

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Claudette Graves Burroughs-White

INTERVIEWER: Cheryl Junk

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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

CHERYL JUNK: This is Cheryl Junk and I'm in the office of Claudette Burroughs-White at the Juvenile County Services Office in Greensboro. Today is Monday, February 25, 1991. Claudette, let's start out with your telling me the years that you went to Woman's College [now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)], what you studied, and why you chose Woman's College.

CLAUDETTE BURROUGHS-WHITE: I was a student there from 1957 until 1961 in sociology with an interest at that time in doing just what I'm doing now, working in the juvenile justice area. I selected Woman's College purely by chance. I had a girlfriend who wanted to go there. Maybe I need to share just a little more.

I am from Greensboro, and we had a very active senior class at Dudley High School here in Greensboro. And we had decided that many of us would try to enter the greater University of North Carolina, at least all the different parts of it. So we sort of selected someone to go to [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill, to State [North Carolina State University], to Woman's College. In addition, we included Duke [University] and some of the other private schools. I was not selected as one of the students, but my best girlfriend, high school friend, was selected to go to Woman's College as a part of what we were doing in our class.

And there was an entrance exam required. Carolyn didn't want to go alone to take that exam and so I went with her. And we thought that since I had to stay all day, perhaps I ought to just, you know, sort of take the exam and act like I was interested in going to it. It was really ironic, because I was accepted and she wasn't.

CJ: Oh no. [laughs] Oh my goodness.

CBW: So that's how I happened to go to UNCG, or Woman's College. And after I was accepted, [I]

felt an obligation to go, to sort of be a continuing part of what my class had set out to do. I'm trying to remember how I felt. I had really wanted to go to Howard University and could not afford to do that. And it looked as if A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] would be my--would end up being where I would go. I also was already working at A&T with a part-time job as a switchboard operator. So I had pretty well settled in on A&T as being the school of my choice and was trying to be excited about that. And so that, without having made that commitment, then it wasn't real hard to change and plan to go to Woman's College.

CJ: Can you say a little more about what the senior project was in your high school? What, what was the--?

CBW: Well, racism was alive and well then, as I'm sure you know, as it is today, but more--certainly, it was more pronounced then. And there was a real big movement in Greensboro to try to integrate schools. It was the same year that we integrated the high schools and the Greensboro Public School System. And I had a class whom I felt that was very, very active in community with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], with a number of the different kinds of marches and so forth going on around Greensboro and throughout the state.

And so we were very committed to seeing if we could make a contribution to some of the changes. And one of the really big areas of change then was education and the integration of the school systems. So I had some classmates who just vowed and determined that that would happen. And we were pretty successful, because we did get someone into every, every school. We had someone at Carolina, somebody at State, someone at Duke, someone at Woman's College. So the class at Dudley that year did manage to get someone everywhere. We were excited about that.

CJ: All right! How many in your graduating class, roughly?

CBW: Two fifteen.

CJ: Fairly big class.

CBW: It was a big class. And I'm happy to say that a number of us ended up going to college. That was also very good when you think of coming from an all-black school.

CJ: What was it like for you on campus when you first got there, in terms of what you expected and what you found?

CBW: Well, I didn't know what to expect. I had some theories about what to expect. I was not the only [African-American] student there to have been accepted. The year before I came--and there were three of us accepted in 1957.

CJ: So you were among the second group of minority students to come in?

CBW: Yes, right. There were five of us. Right.

CJ: Okay.

CBW: And we immediately met and became great friends. [both laugh] And sort of--and it really helped, I think the other thing that helped me a lot was I was a town student, so that I had a tremendous amount of support from family and my classmates and so forth who were still here and very much a part of my life.

CJ: Did you live at home?

CBW: Yes.

CJ: Okay, okay.

CBW: So I think that makes a difference in how well you get along and so forth, because I had that kind of nurturing from home. And I went to Woman's College, went to class, and I was able to go home and really have a tremendous amount of support in that regard. And I think probably you could talk to Margaret [Ann Patterson] and Zelma [Elizabeth Amey], who were my classmates. Their response and reaction may be somewhat different. I spent a lot of time with them.

The campus life was unlike other--I think what it would have been like if I had been on a black campus. The dorm rooms were separated, you know, and so we still had--

CJ: They were? They were integrated--I mean, segregated?

CBW: Segregated, yes.

CJ: So the black students who lived on campus lived in separate dorms?

CBW: The black students--they lived in the same dorms, but they lived in the end rooms of the dorms where they had their own bath, all their facilities, so that we were integrated but still segregated in the sense of what we could use on campus.

CJ: Was that due to Jim Crow laws or custom, or both?

CBW: I think it was due to custom. And the law prevented us from being fully integrated.

CJ: This was three years after *Brown v. Board [of Education]*, 1954]. Yeah, okay.

CBW: Three years--I mean, this is, well, this is many, many years and look where we are today.

CJ: That's right.

CBW: There's not much difference, you know. So, it was accommodating, but not truly integrated. So, in terms of the students, you know, I felt accepted by many. And there were those, of course, who blatantly didn't want me there. I think that was the same with faculties here--some of the professors were extremely supportive, and I remember others who just absolutely thought that we should not be there. I remember being in the registration line once and one said, "I had one of the 'Bs' last semester. Have you taught one before?" So there were some real hard things and--

CJ: I mean, that isn't surprising to me, but hearing you say it, it shocks me. Okay. Did you hook up with the black professors fairly quickly? I know there were very few, but did you--

CBW: There were none that I remember.

CJ: What about Dr. [Joseph] Himes [of Sociology]? Was he there?

CBW: The only--no. He would have been at Central [North Carolina Central University] then, that time. The only blacks who were employed on campus generally worked in maintenance or housekeeping, in the soda shop. There were no black professors there. And as a matter of fact, you ended up being befriended by, you know, people who worked like that. There was a lady in the soda shop who used to look out for me. One of the lab technicians, who happens to be a professor there now, was a real good support person for me. But there were no black professors. As a matter of fact, there was no one that you could--there were no role models for black students at all, in terms of anything above professional or general maintenance or whatever. And that only came much later, not while I was there. I don't even know when that happened.

