. You know if she ain't had no education, the teacher didn't have no education. I say don't brainwash them with that. You know what I used to always tell my children? If they say that about a person I'd say now, the teacher got her education, you'd better get yours. Always respect her, respect him. They're trying to teach you and learn you and one day you can step in the same shoes they're in. But if you rebel, how are you going to learn. If you're mean to the teacher or nasty to the teacher, who will want to bother with you.

105. **Murphy:** And your parents the same.

106. **Ida Allen:** Parents pushing them. Now a child of mind didn't never come to me and say what I say about a teacher. There's a good many teachers they went through, I knowed them when
they wasn't teachers. I tell them all you do is go to school and what's for you you'll get it. And my God has blessed my six boys. They take my teachings and they went on. And them six boys is blessed. The Lord has blessed them. They all have good jobs and make a good living.

107. **Murphy:** When you were young was church different as well?

108. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, church was different.

109. **Murphy:** How was it different?

110. **Ida Allen:** Church was much different. People were loving. Just what you had, if it's a gingham dress or homespun dress, you were good and clean, you would wash it and iron and starch it up and you'd go on to church. If your hair was braided you were respect, didn't matter who had their hair fixed you was to church and love was there. And the church was full and used to walk.

111. **Murphy:** How far was your church?

112. **Ida Allen:** About three miles or more. We used to walk. The morning would go and we'd get back in the afternoon, the sun was ready to go down.

113. **Murphy:** What kind of church was it?
Ida Allen: African Methodist Church, A.M.E. African Methodist Church, un-huh. I was born and raised, I've always been an African Methodist. And we used to walk and go to church and come back and we'd meet one another and be glad. We had a little bag to put our shoes in, rags to dust them, wipe the dirt and stuff off, put the stockings on and shoes and go on in the church. And we were happy. Happy, ain't been none of this going on. But I see so much changes sometimes. I don't think about it now. I try to get it off my mind, put it behind me. I can't let it rely on me now. I hear it in this ear and it goes out the next because I know it ain't going to hold up. Church was different. Church has got too much politician in it. That's what killed it.

Murphy: It was more like a social community?

Ida Allen: Yeah, like people was social about going for help, you know, get some help they have a problem. Somebody could help them with their problems.

Murphy: You could turn to the church.

Ida Allen: Yeah, you could go to them. But now you will have problems and people forget all your problems and don't help you and go and talk politics. And don't help. But see it hadn't been like that back then. Hadn't been like that. So
it's just a big change. I still go to church and whatnot.
I'm the same way. I still go to church. I enjoy it and whatnot, straight and plain just like I was raised. Church don't get no modern. That's a foundation. It don't get no modern. It stays as one thing. It's a foundation. If you are a religious person, you're a religious person. If you's a devil, you's a devil. That's all it takes. And you know right from wrong and that's me. And the church was never no place to play. I always had respect for any church I go in. You won't see me gab, gab, gabbing and looking back to see what this is looking at. Un-uh, I don't. Half the time I don't know who's been to church. Because that's just the way I was raised. That's just the way I was raised and I'm still old fashioned. They're always telling me Mrs. Allen, you're from the old field. I say yeah and I'm planning to stay in the old field. And I don't have no problem with nobody. I said one thing if you do right, that's all you've got to do, right don't wrong. Right's going to stand up. And truth's going to stand up. I found out that. But I always tell my children always try to tell the truth. I say if you can't help a person, tell them right then, no, I won't have time. Don't promise them and know you're not going to do it.
119. **Murphy:** Your promises meant something when you were growing up. It was important?

