Interview with Sue Kelker Russell

August 5, 1994
Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Tallahassee (Fla.)

**Interviewer:** Paul Ortiz
**ID:** btvct10131
**Interview Number:** 1112

SUGGESTED CITATION

Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South
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.

ORIGINAL PROJECT

COLLECTION LOCATION & RESEARCH ASSISTANCE
John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History and Culture
at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

The materials in this collection are made available for use in research, teaching and private study. Texts and recordings from this collection may not be used for any commercial purpose without prior permission. When use is made of these texts and recordings, it is the responsibility of the user to obtain additional permissions as necessary and to observe the stated access policy, the laws of copyright and the educational fair use guidelines.

http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/behindtheveil
Interview with
Sue Russell

Tallahassee, Florida
August 5, 1994

Interviewed by
Paul Ortiz

Unedited Transcript by
1. **Ortiz:** Mrs. Russell, could you tell me about where you were born and what it was like to grow up in the area that you lived in.

2. **Russell:** When I was born?

3. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

4. **Russell:** I was born August 25, 1909.

5. **Ortiz:** And were you born in this area?

6. **Russell:** In Milton, Florida.

7. **Ortiz:** In Milton, Florida.

8. **Russell:** Uh huh. Santa Rosa County.

9. **Ortiz:** What are your earliest childhood memories of Milton?

10. **Russell:** Well, it wasn't a big town and we got along fairly well. The biggest problem we had was school problem I guess, because after we finished the 6th grade there. Well, they used to call us Negroes then. We couldn't go to school with the whites. We had to go to Escambia County, to Pensacola to school. We didn't have a high school in Milton and we had to leave Milton for Escambia or go somewhere else if we wanted to finish high school. And, that was about, you knowed you had the race problem, but it was just about, I guess, like every other, small southern town. Whites had their areas and blacks theirs. Blacks was, of course, subservient to whites, so to speak. But, there were a lot of good whites who were

Sue Russell
good to what they called their special Negroes, or special blacks. And, I never suffered any hardships as a child though, cause I guess I didn't know. My mother was a teacher and my father was a brick mason. And he kept up houses for a woman there who had several homes, she was white, in the Escambia County. He'd leave every Monday morning and go and she was Miss Bessie. And he was always employed. He would come home, and she would bring him home in the afternoons and pick him up every morning. And my mother, I said, she taught school and she always insisted on us going to school. So I really didn't have as much of a problem as a lot of kids there, but most of them had problems.

11. Ortiz: What kind of problems did they have?

12. Russell: I'd say poverty was the main thing, because if you didn't work for the, the females mostly worked in the kitchens and their children helped them around in areas like that. But, other than that I don't know of any special problems we had other than, you know, white kids fighting black kids when they'd meet in the streets and that kind of thing. But other than that, I don't know of any real special problems they had.

13. Ortiz: Now had your family originally moved to Milton?

14. Russell: Beg your pardon?

15. Ortiz: Had your family moved to Milton? In other words, were your grandparents from Milton or had they come recently to that part of Florida?

16. Russell: Well, my family was reared there as far as I know it.

Sue Russell
17. **Ortiz:** So, Mrs. Russell, did you know your grandparents?

18. **Russell:** Huh?

19. **Ortiz:** Did you know your grandparents?

20. **Russell:** I knew my grandmother on my father's side and she lived to be 96 years old and, but I never knew my mother's people.

21. **Ortiz:** Do you remember stories about your grandmother, about her upbringing?

22. **Russell:** Remember what?

23. **Ortiz:** Stories about your grandmother's upbringing. Did she talk to you or would other people talk to you about her?

24. **Russell:** Well, she was, my father's mother was very, very fair. you wouldn't be able to tell her from whites anyway and she was always treated like one and she was never mistreated as such. And that's why she got along with them so well, because she was never mistreated as one. I was trying to think of the name of the professor here who wrote the history of my father's people. The Kelkers. K-e-l-k-e-r-s. And, they were brought over here, he was brought over here by the Spaniards. I think I got, well, in fact I know I have, a newspaper here they sent us. He wrote the history of my father's people. But I should have really looked that up. We got so much junk. But as I say, since my sight has been so poor and what not, but I'll ask my brother about it who lives next door to me. He has a copy also. Yeah. And I'll get that. See if I can find the history of my father's people, the Kelkers.
25. Ortiz: Right off hand do you know a few stories about your father's people?

26. Russell: Huh?

27. Ortiz: Right off hand do you know a few stories about your father's people? You said that they came, they were brought over by the Spaniards?

28. Russell: My father's people?

29. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

30. Russell: What did you say about them?

31. Ortiz: You said they were brought over by the Spaniards?


33. Ortiz: Okay.

34. Russell: Yeah. And, I've got, I have that paper. I'll look in there. I didn't have any idea, you know, as to what you would be asking or what not, but I'll look that paper up and I'll give it to Eton. My family history, of my father's people. I have that.

35. (interruption - visitor)

36. Ortiz: Mrs. Russell, what was childhood like in Milton?

37. Russell: My childhood?
38. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

39. **Russell:** I had a very good childhood, frankly, because there was seven of us. I came from a family of seven and as I said my parents were always able to provide for us and we went to school in Milton, as I said, through the 6th grade. And my mother had to send us to Pensacola to live with relatives over there to finish high school and all of us finished high school. In fact, all of us have gone to college and what not. I had a very good childhood comparatively speaking to what a lot of them had there, because it was rough. Milton was kind of a poor. It was a sawmill town and it was kind of a poor place so to speak, but my childhood as I tell them, I thought I was living all right. I didn't know the difference.

