



## Interview with Ila Jacuth Blue

June 2, 1995

Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South  
Durham (N.C.)

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## 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

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Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University

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

Interview  
with  
Ila Blue  
(DOB ca. 1914)

June 2, 1995

Kisha Turner and Blair Murphy,  
interviewers

**Q:** Could you say your name and when you were born and where you were born?

**Blue:** My name is Ila J. Blue. I was born in a little town in the county, Hoke County, county seat of Rayford. You probably have heard that on the news, because there's nothing else in Hoke County except Rayford.

**Q:** North Carolina.

**Blue:** In North Carolina. I was the twelfth, number twelve, of children; seven girls and five boys. My papa was disappointed; he wanted six girls and six boys. But when I was born, there was seven girls and five boys. I don't know how much detail you want me to go into.

**Q:** Could you tell me about the community your family lived in?

**Blue:** Nothing special about it. Just a large farm, a little town between Laurinburg and Fayetteville, was the town, and Rayford was just one of the small places like Ray Spring and Aberdeen and what have you. Just a hub of them, and all country. All country, country, country. Primarily cotton and grain, like corn and wheat and rye, and trucks--watermelon, all watermelon. All kind of trucks.

School three miles away. Everything on the farm--chickens. Mama, I would say--no, she didn't do that, but anyway, her chickens, and selling eggs to the sanitorium that was about two miles away from us, between Rayford and Aberdeen, selling eggs and milk, eggs and butter, to the sanitarium was a bonus to the family for money. Especially you had money in the fall. That's when you sold your cotton. And trucks, like watermelon, all kind of trucks. We had so many watermelon that people passing by the road would just buy watermelon. We weren't trying to sell them; we fed them to the hogs, etc.

When I was born, there were twelve children, and when I was born, the oldest son, who was the third child, died at three. He died with pneumonia. Pneumonia was one of the things that doctors were not comfortable with back in the olden days. But my oldest brother, as I said, was dead. He died at three years of age. My next brother was away in school.

**Q:** Where did he go to school?

**Blue:** He went to school, went to college. He started at Lincoln University, but he went to John C. Smith because he wanted to be a minister, so he graduated from John C. Smith and went into the ministry. All the summers, he would come home. He was a stranger to me; I didn't know him, hadn't seen him, didn't know him from a house cat. So when he'd come home, he'd say, "This is the baby, the young child." Oh, I'd scream and I'd run away from him. He would offer me money to tell him goodbye. Never. When he would write home, he was coming home, they'd say--his name was David Kaneal [phonetic], and they called him Neal--"Neal's coming home!" My sister and brother would be jumping. Never me. I didn't let him put his hand on me, and he would offer me money, "Just tell me goodbye." He'd hand me some money. No, I'd stand back and look at him. You can see how retarded I was. [Laughter]

I couldn't figure that man come taking over the house, you know, because Mama didn't allow that, you know, people to run around. He'd just take over, and my sisters and brothers jumping all over his lap. I said, "Lord, this is a funny family, you know." But he kept on 'til he won me over. He finally won me over. I guess I was about ready to go to high school. I said, "I guess he is harmless."

But the family was always very close together. The sisters and brothers married off, and, of course, we survived because,

as I say, we did things besides just the farm.

**Q:** Sounds like education was very important in your family.

**Blue:** Very important in our family, because there were twelve children, as I said, but one died; that left eleven. The top third went to college, and the last third went to college, but the middle got caught in the Depression. They did finish high school, but the middle caught two sisters and two brothers, caught in the Depression. They didn't go any further than high school.

**Q:** Couldn't afford it?

**Blue:** No, no, because the boll weevil ate the cotton crop, and so they couldn't go. So the top third, and the middle third missed it, and the late four, three girls and a boy. I guess we were lucky. We were lucky, because the other sisters and brothers who didn't go to college, and those who did go and didn't go, and those who were at home and some who were married, helped us go to school.

**Q:** Financial support?

**Blue:** Yes, financial support. When we finished what we called graded school then--I don't know what you guys call it now--

graded school, there was no high school for blacks to attend in the whole county. All right. But we were Presbyterian, and my brother was then in John C. Smith Presbyterian. My mama read everything in the world, to start with, but she knew about the school and so forth, so we went to a boarding school, what was then called Mary Potter High School in Oxford, North Carolina.

There were three of us. The new baby, as we called it--I was the baby--the new baby and the third one had gone to school for one year. She was a year ahead of us, but we finished seventh grade together. She had gone to Livingston College. Livingston had a high school at that time, but since my sister and I came along, they sent us all to Mary Potter. That was better than sending her to Salisbury and two of us to Oxford, North Carolina. So we went there.

Then when we graduated from Mary Potter by the skin of our teeth, one thing about Mary Potter, everybody worked. Everybody had a job and had to help. My brother, that brother that I wouldn't speak to when I was growing up, he would always send us some spending cash.

**Q:** What type of job did you do at Mary Potter?

**Blue:** We had jobs we had to do--period--just for our room and board. Wait tables, wash dishes, sweep the halls, and things of that kind.

**Q:** And that covered the tuition and room and board?

**Blue:** It helped, yes. It helped. But he would send us a little spending change. That meant everybody at home didn't have a dime, because they were sending their money to us.

But when we finished Mary Potter, that brother that I wouldn't speak to, he had gone to North Carolina Central. It wasn't North Carolina Central then; it was North Carolina College for Negroes, I think. He had gone there for one year, but since he still had in his mind being a preacher, he transferred to John C. Smith. So he knew Dr. Shepherd, and he didn't tell us he was going to do this, but he came by to see Dr. Shepherd. He was going back to Smith, so he'd come right through Durham. He was going from Altford [phonetic] to Charlotte.

He came to Dr. Shepherd that day. He had two sisters who just graduated from Mary Potter, and blah, blah, blah, gave him a lot of junk, that kind of stuff. Dr. Shepherd said, "Well, now, I'm going to give them a scholarship right here," and he did give us a scholarship. So my brother didn't have a telephone, but he would write us and tell us what he had done. He said, "Get you a little clothes," or, "Wash your clothes, pack your trunks. I'm going to be picking you up and carry you up there."

**Q:** Who was Dr. Shepherd?

**Blue:** Dr. Shepherd was the president, the founder of North Carolina Central University. James Edward Shepherd.

So we came to North Carolina Central. It was North Carolina College for Negroes at that time.

**Q:** What year did you come?

**Blue:** What time did we enter? We came up here in '32. Then we finished. We did two years. The next year, didn't have any cotton crop. The boll weevil had our cotton crop. The boll weevils had eaten the crop and we could not come to school, so we had to stay out of school that year.

Well, the next year, destiny rises again to my brother at John C. Have you ever heard about Barber-Scotia College?

