

EBL: Today is Monday, November 15th, 2010. My name is Ethan Brooks-Livingston and I'm at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina interviewing Ms. Elleton McCullough, who has spent forty years of her career as a nurse. So, Ms. McCullough, I just want to start off talking just a little bit about your childhood.

EM: I grew up in Winston-Salem in a low income family. I was raised by an aunt and uncle. My mother was sixteen when she had me, and so this was the great aunt and uncle who raised me. And they were not educated folk.

EBL: What year were you born?

EM: I was born in 1945, March 18th. And I grew up and I went to public schools here in Winston. Although the people who raised me were elderly, they didn't have a lot of education, but they sought and they saw to it that I was enrolled in every advanced class I could get into. So I had that opportunity.

EBL: So it was a great aunt and uncle, primarily who raised you.

EM: Who raised me. Mmm-hmm. They're both deceased now.

EBL: Can you tell me a little bit about what kind of work they did?

EM: Okay. Daddy, as I would call him, was construction. And she was a school cafeteria worker.

EBL: What kind of training did they have for that kind of work?

EM: None. None. Together, I guess they didn't go any further than the fifth grade in school.

EBL: How did your uncle or your dad, as you called him, how did he feel about women working?

EM: Well, since both of them had to work, unlike today, you know, or persons who had a high level of income where you could afford to have persons at home--that was not the case. So I guess it was a consensual agreement that they both worked. ✓

EBL: Sure, economic necessity, sure.

EM: Yeah.

EBL: What were working conditions like for him, primarily.

EM: Since it's a seasonal job, when the weather was incimate, they had to--he was home. And the school, that was seasonal also, like 9-month contracts there. And so, I can't tell you--there was no supplement of income, I can tell you that. What they made, they made, but they were able to, I guess, balance things. Because at the time, unlike today, food in the cafeteria was not

thrown out. They could, mother could bring home food from the school and sometimes we would use that. And in the summertime I would go stay with Grandma in Danville, Virginia. And of course they had gardens and cows and things like that.

EBL: Tell me a little bit more about your grandma.

EM: Grandma, she was 97 when she died, but she lived in Danville, Virginia. And Grandpa lived there as well. Which, the people I'm talking about, the Aunt, that was her sister, or my mother's mother. And she was a custodian, and she cleaned churches, like religious sanctuaries. She cleaned those. And of course I would go with her. And they also had a farm. I hated going there every summer because I would have to go collect things out of the garden, milk cows, and you know we had chickens, and collecting eggs, you know. And today, I do not like any of those things, I can tell you. I would rather buy it than to do that. But in thinking back, or reflecting back, that was the good life, okay. Both groups were religious, except my dad. He was not. And my Granddaddy, he wasn't either. But the sisters, they were. And I was a church-going person.

EBL: How would you explain your relationship with the women in your family?

EM: Good. Let me say this: it wasn't until I was fifteen years old, the lady that raised me, that I learned about Santa Claus. And it was the night, like Christmas Eve, I overheard my mom say to one of her friends, she said, "Now you know Mickey..." (they called me Mickey) "Do you know that girl is more than fifteen years old and she doesn't know that there isn't a Santa Claus?" That was one issue. The other was, in coming into womanhood, the natural things that occurred with me, menstruation and all of those things, of course, that was something that they did not share, as far as educating you about those. I did learn it from a reliable source, but it was not the person who raised me. When I actually came on, of course she took care of me, but I was frightened to death, I didn't know what was happening to me. Education was not a key thing, you know, like we talk to our children today. That was not it. And as a parent, you know, later on in life, I wanted to make sure there were no hidden agendas between my children and myself and there wasn't or isn't today.

Parallel to my working class British - in ferment!

EBL: Would you say that your relationship with these women, or any of your family members, influenced your decisions regarding education, or later, a career?

EM: Yes, I did not downplay them, but education was not a number one priority in our household because they themselves were not educated, but they wanted to make sure that I had the best. And I think I have two cousins who went to college, okay, that I know of. Because my mother was a twin and I don't know about those cousins but those cousins that lived in Danville, Virginia, two of the boys of the four boys from one aunt there, they went to college. But as far as I know, I am the most educated of, oh gosh, all of them. And my grandmother had twelve children and of those children, and they had children, I'm the oldest of the grandchildren, okay, and the most educated.

EBL: Tell me again, do you have brothers and sisters?

EM: No.

EBL: None.

EM: There was a young man who I will call my foster brother, or what have you, because the same family, see they never had children. So this particular lady in Danville, Virginia, was at a gathering, and the lady who raised me said, "Oh, there's a handsome little boy right there." And the lady said, "Well, do you want him?" And she said, "Well, yes." And she said, "Well, you can have him." And sure enough, she went and got the clothing, and she took him in. Okay? And I'm sixty-five, and he must be sixty-three. She raised both of us.

EBL: Wow. Tell me a little bit about your community when you were growing up. Who made up your community?