40. **Ortiz:** What kinds of things would you do as a child? Would you have time to play?

41. **Russell:** Huh?

42. **Ortiz:** Would you have time to play? Would you have favorite games?

43. **Russell:** Oh yeah. We had time to play. Sure. We had time to play. We played all the time, you know, after school, and what not. Of course, my mother was a very disciplinarian.

44. **Ortiz:** Uh huh.

45. **Russell:** Yeah. Did all that, but on Saturdays we would have to get things together for Sunday school. We had to go on church on Sundays. That was just understood that we went to Sunday school. And on Saturdays we used to have to wash our ribbons and press them

Sue Russell
and she saw to that. She was a disciplinary, my mother was and my father let her rear the children. He provided for us, but he let her rear the children. They were very good parents. Very good parents.

46. Ortiz: Who was responsible for discipline in the house?

47. Russell: Mama. Mama. There were six girls and just one boy and he was the baby and anytime you would get out of line, he would say, all right I'm going to send you to your mama. And she disciplined too, because you see, she was a teacher and she was accustomed to that. But she did the discipline, but he definitely was there and provided for us. It was not a divided family at all.

48. Ortiz: Was that true in terms of financial decisions?

49. Russell: Yeah, as far as I know. Now I don't know how they divided their, how they correlated their finances, but I guess they got it done.

50. Ortiz: When you were a child would your family travel a lot throughout Florida?

51. Russell: Would they what?

52. Ortiz: Would you travel, go on trips?

53. Russell: No, we didn't travel, because as I say I guess there was too many of us. We didn't do any traveling.

54. Ortiz: And Mrs. Russell, which church did you attend?
55. **Russell**: Isaiah Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. We were all christened in that church.

56. **Ortiz**: Was that a large congregation in Milton?

57. **Russell**: Well, it was the largest Methodist congregation for blacks there. Yes.

58. **Ortiz**: What kinds of events or activities would the church sponsor?

59. **Russell**: The church?

60. **Ortiz**: Yes 'mam.

61. **Russell**: We used to have Christmas programs, Easter programs, and we used to have what they call Christian endeavor. That was a program sponsored on Sunday evenings. That's about all I remember as groups.

62. **Ortiz**: And Mrs. Russell did your family live in a neighborhood with predominately black people?

63. **Russell**: Predominately black people.

64. **Ortiz**: And was that a close knit neighborhood.

65. **Russell**: Yes it was. Very. Everybody looked after everybody. All the neighbors looked out for each other. My mother, as I said, she whipped a neighbor's child as quickly as she'd whip her own and the neighbors would do the same thing. Spank me and take me to mama and if I told the truth, mama would spank me for having done something. They were very close. Very close. Uh huh. They didn't have any child abuse then. They had child rearing.
66. **Ortiz:** Do you remember any particular neighbors that your parents would go over and visit?

67. **Russell:** Perhaps what?

68. **Ortiz:** Go over and visit and have a lot of communication with.

69. **Russell:** I don't quite get your question.

70. **Ortiz:** Do you remember any neighbors in particular that kind of stand out?

71. **Russell:** Between my mother and that neighbor?

72. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

73. **Russell:** Well, as I said they were a very close knit neighborhood. I don't remember any special neighbors because she had a sister who lived next door and if she had to go some place or something she'd always leave us with her. But, all the neighbors seemed to have been just about equally related as far as I can recall. I don't, now some were less, some were what I guess I would say a little poorer than others. Yeah, because we had two neighbors who the mother was ill. I remember we used to call her Miss Hun and she had three children and I don't recall their father period, but she was trying to rear them and everybody in the neighborhood would try to help her with them. She was about the worse off that I know of, but they looked out for her.

74. **Ortiz:** Was there any controversies or disputes in the neighborhood?

75. **Russell:** Speech?
76. **Ortiz:** Disputes or like controversies or arguments in that neighborhood?

77. **Russell:** Only children. You know how children fight each other over games and toys. Because, see, we had to provide our own games and what not then. We couldn't go in the stores like they do now. They have Christmas the year round in these stores now. We used to shoot marbles and play what we called tea-togly, play cooking and cans. And I recall my father, we always had a little garden and he would give each of us a little plot and we'd plant our little vegetables. So out there. A cucumber get ripe. Wipe it on the side of your dress and eat it and it didn't have any cholesterol either. Or a tomato. And everybody would have to have their own little plot and of course, like kids do, if your tomato ripened before mine, I'd take it, but if they caught you taking it they'd come and spank you. And of course, we didn't have in-door toilets and what not. We had a pump and we kept the outside very clean, because I remember we used to have to put lime out there every Saturday and what not. We didn't have a washing machine. We had to get out there with a tub and a washboard and wash, but, as I said, each Saturday we had to wash and get our things ready for the next week and then had to hang them on the line. If the rain came, you just too bad. As it recall, it just wasn't the worse life in the world.

78. **Ortiz:** Where had your mother went to school at?

79. **Russell:** Where did my mother go to school?

80. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

81. **Russell:** Here.
82. **Ortiz:** Okay. Oh, she went to Florida A & M.