**Q:** Yes.

**Blue:** He was at John C., and we were home picking cotton, what cotton we had. We didn't have any money to come back to school that year. We had already missed one year, didn't have anything that year. He wrote us a letter--didn't have a telephone, of course--wrote us a letter and said, "Wash your clothes, pack your trunk. I'm coming for you and I'll take you up to Barber-Scotia in Concord, North Carolina." That's very close to John C. Smith.

We just laughed him to scorn. We said, "Now, this is crazy. What college would ever take us in this time of year?" Now, you know what time of year it was? That was in November. School was started in September. I suppose it started in September; most colleges did. We said, "This is the craziest thing. Nobody would take anybody in there." But we washed our clothes and packed our trunk, and he came.

He came Saturday. He had a car then. He came Saturday and he packed his little trunk, and Sunday he put us in that car and took us on back there. Where he got that money, I don't know. He was working in Charlotte. He was going to school and working. But my brother always came across. He paid our first [unclear]. One thing, everybody had a job at Barber-Scotia. That was good.

So we went to Barber-Scotia, but my sister and I just laughed and said, "Who in the world is going to take anybody in school at this time of year?" But you see, the thing that worked in our favor, we didn't know that, though, 'til we reached there, because brother was going to do it anyway.

When we came to North Carolina Central, the first year, my English teacher had a junior, one of the junior girls, and an English major, assisting her. We didn't know anything about this, of course, until way about, I guess, ten years later. She told us about it, because when we went to Barber-Scotia, there she was sitting up there. She was the librarian. She was taking library science. So she was the librarian, so we knew

her when we went up there. We didn't know this.

So when my brother--I missed some of the story. My brother went to Mary Potter. Okay. That's how we finally got there many years later. In Mary Potter he had a very dear friend by the name of Mr. Kozar [phonetic]. At this time, Mr. Kozar was the president of Barber-Scotia, but he didn't know that. They went together to Mary Potter. They were schoolmates at Mary Potter. But when he was in Charlotte, he accidentally met him on the street and they talked about it, and he told my brother, he said that he was the first black president. See, Barber-Scotia first had white teachers, and when they came down and fought in the Civil War, a lot of them came back and said they were going to help the black children have school. That's the only school we had in that area. There was one in Ray Springs, there was one in Laurinburg, and they were all around us. So that's how Barber-Scotia started. Okay.

So this man who knew my brother in high school said, "I am the first black president of Barber-Scotia," and my brother, he didn't miss a beat about anything, he said, "Well, I have two sisters who are in school at this time." And Dr. Kozar was crazy enough to say, "Yes, bring them on up," you know. And that's how we got in Barber-Scotia. We didn't know our brother did it, but nobody's going to bring anybody in a school in November. The first semester is almost over.

But anyway, that's how we got there, and everybody had a duty, so we worked and worked. That was a two-year college. So

when we left there, we graduated on the song and a prayer. Well, our work was all right, but I can tell you anybody can finally go to school, because our work was good. I made good grades first semester, because we hit the books.

Well, when it was time to graduate, Dr. Kozar called my sister and me in, and we had passed everything. We were eligible to graduate. He told us that our diploma would be wrapped just like everybody else's, but it was going to just be a sheet of paper, because we owed the school. We owed the school everywhere. [Laughter] We owed the school. We said, "Okay." We said we'd send it back in the summer, and we did send back in the summer.

But anyway, so when had graduation, we got up there. We lived in the building. We went up to the third floor and we were packed. My brother was there, of course, and he was going to take us home that afternoon. My sister was named Lula. We in the family called her "Toot." I said, "Toot, I'm going to read you my diploma." Dr. Kozar told us it was going to be a blank piece of paper. I pulled it out, I said, "Something's wrong here. He made a mistake. This is the real McCoy." It was a diploma!

We put it back and we wrapped it up and we put the ribbon on it, ran back down in his office. He was in his office. We said, "Dr. Kozar, you made a mistake."

He said, "Have a seat there." So we sat down. He just started talking.

We said, "Lord, have mercy. I don't know what he's going to do with us." We said, "You gave us the diploma, and we are going to work and send the money back to you."

He said, "No, you can take that." He went around that, and we were sitting there. Then he told us something. He said, "Yesterday the Alumni Association at Barber-Scotia met," and he went to the meeting and he carried five names. Barber-Scotia had a high school at that time, the last two years, and he said, "I carried in five names, your two names and three more names."

I think there were three for college and two for high school. He said, "That owed money." And he appealed to the Alumni Association to help them, and he said that Alumni Association paid every dime for those five people. And that's how we had the real McCoy.

**Q:** That's wonderful.

**Blue:** You know, I said, "Lord, my mama's praying for me."

[Laughter] So we got the real McCoy. Well, everything that happened to me was a miracle.

So we went home and we said, "We're going to work. Then we're going back to North Carolina Central," because Barber-Scotia was just a two-year college at that time; it's four-year now. But the boll weevil ate up everything, and we were still working on the farm.

My mama was purely a genius, but I can't tell you anything

about my mama. All right. The dean of ladies wrote us again in October--that was a month earlier than Barber-Scotia--and asked us did we want to return to school. We said, "That's a crazy question. Everybody wants to return to school." So we wrote a little letter back and told her, yes, we wanted to return to school.

Okay. She wrote us back and told us that they had an opening, didn't have anything in the dormitory. If we could find a place to stay in the city, they had an opening and we could come back to school. So to make a long story short, we packed our little thing and took all the money in the family that everybody had every dime of, and we came up and registered in October.

My brother, we called "Bruh" and told him. He was the only one in the family who had a car. We called "Bruh." He was still in shock. He came and he's the one who found the place for us to stay. When he was here that one year in college, he located my mama's first cousin, I believe, the family, and he had boarded with the son and his wife--no, it was the daughter and her husband. Anyway, so when we told him we were coming back, he, the big shot, he called them and asked them could we stay with them 'til the next semester. We could come on campus after Christmas, you know.

So when our brother picked us up, child, he had a place for us to stay. [Laughter] So that's the way we came back. So we came on time. We took every dime the family had. They said,

"Why don't you be there, because you'll be a senior this year."

So we came back and we graduated. So that's the story of my life. [Laughter] That's the story of my life.

But let me tell you why I say my mama was a genius. My mama was a genius. After I finished North Carolina Central, I worked and taught at the high school at home. My major was English and minor was math, so I taught English and math.

**Q:** Do you remember what year you started teaching?

**Blue:** Oh, '38, I think. I taught English and math and, of course, the girls' basketball team, so and so and so. All right. I decided to go back to school and got a master's, so I came back to North Carolina Central, and when I went back to high school, then Dr. [unclear], who was chairman, wrote me a letter. I taught in high school, I believe, six years, I believe. Four or six. I believe it was six. I graduated from getting my master's, I think in '44 or '45. Anyway, he asked me to come back and teach freshman English. Okay. So my family thought that was great.

Oh, I missed something. No, I haven't missed it yet, because that was a long time. So I came back and taught at Central. I believe in '48, I decided I want to go on and do the doctorate, and my family thought that was good, too, especially being a doctor. Yes, it was '48.

