

SELLESTINE HUNT

Interview 231a

July 11, 2007, at Lufkin, Texas

R. L. Kuykendall, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with R. L. Kuykendall, Sellestine Hunt recalls her childhood and education, mostly spent in East Texas. She mentions attending segregated schools in Houston and then moving back to Lufkin after her parents' separation, where she continued attending segregated schools. She talks about how her parents had very little education, yet worked hard and succeeded in their jobs and provided opportunities for their children. Mrs. Hunt recalls her mother's job at the Cook hotel in Lufkin. She also recalls several incidences of racial discrimination during the 1960's, particularly at Perry Brothers and at Cook's in downtown Lufkin. She reminisces about being in the band and playing tennis and being a cheerleader at Dunbar school in Lufkin and talks about how she may have had a few more opportunities to participate in activities than her fellow African American students who chose to attend Lufkin High School during the Freedom of Choice portion of the beginning of integration. She did not have to compete with white students, who were often given an advantage in academics and extracurricular activities in the integrated schools. She fondly recalls Principal Franklin at Dunbar, who encouraged her to read more.

R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK): This is R. L. Kuykendall. Today is July 11, 2007. This morning I will be interviewing Mrs. Sellestine Hunt. Mrs. Hunt and I both reside in Lufkin, Texas. Mrs. Hunt is employed at Angelina College as Director of Testing and Student Development. During this interview Mrs. Hunt will explain her responsibilities related to being director of testing. You will hear her telling us about her life as a person, away from Angelina College. She does have a license, she doesn't work all the time, it seems like sometimes she does. She is a very busy lady. I will start the interview by asking some questions and just talk and tell us what we want to hear. Mrs. Hunt I'm going to start this interview with you talking about your original family. This will go back to your childhood, whatever you need to tell us. Tell us about how long you have lived in Lufkin, your parents, mother and father and tell us about when you were born. I don't know what to ask a lady, your background and I'll let you do the talking. Sometime I might ask you some questions about something you said. The next voice you hear will be Mrs. Sellestine Hunt. You may begin with your life as you learned it and your mother and father and move on into your education.

Sellestine Hunt (hereafter CH): As Mr. Kuykendall introduced me my name is Sellestine Hunt. I have lived in Lufkin most of my life except for the times that I left for furthering my education. I was born here in Lufkin and went to public schools in Lufkin and also continued my education at Angelina College. I'll tell you more about that. I'll just do kind of a summary background and we'll get more into specifics probably at a different time, a different occasion. But, I left Angelina and I went to Sam Houston in Huntsville and worked on my degree there and finished and lived in Houston for a short

period of time while I was working on my masters and then of course moved back to Lufkin to work at Angelina College where I am now.

I have my mother and my father are both deceased. My mother's name is Rosie Smith Collins, her maiden name was Smith. She is basically from the Pineland-Jasper area. She grew up in that area. My father, Charlie James Collins is from the Madisonville area. I have, I had one brother, one older brother Melvin Ray Collins who is deceased. I am the remaining legacy of the Collins clan I guess because there were only two children and my older brother preceded me, well he preceded my mother. My father passed away first, my mother and then my brother. Their backgrounds as far as my parents were concerned were basically...my father was a laborer. He had a fifth grade education, fifth or sixth grade education. He could of course barely write his name but he could sign his name. He could read signs and he could read some but not on a high level, probably on a third or fourth grade level, but he was really intelligent when it came to numbers and figures. He could do math problems in his head without paper and pencil. He could figure it out. He worked large construction in the Houston area and he was promoted to foreman and because of his natural abilities figuring out concrete and being able to run large machines and because of that he moved from what I call rural East Texas and worked in Houston. He worked on crews that put in a lot of the freeways in Houston that are being expanded now, but he was one of the original workers on the freeways in Houston. I can remember when we lived in Houston for a period of time that he would work on the freeways and Charlie, as they called him, his bosses called him, was the one they would go to when they needed to figure things out. He was the one that ran the large machines, so therefore I always saw my father as being in a leadership capacity although at the time I was growing up I didn't realize that he wasn't well educated. Everything he knew he learned probably working in Madisonville in the fields, but because of his skills and abilities we were able to live in Houston. I spent one summer in Denver, Colorado because the company he was working for transferred him to Denver to put in highways in the Colorado area. So, I got a chance to go to Denver and live with him for a summer which was an adventure for me.

