

Interviewee: Christine Payne  
Interviewer: Carla Lewis  
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

CL: We are here at the house of and home of Christine Evelyn Payne and we will be interviewing from her house at 116 Pinehurst in Salem, Virginia. OK Ms. Payne, Can you tell us when and where were you born?

CP: I was born in Roanoke, Virginia, on Hanover Avenue Northwest.

CL: And do you remember what year?

CP: 1926.

CL: OK, thank you. Can you tell me about your parents, your mother and father?

CP: My mother had a laundry on Park Street for several years and my father worked for – What was the name of that place? -

CL: Was it in Roanoke, Virginia?

CP: Yes, it was in Roanoke. It was the silk mill. The silk mill for many years.

CL: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

CP: One brother and one sister. My brother Percy and my sister Arnitia (??), Elsie Arnitia Keeling.

CL: Did you have any family living near by you when you lived in Roanoke?

CP: For a short time, my grandmother lived there and then there were several uncles and aunts on my father's side who lived there.

CL: Can you tell me your grandmother's name?

CP: Zella Franklin.

CL: Can you describe your home life? For instance, did you all gather around the front porch in the afternoons or did you listen to the radio?

CP: We gathered around the piano. My mother played the piano and we all enjoyed singing and that was one of the main things that we did. I like singing. My dad liked singing and we enjoyed that.

CL: What other kind of activities did you participate in? Did you go to church?

CP: Oh, yes, church, yes. That was a must that we all went to church, particularly the children of the family must go to Sunday School and we did. We enjoyed that. My mother enjoyed that also. She taught Sunday School.

CL: What family stories were passed on from generation to generation? When you all were around the piano and after singing, did you have a story or a particular recipe or something that you did from generation to generation?

CP: Well, basically, my mother enjoyed playing the piano. My dad had a very good voice and he enjoyed singing and so did I and that was the main thing that we enjoyed music. That was one of the things that we did particularly on Sundays and also some weekends.

CL: Did you talk about the Civil War or any part of slavery?

CP: A little. My dad would talk about that at times and my mother would too and also my grandmother would tell us a little bit about that but not a great deal.

CL: What are your fondest memories of childhood? What is the one thing that stands out right now if you were to tell me a story about your childhood?

CP: I always loved to sing and I would stand in the living room and try playing the piano. I didn't play that well but I loved to sing and my brother would always come in and say, "What's wrong with you?" (laughing) But anyhow, that was lots of fun. I enjoyed singing.

CL: What chores did you have to do around the house?

CP: There were always chores. Particularly in the kitchen. You must wash the dishes and put them up and that was the main thing, and dust. Dust, make sure that the house was dusted. I did that. My sister and I enjoyed doing that.

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CL: Describe your house for us. For example, was it a brick house or did you have a single story house or did you have a garden that you had to attend to or your parents?

CP: It was a single story house but someone always had to be the person to dust the house and I was some how or other that one along with my sister. We would make certain that the house was well-dusted. Then, my sister played the piano nicely and we would start singing and enjoying ourselves after we got some of the dust out.

CL: Did you have indoor plumbing or outdoor bathrooms or can you remember?

CP: Yeah, I remember when we didn't have indoor plumbing but later on, we did have that indoor plumbing. We really had both.

CL: How long did you live in the Gainsboro area?

CP: Hmmm. Oh, golly. I probably left there when I went to college.

CL: And what street was that?

CP: Hanover Avenue.

CL: How has the Gainsboro area changed?

CP: I think it looks better now. We probably don't have the same caliber of person living in that area. So it seems to be alright at this point.

CL: When you grew up, did you have doctors, lawyers, teachers, preachers, anyone in the neighborhood that you lived in?

CP: Hmmm. I would say maybe a preacher or two not really in my neighborhood but somewhere near that. I can't think of any teachers. There might've been one or two teachers.

CL: Did anyone in the neighborhood own their own business?

CP: Yeah, my mother. My mother had the laundry service. She and another lady, Mrs. Davis, Maude (??) Davis, the two of them had the laundry service on Park Street, just below – What is that church on the corner? -

CL: St. Pauls?

CP: St Pauls. Mother and Maude Davis had that and for a long time they had that and it was good. They enjoyed it and I think they both sort of, after so many years, they got tired and they come home and closed it.

CL: Were there any grocery stores in your neighborhood?

CP: There might've been one on the corner. I think so.

CL: Could you all walk to these stores?

CP: I think so. I think there was one not far from St. Pauls Church. I think there was one in that area.