120. **Ida Allen:** Yeah and people looking forward for you to come to help them and you don't never come out. Don't ever tell people that. If you know you're already occupied in something else, don't never tell people you can come become you done might endanger somebody's health. You can't be but one place. Now if you can work it into another day when I have spare time I'll come help you. That's fine for me and that's ( ). If you're asking somebody, well let me think, let me see if I've got any plans or whatnot, then I say no I can't but I could help you such-and-such a day if you want me to. And I'm still that way. I try to be truthful because I want you to be truthful to me. I don't want to be sitting there, got everything laid out there waiting for me and you to work and do something together and I never see you. And I think that's a lot of the problem now, disappointment. Got a lot of people confused. Disappointment, confusion, I think causes a lot of people contrary (End of Side A)

121. **Side 2**

122. **Ida Allen:** No woman back in my time used to drink and stuff that would go on there, it didn't affect me. Because most of the
time the men had most of that, they used to order it and then mostly do that most Christmases. They didn't have the money. So it was scarce. It wasn't plentiful. And then you had to work. Used to work from sun to sun. You didn't go out no hour then. When the sun get up where you could see you worked til it go down where you can't see. You get home you eat and you get in your bed. So that just was life back along when I was growing up.

123. **Murphy:** So when you got married you moved to Sumter?

124. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, I moved to Sumter.

125. **Murphy:** And what was Sumter like then?

126. **Ida Allen:** It was very nice, you know. ( ), you know, horse and buggies.

127. **Murphy:** What year did you move here?

128. **Ida Allen:** 1933. 1933 when I got married, seventeenth day of December. We've been married sixty-one years December coming.

129. **Murphy:** That's amazing.

130. **Ida Allen:** Sixty-one years. Because Leroy will be sixty next month, my oldest son.
Murphy: That's my dad's name, LeRoy. He'll be sixty-one, just turned sixty-one.

Ida Allen: So I tell them the only thing that changes me, I'm getting old and getting gray and getting crippled. That's all. Because work, I love to work. I love to work. I could lay down and sleep and I could get right up and start right back to work.

Murphy: So you worked on the base?

Ida Allen: Yeah, I worked domestic work. I worked with different generals, colonels, majors and whatnot. And I worked for them and I'd keep their children when they went on vacation. And a lot of times I would hear, some of them would be speaking about children, about black maids and whatnot taking care of children. I say it might be happening now but back along when I was doing that type of work, that's the best attention and care those white children ever had, when they had a black maid. I'm a living witness of that and those children didn't know nothing. And a lot of times them children wasn't smart. I'd teach the kids their lessons with my little education I had. That was a colonel's children too, two little girls and a little boy and they loved me. And they went away and they come back they was grown and they come to my house. They was
wanting me to come out there. I went out to the base ( ).

They were hugging me and whatnot, they always know me.

Because I was nice to them just like I was to my own children, real nice to them. I'd tell them different little things to scare them. I ain't never had to whip them, nothing like that. I'd always tell them I was going to leave them home, leave them there by theirself. And they would say is you going home. I'd say yeah, I'm going home. And that's all I had to say. I didn't have to touch them and they'd just sit there and be quiet, be glad to see me. And the little babies they'd pull my clothes off me, didn't want to go to their mother when I was fixing to come home.

135. Murphy: You ended up spending more time with them.

136. Ida Allen: Yeah because they didn't bother with their children. Sometimes I look back, I don't know where you come from or what city but I know a lot of them, that's the only help they had was black maids to mind those children. You didn't find no white, very few.

137. Murphy: No white people, no white women didn't?

138. Ida Allen: No, they didn't mind one another's children. They didn't do it. Other's might have had to get some other nationality who would come in this country. You see we had a
lot of them got in trouble about that, didn't pay no tax on them. You see that didn't you?

139. *Murphy:* Just recently.

140. *Ida Allen:* Un-huh. Yeah, you see a lot of them got in trouble about that because see they just paid the blacks a flat salary or whatnot for doing a day's work. But if you stay, if they asked you back, they want to go to a party or something like New Year's or whatnot like that, they'd always tell me if I'd go baby-sit for them like when they go out for New Year's I'm going to spend the night. Because they're not bringing me home when they're going to go out there and drink and get drunk. I always had my gowns. I'm going to spend the night. And you all can stay overnight wherever you all is, leave the children home, don't make no difference. I was planned to that. I let them know who I was. I was intelligent. I wasn't no trash. I let them know that, who I was. And I didn't want nothing out of their house but what they give me.

