

Interviewee: Maxine Hunt  
Interviewer: Dr. Reginald Shareef  
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

RS: Good morning Miss Hunt.

MH: Good morning.

RS: The first set of questions are background questions and these are just to give some history about you as a person. The first question is, When and where were you born?

MH: Reggie, I was born in Northeast Roanoke. I don't remember the area of Northeast but my mother told me it was Northeast Roanoke.

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: And we moved early to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Northwest.

RS: Miss Hunt, you were born in a house?

MH: At home.

RS: And what year were you born?

MH: 1930. Don't tell nobody.

RS: No ma'am. You don't look it either. (both laughing) And you say that you were born in Northeast Roanoke and then you moved to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

MH: Well, its Harrison now but we called it 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue back then.

RS: Yes ma'am. And so that's in Gainsboro?

MH: Yes.

RS: Were there other streets that you lived on in Gainsboro when you were growing up?

MH: After we moved from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, we moved to 7<sup>th</sup> Street and that's just below Berrill. You know where that is?

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: And that's where I spent the rest of my days.

RS: The third question is, Tell me about your parents and your brothers and sisters.

MH: My parents were Samuel and Susan Nicholas. My mother was a homemaker. My father, during my early years, was a bellman at Patrick Henry Hotel. Later years, he was employed at Norfolk and Western where he remained until he retired. I have one brother and there were 3 girls besides me. There were 5 of us in all.

RS: Now Miss Hunt, after your father got the job at Norfolk Southern, did he work a second job or was that - ?

MH: No, he did not work a second job.

RS: He just worked at Norfolk Southern?

MH: I used to hear him say that, "If you used what you made well then you didn't need a second job".

RS: OK. Alright. Did you have extended family living near you when you were growing up in Northwest Roanoke?

MH: Not near us but I had an aunt who lived with us. In her later years, she had to come back to Roanoke to live with me and she passed here in Roanoke. We had other relatives on McDowel (??) and Chestnut. My mother's sisters.

RS: Did you frequent their houses.

MH: All the time. All the time. It was almost a daily thing. You know Reggie, we had no place to go other than to visit relatives, go to school, go to church or visit relatives. So, it was almost a daily occurrence with them and we were very close.

RS: It was a close community.

MH: Yes it was, very close.

RS: Yes ma'am. Describe your house for us on Harrison. Was it a brick house?

MH: No, it was a wood house, you know. A two story house, not very well kept. It was very cleanly

kept by my parents but the house was not of that caliber.

RS: Did your parents have a garden or did you have a garden growing up?

MH: No. We got a garden when we got to 7<sup>th</sup> Street. Our backyard was mostly garden. We had cold house that we had chickens in that we called the hen house. My father even rented a lot off of 8<sup>th</sup> Street where he would go and plant, you know, have a garden. With 5 children back then, you had to have a garden because you had to can food and run the garden – the table during the summer then put up the stuff for the winter. We had fruit trees in the yard. I can see the Damson tree now. (both laughing) Cherries.

RS: And you had chickens? Did you have to wring chickens' necks?

MH: I never could do that.

RS: You never could do that.

MH: I never could do that but I watched my daddy do that but I couldn't do that. And then they would hang 'em on the clothes line, you know, so they would, I guess so they could finish doing whatever they had to do before we could take 'em in the house. (both laughing)

RS: Growing up, Miss Hunt, what type of activities were you involved in?

MH: Oh, most of our activities centered around the school and of course the Y. I was a girl scout, a Y team and, of course, being so fond of music, I was always in the church choirs and then the school choirs. And we would do our little traveling, you know, going around. But I was participating in about everything they had around town. I just enjoyed doing that. And see, all around here, First Baptist Church, the Y across the street – I'm trying to visualize where I was. And all of the activities, we participated in.

RS: What's the earliest age that you knew you loved music?

MH: It must've been very early because my father tells me that I used to, at the table, when we would be eating, tap on the table (tapping on table) and he would (smacking sound) my hands to stop. I just think I always wanted to play the piano. I guess from a little girl. But I guess I really got into the serious study of music around 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

RS: Were you in the band? What elementary school did you go to?

MH: Harrison.

RS: Did they have a band? Was there a band at the school at that time?

MH: No, just a little rhythm band. But they had a little choir, you know, little choirs and I always tried to get in the choirs to sing.

RS: Did you have piano lessons when you were growing up?

MH: Oh, yes.

RS: About what age did that start?

MH: I imagine I was about 8 or 9. I started as a little girl with Mrs. Moore, Mrs. George Moore I think it was. Then later I went to Miss Whitlock, Miss Audrey Whitlock. Then to Miss Alta Mae Thompson. And I ended up in Roanoke with Mr. Troy Gorham. Do you know him?

RS: No ma'am. I've never heard of him.

MH: Well he was on Patton Avenue in Northeast. I don't know. We called him Professor Gorham. And by that time, I was in high school and ready to finish high school.

RS: About what age did you start playing in the church?

MH: I was a young girl. I guess a teenager. I would say 15 or 16.

RS: Now your father worked for the railroad, did your mother work?

MH: No, she didn't work outside the home but I tell you what, Reggie, she did what we call "took in washing and ironing". She washed and ironed. I can remember people bringing baskets of clothes to our house on Sunday evenings, bring these clothes and she would wash them and iron them. I can remember carrying some of them back. That was how she made her little income. And, believe it or not, that little money she would take and pay for like my piano lessons and she was buying a piano, paying a dollar a month or something like that on it. But, that's what she did.

RS: Now for younger folk who will listen to this tape, your mother didn't have a Whirlpool washer and dryer to wash these clothes with, right?

MH: No, no.

RS: So describe how she -

MH: Now she did have a – What did we call the washing machine?

RS: A wringer?

