

Interviewee: Gloria Dowe

Interviewer: Chris Fetterman

Transcribers: Zach Hildreth and Chelsea Seddon

Today is March 17, 2010. We are located in Lucy Addison Middle School.

CF: My name is Chris Fetterman, I'll be doing the interview.

GD: OK.

CF: Would you like to state your name, please?

GD: My name is Gloria Dowe.

CF: Thank you. All right, you were born in Roanoke, correct?

GD: I was, yes.

CF: Did you live here your entire life?

GD: My entire life, yes.

CF: So anything interesting happened while you lived here, that you want to think of?

GD: In Roanoke?

CF: I mean, any special people come by or famous people or anything like that?

GD: Any people-you know what, I guess quite a lot happened, after all it was, it was a long time. And it's been interesting to see the changes that have transpired in that time; I have met, done a lot of interesting things and I met a lot of interesting people. I don't know who stands out as the most important person that I met but... Oh, I do know too, I did meet at one time Julie Nixon Eisenhower, who was...at that time was, President Nixon was still in office. So...

CF: You said you met her: did you actually talk to her or did you just see her?

GD: I beg your pardon?

CF: When you said you met this person, did you actually meet them and talk to them or did they just come into town?

GD: Actually, it was...they came to visit the Head Start program I was working at at the time and it was interesting because there were TV cameras and there were lots of people from NBC, I believe it was at

the time, and the types of clearances that you had to get to even speak to this person...so that was really interesting.

CF: That's very interesting. Kind of backtracking a little bit: did you have any brothers or sisters?

GD: I have, ooh, I have quite a large family. There are eleven of us and I'm the oldest.

CF: You're the oldest?

GD: Yes.

CF: That must have been interesting.

GD: Yeah, well, even I've always said that my mom had three sets of children and there were the first four of us that were first oldest four, then there was a middle set, and then there was a latter set; and the latter set are the same age as my children, so, yeah.

CF: That's, that's quite a big difference.

GD: Yeah, a very big difference, yeah.

CF: So you said you were the oldest, so did that mean you had lots of responsibilities, did you take care of your siblings?

GD: I did care of my siblings...I got up for them and fed them, I also washed and ironed their clothing, and things like that, so, yeah. We walked everywhere we went at...back in that time so we had grocery responsibilities that we walked to the grocery store and did that, yeah.

CF: Since you had a big family, I'm assuming your house, was it relatively large or was it a lot of people and small?

GD: We started, actually we started out here with the four of us... I was born in Northeast on Gilman.

CF: Ok.

GD: I lived on Gilman Avenue when I was born and then we moved with my grandmother up here on Staunton. They...we had four children, there were four of us, four siblings when we moved out here on Hanover, which is from 715 Hanover, which is right down the street from this school, and it was a GI house at the time. It was probably one of the houses that they had built, like they use stimulus money now to do, and that type of thing, yeah.

CF: You said that aside from taking care of your brothers and sisters and doing groceries or anything, what would you do in your free time...go outside to play?

GD: We did, we spent a lot of time outdoors, as a matter of fact...I marveled at the fact that we did spend a lot of time outdoors and that the children nowadays don't spend as much time out as we did outdoors. We sometimes...one of the things we used to do was, when it was almost time to go to bed, a

group of us would stand up under a telegram pole and just talk and... My cousin lived next door to me so I spent time walking back and forth, I'd walk her home and then she'd walk me back home and I walk her home, and we did that all night, so we did stuff like that. We played a lot of outdoor games; I am a game person even now. I love games. We played things like "No Bears Out Tonight" and that type of thing. We made mud pies...that's just the type of stuff we did. We were able to mingle in the neighborhood. My mom did not want me to learn how to ride a bike, so I went up on Staunton Avenue and I found somebody who taught me how to ride a bike.

CF: Why didn't she want you to ride a bike? Was she afraid you'd hurt yourself?

GD: I think it was a safety thing, because there are lots of things I would have done and accomplished during that time. I've always wanted to swim and I've always wanted to skate. I don't skate, but I did learn how to ride a bike and I tried to learn how to swim twice.

CF: No such luck?

GD: I can float.

CF: That's good. You also said your cousin lived near you guys? Did any other family members, extended family live close to you?

