

Interviewee: Florence Farley

Interviewer: Carla Lewis

Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

CL: The date is February 26, 2007. I am interviewing Dr. Florence Saunders Farley. Dr. Farley, when and where were you born?

FF: I was born on May 28, 1928, at 518 Loudon Avenue Northwest, Roanoke, Virginia.

CL: Tell me about your parents, your brothers or sisters. Did you have extended family?

FF: Oh, no, I had enough of my first family. (chuckling) I didn't need to have any extended family but I guess we did basically, when you think about it because my mother and her brother who had children were extremely close. So, my cousins were very much like sisters and brothers. My aunt was very much like another mother. So, I guess, in a way, we think about that as an extended family. But my mother was a – At first, I'd have to say a very beautiful, visionary white woman who – There were 10 of us. So, I was the 9th child of 10 children and we always talked about the fact that there were two families. My older brothers and sisters and my younger sister and brother and niece who was really as a sister to us. And so, my mother, by the time I came along, was a very relaxed person who just was - just enjoyed life and interacted with her children in such a very comfortable way because, as she said, she had already reared children and she knew she knew how to be a mother. Therefore, she just kinda, as we used to say, "Let the good times roll." So, I was fortunate enough to be born into a family, a large family, and had all the benefits nearly of being an only child or being in small family because it was only my sister and my brother was maybe 5 or 6 years older than I. So, he was kinda out of my range. My mother was married when she – She had her first child when she was 16 years old and so when we start talking about young women having babies of today, we don't understand, I guess, the dynamics of being of the fact that her mother kindly took the oldest of my mother's children in and taught her how to mother. So, the grandmother did a lot of that with them. My mother, Kate, was born in Danville, Virginia, and she came to Roanoke. She finished her education in Roanoke. And at that time, black children only went to the 8th grade in Roanoke. Roanoke Public School education was 8th grade. And my mother was taught by Miss Lucy Addison and many of the principles that Miss Addison taught her as a child, as a student, my mother taught us. For example, if we would ask my mother how to spell a word. She would say to us, "Go to Mr. Webster." And our dictionary sat in the high chair, my baby sister's high chair. And when she got large enough not to use the high chair, the dictionary sat in that high chair in that same place and anytime we had to spell or we would be doing homework and all, we knew that that's where we would go. That was our little library was the dictionary. (chuckling) And we would go to the dictionary, she would tell us, "Just quickly check with Mr. Webster." and we would go to Mr. Webster. She was fascinating and tell many tales about my mother and her whole style of mothering and her relationship with us being students and how she encouraged and worked with us in that domain. She always said that the girls could bring A's and B's home and the boys could bring home A's, B's and C's. So, I don't know why she was so sexist but, anyway, she was. So, she would let them do a little less than we and also, she _____. My father was an interesting, very, very interesting person. He was born in Radford, Virginia.

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CL: Can you give me his name?

FF: My father's name was Statious Thadeous Saunders. And we thought that was an interesting name because no other children in school had my daddy's name. And my mother's name was Neota. Nobody else had her name. Neota Florence. And I have her name and I'm very proud of that. And she was Neota Florence Saunders. She was Aware. Her maiden name was Aware. My grandmother, as I said, was nothing but a matriarch. She just directed her children's families and their lives and so forth 'cause she was kind of an interesting, fascinating woman also. My father was a follower of Marcus Garby and

so I know from childhood about the Black Star and the ship and all. We had pictures in the house of all of that. He was very, very uncomfortable in the South as a black man. He didn't feel that he could make the kind of money that he wanted to rear his children and to do for his family. He was the baby in his family. So, he would go to Pittsburgh where he had older brothers and work in the steel mills. And they made extremely good money in the steel mills. But just periodically when the South became too much for him, he would go north and he would go to Pittsburgh and he'd work and we'd stay here and my mother kept us. He sent money home every two weeks for all of us and everything. So, we had to live – Periodically, my father wasn't home. One wasn't there but that was because he just could not tolerate the South and so he would do that and come back home and we'd cry and love him up and he loved us dearly and we had a good time. But, it was an interesting kind of beginning. My mother was devoutly Christian and Baptist at that. My father was just non-religious and so on Sundays, I used to have a choice. Sometimes I would go to Sunday School but there were other times I would go with my father. We would walk downtown and he would show me all the clothes in the store and talk to me about a whole array of things and so, he had a big influence on my life and a lot of attitudes that I have and all I got from him. I guess its good I had my mother's controlling things, because I guess I'd been wild as a buck if I hadn't. Something wild anyway so who cares. (laughing)

CL: Did you all sit on the front porch and listen to the radio or do you remember your telephone?

FF: We didn't have a telephone. We lived in the middle of the block. My grandmother lived on the corner. OK? And my grandmother lived with my Uncle Alfred. My Uncle Alfred worked for the railroad. He worked with Norfolk and Western Railroad. And so, she lived there. She dominated him as I said. She was in charge of everybody. So, she had – My mother was the only girl in the family and my mother's brothers just kinda worshiped her. So, they did a lot of providing for us, his nieces and nephews. So, the telephone was at my grandmother's house in my early childhood days. We got a telephone, I guess when I got to be a teenager, later, much later in life. But that and – So my grandmother – So we spent – We were supposed to do chores at her house and, of course, we would go down to do the chores and get on the telephone and she couldn't get us off and she was threatening to tell our mother and all. And then it would get to be dark and we would say, "Well, we've got to go home 'cause its dark." and we'd go and never did scrub the floor. We never did make the beds. We never did – We were bad children. But anyway, that's the way did my poor grandmother. But, she had a telephone so we'd go down there and we'd use that telephone. And, as I said, that's when we were using 'em when we weren't supposed to, like all of the children doing now. The front porch was just an extension of the house and so, you were there. You had nice front porch furniture. Just as you would have nice furniture in your house. You took in your pillows at night and somebody had that chore. Everybody had a job to do around everything. And so, those little pillows couldn't sit out and get all the dew and if it rained and all of that, so, you'd have to bring in the pillows that were on the glider. We had a swing and all of that. So, we didn't listen to the radio on the porch. You wouldn't dare. That was something else I think that people – The porch was more like your sitting room, you know, but again, in my day, you didn't eat anywhere but in the kitchen or dining room. So, you weren't eating on the porch and you wouldn't listen to the radio on the porch. It wasn't that kind of thing. It was a place for social interaction among people. So, we didn't have all this artificial stuff like the radio. So, no, we didn't listen to radios on porches. That wouldn't have been proper. We were very proper Southern people.