CJ: What campus activities other than classes did you and your friends participate in?

CBW: Okay. I belonged to the chorus--we made an effort to join certain things. I belonged to the chorus and to the town student association. We, I don't think, ever felt that we were totally included. It was more difficult for me being off campus and I'm not real sure--you know, I probably could have joined more if I'd been on campus. As I recall, Margaret and Zelma were not really active in a number of things. As a matter of fact, our social life--we went to school at Woman's College, but socially we did not stay there afterwards. So we left campus, as it relates to social life, religious life, we--they went with me to church at home or in the community. We enjoyed a lot of the social activities at A&T. Most of our dates came from A&T, so that we went to school--which was not unusual at Woman's College, because with all girls, I'm sure that everybody had somewhere to go on weekends, you know. Everybody was--you could always tell when Friday came, folks were getting ready to go away. So--but we had very little social life on campus.

And I learned to play bridge and so forth so that I could meet more people--became very proficient at bridge, as a matter of fact. And wanted to participate in plays and many of the other extracurricular kinds of things, but studying became an issue. And as I said, living off campus, plus I worked, so that--and I didn't have a car, so I had to commute back and forth using the bus. And so that probably made it very limited.

I was the kind that would have tried to do a lot of things, so I'm sure that if I had not been limited by living in the city and--but I did make some great friends. I can recall the day the buses integrated.

CJ: Tell me about that.

CBW: That was a great day.

CJ: Please, tell me about that.

CBW: That was a great day. There was a student, Brenda, and we would meet every morning at the bus stop. She was a city student, too. And when she saw me this morning, the first day we were to do that, she was just crying. She said, "Oh, Claudette, I don't know what I'm going to do, because I can't sit beside Negroes," and here she was laying on my shoulder crying. It was just--so I said, "Have you ever stopped to think about what I am?" And she said, "Well, I know you," and really helped me to truly understand prejudice and so forth, because it's really--

CJ: One-on-one.

CBW: It's really one-on-one. And it's really who you know and a lot of times, we're just--a lot of it's ignorance, you know. We just really get bent out of shape about things that we just don't

understand.

CJ: And fear. And you can't--

CBW: And I know that she loved me, and had no concept of the fact that I was black as she related to me, only in a sense of the larger problem.

CJ: You became black when she thought about getting on a bus.

CBW: Right, and when she thought about maybe what she could include me in. To give you an example of that, I have one girlfriend who was very close to me, and we went to school together for four years. But she could never tell her parents about me because they had no idea that UNCG had black students, or Woman's College. It took me a long time to say UNCG and now I've got to see if I can reverse that.

But if her parents had been aware that it had been integrated, she would have been pulled out of school. So--they were so prejudiced, they wouldn't even have a maid. So I had all kinds of experiences. I can remember a girl named Keef[?]-and we ultimately became good friends--who was my lab partner in biology my freshman year, who refused to touch any instrument that I ever had my hands on. I can remember another student who thought I had a tail.

CJ: A what? Excuse me?

CBW: They thought I really had a tail.

CJ: Thought you had a tail. Oh, my goodness.

CBW: As I look back at it now, I can remember, though, apparently having fairly good self-esteem, because--

CJ: I would say so. [laughs]

CBW: I got through that, challenged it a lot of times, and tried to help people accept me. And as a matter of fact, Jordan Kurland told me when I finished school, he said, "I don't know what you did here academically," he said, "but socially, you've been just a real asset to Woman's College."

CJ: Who was it that told you that?

CBW: Jordan Kurland.

CJ: Jordan Kurland?

CBW: Kurland, he was a history teacher.

CJ: Oh, I see.

CBW: History professor. And--my freshman year. One that I was very, felt very good about. He was very helpful to me, just very helpful. But I had some great friends, many of whom have lasted, you know, and many people who just accepted me.

But I was going back to make a comment about self-esteem. I went in, I guess, knowing that I would have problems with not being accepted. And for those of us who had spent a lot of time working to integrate and to--we also spent some time preparing ourselves for what to expect and finding a way to build in that support and nurture, and understanding the ignorance associated with it. And trying to help people work through that.

And what I met were just a lot of people who really accepted me once they got to know me--some who changed just tremendously, some who never will, probably still haven't. And it's almost like, in some situations, you can see the lights come on, you know, when people go, "I've gone all my life just hating black people and never really knew why, and I understand it now." And, you know, and that was a good experience.

CJ: Two questions about what you've just said. One is, I want to go back to the incident on the bus. That day that you stood there with your friend, did she get on the bus with you and sit with you that day?

CBW: She did.

CJ: It was a first for her?

CBW: No, we'd been sitting together. That was my point.

CJ: Oh, okay.

CBW: That's why it was even so striking. We'd talk all the way to school and she never thought about it until it happened. That was the point.

CJ: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

CBW: And she was just so bent out of shape because this thing had passed. But she'd been riding to school to with me all this time.

CJ: Oh, it was like an afterthought?

CBW: Yes.

CJ: I see, all right.

CBW: Because she never thought about me as a--and she still separated me from being like everybody else because she knew me, you know. So I said, "You know, you've been riding with me all year." "But, you're different," which is another thing I think that people would say. We used to have a joke that when the whites would tell you you're different, you know, and--you know what that meant--but she really just did not see me as being black until all of a sudden when it hit her, because she got to know me so well. And in her case, I think it was kind of an honest friendship that we developed. I think that some people went out of their way to get to know me.

CJ: Because--

CBW: Because they thought it was the right thing to do.

CJ: Solicitous kind of thing? Yeah.

CBW: Right. And to be sure I was comfortable and to offer their friendship and so forth, because that was--it seemed right. I think in Brenda's case, she just happened to see me riding the bus and we finally figured out after a week that we were going the same place every day, you know. And so we got to talking and the relationship developed without regard to color. She didn't throw herself on me and I didn't throw myself on her. We just kind of got thrown together so that we never talked about race, we never talked about what it was--you know, how she felt about things, versus the person who comes to say, "I'm not prejudice--"

CJ: But.