83. **Russell:** Yeah. It was called Florida Normal then.

84. **Ortiz:** Okay. Could you tell me something about your mother. What kind of person she was, what kind of values that she instilled in you.

85. **Russell:** About my mother?

86. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

87. **Russell:** Well, as I said, my mother was a teacher and she was a very good disciplinarian. She was immaculately clean. Immaculately clean. And that's what I say, every Saturday we had to get everything ready for the next week. There wasn't putting off getting ready. It was understood that when you got up Saturday morning and then after that if you had time to play you played. Well, the sisters, as I said, there was six sisters and a brother. And you know how sisters, maybe sisters fighting each other, pulling each other's hair and what not, and she would whip us in a minute though. She would whip us in a minute if we got out of line. But, my mother was very good to us. Very good to us. She wanted the best for us at all times. That's why I said when we finished the 6th grade and she wasn't satisfied with that because the white kids could go on through high school and she sent us, each of us, every one of us had to go to Pensacola and she saw that we went. And we stayed with relatives and friends over there who helped her out with us a whole lot.

88. **Ortiz:** Now Mrs. Russell, you said that your father was a brick layer.
89. **Russell:** A brick layer.

90. **Ortiz:** A brick layer. Now had he went to school for that profession?

91. **Russell:** No, my father didn't. He wasn't illiterate though. He was not illiterate, but he was suppose to be the best in Santa Rosa County for building chimneys. I think everybody would come to him. As I say he used to keep up the property for Mr. Bill Davidson who was a white man with a lot of property and my father worked for him and Mr. Davidson was very good to him. Whenever any of the kids got sick and needed a doctor, Mr. Davidson would send the doctor to him. And as I said, my father was very, very fair. He was just as fair as you are and a lot of people often mistook him for white. And he was always, he was fair. He didn't have the formal training that my mother had, but he was very good at his profession. Very good.

92. **Ortiz:** Mrs. Russell, would your parents try to protect you or shield you from racial discrimination when you were growing up?

93. **Russell:** Shield me from what?

94. **Ortiz:** Shield you from racial discrimination?

95. **Russell:** No. Well, I guess they had no choice so to speak. As I say, there were certain places we couldn't go and it was understood and she would always tell us, I recall very vividly, don't do anything you know you aren't suppose to do. That was her favorite by-word. Don't do anything you aren't suppose to do. And I guess by her being a teacher and being there in Santa Rosa County and having taught in fact most of her life we could go, we
could go to the store downtown and get a dress or a hat. Mr. Crinchman, Corn's. Any of
those places she had credit. But, as I said, now don't misunderstand me, we often had fights
with those whites a lot. We would pass on the walk. They would try to push us off the walk
and what no.

96. **Ortiz:** Oh really?

97. **Russell:** Yeah. And they would start a fight. Sometimes they would come out on us right,
but we used to have fights with them quite frequently.

98. **Ortiz:** When did you first become aware that there was a system of segregation in Milton?

99. **Russell:** When did I become aware that there was segregation?

100. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

101. **Russell:** I guess from the time I was big enough to know right from wrong. When we were
going to school, when I started school I guess, because the whites would go up there and
we'd go down there. And I guess that, but it was just one of the things at that time that I
guess you accepted and you knew that that was what would happen. So, but now segregation
really hit me more when I came to college.

102. **Ortiz:** Oh, okay.

103. **Russell:** Yeah, than it did any other time.

104. **Ortiz:** How did it hit you when you came to college?
Russell: Huh?

Ortiz: How did segregation hit you when you came to college?

Russell: Well, we, I didn't expect, I guess, as much of it as I found, because I thought that it would. But I remember very vividly Joe Camel was president of, we used to call the Florida State College for Women and used to have vespers every Sunday evening. And he would bring eight or ten of his girls out here and we would be sitting in the middle aisle and the seniors would be in the front and when they would come in, we were suppose to get up and move to the right and we did that for over a year or so. So one Sunday afternoon, Eunice Conley. She was Eunice Golden then. Eunice Golden Conley decided she was not going to move and she sat there and we wore middy blouses and skirts. And she said we had what we call the executive committee. President Lee, the Dean of Women, the Dean of Men, the Band Master, and the Choir Director formed the executive committee and we sat down there and we faced them. They sat on the stage and she sat there and Mrs. McGwin kept doing her hand like that. The rest of us just moved on back. So it was understood they would take those seats.

Ortiz: The white people?

Russell: Yes, the white girls that he brought. And Mrs. McGwin just kept doing that to Eunice and Eunice sat right there and she did not move. And so, after so many times she did that and she didn't move, then Joe Camel pointed to his girls to sit, stay where they were. So the next morning, Monday morning, we had an executive committee meeting and they had Eunice in there and they gave her 14 demerits. Fifteen demerits would send you home and
the rest and all of those who, those of us who were sitting behind Eunice went to this executive committee meeting to see what they were going to do to Eunice. And when we went, I think they were hesitant to do anything to her. I think they had planned to give her the 15 demerits. Now that's my thinking and that's what we thought, but after all of us who were sitting on that same seat went with her, they just gave her 14 and told her if she got another one she would go home. So she stayed. She say well you may as well give me the, I remember very well what she said, you may as well give me the other one now, because I'm going to sit there next Sunday and I'm not going to move. And we said if she sits there we going to sit with her. There were Philistine Frazier, there were nine of us and we, no, eleven of us. And the Sunday we made it our business to go early and we all sat there. So they didn't come. The girls didn't come that Sunday, but the following Sunday he brought them and they sat over there and didn't ask us to move. So that stopped that and that was my first encounter with real segregation, but it made you real angry. Real angry. And we got real angry with our Dean of Women, Mrs. McGwin, because she was white, so to speak. Her color was white, she was suppose to be black, but her color was white. And after that we weren't bothered with them any more, and after semester he didn't bring them out any more. So we weren't bothered with them any more. But we stopped that right there.

