

PHOTO FRIENDS OF THE LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY  
"SHADES OF L.A." ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

GENERAL INDEX OF VERA WILLIAMS INTERVIEWS

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CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE A

- 003 Born in Tatum, Texas in 1906
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- 021 Grandparents on father's side were slaves' children -- Grandmother told stories about slavery times
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- 077 Father starts automobile repair shop in Terrell -- He leaves Terrell in 1922, due to threats and attempts to kill him and run him out of town -- Jule Deckard goes to Los Angeles with his son and works for a year
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- 617 Verna and Arthur's participated in Westminster  
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642 Sunday visits to friends  
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673 Husband gets sick and dies of tuberculosis after 3  
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715 Verna decides to go to work, age 20  
722 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE A

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000 BEGINNING CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE B  
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023 Father tells her she doesn't have to work --  
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080 Goes to work for Lincoln Theater across the street  
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195 Buys house with Al Maddox, "black millionaire"  
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230 Effects of restrictive housing covenant --  
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- 250 African-Americans begin to buy in Sugar Hill area
- 264 Bought first house on Hooper on east side -- "My stepping stone" house
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- 380 Restrictive covenant broken -- Builds "dream house" out of redwood on lot -- Lives there for 30 years
- 411 Sells house in 1949
- 421 Leimert Park opened up for African-Americans -- Buys present house
- 433 Black Dalia case -- Girl's body found on land where house is built
- 444 Feelings about present house
- 454 Problems for African-Americans buying after covenant broken -- Whites charged more money to blacks
- 482 Boundaries of restrictive housing -- Whites would move out when blacks moved in
- 502 Baldwin Hills developed in 1948
- 526 WWII migration of African-Americans -- Jobs in shipyards -- African-American women streetcar conductors -- Rooming houses common
- 560 Rents out rooms during War and pays off first house
- 577 Memories of WWI -- Eating whole wheat flour -- Father's brother went to war
- 615 The Depression was not a hardship for Verna
- 630 Strategies for saving money in the bank
- 640 Buys first house during the Depression -- Borrows money from son and friends for down payment,

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including friend who was waiter at Club Alabam  
698 Renovates house and rents out rooms  
724 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE B---STORY CONTINUED  
ON NEXT TAPE

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CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE A

000 Silence  
004 Buys first house -- Strategy for buying -- Borrows  
money and rents out rooms -- Decides to get job --  
Asserts independence  
023 Recollections of Central Avenue -- Working at  
Tivoli Theater  
038 Political study club -- Betty Hill getting jobs  
for educated blacks -- Goes to Betty Hill to get  
job.  
052 Gets job in Edna Kirby's Glass House -- \$3/day for  
10 days -- Describes uniform  
073 Kraft representative comes to demonstration in  
Glass House -- Later gives her a job as  
demonstrator in grocery stores  
138 Gets job as demonstrator -- Works in advertisement  
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157 Works as demonstrator for a year for Kraft -- Job  
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195 (DAT tape 2 started)  
200 Takes over grocery concession at Vernon/Central --  
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Having fresh fish, bread, eggs, etc. -- Gets a  
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296 Sells business -- Goes into real estate -- Works  
for Al Maddox, "black millionaire" -- Speculating  
on real estate

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- 315 Goes to work for west side real estate office with Japanese owners and earns more money on "listings" than on speculating with Maddox
- 330 Present work as "extra" in movies -- "In Living Color"
- 370 Works through casting companies -- Acted in nationwide McDonald's commercial
- 382 Started as "extra" through contact at real estate office -- Client asked her to come as extra in 1957.
- 409 Works to stay young and support grandchildren
- 418 Goals and future plans are to stay healthy and earn money
- 430 Politics -- Women's Political Study Club -- Betty Hill -- Works as inspector for election board.
- 450 Civil Rights recollections -- Martin Luther King - - Mayor Tom Bradley -- Working as fundraiser for candidates
- 464 Knew Tom Bradley as a detective -- Worked on his campaigns for City Council and Mayor
- 473 Election board worker
- 481 Home was polling place but stopped because it was too costly and they didn't pay enough
- 510 Changes in Los Angeles -- size, crime, drugs, graffiti, single mothers
- 570 Contrast with own experience as a single mother
- 587 Changes in African-American community -- Move to west side -- Describes "low brow" neighbor on east side
- 638 Moving into nicer neighborhoods -- Desire to improve self
- 655 Most important events in life -- McDonald's commercial -- Building new home -- Marrying Mr. Williams
- 676 Mr. Williams was "good catch" -- He divorces first