My mom and dad separated when I was in the fifth grade and we moved to Lufkin on a permanent basis then. My mother, she could read. She probably had about an eighth or ninth grade education. Primarily she worked in private homes. In other words she was a maid. She would tell me stories about before we were born and before she married my dad that she worked downtown here in Lufkin at the old Cook's Hotel and they...she was a cook and she also cleaned the rooms because the Cook Hotel was the place where all the brakemen that worked on the railroad they would...it was located. Where was it located?

RLK: In Lufkin?

SH: It was located downtown where First Baptist Church is built right now. It was right there on that corner where First Baptist Church and you know the railroad came just right across there and they would stop and drop the brakemen off and they would live there

until it was time for them to go back out for another hitch. She and my aunt would go down and that is where they would work.

RLK: You said this was on the First Street area?

SH: This was in the First Street area right there across from the telephone company is where Cook's Motel was or hotel. It was a hotel.

RLK: When was this?

SH: Oh wow! It was before I was born so it was back probably in the forties, thirties and forties. When she came from Pineland she came to Lufkin because her sister lived here in Lufkin, who was Lou Ellen Richards. She married Greer Richards who was a plumber and he was a well known plumber here in Lufkin. When she moved here to Lufkin she lived with them in North Lufkin. They lived on...oh I can't remember the name of the street where they lived. It may come back to me where they lived but, she worked there at Cook's Motel. She was a cook and she was a maid. I can remember that...my mom was stricken with Alzheimer's in her later years and one of the characteristics of an Alzheimer's patient is that often times they will go back in time. It is difficult for them to determine, you know, am I in the present or am I in the past. And, often times she would be in the past and she didn't realize it, but she would often talk to me about, "Come on let's go and get these sheets changed on the bed." And, "Girl you need to come on here come Mrs. Cook" and "Old lady Cook is going to come in and we got to get this done." It kind of broke my heart because I was thinking Mr. Kurk that it took me back to a time that I've never ever experienced working for a white person and being intimidated or being frightened about not getting your work done and what they are going to do or what they are going to say to you. So just you know, listening to my mom and she would say, "Girl come on let's go we got to get this old lady Cook is going to be coming in" and I'm going...the first time I experienced that with her I was like what are you talking about and then I realized she was back in the time when she was working at the Cook Motel.

RLK: How old were you at this time?

SH: Oh, I was taking care of her. I had my family. I was probably around 45, yes around 45. My mom came to stay with us, I moved her in with us when I realized that she was having some difficulty with her mental capacities. I really got a chance to see Alzheimer's, how it was so devastating and how it just takes over the mind and you lose it. They just are not there. They move from living in the past and not recognizing the present to just being there physically.

RLK: Can you think of some sign that began knowing in the process of beginning to understand that she was having Alzheimers? Like maybe she had said something to you and you would wonder before you knew she had Alzheimer's did it ever bring any thoughts to you of what is wrong with her?

SH: At the time it didn't. I always just kind of blew it off as, "Oh mom well so and so," and I would just kind of go on from there. But after I realized what was happening it all

made sense to me. It all just kind of fell into place and it stacked up and I started to realize that those incidents that she was experiencing was because of the Alzheimer's but when I was going through it no sir I didn't. Case in point, my aunt and uncle, her brother had moved in from Detroit and he had retired so they wanted to come back to Texas. He built a house just down the street from my mom, Norman Smith and Ethel Smith, we called him Uncle Buck.

RLK: Which street is this?

SH: He lived on Settlers.

RLK: Settlers.

SH: Yes, he lived on Settlers. And, they didn't have any children so I was really their child and my aunt, my uncle's wife, was the first one that came down with Alzheimer's.

RLK: That's two in the family.

SH: Yes, but not related, but not related. But, she started having some bouts and so we had taken her to Houston to just have her checked out and find out what was going on because she was just kind of bizarre behavior and doing some things and, you know, getting up and wanting to leave the house and getting lost and not finding her way back home and things like that. So, we had taken her to Houston and they were going to have to run a series of test and so we had to spend the night. Well, we got a hotel room and I got the rooms adjacent and we just kind of opened our doors between rooms. My mom and I had a room and my uncle and aunt were right next door to us so, when we got ready to go to bed my mom said to me, and I can remember this as clearly as it happened yesterday, she said...she wanted to go home, she said, "I got to go home I can't stay here." She said, "Those people over there are going to get me, they are going to get us, we got to get out of here." I said, "Mom no, that is Uncle Buck and Auntie" I said, you know at the time I just thought well she is just nervous about being in a hotel room. But why, because she and I had always traveled before I had my family I lived with my mom. When I moved back from school and I came back from Lufkin I lived at home and she and I would take off on the weekends and go on shopping trips.