So I went that year and I didn't have any money to spend,

so Mama asked my sister, who was teaching, to give her some money for me to come home for Christmas. I didn't know how I got home, because she told me to come on home, so I came home.

So I came back in the spring, after school closed, and that's when I found out--I knew Mama was pretty smart, but I found out Mama was a genius. See, when Mama was in school, they didn't have any high school. When you finished seventh grade, she said they would go back to school and help the teachers with the other children. She never did go on to anything. So Mama was sick when I came back, and that was my worst summer. That's when I lost my mother. Mama was sick. Her teeth were bothering her, and she wanted me to take her to the dentist. I said, "Okay." And I took her.

I can't tell you the whole thing Mama told me. I'll tell you just one. But when we were coming back, I think Mama felt she probably was going to leave us, you know, and she was talking to me about things, you know. She told me things about me when I was a baby. I was grown then. I was thirty, and she was telling me, talking about when I was a baby. Just the two of us in the car, and she said, "I had twelve children, but you're all different." She paid me a great compliment, for one thing. She said, "When I was nursing you, if I dropped anything on the floor, you'd crawl down out of my lap and pick it up and give it to me and crawl back up there. None of the other children would do anything like that if I dropped anything, and give it to me." She told me a lot of things about me.

Then she talked about the Lord and how she had prayed when we were out of school, you know. That was at least--we finished Barber-Scotia. I guess that was almost fifteen or twenty years after we left Barber-Scotia. Mama taught me about always trying to stay with the Lord, you know. I probably strayed away from that.

Anyway, she said, "You can always, if you try, generally get things going, but you have to get the Lord's blessing with you." She said the year my sister and I stayed out of school, were almost out of school. When sister wrote us, that was in '30-something. She said, "That's when I wrote the governor." I almost had a wreck, I almost stopped the car.

I said, "Mama, when did you write the governor?"

She said, "When you and Toot were out of school." That was my sister. I was there at the University of Michigan.

I said, "When did you write to the governor, Mama?"

She says, "Because I wrote him, and I know I misspelled words and all that, but I wrote him and told him I was a citizen of the state, and my children were out of school, and I wanted them in school."

The governor didn't write Mama, but this is the way it happened. I told you Dean Rush [phonetic] wrote us and asked us if we wanted to come back to school. This is the way it went. She wrote the governor. The governor wrote to Dr. Shepherd. He and Dr. Shepherd were very friendly at that time. They were very friendly. So Dr. Shepherd--this is the way I figure it--

Dr. Shepherd asked Dean Rush, who was the dean of women, why weren't we in school, and he told her to write us and ask us. The governor wrote Dr. Shepherd and told him, "This lady wants her children in school." Because Mama told him she was a citizen of the state. [Laughter] And I was flabbergasted.

Well, the letter came, did we want to come back to school. We laughed about it. I told you we laughed about that. And we came. And that's the way we got back in school.

But as I say, Mama--I haven't met anybody--nobody has met anybody like his mama, you know. But she didn't say a word to us about that letter. She said, "I know I misspelled some words." [Laughter] And that was years! We had finished college and I had taught there for about six years, and she had never said one word about that. She didn't say, "You got in there because I..." No, she never did mention it.

**Q:** Where do you think her commitment to making sure that you finished school came from?

**Blue:** Got it from her parents, I guess. I don't know. From her parents, I guess. I never knew. I knew my paternal grandfather and my maternal grandmother, the other two. I should have known my paternal grandfather, because her mama, my mama's papa, the way she talked about him, was just like my mama.

Of course, my paternal grandfather, he was great. He died

when I was about five. His wife was dead when I was born. But after his wife died, he would spend months with his children. He had a lot of them. So maybe he'd come and spend about two months with my father's family, then he'd go to another. The Blues had big families.

The thing I remember about him, how gentle he was with Mama and the chickens. He'd go out there and help Mama with the chickens. He'd be holding the little bitty--look at that big old man holding that little chicken. I couldn't fit it all together. He would hoe the garden for Mama. This old man, gray hair, he'd hoe the garden for Mama. I couldn't put it all together then, but I was five when he died. He left that impression on me. He'd be so gentle with the little bitty things. When Grandpa got happy, he would just laugh, you know, and get up on the table. I wanted to know what in the world was wrong with Grandpa, but Grandpa was happy. I didn't put it together 'til years later, I put that together, that Grandpa was just--those little bitty ones, he was just holding them.

[Laughter] He'd hoe the garden. He'd say, "Betsy..." My mama was named Betsy. He'd say, "Betsy, I'm going to hoe the garden for you." But I knew my paternal grandfather and my maternal grandmother.

**Q:** Did they ever tell you stories about their experience?

**Blue:** Oh, yes. I don't remember many that Grandpa told, but he

would tell the family. I was quite small. I was about five, I think, when he died. I was eight when my grandmother died. My family was so large that they were gone before I got there.

**Q:** Did most of your family live in the area where you grew up?

**Blue:** Yes, ma'am.

**Q:** They'd work together?

**Blue:** That's right. Well, no. My paternal family was in a different county, but they were in an adjoining county.

**Q:** What county was that?

**Blue:** We lived in Hoke, and they lived in what was--they call it Kohiffer [phonetic], but they call it Moore [phonetic] now, where Aberdeen comes. That's where my grandfather's family was, in Aberdeen. Hoke was made, so they tell me, so the history says, just so Hoke would have--my county was made just so the state would have a 100 counties. They didn't want 99 counties.

So they carved out of Scotland County, where Laurinburg is, and Moore County, where Aberdeen and Southern Pine and Carthage are, and Fayetteville, Cumberland County, so they carved it out.

Then Robeson, that's Ray Spring and Lumberton County, they carved Rayford out of those other counties so they could have

100. That's what the historians say. They didn't want 99, they wanted 100.

**Q:** What kind of work did you do on the farm when you were younger?

**Blue:** Everything. My favorite was plowing, but I couldn't do it much, because my youngest brother--there were three girls under him, but understand there's a big span between the next girl and my brother. The children thought they were going to be the baby, you know. We were in the field, he'd say, "Sister, I'll take the hoe and you can plow." I just liked to plow. Okay. I grabbed it and he'd get the hoe. But he'd get the hoe and go sit under the tree, you know. When I came back with the plowed acre, he'd say, "Sister, you put that cotton down and you go get your hoe from Sylvester, because he's sitting under that tree." [Laughter]

But we did, we hoed cotton, we picked cotton, we plowed. One sister and I, Cici [phonetic] and I, plowed when they had to throw fertilize, you know, and we would split the middle for every work. The only thing I didn't do, what they had to do, was clean the disk bags. We made the men do that. We wouldn't clean that disk bag. [Laughter]

**Q:** How did you work school out while you were working?

**Blue:** Well, it was worked out for us when I came along. It wasn't that way when the rest of them came along. When I came along, the schools had problems. The children would have to stay out of school for picking cotton and hoeing cotton and things like that, so they did something that I thought was very nice. I think they yanked a month out of the school year, when the crops were laid by, so when we went to school, I think it was August, mainly August, so nothing was going on, plowing and hoeing. The crops were already made. So it was August. So they had school one month. I think it was one or two. Then we'd go back to school after you had gathered the crop, because nobody was in school. Nobody in school except those in first, second, third grade, because they weren't hoeing and picking cotton. But those who were large enough, the people had them home.

