

Interviewer: Robert Dulin
Interviewee: Delois Broady
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Location: Lucy Addison Middle School
TranscribeRD: Chelsea Seddon

RD: All right, this is Robbie Dulin. It is March 15, 2010 and I am interviewing Ms. Delois Broady at Lucy Addison Middle School. All right, Ms. Broady, thank you for being with us. My first question is, where and when were you born?

DB: I was born in Roanoke, July 20, 1931.

RD: And approximately how long have you lived in Roanoke?

DB: All my life.

RD: Wow. You've probably seen a lot of history here.

DB: (Laughs) Yes.

RD: What streets and neighborhoods did you live in?

DB: I lived in the area, it was called the Gainsboro area. I lived on McDowell Avenue, Northwest.

RD: Was that near Henry Street at all?

DB: Henry Street was about...Gainsboro area is near Henry Street. I guess about four or five blocks, and we would run into Henry Street.

RD: All right. Tell me about your parents and brothers and sisters. Did they have extended family members living nearby?

DB: I lived with my mother and father, and I had one sister, and I had a brother who lived in West Virginia until his senior year in high school and then he came to Roanoke and went to Lucy Addison High School.

RD: Oh okay. Did you go to Lucy Addison High School?

DB: I did. I certainly did.

RD: Can you please describe your house for us, for instance, was it brick, or did you have a garden?

DB: My house was four rooms, just a frame, a little frame house, not a lot of fancy furniture or anything like that. We didn't even have sidewalks, the cement sidewalks?

RD: Mmhmm.

DB: But there was love in the house and my mother loved flowers. We had lots...her favorite flowers were pansies and nasturtiums and she planted those flowers every spring, and we just looked forward to those pretty little pansies popping up out of the ground. No lawn to cut, trim, or anything like that.

RD: Nice. (laughs) What kind of activities did you participate in, around the house, around the neighborhood?

DB: Around the house we had our assigned chores to do, like washing the dishes, making the beds, dusting and cleaning, the usual things for housekeeping. We didn't do much cooking. We didn't do much washing and ironing. We just...as we got older we did the ironing. Mama took care of the washing and the ironing and the cooking. As far as activities outside of the school activities, we went to the YWCA, I went to the YWCA. There was a girls' club, I don't remember the exact name of the girls' club but we did a little community work and we did crafts and things of that sort. Not much...I didn't do much...we went to church. And the church that I attended was a Methodist church and we had a youth group there and we did mostly learning about the Bible and the Ten Commandments and those kinds of things. I think my first major activity outside of school, home and church was the junior prom that I attended. And we decorated the gym at the school ourselves, we had a theme, please don't ask me to name the theme.

RD: (laughs) Okay.

DB: (laughs) But we had a theme and we did our own decorating. We had to cut the paper strips, you know how you buy them now? We cut them with a paper cutter and I did remember one incident about that particular prom. We were...schools exchanged choirs in competition and a choir from the Tidewater was coming up for competition at that time and as we were cutting the paper, somebody said, "They are here." And I think I got so excited when I heard, "They are here" that I caught my finger under the paper cutter. Now that was...that kind of put a little damper on things but they took care of it in the nurse's station and we went right on with the activity of decorating.

RD: What kind of work did your family do?

DB: My dad worked for Norfolk and Western. He was a car cleaner. They didn't provide...the African-American's at that time did the menial jobs, the labor jobs, and he cleaned the cars. That was his job. My mom did not work outside of the house until I was in high school. And she substituted in the school cafeterias, cooking.

RD: Did you ever have an afterschool job or anything like that growing up?

DB: Not during my high school days, I didn't. My job was to hit the books and make good grades and plan on doing something with my life. (laughs)

RD: Okay. We're going to talk a little bit about your school life. You said you attended Lucy Addison?

DB: Yes.

RD: Did you walk to school or did you take the bus?

DB: Walked. Walked to school. Rain, snow, sleet or shine, we went to school.

RD: No snow days back then?

DB: No snow days. No "too hot" days, nothing like that. We went to school every day.

RD: So I guess you never wanted to stay home from school just...

DB: Only if we had severe illnesses, not a little cough, but if we had...childhood diseases that I remember: I had measles. I didn't have mumps until I was an adult. When my daughter had mumps, then I had mumps. We had measles, we had chicken pox and... Maybe if we had a really, really bad cold, but I don't even remember being, missing school a lot because of illnesses.

RD: Okay. How much schooling did you complete, obviously you went through...

DB: Finished college and did studies beyond, but I have only one degree.

RD: What college did you go to?

DB: I went to Virginia State College in Petersburg.

RD: Did a lot of African-Americans go to college then? Or...

DB: Most of my friends did. Most of my friends went to school. In fact, during senior year, several girls formed a club, and we called ourselves "The Orange Blossom Soarers", and we used to go down to...Addison was the old school where the administration building is now. And we used to go down...during lunch time we'd go down to the playground and it was lined with orange blossoms and that's where we got the idea, name of "Orange Blossom". And we stayed together that senior year. When we graduated from high school, we disbanded and most of, all of us went to college, went away to college. Maybe one or two stayed and got jobs in the city. And after we finished college, we came back in Roanoke and started this club again, and we now exist as Omnia Bona Club Inc. So that club grew out of the high school gathering and we're kind of proud of that. (laughs)

RD: Did anyone else in your family attend college?