RLK: Women stuff.

SH: Women's stuff, yes. We would get a hotel room and just have the time of our lives. You know, Mr. Kurk that is one of the things that I am so glad that I did was spend time with her because I didn't know that it would end the way it ended. I am still okay with it and even at her funeral my family wondered why I didn't cry. And, I didn't cry because there was no reason to cry and I knew that I had her in my heart and I knew I had done everything I could possibly do while she was alive. So, I didn't feel...I felt sad but it wasn't one of those sadness where I just cried, you know, and not to say that I didn't cry but, I didn't cry at the funeral. I cried after the funeral. I had my own special time when I would cry. It was usually when I was alone by myself. I am going to tell you this because

I think this says a lot about how I am but I didn't realize how I am until one of the members of my family pointed it out to me and she said, "You know we didn't cry at Auntie's burial because you didn't cry." She said, "We were looking at you and we didn't want to cry because we didn't want to make you cry and if you were being strong we felt like we had to be strong too."

RLK: That made you feel how?

SH: That made me feel that I prevented them from releasing what they needed to release. I didn't permit them to do something that they needed to do simply because I was okay where I was and I didn't realize, I didn't realize how...I didn't realize the impact that my behavior had on my family.

RLK: Do you feel sorry about that? Do you feel that there was something good in that fact that you were some kind of a leader to them?

SH: Well, yes and no. That is kind of a double edged sword because my children, my daughter was in the ninth grade I think when my mom passed away, tenth grade, she was in tenth grade when my mom passed away and my son was in elementary school and I think I probably set a standard for them that may not be...it may not be appropriate for them. Because often times you look at someone else and you determine how you are going to behave and how you are going to handle things based on what you have seen other people do and especially people in your family, you know. So, I needed to let them know they had permission to handle their grief the way they needed to, not the way I choose too. That is why I say it's a double sword because they needed to know that it's okay if you want to cry just because Sellestine is not crying it doesn't mean that you can't and it doesn't mean you have to handle it the way Sellestine does.

RLK: Do you think some of that has carried over in their life?

SH: Yes, I do.

RLK: How old was your father when he passed?

SH: My father was seventy...

RLK: In his seventies.

SH: Yes, he was in his seventies, 77 or 78.

RLK: And, your mother when she passed?

SH: My mother was 82.

RLK: They lived very long lives in spite of the circumstances in which they grew up in, the way the world was at the time and all that.

SH: Yes.

RLK: Anything else you want to say? We've talked about the earlier years of schooling or the lack of because of circumstances. Now we have gotten to the point of their deaths. Is there anything else you would like to say about them? We will switch to you now.

SH: Well one thing I want to say is that they overcame a lot because they were not educated that they made do with the skills and the abilities they had. I think that had they been able to be educated they would far exceeded where I am today with my education.

RLK: That sounds so typical of many people and how they came up in an age where things were not allowed as such, that may be a bad word, but in spite of it you are sitting here full grown with children and can still say I respect my parents in spite of what was happening at the time. You have said some good things about them and their actions. May I switch to you, going back to the time you began to know you yourself, that would be at home or when you started school and some of the things that took place at that time? Just take us back to that.

SH: I think I had...I think I had the best of both worlds because my mom and dad separated. I went to school some in Houston so I was able to experience big city school life.

RLK: When was this?

SH: When we moved here I was in the third grade so I went to kindergarten here over there with Mrs. Horn.

RLK: (unintelligible)

SH: Yes, then Mrs. Horn had a kindergarten and I went there and my brother went there and my cousin. When we moved to Houston I started first grade, second grade and third grade in Houston. Then my mom and dad separated and she moved back to Lufkin to be near her people and we came to school here and that is where I finished my education in the Lufkin school district.

RLK: At this time when you began to experience things about life and the things at the time you were living in Houston as a young person relate to being introduced to things as meaningful today that maybe an adult has no idea what these things mean. Can you think of something?