MH: Yeah, a wringer-type machine. But that was all. And you rinsed them in the sink and then you carried them out into the backyard and hung 'em up on the line. And she did that year after year after year in all types of weather. I mean cold weather. Those clothes went out on the line. You didn't have any dryers. You couldn't dry 'em in the house so she carried them outdoors in the backyard where there were lines - line after line to hang them up.

RS: And, at the time, again, so this younger generation will understand this, there were no steam irons.

MH: Oh no. You put 'em on the coal stove and let 'em get hot and then you'd iron. That's right.

RS: That was strenuous work.

MH: It was hard work. It was hard work. And I have seen my mother, you know, just iron almost all day and night. Maybe take a few moments to lay on the sofa and then get back up and start ironing again. But almost running a laundry from the house.

RS: And some of those funds went to pay for your piano lessons and to buy a piano.

MH: Yes, yes. And she continued that on through the time I was in college doing that because you had to pay for all these extra lessons, buy the music and things. But she was a good mom.

RS: She was a good mother.

MH: Yes, yes.

RS: And with parents working like that, you learned a strong work ethic in your life?

MH: Yes, yes. That work didn't hurt anybody. And certainly didn't kill nobody. (both laughing)

RS: Well the next heading is education so, tell me about your school life growing up in Roanoke.

MH: My school life was very pleasant. I've always loved school. I've loved school. I liked kindergarten. Well, kindergarten back then was almost unheard of but I did go to Miss Gertrude Jones' Kindergarten. Miss Jones has been gone many, many, many years. But now Richard was related to her, Richard Jones and you would know Richard.

RS: Yes ma'am.

0.10.53.8

MH: But I went to Harrison Elementary and from there we went to what we called – Was it called Addison Annex? - We didn't go straight to Addison. We did the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade I think in one end of Harrison School before we went into the big building. And then we went to Addison. And from there, I went to Virginia State. And that has been just about the extent of it.

RS: Now, at Virginia State, you were a Music Major?

MH: Music Major, Public School Music.

RS: Public School Music. And when you finished Virginia State, you came back to Roanoke. Did you seek employment in the Roanoke School System?

MH: Not right away. When I first finished Virginia State, I went to Farmville to Prince Edward County at Mary E. Branch Elementary School. Everybody says, “Did you go to R.R. Moden (??) you know where – R. R. Moden was across the street but I was at the elementary school. And I stayed there for 2 years. And then I came to Roanoke. I was off 2 years and then I came into the Roanoke system in '55.

RS: In 1955?

MH: 1955.

RS: And so you started teaching in Roanoke one year after Brown vs Board of Education, after the -

MH: But I was out during those years. See, I had married and I had come to Roanoke. That's when Donald was born. That's when I was off those two years.

0.12.22.9

RS: Of course, later, in Prince Edward County, of course, with massive resistance in Virginia the public schools were closed. What was it like teaching in Prince Edward County in the early 1950s?

MH: It was nice during that time. You know it was completely segregated and we thought nothing about that. I lived there on Main Street, right across from Mary E. Branch and, of course, the church that was so active in the movement, First Baptist, Reverend Griffin, all of those, was down at the foot of the hill. And it was quite a peaceful little town.

RS: What about the facilities? Were the facilities – The Brown decision said separate was inherently unequal, were the facilities - ?

MH: Well, see, we really didn't know what was over in the other part of town. We just accepted what we had over there on our side of town. And I can't say that, but we just accepted what we had. And I can recall even at Mary E. Branch, we had music in the auditorium. I actually taught on the stage. That was the area that the children would come to. And there were times during rainy weather that water would trickle down the walls.

RS: Did the children have to buy instruments or were they supplied by the school system?

MH: No, the children didn't have to buy any instruments during that time. They were so menial that we just used what we had. And we concentrated more on the singing than the instrumental so we didn't have to be bothered with the instruments as such.

RS: That's interesting.

MH: See, the singing, you got your own instrument. The natural instrument. (both laughing)

RS: The instrument that God gave you.

MH: That's right. (both laughing)

0.14.25.7

RS: Now Miss Hunt, how long did you teach in the Roanoke City Public Schools?

MH: For 34 years. I retired in '89.

RS: In 1989. What school did you start off teaching when you got to Roanoke?

MH: I went to Booker T. Washington. I stayed at Booker T. for – until we integrated in, what was it, '69?

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: And then I went to Monroe Junior High School and I stayed there until Addison closed and we came back down to Addison as a junior high school. And what was that, '72 or '73?

RS: Yes ma'am. I think it was '73.

MH: '73, that's right.

RS: And you stayed at Addison until you retired?

MH: That's right.

RS: Oh really?

MH: I stayed on this side of town, Reggie. I worked on this side of town, in this area all of my life, Booker T. Washington up to Monroe and back down to Addison. And so this area I know and I love and the people of this area. So when I go into Kroger Store going around, I just see everybody that I know that I – I love it.

RS: Its a community.

MH: Yeah, that's right.

RS: So was Charles Day the principal over at Addison when you were there?

MH: No. See Addison became – He was at the senior high school and when it became junior high school, it had integrated and we had a white principal when I went there, John Garber, never shall forget him. A very lovely, a very fine fellow.

0.15.54.6

RS: So at Addison, up until – let's see '69 – Oh, you went to Monroe Junior when you left Booker T. right?

MH: When I left Booker T. That's right.

RS: Now in Monroe Junior at that time, was that still predominantly white?

MH: And at the beginning, it was a terrible experience. It was unpleasant. I went there in choral music and Mr. Polk was in the instrumental. Do you remember Mr. J.D. Polk?

RS: I remember Mr. J. D. Polk.

MH: And you know, it was not good at all because they did not want us there. I think the neighborhood did not want us there either. And there was always something going on. And I recall that -

(Interruption)

0.16.53.9

MH: I remember how the white parents were bringing back band uniforms and things, turning them in when they found out that we were there. That the teachers were going to be black. And that went on for a while and we endured it and then things seemed to just started to smooth out. And by the time we were ready to come back to Addison, we really didn't want to leave Monroe. But I met some very, very fine people there and I see a family now that had a lot of children there who were quite supportive. We talk of those days.