GD: My grandmother lived on Staunton. Let me see...and my cousin lived next door so we had an extended family in pretty close proximity, and that time there was no safety issues as far as getting away from your neighborhood at that time, you could walk everywhere you went and there were not... As I got to be a young adult, I noticed that the safety issues were more problematic at that time, but when I was coming up it was not a problem. As a matter of fact, the most interesting thing that... when we lived on Hanover, we actually used to see gypsy caravans going down Orange Avenue, down 460 and I said...and at that time they would talk about gypsies taking away your children. So that was something that was really, really cool.

CF: That sounds cool. You said that there was...as you got older there was more danger or security things...what kind? Violence?

GD: No, not really violence...people were in cars and I remember walking from...at this time I was married, and my husband's aunt lived over here on Hanover, ten hundred block, and I would walk her to her house any time. But one night, it had gotten dusk and I went down and there was some guy and he was sort of around and there was a big stone house on the corner and there were trees around the house, and I knew that he was trying to pick, or snatch me, or whatever; but I hid behind that tree. I noticed that he came by back, and that there were several trees...anyway, when he turned the corner, I flew home. You just notice those things as they became more and more prevalent as time goes on.

CF: Did it get better later on or did it just stay, it never got back to...?

GD: It was pretty much steady, there were not a lot of safety issues when I was growing up, at least not, I guess my parents were probably more fearful of us getting injured because we would fall or something than from somebody else hurting us.

CF: How about school, you went here?

GD: I went here.

CF: Back when it was a high school?

GD: I went here at the high school, went to Booker T. Washington, and I went to all the elementary schools in Roanoke except Gregory and the one on Gainsboro, I can't think of the name of it. But anyway, I went to Harrison and Gilmer, and, actually, when I went to Gilmer, I rode a bus down to Gilmer. I rode a city bus down to Gilmer. And I went to Harrison and I went to Loudon School, those were all of them.

CF: Did you go to school after high school or did you just go to high school?

GD: I've been studying all my life.

CF: That's good.

GD: I went to Virginia Western and when I transferred to Radford, I transferred 198 hours to Radford. So because I didn't...I don't think I really knew what I wanted to do or who I wanted to be at that time, I really probably still don't know, but that's ok. I'm still a product in becoming. And I graduated with a BSW from Radford University.

CF: In what major...what field?

GD: In social work.

CF: In social work?

GD: A bachelors in social work, yeah.

CF: So then, I'm guessing you went into a career in social working?

GD: I worked at a community hospital as a social worker and I have also worked in long term care as a social worker. I've done various and many sundry things. I directed day care centers, I have been a parent involvement coordinator, I've been a social services coordinator. I worked on teams with people in Region Three, to peer review programs. I've worked....I've also been a task expert, where you go into programs that are faltering and you help them, and my specialty was parent involvement and social services.

CF: I'm assuming that since you wanted to do social work or got a degree in social work you actually wanted to help out other people?

GD: Absolutely, absolutely, you know, I think the more we can be connected with people, the more we can offer. It could be time, it could be money, it can be services, and that's what we're called up to be as christian people, even in this age.

CF: I'm assuming that came from your parents, they were very helpful as well?

GD: They were, my parents were...both my parents finished high school. They...I wouldn't say they were upwardly mobile. My aunts and uncles were probably more in that frame than my parents were, so my aunts and my uncles would probably push us more than my parents did.

CF: Did any of your brothers and sisters go to college as well?

GD: I don't think so....I don't think so, we've all had careers. One of my sisters has been a truck driver, she's a bus driver now. One of my sisters worked at the Pentagon and she did those types of things. I have a brother that's a bus driver, I have two brothers, as a matter of fact, that are bus drivers. Trying to think. One of my brothers works at sheet metal; my sister works at a bank. I have one brother that's autistic and one brother that had a disability and they were...one is at Lynchburg training and then one is in a home for boys.

CF: Was that difficult on your family having brothers that were autistic and had disabilities?

GD: Hmm?

CF: Was that hard for your family because they were autistic?