SH: Well, I can just remember the large school, the large elementary school that I went to. It was in Sunnyside; well we called it Sunnyside at the time. It is now South Park; it is the South Park area. It is over, and I don't even know if the elementary school is still there or not but, it's over off of Chocolate Bayou and they have renamed Chocolate Bayou.

RLK: It has been renamed since it was Chocolate Bayou when I was there.

SH: Oh okay, so you know where I'm talking about?

RLK: Yes.

SH: Right, that was kind of the area where I grew up. But, in the Houston school district they would bus the kids because it was still segregated then. They would bus us downtown to the museums and symphonies. I can remember going to symphony's and walking through those museums downtown and looking at those sculptures and paintings and just looking at the tall buildings and just realizing there is another world out there and there is a really nice world out there. There are some nice things in the world.

RLK: There are some nice things in Houston?

SH: Yes, yes, I loved Houston and that is why I decided to go back when I finished my degree, my undergraduate degree from Sam. I couldn't wait to go back to Houston because...

RLK: You said Sam?

SH: Sam Houston State University in Huntsville.

RLK: Okay.

SH: When I finished my degree there my dad was still living in Houston and his family were in Houston, so I lived with my uncle, my dad's brother and his wife in South Park, in the South Park area. I loved Houston. I love the fast pace and I love having the things to do and having places to go and having a variety of places to go and things to do.

RLK: Your brother had been born by this time?

SH: Oh yes, he is older than I am. He is three and a half years older than I.

RLK: What were some of the things that would excite you? Anything else you can tell us about those early years?

SH: Well in addition to the exposure to the arts I really did like those. I remember in elementary school how the teachers demanded excellence from us. And, they had a way of making us believe that we could do anything that we wanted to do. They never said that you couldn't do it. I can remember also we had what we call the special kids, and those kids were I guess they were in the lower grades.

RLK: Would that be what we call at risk today?

SH: I don't know but they had us grouped. They had us grouped according to our skills and abilities and it made you always strive to be in that high group. I don't know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing because there was some stigma on the kids that were in those lower groups.

RLK: What do you mean when you say stigma? I'm not challenging you I just want to get a comparison.

SH: Okay, the kids that were in the lower group were sometimes labeled as retarded or slow, but I could always see them working really hard to get out of that group to get moved up. I don't know whether the teacher would hold that carrot and say, "Oh so and so has worked really hard and they are going to move up to group so and so today and you are going to work over there with them." So, it was like hey I did it! But, we also had that pressure that if you were in that top group you had that pressure of working to stay in that top group.

RLK: Challenging.

SH: Very challenging, positively challenging yes, yes, so I never wanted to drop out of that top group. I did, I did. I dropped out of that top group and went to the middle group.

RLK: Do you know why? Did something just happen in your life or what?

SH: I just did not perform.

RLK: Were you aware that you were not?

SH: Oh yes, I was.

RLK: This gets us back to why you allowed, I guess the word is allowed, why you allowed yourself to drop?

SH: I can't remember why and the circumstances around it. I just remember the feeling I felt when I had to go down to the next group. It wasn't the lower group, the lowest group, but it was a step down.

RLK: Can you describe the feeling?

SH: Just kind of humiliated, embarrassed, I felt that I didn't deserve to be there because I guess I've always really felt good about myself but never been braggadocious about it, you know. I think that goes back to the type of mom I had. She was always very humbled and she wasn't really consumed with herself and I think that kind of rubbed off on me. I had it in here and I knew that this was not the place I should be and yes, it made me work harder to get out of that place, you know.

RLK: Do you feel that somehow you were aware that you were going the opposite direction or did it come from as a result of the teacher in your class?

SH: I think it was a number of things. I think that, you know, my family life probably contributed to some of that because it was kind of, it wasn't in turmoil but my dad...now I realize he was probably an alcoholic, you know. And, I never really thought about that, you know, but I think he probably was an alcoholic. Because he could work five days a week and we knew on Friday if he wasn't home by 5:30 or 6 o'clock he was gone out for the weekend and we wouldn't see him until maybe Sunday night when he would stumble in drunk.

RLK: Did you ever hear any comments from your mother concerning it?

SH: Oh yes, that is why we left. That is why we came to Lufkin.

RLK: Okay.