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CL: I didn't mean on the front porch.

FF: I know.

CL: Did you listen to the radio. A lot of times, people would gather around the radio.

FF: We listened to the radio every night. That was a family affair. That was a family affair. We had our programs that came on at night. We got our homework done. We'd do our homework quickly because if it was a certain night – I remember a show like the Inner Sanctum and all that kind of stuff.

We got up in my mother's room on the bed and the radio was up there. The family sat around and listened to the radio. Again, that was another place that you learned things from your parents and all of us would get in there. In my family, we didn't eat dessert after meals. Dessert was basically special. My mother made dessert every night but you didn't eat it until later in the evening. So, after we had done our homework and we wanted to listen to the radio and that's when we had our dessert.

CL: Did you have family stories that were passed down from generation to generation that you still tell today to your family members?

FF: Yeah, we always shared stories. As I said, like Miss Addison, we thought we knew her because my mother had told us so much about her and different things that we would do in school that she would relate and she would tell. Like, for example, my mother told us stories of her childhood. We still do tell them. For example, with the library. My mother – I became just an avid library-goer. I just went every day to the library. Of course, it was similar to what my mother did. She said that the library in her day was at a store. And it was in the back of the store and I don't remember the name of the store and where it was located but it must've been maybe in West-end somewhere or in the center of Roanoke or something. But she said that you could go to that store and that the man had books and all. She tells a story of when she was pregnant with me, she says that there was some place across the railroad track which would be like up in Southwest a store. And on Fridays, you would – it was a serial and every week this serial came out and she said that she would send my brother over on Friday's and pick up this serial and they also gave you a dish or some piece of china and it was like a luncheon set. So, I have all pieces of that myself now and that's all connected to this luncheon set that she collected while she was reading this book. And my middle name is Therece and that was the heroine of that book or that story so she named me with that as my middle name. So, we have a lot of stories in our family that we tell and we pass down to the children. We've always been a family of readers. Everybody in my family read. And so, she would often tell us those stories but that was very close to me because that's the way I got my middle name. "And remember," she would say, "your name is not Theresa. It is Therece."

CL: What is your fondest memory of childhood? You have many I know but did you have one that just stuck out like a holiday maybe?

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FF: We just had – You know growing up was just fun. It was just delightful. It was just easy. When you think about it. I think that one of the things that – We had Sunday School like I told you. We went to everybody's Sunday School for their summer Vacation Bible School. So, we could just go from one church to the other and do that and that would fill up our summers. And we looked forward to that. And we learned things. It was part of it. We had plays at school and you learned your part. I remember I was Becky Thatcher in Tom Sawyer. And I played the part of Becky Thatcher and, you know, you got all your stuff together and my sister, Ludy, and Barbie, they were Tiny Tots and they were on the radio. And the whole – I guess what I love more about was we lived in a community and everybody was involved in everything. So, Ludy was an announcer for the Tiny Tots and Barbie was singing on the Tiny Tots. Every Saturday morning, these little black children came on the radio and the whole community would say, "Did you hear the Tiny Tots? And so and so sang this and so and so sang did this and all." As I said, we were in plays and everybody was involved. The YWCA. You learned parliamentary procedures. They'd make you be the secretary and you had to learn how to take minutes and the next time – It wasn't this thing about who they elected. It rotated so that all of us could get those kinds of experiences. And I remember one of the things I guess will always stick with me is basically, is the fact that the first woman that I saw, the first person I saw with a PHD Degree was right here in Roanoke at Jerusalem Baptist Church. The pastor of Jerusalem Baptist Church was Dr. E.T. Brown. His wife was Rose Butler Brown. Rose Butler Brown had gotten her PHD from Boston University. And I was at church that Sunday with my mother and Reverend Brown said that his wife

was - "Mrs. Brown is here today but I want you all to know her name has changed. She is a doctor." He said, "She's not a medical doctor if you have pains or anything. She's a doctor who knows all about the head.", 'cause she had her degree in educational psychology. So they had a reception for her afterward and I remember getting in line and marching up to her and my momma said, "Tell her your name Florence." She said, "Let the child speak for herself." (chuckling) And I did and I was so happy that somebody could get my momma and tell her and I could get away with doing it so I did. Would you believe that years and years and years later, I got a degree in Educational Psych and more importantly, she taught at Virginia State in the same Psych Department that I became the chairman of, that I went to study in and became the chairman of. I didn't have any idea that women couldn't do anything. I saw her - Sadie B. Lawson was our principal the year I was - When I got out of this little cocoon of Roanoke and found out that people said that education wasn't something that black people desired and I realized, "That's all we knew". And women didn't do anything or that smart kids didn't want to be smart and there was a stigma. Like I was telling you about Popeye and all those boys, they'd tell you in a minute, they weren't as, as they say, quick and fast as I was with the books but they never put me down. They went on and the teacher let them help - we helped each other and we moved on. So a lot of the - What shall I call it? - a lot of the negative things that they say about us as a people. Its good you're doing a history because I don't know anything about it. I had no idea about it. And we need to rewrite history and tell them, "Oh no, oh no, that's not what we were about as a people."

