

Interviewee: Beatrice Burwell
Interviewer: Alicia Sell
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

AS: Today is November 8, 2006. I am interviewing Beatrice Woodson Beale Burwell at her apartment in Elm Park Estates in Roanoke, Virginia. I am going to start by asking you some background questions. When and where were you born?

BB: In Roanoke, Virginia.

AS: And if you could just say the year also for the recording. Your birth date.

BB: Beg pardon?

AS: Can you say your birth date?

BB: My birth date is November 1, 1910.

AS: Can you tell me about your parents, brothers and sisters?

BB: My mother was named Emma Patterson Woodson. My daddy was named William Thomas Woodson.

AS: And did you have brothers and sisters?

BB: I had 5 sisters and 3 brothers.

AS: OK. Where did you fall in the -

BB: I'm the baby of the family.

AS: Are you? OK.

BB: Only one living.

AS: Did your mother or father have brothers or sisters that lived here in Roanoke also?

BB: My mother had a brother that lived in Roanoke. Do you want his name?

AS: Mm mm.

BB: His name was Ben Patterson.

AS: Would you visit with his family at all when he lived here in Roanoke?

BB: Yes. When I lived in Roanoke, I had a very, very large family. And we'd visit. It was a closely knitted family and I visited – all of us visited with our parents all the time. My father had a sister that lived here. So, we were always visiting.

AS: Was there a particular holiday or a day of the week that you would visit and all get together?

BB: On all holidays, we got together and anytime anything happened to anybody in the family, all of us were there.

AS: Can you describe your home life for us?

BB: Well, I was blessed to have been raised in a Christian home. My father was really a man with a mission and his mission was that he's going to see to it that his children had advantages that he didn't have. He was wrapped up in politics and every time anybody was running for any office in Roanoke, he would have those people to come over and he organized the blocks. He would have 'em to come over and talk to the people in the community. He was really a man with a mission.

AS: What did your father do for a living?

BB: He worked – Before I was born, and until he retired, he worked for the Norfolk & Western Railroad.

AS: Did your mother work?

BB: No. She worked. She worked very hard but she was a stay at home mother.

AS: Do you remember things about your house. For instance, do you remember listening to the radio or when you got your first telephone?

BB: I remember when we got our first radio. I remember when we got our first television. And I remember when we got our first car. It was a T-Model Ford. And we had to get out in front of it and crank it up and jump out of the way so that if it jumped, the car would kinda jump, and whoever was

standing in front would kinda jump too. And that was really a sensation when we got that T-Model Ford.

AS: Do you remember generally what year that was?

BB: Beg pardon?

AS: Do you remember right around the year that you got that car?

BB: I was very young. I don't – I guess I had just started school. I don't remember what year.

AS: What kind of activities did you participate in when you were younger?

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BB: You name it and I participated in it. I was very, very active in elementary school. And its hard and you really can't separate – when I went to school, the family and the church and the community. We really did work as one. I respected my neighbors just like I did my mother and father because I knew what would happen if I didn't. And that's the one thing that I think about so often how it was a community. 'Cause as you know where I'm coming from, everything was segregated then. So, the colored people were very close together. And I could give you one example if you would like to hear it.

AS: Please.

BB: I remember very distinctly and its one of the things that has stayed with me all of my life and has helped to mold my life. Before I started school, my mother took all of us to Norfolk, Virginia, when the soldiers had to go to World War I. I was very, very young. Everybody was crying. The whole group went down from Roanoke. Everybody standing there crying. And I was crying too 'cause I didn't realize the impact of what was going on. Anytime my mother would cry and everybody else was crying, I cried. I cried my heart out. But my brother – My mother had been married before and then he was old enough to go to World War I. I can see right now this huge ship and nothing on it but soldiers. And as far as they went out in the ocean, everybody standing there crying and waving. And I can see right now that ship and I can see my mother crying. And that has had an impact on me all my life because I felt the love. I felt the togetherness and when I came back, the people in my church especially, First Baptist Church, started knitting socks and gloves and they made all these things and they sent 'em to – they'd take 'em downtown somewhere, I don't know where, the Red Cross I guess. They would leave them. And the people would make bonnets and they made aprons that came all the way, you know, a full apron. And they sold that to make the yarn to buy to do this knitting with. It was such love, such bonding together and I had that feeling all my life of people being bonded together and loving and doing and caring.

AS: That's wonderful. Did you have family stories that were passed down in your family from one generation. For instance, did your family have memories about the Civil War or slavery or did you have family recipes that you passed down?

BB: I had a dollar gold piece and it was beautiful. It has the work all around it. And that was given to my father. My grandfather was a slave and that was given to my daddy and that was given to me and I have it now. And I cherish that so much so that I – One time they had an exhibit in Washington in gold and somebody there – I was wearing it. And somebody asked me would I let them put it on exhibit. And I said, "Could you guarantee that nothing will happen to it". And they said they could guarantee it 99 and 9/10 percent because when they put things in these cases, if anybody tried to raise it, it would make an alarm. But I didn't give it because its just so precious and then I stopped wearing it because everybody that see me would want to buy it so I stopped wearing it. But it is in a safe place now. I don't even keep it out, you know.