RS: So initially, it wasn't that good of an experience but over time -

MH: Over time, it grew to be better.

RS: Do you think you and Mr. Polk and the other black teachers that were there that as people go to know you -

MH: Know you and to find out that we were for real and that we weren't going to harm them.

RS: The children.

MH: That's right. And that we loved children and loved our work too and they became very supportive. But the day that I walked up that walk in August of '69, I said to myself, "If I had any way to support my child and myself, I wouldn't go in this building today". But when it was time to leave it, I had a totally different view.

RS: So it turned out to be a good experience and a good learning experience.

MH: Yes.

RS: Well its good that people like you and Mr. Polk were there to do that.

MH: This is true. We accepted the insults and the remarks at that time but just persevered and kept going and it soon -

RS: Won the people over. Well you know Coach Day and I were talking about the whole phenomenon of Jackie Robinson integrating baseball and he wasn't the most athletic guy. There were other men in baseball that could play better but he can endure the insults and so he became the trailblazer.

MH: Yes.

RS: And in many ways, I look at people like Charles Day and people like you as being able to endure as you said.

MH: That's right.

RS: And then and that affects social change. You have to have certain types of people that can do that who were competent but also had the character I guess you would say.

MH: Yes. The wherewithal or something to accept that. And sometimes you would go in at the end of the day feeling quite down.

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: But for some reason we would get it and go back the next morning ready to go again.

0.19.30.4

RS: You guys were trailblazers and you really changed things. One question on here, "Did anyone else in your family attend college?"

MH: Well, now let me get this straight. Yes. In my immediate family, my brother went to Bluefield State. My sister, Jean and Jackie were nurses and they were at St. Philip's in Richmond. They're both

deceased. My sister Norma went to St. Paul. She did not finish. But all of us had some college. My parents were great believers in education.

RS: Well that was my next question, "Was education a priority?"

MH: It was a priority. They had limited education but they believed that we should have it and they worked hard. And really all of us did get some very good training. All of us had college experience. All of us didn't finish. We had 2 registered nurses, a physical therapist and a music teacher. And the one that didn't finish was a very, very good cook, seamstress, she could do everything. But she did not finish St. Paul.

RS: And your parents encouraged both the girls and your brother to go.

MH: Oh yes.

RS: So it wasn't that, "We're going to focus on him and ".

MH: Oh no. Everybody had their turn. And we came on down the line. Everybody took their turn. It was just never thought of that you weren't going any further than high school at Addison.

RS: So it was an expectation.

MH: That's right. It was like grade 13 was coming up next year. (both laughing)

0.21.28.4

RS: Did you find that the priority of education was reinforced like say in the church and the broader community?

MH: Oh it was. Emphasis was put upon education everywhere we went. Now you take my church. I grew up right over here at Hill Street and I'm still there. But you know it was on Peach Road. My pastor, they encouraged us every step of the way and he would let me play for services when I couldn't play and make mistakes would stop and cry and would stop and make you start again. And everybody made us. It was expected of us. And our teachers and our preachers and everybody told us, "You're gonna be somebody". And that's why we were able to achieve Reggie, because the expectations were high and we were highly encouraged.

0.22.23.8

RS: So it was the community effort.

MH: Yes. Everybody.

RS: You can sort of contrast that with today where, I think that's one of the things that are missing especially for young African-Americans today.

MH: It is. Everywhere we went. If you went to get your hair done. If you went to the barber shop. Everywhere you went, they expected you to do well. And they did not take anything less than that. And so we strove to do that.

RS: Well, that was good motivation and when you hear someone like Hillary Clinton say that it takes a village to raise a child, having grown up in that type of environment, I know exactly what she meant. And you know it as well. And, again, the collective body has to encourage certain values.

MH: Now you take your mother who was a librarian at Harrison. Donna, my daughter Donna, was there. They got out before I got out at Booker T. Donna would go to the library. I don't know whether you remember riding home with your mother. I got home, I called her home and down the hill Donna would come. You see, that's the type of support we had. I didn't have to have my child going in the house with a key around her neck. She was in the library until I got home.

RS: And that's a real supportive environment. I mean, that – and so you have a group norm that you're going to do something. My mother would always say that everybody – God gave everybody ability to do something. So if you couldn't go to college, you could do something with your hands. There was something for you to do.

MH: That's right.

RS: There was a collective community expectation.

MH: And everybody worked together. Everybody worked together. That's why we can walk around and leave our houses unlocked and doors unlocked and nobody bothers because everybody was like

one big family.

0.24.24.2

RS: When you were coming up Miss Hunt, describe your home life. For example, did you and your siblings gather around the radio to listen to stories or listen to programs on the radio when you were growing up?

MH: Yeah, that was all we had. We didn't have any television or nothing like that. We would gather around the radio and listen to certain stories. Let me see, I can't even recall 'em now. (laughing) Some of them I could remember on the radio. We would do little things like to entertain ourselves like have a talent show. You do what you can do and I'd do what I could do and we just stayed in the yard and played around the house because you couldn't go out the yard now. You had to stay in the yard and we'd run around in the yard until it was hard like cement. You know, the ground was as hard as cement. (laughing) And you could sweep it with a broom. (both laughing)

RS: Wasn't a lot of grass.

MH: You could sweep it with a broom it was as hard as cement. (both laughing heartily) But we were just really there together and we enjoyed ourselves together.

RS: Y'all were creative in finding things to do to entertain yourselves.

MH: That's right. Have programs and I would sing and somebody else would dance. We'd just do things. You didn't have any money to do anything else with. We could go to the Virginia Theater on Saturday afternoons. But other than that, you entertained yourselves. And entertained each other.