CL: Do you remember having a family vacation?

FF: Yeah. Our family vacation was at Norfolk & Western picnics that they had every year. (laughing) Yeah, that was our vacation. We all went and got cute little short-shorts and little sandals and all of that and packed up all the food in the world. It was the best food in the whole wide world. If your people worked on Norfolk & Western, you went for free. If they didn't, I don't know where these little places were but we got on the train and we went to this place and we sat and spent the whole day and that was one of them. That was one of the summer vacations we had. OK? Another big thing we did was the fair would come every year. And so, you had Children's Day at the fair and you saved your money and everybody got their money together and all you uncles, aunts and cousins and everything gave you money and you just had a big day at the fair. So, yeah, those were the kinds of vacations. My daddy used to take us to ball games in Cincinnati. Again, working on the railroad, you could get free passes from Roanoke to Cincinnati. I can remember one trip that we did that way. And then in the summer, our relatives came back to Roanoke and that was a celebration. And always, momma would cook for days and they would come and visit and everybody had fun. So, there were a lot of different ways of having vacations if you like and a lot of things to do during vacation time.

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CL: What are the chores that you did around your house?

FF: As I told you, all of us had chores. And I spent most of my time getting out of 'em. We had to wash dishes. OK? On Christmas Day after we had gotten all the gifts and everything, during that Christmas break when you're away from school, we would get the new calendar and put down every day who had to wash dishes and who had to dry them. You did dishes in teams. So one person washed and one person dried. And we would know for the whole year, who was supposed to wash dishes and who was supposed to dry dishes. So we took the big old calendar from Norfolk & Western and you put the names down and I was wash and you'd dry. And the person who dried the dishes also swept the kitchen. OK? And washing dishes also included washing those pots and pans that you hated. And I'm not sure if the person who washed the dishes washed the pots and pans or the one who dried the dishes washed the pots and pans but that was always a big problem. My mother had her boys and girls do the same thing so the boys in my family all washed dishes too. So we did that. So we knew a year ahead of time or anytime we wanted to know who was going to wash dishes. And it was a big thing, who was going to be washing dishes on 4th of July and who was going to be the one to do on this day but we

didn't have to wash 'em on Thanksgiving and Christmas when company came because my mother used her good china and crystal. So dish washing was a daily chore that had to be done. You also had to – My mother washed on Monday and when we came home from school on Monday, we had to hang the socks up on the line. She would hang all the big pieces and all and they would be dry. And all these little pieces that were left over, we had to hang them on the back porch to dry. That was something that I did not like. I didn't like any of that work. (chuckling) So, I kept a pain in my side to get out of work and my mother believed me for years and I used that for a while. And then, I – I told you I used to sell these pocketbooks and I used to be the writer, the letter writer for the people in the neighborhood. We had a number of people in the neighborhood who couldn't read or write but they always wrote letters to their families in the country. So on Sunday afternoon, different people would tell my mother to tell me to come up there 'cause they wanted me to write some letters. So, I would go up and I would write letters for these people and I would make like 3 cents of 5 cents a letter and all and then I would put the address and the return address on it and all of that and then I would have to take the letters to my mother to make sure I had gotten it, they called it “backed the letter right”. They called it “backing letters” and I had backed that letter right. And I got paid. See, they game me these pennies and all this change. I always had money and so I would pay my brother to sometimes do my work. I used to pay him to drink my milk and all that stuff so I kept a bankroll and I just paid people to do things for me. I was a real crazy child. (laughing) Dish washing was the main one and my brothers did scrub. Sometimes, we had to scrub – We had a two story house so the inside steps, I had to scrub them some when I was little.

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

FF: I lived all my life here until I went to college. You know you call it Gainsboro but it was just Northwest. We called it Northeast, Northwest, it was just where all of us lived. 'Cause we were backwards and forwards.

CL: Coming back to the area, can you describe some of the ways in which it has changed?

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FF: I don't know where I am. 'Cause I certainly would not have been able to find library and I knew it sat on the corner. I would've been just looking and looking and looking. So, I don't know anything about this place down here really. The street that I was reared on is still there. Our house, we kept, I kept the house, we kept our house until I would guess about 3 or 4 years before my mother died. But after we left – After my mother left home 'cause she stayed there long after – I came home always. I was always home for Christmas or vacation or what have you. But my mother stayed in the house for a long time after. My father died in '55 and I guess my mother must've left that house maybe in the '90s 'cause she was right, maybe about 10 years before she died – Maybe in the late '80s I would say. Then I had nieces and nephews who moved in and they stayed there, three different groups of them and then finally we demolished the house and so just the lot is there. And my grandmother's house has now been demolished and that was on Park Street and 3rd Avenue. Those were the streets there. The Harrison Museum, that's where I went to elementary school. And I went to 8th grade. We had 8th grade was where we went to - 8th grade was Harrison Annex. So, we went from 1st grade to 7th in the middle part of it. On the right hand side, that's where they had the 8th grade for us. So we were in 8th grade there. And then we left 8th grade and we went to Addison, Lucy Addison, and we went to Lucy Addison for 9th through 12th then all the kids from Gainsboro, Gilmer and Gainsboro came in Harrison all met up at Addison. So we had one high school for black kids and we were all there. That whole school was very academically oriented. Very, very academically oriented. Our teachers were individuals with Master's degrees. Basically, at that time, when blacks couldn't go to anywhere but Virginia State and if they wanted a Master's degree, they had to go out of the state and the State of Virginia paid them to go. And so, during the summer, they would go to Columbia, NYU and work on their Master's. So, we were taught by people basically who had Master's degrees and some of 'em had

