

Interviewee: Sheila Mae Anderson
Interviewer: Cheryl Ramsey
Transcriber/Editor: Amy Burns

CR: Okay my name is Cheryl Ramsey and the date is February 23, 2008. I'm gonna be interviewing Sheila Mae Anderson and we're at Jerusalem Baptist Church. And I guess my first question for you ma'am is where and when were you born?

SA: I was born April 15, 1947 at Number 4, Ninth Street Southwest.

CR: And are there any other streets or neighborhoods you've ever lived in?

SA: Yes, I lived at 1008 Jackson Avenue Southwest and from there to Number 38 Fourteenth Street Southwest and from there to Hurt Park at 121 Seventeenth Street Apartment 1 Southwest.

CR: All in Southwest?

SA: All in Southwest, until I got married and moved away.

CR: And I'm sorry wait what was your birth date?

SA: April 15, 1947.

CR: Okay and do you what's your husband's name or your spouse's name?

SA: James Rosco Anderson.

CR: And children?

SA: I have four children: William, Troy, Shannon, and Tamika.

CR: And do you remember or what are their birthdays?

SA: Oh yes. William's birthday is 8/31/63. Troy's birthday is 3/12/68. Shannon's is 4/8/70. Tamika's is 6/12/74.

CR: I think I went to school with Tamika.

SA: You did? (laughs)

CR: Okay.

SA: She graduated at Clemson.

CR: Clemson '92.

SA: Yeah.

CR: Yeah, I went to school with her. Okay so tell me a little bit about your parents and or brothers and sisters.

SA: Well there was only five girls.

CR: Okay

SA: I'm the oldest of the five girls. I have a sister called her name is Rosemary but her nickname is Dusty. I have a sister named Doris Ann her nickname was FeeFee. I have another sister named Annette her nickname was Moody. And my baby sister name is Louis we call her BooBau(??).

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CR: And you didn't have a nickname?

SA: And I'm the only one that don't have a nickname.

CR: And do you have any other extended family members that live near by in the area?

SA: Well all of us are here except for my sister Rosemary. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

CR: Okay.

SA: My mother's still livin' my father's passed.

CR: What was your mother's name?

SA: Myrtle Lyn Bolden Fatherfen (??)

CR: Okay, and describe just like your house and where you grew up and just how your childhood was like here.

SA: Well at the time my mother was single parent raising five girls. From what I could remember we lived in like a three-bedroom well I mean a two-bedroom house. She did, it was sorta rough coming up cause like I said my mother was a single parent trying to raise five girls. She took in days working ironing and stuff like that to support us and my family, my grandmother also helping my aunts and all them helped with our yeah. So I mean we didn't have a bad thing, I've never been hungry, and I know she loves us with all her heart. So, to me that's everything.

CR: What was your child like your childhood like around here or your school?

SA: Oh Yes I went to Loudon Avenue Elementary School, Harrison and Booker T. and Addison. It was beautiful you know we all played games and we didn't have television or stuff like that but we all gathered 'round on Sundays and after coming from Sunday School and Church which we all had to go. And everything, we all went to Bible School we all went to Sunday School we all participated in the programs and things that we had at the church. To me it was better coming up then than it is now because now there's television and all that electronics and as a family we were very close. We'd visit our mother and she took us to visit all her friends stuff like that and Sunday we'd go have dinner with different family members and vice versa.

CR: Did you all have a car or did you have to walk?

SA: No we walked, walked everywhere or went on the bus.

CR: Okay, and is that how you got to school, on the bus?

SA: Yes, yes Roanoke City Bus at that time. We also we used to have movie nights she would take us to the movies and stuff like that.

CR: At the game theater(??)

SA: At the Virginia Theater. We would have family nights she would take us the Virginia Theater. On Saturdays we did our chores and everything. Our chores changed from week to week. One week I had dishes and all the next week I might have to wash or iron old clothes, whatever we all had chores.

CR: And did you, where did you work coming up?

SA: Roanoke Memorial Hospital.

CR: Okay and were you allowed to stay home after school or did you have anywhere to go after school?

SA: Not really, most of the time she made us we had to study, had to study, all the stuff like that. There really wasn't anywhere to go, well I didn't think there was. She didn't allow us to spend the night with other family members you know other people. It was like she kept us all together.

CR: And what how far schooling did you were you able to complete?

SA: I completed up till ninth grade.

CR: Okay, and did anybody in your family attend college, or go past?

SA: Oh yes, my youngest sister, well two of my sisters. My oldest sister Rosa graduated from college and my sister Lois.

CR: What school did they go to?

SA: Well, my sister Rosa graduated from Addison and she went to Virginia Western completed an education, and also Lois she graduated from PH and she did hers through Virginia Western.

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CR: Okay, did you have any stories that are passed down from your mother down to you that you might have passed down to your children.