EM: Okay, the community was a group of low income folk. It was not the projects, but it was just houses. Where we are now, in this area here, if you were to leave out of this building and make a left turn, it would be the whole of East Winston, okay, where I lived. Today it is now occupied by low income apartments. But I lived in an actual house. But the people in my community: there was an ophthalmologist, a primary doctor, a person who lived immediately next door to me was a schoolteacher and a principal, and the people across the street were just common laborers, and the person immediately to the left were common laborers.

EBL: How, you mentioned that a doctor was in the community...

EM: Yeah.

EBL: What was the general feeling in that community of people regarding medical care?

EM: That was not a primary focus back in that time. I mean, you know, it's not that we didn't, I'm not saying that illness was prevalent, but he was a community doctor, not a community doctor, but a primary, a general practitioner. His son, later, was a doctor in the military, and the other son was a surgeon, okay? And the daughter was a nurse.

EBL: And this is an African American family?

EM: And the ophthalmologist was....there were no whites in our community. None. Nothing but blacks, no Spanish, no nothing. Back in the day. But the hospital today is located not far from here again, it was Kate Bidding Memorial at the time. That was the hospital. We had a white hospital and a black hospital. City hospital right now is being occupied by, it's called University Place. The Kate Bidding Hospital today is now a, what do I want to say, it is today a, you have public health in that building, you have also social services and all of those things. And it wasn't until the 1970s that we went over to what is now Novant, or Forsyth Medical Center.

EBL: When people in your family became ill, how did you deal with illness?

EM: I did fairly well, but I will you because when Mom died, she was seventy, the lady who raised me. It was very devastating for me. But let me, I guess I need to let you know, when I graduated from high school, I did not go directly to college. Okay? Even though funds were available for me to go, I did not. I went to New York and lived with my biological mother. I worked in a department store, I was a custodian in a hospital, I did all of those things. And so what I did was, as a panacea, I saved my money and had my house built. At nineteen years old, I had my first home. The lady who raised me, she lived in that house. And I continued to live in New York. And then later on, when I got married, at twenty, she moved up the street from us. But I got to the point that, okay, she died when I graduated from college. Dad died when I graduated from Master's program. So then I became fearful each time when graduation was coming near, who would it be, you know?

EBL: Something bad's gonna happen.

EM: Yeah.

EBL: So when you were living in New York and saving money...

EM: Uh-huh.

EBL: Your goal was to build this house?

EM: Yeah, I did that in lieu of going to college. Okay. I had to do something because expectations were high. When I came out in 1963 of high school, you know, it was a natural progression, go on to college, but I opted not to. And the funds really were not that available, so I went to New York to see if I could, you know, work my way.

EBL: Okay. Going back to when you were a child, and you became ill, who was it that took care of you?

EM: Well, folk worked. The illnesses that you may be speaking of, it was never anything that I was real, real sick. We had the chicken pox or the measles, mumps, not even the flu, but there were folk in the community that would allow us to stay in their house. It was a close-knit community, so everybody knew what was going on in your household and they kept each other. But the daycare as we know it today, there was not. It was neighbors keeping your children.

EBL: So that was definitely a benefit, unless you got in trouble at school...

EM: Right, right.

EBL: And then you caught it from everybody.

EM: Right, right.

EBL: Do you recall any nurses from your childhood?

EM: Yes, Nurse Stablefoot. And she is deceased. I think she died, when was it, a couple of years ago. But she was excellent. She was a public health nurse.

EBL: What is it that you remember most about her?

EM: Well, immunizations and teaching you about staying healthy, but mostly with children, it was immunizations. She was a school nurse, so you know when you were going to school, you had to be vaccinated at the time, or immunized. But she was one of those, and she was a very prominent person in the neighborhood. ✓

EBL: Let's talk a little bit about your experiences in school. Did you go to the same school all twelve years?

EM: No. Right up the street in the same neighborhood where I lived, say, in our block, of the people I told you, if you were to go two blocks above where I lived, then there was, it was called Woodland Elementary. Today...later it changed to Brown, and now it's Shiloh, it's owned by a church now. But it was Woodland Elementary. Matter of fact, my first-grade teacher is still living, and I have taken care of her in the past. The next school was Skyland. Skyland is now housed by HeadStart, and that's within walking distance. But that was HeadStart. I went to high school at Atkins, which has since changed now, it's another...it's called Winston Prep.

EBL: I did notice that on the map for this university that there are several buildings that have the last name Atkins. Was that someone that was prominent in the community?

EM: Okay, very well...and you know, now that you mention it, I don't know, but F.L. Atkins is who this building is named after, okay? The Anderson building, there was a principal at Skyland, and so I think that was named after him, Anderson. And then that Atkins, I don't know, the one in which I graduated. I don't know--there may be a...'cause I see Simon Atkins, and then you have F.L. Atkins, so I'll have to look that up. Uh-huh, I'll have to look that up.

EBL: So you would've started elementary school in the early 1950s,

EM: Yeah, mm-hmm.

EBL: And you said you graduated...?

EM: 1963, mm-hmm.

EBL: So your whole experience of school was in a segregated school...

EM: Yes.

EBL: Is that right?

EM: Yes, yes, yes.

EBL: What was your experience of going to school in a segregated school in Winston?