0.25.55.5

RS: Do you remember while growing up when you got your first telephone or refrigerator or ice box?

MH: That's funny. When we got our first telephone and the telephone would ring, we would knock each other down running trying to answer it. And the same thing was about Venetian blinds, I remember. We were just so excited when we got Venetian blinds because that was something really nice at the window and we would go and open and close you know with the cord. But we enjoyed the telephone more than anything. When it would ring, everybody would run to answer it.

RS: Did your friends get phones around the same time?

MH: Well see, we had party lines. Do you remember party lines?

RS: I remember party lines. I was explaining to this young lady what party lines were. Party lines and private lines. Nobody had private lines.

MH: Nobody had private lines. See you couldn't afford private lines. Everybody had party lines and our friends, we would eavesdrop. That's what we used to do.

RS: That's what you used to do. (both laughing) I was explaining to her how you could be having a conversation and someone else could listen to the whole conversation.

MH: All of your conversation. Can you imagine that now.

RS: And that was entertaining as well.

MH: That's right. And I remember one of our teachers was on our line and she told my daddy that she thought I was listening in and, of course, I denied it but I was. (laughing) But I know I didn't do that anymore. (both laughing) Yes, but our friends all up MacDowell (??) – See I guess they were on a certain line and so it was up the hill and around. We were at the foot of 7<sup>th</sup> Street. You don't even know where that is do you? You know where Petit's (??) store was?

RS: No ma'am.

MH: Did you ever know where Dr. L. C. Downing lived?

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: Well it was right there. He was at the top of the hill. The minister lives in that house now I think. Dr. Bolden.

RS: Yeah.

MH: Well we were right down at the bottom. So all around there we were on the same line I guess.

RS: So people in that community around the same time began to get telephones -

MH: Phones about the same time. But I remember that phone because we used to knock each other down running to answer it. (both laughing)

0.28.26.3

RS: What about a refrigerator?

MH: Well, you see, we had really progressed when we went from the ice box. Now you don't know anything about the ice box.

RS: I don't know about the ice box.

MH: Ice box was where you put the cart out and the man would leave a block of ice. Well, when we got the first refrigerator we were really moving up. We were really high class then. And follow that by a washing machine. Momma didn't have to wash on the board anymore. We were really getting up, real up.

RS: So all of these things were exciting.

MH: They were. And we were grateful for them and appreciative of them. Oh yeah, they were very exciting.

RS: And you felt like your quality of life was improved?

MH: Was improving. That's right. We were getting better all the time and you see, after we got the Frigidaire, you could keep things longer. I remember with the ice box you couldn't have food at certain times of the year and in the real cold weather, you would just sit it out on the back porch. We had a closed in back porch. Set it out on the step. But I tell you what, we didn't get sick from it like they do now with all the modern things they have now. We would set it out on the steps and it would be covered up and stay cold and made nobody sick.

RS: Any other things that you remember that when you – Venetian blinds, the telephone -

MH: That sounds so simple but that was big at that time.

RS: Yeah, if you didn't have it that was a big thing. (both laughing) Was there anything else that you remember that you got and it was an exciting time in your household?

MH: Well no, not really but we just enjoyed everything that we got.

RS: And the new things that you got, you were appreciative of.

MH: Very appreciative of and just enjoyed it.

0.30.15.5

RS: So as you got older and before you went to Virginia State, life was getting better?

MH: It was because see things were getting better. I remember we were doing things like getting the charge accounts. We used to didn't have that and I remember when my mother got a charge account down at Spiegel's or Pugh's or somewhere. We could go downtown and just get little things. It was getting better. And we were feeling it too. (both laughing)

RS: Well that's good. When you were growing up, was your front porch a social area? Was that where your friends came?

0.31.00.2

MH: That was the gathering place. And our house – I have friends today who were my friends then. Our house, being 5 of us, maybe where there was one child, they would come to our house. I have a very dear friend now who was at the church. And on Sundays, she would come home with me after church, stay for dinner and when it was time for BYPU – You've never heard of that have you?

RS: BYP?

MH: BYPU.

RS: No ma'am.

MH: Baptist Young People's Union.

RS: Oh, no ma'am.

MH: Y'all don't have that now?

RS: No ma'am. So BYPU -

MH: Baptist Young People's Union. I think now they call it Baptist Training Union.



RS: I see.

MH: I don't believe they even have it now.

RS: No, I'm not familiar with that.

MH: Well, that met on Sunday evenings about 5 or 6 o'clock, something like that. And that's when we would come back down to the church for that. And stay for night service, you know. And all of our friends would gather there. And my mother used to say, she would look around and there'd be somebody else at the dinner table she didn't even know they were there. But you know, there was always plenty of food. And our friends were welcome.

RS: And so your house was sort of a gathering place.

MH: For our friends and during the summer and when we would go to the fair and places like that, we would all go together. My daddy, like I said, we didn't have anything to take a vacation, but my daddy would take off a day and carry us to the fair. And that was the big event of the summer to go to the fair.

RS: And you looked forward to that?

MH: Yeah. And we would all get together and go to the fair. That was a big day.

RS: When you went to the fair, were there any instructions? I'll tell you why I ask this question. By the time I came along, there was this, I didn't know if it was a myth or if it was true about Eco and Ico (??) how people at the fair would steal your -

MH: But that's why we always went together. And daddy was always there to carry us and we never walked around and talked to strangers or do anything, we all stayed together, all bunched up together.

RS: That was a powerful story.

MH: And everybody believed that.

RS: And have been and even when I went to the fair, I mean, as a child, Melbur (??) used to have to take me 'cause the same thing, he would have to keep up with us.

MH: That's right, you couldn't stray.

0.33.46.2

RS: No, you couldn't stray. What type of chores or work did you have to do, Miss Hunt, when you were growing up at home?