SA: Well I had some, I was telling them about me well like I stayed with my grandmother and how I've always been in this church all my life, and we used to go from on Wednesday night we went to a prayer meeting and it used to be up at the Recco House(??). We used to have our meetings and things there. I guess I remember all the older members and they all know me because of my grandmother and I was in this church all my life and there was a store on the corner of (??) and we all used to go there summertime we went to Bible School that would last from like 9 to 5 (laughs) where we all went and we had Christmas plays with Ms. Gertrude Childers was the superintendent of this church and I have fond memories of her because I thought she was the greatest lady cause every child in the church everybody in the church had a part no one was left out.

However small or large we all that participated. I was baptized here by Reverend Hunter(??) and I've been leaving and coming back, I've always been back you know in this church when we moved away when I got married and moved to Delaware and I came back it was still my home.

CR: When did you come back to Roanoke?

SA: Um in 60, uh 75, no I'm sorry in 77. I came back and I've been back ever since.

CR: Why did you come back?

SA: I missed home. (laughs) I'm a spoiled mamma's child.

CR: And where's your or did you have any children or your husband in the military?

SA: My husband's been in the military.

CR: Okay, did he fight any wars, okay just in ?

SA: No, my youngest son's been in the military for and he lives in Kansas now. My youngest daughter, my only daughter was born in Delaware the rest of my childrens were born here in Virginia.

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CR: And did your do you remember any businesses or shops that you all frequented here in Roanoke or that you?

SA: There was the pet stores and Ms. Libby's. This used to be the Commodore Inn the Shopwell and Mose Assick(??) those are the stores and all they knew us from children.

CR: Are all those buildings still here I know the Commodore is?

SA: The Mose Assick(??) is still there. The Commodore I think is still there Mose Essa(??) Store has moved from it's a church now. It used to be on Salem Avenue. It's now a church but they moved the shop way out on Patterson's so it's still there. There's Chuck's Seafood used to be a laundrymat and I don't know going to the laundrymat throwing away the redfire(??) going there to wash and dry my clothes. The Williamson Drug Store was on 13th Street. Everyone used that drug store. Let's see, there used to be a gas station it is what they call a fillin' station was right there on 11th Street and Sidmore(??) Avenue was owned by Turner's. There was this restaurant, can't remember its name, was right here on Salem Avenue. Can't remember the name right now. It was a black restaurant on right there on Salem Avenue and I guess it's what is on the ten hundred block.

CR: Did you go to the I guess Gainsboro area to go out for a nightlife?

SA: Oh we used to go to the "Y", to the "Y", we used to go the "Y" Orange Avenue skatin' is terrible(??). Little dances at the other Y the (boy's Y) in the evenings we went there.

CR: Was there ever a time when you recall not going on a certain side of town or you are not allowed to, do remember any?

SA : (Can't understand) I really wasn't caught up in that at the time but I do remember my cousins talking about that like Carvin(??) and Addison, I knew they didn't get along at the time. I remember that and the southwest boys weren't allowed to talk to the northwest girls and the southwest girls weren't allowed to talk to the northwest boys.

CR: Do you have any child memories that stand out that are either good or bad ?

SA: I had a fairly, a pretty good life growin' up. Well, like I said, I wasn't rich or anything like that but I think I got good memories of it. I made a lot of friends I knew a lot of people. I guess from me being as old as I am people say I know people from all over but I'm just a person that well I never meet strangers. I think that's the good part, a good thing.

CR: And what kind of work have you done throughout your life.

SA: Nursing assistant work.

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CR: Okay, do you still do that?

SA: I still do that.

CR: And you're still at Carilion?

SA: Oh no I'm at the VVC, the Virginia Veteran's Care Center.

CR: And do you use the public library?

SA: Yes.

CR: Which one do you use?

SA: The Gainsboro one.

CR: And what do you do?

SA: I get books and stuff and when I have my grandchildren in the summer time so we, it's an outing for us. Because my daughter is a teacher and when she leaves instructions for us, we have to go by. (chuckles) In the summer time my children from Kansas come in you know we go to the library, we go to the park, we got to the theaters we just a lot of family things together.

CR: Do you remember any cultural events during your childhood or teenage years?

SA: Oh yes one time we was not allowed to go to the Roanoke theater to me this was awful I only went four or five times I didn't like it because you had to walk up a lot of steps. And by the time you got to the top the movie was over it seemed like. I remember going downtown you couldn't drink out of certain fountains, couldn't use certain bathrooms, couldn't try on clothes stuff like that. I can remember my mother had to measure our foot with a string and that's how they'd size our shoes up. You couldn't just go in the store and try on shoes like we can now.

CR: Did you have to do that often is it something that you knew what you could and could not do?

SA: Yeah, because your parents would tell you what you could do.

CR: Did you ever ask or wonder why?

SA: Oh yeah 'cause he said we was black and they were white and they has signs up "Colored" and "White" and I guess I was young and didn't understand but there was one A&P Store we used to be a (??) and I think practically every child would have to sit in it so you knew not to move from that area until your parents come back.

CR: Where was that?

SA: At the A&P Grocery Store. They made their groceries well there was five of us she couldn't I guess carry five girls around in the store. She just let us sit there and the cashiers knew us so we knew not to act up (chuckles).

CR: Where was that?