110. Ortiz: I see.

111. Russell: That was my first encounter with real segregation.

112. Ortiz: Do you know what had lead up to her individual stand. She refused to move to make way for the white girls. Had she talked about doing this beforehand?
113. **Russell:** No, she hadn't said a word about it. No. No. In fact, we hadn't discussed it. We just, had been one of the things we had been accepting. When we saw them come in, all beforehand we just automatically got up and moved. Nobody, you know, thought anything about it. But I guess she had been thinking about it. She was very fair herself. She was very fair and she didn't have very good hair, but she was very fair and she was adamant about it. So evidently she had been thinking about it, but she had never said anything to us about it. And we were surprised too when she didn't move, because the rest of us had moved. But after she took that stand then we decided to support her.

114. **Ortiz:** Did you make that decision as a group?

115. **Russell:** Yeah. Yeah. Philistine Frazier, one of her classmates called us together in her room after that and told us what to do. And so she told us then if Eunice, ya'll don't let Eunice be alone in this now. Race, I don't say race riots, but race disturbances were running high at that point. Had just begun to run high.

116. **Ortiz:** And you were at Florida A & M. This was during?

117. **Russell:** That was Florida A & M College then, Florida A & M University.

118. **Ortiz:** And that was during the 1920s?

119. **Russell:** In the '20s?

120. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

121. **Russell:** Uh, '30s.
122. Ortiz: ‘30s. And what year did you begin going there, to Florida A & M?

123. Russell: Huh?

124. Ortiz: What year did you graduate from Florida A & M?

125. Russell: When I first graduated from Florida A & M in 1928 and, oh, you mean when was that affair with Eunice?

126. Ortiz: Yes ‘mam.

127. Russell: Oh, that was in the ’20s and at that time I finished what they called Business Administrative, because they didn't have a four year. Then I came back in ’43 and got a degree. I mean, I graduated in 1930. I said 1928. I came here in ’28 and I graduated with a two year course in 1930. And, they only had two years in that and then I came back in ’43 and got a degree.

128. Ortiz: So the event that you talked about, refusing to move for the white girls happened between 1928 and 1930?

129. Russell: Yeah.

130. Ortiz: Okay. And, now when the white girls would move in, would try to move into the seats were they trying to move into them because they were front row seats?

131. Russell: Yeah. I guess so. We was suppose to be behind them. Yeah.

132. Ortiz: Oh.
133. **Russell:** Yeah.

134. **Ortiz:** And you made the decision as a group in subsequent weeks to refuse to move if they came again?

135. **Russell:** Did what? Say that again.

136. **Ortiz:** You were saying that you made the decision as a group to refuse to move. Did the white girls try to sit in front of you again?

137. **Russell:** After they called Eunice in, yes. After Eunice said she was going to sit right there, her same place the next time, then we decided to support her.

138. **Ortiz:** I see. Did you receive any pressure from the administration about that?

139. **Russell:** No. At that time they didn't want to make waves. I think they tried to keep it as quietly as possible, because after that the girls didn't come back but once. They came back once and they sat on that side where they had been sitting all the time and after that they didn't come back. So I think, now this is just my opinion and that's what we thought, because we were waiting. I think that they felt that we were waiting for them to come back and we were.

140. **Ortiz:** Oh really?

141. **Russell:** Yeah, we were, because we were going to do the same thing but they did not come back. So I think it kind of got quieted and it was no more problem.
142. **Ortiz:** Now this event was vespers?

143. **Russell:** Yeah. Uh huh. Saturday evening vespers.

144. **Ortiz:** Now earlier, Mrs. Russell, you told me that this was a time when they were increasing race disturbances. Now what kind of disturbances, were there disturbances in Tallahassee?

145. **Russell:** I'd say they created race disturbances?

146. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam. You said that this was also a time when there was some other race issues.

147. **Russell:** Well, Joe Camel, he would not let, now my brother-in-law, Gilbert Porter was working on his doctorate and he would not let him use the library over there. He had to get the janitor to bring the books out and let him use them over here. And little Alphonza, oh shoot. Little short guy. Can't think of his name. Alphonza, but anyway, the janitor. He would bring the books out that Porter wanted. He would write down and bring the books out and use them and take them back, but Porter couldn't use the library. MacFadden. Alphonza MacFadden.

148. **Ortiz:** Would black students at Florida A & M protest segregation in other ways.

149. **Russell:** Now when the black students started really protesting, see I was out working. I wasn't a student at that time. I had graduated and was working. And they had black students. Daisy Young and all of them were there, but I wasn't a student then. I was working. See, as I said, I graduated in 1930, the first time. And at that time it wasn't prevalent. It was just a
few uprising occasionally and I think Eunice, Eunice. Our situation was the only one I remember at that time that came as such and it wasn't, it was just one of those things that was understood, I guess, that if this continues it will start something. So we'll just let it rest.