AS: What chores did you have to do around the house or in your neighborhood?

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BB: Well, all of us had something. We worked together. We would do what work we had to do and our joy was to do our work. We worked together and then we'd relax together. We would get up and

do whatever we had to do. Mainly, my job was to – Well, I'll back up. My daddy was a strict person on things. A girl is made of sugar and spice and everything nice and he saw me one time trying to cut some wood and he had a fit. He said, "You don't cut wood. You're a girl. Go in there and help your mother make a pie or read a book or try to write a poem." I never cut grass in my life. That's the effects of my daddy. He strictly believed in a girl was dainty. A girl didn't do this. A girl didn't do the other. A girl – and I brought that up in my children. A girl doesn't do this. If I ever see you dancing on the floor and the man has a hat, you gonna be embarrassed unless you tell him to take it off. If you don't tell him to take it off, I'm gonna walk up there and take it off. So you don't want to be embarrassed. So, don't you dare sit with anybody with a hat on. I was brought up that way. You know what I mean? We had values. If you would read sometime when you have time what I wrote about. In school, the teachers were dedicated. All the teachers I had. And as I gave an example, we were taught to love. I had an old desk sent from the white school. We had the old books. But the teacher would say, "You're smart." And that's all I ever heard. And you know, they really had me believing I was smart. And because I believed it, they put that in us. They taught patriotism. You could be singing a song, the Negro National Anthem. Its a hymn now. But it was the Negro National Anthem. We'd stand up. And if we weren't standing straight and singing, she would stop the singing and say, "Aren't you proud?" And we'd say, "Yes, ma'am." And she'd say, "Well, sing like it. Stand tall. You're tall. You're somebody." They put that in us so I wasn't afraid to face the world because it was put in to my family. They put it in me. "You're a Woodson. You're proud. You're smart." And I really did believe I was smart. That's why I tried to motivate my children when I taught. I can do anything and I said on my tombstone, they can put, "She wasn't afraid to try." And my daddy had prayer. He was a man of prayer. When I was real little, I remember getting down on my knees and all of us had to get down and he would pray. And I would smell the rolls cooking and all that good stuff and we would be down there maybe hitting each other under the table but when we got old enough, then we prayed. We had to do that. We never left going on a vacation. I never left going to college. Anywhere. Anything that happened, he would have all of us in. And when my mother died - my mother was living with me at the time she died. And we were just carrying on whooping and hollering and carrying on and my daddy walked in. He said, "Y'all stop that hollering. We're gonna get down on our knees and pray." And that reinforced my faith. I say that anybody that can pray in a time like this. And he prayed the most beautiful prayer I ever heard. And he thanked God that he had answered momma's prayer 'cause her prayer was that she would not die until all her children were grown and able to take care of themselves. And he thanked God for answering momma's prayer and for the beautiful life that she lived. And ever since then, anybody that would die, we'd get down the family and we'd have that prayer. But when you can pray when things go like that. I said, "I wonder if he's in shock. He's gonna thank God that momma's dead." But when he prayed, he was saying the weight of the house off of us. And she was, as you can tell, a beautiful woman. And he thanked her for her beautiful life that she lived. And they are the things that molded me.

AS: Wonderful.

BB: Mm mm.

AS: Do you have – What's your favorite childhood memory?

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BB: One Christmas, we were peeping at one of 'em and saw my mother with this beautiful colored doll. The largest one we ever got. And she looked up and she saw us but she didn't say anything. So then, the next morning, we were acting. And she told us. That really did take something out of the Christmas 'cause we believed in Santa Claus 'til then. But see we got – You know how kids talk and they say that its your momma doing this and that and we would – My mother – I always lived on Gilmer Avenue and my mother and my daddy took and put things under the tree and we peeped over the banister and I was so excited. I think when I saw that doll, my sister – My sister and I were very

close together. I had other sisters too but it was one and I guess I should've named them because we did work – but they were grown just about. My mother married her first husband when she was 18 years old. That family – but we were still all connected but they were just about grown then. So, that's why I didn't name them as sisters. I never will forget that.

AS: Do you remember how old you were?

BB: I really wouldn't know the age. I was still believing in Santa Claus so I was very young.

AS: That's wonderful. Did you and your sisters share the doll?

BB: Yeah. 'Cause they bought just one doll. But we were so close and we shared the same bedroom so it was easy for us to share.

AS: You said you always lived on Gilmer Avenue. What was your house number? Do you remember?

BB: 309.

AS: 309 Gilmer Avenue.

BB: Mm mm. And I'll tell you another childhood thing that I remember.

AS: Yes, please.