SA: At the A&P. It was downtown Salem Avenue. It is now where the new bank it now. So we knew all the stores downtown and all the proprietors they knew us because, like I say, your parents, well my mother took us downtown every Saturday wif her so when we went around, we knew where to buy the eggs, where to buy this that because she taught us how to what you buy out of which area.

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CR: There are areas of the store that you could only go in?

SA: Yeah, was certain areas that we bought eggs from one area. This one particular place you just bought all eggs. You went on the other side and bought your fish you bought that from the fish market. They had something called the hallow market you bought certain meats you could buy bags of meats would last about \$10-15 to last for a month. So you could buy that supplies. I can remember I miss that because you could go downtown and to me it was beautiful to go downtown and just walk around

CR: It wasn't as many buildings.

SA: Yeah. But it was just beautiful, it was. And I mean the people knew you. You went into Cress's or Krogers or McClellans(??) those people there everybody knew everybody even though they was black and white but even the white people knew you they knew you as a child and they you didn't know the difference in the color. It didn't feature the difference.

CR: Okay. Did you have experience with you knew that you were different or somebody made it known that you were different, other than the signs?

SA: No, I never had that thank God (laughs).

CR: Did you have any community leaders or role models?

SA: Oh, yes, I think Alice Johnson, I think Alice Cooper Johnson, she was my ideal person.

CR: What does she do?
SA: She's retired from Housing Authority now.

CR: Okay.
SA: Ms. Virginia Hunter. She was a teacher. I thought the world of her. Like I said Gertrude Childress was my, quite a few.

CR: You mean they were your role models.
SA: Yes.

CR: Were there any community leaders that, activists or things in Roanoke at the time that people were fightin' for I guess your Martin Luther Kings and things like that in Roanoke?

SA: No, not that I remember.

CR: Okay.

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CR: Do you remember if any entertainers came to Roanoke? If so, who are some of the people who came?

SA: Let me see, James Brown, Little Richard, oh, I seen all them.

CR: Where did they perform?

SA: At the Star City.

CR: Okay and that was before the Civic Center was there, what was there at the Civic Center before they put the Civic Center up?

SA: It was houses, it was part of northeast and Star City was on Wells Avenue. It was considered part of Henry Street.

CR: How do you think Roanoke has changed over the years or some of the more bigger things that have changed either socially with people or things that have popped up businesses?

SA: Businesses have popped up, like the Dunk's Hotel (??). I was chaperoned(??) as a teenager I remember going to those and getting hot dogs, to me, they had the greatest hot dogs. When they took the Virginia Theater away, that was sad for me because we didn't have nowhere to go.

CR: Where did you go after that or what did you do after that?

SA: They had, I think they had opened up the American Theater, we could go there but it wasn't like the Virginia Theater.

CR: Were there other landmarks there that you hated to see go?

SA: At the time, when the Virginia Theater was there they had High Street Baptist Church was across the street from it and all the doctors, Dr. Ryan, Dr. Lauden(??), was all, no Dr. Lauden(??) was on Gainsboro, but the doctors were

there the Virginia Sanitary Barber Shop the Brooks Pharmacy(??) all of those were there.

CR: Did you remember Dr. Pinkard, I think was his name, he was a doctor.

SA: I have heard of Dr. Penn(??) was there I remember him and the Clays(??) but they were on Gainsboro. The Claytor Brothers(??), they were on Gainsboro.

CR: I guess one of the questions here is: Do you remember the closing of the silk mills?

SA: Yes, my uncle worked there.

CR: Do you remember how that affected the community?

SA: Pretty bad, 'cause I remember my uncle worked there and you know he was a person that had saved so it didn't really affect him as bad and everything but I remember people talking about it 'cause they didn't have jobs and that was.

CR: What did they do after that as far as jobs?

SA: I guess they picked up whatever they could at the time.

CR: Okay, and do you remember the types of jobs that were available for men and women in Roanoke?

SA: It wasn't that many. Not that I can remember not that many.

CR: The railroad was that employment?

SA: Yeah, the railroad was here but it was they was always laying the black men off seemed like, they were you know work for maybe four or five months and they'd get laid off or something like that.

CR: What do you have anything else that we might not have covered that you want to share or any stories?

SA: Only thing I say I tell everybody that they in high school to stay there and get an education it's the most important thing in the world. I regret that I didn't finish school but I know that I still can go but I keep putting it on the back burner but I'm gonna pick it up and I'm going to finish and get my GED. And I tell them that is the most important thing and go as far as they can go.

CR: Why do you think that?

SA: Because education is the key and it opens up doors and I've learned that from my daughter graduating from high school. Well all of my children graduated, every one of 'em and I've had two graduated from college and I'm very, very proud of them and I've seen how hard it is to not have an education is to get a job and nowadays you need an education just to wash dishes so that's telling these young children they in school stay there, get that piece of paper you know even if they have to go to night school please get that paper.

CR: Well, I really appreciate you talking to me, Ms. Anderson and if you have anything else that you wanna let us know, you can contact the library.
[End of interview.]