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wife -- Then meets Verna and courtship begins

720 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE A

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CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE B

000 Silence

004 Continuing story of Mr. Williams -- He was a  
principal -- Real estate broker -- Met in 1956 --  
Prosperous man -- Married in 1964

020 Mr. Williams admired Verna's economical  
sensibility -- Verna cuts napkin in half on first  
dinner date

032 Mr. Williams asks to see her vacuum cleaner --  
Impressed with her domestic practices

042 Moves to present house in 1982

046 Returns to school -- Earns A.A. degree L.A.C.C. in  
Home Economics

060 Reflects on Home Economics -- High school  
counselors advised African-Americans to take Home  
Economics in past to discourage entrance into  
college

076 Decides on Home Economics major -- Values on being  
a good housewife -- "Cleanliness is next to  
godliness." -- Domestic aesthetics

103 Greatest success in real estate -- Natural  
salesperson -- Selling techniques in real estate

121 Greatest disappointments were deaths of two  
husbands and death of father

141 Philosophy about her disappointments -- Life goes  
on -- Doesn't hold onto malice

155 Present situation of Rodney King verdict

164 Verna's experience of the uprising -- Evacuated  
home because of threat of exploding gas lines --  
Son lost jukebox and was victim of theft in his  
income tax office -- Does not condone violence --

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Feels intense sadness  
226 People stole metal bars off house in Watts she was selling  
267 Clean up -- Food at church for community -- Went to two families to deliver supplies -- Changing attitudes in race relations  
296 New immigration problems  
308 Son moved to Palmdale to escape inner city problems and drugs in schools  
338 Prays to God  
344 End of first interview

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344 to end Blank tape-Silence  
724 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE B

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PHOTOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW -- MAY 27, 1992

CASSETTE TAPE 3, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 3)

000 Silence  
004 Importance of photography  
007 Only one documenting her life  
015 Photographs of grandparents and many photos were burned  
020 "Kodaking" as a teenager -- Outings with friends in Terrell, Texas  
034 Photo Albums -- Oldest one falling apart  
041 Organization by subject matter  
045 Occasions for viewing photographs  
051 80th birthday party -- Made photo display of her life  
068 Family photographs were burned -- Has none of aunts  
077 (Begin Review of photographs)

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(Entries are photo identifications from accession books)

- 077 1. A-006-182. Jule L. Deckard and his daughter Verna in front of his garage and blacksmith shop, Texas, ca. 1910.
- 151 2. A-006-196. Jule L. Deckard's auto repair business, 2322 S. Central Ave., L.A. 1927.
- 163 3. A-006-617. Jule L. Deckard in L.A.
- 249 4. A-006-632. "Papa and his Fords lined up for Texas." Getting ready to return to Texas after Verna's wedding, 1924.
- 272 5. A-006-631. Sweet 16 Club on Verna's Ford coupe, Verna and Anna Louise Griffin on top.
- 343 6. A-006-616. Val Verde Park. (l-r): Mrs. Nealy, Jule and Eula Deckard, Verna Williams, and Verna's son, Arthur Lewis, Jr., 1927.
- 385 7. A-006-197. The Paramount Club, group portrait, 1925.
- 554 8. A-006-180. La Vera White's 18th birthday party, 18th and Central, 1928.
- 659 9. A-006-183. Benefit hay ride for Westview Hospital given by Verna Williams. Some of the Mill Brothers' children in picture.
- 721 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 3, SIDE A -- CONTINUED ON SIDE B

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CASSETTE TAPE 3, SIDE B

- 000 Silence
- 004 Westview Hospital
- 018 10. A-006-633.2. Beauty Contest. Sportswear section of contest representing Maybell's Cafe at 12th and Central.
11. A-006-633.1. Beauty Contest. Center, Verna.
- 055 12. A-006-643. Verna at Beauty contest.
- 083 13. A-006-618. Parkridge, Corona California, 1928. "The largest colored country club in the world."