BB: Our parents really protected us. I never remember ever going home when my mother wasn't there from school. And when I was coming up, every girl had to play the piano. My sister was really an accomplished musician. My brother could play a piano. My brother finished – I'm jumping from one thing to another 'cause you'll edit this anyway, won't you? My brother was at Meharry. He finished medicine. He's a pharmacist. His senior year, my sister had her last year at Virginia State College and my first year was at Wilburforce University. He had 3 of us in college in one year and he did it. But he saved all during the year and his motto was “Invest in land. Have some land. Invest in land.”. And that was one thing that was embedded in him. Have something for yourself. And he invested in land and all of us are still being benefited from the land that he invested. He owned land near Orange Avenue and he owned land almost from Roanoke down through Bedford. He bought land from Roanoke all the way almost to Christiansburg. And it just happened that that land really did pay off that he bought. They were in good spots.

AS: And that was your brother, the pharmacist who owned it?

BB: Yes.

AS: And what was his name?

BB: That was my brother that finished Meharry. His name was Samuel Woodson.

AS: OK.

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BB: So that was one thing. And another thing, somebody moved in the block. When I got married, I moved to 730 Gilmer. Its the corner house. And my daddy came up and he said, “Bea, I see you have some new neighbors. Did you go and welcome them to the block?” I said, “No.”. He said, “Well, that was wrong, you should go always and when people move into the block, go and welcome them.”. And I can tell you something else about my daddy. He paid the, I think it was the water bill, every single day on the same day for 30 years. He never missed paying that water bill. And when he didn't come down one day, the man downtown called to see if he was sick. And I heard Reverend James say so often, “If he had a bill to pay, he would say 'Well, I don't have any money now but if you wait 'til the 1st, New Years Day, I will have it because I know Diggum (??) Woodson will be here”. And my daddy always went to him. In fact, he got up early. It was the custom then that black – I told you I use any of those words – Black people, colored people, negro, whatever, all the men would come and another thing on New Year's Day, a lot of women didn't want a woman to come to the house. Did you ever live through that? That's still in me. I don't visit on New Year's Day. I go to a dinner, the family dinner because I didn't know what people – very sensitive about it. All the women in the world could come to me on New Year's Day 'cause I like people and I like to be with 'em. I'm not superstitious about anything. And then another thing that's so different now, we often laugh and say when anybody had a

baby, you could see, walk down the street, and you'd see diapers, lines of white diapers, pure white. I mean the way they could keep 'em. Now these young people don't know what you're talking about if you said diaper. And another thing that I started to say. Alice and Margaret Roberts, all of us came up together and her mother would have us to come up there and she taught us crocheting, some would crochet and I would embroidery. Then, they'd come down to momma's house and we'd crochet and do things like that and we'd go to the Coleman's house and do things. In other words, our parents didn't turn us loose. We just didn't get out and it's the saddest thing for me now to go into a classroom and see first-grade children, maybe 10 or 15 with a key around their neck. (Phone ringing) That's my telephone but I'll just let it ring. But the key around their neck – And after school, a lot of 'em be just – I mean 1st and 2nd grade and I say, “You're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to go home right after school. Why don't you go home?”. And they say, “Well, there's nobody there and I hate to be by myself.”. And the parents leave crackers or potato chips or something out on the table and they would go in to get a snack and be there by themselves. I never – In fact. Our parents just didn't let us get out and go. And another thing, if we were on program – This is something that stands out with me. If you were on a program at church or anywhere, they would – if you weren't going to say anything but “Good morning” or “Good afternoon”, “I hope you enjoyed the program”, they were there. On program, you were there. I used to chaperone children for parties and I'd say, “Who's gonna pick you up?”. And some of 'em would say, “My mother told me to find somebody coming my way.”. That's elementary school now. Find somebody coming my way. And my mother – I went to very few parties. My parents didn't let us go to parties. Comin' back to this girl stuff. The lady next door to me had a party next door and my mother went as one of the chaperones. Next door! I said, “Momma, what in the world you think I'm gonna be doin’”. But that just shows you you were protected and your church looked after you. And the people were concerned. You know? The doctors were dedicated. Mm mm. It was just something.

AS: That's wonderful. Let's go back for just a second and if you could just tell me a little bit about your house on Gilmer that you grew up in. Was it brick or was it one-story or was it two stories?

BB: It was a ranch-style house and the Delta sorority called it the Delta House because the rooms were very, very large and I had an extra lot and it was a corner house. So we could have our parties. We didn't have to worry about disturbing people. And we didn't know what it was to go home after a dance. Sometime back, all sororities and fraternities used to have a formal dance every spring. The Deltas would like to come – Sometimes when the Deltas had a regional meeting with the chapter from Bluefield, West Virginia, or Lynchburg. They'd always have it at my house because the rooms were so large and it could accommodate all those people.

AS: And that was the house you grew up in?

BB: No, that's when I married. I moved.

AS: Oh, OK. Can you tell me about the house you grew up in?

