

EBL: Today is Friday, November 19th, 2010. My name is Ethan Brooks-Livingston. I'm at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, interviewing Ms. Charlena Garrison, who has spent many years of her career as a nurse. Ms. Garrison, as we get started, let's talk a little bit about your childhood.

CG: Okay. I was born and raised in the eastern part of North Carolina, in Franklin County. Went to school in Franklin County, a small school that had grades one through twelve on one campus. And we may have had two or three hundred students from grades one through twelve. So I spent my first eighteen years of my life in that area. Grew up on a farm, my family certainly was a poor family. I didn't know that, because we always had food to eat. I was never hungry or anything like that. Always a roof over our head. Didn't learn until much later in life that, that I grew up as poor as I did. But, I certainly did. But, I grew up in a family. My mother completed high school. My dad was never able to even go to high school, but they were both very big on our, getting educated. And I grew up with this expectation that I would go to college and I, it was kind of a subtle thing that was implanted in my, in my mind, I guess as a child. Only as an adult when I look back do I realize that that was a pretty unusual programming, coming from their backgrounds. But then I know that that was very important to them. So, I had two sisters older than me, and they went on to college and so the expectation was that, that I would follow in their footsteps.

EBL: What year were you born?

CG: '48. 1948, in December. So it was at the end of 1948. I'm part of that Baby Boomers. So I started, entered elementary school in 1955 because by my birthday coming later in the year, I was, couldn't go that first year that I actually turned six. But anyway, I went to school in a small school, everybody knows you, you know. To the extent that the system could provide an education, I received an excellent education because what was lacking in terms of resources was made up by teachers in an environment where everyone was nurturing, and, you know, they were going to see to it that you did as well as you could to, and that, and they were willing to give everything that they could give. So that was kind of...my education. Throughout...

EBL: Go ahead.

CG: By the time I got to high school, it had become problematic to follow in the footsteps of two sisters because everybody looked at me and said, "Now your sisters would not have done that..." [laughter] You know, that kind of thing.

EBL: So were you the youngest?

CG: I was the youngest.

EBL: Who were your teachers?

CG: Okay. My first grade teacher was a lady by the name of Mrs. McFadden. Now Mrs. McFadden was, I think she was old. I thought she was really, really old then. [laughter] But I'm not sure how old she was now that I'm an adult and I realize that what I thought was old is not

old now, but anyway, I always thought she was really old. And just as an aside, she was a little, short, fat, very light-skinned lady. She almost looked white. And her husband was a big, tall, really dark-skinned man. And she was really, really sweet, and he was really, really mean. [laughter] That's how they were viewed. Prior to my starting to school, he was principal of an elementary school that was near my home. My brothers and sisters attended that school, from grades one through five, but the year that I was to start to school was when that school closed. It was a school...there were a number of schools in the area. I think they were established under some government program or something, probably, back in the days of...

EBL: Maybe a settlement school? [More likely a Rosenwald school]

CG: I'm not sure exactly what it was called, but it was at that time, in '55 when they pretty much phased those schools out, throughout that area. And so I didn't get to attend that school in an official capacity. But when I was five, I used to go to school with my brothers and my sisters. Because they knew us. Teachers knew us, and Mrs. McFadden would give me stuff to study. [laughter] When I was five, before I even started to school. So that school....And her husband, this mean old man, that I thought, he was the principal of that little school. And so when that school closed down, they both had to move, moved also to the school, then, that I attended. And so when I got to that school, Mrs. McFadden insisted that I be in her first grade class. When I got there the first day, I had been assigned to another teacher. But she promptly went to that teacher's classroom, pulled me out, and I was going to be in her class. And so I felt special, and I think I figured that, you know, I ruled the classroom, you know. [laughter] There were a few times she had to kind of chastise me, but I think I felt like, you know, I had free reign. I mean I knew her from the past and...so I started out in first grade kind of mouthy and jumping into everybody's business. I knew what most of the kids were studying, so I'd blab out stuff and all. And that kind of set the stage for my education. [laughter].

EBL: Let's talk a little bit about your family, your parents. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents' jobs?

CG: Okay. My dad was a farmer. And my mom basically was a housewife, and who worked there on the farm. My dad was fortunate in that his family had been able to purchase a farm, you know, in the '30s. So the majority, or a lot of black families, when I grew up, who were farmers, were sharecroppers. And so, we were very fortunate in that we were not sharecroppers. And what I came to, to know, was that that was a real benefit. Because families who were sharecropping were totally at the mercy of the landowner. And there were things that even the adults and parents, who may have wanted to do, for example: if you were sharecropping and it was time to harvest tobacco, it didn't matter that school was open. You know, those kids had to be out of school and working on that farm, whatever the crop was. And that kind of, that kept a lot of students, a lot of kids, perhaps from being as successful as they could have been. You know, there were no choices in the matter. Whereas, I was fortunate enough to have, when school opened, my dad made arrangements for us to go to school. You know, we had to do the farm, but you know, school was important enough that there was not this blanket, you know, you won't. If school opened in August and the tobacco harvesting didn't get over until September, or whatever, there were kids that didn't start school until September, or whenever it was. So I was fortunate not to have, not to do, have to do that. Now, my dad's