EM: Because you didn't know any better, and I'm glad that you asked, because you didn't know any better....see there was never a curiosity to wonder about anybody else, okay? Now, the Babcocks, which are very well-to-do folk, the Reynolds, well-to-do, the Grays, which Grayland is named after, see those are folk, you know, that did not, I mean, we didn't even think about it. Now the people that you might would be concerned was the private school, which was Catholic. African Americans, there was some who went to the Catholic school, it was private. Okay, like the Russells, who owned the Russell Funeral Home, they went to the Catholic school. But the local schools, we thought nothing of it. All of our teachers were African Americans, both male and female. To me, I got an enriched education. You know, I had three years of French, I, with New York, that helped me out a lot. I met all kinds of folk, and I could speak another language as well. But I think I got a good education. I really do. I didn't have to worry about what you had in your home, because hey, I didn't know any better. Okay, because you get used to what you're used to, okay? But it was not until I went to New York to find out how narrow we were here, okay? Now let me go back to Danville, I was there, I saw them water folks down, hose them down on the downtown area. I witnessed not being able to go to certain bathrooms, so I know about that. But I never felt inferior, you know, being in an all-black setting, okay? And I remember when segregation...when we became...see, I didn't have to ride the bus, see I was able to walk everywhere I had to go. So I couldn't identify with riding the bus and the mixture of students, of children.

Interesting!

EBL: Do you recall what year schools here in Winston-Salem underwent desegregation?

EM: Now I want to be honest with you...if I graduated in '63, it had to be after that.

EBL: Probably the mid-'60s, a few years later.

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: Probably when you were in New York, maybe?

EM: Okay, now, let me say this, and whether it's on the record or off the record: Chinese people were responsible for, you know, doing some dry-cleaning. And all we knew were Jewish people. It wasn't until I went to New York I learned, gosh, there's all kinds of folks. You know, there's the Irish, you know, the Germans, just a mixture of folk. And that peaked my curiosity. I wanted to know about those different ethnic groups. So I must tell you, I am well versed in different kinds of cultures and different people. And I valued that. And when I came back home, I just couldn't believe how antiquated, how unlearned we were.

EBL: And we?

EM: Meaning African Americans. Well, people in Winston-Salem. I mean, you know, we were not, I mean we lived in our own little world. We were happy with what was going on and not, okay, the regular country kitchen, cooking rather, those things we were used to. And we

didn't worry about steaks and baked potato because that wasn't all...we were used to what we had, you know. You could have a stew, or you could have molasses and biscuits, and you know, fatback meat and you'd be satisfied, okay? But then when going to New York is when I learned how...the dress code changed, how women were very proud of themselves, they looked good. You know, we would wear our hair rolled up, or what have you. You know, those type things just to see the various styles, you know being exposed to different people. And vacationing, I mean, you know. The people up north, I mean I traveled, you know, all the time, and having fun.

EBL: When you came back from New York...

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: And your eyes had been opened to all these different cultures, and all these different ideas, and different ways of living in the world...

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: How did people feel about you, how did they perceive you, people here?

EM: I don't know, because lots of my classmates I had not seen, you know, for years, you know. And every now and then they would say, "Are you back here in town" or what have you, because I got married when I was twenty, and my husband, he was in the military, okay? But people here would go to bed at seven o'clock, in our community, where I bought the house. They would go to bed at seven o'clock, it was like, dull. Okay? Not a lot of exposure. And my husband and I, we're different people. I mean, you know, I'm educated and he's not. He was a common laborer, worked in R.J. Reynolds out of the service. After the service.

EBL: Did you meet him in New York?

EM: No, no, no, he was living here. He lived in Walkertown. And I lived, where I lived on Highland.

EBL: How did you all meet?

EM: A fellow who is deceased now said, "I want to take you by this young lady's house. She's a pretty girl." And so, at the time he came to my house, I was sick as a dog, looked wild, hair standing all over my head [laughter], and at least he, you know, he greeted me, and we talked later on. And I was very young, I was fourteen or fifteen years old. Even though I didn't go anywhere, I didn't date, per se, but that was the only fellow. [laughter] And that's fifty years ago. [laughter]

EBL: Tell me a little bit more, before we move on from your experiences in high school, tell me a little bit about what you were like as a student.

EM: Studious. I was extremely smart.

EBL: What were your best subjects?

EM: Foreign language. And theatrics, the arts.

EBL: What did you like to do for fun when you were a teenager?

EM: Well, I was limited, I couldn't do a whole lot. As I think there is an employee here, Ms. Bimbo, who is younger than I am, and as I tell you, I can't remember her, but her mother would allow us, as students, to have on Friday night or Saturday night, we could have parties. And of course there was no drinking or anything but dancing, and you know, just mingling together. And she would allow us to do that, and we would do it also as a fundraiser, okay, because I was in an organization back then and there. But I was never a partier, or you know, a person to go out, you know...a lot. And, now whether it was good or bad, we had TV, but you had limited channels. We didn't have cable or anything like that. Church, I had to go to. And I didn't go to clubs, you know, and dancing and all of that. I don't know, but I enjoyed my life, but I didn't do all of that. [laughter]

EBL: Do you remember any particular heroes when you were that age, a teenager?

