

Interviewee: Woody, Vivian
Interviewer: Arlene Ollie
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

Today is February 23, 2008. I am about to interview Vivian Marie Poindexter Woody. We are located at Jerusalem Baptist Church.

AO: We'll start off by my asking you – We don't have to go to this script. Anything you want to talk about is fine. They just have some suggestions for background questions which is: When and where were you born? Uh, how you grew up, that kind of thing. I know that you were born in Charleston, West Virginia.

WV: Yes, I was.

AO: And, what's your birthdate?

WV: August 22, 1926.

AO: How long have you lived in Roanoke?

WV: We came to Roanoke approximately in 1947.

AO: And, um, I know that you settled in Northwest. Do you want to give a brief rundown of the streets and neighborhoods that you lived in prior to...?

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WV: When we first came to Roanoke, we lived on 14th Street for a short time. We had one child at that time when we came to Roanoke. And then we moved to Loudon Avenue. We stayed a short time. Another child was born and we went back to Rocky Mount and stayed maybe 6 or 8 months. Then, we came back to Roanoke and we lived on Wells Avenue. We stayed on Wells Avenue and then we moved to Fairfax Avenue. We had a small house and then another house became available and we went to Harrison Avenue and we lived there for maybe a year or two. And then we were able to buy a home and we moved to Rorer Avenue and that's where we raised 4 children and we are still on Rorer Avenue. The only people in our block who, now the only people who, that, - everyone else is gone. A lot of the neighbors have died and we are the only ones left.

AO: Of the original people?

WV: Mm mm

AO: Wow. So when did you move on Rorer?

WV: 1954.

AO: 1954.

WV: Yes.

AO: That's a good little while.

WV: Mm mm

AO: Tell me about your parents, brothers, sisters? Did you have any?

WV: My parents – It was my mother and my father and a brother. My father died when I was about 18 or 19 years old. My mother died in 1977. She was over here with us by that time.

AO: Is your brother still living?

WV: No, he's not.

AO: OK. Do you have any extended family members living nearby? Aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews?

WV: I have a cousin.

AO: Here in Roanoke?

WV: Yes.

AO: That's great. Would you describe your house that you, well, your house in Roanoke is on Rorer?

WV: Mm mm

AO: Is it a brick house?

WV: No, its a frame house.

AO: Do you have a garden?

WV: I used to have a flower garden but I'm not able to keep that up anymore.

AO: What kind of activities did you participate in?

WV: Church. Morningstar was a big part of my life and all through the years. The church was there when we moved up there and the minister came and he was looking for members. He invited us to the church and I was glad to have a church that I could walk to because it was right down the street. I found a lot of activities and love participating and loved working with the children in the community. There were lots of children in the community.

AO: How about now?

WV: Not as many as there used to be. You know its -

AO: Yeah. What kind of work did your family do?

WV: My mother was a domestic. She did domestic housework and what-not. She came over here and found work after my father died. My dad was a clothes presser. He worked in a dry-cleaning establishment.

AO: Did he work here?

WV: He would come over here and find work in dry cleaners over here. He would stay a while and he would come back. When work got slack in Rocky Mount and what-not. He did come over here at one time. But, it was work over there to do and he worked in it. He was a good presser and he was also a barber.

AO: Great.

WV: Mm mm.

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AO: Tell me about your school life? For instance, where did you attend school? Did you walk? Were you ever allowed to stay home from school.

WV: No. (Laughing) No. School was a wonderful experience. You went to school everyday and you looked forward to going to school. I graduated from Franklin County Training School and had the opportunity to go to West Virginia State.

AO: Did you attend?

WV: Uh huh.

AO: Great. Did you graduate?

WV: For a while, no, no. When I found out that I had to take public speaking for the next semester, I said no and they told me how that teacher was and what-not. (Laughing) And I was a shy person and I did not go back.

AO: So how long did you stay?

WV: That semester.

AO: Just one semester?

WV: Mm mm. But I was able to find a job as a substitute teacher in the school system over in Franklin County. And I taught school at a 2 room school for one year and then I got married.

AO: Did you work during the time you were married?

WV: Not very much. I stayed at home until the last children – I think Andrea had finished school, Miranda was getting ready to finish and I found a job as a teacher's aide over at Hurt Park and I worked over there.

AO: Really?

WV: Mm mm.

AO: That's great. OK, during you growing up years – So, you grew up in Rocky Mount?

WV: Mm mm.