141. *Murphy:* Did they used to try to give you stuff?

142. *Ida Allen:* No, we'd get along real good. And they were very nice people, giving me nice gifts and different things. They were very nice to me because I was nice to their children.
Murphy: But you weren't like coveting their stuff?

Ida Allen: No. And you know, out of the ten years or whatnot, I'd get along with them and one didn't and never speak an unpleasant word to me, a man, whatnot. They'd bring me home all hours of night. As I always tell ( ), there was no fly me because I was a neatly dressed black woman. Neatly dressed black woman when I was to work and I never had no problem. They always had respect for me. I can give them that and I worked for many families from all over the world.

Murphy: So some of them were Army families?

Ida Allen: All I worked for were service people from California, Chicago and way out, Seattle, Washington.

Murphy: Did they act differently than white people from around here?

Ida Allen: Yeah, much differently, very nice. Because a lot of them like lunch time when the wife and children sit to the table and eat and whatnot - and see a lot of these others, the ones live around here, they didn't want you to. I didn't want to eat because if I cooked it I done eat before you eat. I be washing up the pots and getting the kitchen cleaned up where I could go. I done eat. So I always is a step ahead. Because
I just was smart, you know, I done all the stuff ahead and whatnot and go on.

149. **Murphy**: So the white people from different areas acted differently?

150. **Ida Allen**: Yeah and a lot of them when they come up they were surprised after they'd meet some of their friends here around Sumter, they were shocked and they tried to ask me different things. And I said well, I didn't work for them. I had worked for some from here but I didn't tell them. White is white. (Laughter) I had good common sense to know that. I said well, I ain't worked for too many because I had so many children, I had to mind my children. I had to wash and iron and do the laundry and stuff like that for them but I didn't have to work in their house. I always was mingling with them and getting along with them. They knew who I was. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it because when leave there I was going home. That was it.

151. **Murphy**: Did you make pretty good money?

152. **Ida Allen**: Well no, it wasn't too much money. It wasn't too much money in that job. By the time they get into really to wages and different things like that I was ready to stop. They had to pay by the hour and stuff like that and mostly after that
then they didn't work but four hours after they started paying that four hours. I worked didn't work for none of that time. I worked back mostly when women was going to play bridge, when they'd go play golf and stuff I'd be there all day.

153.Murphy: So they would just pay you for the day?

154.Ida Allen: Yeah, you know, just pay day by day for working for them. It was a help for me. My husband, he was working and that little extra change I made that would help out for the children and he could, you know, otherwise put something in their hands to go to school. I wasn't expecting no big salary I don't think because there wasn't no demand on no price, wages then for domestic work. So when they did start with the social security and whatnot going on like that, well a lot of them then they got stricter now, but it was about four hours because they had to pay the price. But see I didn't work under none of that because there wasn't a bigger house full of things there for me to do in four hours and I come out.

155.Murphy: You had to work real hard in four hours.

156.Ida Allen: Yeah, I'd rather stay all day and do whatever I had to do, if I had to wash and iron and whatnot and take care of the children, clean the house, I've got time to do that and rest a little bit too. But four hours you're just running just like
a clock. And then with tension, it's a tension, try to work without a (   ) and stuff like that. I come out from there then.

157. Murphy: About what year did you stop?

158. Ida Allen: Like about the same time he did. I was lacking some quarters, I was lacking three quarters for my social security and whatnot. But when I was old enough I come out and filed on his.

159. Murphy: So like in the late 1950's?

160. Ida Allen: Un-huh. (   ), what year you retire?

161. Murphy: He said 1969 earlier.

162. Ida Allen: Well, that's about right, same time. I come out and he always teased me, he said well you ain't old enough yet to retire. I said well, you're home, I'll go home and cook for you. So I hadn't worked out no more other than keeping my grandchildren. So life was good. I didn't suffer. Had some sick spells, you know, raising my children.