EM: Heroes. Not heroes, but Dr. Allen, who I was telling you lived right up the street, he was a hero. His son, who was one of the first black surgeons, that got to operate in the white hospital, I felt very proud knowing them. Melanie, their daughter, we were not, we were friends, but of course, she went away, and her brother Teddy, he went in the military. And then, you know, I thought he was a hero.

EBL: Let's talk a little bit more about when you married.

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: You said your husband was a laborer.

EM: Yeah.

EBL: What was his educational background?

EM: He finished high school in the military.

EBL: Okay. How long was...what branch of the service was he in?

EM: The Army.

EBL: How long was he in?

EM: He was in for, what? At least five or six years, and he did Reserve. And he went to Vietnam.

EBL: And that's while you were married?

EM: Hmm-hmm. The Reserve was while we were married. But he went to...he was eighteen or nineteen years old when he went into the military.

EBL: And he grew up in Winston as well?

EM: Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm. He grew up in Walkertown.

EBL: Walkertown.

EM: Which is like a suburb.

EBL: Okay. Did his, do you recall if his mother worked?

EM: She did not work. She was a pastor's wife, okay? Reverend McCullough. He, what is now Waste Management, in our area, it was my husband and his [her father-in law's]boys, they ran a garbage route, okay. And mother-in-law did not work.

EBL: Did your husband grow up having any particularly strong feelings about women working?

EM: Real strong. And funny that you should ask, when the program came out when I was twenty-two, that ESR, the Experiment in Self-Reliance funded underserved children to go into nursing, the LPN program, he said to me now, "I hope you know what you're doing because you got to work, you got these babies here, and you want to go to school." So, it was, I guess I had to be like an octopus, I had to do all of those things, I mean, you know. [laughter] And he was, I guess, he told me early on, "All the nice things that you're getting now..." This was before we got married, you know I had to have something new every Sunday to wear, I had to have all of these...And he said, "It's not going to be this way." And I should have listened to everything that he told me about how things were going to change. And he was right. The same thing with the children. After we had children, and you know, he said, you know, "If you want to do all these things, you still have to work." So I had to work, you know, the whole time.

EBL: Tell me about your having children. How many do you have?

EM: I had three. We lost our son in 1996 at twenty-five years old, fell over dead. And I did CPR on him, by the way, but I had two boys and one girl. My daughter is the middle child. The youngest and the eldest were boys.

EBL: You had three children by the time that you decided to go into nursing?

EM: Mmm-hmm. I had one, let's see, as an LPN I had one in '66, another in '67. I waited, in '71, I had my third one.

EBL: Okay. So you were an LPN already.

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: Tell me about your decision to become a nurse, back when you started your LPN training. What led to that decision?

EM: Having worked in Forsyth Hospital, and I worked in New York, by the way, as an LPN later. Folk used to tell me, they said "You know, you're kinda smart..." (and I don't mean to brag). "You're kinda smart, you need to, you know, pursue and go on further." There were forty students in our class, and I'm the only person who went on and became a registered nurse. Out of all those classmates.

EBL: Now, classmates?

EM: LPN.

EBL: The LPN. Where were you going for your training?

EM: Forsyth Technical Community.

EBL: Forsyth, okay.

EM: Uh-huh. But this was a special program, and I will tell you right now, we have a person on faculty here, she only works ten percent of the time, but she was over that program. And she and I, we came back, she graduated, both she and I graduated from the baccalaureate program. But she was my instructor.

EBL: So it was a four-year program?

EM: No.

EBL: No?

EM: When I went to Forsyth Tech, no, that's a thirteen-month. That's an LPN.

EBL: Okay. But the RN, was a four-year?

EM: No. Yeah. I graduated from here and I didn't get any credit. Unlike what you do today, you could challenge exams and could get in here. No, I had to take the whole four years.

EBL: Okay. How did your, you told me a little bit about your husband felt about you deciding to become a nurse, how about the rest of your family?

EM: Well, on his side, apparently they must love it. I have one, his first cousin has a daughter that finished in nursing. I have, none of my children were interested. Oh, let me see...that's the only one. That's the only one. She's a nurse, and there's another that's a nurse assistant and would like to be a nurse. Of my husband's family. But nobody on my immediate side.

EBL: How did they feel about your decision, your personal decision? Were they generally supportive?

EM: Yeah.

EBL: Did they have concerns about you doing that?

EM: No.

EBL: When you were starting your training, where were black nurses receiving training, in North Carolina?

EM: Okay. In North Carolina, no. Okay, now let's...you had, back in the day you had diploma nursing. The same hospital I told you, Kate Bidding, they had black nurses there. Okay, it was a diploma-nurse program. There was a white nursing diploma school. Then you had a new program that came out...I've forgotten what year, but Ms. Barbara, who is African American here, she was one of the first black nurses to go to the one at Forsyth. Okay. But Winston-Salem State was primarily a teaching college, so I want to say that it was right around 1955 or so that the baccalaureate program in nursing...Then you have A and T, that's HPCU, North Carolina Central, HPCU, and those are all baccalaureate degree nursing programs here in North Carolina.