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BB: It was a large 2 story house and all of us had our own bedroom. But see my daddy was very fortunate because he had a good job at Norfolk & Western. He made a decent salary all the time we came up so we were really blessed. You know what I mean? I don't ever remember my daddy not being able to pay a bill when it was due. My daddy started us out with a little Christmas saving. It was maybe about 5 or 10 cents a week. You know, Christmas Savings? 'Cause it might be \$25 you'd get for Christmas or \$50. I'm sure it wasn't over \$50. But my daddy would take that and put it in a savings account for us and he would give us whatever we had saved. It was a custom that every payday, you saved something. You see, you understand, his daddy was a slave. His daddy was freed 6 years before my daddy was born but at that time, it was same as slavery for those people. So, it just came up to have something for yourself. It was just embedded in us. We did, we tried to have something for ourselves.

AS: Do you remember your grandfather's name? Who was the slave?

BB: He was named Phillip. We looked up the family history and it went on back. My father had 8 or 9 brothers. So that's the way that went.

AS: How has Gainsboro changed over the years?

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BB: Gainsboro has changed completely. My daddy's first house is on Gainsboro. And that house was passed down to the family. I'm the last one living in the family. So, I got that house. When they started remodeling – Not remodeling, that renovation, they took that house and that was a very sad experience for me because he had it before I was born. And he rented it out for a long time. In fact, I rented it out when I had it. When the city took it – and it was right up from Gainsboro, about the third house up going up that hill. And they took that house and gave me \$800. That's what they paid for my house. My sister had a 2 story house next door. That was passed down to her. 'Cause my uncle left that house to her, to my mother and my mother left it to her. She got \$800. It was a beautiful 2 story house. It was beautiful. \$800. You know, \$800. Of course, I bought it but I got \$800. And they said they didn't want the house. I said, "Well, I did." They said they just wanted the land. But they took it. But I didn't, I don't harbor hate, not any of that kind of stuff because I was brought up – And let me tell you something else. When I was in school, the ministers – the churches had revivals. Do you know whenever they had revivals, the pastor could bring the evangelist to the school. And at Gainsboro, we didn't have any where – We had to sit out in the yard. And the evangelists would come in, we had service in the yard. I remember Reverend James. He was the pastor of First Baptist for 38 years. I was baptized with him. He married me. He baptized me. He baptized my husband. He did all those kind of things. I mean, he was the man up. He was one of the outstanding men of the day. Anyway, he would bring evangelists up and they would have revivals service on the yard. And all the children in our class, they would tell 'em, "I don't want you to say you want to join First Baptist Church. We're not for that. We want you to love Jesus Christ." And the man would preach. You would take the names of all they'd ask anybody that loved Jesus, they would go home and talk to their parents and tell the parents that they wanted to join a church, any church. And he advised them to go to church that their parents went to. And we would take down those names and went up to say they want to join the church. And the next day, we would check on them to see if they went. And we had devotions everyday. Everyday started with prayer. All that has had an effect on who I try to be today.

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AS: That's wonderful. So you started talking about school a little bit. Tell me where you went to school. What elementary school did you go to?

BB: I went to Harrison School. That's where I started. I went to Booker T. and in that book, if you're going to read it, that paper I wrote, that tells you what I participated in when I was in school. I remember going to Virginia State College when my sister was there going to school. I won the contest, the Oratorical contest. 'Cause see, I tell you parents had me believing I could anything. I won that contest and they sent me to Virginia State and my sister was so proud. The church was so proud. The community was so proud. But now, I can win something and I've seen parents come in school in May, something about the child, and I said, "Who's the teacher?", and some of 'em didn't even know the name of the teacher. That would be in May now. The child has been in that class since September. That's another whole story.

AS: What high school did you go to?

BB: Addison. As I said, my class was the first class. I went there. I went to Booker T. Washington. The school they still use for headquarters now. It was up on the hill. My daddy had all this land all back there and everywhere.

AS: You said you went to college?

BB: I went to Wilburforce University. That's in Wilburforce, Ohio.

AS: OK. And you got a degree in Education?

BB: Yes. In Education.

AS: Did you get a Master's Degree or just your Bachelor's Degree?

BB: I went to school. I'd always got to summer school and so many children were so far behind – I took every course in reading. I had enough hours for a Master's but I got a – I was called a Reading Specialist. I took every course in Reading. And I'd go in that room and I'd say, "You're going to read." Alice Turner – I'm jumping from one thing to the other – Alice Turner was my principal at Harrison School. Mr. Sydney was my principal too. Lucy Addison was my principal when I was in elementary school. Lucy Addison was my principal. I was scared to death of her. My husband finished Lucy Addison and he said she tried to whip those big boys. They'd hold their hand way up here. She's short and they'd hold their hand where the thing would slide off. (laughing) They tell tales about her. But she did have the respect. We were scared to death of her. Very small in stature but it was her personality and that stern look and everything.

AS: So she was your principal?

BB: She was my first principal.

AS: Wow. And your husband, can you say his name?

BB: Huh?

AS: What was your husband's name?

BB: My first - He was the one that I married and went to Washington because he was an assistant principal in Washington. He was a Roanoker too.

AS: What was his name?

