

Interview with Virginia Chubb-Hale – at Gainsboro Branch Library

Interviewer: Carla Lewis

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Counter: 0

CL: My name is Carla Lewis and I'm the Gainsboro Branch Manager, and we are going to interview today Mignon Chubb, Ms. Virginia Mignon Chubb. And we are doing the interview at the Gainsboro branch of the Roanoke City public library system. Here at the Gainsboro library in Roanoke, Virginia. Mignon, when and where were you born?

MC: In Roanoke, Virginia, November 3rd 1942.

CL: Okay. Tell me about your parents, your brothers, sisters, and extended family.

MC: My father's name was Leon Chubb. My mother's name was Pranella Lorraine Delaney Chubb. I have one brother, Richard Lee Chubb, and one sister, Pranella Chubb-Wilson.

Counter: 1:04.39

CL: Okay. Can you describe your home life for us?

MC: I had a very, just wonderful parents. They always gave us encouragement, you can accomplish whatever you put your mind too, and they had a strong desire for our lives to be better than their's. They always promoted education and teaching respect, responsibility, and caring about yourself and your community. My daddy, I have to admire him and my mother. My daddy worked four jobs and never made 10,000 dollars, and my mother took in ironing, and she stayed at home until I was in about the eighth grade and then she started doing domestic work but she always had time to help you with homework and she did the discipline because my daddy had so many jobs. And my daddy his parents really punished him severely so my mother was left up to do all the discipline. Often you hear people say: "I'm gonna wait for your daddy to come home," but that wasn't true, at least not true of any woman in my family –nieces or anything, we were just strong woman and a lot of them have had to raise boys, three or four children on their own. So, I guess that comes from our mom (laughs). And like I said, just about all the women in our family are like that.

Counter: 2.42.1

(In this section: MC talks about telephone, radio, television – but doesn't go into specifics)

Counter: 4.25.8

MC: And one thing I want to say about my neighborhood I don't think any of the parents had finished high school or college but they had this will for their young people to do better. Most of them had to drop out because of the depression, like my parents they both were in high school but because of the depression they had to drop out. They would try to go to night school but it was just too difficult. And practically everybody in my

neighborhood, except for one person, finished high school, and then I found out later that he finished in the military. And I'd say a good 70% of the people in my neighborhood – I might be off a little bit – finished college.

Counter: 5.16.1

(In this section MC talks about her activities: Sunday school, Girl Scouts – but doesn't elaborate)

Counter: 5.37.2

CL: Did you or your family sit on the front porch on the afternoons or after dinner to discuss daily activities, or something that happened in the community, or just sit out and say "hi" to the neighbors who passed by?

MC: Well, you would sit out just to enjoy the air 'cause we didn't have air conditioning or anything in the summertime. A lot of times you would sit out on the porch until late in the evening to get some cool air. And you would speak to your neighbors sometime and another neighbor would be on the porch and you would chat with them and all. And everybody in your neighborhood could correct you in your community not just in your neighborhood. They saw you doing something wrong: "I'm gonna tell your mommy on you, or your daddy," (laughs), and you know it is just so different today. You can barely speak to young people.

Counter: 6.37.1

CL: What family stories were passed down from one generation to another? Or Recipes, or jokes, or . . .

MC: Well, my mother's lemon pie, which I'm not a really good cook so I didn't take that, and her meatloaf. My daddy loved to tell stories about Santa Claus. He would sorta exaggerate, he was a great storyteller, I'm sure if he was living today he would be a professional storyteller.

Counter: 7.20.2

CL: What are your fondest memories of your childhood, or growing up in the Gainsboro area?

MC: Just, how people treated each other – you were like family. If they saw you getting in trouble, they would correct you or tell your parents, they weren't afraid to call. Or really, if you and another friend were in trouble they would also, if they needed to, spank both of you. That wasn't a problem either because when you went home you'd get another one.

Counter: 8.01.1

(MC talks about chores, the house she lived in, and her garden)

Counter: 9.23.1

CL: And how long did you live in the Gainsboro area?

MC: I'd say until I was about 30 years old, maybe a little, I'd say close to about 30 because I had finished college and started working on my master's degree.

Counter: 9.46.2

CL: And how has the Gainsboro area changed today?