We always had to stay out of school two days, and I would just swear I was never going again. I said, "If I can't go today, I'm not ever going." Nobody wouldn't say a word, because they'd know I'd be the first thing up the next morning. I'd say, "I'm not going." I had to stay home to help with the hog killing and the digging sweet potatoes. We had to stay home for that those two days. But I'd say, "If I can't go today, I'm not going tomorrow. I'm not going tomorrow." And nobody would say a word; they went on about their business, because I'd be up early the next morning to go to school. I was a school nut. I was just a school nut. I thoroughly enjoyed going to school.

**Q:** It sounds like your family was self-sufficient. You had hogs and chickens.

**Blue:** We ate. Didn't have any money, but we ate. We didn't raise tobacco, so that's what we made our money from. See, we had so many in the family, 'til they started marrying off, we could take care of our farm, you know, maybe Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Well, Friday, we would go work for somebody else, those who had tobacco. I remember I would string tobacco, and two of my sisters would hand tobacco to me. We'd go home and thought we had a potful of money when we'd go back home. We'd do things like that. Of course, my brother sometimes would sell things, like go up the highway and sell watermelon, cantaloupe, things like that.

**Q:** Did you keep the money that you would earn separately for yourselves or give that to your parents?

**Blue:** Everybody had his own little pocketbook, girl. Nobody touching that money. Nobody touching that money. [Laughter] No. That's your-'uns. You went out and made that little money. That's your money; you can have it. And Mama insisted. As I say, Mama was a pure genius. Mama was a pure genius. Mama insisted that--our house was too small, you know. I look back there and I say, "How in the world did we stay in that place

with all those people?" Everybody now, you've got your bedroom and a big bed. But, no, we had two and three in a bed, I guess, sometimes. All the boys had one room, you know. They had two or three beds in that one room. But that never dawned on me. I thought that was the way to live until I grew up a little bit.

[Laughter]

But Mama insisted, as I say, that even on the mantlepiece-- you've heard you put the thing that you wanted to keep, like money, for example, you had your money, you put it on the mantlepiece or had a wardrobe, you know. You haven't seen the old wardrobe. One part had a door to it. You'd put all your little niceties in there. The boys had one, one in the girls' room, one in the boys' room. If you touched it, now, touched anybody else's, my mama would whip you. You can't whip children now, I guess, but Mama would be in bad shape. Mama would be in bad shape if you can't whip, because Mama was the kind would tell you, "This hurts me worse than it hurts you."

**Q:** I know I've heard it.

**Blue:** Yes, ma'am. And I'd wonder how in the world could that hurt her worse than it hurt me. [Laughter] I told my kids one day, my Sunday school kids, I said, "She was about to kill me. I thought, 'One day Mama's going to kill herself, because she's about to kill me.'" [Laughter]

**Q:** What did you do?

**Blue:** Let me tell yo this. Mama was an oddity in the world, because Mama thought that the Bible meant you're supposed to give that 10 percent, or whatever it is, give that to the Lord. But we'd have a lot of jokes behind Mama's back, you know. Mama used to tell us, if you've got a nickel, I believe that's what it was, she'd tell us you're supposed to give two cents to the church. The other three you save. You give two to the church and you save two, and you can spend that one, you know. Mama would leave us, but we were going to school then, and we'd say, "We know two cents out of a nickel is more than 10 percent." [Laughter]

We didn't need, necessarily, a lot of money, especially children, because our parents bought and kept us in good clothes, and we had hand-me-downs from the sisters and brothers, but, you know, I finally got to the place that they couldn't hand me down, because my feet were larger than the two immediately ahead of me. The one next to me, her foot was always smaller than mine. I believe I came out of the womb with some big feet, for a girl. [Laughter]

Anyway, we didn't have any problem, because we didn't know you could live life the way it's living now, because Mama wouldn't let us live it anyway there. I just thought it was great. I enjoyed growing up. I just thought it was great. Brother would ride us on his back, everybody running around,

everybody playing. But I say that, Mama would have been a good sergeant in the Army, I'm telling you.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Blue:** ... our farm, and we'd go down there and fish. We ate, but we didn't have any money, that was our problem.

**Q:** Your family owned that land?

**Blue:** Oh, yes.

**Q:** How did they come to own that land?

**Blue:** My mama's daddy gave it to them. I'll tell you how. You know, that's another story. My two grandfathers were slaves, but both of them had no problem with growing up or anything. In the first place, my paternal grandfather was the old master's son, and that was one thing. So he was special. All right.

But my maternal grandfather, he was a youngster, much younger than my paternal grandfather, because I think when it was over, when the northerners rushed through there and swept it out, and the people were saying, "Burn up Georgia," he was in the teens. He was lucky. If you read about slavery and listen to the people who know about slavery, now and then you would find a contrary or mean [unclear], but for the most part, you

know Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad. You know what her success was with the white women who helped her. They couldn't go in the daytime because the people would see them, all those people.

My paternal grandfather would tell all about this, you know, because he knew all about it. He didn't tell me much, because I didn't know him, but he told that the white ladies--of course, there were some white ladies that wouldn't do it, of course. You're always going to get some good and mean. See, the white ladies would hide the slaves in the daytime down in their cellars. My grandfather told my family that. Of course, the law found it out, but they couldn't do anything about it, because you don't never say you doubt what the white man is saying. The white lady was in there.

He told about some that he knew about, that Harriet Tubman had this group. Of course, there was more than one group, but she was the big one, and had a sick child in it. The old Missus had them down in the cellar. Said somebody told the law, said the law came, heard they were there, and she told them, no, nobody was there. Said this sick child started crying, so Missus went over to that piano and she did some playing so they couldn't hear anything. Then after [unclear], she said, "I told you..." something like that, what the words were. So they left.

You can't doubt the white lady's word, you know. So the law left. But they knew they were down there. At night, she bundled them up and sent them on their way.

Did you ever read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

**Q:** Yes.

**Blue:** That's the way. Said it was a white missus here. Not every one, but you'd get a good one.

To go back to my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, this is what he told my mama. I think he was 16 or 18 when the war was over, and he said that sometimes you had a very cruel overseer on the farm, so he was going to beat the boys for nothing. He said but all you had to do, the boys could outrun him. All you've got to do, you go to that house to the missus, his missus--not everyone didn't do that, but he says that he'd run to the missus, and she would put a hand on that boy and she'd keep him around the house and say, "He's going to help me in the day, two or three," 'til all this wear out. Then she'd let him go back to the field. But he said he had run a many a day. That man was [unclear], he said he'd beat it to that house. But, see, he was lucky.