EBL: When you were working on your training, either as an LPN or as an RN, were you living at home?

EM: Yes.

EBL: Well, of course, you had children later on when you were an RN or training to be an RN. Where did you do your clinical rotations?

EM: Okay, we did our clinical rotations at...we were at Reynolds Hospital, I think. Reynolds Hospital, and....that's where it was.

EBL: Does anything stand out about that time?

EM: And then Forsyth. I'm sorry, Forsyth. But we couldn't work in the operating room and go to intensive care, but, uh, Forsyth.

EBL: Why was that?

EM: I don't know, but that was off limits to us. Us, meaning nurses in general. Today, it's still a problem. They don't like, necessarily, for too many students to come in the operating room for observation. You know, experience, 'cause there's no faculty with you.

EBL: Do you remember any experiences during that time that you were doing those rotations that really stand out?

EM: I mean, Doctors Webster, and all the doctors that were here at the time, we had excellent experiences and I was very competent wherever I went. I had excellent clinical skills.

EBL: Did you get to try out different areas of specialization?

EM: Yeah. Mmm-hmm.

EBL: Do you remember....did you enjoy any one more than another?

EM: Critical care was nice, but we didn't do a whole lot there. Just generic mid-surge nursing was what were used to, but we got, you know, go to pediatrics, you know. Not a whole lot of OB and things like that.

EBL: Tell me a little bit about the people who were teaching your classes. Who were, what kind of people were they, who were they, were they mostly women?

EM: Okay. All women. Okay. Dr. Webster, even though she's seventy-five. She is...she still comes over here periodically.

EBL: Is this Ms. Sadie Webster?

EM: Sadie, uh-huh.

EBL: I've heard of her.

EM: Sadie was my Dean. Okay. But the person who allowed me to come into the program, she is elderly now, and really don't know she's in this world. She has Alzheimer's real bad. But Sadie Webster, she was cardiovascular. She taught me, and Ms. Fera B [?] taught me Behavioral Health, which was psychiatry, back in the day. And Dr. Johnson was a mid-surge.

EBL: Where, roughly, would these people have been trained?

EM: Okay, now, Sadie probably was trained at Kate Bidding early on. But when she...I don't know exactly. I think that's where she was. But she received her doctorate, say, like 1991, somewhere along in there. Or 1985. 1985, '89, somewhere along in there, she received her doctorate. Dr. Johnson, I knew of her as being Dr. Johnson when she came here. Dr. Coleman, which later on, she taught PEDS. I tell you what, Virginia Adams taught me Pediatrics. She was...I think she must've gotten her doctorate at UNC-G. And then she became the dean up

there in Wilmington. And she was the keynote speaker here not too long ago for nurses...for their graduation...not graduation, but for Homecoming experiences. I remember that.

EBL: Who were your classmates while you were training, either as an LPN or as an RN? Maybe not necessarily names, but just general, were they all women, all African American?

EM: All women. All women, and all African Americans. As a matter of fact, some students that we teach now, their mothers were classmates of mine. Ms. Hall, who is here now, she was younger than me, but she was my classmate. And she and I, we team-teach now. She and I, she graduated in '77, and I graduated in '76. And she's my classmate, I mean, I was here, and I finished first, but I...she and I...are still friends, and we work together.

EBL: That's a pretty neat relationship.

EM: Mmm-hmmm.

EBL: When you were in your training, did you have...it sounds like you might have had more than one, but did you have one mentor that really stood out?

EM: The mentors as you know them today, are not like they were back then and there. There were preceptors and things like that. The faculty, I'm not saying that the respect is different. But like Dr. Webster, I'm just saying, I mean, she was a person that you could talk with, but she would tell you, "Now, honey, you're going to have to separate the LPN and what you do over at Forsyth, and what you do here." Okay? She made that distinction. You needed to know that, okay, you got to leave that over there. You are now, you know, becoming a registered, you know, going into a licensure program, so there was a difference. You felt comfortable with saying I don't know how to do something, and they certainly would help you, but you also knew that if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you would be out of the program. And today, we do nurture them a little bit more than they did back then, but I was independent. I mean, you know, I knew they meant business, and I knew I was a mother and I had children, and I had, you know, I had places I had to be and each one of the roles I had to play, and I wanted to finish the program. I got special permission from the, he was the Chancellor at the time. I had to take twenty-one hours. So I saw myself going and coming, and he gave me permission to take that. Okay.

EBL: Plus a job, plus being married, plus having children.

EM: And yes, mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm. Now I worked part-time, okay. But I did all of those things. And I'm not saying I don't feel sorry for the kids today, but they can't do it. You know, you have to be determined, but the people did not baby us. I mean, you know, this was a program and they taught me well. I mean, I felt, you know, I could compete with any other student in the country.

EBL: Tell me what year you graduated from your LPN?

EM: I graduated from LPN in 1968. 1967. I went on to LPN 2 school in '68 and I graduated from there.

EBL: Okay.

EM: And I came here in 1973.