150. Ortiz: You remember other incidents that happened later?

151. Russell: Uh uh. I don't remember any incidents that happened after than until I guess in the '60s when the kids really started rioting. Wasn't it in the '60s when they had all these race rioting and all this.

152. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

153. Russell: Well, that's when they started.

154. Ortiz: During these years had you registered to vote?

155. Russell: I been voting every since they let me register and I don't miss a vote.

156. Ortiz: And so you first started voting when you came of age.

157. Russell: I don't remember when I registered to vote. I really don't, but I know one thing. I'm registered and I vote every. I tell them I'm going to vote if it's for a dog fight. I don't care what it is. I'm going to vote. I may vote wrong, but I'm going to vote my conviction. I vote. I go to the poll every time they have it.

158. Ortiz: Did you first register in Milton?

159. Russell: First register what?
160. **Ortiz**: In Milton, Florida?

161. **Russell**: Oh, no, no, un uh, no. In fact, in Milton I hadn't, didn't go back to Milton to live until after 1930 because I started to work here as soon as I finished school. I finished school one week and started to work here the next week.

162. **Ortiz**: Did your parents register to vote?

163. **Russell**: I don't know. I really don't.

164. **Ortiz**: Now when you registered to vote in Tallahassee did you have any difficulties in voting?

165. **Russell**: Uh huh. I didn't. I think there was some difficulty, but I didn't have any.

166. **Ortiz**: Mrs. Russell, when you first went to Florida A & M were you thinking about a career? Were you thinking in terms of wanting to do something in particular career-wise.

167. **Russell**: Yes, but I came further than I wanted to be, to finish in home economics. That was my ambition because I had a high school teacher that I admired so much, Mrs. Exum Scoot and she was very, very good to me, very good, when I was in high school. And I wanted to finish. I wanted to be a home economics teacher just like she was. That was the height of my ambition, but that science. I couldn't take it. That science wore me out. And so, I was working Dean Lannier as a student assistant. He was the Registrar at that time and he thought I was very good in that. So he told them he was sending me up to the office with Mrs. Bradford to try for something else. And when I got up there, then he called me in one
day and told me I was in the wrong field and to try that. And that's when I started with this and I got in there and I liked it and I stayed.

168. Ortiz: Mrs. Russell, what was the campus like during those years in terms of social life. Maybe the curriculum?

169. Russell: The campus life?

170. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

171. Russell: During what period?


173. Russell: Oh we had a very enjoyable social because there weren't but so many of us. In fact, Jackson Davis Hall was built and opened the year and we didn't have enough college students, girls to fill Jackson Davis Hall. We had to put two high school. Had a room there, Susie McMiken and Katie Johnson, two high school students to use one of the rooms. See we didn't have enough college girls then to fill one dormitory and that's when Jackson Davis Hall. On Sunday afternoons they would let the boys visit the girls in the dormitory and they just sat out on the lawn. And when that bell rang at 6:30 then they had to get up and go and you had to go to your dormitory. They just had that kind of understanding. And naturally as students would be two or three occasions we got in trouble because they'd slip off and be gone and when the bell rang they couldn't, but when she got ready to check you in if you weren't there then you were in trouble. And once or twice we had, I'm not saying they were
perfect, once or twice we had girls who weren't there and boys and they sent them home in a minute.

174. SIDE B

175. Ortiz: So it's safe to say that the rules were very strict.

176. Russell: Yes, they was. Yes, they was. They was very strict, but as I said, you know, you're going to have some. They weren't perfect, but the rules I guess they had for the kids weren't perfect.

177. Ortiz: Would you or your friends sometimes challenge the rules. Kind of push a little bit.

178. Russell: Not to my knowledge. Not during my time here. I don't recall. If they did, they didn't try to push it as a group.

179. Ortiz: Who was the president during the 1920s?


181. Ortiz: Reely?

182. Russell: ( )

183. Ortiz: What kind of a person was he?

184. Russell: President Reely? I guess he was a fine man as far as I know, because as a student we didn't come in contact with him too much, you know. So as far as I know he was a very
good president. I know one thing. He could get a whole lot from the whites like Senator Hodges or what not. He knew how to maneuver to get what he wanted, but he did a whole lot for Florida A & M College at that time. As far as I know he was a good president. I guess he had to be to stay here as long as he did.

185. Ortiz: And during those years did you go out much into the larger Tallahassee community like French Town.

186. Russell: No, I didn't. That was just off limits to most of us out here.

187. Ortiz: Who would put it off limits?

188. Russell: Well, I guess it was just a different, you mean in French Town proper?

189. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

190. Russell: I guess it was just a different class of people. They didn't, they had the taverns and night clubs and what they used to call, well I guess the night clubs. I don't know what you call it, but we just didn't go over there. That was just understood. A section of town, certain of us just didn't visit. I guess, I don't know whether they, well, it just wasn't thought of as going over there that's all.

191. Ortiz: As a student were you ever curious about that area?

192. Russell: I don't remember that we was.

193. Ortiz: Now what area of town would it have been okay for you to go to?
Russell: Oh, we could go downtown. Downtown proper or to all the stores down there.

