

Interviewee: Gladys Hilton Buckner

Interviewer: Tanya Weigel

Transcriber: Krissy Price

Note: Interviewer had issues with the microphone at the beginning of the interview, causing feedback.

TW: My name is Tanya Weigel and I'm interviewing Gladys Hilton Buckner at Jerusalem Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia. It's February 23, 2008.

TW: Where and when were you born?

GB: I was born in Prince Edward County Virginia December 17th 1936.

TW: How long have you lived in Roanoke?

GB: I've been in Roanoke...I've been in Roanoke since I was about 18 months old. And I've been here ever since, and after I graduated from high school I went to New York for about a year, and then I returned back to Roanoke, and I've been here ever since.

TW: Tell me about your parents, and brothers, and sisters.

GB: Ok. I have one brother, he's younger, and my mom's downstairs, and well I just had a good life. I've had a good life and I'm still having a good life. Well, I went to school and graduated from Lucy Addison High School in 1955. After graduation, that winter I was a debutante, and I worked. I worked at Burrell Hospital, and then, well I got married. I had three children. I worked at GE for 29 years. I'm retired and just enjoying life.

TW: What was your family life...home life like growing up in Roanoke?

GB: Oh...It was good. I enjoyed my childhood.

TW: What kind of activities did you do?

GB: Well...church, Sunday school, vacation bible school, and well, then growing up, before I started school, I would come out here to the church. Mrs. Hunter who was the pastor's wife, she had, well we called it play school. And I would come out to the play school, and that's other than you know being in the neighborhood with the other children in the neighborhood, come out here to Miss Hunters' play school, and just enjoyed myself. We rode our bicycles, we skated, and we played. Then when I did grow on up, I would say the children now they really don't know what playing is. Because we could take a stick or a leaf and we would really have a good time. We would have tea parties, and we got along very well. Then you know winter was winter then. And it was snow. Then, snow did not keep us from going to school. We went to school and teachers when they had their meetings we were over in the classroom doing assignments and they had their meeting and things have changed. And you know when my children grew up they, you know, teachers had a meeting they were out of school. We went to school snow, rain, sleet, whatever. We went to school, and when there was snow when I was a child on

14th Street we would sleigh ride because that was a hill and we would sleigh ride and we just had a lot of fun. And I really enjoyed...I enjoyed growing up.

TW: What was your house like? Did you have a yard or...?

GB: Oh yes we had a yard. We had a front yard. We had a back yard. We had a swing in the porch, and well I enjoyed that swing.

TW: Did your family sit there together?

GB: Yeah. And we ate meals together and that's something families very rarely do nowadays, but when my children were growing up we sat down at the table. We said our blessing and we ate together, and then, they grew up, finished school, went their separate ways, but when they, you know, when they do come we all...we eat together, and I always have Thanksgiving dinner, and then my mother at one time you know, she would always have Christmas dinner and we always went to mom's for Christmas dinner, and it's just like a family reunion. We just have a good time.

TW: Did you have extended family living nearby growing up?

GB: Oh yeah. My grandparents. Well I was...well I was around my grandparents a lot because my mom worked and I was with them. Her youngest siblings, before they grew up and got married and moved out. You know I basically grew up around them, and just had a lot of fun.

TW: What type of work did your family do?

GB: Well, my grandmother didn't work. My grandfather worked for the railroad, and basically mama was a hairdresser. So that's basically what she did.

TW: Did anyone in your family attend college?

GB: Yeah, my cousins and my husband. He went to school for a while, but he didn't finish. He went to college about a year. After he got out of the service.

TW: What type of work did you and your husband do?

GB: Well he started out working at the veterans and then he went to GE to work. And that's where I worked. I worked out in the factory. Well we both did. I was a wireman, assembled the wire, and he was a wireman also.

TW: Then he was in the service?

GB: Yeah, my husband he did. Yeah he was in the navy for four years.

TW: Anyone else in your family in the military?

GB: My grandson and then cousins, and my brother was in the service. My uncle, my father was in World War II.

TW: What is your fondest childhood memory?

GB: Oh gracious I have a lot of those.

TW: Well that's fine.

GB: Yeah I do. Ok. I enjoyed...ok...my mother's youngest brother he was like three years older than me. And he would shoot marbles, and I liked to shoot marbles. He taught me how to shoot marbles. Well as a matter of fact he taught me how to do a lot of things. But I did enjoyed shooting marbles. And there was a game called Jack rocks. I liked playing Jack rocks. And I liked skating also, but I had a lot of fun.

TW: What type of cultural events were happening when you were growing up around here?

GB: Alright...We would go...every year there was a May Day program, and there was an auditorium, we would go to the auditorium to see plays. And then we used to go Maher Field, Victory Stadium was called Maher Field then. We would go there for different things. Alright like there was always...oh what do you call it. It's been so long I can't remember exactly everything. Oh it was like May Day and it was...they had a pole and they had the streamers, and different color streamers, and we would wrap the May Pole. Then there was different things. There were ball games. We did that.

TW: Who were the main community leaders at that time growing up?

GB: Let's see there was a man. Ok. The scout leader... There was Paul Scott and then there was a lady named Juanita Jones. She was this Girl Scout leader, and wait a minute there was somebody else. Paul Scott, Juanita, and it was somebody else too. And of course Reverend Hunter. He was the pastor here then, and there was a pastor here before Reverend Hunter, but I am really not too familiar with him. I've heard...I saw him, but I wasn't that familiar with him. But Reverend Hunter was the pastor that I was most familiar with, and I basically looked at him as the leader of Southwest because he did...he really did you know. He made the community aware of things that was going on in the city, and well I will always remember Reverend Hunter. I say Reverend Hunter was the father of the Southwest.