CL: Tell us about your schools before you went to college. Which elementary school did you attend and high school and - ?

CP: Harrison, Harrison, Harrison. I think that's where I started school at Harrison on Harrison Avenue. What was my teacher's name? I can see her face. She lived in the Northeast section and she was just about that high.

CL: Lucy Turrell (??)?

CP: Lucy Turrell (??). She was one of my teachers.

CL: Where did you go to high school?

CP: Addison, Lucy Addison. Yeah.

CL: Do you remember seeing Mrs. Addison's picture hanging in the - ?

CP: Yes.

CL: She was a principal before then.

CP: Mm mm. Oh, yeah. She might've been there for a short time maybe while I was there but I'm not really sure.

CL: Where did you attend college?

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CP: Where did I go to school? Winston-Salem State University was one. Winston-Salem and Penn State. I got my Master's from Penn State and I graduated from Winston-Salem State with a NC, a BA and I graduated from Penn State with a Master's of Education. A certificate from Virginia Tech for something and I worked there as an English and Social Studies teacher in Roanoke County, Bent Mountain and Roanoke City. The only thing about that, I'm not a good rider. I get sick easily in a car and that's why I learned to drive because if I was driving then I didn't get sick. But to get in that car and go from Bent Mountain, oh, that was terrible. But after learning how to drive, I could do that and I felt better.

CL: Let me go back to elementary school. Were you all ever allowed to stay away from school because of the snow or the rain or different things? When you walked to school, were you ever allowed to stay home a day?

CP: It had to be a very, very heavy snow for us to stay at home, otherwise my daddy would make a path for us from Hanover Avenue down across Orange Avenue and then maybe up that hill but he would make sure that we could get to school. (chuckling)

CL: Did other members of your family attend college, your sister and brother?

CP: Oh, yeah. My sister went to – I've forgotten but she went to college.

CL: And your brother Percy was the Director of the Y?

CP: Yeah. He was at the Y. My sister went way up. I forgot the name of it. It should be in here.

CL: That's OK.

CP: I don't see it at the moment. Fisk University! That's right.

CL: Tell us what kind of work you did throughout your life.

CP: Well, for the most part, I taught school. (laughing) I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much both at Booker T. and Addison and I graduated from Winston-Salem a teacher's college and also Penn State is where I got my Master's so I enjoyed that.

CL: Did you teach at Virginia Western Community College?

CP: Yeah. I did. I forgot that. Yeah, I did. I taught there.

CL: For many years.

CP: How many years did I teach there? I graduated from Winston-Salem but I taught someplace – Oh, 15 years! Approximately 15 years. Reading, English and then I retired. I worked there as an instructor for Virginia Western Community College for probably 15 years.

CL: Roanoke city-

CP: Roanoke – Did I teach there that long? 30 years?

CL: That's what he says.

CP: OK, then probably so.

CL: What kind of businesses or shops did you frequent when you were growing up? Did you go into town to any of the stores that were there or did your parents purchase your clothes elsewhere?

CP: I guess it was both ways. My mother was usually with me and I was always the one that they needed to help me to find something. I needed somebody was with me until I finally found out that I could choose something for myself. She would go with me and I think she enjoyed it and I enjoyed having her with me.

CL: Do you remember any of the stores?

CP: Heironimus was one and – which is closed now isn't it?

CL: Mm mm.

CP: And there was the Pugh's. I can't think of – There must've been something else – Oh, Lazarus.

CL: \_\_\_\_\_ Childrens.

CP: That's where she used to get my shoes. That's about it.

CL: Do you remember the closing of the silk mill or do you remember - ?

CP: Yeah, my dad worked there. (laughing) I remember when it closed. I can't remember the year and how long he worked there. He worked there a long time and then, all of a sudden, it closed.

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CL: How did that effect the community?

CP: To a certain extent, I suppose, it did affect 'em because it was looking for a job then and looking - "Now, I gotta take care of my family. What am I going to do?" and so that was the kind of thing that - And then I'm trying to thing what did daddy do after the mill closed. He found some kind of job. I've forgotten at the moment but I'm sure he did because he had 3 children and I could see him sitting in the corner with figures, trying to figure out how much is he gonna make this month or this week or whatever. To help his family.

CL: What other kind of jobs did African-Americans have at that time?

CP: Most of them worked in homes. They were - I'm saying that but I know a few people that worked in homes and that's what they wanted to do is to be the caretaker for little kids and their homes and whatever.

CL: What about the males? The railroad?