Yeah. As girls, when I was here we had to go in twos. You couldn't go alone. You always had to be in twos. At least two. Two of you had to go together. But, oh, we could go anywhere downtown. Yeah. But when we went downtown, as I was saying Woolworth, Woolworth's 5 & 10 Cent Store, and well, all the stores downtown. We could go in any of the stores. Yeah, when I was here we could go in any of the stores downtown. They didn't have any stores that we couldn't go in.

Ortiz: Could you try on hats and clothing inside of the store?

Russell: As a student, I don't know because we weren't buying their stuff. Now when I started working as a young woman down there, no, you couldn't try on things in the store. But I had some good friends in the stores who would always look at me, would call and tell me I have a dress or such and such a thing or I have. And I had accounts at most of the stores, see, but I would have to bring it out and try it on. I couldn't try it on down there. Downtown. The only thing you could try on downtown in the store was shoes. Miller's Bootery, we used to call it. Miller's Bootery was the name of the shoe store. And we could try on clothes, hats, and things. No, you couldn't try them on there. It got better however, and yes, they would be glad to get your money. When Governor Collins broke up that, see when we, they had the counter. Woolworth had a counter where the whites could go sit at the counter and it was on a Sunday afternoon. See, we couldn't sit at the counter. And he made a speech, how could they afford to accept our money the same of the others and let them eat on one side and refuse to serve us on the other. And that broke that up. Governor Leroy Collins. And I think that started this bus situation. Then they started.
197. ( interruption )

198. Ortiz: So before that happened do you remember times where you would think as an individual that that system, for instance, of not being able to try on clothing or drinking at separate water fountains was a wrong system.

199. Russell: Think of it as being wrong?

200. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

201. Russell: Yes I did. I thought all of it was bad. Sure I did. Yeah.

202. Ortiz: Were there times that you were maybe able to challenge that as an individual?

203. Russell: Well, I remember one day we were on a bus. Eunice Johnson and I were coming from town. We were both young women working then and they wanted us to get up and give two whites our seat and we were coming out on the campus. We were living in dormitories and we wouldn't and so the bus driver turned around and carried us on down to jail house. And, Marion Johnson who then had a barber shop in French Town, he was the mayor of French Town. He was a very good friend of ours. He looked like a white guy himself. We called him. He came down there, raised sand with them and my brother-in-law, Porter. He and Porter came down there and got us. But that was the only real encounter. Shortly after that then we heard of this bus boycott with Eunice Johnson Burgess. She lives here now.

204. Ortiz: Oh, really?
Russell: Uh huh. Yeah, she and I. And there was three workers from the campus on the bus. I think that's what frightened the bus driver. Solomon Lacree and Dempsey Wilson were on the bus and when he saw that bus driver get up, when they saw him, they started towards the front. And he got afraid, I think and sat down instead of doing, turned around and went on down to the jail and carried us down there.

Ortiz: Oh, so he drove the bus to the jail.

Russell: Yeah.

Ortiz: Oh. Was this during the 1950s?

Russell: Yeah.

Ortiz: Do you know if, now you say her name is Johnson Burgess?

Russell: Uh huh.

Ortiz: If she would talk with us about maybe doing an interview?

Russell: Would she?

Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

Russell: I guess she would. She lives here. She lives out Woodgate I think is the name of the place. Yeah, Woodgate. Eunice. She remembers the incident. You can ask her about the incident where she and I were together on the bus and the bus driver carried us to the jail and Mr. Johnson came out. She's here.
216. Ortiz: Now had you planned to do that beforehand?

217. Russell: No, because we didn't know it was going to happen. Didn't know anything like that. Didn't know he was going to ask us to move because they got on. Because we were almost where we were getting off. We said we getting off right soon, but he said you have to move now because we don't have a seat and so we say we are not going to move and we sat there.

218. Ortiz: Did they have a sign on the bus that said?


220. Ortiz: And you were just near the front of the bus?

221. Russell: Yeah, we were in the front of the bus because the bus was full with people coming home from work.

222. Ortiz: Would there be other times when you would do things maybe in terms of say water fountains where you refused to follow that system of segregation?

223. Russell: I don't know, because I knew that there were certain things you weren't suppose to, you know, that I don't say they wasn't suppose to do, but you weren't expected to do. And I never subjected myself much to those kind. I'd always avoid confrontations if I could. And that was the closest confrontation I ever had, but shortly after that then they started this bus boycott.
224. Ortiz: Were there other black people who were thinking along those same lines of refusing to move to the back of the bus in the '50s, before the bus boycott?

225. Russell: I don't know.

226. Ortiz: Mrs. Russell, did you meet your husband at Florida A & M?

227. Russell: Did I meet him at Florida A & M?

228. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

229. Russell: Well, indirectly. He was stationed at Camp Gordon Johnson and that's where.

   Well, I didn't meet him there. I met him in Little Rock, Arkansas, when I went up there with a friend and he was, that's where I. That's where I met him.

230. Ortiz: Now you were living at Little Rock at the time or you just were traveling?

231. Russell: No, I went up there with a friend. That was her home. She worked here and I went up there that summer with her visiting and met him up there.

232. Ortiz: I see. Was he in the service?

233. Russell: Not at that time.

234. Ortiz: And what was his primary occupation?

235. Russell: He's deceased.

236. Ortiz: When he was alive?
237. **Russell:** Insurance. He was a principal of a school in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

238. **Ortiz:** And he also was an insurance agent?