MH: Oh, we had to do everything. There was no such thing as you – you know you cleaned your room, you washed the dishes. Now, my mother never made us do anything that would keep us from doing our schoolwork or taking part in our activities but we had to do that – that room had to be clean. And we knew our chores. Mine was to clean the bathroom and some of us had to wash dishes. We all had different chores to do. But they never interfered with our training and school because that was first in her mind. But, we did that in addition to doing our work at home. And the front porch. I have a memory of the porch – I didn't clean it once and my mother really, really wore me out about it so now I have a thing about – I'll come out and clean the front porch if I won't clean the kitchen.

RS: That made a lasting impression.

MH: A lasting impression. (both laughing)

RS: Now tell me this Miss Hunt, when you guys were growing up, y'all had a coal stove?

MH: Yeah.

RS: Yes ma'am. And your brother or your father and your brother -

MH: Would bring in the coal. That's what I was saying, but after we got the furnace, the coal house became the hen house. I said cold house at first. You know when the trucks would pull up in the yard and dump all the coal and then you'd take the skull (??), is that what you call it? And go out and bring in the coal and you would – Harris Hardwood, that's what it was – you would get the wood and stack it up on the back porch and you made the fire then (??) and we had heatrollas (??) is that what you call it? Well the big stove, before we got the furnace, you know. And you had a stove in every room, upstairs and down and everywhere but we were warm. (both laughing)

RS: Now when you got the furnace, was that an oil furnace?

MH: No, it was a coal furnace. You burned the coal in that and you had to go down in the basement.

RS: OK, so that was in the basement.

MH: Make it up just like you would the coal fire in the stove.

0.36.11.1

RS: Now in your family Miss Hunt, what – are there family stories that were passed down from generation to generation that you remember?

MH: I can't really recall any particular story. No, I can't really recall any particular stories but I know that there were certain things that we would just do at certain times when we would be having like Thanksgiving, Christmas and all like that, there were certain rituals but no particular stories. And there were particular menus. My daughter even now says that granny always had turnips with the turkey and I don't have turnips. And she remembers that.

RS: So she remembers that ritual?

MH: Uh huh. Certain things like that but no particular stories.

RS: Were there any discussions in your family about ancestors who had lived during the period of slavery or the Civil War or anything like that?

MH: No, now I never got any of that history. I guess there were some but my father was an only child and he came to Roanoke to work from Waynesboro and I never really knew too much about his background but no real – No, I don't guess we had \_\_\_\_\_.

RS: You mentioned it, ironically, you sort of answered this other question. It says, "Did you have a family recipe that was passed down through the generations?" I heard you say that Donna always talked about your -

MH: Turnips.

RS: Were there any recipes or anything?

MH: Well, I'm not a cook. I'm an eater though. But I'm not a cook. And I haven't passed that on to my child. I tell ya, my mother did all the cooking. She never had anything to let us experiment with. It all had to be used for the purpose. So she did all the cooking for us. She would let us go and do the playing on the piano and take – I even once tried to take some dancing lessons, anything that was offered. You know Miss Farvley (??) had a little dancing class once. And we went to that. She would do all the cooking, so I got very little of that but she was some cook, I'm telling you. But we knew what we would have and we all had the big Sunday dinners you know. And we kept that up even until she passed. We would go to her house every Sunday for the big family dinners.

RS: Even after you were married and had children, had Dawn?

MH: Mm mm. And the children went there. We all went there.

RS: Oh, I see.

MH: And she cooked those good meals. And you know Reggie, she could get up and cook those on Sunday mornings and still make Sunday morning church service. I've often wondered how did she do it. Because when I get out on Sunday mornings, I can barely get a cup of coffee and a piece of toast. But she would make rolls and cakes and things like that and we would have big dinners like that. And yet, she would be in the morning service at church also. I just can't -

RS: That's remarkable.

MH: I just – We said she was some lady.

0.39.51.4

RS: She had to be. Miss Hunt, did Mr. Hunt or your brother serve in the military?

MH: Yes, they both did. My brother was in the Marines and every time I hear something about Camp Lejeune, I think about him. And Jim Webb says he was in the Marines as he continues to campaign for the Senate. He was in the Marines. And I think of my brother. And my husband was in the Navy and I used to hear him tell of his tales over there about the Navy.

RS: Did your brother have a good experience in the Marine Corps?

MH: Well, he seemed to have as far as I know. He seemed to have. And then when he came out of there, I think that's when he went to Bluefield State and still after that he went to NYU. He kept going

because he – When he passed, he was a Physical Therapist at the VA Hospital.

RS: And Mr. Hunt served in the Navy?

MH: Yes.

RS: Did he seem to enjoy that experience?

MH: Oh, from what he talked about, you would've thought that he was the Commander in Chief.

(both laughing)

RS: Mr. Hunt was a good man. He could tell stories.

MH: He was quite colorful. (both laughing) I remember at his funeral, Reverend Wilkinson made some remark that the whole church just cracked up. Something that Alaska told him. (laughing)

0.41.23.4

RS: Can I ask you about that 'cause your husband was the only person I've ever known named Alaska. Where -

MH: We don't know where his mother got that name from. And we used to just tease him and say that evidently she wanted to travel and had a longing to go to Alaska. We don't know. And that was really his name, Alaska.

RS: Well even as a child, that struck me and I never would ask my parents about it.

MH: Because you all wouldn't do things like that but now the children would ask you. And Reggie, his middle name was Colt, C-o-l-t. We don't know where the lady got that name. (both laughing) And he grew up with people calling him “AC” because he didn't like to be called Alaska.

RS: I didn't know that. Do you have a fond childhood memory? For example, a holiday event, a family vacation, a gift, something that really sticks out when you were growing up.