163. Murphy: When you would get sick would you go to, was there a white doctor that you'd go to?
Ida Allen: Yes, I have had white doctors and black doctors. I had some black doctors too. I've gone to two black doctors, Dr. Burnette and Dr. Williams.

Murphy: And they were from right around here?

Ida Allen: Un-huh, right here in Sumter. After they died then I went to white doctors. It wasn't nothing but white doctors after that and they were very nice. The one I'm with now is very good.

Murphy: Was it during segregation when you went to the white doctors or was it after?

Ida Allen: Well, I went to some when it was segregated.

Murphy: So they had separate waiting rooms?

Ida Allen: Separate rooms, un-huh.

Murphy: And you come in a separate door?

Ida Allen: Sometimes you sit there and sit there and sit there and sit there. Had to go in a different door. The white was a different door and they were sitting over in their part, over in another place. You didn't see them. You were sitting over here in your dark room on this side. So finally get to
integration and all was sitting, make it large and then you could sit as far off as you wanted but it was in one place.

173. Murphy: So did a doctor deliver your babies?

174. Ida Allen: No, a midwife.

175. Murphy: She'd come to your house?

176. Ida Allen: None of my children was born at no hospital. All at home.

177. Murphy: So most people had midwives at that time?

178. Ida Allen: Yeah, at that time and then after that then they tried to make a ( ) but they wanted to condemn the midwives and they wanted you to go to the hospital. But looked like children was more safer when you had a good midwife and the mother was in better health too with the midwife instead of going to the hospital.

179. Murphy: So how would the midwife come to know how to deliver a baby?

180. Ida Allen: See they got their training just like a doctor did.

181. Murphy: So they would study under another midwife or they'd go away to school?
Ida Allen: Like a doctor, a hospital and stuff, they'd get training to know how to deliver the baby, what to do for the baby, how to take care of him, how to take care of the mother and whatnot. It was a heap more healthier mother back then.

Murphy: They're trying to go back to it now.

Ida Allen: And children too. You didn't find babies had large navels because they'd put bands on them but hospitals don't do that.

Murphy: So would people when they would get sick, would they always go to the doctor?

Ida Allen: You had to go to the doctor three months after you were pregnant. Three months you would have to go to the doctor for the doctor to check you and then he'd watch your pressure and different things and your weight and go on like that. Then the midwife would visit you and tell you certain things to eat, you know, certain things to don't do and go on like that.

Murphy: My mother told me once that she had ringworm when she was little and her mother called in a root doctor who made like teas for her. Did they have that too?
188. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, yeah, also made that for ringworm and stuff like that. A lot of us could get this here green walnuts, the green walnuts and they would rub the juice on the ringworm. That would cure it, the juice out of that.

189. **Murphy:** So you wouldn't always have to go necessarily?

190. **Ida Allen:** No, you didn't necessarily have to go to a doctor because most of your mothers and grandmothers back in those days in the spring of the year they used to go in the woods, used to get herbs. And they would come back home and they used to put it in a bottle and the ones what couldn't get some kind of white whiskey to go in it they'd put water on it. And see they used them for different things to give it to their children.

191. **Murphy:** And it worked?

192. **Ida Allen:** Yeah, didn't have to go to no doctor. Just like my children I didn't send them to no doctor no more than when they had to go to school and had to get their different shots. Now they'd give the shots at school then. Because me and a girl was talking about it, she didn't know. Children had better health back then than it is now. A lot of people don't take these children down to the health department and get their treatment like they're supposed to. But when they go to
school the teacher will send a note to the mother or daddy about the nurse going to be there and the children would be to school and they'd get their vaccinations. All this stuff, shots right at school. So that's why children were so much more healthy, the older children like my children than children are now. Because a lot of these children ain't getting their shots.