started working on their Doctorates. In my class, when I was in 1st grade, I went to school for something like a week and then they told my brother to come and get me and they put me out of school. And I had to go back home. In July of that year, Virginia had passed a law that said that you had to be 6 ½ in order to go to school. And I was born in May so I was not 6 ½ so they put me out of school. So I was a dropout, no, I was a put-out in 1st grade. So, I stayed home with my mother. Ludy, my baby sister, was in kindergarten 'cause she was behind me. She was in Miss Wright's Kindergarten and so she was going to kindergarten so that left me at home with my mother by myself. And did we ever have a good time. She taught me everything she wanted to teach me. I never learned how to print. I've always done cursive writing. I was reading everything that you could read and all of that. And so when I marched up to 1st grade, I went to 1st grade with a fountain pen and a bottle of green ink. The teachers, of course, were wonderful teachers because they let me sit and write all day and I would write and they would put things up on the board and they would put my writing on the board. And they'd come down and see this little girl who was doing all this writing in green ink and a fountain pen. Not being in school helped a whole lot and I think I'm still a proponent of children really maturing before they take on crazy academic stuff. But anyway, that's what happened to me so I didn't get my first entry "bang" into the first grade. But that meant that I was older and so I kinda sailed on through school. When we go to high school, there were other kids similar in terms of age and so we were all accelerated kids for the most part. They decided to let us take 5 classes in high school in order to get a credit each year and that made up for a whole semester and so, we had to go to summer school the summer before our senior year and take an English class and we did that. And that meant that we came out in May, when we would not have come out until that January. So, the whole school system had a flexibility and an encouraging kind of idea. All of our high school teachers, for the most part, as I told you, were just Master teachers and when I went to college, I had my high school notebooks. They would tell us, "When you get to college like with English, you're going to need to know your verbs and your this, that and the other." So I had a notebook that would be a record of anybody's grammar book that I took to college with me. I was bored stiff my freshman year in college because I had had all of this at Addison. We had taken – One teacher said I could – One of our Math teachers said, "I'll teach you all a little bit of Calculus." We didn't even know what the word meant. They were showing us a little bit of that because we had done Trig, Geometry, and Algebra and all of that – So it was just a different kind of world. Different kind of world.

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CL: What kind of businesses were around that you all bought your groceries from, your clothes from? Any kind of businesses?

FF: We didn't buy our clothes from any store. We had no retail stores of that type but everything else we had, drug stores, the theater. We would go to the Virginia Theater. We could go downtown to the Roanoke Theater as blacks and, of course, you had to go up the steps in the back up there. My father said, "You don't go." and I would slip and go if I wanted to see something. But his whole Marcus Garby thing, "No, you don't dare do that." My mother, of course, was kinda in the middle of the road. She didn't know what to do. My daddy was so strong about it. I'd slip and go down to the Roanoke Theater if I wanted to see a movie. And then be very frightened because then the dark would come and there you were on that back street and you had to go around the corner. I had no business down there and all that kind of good stuff, so I was scared to death. But when I finally got to where the lights were, you know, on Campbell Avenue, I was safe and I would come on home. We had everything basically but not – You had neighborhood grocery stores. In some neighborhoods, they were run by blacks and some neighborhoods like Northeast I think, like on Peach Hill and some of those places. But for the most part, the Syrians – I think that's what you call them. We used to call them the Syrians. They used to own the groceries. They had the grocery stores and all. I can remember the ones where – See, I lived – The streets that I lived on, we were surrounded by whites. We were about the last street

before you got to the West-end in Northwest where black people lived. And my block was the 500 block and so that one block was black. In the back of us was, at that time when I was growing up, was Center Avenue and that 500 block was white. And everything was white up Loudon Avenue all the way up those streets up there. Gilmer Avenue was all white as you went up. So once you did 5th Street, 6th Street, 5th Street where St. Paul's Church is, that's where the blacks were. And they would kinda down on Fairfax. But when you went up – we were just – That's the reason I tell you we don't know where we lived because that one little block was black. So the Syrians on the corner had a store and they had children. And one little Syrian girl, Josephine, was my age and I used to play with Josephine. I spent a lot of time with her. I used to help her with her schoolwork. She went to school. Loudon Avenue School was a white school and that's the only street I lived on. So, I couldn't go up the street. I had to go to Harrison. OK? But she would go to Loudon Avenue whenever her father was in his mood – They were Catholics – He would send her to the Catholic Church but you had to pay to go. So when he was in a bad mood, she went to Loudon Avenue. When he was in a good mood, she went to Catholic School. And I'm still in there teaching her and getting her – helping her with her work and all. So we were friends with the children who were in the neighborhood. So all of them were our friends. We kinda grew up with them. Where I lived and away after school, I didn't live where they lived. Janice and them lived on 8th Street and all that. That's where all our other friends were that I went to school with but we were down in this little area. So, after we left school on Friday, I played with these Syrian kids because I couldn't get to them 'cause I couldn't go out the neighborhood unless it was something special and if I had to go to Harrison School and I saw my friends there and then when I got in high school, anything that went on at the high school, I saw all my friends. But we were down in that little nook.

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CL: So how did you get your clothes?