CBW: "--but." You know, so that actually it was not an unusual kind of comment for her to make to me. It was a--it was just Brenda for me and it was just funny. I'm sure she never consciously thought about it.

CJ: It was women--woman to woman, friend to friend.

CBW: Yeah. Friend to friend. And I think we had become friends. [inaudible] “what am I going to do?” As a matter of fact, she was sharing it with me as if I was supposed to find some answer for her.

CJ: I see, yeah.

CBW: You know. “What am I going--I can't sit beside these people.” And you know, “Brenda, you've been sitting beside me all year.” “But you're different.” You know?

CJ: Lord have mercy. That's a wonderful story.

CBW: And it's true. But she, but it was--so I had all kinds of friends and--but here again, I think that I never felt lonely or isolated, and I think the reasons for that is because Margaret and Zelma and JoAnne [Smart] and I got along so well. We're still the greatest of friends.

CJ: Oh, that's great.

CBW: And so we had a unique and very special relationship. And I think it was special because there were so few of us that we felt like we had to take care of each other.

CJ: You really were pioneers.

CBW: Yeah. So we just sort of--those things about each other we didn't like we tolerated, because we were just there. And if something happened to one of us, we had to fend for everybody. But in addition to that, the fact that I was home and the fact that my home became their home, so we sort of took care of each other. And therefore was a very pleasant--it was a good experience for us.

CJ: The other thing I wanted to follow up on is you said that in your community you consciously prepared for what you might meet at Woman's College. How did you do that? Was it through structured activities or did you just talk to each other? What was that like?

CBW: Well, we had meetings at which we would talk about different possibilities. And although we didn't--because we really didn't know what to expect--we had hoped that things would go well in Greensboro, but they were having so many incidents everywhere else, when you think about [James] Meredith--I won't explain him anymore, but--and the kinds of things that went on, you know, with him. Even in Greensboro, Joann Boyd--Josephine Boyd.

CJ: James Meredith was at A&T?

CBW: No. He was at Mississippi. The incidents in other parts of the country, we didn't know what to expect. And right here in Greensboro--Josephine Boyd had gone to Grimsley [High School], which was Greensboro City High at that point. And Josephine had gone in with a police escort and so forth. So we had tried to talk about the different possibilities and the fact that you may not be accepted, that you may go through some things, so that we were sort of suited up to meet whatever, you know.

As a matter of fact, there was a lot--we didn't have that type of thing, I didn't have that kind of experience. I don't think any of the students at UNCG had that. And except for personal kinds of situations, I'm not aware that any of us experienced anything that was just so overwhelmingly terrible, you know. You may run into a person or an incident that was bad, but it's just something that sort of overwhelms me that all of this experience was not--you know, there were some things that the system sort of built in, you know, but prior to 1956, when JoAnne Smart and Bettye Tillman came in, there were no tests for entrance.

CJ: I meant to come back to that. I was astonished when you said that. You reminded me of coming back to that.

CBW: When it was integrated, then they initiated the entrance exam so that--

CJ: That's a very important fact to have on this tape, because nobody else has--well, you're the first person I've talked to who was among the first blacks to come.

CBW: Well, JoAnne is accessible. You can easily talk with her.

CJ: I've been trying to get her. [laughs] I've been trying to get her. I want to go over and see her.

CBW: Yeah. She probably can give you a lot more since she was the first. And Bettye Tillman is deceased, but--

CJ: Okay. So there was an entrance exam after they integrated?

CBW: Yes. I think JoAnne and Bettye probably took the first entrance exam. And we know that it was instituted because the [unclear]. So, the--and I don't know how many girls applied the year that we were accepted. And I don't know how you'd find that out.

CJ: Oh, I can check with the Alumni Office.

CBW: It would be interesting to know how many blacks applied.

CJ: It would be. Was there any kind of recruiting of blacks on your--in your high school?

CBW: No.

CJ: No.

CBW: There was no open recruiting, and I can remember my teachers thinking that we were loosing our tree, just the whole idea of integrating the university.

CJ: What did your teachers think of it?

CBW: Many were very supportive and helped us with--in terms of the sensitivity kinds of things that we had to go through.

CJ: You mean like role playing and things like--that kind of things?

CBW: That was not across the board. But you had many teachers who really helped you with your self-esteem, to say that you could do well anywhere you went, you know. And those that helped us to identify students that they thought would do better, because I think it has not only to do with academics, but it has to do with how you feel about yourself and your self-esteem, how much you could take.

CJ: You have to be very solid to do--

CBW: You have to be solid, you have to be stable to do that.

CJ: You sure do.

CBW: So that helped us in our selection of most of us who would really go. You know, I was a part of the group. I don't know that I ever really said that I interested, though. But Carolyn was just, she just thought that was wonderful. She wanted to go.

CJ: Too bad. Where did she end up going?

CBW: You know, I lost touch with her.

CJ: Okay.

CBW: She left here and went to New York, and I don't know where she ended up going. I know she went to school. That's a good question.

CJ: All right.

CBW: And I need to find out. I never--as a matter of fact, I think she was a little angry with me because I made it. Not with me so much as to what happened, yeah. But we--that's interesting, because I know she went to school because she ended up teaching. But I'm not sure where.

CJ: Do you remember at all what the entrance exam was like?

CBW: No, except that I thought it was--well, I don't test well, so I thought it was awful.

CJ: Was it multiple choice?

CBW: Multiple choice and all the--yeah, I remember lots of multiple choice. And I apparently did okay in some sections that I thought--as a matter of fact, I do remember saying, "This is awful. I can't do this," and so just sort of not really putting priority on it, since I didn't want to go anyway. So just sort of, you know, just getting through it.

CJ: No pressure.