I don't know, maybe women are just more humane to men, I don't know, but he said you never would have made the underground railroad if it hadn't been for some of those white ladies. They would hide them in the daytime. My grandpapa told Mama about the one, said they had them there, and they knew they were there, so somebody told the law. She told them, no, they weren't there. Then when he heard the baby crying, said she

started playing that piano. The white lady started playing the piano.

**Q:** Did he run away from slavery?

**Blue:** No! He wasn't doing any work. I told you the boss was his daddy.

**Q:** That was your paternal grandfather?

**Blue:** My paternal grandfather. My maternal grandfather was much younger. Let me tell you about him. Mama told us this. He told Mama, of course, because he was, I think, 17 when the war was over. You see, what you call now Wagum [phonetic] and Norenberg and Rayford, Rayford wasn't in, but it was in that area down there, that's where we lived, and that was his land. He lived in Hoke County between Norenberg and Rayford and Fayetteville and Ray Springs and Aberdeen and all that stuff.

He told Mama that he was 16 or 17 when the war was over. Okay. He said that the Yankees came through and just swept anything they wanted to, because they had won. Said that they called him and said, "Dave, I want you to keep the horses." It's a place we call Lumber River; it's not a river, but there's water and a bridge there and everything. Said, "I want you to keep them down here," and all the white people in there, the white men, brought their best horses, because the Yankees, as

you know, were riding through, just taking them, and gave them to Dave. Said, "Dave, you keep them quiet now." And had them down at Lumber River, this place you can go to, you wouldn't see the horses. It's sand all around. It could have been a beach if you had somebody to do it, you know. Because we look at it now when we go to Laurinburg, say, "Dave was down there with the horses." He had a gang of horses, all the best that these people had, because the Yankees would ride through and just take them.

Okay. Her daddy was listening. He could hear them coming, hear the Yankees coming, because they was making a lot of noise.

They had won and they were taking things. He said he just waited. Said he took off his shirt. He had on a white shirt. So he took it off and he was down there with the horses, took his shirt off. He heard them hit the bridge, a long bridge over Lumber River. He heard them hit the bridge. He took off, took his white shirt, and he stopped them right there. He said, "Come over here and get all these horses."

They went down there, and every man took one, and he rode off with them. He knew he had to go or they would have killed him. He stayed off for years, he said, he rode on, and finally went to New York. He left and went to a little place, I don't know whether it was Jamaica, somewhere. He stayed off 'til he was grown. He came back, and I guess all the masters were dead when he came back.

**Q:** So he went to New York?

**Blue:** He didn't stay there. He went on with the Yankees, because he knew he had to go now. He gave all the horses away.

[Laughter] Said he took off his shirt. "Come on!" Then he jumped bareback, didn't even have a saddle, like a wild man, rode on off with them.

As I say, Mama had a job for everybody to do. [Laughter] "This is your week to do so and so, your week to do so and so."

But I thought that was great, myself. My sisters and brothers told me, "You didn't have any better sense." [Laughter]

**Q:** Your family got your land from your paternal grandfather?

**Blue:** Maternal grandfather.

**Q:** And he acquired the land how?

**Blue:** Oh, well, after he left and went away, he stayed away a few years, you see. He was grown up when he left. I guess he was about 17 when he left. When he came back, he had some money, but he didn't buy it then. He came back and worked. He was working on this farm. If you remember a little of history, that they were selling land almost for nothing once upon a time.

He bought several, several acres. He had three children, but he had two girls and a boy, but the boy died, so he divided it between his two daughters, my mama half of it and my aunt half

of it.

**Q:** Did he have any problems with white people around, holding on to the land?

**Blue:** No, no problems. I don't perhaps know all of the ins and outs of this, but I don't know what period it was, but they were just selling land almost dirt cheap. I don't know how much it was, but Mama was telling us. I never knew him. But she said he was always a go-getter, and she said people heard him talking, thinking maybe he degraded something, you know. He'd say, "You see that black nigger over there?" And Mama said, "I guess nobody said anything, because he was black himself."  
[Laughter] He was very dark.

But, see, he was always enterprising. He gave all those horses away. He thought that up. "Now, Dave, I want you to keep them. Just keep them so when they come through here, they'll take all the horses." They were taking horses, anything they needed. They were the heroes then. They had won the war. He told them, yeah, he would. I think he was 17 then. But he knew he was going to leave there then, so he jumped on one of those horses, didn't even have a saddle on it, nothing.

**Q:** The white men thought he was going to keep the horses for them.

**Blue:** Well, not only one; it was those in that area, because they were taking horses. They'd ride one and go get them another one, go to that man's house and take his, take another, throw a saddle on that one, go on off. And Dave told them, yeah, he'd keep them. [Laughter]

**Q:** What church did you go to?

**Blue:** Presbyterian.

**Q:** It was in your county?

**Blue:** Yes. As I say, after the Civil War, many of them, particularly these were soldiers, primarily, who saw the situation, just what slavery had been. That just disgusted them. They came down and just created schools, almost, like mushroom stools. As I mentioned to you about Ray Springs, Ray Springs is twelve miles from my door. There's one in Ray Springs and one in Lumberton, one in Norenberg, one in Carthage. Some of them are still--I went to the one in Oxford, you know, but the one in Ray Springs then was no longer in use because when we had the public school, then the people started sending the children to the public school.

The Presbyterian church which I join now, there's several people in there. One lady who went to this school in Ray Springs, down below our house, Lumberton, it was then, down

below our house, and my older sisters and brothers went there.

The schools that the blacks had early, and the state made them do it, were constructed by the Presbyterian Church and there was another group, the Rosenwald Fund. Have you ever heard of the Rosenwald Fund?

**Q:** Yes.

**Blue:** The Rosenwald Fund. Now, the Rosenwald Fund, it was called Rosenwald, but that was the Rockefeller family and their ancestors. The greatest school that I attended, one through seven, was a Rosenwald school. The state was not building schools then; the counties were supposed to do it. They didn't do it. When I graduated from graded school, I didn't have anywhere to go at home, because they had not built schools for blacks.

**Q:** How was your Rosenwald school?

**Blue:** They were better than the county. See, the county was building schools there. They were better than the county. The school was nice. The one that I attended, it was very nice. In the center was a large auditorium and a stage, and that stage opened onto closets, big long closets. They were four rooms, two on that end of the state, two on that end of the stage, the one that I attended. So they had grades then. See, once upon a

time you had primer, and always had eight grades. Some people said, "But you've got eight grades now." You had eight grades then, but the first one was primer instead of first year. You had a primer, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and it still gave you the eight years.