GD: You know, at the time we were not as advanced in medicine and everything as we are now, so, I guess my parents did not really know what was going on. The other thing was my dad worked on the railroad so he was gone quite a bit. So, when my brothers were diagnosed, we did not know what was going on and I was quite young at the time. Just know that it was difficult in that they had needs that, at the time, we weren't sure how to fill.

CF: Was the medical people around here, were they helpful with that?

GD: You know, I think there were lots of limitations then, I think there were lots of limitations as far as who to go to, what questions to ask and who would know the answers, as far as that respect. I think the area of autism is still one that's not quite well-defined today and that people are still not getting the help they need.

CF: I...I agree with that. You said your dad worked on railroads. Did he build them or did he work on trains?

GD: Actually my dad was a cook on the railroads so he worked dining car for a long time and then he moved to the administrative office, and he cooked for the president of the railroad.

CF: Which railroad company?

GD: Norfolk and Western at the time.

CF: Did you have any other members of your family that were in the military, or anything like that, 'cause you said you had a brother who worked at the Pentagon?

GD: No, my sister.

CF: Oh, your sister, sorry.

GD: My sister, no, but I have a brother that's in the service right now, and he's in the Army. None of my other siblings were in...No, no I need to take that back because I have sister that was in the Air Force.

CF: Is your brother an officer or is he enlisted, do you know?

GD: I don't know what his rank is, he was in reserves and he was a trainer in the reserves. I'm pretty sure he had some kind of office. He's a bus driver with a couple of million miles types of things going on too, so yeah.

CF: Kind of going back to regular family life stuff, in Roanoke, was there any specific stores or businesses your family went to a lot, like a family grocery store or a neighborhood grocery store?

GD: There were, we used to shop at Johnson's grocery store, there were Kroger stores here then too. We were able, my Dad was able to go and buy the groceries and charge them, and pay for them over time, that type of thing. There was no...hardly any interest or anything like that, you would just pay for the groceries. It was Johnson's store and it was on Eleventh Street, if I recall, yeah.

CF: Again, you mentioned earlier that when you were younger, it was a very, open community, you would go out and play with the kids all the time, so was the community... was that always like that or like you said...there were more things that were kind of bad, did people become less social?

GD: You know what, people were very social, I thought. Everybody knew everybody else in the community. If one of your children did something here and this neighbor saw it, your parents knew it before you got home.

CF: Yes Ma'am.

GD: We had picnics and parties, we would have church activities. I remember the Catholic priest in our neighborhood, I'm not Catholic, I'm Baptist, but the Catholic priest, Father McDonald. He was community-oriented; I remember him or the church buying me a white dress for something that I needed. Now I don't remember what it was but I do remember him coming across with this white dress. So yeah....

CF: Some people were helpful.

GD: Very helpful, very helpful.

CF: You said for special events and stuff or there were community events...were there any things like baseball games or concerts that happened that you remember?

GD: Not a whole lot of that, maybe later on like in high school, that type of thing in high school, mostly in high school...sock hops, basketball, football were big.

CF: Isn't, wasn't there a local team, like a Triple A team for baseball here?

GD: There was a, I think it was a Negro league here and I think that's what it was called.

CF: Did your families ever go to those games or...?

GD: Yes we did...in later years...I know some of the people who played on that team so, a lot of them are dead now, but yeah I did know some of them.

CF: Did you actually follow baseball, or not really?

GD: Did I actually?

CF: Like did you actually pay attention to it a lot, or no? Was it just something you kind of...?

GD: I know what's going on, I knew what was going on yeah, yes, I would cheer for whom I thought was, you know I was cheering for, yeah, yeah, I would do that.

CF: 'Cause I was going to ask, if since you mentioned the Negro leagues, how did your family or your community feel when the color barrier was broken in professional baseball? If you remember that.

GD: I, I think there, I think there were a lot of...from one of the guys that I that I had...knew and talked to, I think there were a lots of regrets that they were not able to go advance further than they were, but they were very proud of what they had done.

CF: That's good. You mentioned people like the Catholic priest?

GD: Uh huh.

CF: Were there any other strong figures in your community?

GD: The church was, was the place in the community that set the moral standards, that set the values and most...a lot of the activities surrounded the church...the Catholic church used to have bazaars...I actually was a girl scout at St. Andrews Catholic church. My church was First Baptist Church in Northeast and I remember the leadership of the older women just having a huge impact on who we were as Christians, that type of thing.