CBW: And there was no pressure. Probably if I did well it was because of that. In other words, I had no real obligation to do well, because, you know, after all, I was just there with Carolyn. And I--let's see, that day the students, the students going to State--and two of my classmates were accepted at State that year, Richard [unclear] and Yvonne McAdoo[?]. And one went to Carolina. David Hansby[?], who's still here. We all went out there to take this entrance exam.

CJ: Was it only black students taking the exam or everybody?

CBW: No, there were some others. Everybody was taking it. And I can remember I decided at one point I wasn't going to take it at all. And Dean Mossman--

CJ: Oh, yes, Mereb Mossman.

CBW: --said, "We just can't sit here all day. You know, why don't you just go on and take the test?"

And so it was in the Elliot Center in the, what is now the basement of Elliot Center in the large game room area--

CJ: Okay.

CBW: --right beside the bookstore. And it was just so big to me. And I said, "Well, I can find things to do here all day while I wait." She said, "No, just take the exam." And I did. But--and as I think about it, I'm trying to think about some of the things that may have helped them to make selections. I think your references had a lot to do with it. And so did your community involvement. Probably some of the same issues that they still use now.

CJ: Were there such a thing as the SATs then?

CBW: No.

CJ: No. Okay.

CBW: But you had to have reference letters and A's by teachers. And I had a very strong background in Girl Scouting and had been exposed to a lot of whites and had gotten along real well with them, that contributed, as I, I remember talking to JoAnne and Zelma about this. We had, I think, in some way, in community organizations, demonstrated the ability to get along with others, so I think that had something to do with being accepted.

CJ: That must have been important to them. You mentioned Mereb Mossman; were there other women on the faculty who, although not black, were role models for you?

CBW: Oh, yeah. Katherine Taylor.

CJ: Katherine Taylor. She comes up a lot. Her name comes up a lot.

CBW: Yeah. She's, she was probably--she seemed to understand. She was caring, supportive, and fair.

CJ: What was her position then? Do you remember?

CBW: Dean, she was Dean of Students.

CJ: Dean of Students, okay. So that she succeeded Miss [Harriet] Elliott, yes.

CBW: And the thing about her, I just always thought she was so great, and even if she didn't like something, you could depend on her to be fair about it. And so I remember her with good feelings.

I just thought Mossman was the sweetest thing in the world. She was very caring.

CJ: I have never heard anyone say anything negative about her.

CBW: Oh no. She was--if she was prejudiced I never, sure never felt it. Who else do I remember? I remember being very, feeling very good about a lot of teachers. I remember Parker, Dr. [Franklin] Parker, and S. C. White[?]

CJ: What department? History?

CBW: History.

CJ: History.

CBW: I loved history people.

CJ: All right. Good taste. [laughs]

CBW: Kurland. Jordan Kurland. Richard Current. And don't let me forget Dr. [Richard] Bardolph.

CJ: Dr. Bardolph.

CBW: Dr. Bardolph. Yes. He was very special. And in the sociology department, Lyda Gordon Shivers.

CJ: Lyda Gordon Shivers. Okay.

CBW: She was a great lady. I always felt very good about her. She was my advisor for a long time. And of course, Dean Mossman was in that department, too, so I got to feel even better about her. So--but I found these people to be very, very helpful and they were very supportive of me.

CJ: You said from quite early on you felt a sense of mission to work with juveniles and young people and to help. So sociology was sort of a given by the time you got to school, but--

CBW: I had made a choice real early in my life to be one of two things. I was always fascinated by

the criminal justice system. I think that was really reinforced after I met Dr. Shivers at Woman's College. But before that I had decided I was going to be a professional Girl Scout or I was going to do some kind of social work.

CJ: You were a scout as a child?

CBW: Yes, Girl Scouting all my life. You had to do it for my mother. But my mentors had been real great Girl Scout leaders and I had one that used to tell me, "When you grow up, you just got to be a professional Girl Scout, because it'll be time for blacks to really get into it big." When I was in about the eleventh grade I was working for the Y, YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], in the summer program and got a chance to know a probation officer. And that person became a mentor.

CJ: A woman?

CBW: And--no, it was a man. But I just--and he had girls and boys. I used to tell him he was so insensitive to the needs of the girls. And I said, "Wait. Just you wait. One of these days I'm going to be a probation officer and I'm going to show you how to treat girls who get in trouble."

I really thought that Lyda Gordon Shivers was unique, because she was a social worker with a law degree. So I just was fascinated by criminology, just thought that was the best thing I had ever--and I was not a really good history student, but loved history. Still do. Just loved it. And I thought that one of the greatest things at Woman's College was the history department. I mean, when you could have the Currents and the Bardolphs, and all these were just wonderful people.

CJ: It's still is. It still is.

CBW: Johnsons and the Parkers. Oh, they just knew so much history. I just thought that was, oh, it was just a rich department. But I really enjoyed it. I had just about all of my scuffles in those classes, though, let me tell you. Just never the best student in the world, but just had a wonderful time and just met a lot of great people. So I was really torn between whether I wanted to stay in the history area or get into the social work area.

And I knew I had to teach, too. My grandfather decided that in my family, that no one went to school unless you taught. Education was so important to him, and he thought that if you went to school, you ought to be able to give it back. And you gave it back through teaching.

CJ: So he was a big influence.

CBW: He was a big influence, yes. That was also very--I think it's kind of like a black historical kind of mission that you go back and you teach and you share what you know. It was very much a part of who I was when I came to school. So here I was trying to decide where I wanted to be, but knowing that I ought to want to teach, because social work was kind of popular, that was the new and going thing[?] in the late seventies.

But teaching was important--and knowing that you could find a job teaching, you know. You could always do that if it gets around to--so you, I ended up doing student teaching. But I also did an internship, which was here, by the way, in juvenile court. And I came here and never left. But anyway, it--I had one semester of practice teaching and a semester of an internship that Dean Mossman set up with the juvenile court.

CJ: So your degree was accompanied by a teaching certificate, too. And tell me what you've done, outline your life for me post-grad[uate school].