0.42.24.9

MH: I don't know. I had a lot of really nice experiences. Let me tell you one. It doesn't seem like its important. You know there was a time when styles were important to girls and there was this style of coat, the hooded coat, the long hooded coat. And all of my friends, my best girlfriends had gotten a hooded coat. I didn't have one. And I was sort of hurt by that. I didn't have a coat. And one day I came in, this was my dear Aunt Sally. I came in from school and she was living on Madison Avenue and as I told you we would make our daily visits. And when I came in, after school I came by Aunt Sally said, “Honey, go upstairs and look on the bed and bring me that bag down here”. And I got up and went upstairs and brought the bag down. And she said, “Look in there and see what it is”. I looked in it. It was a hooded coat. I was never so happy in my life because I had what my friends had. Now, that doesn't seem like a big thing to kids now because they have everything but that was the way our aunts did us. She knew that I was upset over not having this coat and I never will forget it. She got it from Shutz (??) United. That was a store down on Campbell Avenue. But that's what the bag said.

And that was this coat in there. That meant so much to me. So much.

RS: Well, families used to really do that. That happened a lot in my family as well. If you wanted something, your parents didn't think you needed it or couldn't afford it.

0.44.24.2

MH: And I remember when I was at Virginia State – Now this was my Aunt Helen who lived with us but she had moved – you know during the war, a lot of the people went to Washington and Connecticut to get better jobs. And Aunt Helen eventually ended up back here with me and living and passed. But I was at Virginia State. I was a big girl then. And the choir was getting ready to go on tour and we were in Chapel. It was during Religious Emphasis Week and now I know you wonder why I remember so vividly. And everybody was talking about what they were going to wear on this choir tour. Well, I knew that it was nothing in Roanoke to get. I sat there in the choir and on the back of the church bulletin, I guess you would call it now, I wrote Aunt Helen. I wrote her a letter and I told her that the choir was going on tour and I wish I had something to wear like the other girls. When Chapel was over, I mailed that letter and in 2 or 3 days, I got a long distance telephone call. Well, that was unheard of. I don't think I had ever been called long distance at school and down the steps I came in Barrett

Hall at Virginia State to answer the phone. It was Aunt Helen. She said, “Look, Baby, I got your letter and auntie just wanted to let you know you're gonna have something new to wear like the other girls and stop worrying about it.” And she sent me a suit, black patent leather shoes, white blouse. And I had – When she go so she couldn't live alone, and her minister called me and said, “I'm bringing her to you”. And I kept her. I kept her. I remember those days.

RS: Well, those are special times. I think the story behind that is that they really wanted you to focus on your work.

MH: And she didn't want me to be upset about – She said, “I want to put you at ease. Go on and get your lesson, you're going to have something to wear like the other girls”. And she did.

0.46.39.5

RS: It reminds me of when I was at Virginia State and my Grandmother Thomas always did domestic work, right? I got to the point that I didn't particularly – We were a different generation so I didn't particularly like my grandmother working for white people.

MH: That's right.

RS: So I always like to dress Miss Hunt. I made this announcement one time. I came home and I said, “Grandmom, you're 70 years old, you ride the bus everyday. You don't have to do that and I don't particularly like for you to work for white people like as in domestics”. And the first day, she told me, she said, “Well, Reggie, you know all the people. They treat me well. They treat me with respect.” And I said, “Yes ma'am”. Because she was deconstructing my argument. She started off with that. And then, Miss Hunt, she hit with me, “And you know all those nice clothes you like to wear. Where do you think they're coming from.” (speaking simultaneously and both laughing heartily) That was a real good lesson for me. It was a real good lesson for me and it also taught me that just like your aunt was making sacrifices so that you could have nice things and again, focus on your work and not feel in any way incomplete, that's what people did. 'Cause that's exactly what my grandmother was doing.

MH: That's right. They really, really did do that. And these grandmothers are something.

RS: Yeah, they are.

MH: I'm at the point in my life now where I'm experiencing that.

RS: And I know you're a good grandmama.

MH: I don't know about that. But I am experiencing it. (both laughing)

0.48.16.0

RS: What are your memories of the Gainsboro Library and Miss Lee.

MH: Ohhh, bless her darling heart. Miss Lee did everything in the world for us. It was right over there around the corner right? They've moved and made stuff around here so much I can't even get my bearings. It was in the bottom of the Y, you know. And Miss Lee was just everything to us. We went there. She – Not only did she help us with our work and how to use the library and everything but she was such a lady of grace. She taught us good manners. She taught us how to be ladies and we just learned to love Virginia Y. Lee. That's a name in this town to people in my age group that's revered and honored with great respect. She taught us so, so much. And she was such a gracious lady. We had such wonderful role models in ladies like that. And we loved Miss Lee but she didn't take no stuff from you. She didn't take no stuff off of us now. We had to walk the chalk and do the right thing. But she was kind. She instructed us and she made us be ladies. Talk about the card catalog and all that stuff. They don't even call it now.

RS: No, they don't call it that now. (both laughing) But, yeah, I know she had a big influence over my mother and I think my mother used her as a role model.

MH: Yes, I'm sure your mother did.

0.49.50.0

RS: Were there other people in the community when you were growing up that you thought of as role models?

MH: Well, you know, Reggie, our teachers and our ministers were always our role models. And we respected them. Oh, just think of people like Reverend A.L. James. There was a church over here at - my pastor Reverend D. R. Powell and people like Miss Sly. I remember Miss Sly carried me - I'm still having teeth problems - Miss Sly carried me to the dental clinic up in Burrell and Dr. Fiers (??), Mrs. Fiers husband, was the dentist. I remember he started pulling a tooth and it hurt and I jumped up out the chair and ran back down to Harrison School. Miss Sly didn't do a thing but come right over there and just beckon me out the room and I jumped up and jumped in the car and went on back up there. But I respected all of my teachers and I dearly loved Eunice Poindexter. I loved her unto death. Because she was the choral teacher at Addison. See, that's where my interest was. I respected all of my teachers. Miss Sadie Lawson, Miss Ella Mae King - You don't even know those names.