mother had been a schoolteacher. She was born and raised in eastern Kentucky. She was a schoolteacher. She didn't get married until, to my grandfather until she was almost thirty. And so, education was a big thing for her. So she married my grandfather. They moved back to North Carolina. He farmed then. So his children had to work the farm because they were just buying it, so it took everybody working and all. So my dad was the youngest of his siblings and so he got through maybe sixth, seventh grade. And it was at that time that everybody had to just work and dedicate to, to purchasing, to buying the farm. So that was as far as he got. But, once my grandparents died, I never knew my grandfather, but at some point, I went out in the old house that my grandmother had lived in and would go upstairs around and prowling around, there was a bookcase there with lots of books. And, I guess I was probably in college when I really looked at those books. Lot of philosophy books. Books, old, from the great philosophers, historians, religious books. History by Josephus and The Jewish history. Just all kinds of books like that. So I asked my mom, I said, "Who in the world owned those books?" And she said, "Your Grandfather." I said, "Did he read them?" She said, "Yes, he was reading them all of the time." I said, "Well, but I thought Granddaddy was always...all of the pictures, just snapshots, that I saw of him, he was in bib overalls." And even when he caught himself having to dress, he had on a dress shirt, with the sleeves slightly rolled up, but he had on bib overalls. And I said, "But I thought he was just a..." You know, they talked about him not being fancy, and insisting that he didn't need this fancy stuff. She said, "Well, he didn't, but I never said he was dumb." [laughter] Or ignorant, she said. He was just very simple when it came to his surroundings. But, well I, he was brilliant, he had a brilliant mind. And so I was amazed, so apparently that got filtered down, and my dad, although not formally educated, had quite a brilliant mind. And there are four kids in my family, and we have a couple of Master's degrees, a PhD, and at least, and an associate degree. But anyway, we married and some of the spouses were PhDs, Masters, Divinity, you know, all that. When we set around a table, family table, my dad could hold his own in any conversation. You know, when subjects came up that he was not aware of, if it was something of interest, you had to enlighten him. If it was not of interest, you know, he just discarded that. It was no issue, you know. [laughter] He was not uncomfortable with that. But, really could hold his own. And so, only in retrospect do I see what effect Dad had on me, and this sort of says that I would go to college, although if I had looked around at my circumstances, I never would have gone to college. If I had looked, if I had thought about the fact that, when I enrolled at Winston-Salem State, and when my dad gave me twenty dollars, that, you know, and mind you, my tuition and all was paid through grants and loans, and I had some small scholarships and that kind of thing, so that that twenty dollars was what he had to contribute to my college education on that date when I came, you know. That twenty dollars cash he gave me, and the gas that it took to drive from Franklinton to Winston-Salem, if I had realized the significance, that that was all he had, you know, I never would've thought I could go to college. But see, ignorance is bliss. You just figure it's going to happen. And you do those things to make it happen. And it did happen, you know. But for me, I just kind of thought that was the way, that was the way it was. You know, that was the way of life, so...that's kind of what got me here. Yeah.

Wow!

EBL: Tell me a little bit about your dad's working conditions on the farm. Not when he was growing up, but when you were growing up.

CG: Okay. Growing up. What I have come to know: I used to, I've found out that at the beginning of the year, the farmers went to the agriculture place and they borrowed money, the money that's going to be needed to live off of and plant the crops and all. And then in the fall when they sell tobacco, had to pay off, well I'm not certain--had to go down there and pay his debt. And some years the crop didn't earn enough to pay off the debt, so that there was this debt that was carried over. And sometimes there'd be some left over and all. And what I didn't realize was, you know, that that's the way we were living. And I clearly recall in, my dad would plant cucumbers, and we would pick cucumbers. That was the hardest work on earth. [laughter]. I don't eat pickles now for that very reason. [laughter]. But that, seems like that came along in June or July. That was some cash that could be used for something. We did go on a picnic for Fourth of July or something like that. But that was a little interlude of a little cash that came in that the family could use. The main crop, tobacco, that went to, that's what we lived off of. It came at one time of the year, but we, that money's what we lived off the twelve months. But it was through that borrowing of money at the beginning of the year, you know, then when you finally sell the tobacco, having to pay it back, kind of thing. I didn't understand at that time what that was about, but...

EBL: So somebody had to be an excellent money manager to make things last for twelve months.

CG: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And that was, and that was primarily, well, you know, we raised the food, so we had hogs, and chickens and so...eggs and milk, we had cows. And so, there wasn't a lot of money spent on food, you know. We grew a garden. My dad was one of the greatest gardeners. I mean, he grew enough, a garden big enough to feed Bangladesh. [laughter]. And my mom felt compelled to preserve and save and can or freeze every bean, every grain of corn, every, everything. So, you know, like I said, eating was never an issue. So we would...and so, my dad was a little farmer.

EBL: How many acres, do you recall?

CG: The total farm was like fifty acres. So, and there's something about this tobacco allotment that's based on the total acreage that you have, so much was allotted for tobacco. And so apparently tobacco was the mainstay and that was the one, I think, that was quite regulated and that kind of stuff. Now, to supplement all of that, I think the cotton, planting cotton and selling it was to supplement and so that, I think the cotton planting probably brought in a little money for Christmas and a little bit to tide through the winter months, you know that kind of stuff. I never really asked, you know, my dad about that process. I just, over time, hearing little pieces and putting pieces together. But I do know that one of the things that my mom, she, it seemed to have been a source of worry for her, was what she referred to as "the debt." And I later learned that was this whole process, how they worked with the Agriculture Department for that advance money and that kind of thing. And then I know that money had to be paid back in the fall of the year when the tobacco was sold.

EBL: Now, did your dad ever employ anybody else to help him with the farm?

CG: Not really. My dad, our farm was adjacent to his brother's. And so there were four kids in my family. My uncle had nine children. So the two of them worked together and they helped harvest our crops. We helped them, you know, so we kind of worked back and forth with them. And the way that, the neighborhood that I grew up in, there were two additional farms that kind of touched our property or my uncle's land. Both of those were black men. Families. And both of them were large families. And when one family finished their crop, if somebody else was still not through, you know, you'd look up...Now the greatest joy in my life, because we had the smallest family, and we were probably...the other two families, their children, they had children that were older than us. Some of them were, like, close to adulthood when I was a little girl, or late teens or something. I thought they were grown people. But we'd be in the field just chopping cotton, you know, just so much left, and you know. We're just doing the best we could do. And we'd look up and here's about four or five people coming, you know, neighbors coming with their hoes, and they'd just chop our little field up in short order, you know. [laughter]. So, we would look up and see them coming and to me that was just like a band of angels coming from heaven, because [laughter] because they would do that. So, he, at least when I was growing up, he didn't have to hire people until after we grew up and left, left home. And so he would have to hire people and then it wasn't many years that he, he was able to...after a few years, after we left, and after a few years of hiring, he then would....you know you can rent your, like tobacco allotment to somebody else, for a fourth. So they work it, they do everything, just pay you a fourth of the profit. He later did that because it was not cost-effective to hire. If you've got a small farm, you would use up all your profit hiring. So if you didn't have children to work it, you really weren't going to get much benefit.

EBL: Well, tell me a little bit about your mother. She didn't work outside the home...