TW: Did you have any other role models in your life?

GB: Reverend Hunter other than Reverend Hunter. Ok. My mother's oldest sister. She died when I was young, but I always visualized her because, I guess, because during the summer she would come and get me and take me to Baltimore. But she dies when I was about nine or ten years old. But I remember her, and then my mother's two younger sisters, see I was around them a lot. They were more or less, I guess, sisters because they carried me around with them a lot. And the youngest one was very mischievous. Yeah.

TW: What types of stores and businesses did you family go to around here?

GB: Oh. Grocery store at that time it was like Heironimus, N.W. Pugh's, and let's see there was Phelps and Armstead, and I can't think if there was another. And then they would go down to the market, but yeah.

TW: What types of jobs were available for people at that time?

GB: Well mostly...it was, well for the women it was mostly domestic work. Well, it's still domestic. They worked in homes, and like cleaning in the hospitals, cleaning. I still say domestic work. And the men they mostly...most of the men worked for the railroad, and then there was another plant here all I know is that they called it the silk mill. But I can't tell you what they you know what they produced or anything like that. But that was mostly what was available then.

TW: What do you think are the biggest changes you've seen in Roanoke since your childhood?

GB: The biggest changes? Well integration was one big change. And then I guess, well there has been a lot of changes like, you know, the malls came and alright. When I was growing up there was transportation. Streetcars. I used to like to ride streetcars, changes like that. Streetcars and then the buses came, so the buses are still here but you know that...See, when I'm sitting at home by myself I can think of a lot of things, but when you need to you can't remember. Basically...

TW: Is there anything else you'd like to mention about what you think about Roanoke or your neighborhood here?

GB: Well, the neighborhood... I don't know, it seems like this was a vibrant neighborhood, but it seems like in the past few years, even now, it sorta pushed this neighborhood aside. See a lot of things that's going on in the other neighborhoods, it seems like the city has just more or less said forget Southwest. But basically it's a good place to live.

TW: Any other memories?

GB: Oh I have lots of memories. Oh yeah I have a lot of memories.

TW: Any you'd like to share?

GB: Yeah, I still have friends that live up here. But you know basically it all...everybody has basically moved out of Roanoke, and some... they leave but they come back. I guess because of the housing that is why a lot of them are not in Southwest. They in Northwest, Northeast. The majority they come...when they do come back they basically go to the county. And see Roanoke...I don't know...well, the majority they come...when they do come back they basically go to the county. And see Roanoke...I don't know. There is something...well I feel my friends that live in the county they say Roanoke is not...they say Roanoke is really basically you paying, paying, paying taxes. Your taxes constantly go up, but they're not getting what they're paying for, so... I wouldn't know what they pay in the county because I don't live in the county. Now this is...ok I have a friend that lives in northern Virginia, and she tells me Roanoke is money hungry, but what are they doing with the money? Said look at Salem, said Salem has moved on and Roanoke is doing nothing. I told her I said they're doing something. She said

no what are they doing? She said seems like there is in fighting. I told her, maybe so I don't know. But she says well I'm trying to think. No she still has relatives here, but her parents...I think her parents are deceased. She says, I retired, but I am in Virginia but I'm not coming back to Roanoke. She said I'll stay in northern Virginia. She worked in D.C. I think she worked in D.C. and New York, and she says Virginia...she says Roanoke, Virginia...she says Roanoke really should be on the map. And I said we are on the map. She says but...she says, my friends consider Roanoke is country. I said Roanoke is not country. She said, yes it is. She says Roanoke. She says Roanoke is just not moving. She says Roanoke is at a standstill. She says Roanoke hasn't improved too much since I left. She's I've been gone thirty some years. I said well yes you're right. She says I left from high school. I said well that's more than thirty years you know. She says yeah but she says, no...Roanoke is not it's not growing. And she says Roanoke is just at a standstill. She says what does Roanoke have to offer? I said well there's a lot to do if you want to do something. I said there's the symphony and there are plays and everything.

TW: Do you think there is a time when that changed? That you remember?

GB: Now I'm going to say this. Revitalization, I think has a lot to do with Roanoke not expanding. And now like the Civic Center, Magic City Ford and all those. See, that was a neighborhood. People lived down there and now you see what there the Civic Center, Magic City Ford. And I think that drove a lot of the residents of Roanoke out of Roanoke. I don't know. I guess because I grew up here and while I tried New York, but New York is cold. The people in Roanoke are friendly, and when you're just out of high school and you go to a place like New York. That's a ... that's a drastic change. And see I couldn't adjust to it. I'm the type of person if I see you, I say hello. I say hello to you and you know what are you speaking to me for, you know. That type of attitude, and you live next door to each other and you don't even you know nothing. You don't even speak. I just couldn't adjust. So, I said I'll try it. I tried it and I said no, this is not the place for me, so I came back. I've been here ever since, and it just so happened that my husband...well see we met in high school, and he went into the service he came back. Now he lived away for a while, but he came back. So that's it, and the majority of us, well the majority of my friends, we stayed, some left and came, some didn't and but the ones that I was more closer to, they, you know, they stayed here. A couple said no I'm not going anywhere else. They stayed right here you know. The majority of us are family oriented, so we don't go too far from family. Family and friends, and you go to a place like New York you don't find that.

TW: Anything else?

GB: No

TW: Thank you