FF: We bought the clothes up and down – Kiddie Corner. We bought clothes where white folks bought their clothes. You remember Kiddie Corner? We bought all our clothes at Kiddie Corner. So anytime you got your things for Christmas and all – I can remember my girlfriend Doris and one Christmas, we had coats. Mine was brown and her's was blue. We had a dress and her's was – I said, “Oh my goodness”. So we would come out looking just alike. And that was where nice clothes were. You just bought nice clothes. We had beautiful – Roanoke was the center of the retail district of Southwest Virginia. Everything else was kinda hillbilly. Roanoke was the center so you bought beautiful clothes in Roanoke. When I'd buy shoes and all when I was in college, they thought I was from New York, fashion plate.

CL: Talk a little bit about your school life. I know you've talked about it. Harrison -

FF: It was just rich. Harrison Elementary School then to Addison. And many of our teachers were from Virginia State and when I finished high school, the state of Virginia gave 2 scholarships for the valedictorian and the salutatorian for every high school in the state of Virginia. You got to go to a state school. And, of course, blacks only went to Virginia State. So, I was the salutatorian of my class and so I got the state scholarship. When we start talking about how they recognize kids who do well and all that, that was just a rule and that was for black kids or white kids. Of course, we went to Virginia State. So I got that scholarship and went to Virginia State from here. That was one of the scholarships. I got that scholarship and I got the Virginia State Alumni Scholarship of \$50. That was a big piece of money for me to have and it helped me a great deal. The school system in Roanoke was rich. It was extremely rich. As I said before, when I got to college, I was shocked at how simple things were. It was just a repeat of what we had done in high school.

CL: Continue your education.

FF: Huh?

CL: Continue about your education.

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FF: I went to Virginia State as I said. And when I went to Virginia State and stayed 4 years and I majored in Psychology. So, that was an unknown. My mother thought I was going to be a teacher. So everybody through that when I got out of college I was going to teach school. And I got out of college and I don't have a teaching degree and I can't be certified (laughing) and it was at a time when jobs were unheard – you just couldn't find a job. So, all my friends were getting jobs that finished with me. They were getting jobs teaching school and I was ineligible for a job and my mother said, “What did we send you down there for? What is this psychology? I have no idea.”. And the family was very angry with me because I was unemployable. I was willing to work anywhere. I could not find a job. So that summer, I was down on Campbell Avenue and I saw Nadine Young who was a classmate of mine at Virginia State. She lived in Rocky Mount. OK? And so we start talking. I said, “What you gonna do Nadine?”. She said, “I got a job. I'm teaching in Rocky Mount.”. She was a Home-Ec major. I said, “I have not found a job and I don't know what I'm gonna do. I have to go to work.”. She said, “I have a job and maybe you would like this job. Its a job with little crazy children.”. (chuckling) I said, “What?”. She said, “Yeah, I take care of them. I bet you - I'm gonna leave it. I bet you I could get you that job. You meet me.”. And she told me where and we met up and she said, “I'm gonna take you down there.”. It was in Hollins. She said, “I'm gonna take you down. I'm gonna see if I can get her to hire you.”. I went down to Hollins, Virginia, and there was this school. A private school. It was like a farmhouse. A beautiful farmhouse. It sat at the bottom of an apple orchard. It had a little gingerbread house on the side and a beautiful farmhouse. I went down. This lady's name was Mrs. James and she introduced me to Mrs. James. Mrs. James had had a residential school for – we would call them “developmentally disabled children”. OK? When she heard I had a degree in Psychology, she said, “Oh, yes, I'll hire you.”. She hired me for all of \$180 a month and I worked on every other Sunday and didn't work on Saturday but worked every other Sunday. This was a residential center for rich white children who were developmentally disabled. One of the Gayles – Lewis-Gayle Hospital – His daughter was there, Theodora. There was a child there who was the, a child of the person who owned Myrtle Beach at that time. They were just wealthy at that time. They were paying something like \$2,500 for just tuition. And she fed them. Each one of them had their own pediatrician. A person came and collected their shoes to shine their shoes. One girl wore cashmere sweaters. I'm like 21 years old or so and she wore her cashmere sweaters and dyed-to-match skirts and she was a child who sulked and bellowed and carried on. I would just look at those beautiful cashmere sweaters and want one so badly and there she was just salivating all over these pretty sweaters. I was so jealous of her pretty clothes. (laughing) But anyhow, that was the kind of wealth that they had. We would carry them over to Hollins College to different affairs, to concerts and all of that. They were, when I say developmentally disabled, they had what we would call a stigmata. You could look at them and they had the physical stigmata. Some of them were macrocephalic and they had the large head and small credence and so forth. So they were identifiable. They were children that we would call today developmentally disabled. Anyhow, I was there. I had 4 little boys and in that group was one little boy named Butch and he gave me my first experience with an autistic child. You know how many years ago that was. This whole concept of autism had not even been written about. It was done with this guy – eventually, as I stayed in psychology, I met the person who basically came out with the first research paper on autism. I had these 4 little boys and Butch was the bright one. He obviously was not like the others. So he and I just bonded. He could not speak. He had one underdeveloped eye. He had all the ritualistic behaviors that go along with autism and so forth. But he bonded with me. We just became as one. He was my salvation on this job and all. Of course, she said, “You can't tell people you're teaching. You can't tell people you're teaching because in the state of Virginia, black people can't teach white children – Negroes can't teach white children.”. She used that word at that time. “So you'll have to be the companion.”. That was my little job that year. I realized I couldn't save any money making