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- 086 14. A-006-181. Orange Julius stand owned by Verna Williams and son, Arthur Lewis at Vermont and Central, 1952-53.
- 174 15. A-006-636. Edna Kirby's Glass House. Pan Pacific Auditorium, 1938. Verna Williams on left, doing demos, on right, Edna Kirby.
- 225 16. A-006-637. Group photo aboard ship, (l-r): Visitor, Gladycé, captain of ship, Verna, trip to Catalina.
- 238 17. A-006-178. Portrait of Arthur Lewis Jr. and his mother, Verna Lewis, 1927. Insert is Arthur A. Lewis, Sr.
- 263 18. A-006-193. Arthur A. Lewis posed in goat drawn cart, 1932.
- 275 19. A-006-179. Halloween Party at the Larada Ballroom, 1929. (l-r): Mable A. Brown, Verna Deckard, Maria Phillips.
- 325 20. A-006-620. Verna and son.
- 340 21. A-006-627. Verna and Sidney, Santa Monica Beach, segregated section, 1931.
- 361 22. A-006-628. Verna, Sidney, Gladys Babinaeu, Theopolis Smith.
- 371 23. A-006-629. Verna and ?
- 389 24. A-006-630. Arthur and Verna, 08/02/24.
- 463 25. A-006-635. Santa Monica Beach, Irma Banks' baby, Verna
- 664 26. A-006-184. Antique Art Club garden party, 1933.
- 722 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 3, SIDE B -- CONTINUED ON CASSETTE TAPE 4, SIDE A

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CASSETTE TAPE 4, SIDE A

000 Silence

007 Remembering women at the garden party -- continued

084 27. A-006-194. Bridal Luncheon. (l-r)

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counterclockwise): Laverne Hardy, Velva Stewart, Laura Slayton (hostess), Verna Deckard, Vivian Howard, Sept. 1934

- 142 28. A-006-175. L.A. Urban League Guild, Fantasia Ball, ca. 1956.
- 167 29. A-006-192. Members of the West View Hospital Women's Guild at the "Club Alabam," about 1938, Verna 5th from right.
- 196 30. A-006-176. Phys-Art-Lit-Mor Club, 1973. (l-r): Lois Carr, Verna Williams, Montana McNealy, Bessie Davis (president), Theressa Johnson.
- 245 31. A-006-195. Golden Key Stroke Club, 1965
- 311 32. A-006-621. Bob Parish, singer, 1949. At Verna's house on Gramercy Park.
- 328 33. A-006-177. The Mills Brothers, 1949.
- 342 34. A-006-622. "The Four Hot Shots" nightclub act. Ameil Brown was a boarder at Verna's, 4356 Hooper Ave.
- 356 35. A-006-619. Jellybean Johnson, dancer, 5/14/31
- 368 36. A-006-174. Jack Johnson, given to Verna by Johnson, 1931.
- 402 End review of photographs
- 402 Designs a tablecloth composed of proverbs
- 406 DAT TAPE 4 STARTED
- 505 Views on how African-American community has changed since restrictive housing code broken in 1948
- 563 Philosophy of life -- Coping with hardships -- Need for spiritual guidance and political leadership in present post-riot Los Angeles
- 605 Believes that God will take vengeance on those who deserve it
- 646 End of interview
- \*\*\*\*\*
- 646 TO END OF TAPE IS BLANK

CASSETTE TAPE 4, SIDE B IS BLANK

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Accession #

Interview with Verna Deckard Williams, Los Angeles, California  
May 21, 1992

Interviewer: Amy Kitchener

K: Kitchener

W: Williams

Note: Interviews were recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. The three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording.