BB: Lawrence. That's the one I got to be a Burwell with. But people in Roanoke call me Beale. Nobody calls me Burwell in Roanoke. 'Cause see when I married, I went to Washington and I got on the teach staff. In fact, the man hired me before I moved there. Being in a sorority and him being the principal and he was the principal during the first year they integrated in Washington so you know what he went through. It was exciting. I enjoyed it. And then the other high schools would send us tickets to go to their reunions, school reunions where he taught so I was going somewhere all the time 'cause he taught Chemistry and Math in the high school for a long time, Armstrong High School. Then they made him Assistant Principal. So I had a full beautiful life.

AS: What did you teach?

BB: I taught 6th grade. Elementary school. I was always in the elementary school. I taught 6th grade at Harrison School. Oh, and I got the Teacher of the Year and all that kind of stuff. But I have plaques that would fill these walls. The plaque that means the most to me - I get letters from my students. And they will come and they will tell me and these are the plaques in my heart. Some will come and say, "You showed me the right way." or "You helped me to do this." Now, they are the plaques that I cherish and they're the ones that are in my heart. And I had so many inexperienced – I taught a boy in the 6th grade. I was looking to see what time that was.

AS: Its 11:30.

BB: This boy, you talking about a handsome fella. He was so handsome. He always had his head down like this. He was on welfare which is alright. He came to me one day and he said, "Would you let me go home?". I said, "Ask the principal.". He said, "She won't let me go home.". And I said, "Are you sick or something?". He said, "No.". I said, "Why you wanna go home?". He said, "Because my mother got her check today and if I don't get home today, she won't have money to buy me shoes tomorrow.". He had on a pair of shoes and the children teased him. And I'd walk down the aisle, he'd have his head down. I'd take my hand and raise it up. I said, "If I was a good-looking person like you, I'd be walking in the air.". That's the way I'd talk to him. Do you know that boy got to be up the highest rank in the Army? Mm mm. And he'd tell me all the time, say, "I never did understand something or another but you gave me confidence in myself.". Now that's a plaque in my heart. He went right on up there. You don't tell a child usually that they're good-looking. At least I

never told a fella. I'd say, "You're just handsome." He had such an inferiority complex. I worked on his inferior complex as much as I did trying to teach him an adjective from an adverb. (both laughing) 'Cause you're teaching a person. You know what I mean?

AS: Mm mm.

BB: He just _____ 'em out. But see he's another one. He got himself a job and was able to buy things for himself – I guess he thought he was ugly since he had his head down all the time. And I'd go in an assembly and a teacher would come in with children and when I see somebody with their head down and I'd go to the social worker. We had a good counselor in Washington. I said, "What's that girl's name? Something's wrong. She's always coming in with her head down." What happened, they were coming in and all of the children had on uniforms. They wore uniforms where I taught, dark blue skirts, dark blue jumper and a gold blouse. And I said, "You take this money and buy her 2 outfits, one skirt and a top to go with it and a jumper but don't tell anybody you know where it came from." And I bought a lot of things. I believe in tithing. I'd take money out of my tithe and – One thing I liked about Sears and Roebuck, they would sell their shoes. The counselor would take 4 or 5 children down and buy shoes for 'em. Sears and Roebuck would sell them good, stout shoes for what they say they paid for 'em themselves. And I said, "Well, I'm gonna put money in the shoe bank." I went to one lady. I said, "You know I notice that whenever its snowing or raining or real, real bad weather, your kids are out of school, 2 girls. If you tell me its none of my business, I will not be hurt. Because in a way its not my business and in another way it is my business. I would like to buy them boots." And I gave her money to buy boots or galoshes or whatever you call 'em for her 2 girls. And so I was thinking that I hadn't priced any boots for children or anything, I just gave her what I paid for mine for her to buy – I gave her twice that much. She bought both of 'em whatcha call 'em and gave me money back. I said, "How in the world could you get 'em that cheap?" But anyway, I gave her the money back. I said, "You buy them 2 pairs of shoes 'cause its not raining and snowing all the time." And I gave it back to her. And I said, "Don't you ever tell the girls that I gave it to you 'cause if I ask the girls to go to the store for me or something, they would feel that they would have to do it." And she never told 'em where it came from. I like to do things and I don't like to say anything about it. I don't like for anything to be said.

AS: We're almost done. I have just a few questions about Gainsboro specifically, about the community. What businesses or shops did your family go to? Do you remember?

BB: What businesses?

AS: Where would you go shopping or were there places you would go in Gainsboro to do that?