CBW: Well, I did my internship here. When I left here, when I graduated that year, the person that I worked with was pregnant and needed someone to come in and work a temporary position for her. I had decided at that point that I was going to, one, leave Greensboro. And I did leave. Went to Philadelphia. Got a job right away as a probation officer. Was frightened to death about two weeks after I went to work because a probation officer was killed in New York that I had met.

So that just scared me to death and I wanted to come home. So I had the choice to teach in Charlotte. Got a teaching position in Charlotte. It wasn't difficult for me to find a job. [inaudible] Woman's College contributed to that, you know, because wherever you applied, particularly if you were black, and they saw that you had finished Woman's College at the University of North Carolina, that was very well-received in North Carolina. Not in the North, people never heard of it in the North. But as a matter fact, we used to laugh about it. You know, what are we going to tell people when we go up there? They won't know where Woman's College is. You know, they know everything else, but they've never heard of Woman's College.

But anyway, I got a letter from what was then the Domestic Relations Court of Guilford County, and--from the chief court counselor here, and he said, "Would you come over and work temporarily in this position?"

CJ: What position was it?

CBW: As a probation officer.

CJ: Probation officer, okay.

CBW: So I agreed to do that, which would have allowed me time to stay in Greensboro to see whether or not I could get in school--to do what, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to deal with a master's in social work or to get back into history, because I was very much fascinated by history. And didn't feel like that--I was interested in law, but I didn't know whether or not I could hack law school in terms of--academically whether I could hack it and financially whether I could, wasn't sure I could read well enough in law school.

So, I came to work here on the temporary--and I was told by a lot of friends, "Don't take it for six months. You can't do anything in December, so just tell them you'll work through next summer." And so I was to work from August of '61 to June of '62. Well, the person became very ill and subsequently died, so the position was open and I lucked into it. And here I am.

CJ: You've been here ever since?

CBW: I've been here. Thought about leaving a lot of times, but I've enjoyed it. It's very rewarding work. I did finally decide to get a master's in social work. Started that at Carolina. Needed an internship to finish it, never finished it. Married, started having children. I hoped I wouldn't have to work anymore, but it didn't work that way.

Was promoted early on here. As a matter of fact, I became senior probation officer in '66, then moved up to intake officer and then on to supervisor in the seventies. And I've stayed here in a supervisory capacity since. It's been very rewarding. I've watched the staff grow, watched the pendulum swing. Been very much involved in the development of the program in Guilford County and in agencies that work for children, and in the state. My experience, you know, my job has been here with the state. I've been able to do a lot of things throughout the state in the sense of working with new counselors and teaching some at the North Carolina Justice Academy, doing some training workshops. And in Guilford County, just really feeling good about the many different agencies that I've worked to help to develop, like Youth Services Bureau, Youth Care, Youth Focus, Southeast Council on Crime and Delinquency. I've been busy.

CJ: Say the name of that last one for the sake of the tape again.

CBW: Southeast Council on Crime and Delinquency.

CJ: Okay, thanks. It sounds like you've been real active in the proactive side of it, as you were talking about before we turned the tape on. You were interested in prevention rather than treatment.

CBW: And that's always been very difficult to sell because--and still is and probably always been very challenging. I'm probably more discouraged now because its like you think you pass over so many humps and then you're back. And I've been at it so long that my energy level is at a different place from all the new younger folk who need to go through what I've already been through, so I'm getting to be an evil old lady.

CJ: Oh no. [laughs] Well, for the sake of the tape, I don't want to embarrass you, but I do want to read your wall to the tape. This is really neat. You have got, up there on the wall you've got a community award from 1960 to '85 for significant and enduring contribution to the weal of the community. Oh, yeah. That's wonderful. The weal, w-e-a-l, weal of the community. Right in the middle there. There it is. The furtherance of justice, equality, peace, understanding, freedom, and love among people, presented in 1985. And then we've got the Youth Advisory Council certificate of appreciation, the NAACP Youth Service Award for outstanding and dedicated service, and the date on that is 19--

CBW: That's '89.

CJ: 1989, all right. And the United Way Board of Directors Award for helping the community, the National Black Child Development Institute, in appreciation for leadership and dedication as president. And I can't read the gold one there. That's--

CBW: That's the mayor's appointment to the Greensboro One Task Force, in appreciation of service.

CJ: Okay. That you were appointed to the Greensboro One Task Force. In other words, you've contributed a great deal to the community. And that wall's got all kinds of other stuff of it. I think--is there one over there that means the most to you?

CBW: Yeah. A couple that really mean a lot to me. Well, my Service to Mankind award.

CJ: Okay. Don't move too far away from the mic[rophone].

CBW: Service to Mankind, which is a Sertoma award.

CJ: Sertoma, okay. And that was 1989-90.

CBW: And then the Outstanding Service Award from the State of North Carolina.

CJ: Oh, that's wonderful. Juvenile Services Association Award.

CBW: That's a Jaycee award for a correctional officer. That was years ago. I thought that was so special.

That one came from A&T. I'm now in A&T's social work hall of fame, and I got the Child Development Award there last year.

CJ: Oh my.

CBW: So that's a state Elks award for service to children. My YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] award is important to me. All of them. And then that's the Sojourner Truth Award from the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women.

CJ: Oh, I see that now, yes. Oh my goodness.

CBW: But I've been very much involved in Greensboro. I was on the original Mayor's Task Force to establish the Commission on the Status of Women. I'm very proud of that. My most recent accomplishment and something I'm very proud of is the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the sit-ins. That gave me an opportunity to finally be a part of that, because I was a part of it in '60, but unnoticed. And unnoticed because I was in the community, here again, in the planning effort—because you remember I lived in the city. And I was a student at Woman's College and--but Woman's College didn't get noticed until the third day after the sit-ins started, because that's when the white students came. And so nobody ever thought about the black students who may have been there already. But that's because we were--looked like everybody else there. So--

CJ: They didn't--go ahead, I'm sorry.