SH: That is why they separated and we came to Lufkin. One of the things I told my mom was that, and I can remember saying this to her, because I never wanted her to feel badly about leaving that environment and I told her, I said, "Mom the best thing that you could have ever done was to have left Daddy and moved us to Lufkin because if not we would have been swallowed up in Houston." Simply because the situation with him and you know, Mr. Kurk financially we were very well off. He made good money on construction, but if he didn't make it home on that Friday then we didn't see that check and it was tough. So, going back to why I failed from that first group to the second group and maybe what caused it, I think often times its situations going on within the family and you got to realize that takes ones focus away from what they should be focusing on when they are dealing with other stuff. When you are up on Sunday night and your dad is ranting and raving and he is drunk then it's difficult to concentrate the next morning when you get to school, you know. But, I think all of that goes into making me what I am today.

RLK: Do you remember what grade you were in elementary school?

SH: I was probably in third grade then, yes that is when we moved when I was in third grade.

RLK: Can you remember any definite differences between being in Houston in school and coming to Lufkin?

SH: Oh very definitely, oh yes, very definitely. When we came to Lufkin I enrolled at Garret Elementary on Kurth Drive and we lived on Bob Street which was about a block over from the school, so it was in walking distance and verses when we were in Houston we had to ride bicycles. We had to ride our bicycles to school. It didn't matter what kind of weather we were out and about on the bicycles and I can remember one year it snowed in Houston and we had to ride our bicycles home and it was so cold that my brother's hands froze to the...

RLK: To the handle bars.

SH: ...yes, to the handle bars. In Lufkin we walked to school and my cousin's mother, Aunt Jackie, had been valid counselor for years...

RLK: Excuse me do we know what year?

SH: Let's see we came to Lufkin when I was in third grade so this was probably my fourth grade year.

RLK: What year was this?

SH: You are going to make me go back, 1960, okay all right it was nineteen...

RLK: Well that is okay just a general, in the sixties, late sixties, early sixties.

SH: Let's see I was born in '51 and I started to school when I was 6 so that was '57 so three years from that would be '60 and another four years so, it was about around '61 or '62, yes.

RLK: Tell us something about the times. At the time what was going on? At the time you are ten years old and in Lufkin, Texas what can remember taking place as you saw Lufkin?

SH: As I saw Lufkin, as I said we lived on Bob Street and my mom had gotten a house right next door to...well, when we first moved here we lived with my aunt and her husband and her daughter. And, then we got the house right next door to them and we were within walking distance to the school. She was always there when we would get out of school, my aunt was so, we didn't go home to an empty house. We always went over to Aunt Jackie's house until my mom would get off work. She worked in private homes. She worked for the people that owned Plus-Tex Poultry.

RLK: The Plus's?

SH: The Plus's yes...

RLK: (unintelligible)

SH: No, I don't think so.

RLK: Well I won't get off...we will talk about it.

SH: She was always there. The school, you were asking me about the school. The school was...Mr. Franklin, C. F. Franklin was my principal and he was very authoritarian, very authoritarian. We of course had to...we had to...he would come into our classrooms and he would visit the classroom and he would see how we were performing. And sometimes

he would come in and he would teach the lesson. In looking back on it now I don't know whether he did that with all of the classes, but his daughter and I were in the same class together, Janice Franklin and he would come in and he would ask us questions and see how quickly we could respond and how active we were and how we could do our work.

RLK: What did you think about that in comparison to your teacher? I'm not trying to put a downer on it you said, listening to you, you say there were two different methods that were being taught and comparing what was taking place did you find one better to learn from or..?

SH: I think it was, you know, looking back on it I think it was his way of coming in very similar to what they do in the public schools now and I don't think they had that back then but, I think this was his form of it. This was his own creative form of doing teacher evaluation, you know. They didn't...I think back then they didn't have a formalized teacher evaluation and I think that was his way of coming in and saying okay I'm going to evaluate you by evaluating your students and I'm going to see how well they perform.

RLK: What do you think about that?

SH: What do I think about it now or what did I think about it then?

RLK: At that time.

SH: I think at that time I was so involved in wanting to please and perform and to stand out, you know. Thinking back from when I was in Houston being up here, moving down here and moving back up and never wanting to go back to that second level that when the principal came in, you know, then I wanted to shine. I wanted to be one of the star students. I wanted to show him that I could shine.

RLK: Did you get respect from your principal? You did? Would you call it that today?