239. **Russell:** Yeah, after he stopped teaching. Went into insurance.

240. **Ortiz:** Was that for the Afro-America?

241. **Russell:** No, he was in St. Louis then at that time.

242. **Ortiz:** Oh, I see. Mrs. Russell, what year did you get married and moved here to Tallahassee?

243. **Russell:** Did I what?

244. **Ortiz:** What year did you get married and move into your house in Tallahassee?

245. **Russell:** Oh, I got married in '43 right after I graduated.

246. **Ortiz:** And at that point were you living out here in this area?

247. **Russell:** No, uh uh. I lived in Little Rock for five years, through '43. I know when I left there I lived on Young Street. See I built this house right here in 1957.

248. **Ortiz:** Oh, so you moved out here in 1957?

249. **Russell:** Uh huh.

250. **Ortiz:** Was there a lot of other families living out in this area?
251. **Russell:** I was the first one to build out here.

252. **Ortiz:** Okay. And were you able to receive a loan for building the house? Was that from the Credit Union at Florida A & M?

253. **Russell:** No, that was from Tallahassee Federal.

254. **Ortiz:** Was Tallahassee Federal a place that black people banked at?

255. **Russell:** Was it a what?

256. **Ortiz:** Was it a place that dealt fairly with black people in terms of banking practices?

257. **Russell:** I guess. I guess, I don't know whether they had banking practices. I guess so, but anyway, I was working with Mr. Lee, Jr., who was the business manager and I had good credit all over Tallahassee. Good credit. And Mr. DeMilly told me if I got Mr. Lee, Jr., to vouch for me and I didn't have any problem. So I don't know what. And it evidently wasn't because they developed up there on Young Street back of where I was living and all they had a settlement back there and blacks were developing that and building. So I never heard of blacks having too much problem like that. As I say, they might have. Maybe I just didn't hear about it.

258. **Ortiz:** So you really raised your family in this area?

259. **Russell:** I never had any children.

260. **Ortiz:** Never had children.
261. **Russell:** I helped my sister with her children.

262. **Ortiz:** I see. What church were you attending here?

263. **Russell:** Do I attend here?

264. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

265. **Russell:** ( ) Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church.

266. **Ortiz:** Okay. And you started going there in the 1950s?

267. **Russell:** No, I went to Bethel A.M.E. which was over town at first and I came out here. They dedicated a Fellowship Day program to me over there. There it is. Look at Chapel A.M.E. Church. That's it. On the 12th of May, and there's the plaque they gave me.

268. **Ortiz:** Oh, I see. They named a fellowship after you.

269. **Russell:** I was the financial secretary over there for 27 years.

270. **Ortiz:** Oh, this is really neat. Do you have extra copies of this?

271. **Russell:** You may have that one.

272. **Ortiz:** Oh thank you very much. Mrs. Russell, during those years, the '50s and '60s, what were the major changes happening in the black community in Tallahassee?

273. **Russell:** That was a time when they really had, I think that was when Martin Luther King started the bus boycott and everybody got, it was really a restless time. Very restless. People
were afraid to go different places and what not. Whites were almost as afraid as blacks was because you never knew what was going to happen. And they had marches. It was, especially in the '60s, and used to have speakers and all. It was a restless time. A very restless, but it began to taper off and get straight. But it was a restless time. Very restless.

274. Ortiz: Would you go to some of the rallies, churches, or attend any events?

275. Russell: I would go. Yeah, I would go. I remember I went to hear King over at Bethel A.M.E. and Abernathy came here and spoke. Yeah, I would always go to his speeches. Yeah. But I never took, I never marched or anything like that. In fact, I was working and I just felt that I couldn't, but I never marched. When they would have rallies and ask for money to help, they put a lot of kids in jail and what not, I would support things like that. Give them money to help get a bond or get the kids out. But marching and all, I never marched or what not. But I would always give them financial support where I could or keep a child. If a child get in jail and the mother or something would come, have to come up here and see about them and didn't have any place to stay, I would always let one of them or someone stay with me or something and all, but that was the kind of aid that I gave.

276. Ortiz: Now, Mrs. Russell, earlier you said that you began to vote really as soon as you could. As soon as you were legally old enough, you began to vote.

277. Russell: To vote?

278. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

279. Russell: Uh huh.
Ortiz: What led you to that, to voting? Were there issues that you were particularly concerned about?

Russell: At the time, I guess I did. I'd look at the issues that were being, that we were confronted with and I would try to see who was talking about them. And at the church they would call different speakers in. That's where they would always have to have their speakers, in churches, and tell you what they were thinking on issues and what not. And, I guess I made my decisions from what they said, but we were always encouraged to vote from the campus and I always wanted to. I always wanted to vote. I don't know why. So the administration at the college would encourage?

Russell: Yes, we encouraged it. Yes we did.

Ortiz: Did you register on campus?

Russell: I don't remember frankly. I'm going to tell you truth. I don't know where we first registered. I really don't. I'm so glad you asked that question, because I really don't know. I don't remember.

Ortiz: It's interesting because it seems like black people here in Tallahassee were registering to vote than some other areas. Do you know what would account for that. Was it easier to register for black people?