CBW: Last year was the thirtieth anniversary. I chaired that and finally got UNCG recognized, and I felt good about that. Even--I wanted even the white students to be recognized, because I thought that it was very significant that Woman's College had students who would take the risk to come and be a part of that incident of the sit-ins. And I was very impressed with the student body's help, of A&T, Bennett, the Woman's College, Greensboro [College], Guilford [College], being able to work together on issues. And so I was very pleased.

CJ: One student that I interviewed, one alumna that I interviewed who graduated in 1965, I think, said that--I don't remember the year she graduated; it might have been later than that. But anyway, she said that the university prohibited the women from wearing their class rings or their class jackets to the sit-ins. Is that right?

CBW: Class jackets.

CJ: All right. That's true?

CBW: Didn't want people to wear their jackets. And that was a big to do. I don't know if it still is, but I can remember as a student there, two very, very significant campus traditions that we were a part of: the class jackets and Rat Day. I don't know if they still have Rat Day.

CJ: They don't still have Rat Day, but I've heard about Rat Day.

CBW: Rat Day was awful.

CJ: Tell me about Rat Day.

CBW: Well, I just remember that people get all dressed up and all kinds of things happened to you, the upperclassmen sort of do to you.

CJ: You were a freshman and they'd do it to you?

CBW: Yeah.

CJ: Do you know when they're going to do it do you?

CBW: Yeah, oh yeah.

CJ: It's not a surprise?

CBW: It's not a surprise, no. And so that--I do remember that, and I remember just thinking that having that jacket was just really something special. And it was special on campus and off campus, because I can remember--

[End Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

CJ: Okay, we were talking about class jackets and what a big deal they were. Go ahead.

CBW: We liked to wear them on campus and off campus. Off campus they let everybody know that we were the students from Woman's College.

CJ: You were proud of that.

CBW: Yeah, we were proud of that. And--both in the white and black world. In the white world the heads would turn, because you had these black girls with Woman's College jackets on. But also, it gave us, we thought, a little more prestige and made us stand out more at the off-campus affairs like basketball games. You know, we'd come strolling in late with our jackets on, you know. So we got a little attention from that. But they were just really special.

CJ: When did you get them?

CBW: Freshman year.

CJ: Freshman year, not sophomore year?

CBW: Or was it sophomore year?

CJ: In the forties it was sophomore year. I didn't know if they changed it or not.

CBW: You know, that's a good question. It seems like it was freshman year. It always seems like there were four colors on campus.

CJ: What were your colors? Do you remember?

CBW: Ours were blue and white.

CJ: Blue and white.

CBW: And there was always a red, green, and gold.

CJ: Oh, gold. Not lavender?

CBW: No.

CJ: Not lavender.

CBW: It was gold.

CJ: That changed. Yeah.

CBW: That changed. So it seems like it must have been freshman year, because you had the four

colors on campus and that would let you know what year, you know. And when they got to be seniors, I mean, you got to be juniors and seniors, you were really tough stuff. And I thought that was good. As a matter of fact, I think jackets are far more significant than class rings.

CJ: They seem to be with everybody we've talked to. The jackets meant the most.

CBW: Well, they're so visible and just let folks know that you'd been able to get there and stay there, you know. When you were a little freshman, it didn't mean so much. But every year it just got better.

CJ: What other sorts of marks did the freshmen have that separated them all from--were there beanies or anything like that?

CBW: On Rat Day you could see--I remember the beanies on Rat Day. I don't remember nothing like that[?]. Yeah, there were--

CJ: You had beanies on Rat Day?

CBW: Oh yeah. I don't know. I'm sure lots would go on on campus that I probably missed by being in the city. I'm sure that all kinds of things would happen in the dorms. I don't remember, in sharing with the other students, the other black students, that they, that they talked about things. A lot of times they didn't feel included in a lot of things and didn't participate. But I don't--in terms of traditions and so forth, I can't remember anything other than graduation that stands out as so great as the jackets, and you know.

CJ: Did they still have the Daisy Chain at graduation?

CBW: Yes.

CJ: Tell me about that. Do you remember at all?

CBW: Not very much.

CJ: Okay.

CBW: Not very much.

CJ: Did they still have the honor code? And was it administered by students or faculty?

CBW: Yes, yes. It was administered by faculty, but I think you had student representatives on there, and--

CJ: Was it taken seriously?

CBW: I thought so. There again, I was off campus. I don't know how someone on campus would respond, because I probably wasn't into it as much as a lot of--in terms of, you know, living, but in terms of class and cheating, yeah, that was taken seriously. I don't remember ever thinking that anybody was cheating on exams and so forth. You were expected to comply and I think we did.

CJ: Yes. And it was as I understand it, a reciprocal thing. If you knew somebody was cheating you needed to turn them in.

CBW: Yes, yes.

CJ: And you needed to turn yourself in. Okay.

CBW: Yes, yes. I thought it was--well, it's different than today, but that is true.

CJ: It is different from today.

CBW: It really is.

CJ: Very different. Was chapel required?

CBW: No.

CJ: No. Did they still have chapel?

CBW: No. I don't remember chapel. I remember their having the different, the different ecumenical groups. And, for example, I felt very accepted by the Wesley Foundation. But we didn't have chapel.

CJ: Did they reach out to you? Did Wesley reach out to you?

CBW: Yeah.

CJ: The school motto was and still is, although most people don't know it, "service." In your discussions with other students, did--how did most of them relate to that motto? How did they--were they conscious of it, or were they going to do service in their lives anyway, or did people come to school with a mission? Or why did, I guess the question I'm getting at is why did the women you know come to school and was it with a desire to serve?

CBW: You really want to know what I thought?

CJ: Yeah, I really do.

CBW: I thought most--we used to comment about this--I thought most did come with that, knowing that they had to serve. I thought that was very much a part of Woman's College. I thought that was just kind of like a prerequisite to get a husband and to do well in life. You still ought to have a degree, although you may never use it. But that being in college positioned you to meet the up and coming young men who would do well in the world, and so that most of the young ladies who came to Woman's College came with that in mind. And that that the degree would position them to go back and marry the upper-class young men, and they would, in fact, do community service.