0.39.45.4

BB: I forgot to tell you about my mother's brother was named Bell. He had a store at the corner of Gainsboro. I got that on the notes I have. He made enough in that store – it was at the corner of Gainsboro and Harrison or Rutheford. It was one of those corners. And he made enough selling at that store to support his family. He bought a house and supported his family. And we bought a lot of things from, most of the things from him. In the meantime, in Roanoke, they couldn't raise hogs and all that kind of stuff where we lived but they could way over where the back of where they had Booker T. school, they could raise it way back over there. And so my daddy always had somebody to raise 'em for him. And then some of the places that sold food and things, they would – what was left, my daddy would go by and pick it up and take it over there to the man that raised all these hogs for him. Then, on the corner of where I was raised up as a child, its called Dillard's. They had a store right on the corner across the street. And then, on the next block at the corner, it was a meat shop. Then we bought – We had – The market was in full bloom then and you could take 1 or 2 dollars and I'd go down on the market and I'd bring back all the cabbage and the beans and everything I could hold. You could take 1 or 2 dollars and do it. It was stores in the community and we would always, as I told you, work together in the mornings, clean the house and whatever. Then, we would change clothes and go to the

front porch. That was the pride of our life, going to the front porch. But, at that time, the people on the market that sold peaches for instance, if they didn't sell 'em all, they'd come in the streets hollering, you know, what they had to sell. And my mother, oh, she was really, I don't see how she did all she did. She would buy them. She'd say, "How many bushels of peaches do you have?" He said, "Four bushels. I'll let you have 'em for 50 cents a bushel." Momma would buy all four of 'em. Then she'd say, "Y'all take your clothes off.", 'cause we had work clothes and we'd have to go in and start peeling peaches or something. And a lot of the time, we'd go out on the porch. We'd say, "Lord, please don't let anybody come by selling." But that's the way she maneuvered. And that's the way we had everything. She knew how to manage. You know?

AS: Would everyone in the neighborhood go out and hang out on their porches in the evening?

BB: In the evening, yeah. Sometimes, when it would be so very hot – my parents had a big, 2 story house. It was about 8 or 10 rooms in that house. But anyway, sometimes, it would be so hot upstairs that my mother would say, "You can stay up later tonight." And we'd go out. All of us had a lot of land with our houses. And we'd go out and put the yard chairs between the two houses and the neighbors would come and we'd be out there and it was so nice. I wasn't afraid. I was never afraid. There was never anything to be afraid of 'cause we looked after each other. I remember when my first husband died. Alice Turner, my principal, would send somebody from the school and she would take the class – This teacher would come down for 2 hours and the principal would take the class. Then another principal or another teacher would come down. And somebody would take the class. Or maybe they would double a class. I was never by myself. And you know a long time ago when I came up, you knew when anybody died. It just spread in the whole neighborhood. We were bonded together because we were all on this side of the railroad tracks. We didn't go on the other side except for business or something like that. They always hung a wreath outside the door. Anybody'd die, you'd pass by and you'd see a wreath. They brought the people home when they died the night before the funeral and somebody would stay up all night long with whoever in the family stayed up all night long. And they never – somebody was always sitting right there in that room and people would bring coffee in and doughnuts and that's the way we lived then.

AS: Do you remember the Gainsboro Library when that opened?

0.44.29.2

BB: Yes. And I remember Virginia Lee. But coming back to Gainsboro School, I never saw a pot-belly stove when I was going to school. They didn't have them. We had the regular furnace. My first year teaching in Roanoke was in Gainsboro and I looked in there and I said, "What in the world is this?". But we had a janitor and he would come in every so many hours and put coal – It was never cold in that school. They really kept those rooms – 'cause coal, I think, gives off more heat than anything you can heat with anyway. Nobody wants coal now 'cause its too dirty and everything. But that was my first experience in looking at a pot-belly stove. Queen Williams was the principal. That's that old school with the _____. I thought that y'all would like to see. And I enjoyed whatcha call 'em but the school, as I say, you couldn't separate it from the church and you couldn't separate the church from the community. Now to give you an example, the Bible Band Missionary Server. I guess I came up almost before I was born 'cause my mother was one of the first members of the Bible Band of First Baptist Church. And whenever anybody was sick, they had hours they'd go at night. And when my mother would go at night, she would take us, the girls, with her. I'd be sittin' up in a chair asleep. But my mother, that's the last woman I went to see with my mother because Ella Butcher. Do you know the Butcher's? She died and when she died, I was there the night before she died, sitting up I the chair up there sleeping. And my mother, when I went to sleep, I remember momma being at her bedside doing something for her. Now that's – We couldn't go to the hospital so the church was the hospital. The members would stay up all night long with you. We live in a different society now. Everything is different. I tell ya, the world's been turned upside down. Mm mm.

AS: Do you remember strong community leaders in Gainsboro that you remember?