CG: Not when I was growing up. Not until I was in high school. So she just pretty much, was a homemaker. But my mom was an excellent seamstress. So she brought in money by sewing. She made clothes for a lot, a lot of people. And there was almost nothing that she couldn't make.

EBL: Did she make the family's clothes?

CG: Oh yes, oh yes. You know, to get a store-bought dress was such a big deal for us because she made our clothes. And I would always just feel so, here I am this little homemade...you go to school and everybody else has got bought dresses, and what I didn't realize was that a lot of kids were envious of me because my mother, she was, she was very careful to try to make stuff not look homemade. And she would, she could always add adornments, you know, and that kind of stuff. So she was very creative, and very good with that. She, there was a lady that was teaching in my school who was really fat. Grossly obese. Real big, real big. And she had to have all her clothes made. And all her clothes looked alike. Kind of a big sack, you know. And so the lady, whoever had been making her clothes got sick or something and she heard that my mom sewed so she asked her if she could make her, you know, make some stuff for her. And so my mom made her some stuff with different styles, and oh, that was it from then on. So, this lady, when it was time for spring commencement and all, when the teachers had to put on the academic regalia, she had a little robe that didn't come all the way down and she couldn't hardly get in it and all, because that was as big as they made them at the company. And my mom

made her a robe, you know, the black robe, and oh, she just [laughter], that was just the thrill of her life, [laughter] that she had a robe that she could get in. So my mom could, could make anything. She would make men's suits. Yeah. She made, there was a young man who was, like, four-five hundred pounds, who was getting married, and she made him a suit for him to get married in. And the waist of the pants were seventy-two inches across. It covered the bed, just the pants covered the bed, you know. It was, it was wild, but she made it. And his family was most appreciative. So she brought in extra money like that. Now, her desire, when she grew up, she wanted to be a nurse. And was planning to go to an LPN school and when she was nineteen, she was eighteen, her mother became ill. And her mother died when she was nineteen. So that pretty much ended her dream of going to school. She was the youngest girl at home, and so she took over running the household, you know, for her dad, and the rest of the family until she got married. So that kind of ended her dream for that. So when she was in her fifties, well into her fifties, she went to the, took up CNA course at the technical school and did work for about ten years in a nursing home as a CNA. So she loved it, and so kind of lived out some of her dream. And then lived the rest of her dream vicariously through me. [laughter].

EBL: How did your father feel about women working?

CG: I, you know, I don't know what he might have felt early on, because that was not even an issue, you know. In that, where I came from, women just...there was no work for women other than domestic work. And other than working on the farm with their spouse, in that area. There were a few schoolteachers. There were schoolteachers, a few nurses, and then the only other work for women primarily was working as domestic workers, so...I don't know how he actually felt about it. And certainly by the time my mom decided to pursue the CNA, you know, whatever issues he had, there was none at that time.

EBL: Let's talk a little bit about how your family, your family's relationship to medical care. When you became ill, or when your brothers or sisters did, who took care of you?

CG: Okay. My family...I was introduced to the world of medical care as far back as I can remember because in those earlier years of growing up, my mother's health was really poor. She had lots of heart problems and all kind of stuff, so she was in and out of the hospital a lot. And she, when I was a little girl, there was a hospital for blacks in Henderson, North Carolina. A little small hospital. When I look at the building now, I can't believe it ever was a hospital, but it was. And she was, would be hospitalized for long periods of time and she had surgery and would have to have blood transfusions. And my dad would have to go out and get people to donate blood for a blood transfusion. And my dad and my uncle were, they were probably O-positive, since that's the universal donor. And they were known to be willing to donate blood, so people that you didn't know would get their names from somewhere and would come and ask. But at the same time, that's what people did. And I can remember times when my dad would go to different ones and ask if they would donate blood. And there was a gentleman in the community who, who, well, he talked a lot. You know, I mean, he would be one you want, you see coming and drop your head, oh don't want to see him coming. But apparently he had donated blood to my mom when I was born because growing up as a kid, he never would let me forget [laughter] that I had some of his blood. [laughter] And he was not the person that I wanted to think I had, you know, any of his blood, at that time, you know. "Oh God, here he

comes!" You know, go to church, and he'd hug me, "There's my baby--you got my blood!" And I would be, "Oh, please don't tell---don't say that!" And so, my mom was in and out of the doctor's office a lot. In Henderson, there were two or three black doctors, even in the fifties.

EBL: And that's still the eastern part of the state?

CG: Eastern part of the state, yes. Mmm-hmm. I don't...even in the fifties. And of course the hospital was a segregated hospital, Jubilee Hospital was that hospital. And one time my mom was in the hospital for a prolonged period of time and my dad would take us to the hospital to visit her on Sundays and the nurses would comb my hair. [laughter]. My daddy would, he could cook, he could do everything, but he couldn't do anything with the hair. And so, we'd go to the hospital, spend the day running through the hospital and all, and the nurses would come my hair, and that, so it was that kind of a, that small of an environment. And the city, or the monies, funds were donated to build a new hospital for African Americans there, probably in the early '60s. And then, by, in the early---'59, '60, something like that, then by about 1970, a new hospital was built that was totally integrated. So they shut down the then hospital for blacks and previous white hospitals and did the one integrated hospital there in Henderson. But a lot of towns at that time were, did not have the benefit of black doctors. But Henderson did. And so my mom was constantly under their care. And so I had a brother and sister who had developed rheumatic fever. I was never sick. But brother and sister developed rheumatic fever.

EBL: Were they also hospitalized?

CG: They were not hospitalized for that. My brother was in the hospital for problems that later, he was diagnosed with sickle-cell anemia. Sickle-cell disease. And, but for a number of years, that was not diagnosed, you know. And so he was one of the first people we ever heard of. And so I got introduced to that disease early, kinda early on in life.

EBL: Who were the, if you recall this, who were the ones doing the research on that, that particular illness? Was it primarily people in the African American community that were researching sickle-cell?

CG: No. There weren't....I don't know, I take it back, I take it back. It was not a whole lot of research being done. There wasn't a lot of research that took place until much, much later, so I don't know. But he was diagnosed at Duke. Having been, he had his pain issues and all being attributed to many other things. But at one point, was very ill, was admitted to Duke, and his, his hemoglobin, his red-blood, his blood counts were just so extremely, extremely low. And that, their investigation was what led to, to the diagnosis. So, it was being looked at, but it was not a wide-spread thing that most any doctor would pick up. It wasn't until his extremely low blood counts led him to be sent to Duke, probably by the, one of the local doctors. And so then that led, you know, then my mom would start looking for information and that kind of stuff. So we, I was exposed to some of that information early on. And then around that time, we found out about some other family members that didn't live in that area, but were family members who, one family, he had three children who had the disease.