Russell: Well, maybe it's because the university, the college was here and they were teaching government and what not and, you know, and giving you reasons as to why you should vote. And, now I'm saying I guess that's one of the reasons that they. And then

Sue Russell
maybe they had more collectives learned people, a group, you know, than they did. You go to other places they have five or six learned and scattered here and scattered there. And for instances like, well, I'll just say like Jacksonville. Maybe there's 15 or 20 but over this part at least Tallahassee, at least Jacksonville, South Jacksonville, but here they were collected. All together. See? I'm saying that possibly could have been the reason. I don't know. But frankly, I don't know remember when I started the whole thing. Really don't.

287. Ortiz: What kind of role did ministers play in the Tallahassee black community during those years?

288. Russell: The ministers?

289. Ortiz: Yes 'mam.

290. Russell: As a whole, I don't know. I really don't. I know all the churches were always opened for meetings because that's about the only place they could have meetings would be in the churches and I know Bethel A.M.E. was one of the main meeting places. But the ministers as a group, I don't know. Frankly, I don't. I don't remember that they were organized as such, but as a ministerial alliance or something like that. I don't really know. I know Reverend Steel was one of the leading forces behind Bethel Baptist. He was one of the leaders, he and Father Brooks. Father Brooks of the Episcopal Church and Reverend Steel was two of the leading ministers who were in the forefront over the years. I remember them very vividly because they were two of the main ones.

291. Ortiz: In your opinion, Mrs. Russell, what set Reverend Steele apart from other ministers?
292. **Russell:** Say what about him?

293. **Ortiz:** What distinguished Reverend Steel from other ministers in Tallahassee? Was it his congregation?

294. **Russell:** I don't know. Maybe, I don't know, but I know he was a fighter for, he was connected himself very closely, as close as he could to King and he wanted to break down the laws of segregation. But as to, I would just be afraid to pin a badge on him because I don't really know what caused him.

295. **Ortiz:** Mrs. Russell, over the years what have been some things that have inspired you to overcome obstacles that you might have faced during those years of segregation. What were things that really inspired you to prevail or transcend that system?

296. **Russell:** And caused me to what?

297. **Ortiz:** To transcend that system.

298. **Russell:** Like what do you mean? Like what?

299. **Ortiz:** Like maybe religious beliefs, role models you might have had, people that inspired you.

300. **Russell:** Well, I don't know. I think. I don't know of any particular thing, maybe experience, you know, have had a lot to do with it. A lot of things you perhaps would have overlooked as a youngster, a young person, you think about it now, you know, and I don't know. I guess experience teaches you more than anything else and in fact, and you try to
profit a lot by mistakes that you see were made. But, you know, you can be... ( interruption ).
You know this violence thing. This thing. I worry a lot about that and I just wonder what causes it. What caused all this violence and if I could just, like they say, role models and, you know. That worries me more than anything else right now and I don't know what. During our time this sort of thing just didn't exist. And, have you ever heard of so much violence? Where you from?

301. Ortiz: Originally Washington state.

302. Russell: I don't know. I just wish I knew the answers. I was just reading this morning in the paper where they robbed a woman of a wheelchair. Took her wheelchair and her crutches away from her. And you know, that's getting to be the last straw.

303. Ortiz: Mrs. Russell, there's some biographical information that I wanted to ask you.

304. Russell: Say what?

305. Ortiz: Some information, some biographical information that I need to fill out, if you wouldn't mind me keeping you a few more minutes. Now you spell your last name R-u-s-s-e-l-l?

306. Russell: Yes.

307. Ortiz: And your first name is Susan.

308. Russell: It's usually Sue. Middle initial K for Kelker.
309. **Ortiz:** Okay. Is that your maiden name?

310. **Russell:** Kelker. K-e-l-k-e-r. You said my maiden name?

311. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

312. **Russell:** Yeah. K-e-l-k-e-r.

313. **Ortiz:** And Mrs. Russell, your date of birth?


315. **Ortiz:** And you were born in Milton?

316. **Russell:** Right.

317. **Ortiz:** And your husband's name was?

318. **Russell:** The high school?

319. **Ortiz:** Your husband's name was?

320. **Russell:** Arthur. Russell.

321. **Ortiz:** And his date of birth.

322. **Russell:** I don't really remember Arthur's date of birth to tell you the truth. I don't.

323. **Ortiz:** Was he born in Florida also?
324. **Russell:** Arkansas.

325. **Ortiz:** Oh, Arkansas. In Little Rock?

326. **Russell:** Uh huh.

327. **Ortiz:** And, Mrs. Russell, what was your mother's name?

328. **Russell:** My mother?

329. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.


331. **Ortiz:** Now was Alemina her maiden name?

332. **Russell:** Her maiden name?

333. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

334. **Russell:** No. Johnson was her maiden name.

335. **Ortiz:** And she was born in Milton?

336. **Russell:** Uh huh.

337. **Ortiz:** She was a teacher?

338. **Russell:** Uh huh.

Sue Russell
339. **Ortiz:** And do you know about her approximate date of birth and then the year that she died?

340. **Russell:** My mother?

341. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

342. **Russell:** Date of her birth?

343. **Ortiz:** Yes 'mam.

344. **Russell:** 1891.

345. **Ortiz:** And she passed in?

346. **Russell:** Mama passed in 19. I'll ask my sister. I'm not sure. 19, I'll ask her.

347. **Ortiz:** Okay. I'll take this off so you don't trip over that. (removes microphone)

348. END OF INTERVIEW