EBL: Now the LPN 2, was that just more advance training?

EM: Yes. Operating room. That was the specialty.

EBL: Okay.

EM: And of course, that's ceased.

EBL: When did you get your first job?

EM: Oh, gosh. 1970.

EBL: So there was...

EM: No, '69. No, I got my first job as soon as I finished the LPN 2 program. I worked in the operating room. I worked at Baptist in the operating room. And I worked from '68 to '69. And then I went from there to New York, and I worked at Harlem Hospital and Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital and I came here in 1970. Okay. And worked at Kate Bidding until 1973 when they closed that out and said we had to go over to Forsyth.

EBL: When you were working as a nurse, well, at any point in your career, have you ever had to do any other kind of work, in addition to your nursing work?

EM: Like, okay, now. When I was in grad school, after graduation, I decided that I did not wish to teach, so I was in administration. But also I developed a tutorial program and all of that, so...all of that, along with this, I've worked several jobs, you know. [laughter].

EBL: Tell me a little bit about your relationship with your coworkers. From those early jobs, you were telling me that mentor relationships have changed from what they used to be to what they are now.

EM: Mmm-hmm.

EBL: What about your relationships with coworkers, or maybe supervisors, or doctors, even?

EM: Funny that you should ask. In the RN-to-BSN, Sandra Wilder is, first of all, she taught at the first white school at Forsyth. Okay, she's African American. After that, she came into the hospital and she was over critical care. So she was Director of Critical Care, so I was answerable to her. Okay. Now, she's here, and you know, we're peers. But I think, you know,

as far as friendship is concerned, and colleagal, I think that's, I think it's gone well. And I'm in a sorority, a nursing sorority where there's nothing but registered nurses. Okay, and some of them are, we've been together thirty-two years in that, some of us. And Ann Moore, who is one of the nurses here, over across the hall, she and I have been peers that long. And friends.

EBL: Was there ever any kind of a notion of a hierarchy in amongst your group of peers? Maybe people who had decided to not to go on for an RN? Would you say there's a hierarchy there?

EM: It's not...the majority of my classmates, of course, the '67 classmates, a lot of them are deceased, okay. There's one, she works at the nursing home now. We're still friends, I mean, you know, whenever we see each other. And she'll call if there's something, a concern that she has wherever she's working and she wants to validate, you know, whether this is correct or not. So there's always, you know, communication and colleagal, you know, we speak in the community. As far as me being different and more than anybody else, or climbing that ladder, even when I was a supervisor, I got the respect from the subordinates. But we still, now, I'm working right beside them, because I work every Tuesday and Wednesday, 7p to 11p, and I float. So, those same people, I'm probably the oldest one there still floating, but, you know, I'm still there.

EBL: Tell me a little bit about this...maybe when you got your first position as a supervisor...

EM: I was the first black at Forsyth.

EBL: What were you doing?

Missed opportunity to ask how & why she took that job?

EM: We were brought...we had different areas. I had OB and Critical Care. So Critical Care was ICU, CCU, and Obstetrics.

EBL: Now is this Forsyth County Hospital?

EM: Forsyth Medical Center today, part of Novant.

EBL: Who were the people you were supervising?

EM: Oh, gosh. All folks. You have unlicensed personnel, you had...I was the house supervisor, so when the call came through, any administrative decision...didn't know what to do...not only would we assign people, but I would ask and answer questions and also start IVs, whatever, you know, there was to do, I did.

EBL: Tell me about your current job. What, you're working at Winston-Salem State. What is your job title?

EM: Here, I'm Coordinator for Maternity Nursing, which is a senior course.

EBL: When did you join the Nursing faculty here?

EM: Now they said it was 2002. I thought it was earlier than that. But, August 2002. But, I had always assisted the University with preparing the nurses to take the state board.

EBL: When did you begin doing that?

EM: When I graduated from UNC-G in 1981 and decided I did not want to teach, but I said, why let this go in vain. So I developed a tutorial program.

EBL: Okay.

EM: So I traveled. I taught at Auburn, USC, you know. Prairie View. We were just moving around. I know half the personnel at Forsyth Hospital.

EBL: What degree did you complete at UNC-G?

EM: Masters in Science, in Nursing. And my classmate is the president of greater Winston-Salem over at Novant. She was the first nursing chief operating officer. She and I went to UNC-G together, graduated in '81.

EBL: Tell me about some challenges that you have faced in your career, some, maybe with coworkers or supervisors or just the kinds of things that you were doing at the time. Maybe changes in technology?