EBL: Wow.

CG: Yeah. Mmm-hmmm. So, and that family would have been, I guess the father would have been my mom's first cousin or something like that. So it did, was in that family line. So, growing up I had a lot of exposure to the medical world.

EBL: Do you remember any nurses in particular that you spent any time with?

CG: Not really, not nurses. Other than, there was a neighbor who would've been about ten years older than me who went to school, became a nurse, went to A and T, moved back home and married, and settled there. So she was looked at as THE premier nurse, the nurse of nurses. And, let me tell you a practice that's sort of unique to the black people in that area. Or it may not be unique to that area, but one of the things that used to happen when I grew up, if someone died, there was a funeral. Of course, the people, the family, the bereaved family would be graced with the benefits of a nurse at the services to help them when they fell out or when they fainted or whatever, you know. So she played that role to the hilt. I mean [laughter], you'd look up and as the family's coming in to the church, she would be leading the procession in her cape, cap, you know, full adornment. And so my mom thought that was just the grandest thing, a service greater than any ministry [laughter] ever. And of course when I became a nurse, it was her hope and dream...[laughter]

EBL: That you would do the same...[laughter]

CG: That she would see me doing the same. [laughter]. A hope and dream she never saw come to fruition, but anyway. But that was the one nurse that, that I knew. But strangely enough, as I'm thinking back about those experiences, I don't remember nurse, any specific nurse. I know that there were, like I said, when we would go to the hospital the nurses would comb my hair, but who or what they were like, I just didn't know. That didn't stay in my memory. I kind of remember some doctors that took care of my mother a little better than, than the nurses, yeah.

EBL: So it sounds like, from the story of a nurse leading a procession for the bereaved, it sounds like nurses were really highly respected in your community.

CG: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They were. They were.

EBL: Would you say that that was probably one of the most respected careers for an African American woman in that community?

CG: Teaching was number one. That would've been number two.

[phone ringing loudly]

EBL: Let's talk a little bit about your experiences of school. We talked a little bit briefly about it--I wanted to ask some questions about your fellow students. Were they from similar circumstances as you?

CG: Mmm-hmmm. Yeah. Very similar. No one in that area, there was no "big people" in the area. In my estimation, my opinion, I thought people had money, you know. Well, first of all, early on, our house, we did not have indoor plumbing, for example. My dad built the house. He and another man built the house, but we didn't have indoor plumbing. And by the time I started to school, and mid-way through school, a lot of the other kids were in homes that had bathrooms and, you know, and whatever. So to me, that was the mark of success, you know. [laughter] Later, you know, my parents added the indoor plumbing, but as a little kid, for me, if they had indoor plumbing, you were rich. [laughter] You had it going on, you know. So, now I know that we were all virtually in the same boat. Some, you might have, one might have indoor plumbing, one might have food on the table, you know so. We, there, in that area, there would've been no one that would have been considered well-off. I mean, everyone was just eeking out a living, yeah.

EBL: How big was the community? How many people would you say? Was it a large town? Was it a...

CG: No. Now, mind you, the little town where I went to school, Franklinton, had a population of about 1300 in the town limits. But I lived about ten miles out in the country. Henderson probably had 5000 people at that time, maybe. And I was about ten miles from Henderson. So we were about halfway between. You know, I'd go, we'd go either way. [loud cough]. So, outside of the city limits, you know, it was rural. People kinda sparse, spread out. But not considered a heavily populated urban...no.

EBL: Let's talk a little about your experiences in high school, maybe when you started formulating some ideas about your, your future career. Do you remember any teachers that stood out in your high school years?

CG: Mmm-hmm. Yeah. And the teachers that stood out in my mind [loud cough] made it very difficult for me to have any kind of directions, because my history teacher made me want to teach history. My biology teacher wanted me to teach biology or do something in the science world. My home economics teacher made me just want to do that. And so I mean I couldn't, I had no idea of which direction I wanted to go in because every one of them made me think, oh this is it, you know. And then along to my senior year, a new teacher came in and I took physics under him and then, oh, I just don't know what I want to do. I want to explore these sciences more and all, but there were some that really stood out, yeah.

EBL: What kind of student were you?

CG: I could've been a great student. [laughter]. I told you I started out mouthy and running things in the first grade. And so, I kind of maintained that [laughter] opinion of myself throughout, you know. And along about the tenth grade I found out that people would follow me, you know. It was kind of a fluke. In, this would've been, I was probably in the ninth grade, I think, so I would've been in the ninth grade in about 1963-64, something like that. You know, we're in the throws of the Civil Rights Movement. People are sitting in, people are demonstrating. And one day something, there was a big mess, ruckus broke out in the hallway and the principal and teachers decided to, I mean it was like widespread among students in the

high school. So they said students couldn't be in the hallways. So in the mornings before class starts, you had to go into your homeroom and sit down. Before then we could meander around and all. And during the lunchtime, if you weren't in the cafeteria, you had to be in the classroom. Hallway had to be cleared at all times. So we got to school that morning and found out about the new rule and was talking. And just, I was playing, I got up, and I put my hands behind me and I was walking around in a circle like little cartoon characters, thinking. I was acting like I was thinking: "What can we do, what can we do?" I was just putting on. And then I wrote up on the blackboard, "BOYCOTT." You know, 'cause this was the word, this was the buzzword. And so students said, "YES! That's right! They got us in prison." And somebody said, "If we're prisoners, we oughta act like it." So we all go pieces of paper and wrote our prison numbers on our backs and so when it was time to, for classes to change and go to the next class, my class goes out in the hallways, we got these numbers on our backs and people start asking. We said "Well, they got us in prison, we're acting like prisoners." Well that got the whole school in an uproar. I mean, kids was talking about boycotting and rioting and all like that. The principal and the teachers, they got, they got frightened. They thought we were going to do something. Well, low and behold, I thought, "What have I done?!" [laughter] I was just playing, you know! And the faculty met again that evening after school was dismissed. They announced to us the next day that the ruling would stand for thirty days. See, originally, that was going to be it forever. And I guess they got scared, so they, but they didn't to back down completely, so they said for thirty days. And I thought, my God! I was just playing and the world has taken me serious, you know. So I started testing that from then on, you know--if there was a certain way I wanted the class to go, or whatever, I would come up with stuff. And then I found out that the rest of them would just follow me, so I just kind of played that on out for the rest of my high school.