\*\* Interviews are not transcribed in their entirety. However, entire interviews are indexed.

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CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 1)

K: Verna, when and where were you born?

V: In a little town called Tatum, Texas. It's called East Texas, then Rusk County.

K: And when was that?

V: August 27, 1906.

K: And who were your parents and what did they do?

V: Well, Jule and Eula Deckard. My father was a blacksmith in that little town. My mother didn't work. She was just a housewife. He had a very interesting business, blacksmith. Then he went into repairing automobiles when cars came out. He started his blacksmith's shop about 1902 and then when cars came in about 1908, he bought a car, tore it down, put it back together and taught himself how to be a mechanic. 013 Then he became a blacksmith and a mechanic because there were cars, there were lots of horses and a few cars in that little town. The farmers would come in on Saturdays and bring their horses. What few had their cars would bring their cars to him.

K: Were there other blacksmiths in that town?

W: No, he was the only one. He had no competition at all. He made all the money there was to be made in that field because no

one else wanted to come to a little town like that. The population was just 500.

K: How about your grandparents? Who were they?

W: My grandmother and my grandfather on my father's side, they were slaves' children. One was eight, my grandfather was eight years old when the slaves were freed and my grandmother was eleven. She was three years older than my grandfather. 023 But she remembers lots about the slave days and at nights, instead of having radios and TVs to look at, we'd sit around my grandmother and she'd tell us slavery time stories. She was a good storyteller. She used to tell us more things about things that happened. If you saw that movie "Roots," well, I had heard all about those happenings before that came out because my grandmother had told me things that were very similar to what was in that movie.

K: Do you remember any stories in particular that she told?

W: Yeah, she'd tell us about when one of the slave men did something that he wasn't supposed to do, he would get so many lashes with a whip, like they whip the horses with. They would give him so many lashes for punishment. 034 And of course at nights if the master decided one of the slave women, he would just come into the slave cabin and make the husband get out, and he'd get in bed with his wife and she'd have babies by the white man, babies by her husband. So she was just a tool as far as he was concerned because she was his property so he could do what he wanted to with her. The poor man couldn't do anything about it. He had to just go out and take it. He'd go out of the room, he couldn't stand there and watch.

K: Were they also in Texas, your grandparents?

W: That was in Palestine, Texas, where she was a slave girl. A little town called Palestine. When they were free they moved to Tatum where I was born.

K: And your grandparents on the other side of the family?

W: Well, my mother's father was a German. He was white and then my grandmother, that was, she was mixed. She was African and part Indian I think. My grandmother on my father's side, her father was an Indian. Her mother was a slave woman, but her father was an Indian. That was on my father's side. On my mother's side, her father was German and her mother was a black woman. So we're all mixed up. And my grandfather on my father's side, his father was Scotch. So we're all mixed up with Scotch, German, African, and Indian. Four different nationalities. 057

K: Do have any brothers or sisters?

W: Not living.

K: How many did you have?

W: My mother had six children all together. Four of them died as babies, no, three of them died when they were babies and one died when he was about 10 years old and then my brother, no, my brother's not dead. I forgot. Yeah, he's still living, but same as dead, I don't know where he is. He just went on off and abandoned us. So I don't know where he is. But he's not dead, I don't think.

K: So, for most of your life you haven't known your brothers and sisters? 066

W: No.

K: When did you come to Los Angeles?

W: 1924.

K: Why did you come here?

W: In 1922, my father had to leave Texas on the spur of the moment because, well, let's go back. In 1919 in the little town where I was born, where he had the blacksmith's shop and the automobile repair shop-- Well, he was making so much money that they just couldn't understand the idea of this black man making all this money. So they burned his buildings down. And that's why he left that little town called Tatum. He moved away from Tatum to another little town in Texas called Terrell. Terrell is near Dallas. 077 He stayed in Terrell about five years, but he only had an automobile repair shop in Terrell. My mother was real light and had a lady to come and visit us who was also real light and you wouldn't know that she was colored because her father was white also. So Papa was taking her around sightseeing in this town in Terrell. My mother wasn't with them, but everybody knew who my mother was, although she didn't look colored. But they knew who she was. But they saw my dad with this other real light lady, carrying her around town and they assumed that she was a white woman and he had his nerve taking a white woman around. So that night after she left, he took her to the station and she left, in that early part of the evening.