SH: Oh yes, I think so. Also what you have to realize is back then the principals and the teachers knew the parents, they knew the students, they knew the families that you came from and you know, I've always felt that when I was in that schoolroom or wherever I was I was representing my mom and I wanted to do a good job on representing her.

RLK: Okay, listening to you say that, anything you think or said that made you do your school work in the past by comparison, I don't mean other than this but I mean this factor having made you do your best at school.

SH: I think when the administrators and the teachers have a direct contact and a direct relationship with the students and their families there is that bond there and they respect each other. You got to have that respect. It was like my parents called Mr. Franklin the principal Professor Franklin. He was held in high esteem and, you know, if he said Sellestine needs to spend some time in the library reading then Sellestine spent that time in the library reading.

RLK: Any comparison to today? Not, that you mean for it to be but, do you see it as a comparison as to today?

SH: I don't think we have it today. I don't think we have that and I think that if a principal or teacher said to a parent, "Your child needs to spend more time reading" I think there is an automatic suspicion on the part of the parent, "Well why do you say that, what do you base that on?" "Why my child, did you tell anybody else's child that?" Those kinds of things. I think it goes back to, "Do you really care about my child?" I think my mom and the parents knew that Professor Franklin cared about us and he loved us and he wanted us to be the best that we could be. They were willing to put us in their hands and say okay if this is what you say then this is what we are going to do.

RLK: Do you see maybe in color a difference as a result of integration? Now I'm not talking about color, but in the manner of teaching.

SH: Oh definitely, oh definitely, yes, yes. Because I can see the difference and having gone to a segregated elementary school and high school and then experiencing integration in my college years and then looking at my children as they went through that there is a big difference, a big difference. I think that the world has changed so much and the kinds of people that are going into education are not the kinds of people that I had when I was in school. The kinds of people that we had when we were in school were ethical people, moral people. If they had any skeletons in the closet they kept them in the closet. We didn't know about it. They didn't bring it to the campus. I just think that we need to look at the caliber of teachers we are bringing in and I think if we can get the best of the best in education that really want to be in education and want to teach and believe that education determines a kids future and the future of the world then we will see some changes.

RLK: Education is very important to all of us. Tell me some other things about being a little girl and growing up and things that were taking place in your life that you recognize as being looked at or being different or whatever and how you felt about life in general other than in a classroom setting.

SH: Well, I can remember when we moved to Lufkin and you know at that time we could walk to town. And, we would walk to downtown and right there going downtown where Cook's Motel used to be, which was a big white boarding house, I can remember it was there even when we moved here it was an old house that was sitting there and when we walked to downtown Lufkin there was a hot tamale man right there at his spot...

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SH: ...there was a hot tamale man right there on First street where the railroad track comes across there by what is now Lufkin Conroe Telephone and he would always be there. That was his spot and we would always walk to town to go to Perry Brothers to the

five and dime store. Everybody would buy this old man's hot tamales and he was a black guy that would sell hot tamales there. I can remember going there, I didn't like hot tamales but my brother and my cousin did and we were there to buy hot tamales for them and they would eat them on the way back home. I would always buy something else at Perry Brothers, but we were standing there and this white guy came up and we were there first, but you know, he just kind of pushed in line in front of us and "get back."

RLK: He said that?

SH: Yes, yes, and so we stepped back and he bought his hot tamales and he brushed on off.

RLK: About how old were you then?

SH: Probably about twelve, probably about twelve. Then we proceeded on to Perry Brothers and the big thing about Perry Brothers, I can remember this growing up, in Perry Brothers they had two fountains; they had a black fountain and a white fountain.

RLK: You mean the signs?

SH: The signs.

RLK: The water was the same from any fountain.

SH: Exactly. They had signs over the fountains and they had this little lady that worked in this section over where the fish were and it was, if you can visualize this Mr. K., the water fountains were here on this wall and they had fish tanks where you would go and buy your fish here and then they would have the checkout counter right next to it so she would go and she would get your fish out and put them in the little bag and you would step to the checkout counter and she would check you out. Well, she could watch the water fountains and it really became a game for us because I don't know whether Perry Brothers assigned her this or not but she would watch to make sure none of the little Negro children would drink out of the white fountain. But we always made sure that we had bought whatever we wanted to buy in Perry Brothers and then we would go over and get us some water and even if she was checking somebody out she would be watching like this, so we would be standing in line to get our water, my brother, my cousin and me, and my brother was always the prankster and he would say, "Okay I'm going to get my water first and then Marie you come up next and when I finish I'm going to step right over here and I'm going to drink out of this white water fountain and we going to turn around and walk out." So and we would do it and she would say, "Hey, hey, you get out of there, you get out of there." And so we would keep a drinking and we would turn around and walk out.