EBL: What were they, this was a segregated school, right?

CG: A segregated school, right.

EBL: What were they protesting?

CG: They were protesting to be protesting. We were protesting the rule that they said the halls had to be clear.

EBL: Just the hallway. What did they think was going to happen if it was an all African American school?

CG: Well, they were fighting among themselves. It wasn't a fight, but then, if two people fought, everybody had to fight. Because if whoever was fighting had a brother or a sister, and then that brother or sister would take on the brother or sister of the other ones fighting. So a fight became a school fight.

EBL: So everybody had different opinions about what should happen, maybe? Was that what started a lot of the fights?

CG: Well, no, just regular little old fighting. I don't like the way you look, bam, bam. You know, that kind of...no major, no real issues. It was just tantamount to children fighting. Yeah.

EBL: Okay. So maybe just a lot of tension in the air from what's going on around you?

CG: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EBL: Do you recall hearing about the sit-in in Greensboro?

CG: Oh yes. Oh yeah. In fact, a classmate and I had sneaked off from school one day, went downtown, and I don't know why we would've been....because we would not have had permission, but there was a drug store in Franklinton. It was called a Corner drugstore. It sat on a corner. And it had a long, long counter, a lunch counter. But it was segregated. They had a window on the backside that blacks could come and order, but you couldn't go in and sit inside. And so I told me classmate, my friend, let's go and sit, let's go in and sit. And we did. And the owner came to the table, we were sitting down at a table, and looking back, he seemed really ill at ease. But, you know, kinda cleared his throat and very politely told us that he couldn't serve "coloreds," and I could tell he was ill at ease and I thought, oh, we could play this off, you know. But I also thought, now, if they call the police and take me to jail and my dad has to come get me [laughter] and asks me why on earth am I down here instead of in...I am going to be in a world of trouble [laughter]. So, we said, we better go, so we got up and left. But again, I was kind of just testing, not fully realizing the degree of problems that that whole era held. And when I thought back over how uneasy that man appeared, he would've had no way of knowing whether we were sent there to start a protest movement, or anything because things were very tense at that time. And, but I realized...but I knew that my daddy would tear my tail up [laughter] if I'da got put in jail. Now my dad was a civil rights activist through the NAACP. But it was not....but me getting, leaving school on my own was not the way to do anything, you know.

EBL: You had to be smart about it. [laughter]

CG: Oh yeah, oh yeah. [laughter]. So we jumped up and then ran back 'cause then I realized, you know, they'll know we've sneaked off from school, and that kind of stuff. So, you know. But I was, I was excited about that whole, that whole era. That whole prospect. In fact, we were playing, and my brother, in 1962, was it '62 that the march on Washington? '62-'63, whatever. He had been--it was '63. He had been in the Army in Germany, 'cause even with sickle cell, of course they weren't looking for it, so he got into the Army, and he'd gotten sick and had been sent to Walter Reed Hospital. And we were planning to, my mom and dad and all, we were going to Washington to see him. He was at Walter Reed. And the Saturday that we were going, supposed to be going to D.C. was the Saturday of the March on Washington. Well, they didn't know it, but my intentions, my sister and I, we talked about it. We didn't know where Walter Reed Hospital was in relation to the March on Washington, but we knew they were both in D.C. Now our intentions was to be in on that march. Now we didn't, you know...[laughter]we didn't know anything about how we were supposed to get there, but our whole reason for going to Washington might have been under the disguise of visiting a sick brother, but our intent was to be in that march. And the Friday night before, we were going to be leaving out early

Saturday morning. They called from Walter Reed and said they were transporting him to Womac, the hospital down there at Fort Bragg. [laughter]. So, we didn't get to Washington. But that was my intention, to be in that march. Didn't quite materialize.

EBL: Well, before we move on, you mentioned that your dad was involved with the NAACP. How did that happen?

CG: Well, my dad, in the...one of our next-door neighbors, they were number one, they were both, and my uncle was, they were deacons in the churches, in their churches, their various churches. It was the church leaders that were at the forefront of the civil rights movement in many instances. It had to be churches because those were the only institutions that were solely owned and operated by blacks. You know, you couldn't come to schools because schools belonged to the state. So school officials couldn't branch out and do stuff like that. Jobs, if you had a job, you know, you couldn't do nothing through those kinds of institutions. So it was the black churches, it was the only organized institution that these movements, the movement such as that could come through. Hence, Martin Luther King, pastored churches. All the, you know, those were the vehicles. So they were, my dad was a deacon. He was a, you know, a community activist leader, if you will. And so out of those, that environment is where the people were able to unite and take some sort of stand. Now here again, sharecroppers couldn't join the NAACP, or they'd be kicked out of their homes. So about the only blacks in that area who could publicly, actively, well, just even be a member in the NAACP without issues, would be somebody who was not dependent on a white person for their livelihood, or for food or shelter, or that kind of stuff. And so he and others did, did join. And in fact, I remember when they made their first attempt to register to vote. In the Eisenhower election in '56, I think. And they were turned down several times. And they kept going back. And so, they would be, I remember my daddy talking about they had to have, pass a test. They had to read a portion of the Constitution and explain it. So, but he, you know, he was a part of that and my neighbor was the president of the NAACP and my neighbors had a son who was killed by a police officer in 1956. And his son was sort of, weak, well, sort of slow. But he never had a drivers' license, so a police officer insisted that he had been driving a car. Now where he saw the guy, the guy was standing inside a place, so you know, they kind of pulled them out and said, "I know you been driving and you ain't got no license..." and that kind of thing. And ended up killing him. And so the neighbor apparently did file a civil suit or something. Anyway, it went through several levels of the court system in 1956, which was not heard of, that he would take on a white man, a white police officer and that kind of stuff. I don't think the police officer ever was convicted, but so many years was tied up with this in courts and all that, you know, he probably did not have much more of a career in that and when my neighbor was willing to do that, then he was, you know. The people that said you know, he was...and during all of that he was backed by the local NAACP. He became the president and that kind of thing. So kinda became a leader in that way. So...