BB: I remember undertaker Hughes. He was about 100 years old. If he wasn't a hundred, he's mighty close to it because I remember everybody talking about, "Well, you know he's almost 100." I don't remember whether he reached 100 or not but I know he must've been mighty close to it. He had an undertaker shop on Gainsboro. Gainsboro was a very popular street. And Henry Street was a very popular street. I remember Dr. Brooks that was a pharmacist on Henry Street. I remember Dr. Robinson that was a pharmacist on Gainsboro. My daddy was young at heart and I'd take him over to Henry Street and he would go in that drug store on Henry Street, right in the main block and talk to Dr. Behr (?). I'd take him there all the time. 'Cause my daddy, as I said, he was in politics 'til the day he died. One time I went – And I'm rambling because I'm just telling you as I think about it. I went down to my daddy's house. He lived at 309. That's where I lived until I got married. I moved to 730. My daddy said, "Bea, did you get a card from Poff today? Poff was a something or other in Washington. And he said, "What did you do with it?" Poff would write a card or send a letter or card or something to everybody. He said, "I'm going to mail anybody that I know of." He said, "What did you do with it?" I said, "I put it in the trash." He said, "You should not have done that. I want you to see this letter that I got from Poff." And Poff told my daddy that he was the most dedicated person that he had ever met and if all his constituents were as dedicated as he was, my daddy never, never wrote or got any mail that he didn't answer. I put mine in the trash. (chuckle) He said, "Don't do that. It means something to show that you are patriotic and that you love your country." And I have voted every year. My daddy worked to help abolish Poll Tax. I tell you this, I went to Wilburforce _____. I got a pass. My daddy could get a pass because he worked at Norfolk & Western. I was on the train and the conductor came by and he looked at that pass. He said, "You're not supposed to be on this train." I said, "Why?" He said, "It's a number." Well you realize at that time of segregation, the conductor would stand on the outside of the coach and if you were colored he would tell you to go to the right. That was the one next to the engine where it was the noisiest and the dirtiest. And they'd send you there. Anyway, I was on the train. The conductor said, "You're not supposed to be on this." I said, "Why?" He said, "This number's not good on train. I'll make out the number." I said, "7". Cause trains had numbers. I said, "Well, I've been riding it all the time." He said, "Listen, I'm not a racist." That's what the conductor said. And he said, "I would rather see you get off as we're going through West Virginia." Berkley, West Virginia, or somewhere or another. Wintertime, Christmas, I was coming home for Christmas. "I'd rather see you get off because when the next man that comes on, the conductor, he'll put you off anywhere 'cause you're not supposed to be on here." There were about 15 of us from Wilburforce. At one time we had about 15 here that – We had a Wilburforce club. Judge – Did you know Dillard (??)? He got to be a judge. He went to Wilburforce and Arthur Spencer and all of them. Anyway, we had about 15. They lived in Newport News and Portsmouth. They said, "Well if she gets off, we're getting off." All 15 got off that train. He knew the thing was closed, the station. He said, "And I'm gonna call and tell 'em that I'm stopping the train there 'cause there's some people to get on." And all of us got off, in the wintertime, snowing, cold, 'cause you know it's cold in Ohio. And we got off that train about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. All of us 15 standing outside the thing and had to stand there. My daddy called – I guess he went to everybody. Maybe he wrote the President of the United States I imagine. He said, "I will die fighting that you'll never be put off again." That law was changed. That law was changed. Showing what politics did. You got to go through the system. The only way you get anything changed is by voting. From that time on, that word – They didn't put any discrimination – It wasn't a race discrimination numbers anybody that couldn't ride certain trains. From that day, my daddy worked. He wrote to his congressman. He went to the City Manager. He went all the way up and that law was changed. That shows you what persistence will do. So those things are kinda in me 'cause I'm a fighter. I worked in the – I got pictures in there of Clinton. They have sent me personal autographs. Hillary Clinton wrote me a letter.

I wish I – I tried to find that letter. I got some things up there now I stuck in that book 'cause I said – and then I couldn't reach the book. I was trying to find that letter. When she wrote this book about “It Takes a Village” and asked me if would I write about my school days for her to put in that book. I didn't do it but I wasn't in town then. I was away having myself a ball. (laughing) And when I got back, the deadline had passed, way passed. Because, see, I went to Delta convention and I was at the convention for a week. I went from the convention to a cruise. I was away another week. Then, I stopped by my godchild's, my campus daughter for another week. I got back and it was too late but the deadline had passed. But I regret that I didn't – 'cause I could've answered and said I was out of town and the deadline had passed when I got the letter. But to tell you the truth, when I got back, I said, “Oh, they're writing for some money or something.”. I don't think I even read it then until another week. (laughing)

0.54.13.5

AS: Well, the time's almost done but is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to share with us?