RS: Oh now I knew -

MH: Miss Ula Hackley (??) - Great souls, great souls. Miss Anne Sykes Morrison. She was my teacher and when she got married, we got mad. We loved her so we didn't even want her to get married. (both laughing) That's how we felt about our teachers, really we did. We were upset because we thought that if she married, she wouldn't like us like she had. (laughing)

RS: And all these were intelligent, strong women.

MH: Yeah, that we just admired and loved. Yes, they were strong women. And we wanted to be like them.

RS: I remember Miss King and Miss Lawson and of course, Nancy Fiers and I are the same age so I remember -

MH: So you remember Mr. Fiers, OK.

RS: I remember Miss Fiers so its quite a few of them that you mentioned. Actually, they were at Addison when I was in there.

MH: Eunice Cooper, was she there? You don't remember her?

RS: I don't remember her. But Miss Poindexter, I remember her.

MH: And Miss Lawson, Miss Ella Mae -

RS: Miss Ella Mae King. And you're right, they were all strong. They were disciplinarians. They were fair but -

0.52.37.8

MH: This is it, they were so fair - We would say that Miss Poindexter was so fair that we believed that if her momma was late for choir rehearsal she would put her momma out of choir. (both laughing) She was so fair and that we learned to respect her for. You towed the line.

RS: Well, Coach Day and I were talking about this old issue of punctuality, being on time and that was something that I got from my parents and he talked about and Eunice Poindexter. You had to be on time.

MH: Reggie, would you believe that when we were getting ready to go to the music festival at Virginia State College, we would have extra rehearsals. Now, she would call rehearsal at 7:00 in the morning when the Norfolk and Western whistle would blow at 7:00, she would get up and close the door. Nobody came in after that. But, we were all in our seats because we wanted to be in the choir and go to the music festival. And when the whistle blew, she closed the door.

RS: That's an interesting phenomenon and I was telling Coach Day, that's the one thing I see with my children. My children think - They've learned all these big words now so they'll say sometimes, "Daddy, you're so neurotic about time". (both laughing) But I gotta be places 15 or 20 minutes early.

MH: That's right.

RS: And they feel comfortable getting there 5 minutes -

MH: Boom!

RS: That's right. I tell my son all the time, "Well you don't know if there's going to be an accident or what could happen".

MH: That's right.

RS: And it just goes right past 'em. He gets places but he's never early.

MH: And he'll be on time but he won't have no time to spare. (both laughing)

RS: And I worry about them about that. (both laughing)

MH: That is so precious.

0.54.32.6

RS: What were some community leaders that you remember? And this is either in childhood or in your adult life.

MH: Well, you know the one community leader that I hold in dear respect was my pastor, Reverend Wilkinson. And you see, during the time that he was really making the moves for integration in this community, you see, a lot of those times, I was out there with him because he would carry the church choir. And I had the greatest respect for Reverend Wilkinson and those who moved with him. Now some weren't so outstanding as far as the community was concerned but they were there with him to give him the backing that he needed. And I held him in high regard. Well, you see, our leaders, like I say, were our ministers and all, they were the ones out there with out educators doing the work for us. There were others in the NAACP and things like Mr. Holler and – Let me think – There was another man – Who was Mr. Hudsona (??) - I can't get that straight, my mind is failing me but he was out there too.

RS: Yeah, I remember him. But an interesting thing, we lived right down the street from Reverend Wilkinson. I mean they lived on Staunton and we lived down on 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

MH: Yeah, yeah, you lived down on 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

RS: So I grew up with Nadine and Cassandra.

MH: Oh yes, but do you know every year on his birthday and father's day, they send flowers to the church.

RS: Oh, really.

0.56.22.8

MH: And it was just this past June 18<sup>th</sup> is his birthday and I went in church and this gorgeous flower arrangement was on the altar. And I kept looking at it and I looked at it and thought, "What are those flowers for?". And finally I said to one of the ushers, "What does that card say?" And it said, "In memory of him from the girls" and then Reverend Stone finally announced it. And I looked at them so and Reggie, you would not believe, I said, finally I interrupted the service. I said, "Pastor, I'm just having an emotional feeling now". I'm looking at those flowers. I said, "Would you allow me" - incidentally they had named me a music director emeritus – I said, "Would you allow me, as music director emeritus to exert my influence. I would like to change the meditation hymn to one of Reverend Wilkinson's favorite hymns." And he said, "Yeah, surely". And I told 'em what number it was and we just had a wonderful experience and those flowers were from Nadine and Cassandra so you do remember him.

RS: Well I always thought, you know, it was always tough, I assume, growing up to be the children of a minister. Reverend Wilkinson was a leader and I remember Nadine and Cassandra, they were people who helped integrate schools around here.

MH: You remember there's a picture, I think the World News still carries it, they show it every once in a while, when their mother lead them up to Melrose School and Reverend Wilkinson was out of town on that day, I remember that. And I said to my husband then, I said, "Look, you get up and go over on Melrose because Uvasini (??) was the name we called it". I said Uva's (??) going to be carrying the girls to school. And then the marchers told me that their mother said the same thing to her husband, "Get up and go over on Melrose because she's got to carry those children to school". And I guess for protection for her and support. Yes, they surely did. They integrated Melrose School.

RS: Yeah, I remember that. I'm going to Harrison and my mother was there so it was very comfortable for me but I can remember Nadine and Cassandra and as I've grown older, I can understand the sort of stress that was in that family.

MH: You know it was even stressful for the church. Remember, we had to put that door on the garage, you know the one that rises up because he would be out at night and we worried about him coming in. It was a strain. And even to go with him on the choirs when he would go on these meetings, it caused stress in even our personal home because my husband did not want me doing that.

RS: Exactly.