CP: Oh yeah. N&W. That's right, N&W. I forgot that. A great number of them worked at N&W. \_\_\_\_\_ at Burrell Hospital who worked there. A few black doctors and nurses, yeah.

Unknown: Teachers, beauticians, barbers -

CP: Yeah, lots of barbers. A lot of black teachers and they were needed. A lot of 'em but I can't remember how many now but there were a great number of black teachers there, men and women.

CL: What memories do you have of the Gainsboro Library and Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee?

CP: I enjoyed going there. In fact, I enjoyed getting a book out and reading most of it before I even left the library. I enjoyed it with Mrs. Lee and somebody else used to work there, right? (chuckling) And they enjoyed it also, right? Good, good. How is it going now, OK?

CL: Wonderful.

CP: I'm glad. Good, good, good. I thought perhaps it was doing well and it has.

CL: Do you remember the Dumas Hotel or any of the entertainment that came?

CP: Why don't you tell about the Dumas Hotel and what's happening to them now?

Unknown: I don't really remember anything but I just know the history.

CL: They had performers to come in and Henry Street was really jumping at that time.

CP: Yeah.

Unknown: Because when you had entertainers to come in, they couldn't stay at the Hotel Roanoke so that would be the only place they could stay was at the Dumas. Then they had a little restaurant. We would go to the movie, to the Virginia Theater and there was a little ice cream parlor and the Barlow family owned that.

CP: Yeah. I'd forgotten that.

Unknown: It used to be a lively place at one time. People that I know would come from other places to stay.

CL: Who were some of the strong community leaders at that time?

CP: Hmmm.

CL: Teachers or -

CP: Yeah, teachers but I was trying to think of someone else. My mom and her friend that had the laundromat. And it was good business for them. Who else in that area? And I guess when you think about that, there were so many people from the various churches who did a great deal for the area and in particular \_\_\_\_\_ where they lived. There was always something that they would do for you. That was good. Let me see, who else? Oh, the Y. My brother worked there for a long time and he enjoyed that.

CL: When you were sitting on the front porch and kids would come by and if they were doing

anything other than good, would you correct them? Would your parents correct them?

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CP: Oh yeah, oh yeah. All the time. Absolutely. In fact, you almost knew not to do anything. Don't you dare do that. We were pretty good children I would say, my family, the 3 of us. Even though my brother and I used to get into it sometimes. (laughing) But we were good kids.

CL: How was life affected by segregation, the Civil Rights movement?

CP: I guess that we were in some ways and in other ways we were not because this was something that we were gonna have to take care of families. We were going to have to have a house to live in and so we didn't always feel that this was something that we had to go to them to help us do. We could do this ourselves.

CL: And still maintain your life.

CP: Right.

CL: Did you or anyone in your family go into the military during that time? Participate in any wars or -?

CP: Hmmmm. My father didn't. My grandfather didn't. There might've been some relative down the line or somebody who went but I can't think of them now.

CL: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about growing up in the Gainsboro area that we have not asked questions about? One of your memories, one of your fondest memories of - ?

CP: Well, I always enjoyed going to the library and reading. I always liked reading and I didn't go that often but when I went, I enjoyed it. That's the one thing I enjoyed.

CL: And singing and playing the piano.

CP: Yeah, I enjoyed singing.

CL: Did you play at a church?

CP: I didn't play, no, but my sister was the one who was the one who played. I could play a little bit but I sang better than I played. (laughing)

CL: Did you sing at any churches in the area?

CP: I sang at a lot of the churches around. I didn't mind doing that. I enjoyed doing that really. That was about it.

CL: Did you have a favorite song?

CP: I don't know. I think I had many favorite songs and I would sing sometimes without mother's playing and my brother Percy would come in and say, "Girl, why don't you shut up.". (laughing) But I enjoyed singing. I still do.

CL: You wouldn't want to sing a song for us would you?

CP: Oh, not today. Another day.

CL: What about 2 or 3 of one little short -

CP: I don't even know what.

CL: Anything you'd like to sing. One of your favorites.

CP: -Singing- (in an operatic-style voice)

"Lord is my light

And my salvation

Whom then shall I fear

Whom then shall I fear

The Lord is a strength of my life

The Lord is a strength of my life

Of whom then shall I feel afraid"

Applause

CL: That is so beautiful.

CP: I'd forgotten. No, it wasn't.

CL: It was beautiful.

CP: Make me cry.

CL: Make me cry. Christine, that was beautiful. Unless you want to do another one?

CP: No. (laughing)