I graduated from a Rosenwald school. It was about three miles from my home, so my mama, I suppose she did it with all the children, I don't know, but when I was five, Mama and my oldest sisters started teaching me the primer. You had to buy your own books. She went to town, bought the primer. They taught me the primer, they taught me first grade, because Mama said six miles a day, three one way and three back, was too much for me to walk. So they taught me at home.

So when I went to school--and you had to buy the book for the child anyway then, but, see, the county wasn't as good. When the state took over the schools, they were much better. Those counties were mamby-pamby, you know--those crackers. [Laughter] So when I went to school, I knew the primer and the first grade, because they had taught me at home.

I had a very nice teacher. She and my preacher brother were supposed to marry, and we wanted him to marry her. I don't know what happened to them, but they didn't marry. We put it on him, you see. We said, "You didn't have sense enough to marry Missy." But anyway, when he would come home from school, he'd just get in there and take a bath and dress and gone. "I've got to go see the party." He called it a party. "Got to go see the

party." We were just flabbergasted when he didn't marry Beth. She was lovely.

I was in her class. No, I went to Geneva's class. See, I was supposed to be in the primer, but I knew the primer and I knew the first grade. They had taught me at home. So I told a little story. I went back home and told my people--I guess I stayed in there about two months, then came back home and told them--you had to buy the books then. I told my mama that the teacher said you could buy them in the first grade, because I was ready for the first grade. So Mama went to town and bought it.

So the next day I went in. You know, children are doing lots of things. I found that out. [Laughter] I went in the next day, but I went in the teacher's room and handed my book. The other teacher had a book. She thought I had been promoted. I promoted myself, you know.

So I was sitting up there, because they had taught me that in school, because Mama thought it was too long for me to walk twice a day, so they had taught me that. So I knew the work. I was having a good time.

[Unclear], the teacher I had left came stepping in to talk with that other teacher, and while she was there, she looked at me. I was sitting up there just as nice, didn't say a word, and she didn't say anything to me, but she talked to the teacher, you know. "She told me she was in first grade." But she didn't bother me. She left me in there. But I really had been through

that book, because they had carried me through that at home.

**Q:** Your older siblings?

**Blue:** Yes.

**Q:** And your mother.

**Blue:** That's right. They carried me through that book.

**Q:** So that's how you ended up in the same grade with your sister.

**Blue:** That's right. The teacher didn't say anything. I did know it. I guess she said, "She learned it from somewhere." She was nice enough, you know. She could have stood on protocol, you know. I was sitting there with the book. She knew Mama had to buy it. I was sitting there just as nice. [Laughter] So that's how we went through school together. I took my job in hand and walked on into the other teacher's room and handed my book. The teacher seen that Mama had bought the book. I told her a tale. I said, "Teacher told me I was promoted." I did know that book and I knew I knew the book. I was doing all right, reading and spelling. I decided I was going on, you know. I don't know what in the world made me do a thing like that. That was terrific! I know I shouldn't have

done that, but I was sitting there, just sitting there. But the Lord was with me.

Let me tell you this now, but I shouldn't tell this on the tape. The Lord really has been with me. Let me tell you how it was with me. That brother of mine who did everything, that I wouldn't even speak to, you know, he was in college. I believe he was at Lincoln University then before he went to John C. Smith. I was fourth grade. He became ill and he came home. He was ill, I believe it was the last semester and into the summer, and so he came home.

So when he was well enough to go back to school, see, he hadn't been working and he didn't have any money. They needed a teacher for a two-teacher school, and it wasn't in the same county, but it was a little school called Millside. It was long; I was walking a long time. They asked him to be the principal of this school, and he accepted it. He needed the money in the first place, because he had been sick, he hadn't worked, and he needed the money. He was going back to school in September. Okay. He accepted it.

There were three of us, the last three children, three girls, said we wanted to go to brother's school. He said okay, but he had to live there, because it was a long walk and it may be raining and so forth. But we would walk from home. We'd take our lunch and walk. So I was in fourth grade, I remember that. I was in fourth grade.

You know, I know you don't do that with your little sister

and brother, but I would ask my sister--I had trouble with improper fractions. If I had to subtract three-fourths, maybe, from just one fourth, and I'd go to my sisters and brothers and they would work it for me. The answer was in the book then. I would say, "Well, how did you get that?" They'd say, "I borrowed one." But they never did explain to me what they borrowed. They didn't tell me that if it was three-fourths and one-fourth, that they borrowed one and then there were four-fourths added to that one-fourth. They just said, "I borrowed the one." I would look at that. See, I just put the one up there, and I'd have eleven-fourths sitting up there, something like that, you know. But they never told me that. I would go and ask them again, because I couldn't work it. I couldn't work that improper fraction.

So when we were going to Bruh, Bruh was the big principal, you know, so he was teaching this math class. Some kid in there was smart, too, smart. There was one little old boy in there named Bedford Percel. He was just like lightning. He could get through all the lessons, math and everything. Well, my brother, Mr. Smartie, sent us to the board. Now, he didn't know that I couldn't work that improper fraction. I had never asked him; I had asked my sisters and brothers who were home with me. And bless the pastor, he gave us a problem that was an improper fraction.

So I had everything going. I don't know what it was, whether I had two-thirds and one-third but what it was, so I

stood there and I said, "Well, by golly, I'm in good luck. I'm standing by Bedford Percel." And I kind of sneaked over there, and I put down his answer. I knew Bedford would be right. I put down his answer.

Bruh would have us return to our seat and then he'd have somebody to stand. So when he got to that problem, he called on me. But, see, I didn't know that Bruh saw me copying the boy's answer, but he saw me. He called on me. In those days, you stand, you know. I stood up and I said so and so and so. I said, "You can't take two-thirds from one-third, so I borrowed one." To this day, Mama was praying for me. Something said, "Ding, ding, ding, ding! You borrowed three-thirds." Lord, I was so happy. I said, "I borrowed one and I had three-thirds, one-third, or two-thirds, leaves two-thirds."

Bruh knew I had copied the answer. He had never mentioned to me. We went home that night and he told my family that weekend, because he stayed. He would go home Friday and come back Sunday night. He told Mama. He said, "I don't know how she explained herself, because I saw her copying that." That's why he called on me, because he was letting me know you don't do things like that. But he didn't say anything to me, so I didn't say anything to him. But I said to myself, "Yeah, but the Lord was stronger than you was." The Lord had my mama praying for me. [Laughter] Mama was praying for me.

I just couldn't get those improper fractions, because they didn't explain it to me right, my sisters and brothers. They

said, "I borrowed one," but they didn't tell me to reduce it to one-third or two-twos or two-halves or three-thirds or four-fourths, you know. But I knew Bedford would be right, so I just copied it and went on to my seat.