DB: My sister attended one yea, and she became ill and had to come out of school, and she didn't go back.

RD: Okay. Can you please describe your home life for us? For instance, did you gather around the radio in the evening, or maybe the first time you got a refrigerator or a telephone.

DB: (laughs) I do remember having an ice box to keep our foods refrigerated that sat on our back porch. And I don't know if you all know anything about an ice box or not, but the ice man would come through the neighborhood and sell blocks of ice and you could get twenty-five pounds or fifty pounds, that kind of thing. And I don't remember the year, the exact date or anything, but I do remember when we got our first refrigerator. That was a major, major thing for us. We had radio. That was our at-home entertainment. I vaguely remember when we got our first black-and-white TV. I guess I...I'm almost sure

I was in college when we got our first TV. We didn't have telephone. We used...if we needed emergency calls, people needed to call us at a neighbor's house across the street. When I first started major dating after I graduated from college, my today's husband used to call me at the neighbor's house across the street. And then the everyday chores of keeping a house and those kinds of things we did on a routine basis.

RD: Okay. Did you ever sit on the porch in the evening?

DB: Sat on the porch a lot. Yes, we did. We certainly did. And earlier you asked me about having a job in high school. I didn't have a job but we were like neighborhood errand people. People...I remember we lived on a hill, like. And the store, there was a grocery store at the foot of the hill. And I would go up and down that hill for family or neighbors or anybody, you know, anybody in the neighborhood. And the...in the earlier days, four was like five cents a pound, sugar ran something like ten cents a pound, and we bought things by the pound. We could also keep our count at the grocery store and my dad got paid once a month and we would pay that bill off before we started another one. but we could keep, get like a loaf of bread or the things that we called staple foods at the grocery store. And when you'd go to the store, the neighbors would say thank you sometimes and then sometimes they would say, you can keep the penny change or the nickel change and that was like really a great reward. So that's was probably as much work that we did, I did.

RD: Okay. Did you, a spouse, or children ever serve in the military?

DB: My husband was in the military. He was in the army, and he spent...all this happened before I married him. He spent a good time in the European theater. He was in World War II. He spent a good time in the European theater. When he went over, they were close to ending the war and just had to secure the place and see that it was kept secure.

RD: So he was just, like, military police then?

DB: Well, technically his job was in the...he cooked. He cooked.

RD: Okay. Were there any businesses or shops that your family frequented a lot? I know you said the grocery store.

DB: Yes, the grocery store. And there were the stores on Henry Street. And we could walk to Henry Street, I guess, four, let's see, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three...so I guess it was about seven blocks to Henry Street, seven blocks to Henry Street. And on Henry Street, there were places like...there was a drug store...my dentist was off Henry Street, but I could walk to that. We had bus transportation but we didn't use it, because we were strong enough and healthy enough to walk. And across, we would walk across Henry Street, cross a bridge and we would be in the downtown area of Roanoke, and the downtown area of Roanoke at that time had department stores like Heironimus and N.W. Pugh and those places and Woolworth's Five and Ten. The fountains were segregated, the bathrooms were segregated, and my mom instilled in us, take care of your private business before you go to town. Do not drink from the segregated fountain. Do not use the segregated bathroom. Go down there and do

what you go to town for and come back home. And that's what we did. When we needed a dress for a special occasion, she would go with us, and we just went to the store, made the purchase, and came back to our side of town.

RD: Okay. Do you recall any instances where, like, somebody used the wrong drinking fountain or anything?

DB: I don't, I don't recall anything like that. I think we were kind of sheltered, like, from it, because she just made a point, be sure you do not attempt to drink, you know, from the fountain. Do not go to the bathroom. And we never had emergencies, because that was ingrained in us, you know. We went to town...I'm sure there were incidents that occurred, but...when the integration process started, I guess I was in, ready to go to college then, and they...I don't remember the incidents that occurred to bring us through that.

RD: What was it like after the integration, when there were no segregated stalls or anything? Was it surreal or..?

DB: Actually, I...the first time that I went to the American Theatre--that was a segregated situation--I was just so disappointed because when I walked in there, in the part that I could really get into, that they had kept us out of, I was just shocked that...why couldn't I go in there, because it was not that grandiose or anything like that. I do remember going to the movies downtown and sitting in the balcony and they were not well-kept and there were little visitors there, little mice that ran around. And because of that situation, we just didn't go there that often; we just stayed away from those things.

RD: Okay. What was your fondest childhood memory? Like a favorite family vacation or a gift or..?

DB: I guess my fondest memory...because my dad worked for the N&W, he could get free passes that allowed us to ride the train from Norfolk, Virginia, to Cincinnati, Ohio, and in the summertime that was like a, almost like routine thing, we would get on the train and you could ride down to Norfolk, get out and spend the day down there. Or we would ride up to Cincinnati and get out and spend the day there, go to the zoo. Those are memorable occasions to us. My grandparents lived in Bluefield, West Virginia, and that, we could ride the train to Bluefield. In the summertime, we would go there and spend some time there with my grandparents. And those were fun days.