And they would be--have all--they would be the Junior Leaguers and the missionary groups for all the communities. And I think that was a great part. I think service, community service is a big part of, of what you see and hear a lot of on campus. And I think--that's really the way I felt. That I just could spot young ladies, I said, "Oh, she'll go off and marry somebody rich and never work a day in her life." And--versus there were those that you could see that really would go off and work every day for the rest of their lives. And those who'd go off and really make a contribution because they really were great folks and wanted to do that. Not that the others weren't great folks. But I can remember meeting all kinds. And I was very fascinated by the very, very bright creative young people, those that I knew would be writers and doctors and lawyers and Indian chiefs, you know. [laughs] And just wonder, "How do you get to be that smart?"

CJ: Do you--were you aware of the discussions in 1961 that were going on in administrative levels about letting men in on campus?

CBW: No.

CJ: Nobody was aware of that?

CBW: Well, I wasn't.

CJ: Oh, you weren't. Okay. I don't know exactly when those started. I think they were beginning to talk about it then, but I'm not sure. So there was nothing mentioned about men coming?

CBW: I thought that might--were there not men in some of the graduate--

CJ: I don't know about that early. I really don't. I know that men were admitted as undergrads in '63.

CBW: No, I don't remember that. I do know that the only conversation I ever remember had something to do with the way the face of the campus would change. Because we, we looked so bad going to class, and we used to say, "Oh my goodness." People would look so different on Friday. I mean, because people came to class in rollers, I mean just--

CJ: Oh, no kidding. Really?

CBW: --something awful. A woman's college will do that to you. And then, if you had males on campus it just [unclear], you know. As a matter of fact, you could see people leaving campus and you wouldn't know who they were. I mean, you'd see them all week in class every day and they looked so different.

CJ: Tell me a little about this, because this is, in a way, a contrast from the image that I get reading the newspapers in 1940 and seeing the yearbooks, and the alums I talked to talked about looking just so. Going to class, everybody was proud how they looked and the newspaper would scold you if you looked sloppy. In fact there was an editorial from 1941--

CBW: Oh, I don't agree with that in the late fifties.

CJ: Not the fifties? They had changed. Either that or--

CBW: No. I think--oh, yeah. I think--I don't think that people looked real, real bad, but you remember we were going through the hippies and all of that. You know, people just didn't--we had--yeah.

CJ: Oh, that's right, the beatniks and the hippies and all that.

CBW: Yeah, the beatniks and that was all out. So I think that that had passed. Some folks looked bad comparatively speaking.

CJ: Was there a dress code? Specifically about pants on campus? Could you wear pants to class?

CBW: Yeah, you could wear pants. I don't remember, I don't remember--apparently I must have complied or I would remember a dress code. There may have been, but it was very liberal, you know. I don't remember.

CJ: It sounds like it had changed a lot since the forties.

CBW: Yeah. I can imagine a day that was very prim and proper, and for activities, everybody was always very prim and proper. I think you were kind of expected to be that way. But I don't think I realized that just going to class every day.

CJ: Yeah. The people would get a little bit--

CBW: Yeah. And on weekends they would look wonderful. The hair combs came out, all the hairdos, and you'd see them leave campus. They were really sharp. I remember telling a girlfriend I didn't know she was pretty until I saw her on Friday afternoon. [both laugh] Now that was very striking to me. It's amazing how people perceive things differently. But I remember that.

CJ: Yeah, yeah. Well, are there any other memories or things you want to be sure not to forget to say? Things you'll think of tomorrow morning at one o'clock in the morning?

CBW: After this is all over I'll think of something to say.

CJ: Yeah. What are your overall impressions of your education at Woman's College? You've already intimated some of that, but did you get what you came here to get?

CBW: Oh yeah. I think it's a good school, I think it's a good school. And if you go to school purely for academics--I have a lot of friends I would recommend it to and a lot that I wouldn't. That's because I still think it has some problems. I think inclusiveness is probably--someone asked me recently why I thought it was a gradation now, because that's a lot of what I hear the Neo-Black Society and others say. And you know, the only answer I have for that is that we were not expected to be accepted, so we didn't look for it. And I think young people now expect to be accepted, and when they're not it's just very painful for them. And so it was like whatever acceptance you got, you appreciated it, you know.

I didn't expect to be--to fulfill my social life on campus, even though I had been extremely active in high school in many different organizations and extra-curricular activities. I'd never envisioned myself at Woman's College having to have those activities. I also never missed them, because I was at home and kept my church ties and my community

ties. And--but for someone who would, you know, come from a long way, who had been used to being extremely active and so forth--I suspect it may have been different for the others.

I also think that we had to do well. We knew that we had to do well and that we had to make it. And that we may--we also accepted that we may have to do more than anybody else to do that; I don't think young people accept that as a rule--that we were sort of like being looked at, and that we were the test case. And so we sort of prepared ourselves a little bit differently, I think, because we [unclear]--

CJ: Goldfish bowl, goldfish bowl. Did you--it sounds as if an awful lot of the impetus for this preparation came from you yourselves, that you were all astute enough to know. You saw what was going on in the world around you and that other areas were being integrated slowly, and you saw what happened to people who tried to do it.

CBW: And I think it was not just the black-white issue, but I think it was just a trying generation, you know, of young people who were just saying, "We're going to rebel against this system," whatever. So that happened in our high school. We didn't have any yearbook. We decided we were going to have a yearbook. We didn't--we had a principal who said you couldn't do this. Well, we challenged everything. So we were just at that challenging age.

CJ: Question authority.

CBW: Oh yeah. That was a big to do. So I think that, you know, just to integrate schools was a, just a spill over from that.

CJ: Let me ask you a political question that I wanted to ask you, because I've never had a chance to ask it before. What was the feeling among the black community you were familiar with when Kennedy was elected?