BB: I just wish that my parents were living and see. Oh, let me tell you about my grandson. He is a model. The only people that could go in Hot Springs Hotel were the ones working there. They called him about a month ago. He's out there modeling. That's his picture. He finished – right there – He finished VPI. He finished VPI. He got a good job in Richmond. He wouldn't give up his job and he was modeling. I wish you had time to see these pictures. He was modeling – He wasn't thinking about modeling and he was in a store looking at something and the man came by. When he went to Richmond, he got a little apartment. Do you know, he's been there 5 or 6 years and he has been promoted right on up, right on up, right on up. Now, he has bought a house in Richmond. To show you how the world has turned upside down. When my girls went to school, they went to Patrick Henry. Do you know that for a time, the police had to escort the bus to Patrick Henry 'cause not only were the children fighting everyday, parents were out with things to fight. And they were escorted everyday. Well, see, that's the difference in my school. I never had the word fear. I never had – I don't think I ever heard the word “dope”. I want to learn. You know what I want to do now? And I'm gonna write I might – I regret I didn't write to Hillary because I might have to write to her. I want to find out now – I'm curious – I wanted to know. I was told by mouth. I'm gonna check it that we got the word negro because when after slavery, that congress or somebody – This is by word of mouth, handed down, said, “What are we gonna do with those people. They don't even have a name. What are we going to call them?”. And I was told by mouth coming down – mouth to mouth – that congress passed the law that we would be named or called Negroes. I'm gonna find out who named us. Why did you name us that? Who named us African-American? I think that might've been by popular demand. But I want to go back. That's my project now. I want to find out how did we get that name. Now if I can't find – You could do that. Do you know why? Did congress pass that law?

(Carla Lewis speaking)

CL: I will find out and tell you.

BB: Yeah. Word of mouth, that's what I was told but see, I'm curious.

CL: I will look it up.

0.57.23.9

BB: I want to live. I want to find out everything. My son said, “Momma you ought to see what's on the board now”. He worked for the – My son attended Hampton and he worked in the telephone company here. He's wrapped up in all this stuff. He's really wrapped up in everything and he's still – anytime they have a course offered at Virginia Western and anything about computers and he's talking about things and when I was living in Washington, I'll never forget. He said, “Momma come on out here” something or another. He wanted to get something about the internet or computer or something. And so I rode with him to Maryland. I went out there with him and he said, “I asked the man”. They

were talking, he was talking to the clerk and I didn't know what they were talking about. They had a language all their own. So I said, "Well, Do you have a TV?". He said, "No, we don't carry TVs. That's low-tech.". I said to myself, "That's low-tech and I don't understand." I don't understand low-tech." But there was something up there. I didn't even know what they were talking about with that language. Just like crocheting. You know crocheting has a language of its own. Anyway, that's what they – He's wrapped up in it. Now when he – He used to work with Boy Scouts and he's wrapped up in Spanish. He was in high school. He would take the Scouts. And he's gotten every permit, I guess you call 'em permit, for to talk on HAM or something or something whatever it is. He can talk to everybody overseas. And he'd bring a lot of Scouts that were interested in Spanish and he would call Spain and those kids would talk to people in Spanish. He did all that for a while. Life is just interesting. I just want to live to be 100. (laughing) I want to see all my children and their children. I have grandchildren. All my grandchildren call me Ma Bea because I told my son, "Now look here. One thing I regret." I was trying to be young. So I put my age back. And when I went to Washington, my second year, they had the principal send in this thing that recommended me for the Outstanding Elementary Teacher of America. My name is in that book, twice. When I got the book, I looked in there and it had in there that I finished Addison High School in 1929. I got my magic marker 'cause see I put my age back and marked out that '29. I got this and I got that or I got this or I got that and they put my name on the trophy for the Urban League for being outstanding something – senior citizen or something I got it for. And my name is on the trophy. They keep it in the national headquarters or something. But all that doesn't matter. But anyway, I took the black marker and scratched out every date. I'm so sorry I did that 'cause you know - (laughing) Now I can stand at the hill hollering, "I'm 96.". One time, I put it back. And then I got scared one time. They said, "If you put your name back on the driving permit, they can take your driving permit.". So I put it right on the driving permit. They can take it and not give you one. They can stop you from getting one they tell me. 'Cause you say everything is true. So I put – I was old when my son was born. That was about 8 years before he was born. And the doctor told me, "You cannot carry a child.". I was so little, you know, petite. He was a premature baby. He was born at 7 months. That shows you how God is. That child slept for those other 2 months. You wouldn't know a baby was in that house. He just slept. And the day he was supposed to be born, he started crying as a newborn baby. You ought to see that book. I said, "Lord, if I had that to do over, I wouldn't do it.". But you have more sense. But you don't go this way but once so I tell everybody, "You're on this journey one time so just make it a good one.". And that's what I'm trying to do now. I pray everyday that I would put a smile on somebody's face before I go to sleep at night. That's my prayer.

CL: Miss Beale-Burwell, this is Carla Lewis at the Gainsboro Branch Library. And we are here in your home and I wanted to thank Miss Virginia Wolfe for telling me about you and thank you so very much for interviewing for us.

BB: I'm glad y'all came up.

CL: Oh, we are just happy to do it.

BB: I can look back. I was crying Miss Ellie. You remember Cubbie Gill? (??) He crowned me – I was crowned Miss Addison and he gave me this long bunch of red roses out on the football field. I thought I was hot stuff. At the intermission of the football game, he escorted me to the middle of the field and somebody put this robe, this thing on me and he presented me with those roses. And I was the first Miss Addison. Isn't that something?

CL: That is something. We are just so happy that you were able to do this with us.

BB: I'm wondering what's in that book that I stuck. It was something. (recording ends)