And he went home and told Mama that. He didn't know how. "She explained it very well, but I saw her copying." So Mama told me what he said. But I say, Lord have mercy, I didn't tell Mama, but Mama was praying for me. But I couldn't get those improper fractions. They didn't explain it to me, and the teacher never explained it to me. They said, "Borrow one." Where would you borrow one? I put that one up there. I knew it was ridiculous to have ten so and so. [Laughter]

**Q:** How big was your school?

**Blue:** Oh, it was a small school. You mean my graded school?

**Q:** The Rosenwald school and the school your brother was principal of.

**Blue:** The Rosenwald school was large. The rooms and the plant was large and a large student body.

**Q:** In your class, how many?

**Blue:** I guess generally--see, it went through seventh grade, so

I would imagine anywhere from thirty or forty students. See, it was in a location, a little place called Bomo [phonetic]. There was a store there, a store down the road. There was a church near and a Masonic lodge there, and it was thickly populated with farming, farmers. It was rural, and they had a lot of children--the farmers had a lot of children. My parents had twelve. The classes were reasonably large.

**Q:** Did they tend to have students from all around the area?

**Blue:** Yes, all around the area.

**Q:** Did you have to pay to go to the Rosenwald school?

**Blue:** No. The Rockefeller family just knew we didn't have any--as I say, after the Civil War, they built schools and churches for the blacks, particularly the Presbyterian. That's where I got tied up with the Presbyterian, I guess. I know my family was in the Presbyterian Church already. They built churches. As I say, Barber-Scotia, the man who came down and gave the money for that had fought in the Civil War, and he was from the Washington area. He came back and he said that he was going to set up a school for black children.

That's where Mary McLeod Bethune went to school, because her mama--the Presbyterian missionary came by then, after the war, was going to take these black children and teach them, you

know. Went to the Bethune cotton patch. The mama said, "I don't know. We've got to pick this cotton. Take that one over there. She's lazy anyway. She don't pick cotton." Well, that was Mary McLeod.

And she took her. She finished teaching in that little house, and then they gave her a scholarship to Barber-Scotia. She was going to be a missionary, but she was so smart, she ran through everything. I don't know, she was 18 when she graduated. Barber-Scotia was not a four-year school then. So the missionary group didn't want to send anybody under 21, because you have a lot of things happening to you. One, you being an adult when you went.

So in the meantime, while she was waiting to be adult, she decided she was going to get out of school. All right. She was writing people, philanthropic people, who had helped schools and built Barber-Scotia, for example, and she got tied up with the Rockefellers again. She wrote them. So they wrote and told her that they'd come down and see her plant then, before they put any money in it, see what she was doing. She said, "Okay." All right. So they sent somebody down, somebody from the Rockefeller Foundation. He came on the train, and she met him on the train. Did she have a car then? She may have had a car.

Anyway, I think they walked from the train station to a place. He said he wanted to see the school. Okay. They walked and talked. Finally, she stopped at a place. She said, "Where is the school?"

"This place?"

"Yeah, where is the school? That school is here, but where?" He went back and told them to send the money.

[Laughter] Said she got down there. She wrote back to the Rockefellers, they sent the money for the school. I tell you, she is--have you ever seen her, Mary McLeod Bethune?

**Q:** I have.

**Blue:** She came to North Carolina Central when I was there.

**Q:** When you were going to school?

**Blue:** Uh-huh. The poor students could hardly get in the auditorium on a Saturday afternoon. Standing-room only. And she was great. She was great. She told us about--well, she has a son, and she was talking about from a youth on up, how you should be and what you should do about the children. Said she and her son were walking down the street. Talk about her son, you know, he's a kind of ne'er-do-well now. He may not be that bad. Anyway, she said she and her son were walking down the street and they met a white lady with a son walking down the street, her son. Her son said to her, "Mama, I tipped my hat to that lady, but that boy didn't tip his hat to you."

So she said, "Son, I want you to be a gentleman. I don't know what that lady wants her boy to be." He understood it. To

be a gentleman, he was going to tip his hat to the lady.

Ah, but she was great. She would say, "I'm a [unclear], and I'm glad of it." Just standing-room only, on a Saturday afternoon. These kids would be out at football--no, siree. You could hardly get in the place. Mary McLeod Bethune. And it was worth it to go and look at Mary McLeod Bethune. She was a dynamic lady.

**Q:** What was Durham like when you were going to school?

**Blue:** Oh, I would give it a good grade. I'd give it a good grade, number one, for their regard for the school and Dr. James Edward Shepherd. There were people in school at Central when I came here should have been out years and years ago, but they didn't have anywhere to go. When I came here to go to school, I was a college-age child. I started early for college, perhaps, but anyway, there were so many adults, mamas and papas there. They weren't mamas and papas, but they should have been mamas and papas.

They used to laugh at me, my sisters, just to hear me say this. They said, "Little Blue..." See, there were two of us. They called her Big Blue, but I was a little taller than she was. "Little Blue, so and so and so." And I said, "Ma'am" and "Yes, sir," and that would just tickle them to death. They just had a good time. So I'd say "Ma'am" and "Yes, sir." I didn't know what they were doing. That's what we did in the country.

We said "Ma'am" to people and "Yes, sir," to people. I thought they were so old that I should say. [Laughter]

They had no school until Dr. Shepherd started it, but it was a religious training school in Chataqua at first, then finally it got around to North Carolina College for Negroes. That's what it was when I came. But there were people there who had wanted to finish high school, but they needed the boarding school money to go to one of the other schools. My brother was in school, but he would work in the summer at the hotels to go to school in the winter. So these people, I said, "Ma'am." I said, "Yes, ma'am." That would just tickle them because I would say "Yes, ma'am," so I didn't even know what it was all about then 'til I found out. They said, "Ask this question," just to hear me say "Yes, ma'am" or "Yes, sir." That would just tickle them.

**Q:** What would you do for entertainment?

**Blue:** Not much entertainment in Durham. There was a theater. Well, back in those days, the students didn't have all those liberties, you know, that they have now. They're on your own now, you see. No, you had to be in at a certain time at night, you had to check out. In our dormitory, you'd go down to the-- what did they call the lady? A matron, I guess. You would have a big book; you would check out.

**Q:** Even as a graduate student?

**Blue:** No, not as a graduate student. The graduates, you were on your own as a graduate student. But undergrad. You'd go down and you'd check out and you'd check in. You came in and checked in. The dormitories were locked at a certain time--the girls' dormitory. I don't think the men's dormitory was locked, but the girls' dormitory. You didn't go out after so and so, and things of that kind.

When I first came here, had a lights-out. You studied, but the bell would ring at 11:30 or 12:00 or something, and you were supposed to turn your lights out, you know. Some people did and some people didn't. The boys probably [unclear], but the girls didn't. They had to check in and out, and they were due in at a certain time.

**Q:** The guys didn't have a curfew?

**Blue:** No. Guys didn't have a curfew. I don't think they did when I first came here, but I don't think they did. I really don't know. I know the girls did, but I don't think the boys did. Could be. But they didn't have automobiles. Dr. Shepherd didn't permit it, boys running around, he said, "Wasting your parents' money." One boy did come here from around Rocky Mountain or somewhere. He had a good-looking car and ran around all the time, but he was failing everything. They put him in

his car and sent him back home. Dr. Shepherd said, "You shouldn't be wasting your parents' money." He was failing everything. That was the last we saw of him. Somebody said, "Where's old so and so?" "Dr. Shepherd sent him home."