AO: Would you describe your homelife? For instance, did you gather around the radio in the evening?

WV: Yes

AO: Do you remember when you got a phone/refrigerator, that kind of thing?

WV: I don't think we had a – we had an ice box and the man would come and bring the ice with the tongs and what-not. And, I don't think we got a refrigerator until I had left home. But the radio, I remember listening to the prize fights, Joe Lewis, and listening to the ball games and I was always a Yankee fan. I always have been and always will be, no matter what comes. (Interviewer Laughing)

AO: Did you sit on the porch in the evening?

WV: Yes, we did. During the summertime, we would have watermelon and we'd put the watermelon out in the grass on a rainy day or something and it would cool, a cool day, you know? And in the evening, we would cut the watermelon and have watermelon.

AO: Alright. What chores did you have to do around the house?

WV: Washing dishes and helping to iron. My mother worked and sometimes when she would come home, she took in washings. Sometimes I would have things that I could do. I would have that iron and press and such as filling the wood box. I would go out and cut/split kindling wood and what-not and have the wood box filled so she wouldn't have to do that in the evening. And I helped her to wash and hang up clothes. We had a garden and we would have to pull weeds. We would pick beans and all things like that. It was a good life.

AO: Sounds like it.

WV: Mm mm. And school, like I said, I loved school.

AO: Was it far from your home?

WV: No, I was right at school. I could walk up the path to school. The children that came on the bus, they all liked to come home with me to lunch and I met a boy, a young man, not too long ago over to the funeral home, and he remembered coming down to my house because we had a big pear tree and he said he had never tasted pears as good as those pears. (Both laughing) And I said, "I thought you kids were coming home with me because they liked me". (Both laughing)

AO: That's cute.

WV: They always came home with me to lunch. (Laughing)

AO: That's fantastic. Did your parents pass down any family stories, you know, about their growing up, their parents, their childhood?

WV: Uh, my mother grew up on a farm and I was able to go back to her home and spend the summers on that farm and what-not.

AO: Was that in Franklin County also?

WV: That's in Botetourt County.

AO: OK. Where in Botetourt?

WV: Uh -

AO: Fincastle, Eagle Rock -

WV: They called it Buchanan where we were. The Barnetts from Botetourt County.

AO: Ed Barnett?

WV: Ed Barnett is my granddaddy.

AO: OK

WV: My grandmother's name was Iantha, Ianthia.

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AO: OK. Did your husband or sons serve in the military.

WV: Yes, he did.

AO: In which wars?

WV: WWII. He has great stories to tell about that because he was in the area where the Aborigines were and he liked to talk about them.

AO: That sounds interesting.

WV: Their customs and what-not and he was telling me the other day how they fished, how they found some substance in the water and they would get it out, I guess it was some kind of wood. And he said

that they could get it out. It was soft when they got it out. They trimmed it and shaped it and laid it out to get dry. They could stand in the water and watch the fish and spear the fish and that substance got just as hard as anything.

AO: That is interesting. Did he come down with you today?

WV: No, he's not able to come.

AO: Would he be willing to be interviewed by someone if they came down?

WV: I don't know. (Laughing)

AO: We'll have to call him and ask him. 'Cause it would be great to get his stories about being in Australia. That would be fantastic. OK. What businesses and shops did you and your husband frequent? I'm curious. I would say this briefly, with the research that I've been doing, it seems as if Salem Avenue was almost like Henry Street to Northwest. It seemed to be a lot of businesses on Salem Avenue. Were they there when you came to Roanoke. 'Cause the years that I've noticed this is back like in 1915. Right out in here 'cause Dr. Pinkert (??) had a hotel.

WV: You know I didn't know anything about that.

AO: OK, so that was all gone by the time you got here?

WV: Mm mm.

AO: So, where'd you shop? You know, grocery shop?

WV: Where did I grocery shop? Hmm There was a – When we moved up here, there was a store – I'm thinking it was a Kroger Store.

AO: Really?

WV: You know where Save 'n Shop is, Claude's store now?

AO: Uh huh.

WV: Long years ago, that was a grocery store and I think it was a Kroger Store, now I'm not sure. I'm really not sure.

AO: What's the name of that street? Patterson?

WV: Patterson Avenue.

AO: I'll have to check into that. Did you go down on the market?

WV: Some. I can't really remember where we got most of our groceries at that time.

AO: What if you just wanted to, say, go out as a family, where would you go?