all of \$130 a month. I was giving my momma \$50 a month 'cause I was living at home. They took out for Social Security and Income Taxes. I was supposed to be saving money to go to graduate school 'cause I realized you have to have a Master's degree. So, I joined the Army. I saw a poster one day basically before I left State. They were giving commissions to college graduates and you could go into the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant. So I said, "Well, I think I'll do that.", 'cause I needed to get this money to go to school. I joined the Army and I got a commission. You had to take tests and all of that and I passed all of that stuff. I became one of 10 blacks from all over the country. It was not but 110 people in there and there were 10 of us blacks. Another person was white but – Mary Surettes (??), I need to find her. She's somewhere in this Southwest Virginia area. But Southwest gave two of the women from this state 'cause you could only – every state had 2 women. I went in the military. I stayed as an officer in the Army and I did the whole training bit for other recruits and stayed at Fort Lee. I stayed there. I got promoted to a 1st Lieutenant and then I said, "I can't stay in this all my life. I've got to get busy 'cause I had to become a psychologist.". So, I resigned my commission and went to graduate school at Virginia State. I resigned my commission, got out of the Army like on a Friday and went to Virginia State on a Monday and I did my Master's degree there. And at the end of that, my mentor had made contact with the person at Crownsville State Hospital in Maryland and had set up a kind of internship. There were very few internships for people with Master's degrees. You had to have a PHD to do an internship. So, I got that. She hooked that up for me and I got the internship. And after that year, I got my Master's, got my internship finished. Then I was employed at Central State Hospital in Petersburg as a Chief Psychologist. I stayed there for 7 years and I left there and went to Virginia State as an assistant professor in the Psych Department. I stayed there for a long time and finally decided that I was getting involved in a lot of political stuff and getting to be very controversial and all and decided I needed my PHD in order to survive 'cause they were going to fire me. (laughing) In fact, they did fire me once, but anyway, they had to rehire me. I said I better get my meal ticket.

0.47.30.6

CL: Around what year was that?

FF: That I went back to school?

CL: Mm mm.

FF: Gone through Civil Rights – We had started Civil Rights – I went back to school in '75. Yeah, because I was getting in serious trouble. My mentor was retiring and she says, "I can't be here to protect you so you better get that degree.". (laughing) I went back to school and went there on a special kind of scholarship because they had never had any – I went to Kent State and that was just jumping from the frying pan into the fire because this was right after the whole shooting at Kent State. They were still in an uproar over that and I fell right in place with all that protesting and all that marching and living in "tent city" and all that stuff while I was working on my doctorate. I got that and came on back to Virginia State. So that's the end of the education. I also went to – I was a National Science Fellow at Harvard for a summer – 2 summers and I also went to Beloit College as a National Science Fellow and I was out there in Wisconsin and then I went to – Some of my African travels was with the American International Studies – American Group for International Studies and the reason I was telling you about why I loved the mother-child kind of thing because I studied mother-child relationships, parent-child relationships and I went from West Africa to East Africa and worked with that kind of research during that period of time. So then, all of a sudden, I got done and stopped going to school. (chuckling)

CL: What other kind of jobs were available when you were in Roanoke?

FF: Nothing was available here.

CL: For your parents or your neighbors? You mentioned the railroad.

FF: Railroad, silk mill.

CL: Do you remember when that closed?

0.49.34.2

FF: No. I remember when it closed but I don't the year. But, yeah, the silk mill was a good job and the railroad was a big job and people could make a basic living. Those were the two that I remember most. Of course, a lot of people worked in the hotel industry. 'Cause hotels they had in Roanoke and a lot of people worked there and they had a style of living. My girlfriend's family, they worked in restaurants. They were cooks. Another friend of mine, a young person with me, her father worked at the country club. So those kinds of places were best. Women did domestic work. There were very few jobs for them and you knew if you were going to do anything, you had to go to college or you'd learn a trade. So many of our youngsters – we did have a decent vocational program in high school. Then, we also had that business degree. We had 3 degrees, the academic track and the general vocational and then the business. So many, again, of my friends, they didn't go to college. They were well-equipped to start working and they went to work in Washington D.C. So, they left Roanoke because there were no jobs as secretaries for them. Whereas white kids could come right out of high school and go into it. They were fully capable but those jobs wouldn't hire them. So, segregation hurt a community such as this because the talented people left. The real talented people left. So, whereas you talked about it hurting blacks, it hurt your whole community, all your people in that community because you didn't have the blending in of all people to be all that they could be. They just took their talents and went elsewhere. So, you could go to Washington and you could just meet all those women who just went up the ladder who had learned their business at the high schools here.

CL: Tell me about your fond memories of this library which is the Gainsboro Branch.

0.52.03.3

FF: OK. This is my library. As I told you, we always read in my family, whatever. My brothers read. My brothers read those True Confessions and all those old kind of books. We just read and nothing was – I loved the library. It was across the street. When we were talking the other night, I realized that this library was what, '42? And that's the year I went to high school. So we had a good library at Addison. So, I did not spend high school time in this library but my entire elementary school was in that library and it was on the first floor and the Y was upstairs. I can just see it. I can go in the door. Miss Lee was right here. And the children's library was over on the left and that was our little nook and I can go right now and tell you where these books were and all. Everyday in the summer, I would take a bath and I would put on a clean dress. My mother washed and ironed – Well, washed all day Monday and ironed all day Tuesday, the girls clothes. And Wednesday, she ironed all the brother's shirts and daddy's shirts and all the mens clothes. We would have all of our dresses and I would pick me a dress and put it on and walk to the library. And I would have gotten a book and I'm bringing this book back and I would go and I would read, go and get me another book and Miss Lee would close it and I would walk back home. So that was my journey everyday, this little gal would go. I was always by myself. This was my privacy kind of thing. They had a contest in Roanoke that – This was for all children in Roanoke and I was the child that read the largest number of books. So that summer, I read the largest number of books. I got \$5 for reading that and I was rich again and I shared. (laughing) I bought a pair of sandals. I bought those sandals because my foot is extremely narrow and I never could buy a sandal that would fit and my daddy would not permit me to buy them but I had my own money so I bought sandals that were too big for me. I thought they were adorable. I bought a pair of skates. I bought everybody in the family an ice cream cone from the Roanoke Dairy. Then, I had a little change left out of my \$5. I won that prize. I also reached the point where I had read all of the books in the children's section of the library. So, I just wandered where the next group of books were. So Miss Lee said, "Florence, come out of there." I said, "But I want to look to see if I want one of these books." So she said, "You can't have those books. Those are books for grown people. Those are adult books and you can't read those books." I said, "Well, what am I gonna read?" And she said, "Well, when we get some more books then you can read them." I said, "Well, I need a book tonight." She said, "Well,