[Laughter]

Oh, Lord. It's a whole new ball game. It's a whole new ball game. Now everybody has an automobile. You know, I had a car when I went to the University of Michigan.

**Q:** Is that where you got your graduate degree?

**Blue:** Uh-huh.

**Q:** When did you go to Michigan?

**Blue:** My first year was summer of '48.

**Q:** That was in Ann Arbor?

**Blue:** Ann Arbor.

**Q:** How was that?

**Blue:** Ann Arbor's a nice little town. It's a small town. It's a nice little town. The first year I went to Ann Arbor, I had a car that I left at home with the family, but after that, I

carried it with me. When I started going in the summer to complete my dissertation and doctorate and so forth, I'd take my sister with me. She has a library of science degree from NCCU, from here. So she'd go with me. She was my cook. She was an excellent cook. We lived there in a dormitory that had a kitchen, and she's an excellent cook. People would be coming down the hall, saying, "Who's that cooking all that good stuff down there?" So she would go with me.

We were the only two left at home at that time, anyway. We would drive up. We would break the drive. The first year I didn't have a car. That's right. Didn't have a car the first year, but when we went in summer school, we had my sister's car, I guess. We'd drive.

She had a very dear friend in the library of science. She had a library of science degree from Central, but since she was up there, she decided she wanted to get another one at Michigan.

She was just playing along, and she did. But she had a dear friend in the library of science, a little white girl from West Virginia. That's where we broke our trip after that. We'd spend in her apartment--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

**Blue:** The people who commute could park on campus, and the handicapped could park on campus. Anybody else.

**Q:** They welcomed black students at Michigan?

**Blue:** Michigan has never been segregated. Never been segregated. It's one of the states that's never been segregated.

**Q:** So black students have been going there a long time?

**Blue:** All the time. The first time we went up, I had a little automobile. The first time I went, I didn't have my automobile, but my sister and I went by automobile. When you registered, if you had a car, you know, put it down there. So I parked my car where I was moving, and the University House, that was city property, something like that, along the street. You had to move it on Tuesday and Thursday, they were going to clean the street, and you had to be moving your car. So I got a little note in my mail about owing so much money, so I wanted to know [unclear]. I hadn't moved the car. I said, "But I already had registered my car when I registered." They said, "Oh, yeah, but that's just to drive in the city. You can't drive on the campus. It's only people who commute, and the handicapped." Because they just had too many. Didn't have the space. Only people who commute and the handicapped could park on campus. He said, "No, you can't do that." I said, "Thank you, sir." I paid my little money and said, "That's the last time I do this." Then you live on the street. Many cities do that, on Monday

and Wednesday or Friday, then they sweep this side, so you have to be sure you don't have your car on the other side. That's the way we had to do.

We lived in the Betsy Barber [phonetic] House. That's right on campus, but we were on the city street. So we had to keep that. Had a kitchen there, and my sister would cook up some good stuff. She was an excellent cook.

**Q:** When did you finish at Michigan?

**Blue:** You know, I've forgotten all these dates.

**Q:** You're doing a good job.

**Blue:** It must have been--it took a long time, because I was going in summer school. My first year, I went a whole year. I wanted to get the lay of the land and get myself settled. I went my first year. That was in September, came back Christmas and came back in the summer. But after that, I did it in summer school. Then once you passed the test, then my committee told me I could write my dissertation in Durham. I could send him copies. But I never sent him copies; I'd go up in the summer. I wasn't taking any classes, because I didn't have to be in Ann Arbor to do that. So that's what I did. Then you had to go up.

But as I say, I thoroughly enjoyed it. The last thing, do you know that my advisor sent me a notice, "Yes, the

dissertation's fine and everything. We have set up your oral examination January so and so." It's so cold! I said, "What made him do a thing like that?" But I know I had to go, and so I went. I went on the train. I don't like to fly. But I went on the train. Okay. And school was out. It was January. That's right. They were out for Christmas vacation. I went and I stayed with the family where I stayed when I was going to school there. All right. So it was a bad night, but I went down. I said, "I should go on back to Durham." I didn't like that thing.

Anyway, we had the examination and then, you know, other students who were working on dissertations and things. They all had come at once to see what gives, how they act. So there were several there. We got through it all right.

So I went on back, went to my place. I was working. I told Dr. Ferrison [phonetic], the chairman of my department, I said, "I'll be back." I told him how long I'd be gone. I was due to leave the next morning. I went down to the airport. I sat and I sat and I sat. I'd go up the desk. "Is that the flight?"

"No, it's not ready yet." And that was a time when they were kidnapping airplanes, you know, and doing all that kind of stuff, and shooting and carrying on. I said to myself, "I don't know if I want to get on that thing or not when it comes." I went back again and asked the lady. She said, "No, no, no."

So I went back again. I said, "Has anything happened to

the airplane?"

She said, "No, the engine just froze." [Laughter] In Ann Arbor. Oh, it was so cold, and I'm from the old sunny South. But I had been sitting there, saying to myself that somebody had called in and said there's a bomb on that thing. I said, "I don't know whether I'm getting on it or not," but she told me it was frozen. I decided I'd get on it. But that was when they were calling in and saying there would be a bomb on the plane, you know. That was before your day, of course. Some people thought that was funny to call in and do things like that. I said, "If they call in with a bomb on there, I'm not going to be on it."

But we left Ann Arbor. It was supposed to be about a three-hour flight. We'd stop in West Virginia and then somewhere in North Carolina. Lord, have mercy! We were here in no time. They made up all that time they had lost. They brought that plane in. But I don't like to fly. I'm a non-flyer. When I got on that ground, I said, "Thank you, Lord." I've been on one since then, but I just don't like to fly. And now the way these little old things around here have been dropping--have you been reading about this? I think I'm going to go in my old automobile.

But Michigan is cold, cold, cold. It is cold. But it's such a lovely place, and the people is lovely. I enjoyed my professors, I enjoyed the students. It's just a nice place. I enjoyed it. But it is cold, I can tell you that. If you can

stand the weather, you can make it. The students had a joke. What was it? Say, "Michigan is a place of winter in August." I think that's what it says, winter in August. [Laughter] Everything else is free. August is the only one. Winter in August.

Michigan was a great--did you read about Michigan's coach getting himself off of the--you don't read about sports, do you?

**Q:** Sometimes.

**Blue:** Michigan's coach, Mueller [phonetic], the football coach, went out and hit his wife and drank and cursed and everything, and lost his job. He wasn't the coach when I was there, of course. That was a long time. But I said, "This is ridiculous." And they said how much he was getting. Of course, to me it sounded like \$10 million.

[End of interview]