MH: Once, he told Reverend Wilkinson that. He said, "She's not going". He said, "Because, see, she's going to keep on following you and she's not going to have a job". And so Reverend told him, "Well, then that would give us a case". And I remember Alaska said, "No case is going to feed us".

RS: I don't think -

MH: It made stress all the way around.

0.59.39.3

RS: And I think that as you look back on those events and people like me have benefited from it and certainly generations afterward, you don't think about the stress and the strain that that put on families and it put on communities. Again, that was a lot on Nadine and Cassandra to integrate a school.

MH: Bless their hearts.

RS: I think we don't think about it. You have to talk to people like you. I never would've thought but it makes perfect sense but the kind of stress it put on your family and Mr. Hunt. 'Cause I can hear Elmer Thomas saying the same thing and keeping the job was the main thing.

MH: And here I'm gonna run out here and play the piano with you marching and carrying on.

RS: I can remember once my Uncle Bunny who cooked on the railroad.

MH: Yeah! I knew Bunny and Leo both.

RS: Well Bunny had an alcohol problem and he fell out cooking. This was the late '60s and my mother gonna go down here and talk to the people about getting Bunny his job back. And I can remember my father telling her, "Don't do it". And then he told us that Maxine, "If you're gonna do it, don't be smart with the people because I can lose my job". That was a big issue. (both saying the same thing simultaneously) That was a real big issue. And I can understand Mr. Hunt saying, "Case is fine but that's not going to put anything on the table". (both laughing) And so they've got a question on here about segregation and the civil rights movement and - Any memories about Gainsboro or urban renewal in the area?

1.01.24.2

MH: Well, now you see urban renewal destroyed my church. Now that was a big thing for us and we felt like we never got what our church was worth to us. And we had to go to Addison School for 2 years to worship. You know we worshiped in the school until we could get the little church that we have over here now and it's a nice little church but it's not the church that our old church was. Urban renewal really did put a hurting on us at our church. And we were unhappy about it, very unhappy about it. And I just think of all of this area. When I go around down here sometimes, I actually get sick but we have learned to pick up the pieces and move on with the times but urban renewal really did tear us up. It really, really did.

RS: I think people would have to be from this community to understand.

MH: And to feel it. You will never know how I felt when Burrell went out. I was raised playing up on the - where the new part is where Carillion has its - that was like the tennis court and we used to play on that area. And my father was sick a lot and those great nurses like Miss Willis and Miss Sims and Miss Moore, they nursed him to health. And when that place went out of existence, I was hurt.

RS: I think - I don't know if you're familiar with this lady, she's a psychiatrist, a professor of psychiatry, Mindy Fullelaw (??). She's come to Roanoke several times and talked to people about the psychological and emotional impact of this very thing. And I'm glad that Mindy has done that because she records it because nobody - When people see urban renewal, they'll see new buildings or whatever -

MH: And they think it's wonderful and it is in that way but what it has done to get to that. And I really

do – Burrell was really dear to us and I was never happy. And yet I go there to the Carillion doctor and I'll tell them, I said, "Well I'm sitting in the area of the emergency room or I'm -". And the nurses look at me as if I was some woman out of – (both laughing). But, it was quite a strain on us when we had to give up Burrell.

RS: Well, a lot of the institutions that people had invested in and they held memories and nobody gave the black community those things, these people really built those things up.

MH: Reggie, think of all the things that we had. You could go almost across the strip, there was the drug stores, the theater, the hotels – Think of Dr. Brooks and Dr. - All the things that – And we don't have that.

RS: Anymore. Well, they did destroy the community and it destroyed vital institutions.

MH: Yes, it did. It took everything we had. And I can almost feel the hurt now to even talk about it.  
1.04.49.7

RS: Well Miss Hunt, I have one final question in closing. Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to share with me today or share with this oral history?

MH: I don't know of anything that I could share with you Reggie but I think this is a wonderful thing because our children really don't know anything about it. And they don't know what a lovely place we have here in Roanoke. But they will never know if we don't give it to them this way. You know, there are so many little things I hear even in – of course you know music is – but they don't – our children don't know the hymns of the church. Our children don't know spirituals. I mean just so many things, even with my grandchildren when I talk about it. They laugh sometimes when I'm saying these things and there's just so much – I guess that's so dear to us that I guess our children will never know. And once I heard – and I'm gonna stop now – Once I heard them talking about they were gonna teach the children the National Anthem and the parents were raving about that. Years ago, we taught all of that. We did a unit on it. And every child knew the National Anthem, "My Country Tis Of Thee" or "America The Beautiful" but our children don't know those things now.

RS: And thus, they're disconnected from the society because, I mean, that's what schools and churches and other institutions did. They reinforced these things.

MH: That's the word, that's right.

RS: And so the children really miss it. They don't have an appreciation for these things or even for an institution like this and I think that's one of the reasons a project like this is really important.

MH: And Mrs. Lewis is just about to flip she's so excited over it all. She is really – And she's so grateful and appreciative. But she has done such a lovely job here at this library and I certainly hope we can keep our library here now.

RS: Well, I hope so too. I mean I really hope so.

MH: Yeah, its lovely and we are enjoying it and we call and ask her to do all kinds of things.

RS: Well, she's – Carla's – She's what I think a librarian should be.

MH: Well, the class of '56 and that was my sister's class, Jackie's class, my younger sister's class, had a reunion and one of the members called and said we're going to have a souvenir booklet and would you like to remember your sister - and I'm talking too much – and I called her and I said, "I want something beautiful about sisters, something beautiful". Sent me two things that were just outstanding.

RS: Well, thank you so much Miss Hunt.

MH: Is that the lady that writes for the paper.

RS: Yes ma'am.

MH: That's what I was thinking. Oh! I like your articles darling. I've never seen you in person. Hello! I'm pleased to meet – I'm going on about something else. (both laughing)