So that night, that same night, they came to my father's garage and said, "Deck, look at my battery," and when he went to look at the battery, he stooped over and took the floor boards out of the car. They hit him in the head with a sledgehammer, trying to knock him out and trying push him in the car. And they were

going to take him out and tar and feather him. He said he saw tar and feathers in the car, but he didn't have any idea it was for him. So they tried to push him in the car, but they didn't succeed in knocking him out when they hit him, instead of knocking him out, he got so mad like a bull, he just got mad and came up fighting. They were stunned that they didn't knock him out. There were six of them and four of them had gotten out of the car and gone in the back of the garage to hold the guns on the boys that worked for my dad, so that they couldn't come out to help him.

But they overlooked my brother. My brother was standing in front of the garage, just standing there. He said he should have been in the back working, but I guess God just planned it that way. He was just standing out there in front and they overlooked him. They didn't pay him any attention because they thought he was a little white boy I guess. He saw them knock my father in the head. He ran over to my father's rescue. I think he was about 15 years old then. And he ran to my father's rescue and the two of them outfoxed those two men that were trying to get my father in the car. And they got away from them. But they shot at them as they were running. They did shoot my father in the meat part of his arm, in the flesh part of his arm, but it wasn't a serious wound. But where they hit him in the head was serious because they had to take stitches in that, in his head. But my brother, he ran zigzag across the vacant lot, he said he'd seen that in the silent movies and thought about that while they were shooting at him. He said, "If I run zigzag, they won't hit me." So he ran zigzag and they didn't hit him. They were shooting at him but they didn't hit him. But they did hit my father.

But anyway, my father ran home, went to the doctor and called the doctor and the doctor came over to the house and sewed up his head with stitches. And the next morning he and my brother left to come to Los Angeles. That's what caused them to leave because he figured they'd come back since they didn't succeed that night. He figured they'd come back later and try to kill him. So he left the next day, he and my brother drove out here in 1922.

121 He stayed a year and worked and, my brother, he wouldn't come back. But the following year, after a year, my father came back because my mother and I were still there. One of the boys that my dad had working for him-- He had trained him well enough to continue running the business, this was my cousin, he was my first cousin. His name was Tommy Deckard. Tommy ran the automobile business while Papa was gone and that took care of my mother and I because he knew the business just as well as my father did. So my father came back after a year.

K: Did he know anybody here in Los Angeles when he decided to come here?

W: Yes, my uncle and aunt were already out here. They had been trying to get him to come anyway. So he knew them. He got connected with a man who was running a garage and worked as a mechanic. 132 When he came home after a year, he stayed there a year and the following year, which was '24, he brought my mother and I out here on a visit to visit my brother because my brother wouldn't come back. He stayed out here, so we came out here to visit my brother in 1924 and that's when I ran off and got married because I didn't want to go back to that old bad Texas, I called it "old bad Texas" then because the way they treated us, you know, so I came out here and people were so nice that I decided I'm not going back to Texas. I couldn't talk my people into letting me stay out here and go to school. So the only way I could stay was to slip off and get married. And I did. 141 Mama and Papa went back and sold out everything. They moved back here in '25, but I came in 1924.

K: They wouldn't let you stay here just with your brother?

W: No, because he wasn't married, he was single. He wasn't keeping house and they said there wouldn't be no woman around to look out after you. And my aunt and uncle, they were working out in service. They worked for James Cruize. He was a silent motion picture director, and Betty Compson was his wife and they were working for them and living on the place so they didn't have a house either. 148

148- 156           Aunt and Uncle in L.A., worked for James Cruize in couple job as caretakers, aunt was cook and uncle was butler and chauffeur.