EM: Now I don't wish to sound cocky, but what has happened is that, supervision, one of the things that I value is that they sent me off on, to a creative learning institute, which is over in Greensboro, where you know and learn about leadership. Because I later became Nurse Manager over clinicians, thirteen registered nurses over at Forsyth. In which we were the you-name-it for all of the hospital. So we developed, I developed that in 1994 to 1997. The challenge was, and whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, I was ousted out of the job, afterwards, but the good thing about that is, the role still exists, and it's throughout all of Novant's services. So, I did a good job. I rolled it out like it was supposed to be. But I'm saying that after you do a good job, then you're no longer needed. You understand what I'm saying? I did write an article on that. But, so that sort of bothered me. Okay. Then I left there and went to, still part of the Novant system, there was a job that worked with, it was like in a complex, it was right across from the hospital, but we worked with partners, Medicare Choice patients. Some of us had telephonic loads, where you would call out to people, and some of us had both that and home visits. Dr. Shepard and I, okay, she's now over here. She and I, we did that until Blue Cross Blue Shield bought out partners. So I had to come back into the hospital and I became the nurse, the head nurse over Radiology. Now, they didn't like me at all. I didn't last there nine months. I had six nurses to work under me. I had to be answerable to the Radiologist. And there were six different modalities in which the nurse would have to work. The problem was, they wanted me to be right beside them. Make sure I worked right beside them, took call like they did, and make sure I had education opportunity and nursing, I had to link them with nursing. Now, that did not last. And once that did not last, then I came here. And to make a long story short, the nurse who took my role, she does not have to work in any

of the services now. And I don't want to be racial, but it's racial. They did not like it. I had one black nurse and five whites. The whites had difficulty with me not being in, it's called "special procedures," where you have to be on call, come back, and all of that stuff. And they wanted me to take call just like they did. I wasn't opposed to that, but I could not do everything that you wanted me to do, and be administrative, and now, a worker-bee. I mean, I don't mind working, but I couldn't do all of it. Now, I went through every modality, so I could function in any one of those, but then, was it right that, you know, the Radiologist listened to what they said, and it became difficult for me.

EBL: So you left that position and came here?

EM: Yeah. Mmm-hmm. Dr. Flack, who is the former Dean here, she had been encouraging me to come here all along. And I said, "Well, honey, I don't want to come over there and take a twenty-thousand dollar cut." But, in the end, it sounds good. So, I took the twenty-thousand dollar cut and came over here. And now, in reflecting back, that's the best move I could've ever made.

EBL: Piece of mind?

EM: Well, not only that, but education was not a focus there. And I've always aspired to be educated. And that wasn't there. And today, it is something that, you know, nursing, you've got the magnet hospital, they're talking about theorists, they're talking about continuous improvement, sigma, all of those things. See, now it's important. See, I had all of that, you know, before, but now is the time, and we have hospitals all over both South Carolina and North Carolina and bordering the Mason-Dixon line. So education is now key. You know, I like it. I like the students, and you know, I have the time off, and see, I can finish my PhD.

EBL: Have you seen a shift in what kinds of things are emphasized, so far as educational or any kind of training goes?

EM: Yes. The majority of the nurses at Forsyth Hospital as well as Baptist, they were just associate degree nurses. Now, all of a sudden, either because they are magnet-certified, that they want their nurses, especially leadership folk, to make sure they elevate the plane of nursing to be master, I'm sorry, baccalaureate-prepared. So now you have RN to BSN and you have Ms. Little, who takes the program over to the hospitals and things like that. So education is an emphasis, whereas back in the day it was not.

EBL: Do you see an increased demand in nurses being specialized?

EM: When I graduated from UNC-G in 1981, I was a clin-spec. I was a clinical specialist, and because my focus was maternity, I did not have to take the certification at the time. Today, in order to be in certain areas, of course you have to be credentialed, like oncology nurse and all of that. But they want all of the nurses to be registered nurse certified, meaning your education is up to date in the area that you're working, whether it's med-surge, or obstetrics, or pediatrics, or what have you. They want you to be certified.

EBL: Do you think that nurses' relationships with doctors are different today than they used to be?

EM: Yes. We are no longer submissive. We can stand on our own as far as, we will not orchestrate an order unless it is, or carry out the order unless we find that, you know, if we have any questions about it, we will certainly bring it to their attention, you know, I just won't do it because you say you're the doctor. We do talk, of course, we have to follow his lead, but it's more now, you can have conversation with them. And when you call them, of course, we know we've got to have the most current vital signs, we have to say how the patient's condition has changed, and based on that, "May I suggest this," or what have you. And they will listen to you.

EBL: Now, you did say "he" in referring to a doctor. Would that relationship, or is that relationship different when the doctor is a woman?

EM: Same thing. No, same thing. As a matter of fact, now my thing is, my doctorate, I'm going to be looking at female nurses' attitude toward males in women's health. Now that's going to be a big issue when I go and approach people, because there are no males in women's health. They're there in newborn nursery, I'm sorry, NICU, but they cannot be out there on the floor, around in this area here. They may have them in Asheville, but they don't have them down here.

EBL: Why is that?

EM: They just have concerns in women's, you know, with women's health that males should not be. And I think nursing is no longer a gendered profession. If we're saying, you know, the same thing with MDs. Now, if, in labor and delivery, a female doctor has to have a chaperone when she does a vaginal exam as well. Okay. Male or female. Now, we listen to them either way, so it does not make a difference whether it's male or female. A physician is a physician.

EBL: You mentioned that nursing is not gendered today as it was. And I did notice that there are quite a few men in the photos out in the hall...

EM: Right. Mmm-hmm.