EBL: Let's get back to school a little bit. Jumping backwards a little.

CG: Mmm-hmmm. Okay.

EBL: Tell me a little bit about your, what you did for fun when you were a teenager.

CG: Oh. Mostly having the opportunity to go to another friend's house on a Sunday evening, hang out. Have a little boyfriend come to your house on a Friday night, stay until 9 o'clock. Or Sunday evening, once in a while, get to go to a movie. There was a drag strip within driving distance that we used to sneak to, you know. [laughter] That's where the guys would go if their daddy would let them borrow the car for the afternoon. We didn't live too far, we were in close distance to Carr Lake, that's up on the border, North Carolina Virginia border. And there were some recreation areas there, parks and stuff. In the summer, we would sneak down to the lake. Generally that was not with permission from parents. There wasn't a whole lot to do. Although we just had fun interacting, visiting, hanging out together as a group of people. I graduated in '67 and our class, we travel. Now I just got back from a 7-day cruise last week with a group of people from my high school class. So we still do stuff together. We didn't have a whole lot to do then, but we just kind of hung out and I really don't know what I did for fun. [laughter]. I remember having a fun life, [laughter] but I sure can't think of much that I did for fun, you know. Somebody would have a hi-fi and we'd play, you know, records, and dance. You know, just listen to the music, that was basically it.

EBL: Were you involved in any student organizations at school?

CG: Yeah. Small school didn't have a whole lot of organizations, so I just joined everything that came down the pike. [laughter]. You know. Four-H club, you ever heard of Four-H club?

EBL: Mmm-hmm.

CG: When I started out that was in schools then and later went out into the communities. I was active in it throughout my life. In high school, we would have the Glee Club, Honors Club, we had Future Homemakers of America. We created a little science club or something like that, so I just thought it was my duty to join as many things as I could. [laughter].

EBL: Did you have any heroes or people that you looked up to when you were in high school?

CG: I had one hero. I don't know that this was a positive thing, but...[laughter]...when I was a senior...up to that time, no heroes, you know. They were okay, but, you know. When I was a senior, the senior class advisor became pregnant, so she, you know, back then, you didn't work, teach in a classroom pregnant. Not showing and anything. So they had to bring in this lady that was retired. Yeah. The lady that they brought in, she was a little local lady, who had taught my mom. She looked to have been in her 80s when she came back in. I don't know. Little bitty lady. But she, she always looked down her nose on everybody. But she came back in there and I don't think she had much respect for the principal. So she would disobey all of the principal's edicts [laughter]. Now, I'm telling on myself that this would be my hero. [laughter]. But we had two advisors. This old lady, retired lady, and a young lady who was probably no more than four-five years older than we were, she was our advisor. She was a little stick-in-the-mud. [laughter]. At the time, Elizabeth City was college at that time. They had, you know, a career day, high school, you know, one of those things. We wanted to go. And the young advisor said no, it's too far. We can't go. I was the senior class president. The little old lady pulled me to the side later and she said, "You tell your classmates to meet me here tomorrow morning" or

whatever day it was. So I got the word around to the classmates. One of the guys in the class was a bus driver. And he would also drive the activity bus and all. And we met, the old lady met us. We met at, like, five o'clock in the morning. And got on the activity bus and headed to Elizabeth City. [laughter]. When we got to the campus, it was like seven o'clock that evening, the principal was there and he was fuming. And he started yelling at her. She said, "Well, fire me!" Well, you know there was no firing. She retired, you know, he needed her. She said, "Well, fire me!" And we thought that was just the greatest thing in the world. [laughter]. I wasn't really going for positive at that time.

EBL: You mentioned earlier that going to college was always an expectation, so long as you can remember. Did you have plans, immediate plans after finishing high school, for going to college?

CG: Just to go to college. Did I do anything constructive, like send out applications? I just couldn't get myself together to do those things that I was supposed to do. [laughter]. I was being fussed at by everybody. Parents, sisters who were in college and all. "Do this, you oughta be doing..." But I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do, you know, so...Coming to Winston-Salem State in nursing was not planned. I was, it was getting close to the end of the academic year. Maybe Easter vacation or something because both of my sisters were home from college. And everybody was fussing at me, "Have you applied, have you done...?" And just to get them off my back, I said, "I've been applying to school, to schools." And I was lying. I hadn't. And my sister's friend, boyfriend, who's now her husband, was there visiting. And he said, "Well, what do you want to study, be, do?" And I said, "Nursing." It just came out. I had not planned that. And my mother just started praising the Lord. [laughter]. Practically fell out in the floor, you know, "Oh, I always wanted you to do that. Thank you Lord, thank you Lord." And so then, you know, I'm stuck. I've done told a lie. I didn't know Winston-Salem State had a nursing program, 'cause it was called Winston-Salem Teacher's College. TC, that's all I'd ever heard. So my, now brother-in-law, he wasn't a brother-in-law then, said, "Oh, are you going to TC? I hear they got a good nursing program." I said, "Well, I'm going to try." That was a lie. I didn't know anything about it. I went to my room as soon as I could ease out, wrote a letter to Winston-Salem State, asking them for information about the nursing program. Within a week, had the information packet, applications and all of that, filled them out, signed, sent them back. Within two weeks, had my financial aid packet, acceptance to the University, the full nine yards. I felt compelled to go, then. [laughter]. You know, all of this is worked out for me, you know, I didn't put no effort in it. So I felt compelled to go. So I came on, and I said, "Well, I'll try it." And I liked it, so, you know, that's it. That's it.

EBL: Now how far was Winston-Salem from where you grew up?

CG: 135 miles. Yeah, furthest from home I'd ever been at that time, I think.

EBL: How often did you get to go home?

CG: Holidays and breaks, yeah.

EBL: Well, so it was kind of an accident that you decided initially to become a nurse?

CG: Mmm-hmmm.

EBL: Your mother supported your decision wholeheartedly...

CG: Oh yes. She, she...it must've been her prayers to the Lord that did it, 'cause I sure didn't plan it.

EBL: How did the rest of your family feel about it?