193. Murphy: They slip through the system and they don't know.

194. Ida Allen: No, no. See there are so many young mothers and single mothers having children now and a lot of them don't ( ). They know alright but they just don't go take them. They just don't take them. Then when they get to school, some of them they can't hardly get them in school because they don't have the work, the paperwork where they've had their shots and stuff so they can't take them in school. So then the poor child have to get all them different shots and stuff before they can get in school because that's the law now.

195. Murphy: Mr. Allen, I wanted to ask you about church, what you remember about church when you were real young, like with your family.

196. Johnny Allen: See I told you my family died when they was young and I can't remember whether I joined a church. Before my
parents died or nothing I can't remember. I do remember after
my mother died that I joined the A.M.E. church, Allen's
Chapel. I had a good church.

197. Murphy: What was it like?

198. Johnny Allen: Well, my first assignment was the president (  )
and the Sunday School teacher for the senior class. That
would be the grown up class (  ). And I was one of the
superintendents and I stayed there about thirty years. Nobody
wanted it, that's why, a lot of work.

199. Murphy: My father does that.

200. Johnny Allen: And I was president of the gospel choir, president
of (  ) board. I was born to work. And then after I got able
to sort of travel I got out in the connection with those
people as superintendent of the Sunday School district. Had
about twenty-three or four churches I had to visit and make a
note of my groups and everything. Later I was president of
the city organization. And I made about seven, eight or nine
trips to the general conference as a delegate. That's the
whole connection. I had a good church life. The president of
the state, for the organization of the state, (  ) his former
president, these years was up the first of this month, first
of June so we had to make another (  ). We went to Greenville
and that's where the state meeting was. Left Thursday night and you got in there Friday morning and Saturday election. You know when you're in the, you might say in the government of the church, then you can kind of understand the operation of the church. A lot of people grumble about you asking for so much money and it costs so much money but they forgot he moved here in 1963 and it's 1995 so he's been there about forty-three years. When he came there the light bill was about ten dollars a month. (Laughter) See what I'm talking about?

201. Murphy: Yeah.

202. Johnny Allen: Now it's a hundred or better. You don't grumble about that. Why do you want to grumble about the church. Got expenses just like the home (   ). But everybody mostly in South Carolina know me and I know about everybody. When I go to a church they don't have to ask me, nobody don't have to ask me who I am. (   ) because I've been (   ). I don't run my mouth you know just to be running it. I just talk. You learn how to talk and you learn how to do things by sitting down in conversations with people and listen to them talking. The minister told me one time he said Mr. Allen, said you know all these people and most people can get off to get to those meetings. I hear a lot of people complaining about they
having such a time getting off. I said well I didn't teach school. I worked to a furniture factory. He said I thought you were a school teacher over at the junior high school. I said no. But you don't have to run your mouth and go on. Just be yourself, that's all you have to do and people will recognize you. Sometimes they maybe think you, I know a white guy sitting down here in (    ) church. I used to go all the churches, attend all the churches. I got to go downtown on Monday to take care of some business. You can go down there like I'm going with you. Whatever I had on Sunday I'd put it on Monday to go down there and sit down and talk intelligently.

203.Murphy: Look your best.

204.Johnny Allen: Yeah. So he asked me what kind of work you do. I said I work for the furniture business. He said man, I thought you were doing some kind of federal work.

205.Murphy: You present yourself.

206.Johnny Allen: Yeah, sometimes people pay attention to how we dress and how we talk and things like that you know. And like I say, a lot of people that I trade business with would think that, the church was Allen's Chapel and was my name because my last name was Allen, they thought the church was named for me.
(Laughter) So I told them no, the church had that name before I got there. They said well you're a good man. If it was named for you ( ), you're a good man. But people look at you and sometimes try to set you up. I had a good life though, good church life. People respect me because I respect people.

207. **Murphy:** Thank you very much.