RLK: What other kind of experiences did you experience at the time set up that you are talking about?

SH: Well Perry Brothers was kind of the store that we would always go but I can remember a little bit older across the street from Perry Brothers where Greg Longino's office is now that corner and all the way down to Lee's Jewelry was there and then next to Lee's was another entrance to Clark's. Now where Greg Longino's office was there was an entrance into Clark's. You could go in to Clark's and go upstairs...

RLK: Lufkin Avenue?

SH: Yes, Lufkin Avenue. I can just remember that when we would go shopping that Clark's was the store. Clark's and also...oh I can't think of the name of the other...Cannon and Parker, Cannon and Parker. Those were the two top stores in Lufkin, Cannon and Parker and Clark's. My mom would save money 'cause I had large feet and she would buy one pair of shoes for me at Clark's or Cannon and Parker because they carried, I don't know if you remember this or not LifeStride shoes for kids, for children. Those were the top shoes but they were expensive, probably five or six dollars at that time. But I can remember going in there and my mom, they had lay-a-way at that time and so whenever my sizes came in she would always want to lay-a-way some shoes for me and you could pay a couple of dollars down and go in and pay every week or every two weeks until you could pay for them and get them out and they would just put them back. They would lay them away for you. And we went in to buy some shoes and she was going to lay them away and I remember this just as if it were yesterday, we were in and the guy he would always wait on us because he knew kind of what my mom shopped for and what size I wore so we were waiting for him and we were looking at the different styles and he came out and he had said, you know, "Let me measure and make sure you haven't grown any." And Mr. Clark, not Jimmy Clark, but the old man Clark, and I know that now because I can remember exactly what he looked like and I remember and he probably every time I would look at him I would remember that situation. Mr. Clark came over and this white lady had come in and he pulled this guy off and said...I can't remember exactly what he said but basically it boiled down to you can service them later you need to take care of her.

RLK: How did you feel about that? Did you leave?

SH: No, we didn't leave. My mom evidently was very accustomed to it, you know, and it was almost a way of life.

RLK: She wasn't anybody.

SH: Yes, so she just kind of sat down and we waited until he finished. I mean she tried on several pairs of shoes and we waited.

RLK: It was because you couldn't get shoes at another place right?

SH: Exactly, exactly.

RLK: Any other encounters similar? This would be '63 or '64 or something?

SH: Yes, I probably had one or two at Canon and Parker but I can just remember having a lay-a-way there. I was working and this was awhile back, I had started to work. I don't know where I got that from but probably because of my mom because she was always real neat, you know, and I always liked quality things and nice things and I would love to go in Canon and Parker because they had real nice clothes and well made. I knew how clothes were made because my daddy's sister was a seamstress. When we lived in Houston I would love to go to her house and she lived over on Rosedale and Thirdmore. She had an upstairs house and she lived upstairs and rented the downstairs out. She had a business. She was a seamstress, she sewed and I would watch her make things and I said when I grow up I want to learn how to sew, I want to be able to sew and I did. I used to make all my clothes.

RLK: Do you sew now?

SH: Not any more, I can but I just don't have the time. But I loved to make all of my clothes and I took, well it was required, every girl had to take homemaking when I was in high school. Mrs. Ruth Washington ripped up a number of my garments but she taught me how to sew well. Lined garments, coats and things I can make. I was poor and I had to make my clothes. My dad, because he kept a relationship with us, when I was in ninth grade and started sewing he bought me a sewing machine. I still have that sewing machine today.

RLK: Useable?

SH: Useable.

RLK: Somebody just getting out there and using it.

SH: Yes, I can mend things but I was telling you that to say that is where my knowledge came about well made garments and what to look for in well made garments and I knew that Canon and Parker had well made garments and I always wanted to buy my clothes from Canon and Parker, but I couldn't afford their clothes all the time unless I put something on lay-a-way and it was on sale and I could just pay it out. I can remember buying a couple of dresses from Canon and Parker.