CG: Oh, they were excited. They were just glad I said I was going to do something, you know? [laughter]

EBL: Had you ever considered any other career?

CG: All of those others.

EBL: All of those?

CG: You know, but seriously...

EBL: Just couldn't see anything...

CG: Tangible, yeah, yeah, yeah. I look back in my high school book, that was for the seniors, it had what each one of us said we were gonna be, and I read my article that I said that I was going to be a chemical engineer. I said, "I don't know what a chemical engineer is. I certainly would not have known what a chemical engineer was then!" [laughter]. I must've just read that in a book or something somewhere, and so when it was time to say it, I probably just said it. [laughter] 'Cause I didn't remember saying it.

EBL: Where were, other than Winston-Salem, where were African American nurses being trained in North Carolina at the time?

CG: A and T had a baccalaureate program. There were some hospital schools, Kate Bidding Reynolds here in Winston-Salem. There was Lincoln Hospital in Durham. There was a St. Agnes Hospital in Raleigh that was also affiliated with St. Augustine's College. So they were graduating people with degrees but their training was there at the hospital. Those were the ones that were in the area that I was familiar with. There were others, but in the area that I grew with, those would've been the ones that were in reach.

EBL: Tell me about your program at Winston-Salem. What year did you start, again?

CG: '67.

EBL: Okay.

CG: And, uh...

EBL: It was a four year...?

CG: Program, uh-huh. So I finished in '71. We had very small classes then. Maybe twenty-five of us came in together. And then we came into the program, so from Freshman on up, we were with the Nursing faculty. Small unit, very nurturing. Very intense in the academic requirements, but in a very helping, nurturing environment. So, we didn't have the numbers that we have today.

EBL: So you lived on campus?

CG: Yeah, lived on campus. All of us who were in the program, we pretty-much stayed in the same dorms. We took all the classes together, we just hung together and supported each other, yeah.

EBL: What was one of your biggest challenges as a student during those first four years of training?

CG: Mmm...I guess just the, the requirements of meeting the academic requirements, the rigors of it. It required just kind of staying in the books without the opportunity to do much of the college life. The rest of the stuff that was going on on the campus.

EBL: Where did you do your clinical rotations?

CG: Um...primarily at...well, we didn't have nearly the clinical opportunities that we have now. Baptist and Forsyth, we did a little more at Forsyth. Baptist was not very open to us. If we got there, it would be on a, some back-alley thing that you didn't have much control over. Forsyth was a little more open, but they limited us to the kind of medical units where you know, you're just kind of doing....we weren't allowed in those real acute care areas. And so, but our instructors were able to be very creative and help us get the, what we needed.

EBL: Now at the time, had hospitals already been pretty much desegregated in this area?

CG: They had been. They were. It was in that process.

[interruption in recording---interviewee needed to speak with a student]

[transcript picking back up from previous]

EBL: Okay, so we were talking about your clinical rotations.

CG: Now, Kate Bidding Reynolds had a diploma program. Baptist Hospital had their own diploma program. And Forsyth Memorial had their own diploma programs. Okay. Kate Bidding Reynolds Hospital, I think they, their last class finished in maybe '70, 1970, '71. And

you know that hospital closed down as an acute care hospital shortly thereafter. Baptist and Forsyth's programs closed, the nursing programs, closed around that same time. But at the time I was a student here, both those hospitals had their own programs. And although there was the talk about them closing, that was not the hospital's choices. They preferred to keep their own nursing programs. But the whole nursing education thing was moving from the diploma-type to you know, the baccalaureate thing. So there was a resistance and resentment, I think, toward, or at least the way it seemed, toward Winston-Salem State, and the students here. And those facilities, they reluctantly allowed us in, but only to get what was left. And so the learning opportunities just were not there. What we, what our faculty did, though, was help us to understand that, you know, if you've got a good concept of the principle behind something, you don't have to do it ten times to know how to do it. You know, if you understand all of the correct principles, that you can do it even if you've not practiced it and all. That was the kind of the thought that was instilled. So that when I went out into practice, I went out into practice with the attitude that I could do anything that would come down the pike. Most of it I had never done. But because I thought I could do it, I'd just jump on in there and do it.

EBL: Did you have the chance to learn any areas of speciality?

CG: Very little, very little. Two days on the pediatric floor, you know, you're not learning anything, no. Observing some stuff in maternity. A little bit more mental specialty, 'cause we went to John Almstead Hospital in Buckner for six weeks in the summer, so, intense mental health, but not that much in the rest of the specialty areas beyond that.

EBL: So you graduated in '71?

CG: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: Okay. When did you get your first job?

CG: Way too soon. [laughter]. I had a job waiting for me when I graduated. It was my desire to sleep the summer and then go to work in September. That was my desire. But you know, nursing students were being snatched up and promised jobs as soon as they graduated. You know, there was a time you could work as a graduate nurse and you would've have to pass the boards. You just didn't...you'd have your RN, but you would still work. And that was going on when I graduated. So I applied to the VA in Salisbury because I heard it takes three years to get on at the VA. So here again, I put in that application to the VA, so when my mom asked me was I trying to get a job, I could say yes without totally telling a lie, you know, [laughter] I mean I got there through one lie, you know, so I'm trying to be a little bit more cautious about my lying. So I did submit an application to the VA. So that when my mom said, "Are you trying to get a job?" I said, "Yes, I've put in an application." And I was truthful, right? What I did not know was that at that time, I sent in an application maybe in May or April or something like that. What I did not know was that that particular facility in Salisbury was under mandate from central office to increase their African American nurses and their BSN nurses. So my application lands on their desk [laughter] and I'm both. I'm thinking [laughter] there's no way I could get hired, but I can tell this lie, and then in August I'll go ahead and apply somewhere. So I've put my home address and information on the application. The guy from Human Resources

called my mom because that's the information there, and tells her that I got a job, just make sure she's down here on such-and-such date for her physical exam and all like that. So my mom calls me and tells me, "I'm sending you some money for bus fare. Be in Salisbury on such-and-such a date so you can get that job." [laughter]

EBL:[laughter] What happened to your leisurely summer?

CG: So, yeah, yeah! That's what I wanted to say. So I thought, oh my goodness, I'm trying NOT to get hired. So I went there and worked nineteen years.

EBL: Nineteen years.

CG: Nineteen years. On a lie. [laughter] Again.