157-161           Verna's activities when first came to L.A.

161-170           Summer school, Polytechnic H.S.

169 They had a summer school there. They just had one summer school open and that was the only one open, and kids from all over town came to Polytechnic. I was over on the east side, most of the colored lived on the east side, but a few lived on the west side. So those on the west side came over there and those on the east side came from all over because there was only one summer school open. So I got to meet the cream of the crop in L.A. while I was there. And I was a very popular girl because I was the new girl from Texas with my own car. And that was unusual. Nobody had a car, you know. Well, one other girl, Dr. Diggs' daughter, Gwendolyn Diggs. She had a car at her disposal. It wasn't her own car, but her father let her bring it to school sometimes. So she would drive to school one day and I'd drive one day. We'd pick each other up. And then after school we'd go to the beach in the car. Whoever had the car-- We'd get in one car and go to the beach after school was out. 182

K: How did you get to have a car?

W: Well, Papa had bought me that little Ford in 1924, Ford Coupe. And I had driven it out here from Texas. And we came in two cars, in a Ford touring car, it was a 1924 touring car-- And then he bought me this little Ford coupe, 1924 Ford coupe. So we came in the two cars. So I drove all the way out here, although he had a boy along to help drive, but I decided, "Well this is my car and I don't want anybody driving my car," (laughs) so I drove the whole distance, which was about 2000 miles, I guess then, because we didn't have the beautiful freeways like we have now.

But we stopped every night and we camped along the way. See, you couldn't stay in the motels and we couldn't eat anywhere you wanted to eat either. If you did, you had to go in the kitchen and eat. So Papa brought a little tent along, and we set up camp every night. And we slept in the tent and if he'd see a rabbit on the way, he'd stop and kill the rabbit and Mama would cook the rabbit for dinner. She had a little coal oil stove. It was really fun. It was just like a camping trip, only it took us seven days to get out here. And when we came in, the highway brought you right through downtown Los Angeles. I have pictures of that, too. And we had on the car, Papa had a sign on the car, "FROM Terrell TO LOS ANGELES." And as we drove through the downtown section of L.A., which the highway brought us right through downtown-- The people saw this dusty car with the luggage on the top and the sign, "Texas to Los Angeles," and they all hollered, "Hello, Texas!" And we just felt we had a welcome committee waiting for us because the crowd was just hollering, "Hello Texas." (laughs) We were definitely from Texas with that dirty car and all this luggage and the sign on it, you know. So right away I fell in love with Los Angeles because everybody was so friendly. 210

K: How did you meet your husband? You said you hurried up to get married so you could stay.

W: We had gone to school you know, in the summer school. And in those days the kids had lots of little house parties every weekend, like on a Friday night. Somebody would have a little house party. So I met him at a little house party. One of the little girls I met at school had a little house party and invited the kids from all over town. So I met him at this little house party. He just came up and asked me for a dance. Nobody introduced us. He just asked me for a dance (laughs). And I gave him my phone number and I didn't take his. In those days girls didn't call up boys, you know.

So then he called me up and it was so funny, I met another fellow that same night named Louis. His name was Lewis, Arthur A. Lewis. And then I met another fellow that night named Louis, but

his first name was Louis and his last name was something else. So, I'm expecting Arthur Lewis to call me because he told me he was going to call me the next night. And I was expecting him to call me and this other fellow named Louis called me and he said, "This is Louis." I thought it was the one, no I mean, Arthur, the one I wanted to hear from call me. And he said, "This is Lewis," but I thought he was the other fellow. I thought he was the one who's first name was Louis. And I wanted to hurry up and get him off the phone because I wanted the phone to be open for Arthur Lewis to call me, you know. And it was Arthur Lewis I was talking to but I didn't realize it, you know. And I almost lost him. I almost didn't get to meet him because he said he sort of got disgusted. He thought probably I was just trying to put him off, you know. But something made him call me back anyway. So when he called me back, then I realized he was the one that I expected to call. The other one never did call. But I thought it was the other one. Now that was Saturday night he called. So he wanted to know if he could come over on Sunday. And I said, "Yes, I'll be home after church."