CF: And you said you were a girl scout, did you stay with them for a long time, or just for a few years?

GD: For a few years yes. Yes, Missus, missus Ina Shaw was our troop leader at the time, yes.

CF: Was that very... did that have a good impact on your life?

GD: It did. You know what scouting...if you get into scouting and stay into scouting, it would have a huge impact on anybody's life, because it it builds industry, it builds morals it in, like you learn how to work together as a group, it has, it can have an huge impact.

CF: That's how I felt when I was in the boy scouts. I just, I never really asked anybody if the girl scouts were like that.

GD: Oh yeah, absolutely.

CF: You mentioned the older women in your church were, I assume, role models, was there anybody else in your life that were role models?

GD: My aunts, my uncles, my teachers. Even today when I see one of my teachers, especially the ones that I was really, really close to...and see the other thing is that we...our teachers lived among us. We knew them like Mrs. Wilfor—Anderson lived right next door to us, Coach Charles Price lived next door to us on the other part of Hanover so we had our neighbors...I had one particular neighbor who used to go to the Goodwill store every Wednesday and, at that time, we girls still wore petticoats and under slips and we would starch them up.... But anyway, she would go and she would she would find something that she would felt like we could use and she would bring them over in a little brown bag and say "Hey come over here and get this," and you know that type of thing.

CF: That's that seems very nice. I know you, I've asked you...you've mentioned a couple of times how Roanoke has changed, and I figure since you've lived here your entire life, is there anything that you think has really changed since you...?

GD: I...I do, and I don't know where...our sense of history is not here. Instead of us preserving history in Roanoke, I really don't think that we do a good job of it here. We'd rather tear it down than build it up, or...or make it what it needs to be, and I think that's...that's a detriment to this community. It's hard for young people not to have a standard to, or a foundation to to look at. We've... we've destroyed more than we...and some of the things that we build...well you know that's just my opinion.

CF: Yeah I can, I can understand that. For when you grew up, how was the job, availability of jobs...was there like certain jobs that you couldn't have as a woman, or anything like that?

GD: Very true, very true. I guess we, I managed somehow, you know? But also when I started in the job market it was during the Lyndon Johnson's great society. So I was able to get a job, even though it was a low, low paying job and I was able to work my way up through the ranks. But, but jobs like the telephone company at the rail road, GE, or any of those jobs they were not easy to come by.

CF: I'm not trying to offend, if I do, I'm sorry when you say they were lower paying, was it because you were a woman or was it also because you're black?

GD: Well...

CF: Or was there a lot or not as much racial issues in Roanoke as other places?



GD: Of course it was, of course it was. I'm pretty sure I'm a light-skinned black woman, and I'm pretty sure that I could've walked and gone anywhere in the United States, took off my black face and did pretty well. So those opportunities were, were not here for black people. As a matter of fact, somebody was just telling me just the other day and I went to this gentleman's funeral and I...I didn't know he was a social worker. And for years and years and years he worked as an orderly, at, at one of the institutions here and they found out he had a four year degree. They didn't want to do that, they just didn't want to do that. I feel that when, when you...people have to want to see a change, people have to want to make, make a, make a difference. And if...and there are a lot more hard-hearted people in the world now then it was when I was coming up, even though there were those barriers. Our young people coming along now don't know what they will have to face.

CF: Going back to racial issues, were there any places in town that were more white-oriented, towards black-oriented or anything, any events like rallies that happened during your time here?

GD: There were some that, not necessarily that I witnessed, you know but that I certainly heard about. When I was coming up we were able to...I remember when like the movie theatre was and everything was integrated and I remember having to go, going to the Roanoke theatre before that and have to go in the back door, up the steps and look at the picture, so I do remember those things. I don't think Roanoke was necessarily...there were people who will say that, and there were people working in, in those types of areas. I remember Doctor Wilkinson was one of the people, and I think Doctor Harry Pin was in there and...but I, I don't think that...I don't know how I want to say that, you know we could say—you know there, there were lots of things that were going on. They didn't always come out, yeah, maybe that's the best way to say that. There were lots of things that were going on...even when... I, I've read about them later. But it didn't make me, didn't know it was going on at the time.