CBW: Oh, this was exciting. It was wonderful. See, North Carolina really didn't have a good record, when you think about the political climate in this state.

CJ: No. Still doesn't. [laughs]

CBW: And we just challenged a lot of things. I can remember thinking--the governor, when I was at school, was Hodges.

CJ: Oh, Hodges, Luther Hodges.

CBW: He was awful. Well, A&T had just booed him when he came to speak over there for not being able to say "Nigras." I mean, for saying "Nigras." He couldn't say "Negro." He couldn't get the word out.

CJ: And Sam Ervin was in Washington.

CBW: I later learned to respect Sam Ervin.

CJ: So did I, and I'll tell you the story when we're off tape.

CBW: I remember the--later learned to respect him. I had a professor that I just challenged all the time. Really not say his name, but his funeral was this weekend as a matter of fact, and just yesterday I was reading about him, when reading my paper--I was in Raleigh this weekend--Blackwell P. Robinson.

CJ: Yes, yes. North Carolina history, right?

CBW: When he first taught me I thought he was just going to go bananas. I just couldn't take it. But--and I'd go cry to Richard Current. "This man doesn't want me in his class." He says, "You've got to get in there and cut the mustard for that."

CJ: Oh, good for him.

CBW: But it was a strange state. I can't remember a governor that I liked until Terry Sanford. I still like him.

CJ: He's all right. [laughs]

CBW: He's old now. He's worn out.

CJ: But Kennedy was received well?

CBW: Oh yes.

CJ: Lots of hopes.

CBW: Lots of hope. Very sad day. I can remember just crying my eyes out when he was assassinated. I was on my way to work to bring a child to court. And I just thought--I had--I was just, it was just awful. And I don't know what we expected this man to do. As a matter of

fact, so bad that when I hear things and read things that I now know about him that I don't like, I just resent it.

CJ: Yeah. I don't--I know. It's hard to remember.

CBW: I don't want to know.

CJ: He was King Arthur. He really was.

CBW: I know. I know.

CJ: I remember. I was a sophomore in high school when he was killed, and I will never forget it.

CBW: Just don't tell me all the bad stuff.

CJ: I know. Well, any parting words for posterity?

CBW: I'm such a history freak. This is great. I'd love to be around two hundred years from now if somebody bothers to listen to this.

CJ: You can come haunt the department in the library and read over somebody's shoulder.
[laughs] Well, thank you, Claudette, it's been a great pleasure.

CBW: Well, that's the one thing that I can remember that I do want to share, is the library. When I went to Woman's College, I thought that library was the greatest thing I'd ever seen in my life. I mean, it was just humongous.

CJ: Had the tower been built?

CBW: No, no. I just still thought it was just great. Books and books and books. Gosh, that was so wonderful. I'd not been in a library--

CJ: Never been in a library like that?

CBW: Like that. What I really can remember is thinking that's the greatest place in the world. Not waiting to leave there.

CJ: Did you spend a lot of time there?

CBW: Pretty much so.

CJ: Yeah.

CBW: Because that was on campus. You needed spots to spend time when you didn't live there. So I had a little nook down in the bottom of the library. Really spent a lot of time my freshman and sophomore year there, because I was always scared I was going to flunk out of school and that was my major heavy, you know. Just like the headlines said that I was accepted, I could read the headlines saying that I'd been kicked out, so that always bothered me.

CJ: Did you--I'm trying to put myself in your place, and there would be, if I were in your place and felt that heavy weight to succeed, with everybody watching me, there would be a part of me that would have resented that.

CBW: Oh yeah. And I also resented that probably I would have done better without all of the stress of that. And I never really had the freedom to--well, I guess I had the freedom to try to do well, but it was such a struggle for me to do well. And I am--I was never really the greatest student in the world, but I could learn things, you know. And it was always stressful. And I don't know whether--it was such a stressful thing to learn, just two and two is four. Everything seemed so hard, you know.

CJ: And then with that added pressure of if you flunk out--

CBW: Yeah. It just seemed so hard. And then trying to work and then I--it was always such a problem. It was just like I wasn't going to make it and I was always afraid of that.

CJ: Nobody should have to go through that.

CBW: And I wondered if I had been somewhere else--and I could see my friends who were in other schools, and it was just a breeze. I mean, they weren't even studying.

CJ: Some of them went to black schools and--

CBW: Yeah. And they just, and they were getting by and they were just breezing along, and I was scuffling just to stay ahead. That may have been the case anywhere that I would have gone, but I really felt like it was because I was there and [inaudible] so we felt that way. But it paid off. You know, I felt like, well, many of my friends, I was doing twice as much and they were getting the great grades, and I was scuffling to make it, you know. And they got all of the scholarships to grad school. And I had to try to figure out whether I could even be

accepted, you know.

CJ: But without you, though, without you five, the kids today would have had a much harder time. It was--

CBW: I know. It was--on the other hand, I never thought I'd find a job. I mean, I was in demand. The minute--when I first came to work here, the judge was so proud of the fact that he had hired someone that went to Woman's College. "Now, do you know this young lady is a graduate of Woman's College?" And we just thought that was special because his wife had gone there and that I had to be the smartest black woman that he'd ever seen.

CJ: He did have to qualify it, didn't he? [laughs]

CBW: He used to tell people, "She writes well." As a matter of fact, I decided to leave here after I was going to get married about '64, and I asked him for a reference. And he wrote--I was going to Baltimore to work for the court system there, and so my reference letter read, and I quote, "She has a job." And he signed his name. And so I came back and I said, "Judge, I am considering marrying a man from Baltimore and I need a job, and you have to give me a reference." So then he wrote them back and said, "If Miss"--my name was Graves then. He said, "If she wants a job, you'd do well to hire her."

CJ: [laughs] That's all he said?

CBW: "William B. Comb, a Judge of the Eighteenth Judicial District."

CJ: Oh man. Well, I think we've covered just about all the things I had in mind and I appreciate this very much.

[End of Interview]