you can't have a book tonight.” I said, “But you have to. All of these books are over here and I haven't read them.” So she told me I couldn't read 'em. She said, “You have to leave the library.” 'cause I was going into a big argument (laughing) and Miss Lee was too sweet for anybody to argue with but I did. I went home and I told my momma that I couldn't go to the library anymore and that Miss Lee said that I couldn't read the books and all of that. So, Miss Lee did call momma and they talked. Miss Lee said that I couldn't read the adult books. So momma said, “I'll see to it that she'll take care of them.” She said, “No, she's not supposed to read them because she's a child and she wouldn't understand them.” So momma said, “Well, then, there will be no harm done because she won't understand them and let her think she's reading.” So, I got into the big children's book. I understood more than that I thought I understood I'm gonna tell you that. I learned a whole lot of stuff. (laughing) But you know they were sanitized back then too. So, what was the big deal? (laughing)

0.56.48.7

CL: Who were the leaders in your community when you were growing up?

FF: Hmmm. Our teachers and our preachers. And we knew all the professional people in the community. We knew all of them. So, our teachers were the top leaders and the preachers at the churches and, as I said, we weren't – Well, Sweet Union and Jerusalem were sister churches so that was a real close connection. So, my sister, who was like a surrogate mother went to Sweet Union. And my mother went to Jerusalem. And the first Sunday they did joint communion and one year, one Sunday, like January it would be at Sweet Union and February would be at Jerusalem and they rotated backwards and forwards and so that meant that I eventually learned the kids who lived in West-end and became friends with them also. But the preachers of those churches and all the churches. I guess as a child, you could call the name of every preacher in town because they had an impact on you and your teachers. And I remember Harry Penn who was a dentist and we knew him. We knew all the Downings. You just knew all your professional people. They were part of the community. This thing about having heroes and all of that, they were just people who did things in the community. They were your neighbors. Your mother or father had gone to school with some of them and they were from the community and they were of the community. We knew the man who ran the theater, Mr. Nabors and we knew – that's all that's coming to me now. You knew who owned the drug store. Then, as we grew older, and started having a little night life, we knew all the clubs and all the folks who were in the club and who were involved with that. We just knew everybody and they were just people who did this kind of work and made this kind of contribution. So, I don't think we thought about them in a kinda hero or heroine way because of the interaction, they were just people and they did this kind of thing. You go to college to do this and you do something else to do that and you knew the roots and the pathways and so forth. But the center people in your life were those teachers in that school and I mean they were real teachers.

CL: And you had a lot of respect for them didn't you?

FF: Well, yes, because they had respect for those children. The community respected them. They helped to make your community.

CL: Very good. Did anyone in your family – Were they in the military? Your brothers, sisters?

0.59.49.6

FF: Yeah, my brother. The brother next to me. He's the youngest boy. I had 3 brothers and so my youngest brother maybe, I would say, he must've been 5 or 6 years older than I. He went into the military at age of 18. He was drafted. He was real bright, intellectual, just sharp, bright as he could be. He finished high school and right after high school, he was drafted. OK? We had a big blow-out, he and I, maybe 2 nights before he left. Over something insignificant. We were just fussing and all. He went into the Army and he wrote me a letter, about the first letter that came, he had written to me. He wrote to me. And they had special little envelopes and everything that the military used for them to write on and all that stuff and he wrote me. He said he was so sorry that he had mistreated me and he

hadn't treated me nice before he left and he just wanted me to know that he was sorry and he was going to send me – They made \$21 a month – and he says, “I know you're going to college and so I'm going to send you \$10 a month out of an allotment, out of my check. I'm not going to send any money to momma. I'm going to send my money to you.” This was because he was so scared he was going to get killed in the Army because he had been mean to me and so forth. So he said that was the way he thought maybe he could be safe. So he sent me this. I get my first check, 10 whole dollars. I said I have to save my money. Somewhere along the way, I learned about the crash, the big crash of the '30s and when all the banks crashed. I was afraid. I don't think I got that story right. So I was afraid that the banks were going to crash with my money. Somewhere along the way, I learned that the post office – you could put your money in the post office and that would be the Federal Government and the only way you could lose your money was if the whole country went down. I said, “Well, that's where I'm going to put my money.” So I went down to the main post office and told them I wanted to save this money. I discussed it with my mother. She told me to go on. (chuckling) I went on down there and discussed it. I deposited my \$10, my check into the postal savings account. And you had a book and they gave you like a coupon and you put that coupon in your book and every time I would go down, they would put it in there and stamp it. It came every month and I can remember – And I never touched a dime of it. - and when I finally got ready to go to college, I had something like \$180, about 18 months, and I had saved my \$10 and, child, I had _____. My mother said I could spend something like \$40 on clothes and then the rest of the money I was supposed to keep for the tuition to pay each time. So that was my brother and his experience in the Army. Then, my middle brother, went in the same branch of service which was the Ordinance. He was stationed in Camp Gordon, Georgia. He was so mild and very kind of passive and very compassionate. We just kind of ached for him being there because he was smaller than my other brothers in stature. But he was there. He went overseas. In fact, they ended up on the same boat going to overseas and Europe. They were both on the same boat. We didn't realize until they came back. He would come home of furlough and I can remember he had some money. He said, “What you want me to buy you?”. I don't know why but I decided I wanted a pair of riding pants and riding boots. Don't tell me why 'cause I've never been on a horse in my life and never liked any animals and all but for some reason, maybe I read about it in a book. I don't know where I got that image but he did. He bought me these riding pants and these boots and I don't think it was a style. I don't remember anybody else walking around in riding boots. I don't think it was a style. I don't know where I got it from. But anyway, I had 'em, green riding pants and brown boots. And I would shine those boots up and just march all over the place. My other brother was in the Navy. That was my oldest brother. When he got out of the service – He's the one when I was in college, he used to buy my clothes for college. So my brothers did well and were very much a part of Army life but all 3 of them served. And, of course, none of them wanted me to go in the service when I jumped up and decided to go in the service but they didn't want me to go. Good little girls didn't go in the Army.