EBL: What would you say is the percentage of men enrolled in classes?

EM: I still think it's one...it's still one percent. Okay, say in my class right now, it's a seven-week course. There are sixteen students. Of the sixteen, there are three males. Okay. In a med-surge, I would say they have at least six or seven males. Or maybe even more. In the Master's program, I don't know how many males are there, but they're, we're encouraging males.

EBL: Are these men African American?

EM: Not all, no. No, no. A lot of paramedics because the paramedics, you know, we have, we were the only program here with paramedics to be BSN. So a lot of them, they are white.

EBL: Do you think that there is, and I don't even know if you can speculate on this, but I did notice in a lot of the photos where, out in the hall, where there were photos of people and their graduating classes, of the men that were pictured, they were almost always white. Is there a reluctance in the black community for African American men to go into nursing?

Good question!

EM: Let me say this: if this is an HBCU school, and it's not worrisome as it once was, but when the paramedics...

[brief interruption]

EM: what happened was, we used to be...

[interruption continues again]

EM: There used to be a lot of conflict when the program first got started because it appeared there was preferential treatment to the paramedics, okay? For example, with challenging exams, and things like this, seemed like they, and of course, a lot of them, you know, they were in emergent situations, so they could, of course, they had a little more experience than your generic student. But that has sort of waned. And 'cause it's going to be, you might as well get used to it. So, I think right now we are pretty, they get along, you know pretty good, and you know, and they have their own studying partners and things like that, so...

EBL: Okay. Tell me a little bit about something you would consider the highlight of your career as a nurse. Maybe your, one of your most rewarding experiences.

EM: Just being able to see the students from, in this setting. To see students grow, mature, and out on their own, and you know, and then, as I said, I do work 7p to 11p and sometimes I have to go over and work right beside them, and you know, and they give me out an assignment, you know. I think that's been rewarding. The number of students that I have assisted to pass the state board, that's been gratifying. But I just thank God each and every day that he allows me to be fluid as I am, and to keep, you know, on top of things, even though I know my time is narrowing because I am older. But if he can continue to give me the wisdom and knowledge that I have, you know...that's, that's the highlight for me. And I do wish to get my doctorate before I leave here or retire.

EBL: Well, speaking of further studies, tell me a little bit about what you're trying to do with your dissertation.

EM: Right now, I am online taking a course online. I finished all my core courses. And surprisingly enough, it is not in nursing. It is in Human Resources. Okay, so I have learned quite a bit of information, but it's more related with health, okay, and knowing what people mix with what people, when looking at your employees, or systems, what would fit, be the right fit, I think that's very important, whether I do it here, or I can do it online or what have you, in the future. And it's now turned out to be public leadership. That's what the PhD is in. And it's on, Capella online. And I have two more residencies that I have to go to Jacksonville, Florida to one, and to another area and then I sit for comps, and then dissertation.

EBL: When do you expect to graduate?

EM: I hope to by, it will be say, probably December 2011.

EBL: Not too far in the future.

EM: I hope! I don't know, I just hope right now people are really just running scared, you know, because they, some of them are at Hampton, some of them are at UNC-G, and at other places, and there's and Walden's. So there's a lot to think about.

EBL: Mmm-hmmm.

EM: And that's one of the prerequisites now for being hired here.

EBL: What's that?

EM: You have to have a PhD or EDD.

EBL: Oh, okay.

EM: Mmm-hmm. Because see, you have Master's and you have nurse practitioners, and you have F and P program and you already have PhD in, I'm sorry DPT, Doctorate in Physical Therapy. And they're trying the DNP.

EBL: Well when do you expect to retire?

EM: I have until 2012, and I'll be 67, I think, if, you know...but I can retire at any time, I can stop what I'm doing and stop at any time. But, funds available for education--one of the requirements is that you have to pay back the money through service. So I would have to teach whether it's online or somewhere, you know, in my home or whatever. Just to repay them.

EBL: Well that's interesting.

EM: Yeah.

EBL: And it's interesting to hear that you're still going further with your education.

EM: Yeah, well I did before retiring, I always did want to have a PhD.

EBL: Well, I hope your continuing studies go well...

EM: I hope so too.

EBL: And good luck with that dissertation. [laughter].

EM: Now, how far along are you?

EBL: I have one semester of coursework left.

EM: Okay.

EBL: And I'll have, this is my second Master's Degree.

EM: Okay.

EBL: So, onward to a real job!

EM: Okay, well, that's great.

EBL: Let's hope so. Well, is there anything else that you wanted to share?

EM: No...first of all, thank you so much for interviewing me. It has been helpful for some of the things that I hope to do, you know, with the dissertation because I was going to do interviews as well. But, just the time and effort that you put in this and also for interviewing me, that's been great.

EBL: Well, I enjoyed hearing your story. You have a fascinating life story!

EM: [laughter] Well, it's too much. Well, now I do appreciate you, and you know, it's a lot having to travel from where you are, and to come down, but I mean, you know, you have to do what you have to do.

EBL: Sure, yes ma'am.

EM: And I do appreciate it.

EBL: Well, thank you.

EM: Okay.