RD: Now you said you went to Cincinnati...that was desegregated. Was it a change to go from segregation to desegregations and then back to segregation?

DB: Well, the things that we did...we just, we would concentrate on staying in, mostly around the train station. Have lunch, there was a zoo in Cincinnati, we always went to that zoo, and we didn't encounter any situations there, it was just fun. That I remember.

RD: Okay. What kind of work have you done throughout your life?

DB: Well, I was a teacher for thirty years. I retired in 1990. Since then, my husband is in the ministry now. He was not always in the ministry; he was not in the ministry when I married him. And we do

visitations. Sick people, we visit sick people. I did, I belonged to Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. That was the sorority that I joined when I was in college. And we have community projects that I participate in. The group Omnia Bona Inc. is somewhat like a sorority. It's a sisterhood and we do community projects and I spend time doing that. What, one of the after-retirement projects that we did...we had a reading academy through the sorority and we'd go after school and help second- and third-graders with their reading problems. That's about it. Volunteer work. And I read a lot. I don't read as much now as I used to, because I have had one cataract removed and I need to have the other one removed and I haven't had that done yet. So I don't read quite as much as I used to.

RD: Did you ever use the public library for reading?

DB: Yes, yes I did. (laughs) When we were growing up, we used the Gainsboro Library. And it was always a treat to go to the Gainsboro Library. The...Virginia Y. Lee, the lady who was responsible for getting the Gainsboro Library started was the librarian. She was very kind to us when we would come in. And I on occasion do use the library downtown. I have two grandchildren that excite me. And their activities now are sort of like, anything that they're in, I try to be involved in that. The boy is twenty, in fact, he was twenty yesterday, he goes to school at North Carolina Central. He plays baseball for them; they're not doing too well right now. The granddaughter is sixteen and she's a junior in high school, and she'd passionate about dance. She dances competitively and whenever I can, I go to North Carolina to become involved in either her recitals or the boy's activities and school.

RD: Okay. Do you remember who some of the strong community leaders were and what role they played in the Civil Rights movement or just anytime in Roanoke?

DB: Well, I know Reverend Wilkerson was instrumental in...He was very much involved in the integration role. Reverend Taylor, he was mayor of Roanoke. He was involved in community activities and my husband is a member of his church and I became involved in a lot of activities that were going on at High Street. My husband also has his church in Fincastle, Virginia. And he goes, pastors there on two Sundays, and then we minister to the congregation by visiting them. There was a lawyer in Roanoke, Reuben Lawson; he was instrumental in the integration process. I always looked up to my teachers; my teachers were sort of like my role models. They were good, they were caring, they taught character-building as well as education, and that impressed me a lot. My teachers impressed me a lot.

RD: Did you try carry on that when you became a teacher?

DB: I think I did. I think I did. I tried to show concern for my students and I was a pretty strong disciplinarian. And I think I picked all of that up from the teachers that I had had before me. And then several of the female teachers that I had were members of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and that influenced my going into that sorority, as well as my sister, she, the year that she was in school, she was in the pledge club. And she had pledged the Ivy League club, which was the...it's different today; you stayed in the pledge club before you could go into the sorority at that time. So those were my influences in going into the sorority.

RD: Okay. Can you describe any cultural events that happened in Roanoke, like for entertainers that came, big names or..?

DB: Mahalia Jackson came to Roanoke, Cab Calloway came to Roanoke. Can't think of the man's name, he sang "Lordy, Lordy, Miss Claudy," and I know you all don't know anything about that song, but...and he played a guitar, I can just see him running across that stage. I could not go to places to see things like that until after I went to college, but I do remember we had Mahalia Jackson in the Valley View Mall. She performed there. The other people that come to mind, I saw those people after I graduated college in Greensboro, North Carolina. Thinking about Roanoke, I can't think of anybody else right now.

RD: What were some of the biggest changes you've seen in the City of Roanoke over the years?

DB: I think the major change in Roanoke has been the redeveloping area. The part of Gainsboro that I grew up in is no longer there. The hill that I lived on, they leveled that and today, in that general area, there are some industries, there's a hotel, motel, the Orange Avenue Family Center was there, it is where it is now, so it's still there, the section before you get to the catholic church and that area all has been leveled and there are some new, small homes there, because when they leveled the street that I lived on, we... my dad was able to get a grant and he rebuilt on another street in that same area, so I think the redeveloping areas were the major things that changed Roanoke. The Downtown area is nothing like it was when I was growing up. The malls came in and all of the businesses moved out to the malls, stores moved out to the malls. The way Downtown is now is much different than it was when I was growing up.

RD: Do you remember the closing of the silk mills, at all?

DB: Vaguely, very vaguely.

RD: You said most of the jobs available for men and women in Roanoke were service oriented before integration.

DB: Yes, before integration. The Norfolk and Western was the main employment for people of color and the Veterans Hospital in Salem.

RD: Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to share with us today?

DB: I can't think of anything else. I think that about covers it.

RD: Well, thank you so much for your time.

DB: You're welcome.