WV: Go out as a family – I can't remember. I don't think – I can't remember or recall it right off. I remember going to that store that I was telling you, like the grocery store, for 4th of July and I bought some things and he bought some things and he had bought practically the same thing that I bought. (Interviewer laughing)

AO: Did you ever go to Henry Street for anything?

WV: The most thing – Now we were talking about that a couple of days ago and I saw the little article about the Brooks in the Tribune.

AO: Albert Brooks?

WV: Mm mm. And I told him, I said, “Maybe that was Dr. Brooks' people”. It wasn't?

AO: No. He came out of Wirtz in Franklin County, Albert Brooks did. Um, I said I was going to do the genealogy to see if there is any connection at all but he was John M. Brooks that owned Brooks Pharmacy. That was what you were talking about.

WV: Uh huh. We used to go there sometimes and get a sandwich and I told him, good liver cheese sandwiches.

AO: Really?

WV: And it was a nice place to go in. Quiet. And that's the only place that I really remember going on Henry Street. Otherwise, I don't remember anything else. And he told me that there was a club up over there, 308 Club or something like that, over the drug store.

AO: Mm mm, yeah. I don't know when it started though. Yeah, it was. I know it was there when we moved back to Virginia in 1962.

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WV: OK. And went to Virginia Theatre and otherwise, it wasn't a whole lot of going out for me. Now, he may have known places to go and what-not, but I didn't.

AO: Mm mm, OK. What is your fondest childhood memory? For example, was it a holiday event or a family vacation or a gift that you received? Just a memory that brings you pleasure like you talked about the kids coming home with you for lunch from school. Anything that sticks out in your mind about your childhood.

WV: I don't remember anything. Christmas was always a nice memories and getting a box from my grandmother at Christmastime. We looked forward to that.

AO: Do you use the public library?

WV: Yes. I talked about the library on my way down here.

AO: Really?

WV: I miss the library when I moved to Southwest because I used to walk to the library from Harrison Avenue.

AO: Down to Gainsboro?

WV: To get books. Uh huh. And I miss the library.

AO: So you didn't got to any of the dances and..?

WV: No.

AO: Who were some of the strong community leaders during that time? Did you have any role models?

WV: I remember Miss Lee being a figure. Virginia Lee?

AO: Mm mm. Anybody else come to mind?

WV: I remember some ladies that used to go up to the VA and entertain the patients, Miss Mary Claytor. I met her when I came to Roanoke, when we lived on Fairfax. She and her daughter Mary Claytor, they kinda took us as their children, she and Mr. Claytor and they took my children, the two older children to First Baptist and they were nice people to know and what-not. When you're young and living, you know, and I really appreciated them. They were like family to us.

AO: How has Roanoke changed over the years?

WV: How has Roanoke changed over the years?

AO: Do you remember the closing of the silk mills. Did they have any effect on you and your family?

WV: Not really. Not really. 'Cause I didn't, I never worked at that. My husband never worked at that. He went to the VA. Well he worked for Kroger and he went to the VA. He worked for Rainbow Bakery. He worked for Kroger Bakery and finally he went to the VA.

AO: Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to share with us?

WV: I can't think of anything else.

AO: OK, well I thank you so much for coming down this morning and sharing your story with us and I will make sure that someone gets in touch with you about the pictures that you had that you wanted us to see. And about seeing if we can get someone to interview your husband if he'd like to be interviewed. So, again...

WV: What kind of pictures would you be interested in? When I think about the neighborhood and what-not, I think about the children that have grown up...

AO: In that neighborhood. And perhaps even if you have say pictures of just your general surroundings, your house, what the neighborhood looked like.

WV: Mm mm.

AO: You know, before now, today. Any kind of visible change that can be discerned through the photographs.

WV: Oh, I was talking to a child that came to see me. She used to live on Rorer and I was showing her some pictures and her husband was with her and he was talking about the trees and what-not and wanted to know if those trees were there and I said, "Yes, there was a tree-lined street when we moved

up there but they kept trimming the trees off of the line and what-not and finally the trees just got old and disappeared and what-not. It was was a beautiful tree-lined street, Rorer was.

AO: On both sides or one side?

WV: On both sides.

AO: Times have truly changed.

WV: Mm mm.

AO: Truly changed. And again I want to thank you for coming in.

WV: It was a good neighborhood and I was telling somebody, the kids used to play football in the street because there were so many kids and what-not. And they would send the police out. (Both laughing) Everybody would scatter.

AO: Everybody was running then, right?

WV: Right, uh huh.