MC: All the redevelopment, a lot of the people who lived in lower Gainsboro their houses were taken for redevelopment and they moved up in Northwest where I live now. They just took so much from that area and often the people really didn't get enough to go and buy another house so that's the change. To me they just took so much away from African-Americans.

Counter: 10.59.2

CL: Did the people in the Gainsboro community own their own businesses?

MC: Yes, 'cause Henry Street was, I just call it like a real holy city (??). 'Cause everything was there, you had doctors, you had lawyers, you had the Dumas, the only hotel where African-Americans could stay, you had the Virginia theater, that was the movie you would go to and my cousin who was in the medical field at the time, she was 15 years old but she would always come and that was such a treat. She was so elegant and professional and we would walk across Henry Street and we would go to the movie and after the movie we would stop at Jack & Jill's to get a hotdog and some ice-cream and that was just a wonderful time. She just had everything, everything that you would want. The shoe shop, the record shop, and my cousin, my uncle rather, he had an insurance company, I can not think of it, but it was right near where Dr. Pin's (??) office was and the Virginia theater. It was right on the diagonal from the Dunes (??), not really across, I guess in a way it was sorta. But my uncle my marriage, he was President of that insurance company.

CL: Do you know the name of that uncle per chance?

MC: Amber Bishop, he died many years ago. And right where they, and then Doctor Downin's (??) office was right across from the Virginia Theater. That was my family doctor, doctor L.C. Downin(??) at the time.

Counter: 12.48.1

CL: Okay, let's talk a little bit about your education. Where did you go to Elementary School?

MC: Harrison Elementary School, and I could walk across all those hills and I could come home for lunch, and if I didn't come home for lunch I would have a bag lunch (laughs).

Counter: 13.33.1

CL: Did you or any member of your family attend college?

MC: Yes. My brother, who's two years older than me, he finished in my family first.

CL: Can you give us his name?

MC: Richard Lee Chubb. And then my sister went to nursing school but she dropped-out because she started her family. And then I, am the youngest, and I finished college.

CL: Which college did you finish at?

MC: I did my undergraduate work at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia, and my master's in education at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Counter: 14.25.1

(MC talks briefly about jobs available to African-Americans – mainly working the railroad, teaching and nursing)

Counter: 15.43.1

(MC talks a bit about the Gainsboro library and Ms. Virginia)

Counter: 16.22.1

CL: What were, who were some of the strong community leaders that you remember from the Gainsboro area?

MC: I'm sure there were others but the one that stands out in my mind is Dr. Harold T. Pen (?). He was my dentist but he just cared about people in the community. He lost a lot of money. He tried to open up a dress factory I believe, and that did not materialize because other-so-called black leaders did not pitch-in to help. So, I would have to say Dr. Harold T. Pen (?).

CL: Was he also your role model, or did you have another one?

MC: My parents were my role models, and my aunts and uncles. But my mother and daddy, they were my role models.

Counter: 17.25.0

CL: How was life affected by Segregation and the Civil Rights Movement?

MC: Well, I think anytime people are treated like second-class citizens, that's not good, 'cause I finished Addison High School in 1961 and a lot of, we had hand-me-down material, we didn't have things like the other schools. But one thing I must say, all of our teachers looked professional and you were taught values. You were taught that at home, but when you arrived at school you were also taught that. And, they were outstanding. 'cause you see some teachers today, and I'm not putting anyone down, to me they are not a good example. Some of them – they already young, but they look like the students. But all of our teachers, men and women, they were just classy. I don't know if she's met Mister Harlem . . .

CL: Didn't ask.

MC: They would be dressed. And He was one of the volunteers for a mentor program I had started at one of the schools, but just so professional. And I think that has damaged

young people today too, because not looking the part – and you're supposed to be a professional.

Counter: 19.12.1

(MC lists the family members serving in the military – one cousin in Vietnam, one in Iraq: Desert Storm, and one in Korea War)

Counter: 20.19.1

CL: Talk about your memories of Urban Renewal. What effect did it have on your life, or the lives of your family members?