CF: Do you think because Roanoke was a more, a larger and more modern compared to the cities—the cities and towns around here that it wasn't as bad? Or like say as in Bedford county, or other places?

GD: I don't know... Roanoke is so—sort of clannish, and I think they, Roanoke has a tendency to hide stuff under the bushel, so to speak, or sweep it up under the rug. Um I, it wasn't like Prince Edward county, who closed their schools. I think there was some people who probably made a difference in the way our schools were, were integrated rather than...so it didn't come into a full-blown war, that type of thing. But I'm pretty sure the feelings were still up under.

CF: This is also kind of going back some...you mentioned earlier that you used to have to ride the public bus to school?

GD: I did.

CF: Was that also segregated when you went to school?

GD: Hum?

CF: Was the bus also segregated? Or could you just...or not?

GD: You know what? I, I didn't even pay any attention to that because I was six seven years old when I was riding the bus...

CF: Oh.

GD: ...to school, so I'd put my whatever in, my token, I think we were using at the time, and I'd go to get to school. And sometimes I would, sometimes when I didn't ride the bus, I would ride with Doctor E.D. Downing's wife, who was the principal at the school at that time.

CF: All right, I really don't have any more questions, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

GD: Anybody else have any questions? I don't got, I don't think I do. I really think that we've covered a lot of territory.

CF: That's fine it's, it's mainly whatever you felt like talking about so if—

GD: Right, right, well basically I have, I had three children, and all of them are employed well and I'm...they're lucky. They did not go to school, they did not have a wish to go to school, obviously. But they've gotten in trades...they're mechanics, or my son, er, daughter works for an insurance company. So, so yeah.

CF: Do you think it was better raising a family now or do you think it was—it would have been better to raise a family when, back when you were...the times when you were younger?

GD: In some areas it's better to raise a family now but in some other areas it was better to raise a family then. And I'm gonna tell you why because...we were...I feel like our, our people had a stronger moral base. And our moral base is eroding so very fast, that I don't know in that regard. The other thing is that we could make it off of, we learned how to make it off of a little bit, and you don't have to have a lot to, to, to make it, but you have to have commitment. And that, that has to be the connection...we had connections with our neighbors. We had connections with, with, with the people, with the teachers and... in that, in that respect it, that was a good thing.

CF: Do you think people nowadays have less commitment to do things?

GD: I do, I do. I definitely do. Like going...when you see somebody going through something, going through means being there. And that, that doesn't mean that you got to talk about, it that means that you got to do something. And it...and being, you just don't have that kind of commitment, we don't have that kind of commitment in the churches, we don't have that kind of commitment in the schools, you can see, look at all the cuts. And, and the schools is...I mean that's the foundation. We don't have, we don't have the parent involvement that we need to bring this together. When I worked with parents, we talked about the real world and, and how to maybe make a change in that and that's, that's eroding.

CF: Do you think that people are more interested in themselves now than helping other people?

GD: I, I think people are very selfish. I think our government has become so focused on... it's so big that it's lost its focus. I don't think, I don't think that we have it together, because this country has a lot of problems. A lot of problems, and it's eroded over time because if you, if you've ever gone on a tour up like in New York, for instance, you hear about Henry Hudson and his age when he did all the things that he did...that's our foundation, that was it, you know? You could build on that, you can—what we got is crumbling, and it's crumbling from the bottom up and from the top down, so yeah.

CF: Do you think there's still people that are trying to fix it, though?

GD: I think people are still trying to fix it. But we've fallen so far morally, that the decay is not going to, I don't think it's going away anytime soon.

CF: Probably not but at least I think that some people are...people trying to do the right thing will eventually get what they want.

GD: Right, but you have to get together in order to do that. We could hear you but you don't get anything accomplished. You just...you're spinning your wheels...that's the way I feel about it.

CF: All right. Is there anything else—

GD: Nope, nope, nope. I think that's, this could be very, very deep.

CF: All right. Thank you very much...I guess that's it unless you have anything else to say.

GD: No, no I'm fine, I'm fine. Okay...have I answered all of your questions though?

CF: I think so.

GD: Okay. Good, good.

CF: Is there anything else we need to fill out?

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