RLK: What other experiences did you have at that time growing up, integration? There was a war going on? Or did you know that there was a war of some sort going on?

SH: I knew there was but I wasn't directly affected by it.

RLK: Any relatives in the service?

SH: I had one cousin that lived in Madisonville that was in the military. He made it back safely. There wasn't any problem with him. I guess basically that was it.

RLK: What about football season, did you have any directness at that time? Were you in one of the drill teams or whatever?

SH: Oh yes when I was in high school. You are jumping from elementary to high school.

RLK: Well I'm going to be doing everything.

SH: Oh okay.

RLK: Kind of relate to me what this was.

SH: Yes, when I was in high school in ninth grade I made the cheerleader team. In fact when I started Dunbar I started out in the band and I played the clarinet and in my...well I played in the band. We had a junior high seventh and eighth grade band. In ninth grade I started playing tennis and I couldn't play tennis and be in the band. I loved tennis and in fact the reason I started playing tennis, I told you earlier that Mr. Franklin said I needed to read more, I was in the library and I continued that reading and I found a book on Althea Gipson, who was the first Afro American woman to win Wimbledon. And I read this book on her and that motivated me and I said, "I want to play tennis." She had long arms and long legs much like Serena and Venice Williams, much like me. And I read that story and her experiences being on the tennis circuit and the trials that she had to go through and how they treated her and how she had to go through back doors. She couldn't use the same locker room as her white counterparts and things like that and when she was traveling how she had to do her hair and all sorts of things because they didn't have beauticians that could do black people hair. It was so...it stimulated me and I thought okay I want to play tennis. So I got out of the band and pursued tennis. I started playing tennis and someone encouraged me to go out for cheerleader so I went out for cheerleader and I made the junior varsity team of cheerleading. I was on there for probably about the first half of the year and I was moved up to varsity. I continued to play tennis which paid my way through college, the first two years at AC because they recruited me on a tennis scholarship. When I was in high school I was on the cheerleading team. I was a cheerleader which taught me a lot of leadership skills, how working with other people, negotiating with other females. The tennis taught me a lot of discipline because of course I had to practice, to handle my grades, to keep up with my school work. I had responsibilities at home because my mom worked outside of the home and often time when she got home I had to have the house cleaned up, you know. And I had to have my clothes ironed and I had to walk down to the laundry mat and wash all the clothes, the sheets and the towels and folding them up. My brother and I had to walk back up with the basket up Kurth Drive home, those kinds of things, you know.

RLK: What was the name of that?

SH: Crane's Laundry Mat on Kurth Drive, yes.

RLK: I didn't mean to switch you from elementary to second year but at any time just pull things together. Life in general when you are doing so many different things at one time in life that it does skip itself and then you think about how you are doing this that or the other. The sixties had their own problems and other people in the world and I was trying to get something specific in a small town and how things went.

SH: You know the experiences I had whether they were racial or any kind of discrimination didn't have traumatic experiences with that. I was sheltered quite a bit and I think that was primarily because I went to a segregated school. Now, had I chosen to go to Lufkin High I probably would have experienced it more. It would have been harder for me because I did have some friends...because at that time it was Freedom of Choice, that they could either chose to go to Dunbar or to Lufkin High. Some of my friends chose to go to Lufkin High.

RLK: Or their parents chose.

SH: Or their parents chose, right. And they did experience discrimination. They would write outstanding papers or they would write a paper and the English teacher would say, "You couldn't have written this." "Why?" "You just couldn't have written this." "Give me a reason why?" "You just couldn't have written this." Those kinds of things and just not having an equal opportunity to make the drill team or be on the cheerleading squad and those kind of things. I was at Dunbar and I had those opportunities to be on the tennis team. I probably could not have been on the tennis team at Lufkin High but my tennis coach at AC was the one that made it happen. I had an opportunity to play with the white girls from Lufkin because he pulled together a match between the Dunbar players and the Lufkin High players, you know, and we beat them, you know, and that was an eye opening experience for them.

RLK: God did something for everybody didn't he? He made us all equal.

SH: Yes.

RLK: We are still denying that in some fashion.

SH: Yes.

RLK: Can we let you rest and possibly start at this point in terms of how things were during the years of high school, what you experienced, what some of your friends who chose to change schools or their parents chose?

END OF SIDE TWO
END OF INTERVIEW