MC: Well, it just changed things. When you have that a lot of black businesses went, they weren't anymore because they couldn't keep up or compete, and when you have changes someone has to lose. We lost our hospital eventually, and I think the de-segregation, or integration was good in a lot of ways, but in some ways it killed the black entrepreneur because they couldn't survive.

Counter: 21.19.06

CL: Tell us about a memory you had and you have and still have that you feel good about in the Gainsboro area, you've told us some of the memories sitting on the front porch and everything, do you have one major one that just sticks in your mind that you can tell us about, that you tell others when you meet? . . . Something that happened?

MC: I can't think of anything. The only thing that keeps coming back to me is just the unity we had, that people could just, if they saw you doing something wrong they could correct you and you would know just about everywhere you'd go you'd see people out on the porch . . . you know you just knew, it just felt like family, and you felt protected. Now where I live I rarely know my neighbors (laughs), I mean you just don't feel, you don't have that comfort-feeling, I guess that would be the positive thing – just knowing people and feeling comfortable to walk in the area and every—and the area as a whole, you know?

CL: Okay.

Counter: 22.00.0

CL: Now, we have covered a lot of questions. Is there anything we didn't cover that you would like to tell us about? I know you said you were teacher of the year when you were at Addison Aerospace School, can you tell us a little bit about your teaching experience and the gratification?

MC: Well, I had a lot of wonderful students and parents to work with. And I always tried to encourage students to have self-discipline. If I discipline you it's because I care about you. If people let you do whatever you want then they really don't care about you.

Discipline is showing people that you love them and when I went to Wascena (??)

Elementary School which is in Southwest Roanoke, a couple other teachers and I when they desegregated all the schools in Roanoke Valley, I was one of the first teachers to go

there and I was there for about thirteen years and some of my parents at the time, they really weren't used to having an African-American teachin' they had had a lot of African-American working in their homes. But as time went on at Wascena (??) in 1980 or '81 I took a group of my sixth graders to Paris, France and Italy for ten days and we had a wonderful time and everyone in the group just couldn't believe it. The children's asked questions they did everything it was just a wonderful, unique experience. At Wascena (??) Elementary school I won also the "Social Studies Teacher of the Year" award and I just got a lot of recognition for that and because of my parents and students – it wasn't me alone I had such wonderful parents who really encouraged and worked with you. The projects that we would do – is it the Roanoke times? – I know for several years they would have somethin' about African-American history projects that I would do or the World's Fair. Or that was all because I had such wonderful parents. They were workin' harder than the students to make the programs turn out well because you would have people from the community, we would get acknowledgements from the Governor, and we would have Senators and different people to come to our activities and everything.

Counter: 25.12.1

CL: Thank-you. Thank-you Mignon for participating in the Gainsboro History Project. Now is there anything before we close, anything else you would like to tell us?

MC: I would like to say I thoroughly enjoyed working at the General Assembly while Doug Wilder was our Lieutenant Governor at the time, and that was really a unique experience meeting and talking and seeing the operation of the General Assembly and the bills and everything . . . I just, I've had a lot of wonderful experiences but that was . . . but recently one of the most exciting things that I've done in 2006 I went through the Roanoke Citizens Police Academy, and that was just exciting. And now another retired teacher and I, we are getting ready to join the Alumnae and we are going to help with the Senior Citizens Academy. And that was just . . .

Someone in the background: What are those, can you just describe it a little bit? You said, the, what is the Police Academy that you completed?

MC: They teach you the operation of the Police Department, they show you about the tactical team, how the dogs are used, the horses, I went target practicing, I rode in a high speed chase, I did the ride along where I had on a bullet-proof vest. I had a radio and my officers said: "Misses Hill, if I get hurt you have to know how to call on the radio," and then they told us about that drug enforcement team, homeland security and all, and it was just marvelous I would recommend that to any citizen to participate in. If they don't want to do the regular one like we did they can the Senior Citizens one. Somebody even asked, "are you interested in being on the police force?" I said, "no I'm too old." But that was just exciting (laughs), I thoroughly enjoyed that and I've encouraged some of my other friends in other cities if they like excitement they may want to try doing that but it was just wonderful.

CL: Great. Well, wonderful. Well, thank-you Mignon. I really appreciate your participation and we will close-out now and I want to say thank-you one more time.

MC: And thank-you.