1.05.32.5

CL: OK. Did I ask you questions that you wanted to answer? Anything else that you want to tell us about your experience in Roanoke or growing up or your parents or just anything you would like to tell us.

FF: I think I may have covered. I don't know.

CL: What about your artwork? Can you just tell us a little bit about your artwork?

FF: I can talk a little bit – tell you a little bit about that because it did start in Roanoke.

CL: Its so beautiful.

FF: OK. I started embroidery in Vacation Bible School. The piece that I did there was a runner for a hall table. So it was a long scarf. It was blue linen. I liked linen back then. I did it all in white. It was a very, very attractive piece. In Vacation Bible School, you put your artwork up on the last day and people came and all to see it. And that was the piece that I did there. Then, I learned to – I saw a little

girl, little white girl knitting down at NW Pugh. They had the most beautiful threads you ever – just beautiful corners with all this thread. They stacked them in bins on the wall and all this color and I just gravitated to it. And this little girl was just knitting away and the lady was telling her this and she was telling her that and all. I said, “I wonder what is she doing.”. All I could do was just stand and kinda watch. I went home and I told my mother about the little girl and she had these two needles and some thread and she was doing this. I told her, I said, “If I could get me some of those needles and some thread, I could go down there and get her to teach me.”. My mother said, “Well, no, not really. And I don't want you going down there to ask her to do that. But I'm going to see if we can find somebody who knits because I know some women who knit.”. Anyway, this lady did teach me. Momma got this lady and she taught me. It seemed to me, in my thinking at that time, that I wasn't learning fast enough. She wasn't really teaching me the way I wanted to be taught and I wasn't making anything. I didn't know how to take these – She never did teach me how to take the threads off the needles, the stitches off the needle. So anyway, this one day I just kinda stuck my stuff in my book bag. And on my way home from school, I decided I'd go down to NW Pugh. I went down there and that lady was there. So I went up to her and I pulled my stuff out of my book bag and I showed her and asked her could she teach me, show me how to do it. She said yes. And so she went ahead and she showed me and I took some off and she showed me again and she took 'em off. So, she said, “I don't like the way you put them on. Let me show you another way.”. And she showed me the other way. And I went stepping home. I stopped by my uncle's house first and asked him if he had 10 cents for me to get some thread. He said, “Yeah.” and he gave me a dime and I went straight home. Of course my mother she was not happy because I had done what she told me not to do. She was pleased that I had gotten that out of my system. So from there, I got another dime from my uncle and I bought a book and I bought that at Kress's and that book taught you how to knit, how to crochet, how to tat, how to embroidery and cruel was in that book. Every kind of stitch work like that that you could do at that time. Embroidery was there but not cross stitch but that's all cross stitch is is embroidery. Its one-stitching embroidery. I bought that book and found that book. I taught myself how to crochet from that book and I made sweaters and I made scarves and then I made these Corday bags and my mother would line the bags and put the zipper in the bags and all and then we would sell them to neighbors who would pay me for the thread and a little bit more. And I made bags and things for them. And then, from then on, I just kept doing needlework of all types and all varieties and have found it to be a very private satisfying kind of thing. Its very rewarding. I have never been able to draw. I've never been able to paint. Therefore, I see this somewhat as that yearning that I do have to do paint, to do some type of expression of images on canvas if you like. And so the thread gives me that opportunity and the beads and embellishments now. This is the way I create is in this realm and very much so. But I thought art was a waste of time in school. And I thought - little art teachers would come and have us do little stuff in school and I never thought that what we were doing was meaningful. I thought it was a waste of time. I wanted to be doing reading and writing and doing arithmetic and all those other things. I thought that's what school was for. I realized the reason I didn't like it. I couldn't do it. And when people talk about children, “Just try.”. No, I couldn't do that but I can do this.

CL: Beautiful.

FF: Yeah, I can do this.

CL: It is very beautiful. Thank you Dr. Farley.

FF: Its nice sitting in this room with all of you and its a joy to be able to – I never thought about bringing – I was never thinking about having any show because I don't think this is art. I didn't think it was until other people have told me that but I guess this will be a very pleasant memory and it kinda ties things together for me since it all started here. And I did have it in the library in Petersburg. Because I had kindly taken Petersburg as my home after I got married and stayed there and invested my adult life there, it was kinda nice to come home. It was really beautiful to come home. And certainly

beautiful to come to the Gainsboro library. (laughing)

CL: Well, we thank you for coming to the Gainsboro library. (clapping in background) Thank you so much. This is exquisite. I can't say enough about it and everyone who has been here just love it. They ooh and aah at each piece. So if you have missed the art exhibit, you have missed something. Thank you Dr. Farley.

FF: Thank you.