EBL: [laughter] What, where else were you thinking about applying?

CG: I wasn't thinking about applying anywhere! I told you I didn't want to go to work! [laughter] I figured in the summer I'd have the opportunity to figure out where I wanted to go, you know. I knew I didn't want to go back home. Eighteen years in a small town, now I'm ready for the big...ready for the big ones, so...I hadn't really made any plans. I told another lie and, you know...

EBL: Got somewhere...

CG: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: What kind of work did you do at the VA?

CG: Started out on a medical unit. Worked there for about a year, went to a psychiatric unit, worked for a year or two there, then went back on a medical unit as a head nurse.

EBL: Were you supervising anyone? Well, obviously, as a head nurse...

CG: Yeah, as a head nurse. Mmm-hmm.

EBL: How many people were you supervising?

CG: I had, I probably had about twenty people. I tell you, I was cocky, I thought I knew some stuff. [laughter] And I remained in management for, until I left there in nineteen years.

EBL: What made you finally leave?

CG: Well, the commute was a bit much. I'd gone back to grad school, and I was going a lot of commuting. Kids were in high school, having lot of...it just got to be too much work an hour away from home. And so I left there and went to Baptist.

EBL: Let's talk a little bit about your family as an adult. When did you get married?

CG: A year after I graduated. And I went on and had two children. And so my children were three years apart. And when they were small I was still commuting, you know, back and forth, to Salisbury. And of course as they got older and was involved in more and more activities that got to be more of an issue, yeah.

EBL: What kind of work did your husband do?

CG: He worked for R.J. Reynolds. 'Cause he was from here. We lived here, so...

EBL: How did he feel about your career as a nurse?

CG: Oh, he was happy about it. He was very proud of me being a nurse, you know. I was sort of a trophy for him.

EBL: [laughter] Well tell me about when you decided to go back to school. Graduate school. What made you make that decision?

CG: I was still in Salisbury and I was in management, and so it was encouraged, that you know, if you stay in management, you have to bump it up a notch. And so I went back to UNC-G and I got my Masters in Nursing Administration, yeah.

EBL: How long did that take?

CG: Two years.

EBL: What year did you graduate from that?

CG: '89.

EBL: '89, okay. Did you keep the same position for a little while longer?

CG: Uh-uh.

EBL: That's about when you left?

CG: Shortly thereafter. I said I spent all of that time in nursing management and got my masters in it and then went into something else, so it wasn't that long when I went to Baptist into totally different area, into oncology. And really loved it. But then also started doing clinical for Winston-Salem State and found out that teaching was what I liked.

EBL: Okay.

CG: And so ultimately came here full time. But during the time when I was at the VA, you know the government is a strange animal. The government, the VA being a part of the

govenrment, the VA people will decide, send out an edict that every medical center will have a specialty---whatever is the en vogue specialty. So the edict came out that every VA would have a respiratory care unit because we had all of those veterans were smokers with COPD and all. So when that came down the pike for Salisbury, they were going to open up a respiratory care unit, I went to that unit as the manager. So I ended up having to go and get some training myself, and then train my entire staff. ANd so I got a big kick out of that. A few years later, they said, we don't care nothing about CO--respiratory anymore. You've got to have a re-hab unit. So the local management said, well this is the only small unit. All of a sudden we'll disband the respiratory unit, these patients will go with the regular medical patients. We're going to open a re-hab unit. So I had to go back, I had to go learn re-hab stuff [laughter] and train a whole 'nother staff, you know. The one thing that I learned that, found out that, I was very energized as I was learning new stuff. And then once I get it under my belt, the boredom set in. And so when I went to Baptist, oncology was one area that was totally, totally foreign to me. And so that's where I went, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And later did staff development with the oncology units, you know, at Baptist. And 'cause I just...that's when I knew I enjoyed the teaching thing.

EBL: How long were you at Baptist?

CG: Six years. And I came here full time in '96.

EBL: What, have you always held the same position here?

CG: No. I was full-time teaching until 2005. And I started with Student Affairs, advisement, that kind of stuff, it's what I do now.

EBL: What's your official title now?

CG: As of this academic year, I'm Admissions Coordinator. Used to be Student Affairs Director.

EBL: How would you characterize your job now, what kinds of work do you do?

CG: Lots of student advicement. And I kind of monitor student progression, kind of oversee that. I assign people in the right spots to progress through the curriculum. And in the end, it falls in my duty to do the final clearance with stuff for them to graduate and that kind of thing.

EBL: Do you miss being in the hospitals, or doing the work with patients?

CG: A little bit, yeah, yeah, yeah. I do miss it, but as you get older, chasing ten students up and down the hall is more than a notion [laughter]. I did it, I loved it when I was doing it. I was energized by it. But as time goes by, you know, you kind of need something that's a little less physically demanding. Although I do miss it a little bit.

EBL: Do you plan to retire from this position?

CG: Yeah, I do.

EBL: Is that coming up pretty soon?

CG: Three or four years. I've got a few more years.

EBL: Alright. What would you say, just one last question, what would you say has been the highlight of your career?

CG: Highlight of my career....

EBL: Saved the tough question for last.

CG: Yeah, you did! [laughter] You did, you did. Okay. If you'll like right behind you at that photo, that's me, the then-Chancellor, Harold Martin and the Provost Johnson. I received that Master Teacher Award, John Fountain Master Teacher Award. For a teacher, that's a big thing. And teaching, I think, has enabled me to be a better nurse. 'Cause staying in the books to teach keeps you abreast that you can transfer there. Plus in teaching, when I go to Forsyth and Baptist, you know I can't go anywhere without hearing Ms. Garrison! Ms. Garrison!, you know. So all of these people whose lives I've touched, I'm seeing all around all the time. And so teaching nursing also has kept me a nurse. You know, I'm a nurse, and then I'm a teacher of nurses, I'm a nurse educator. So to get credit as an educator, knowing that I'm educating nurses kind of brings all of the pieces into one, to one point. That might well be it.

EBL: Alright.

CG: Okay.

EBL: Well I thank you very much for sharing your stories with me. I got some interesting tales.

CG: Okay.

EBL: And I guess that's it, unless you have anything to add.

CG: No [laughter] I've talked too much now. So for what was supposed to have been an hour...see you got the most mouthy person! [laughter] Okay.