K: Where were you staying?

W: I was staying over on Compton Avenue, 50th and Compton, near where that Hearst girl's group got killed.

243-250 Talking about Patty Hearst

K: So Arthur came over on Sunday?

W: Yeah, Arthur came over on Sunday, and I told him, "I'll be home after church." So when I came home, I was late getting home from church and my parents had all gone and left me. We had all planned to go to the beach. That was the outing for Sundays. You go to the beach and play around in the sand. But the people that was taking my parents to the beach, they got tired of waiting on me because I was late getting home from church, you know. So they went on off and left me. And so I was home alone with a lady we were rooming with, she was there. So I was just worrying about, "What am I going to do now my folks left me here? I don't know what I'm going to do." And I had forgotten that Arthur said he was coming over that Sunday. And he came and oh, I looked out and saw him coming and I got so excited. And I ran and put on my best dress that I had made in school. Because at summer school, I took sewing in summer school and I made myself a pretty blue dress. Oh, I thought it was beautiful. So I rushed and I let the lady answer the door and let him in.

I was rushing changing my clothes and I came out and I was all dressed up, you know. Made a big impression on Arthur, you know. And Arthur had a friend with him who had a car. Because Arthur didn't have a car, but his friend had a car. So I told him my

folks had gone. "They got tired of waiting on me and I was late getting home from church and they had gone." He said, "Let's go for a ride, my friend has a car, we'll go for a ride." And ordinarily my folks wouldn't let me go out with boys by myself. But since he had the other fellow with him and they had gone and left me, well, I just went on with him, you know, and we went for a drive. First place he took me was to meet his parents, which was his grandmother. His mother wasn't here. She was living in Greenville, Alabama. His father had died. But he was living out here with his grandmother. So he took me by to meet his grandmother and his aunt and uncle, that's where he was living. Oh, that made a big impression on me because they say when a young man introduces you to his people, they really like you, you know. So that made a good impression on me. But he brought me back home early before my folks got back home and they liked him. So ordinarily when I'd go out to little parties or anything, my brother had to go along because they didn't want me to go out with boys by myself. But they liked him so much that they trusted him so, they let me go out with him by myself so we just-

288 And I had been here two months when I met him, so the last month I was supposed -- we were supposed to stay out here three months. The last month when I was here was when I met him. And I only knew him one month. And when it came time to go back to Texas, I just couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted to go to Texas. And they wouldn't agree to let me stay out here, my parents wouldn't, so I just sort of kept hinting around to my husband-to-be, that "Oh, I'd just do anything to stay out here. I don't want to go back to that old bad Texas." And he said, "You'd do anything?" I said, "Yeah, I sure would." And he said, "What about marrying me?" (laughs) That's the way he proposed. (laughs) And he used to tease me after, he said, "I rescued her, she didn't want to go to Texas, so I rescued her by marrying her." (laughs)

And my father wouldn't let me spend the first night with him.  
301 Oh, a little friend of mine was having a farewell party for me because we were supposed to have been going back to Texas because Papa had his property back there. He couldn't just stay out here until he disposed of his property. He hadn't planned to stay out here anyway. But my brother was going to still stay. - He was thinking about going back. Papa said, "Well I don't know whether this license is valid or not, you have to stay at home tonight. Young man, you go on home and you come back in the morning." (laughs)

K: After you got married?

W: Yeah, we had slipped off that day and gotten married because I was supposed to leave the next morning, you know. And we slipped off and got married that day and I had a little

girlfriend with me, Anna Louise Griffin, was her name. She went with me to get married. We had the license, but it wasn't a gold seal on it. Papa looked at it and he said, "There's no gold seal on here. How do I know this is a valid license?" And I said, "Oh, Papa, you know I wouldn't say I was married if I wasn't." But he still wouldn't let me go home with him that night. He made me stay home and he told him to go home and come back the next morning. (laughs) So he came back the next morning and I was eating my breakfast and I saw him coming and I got so full I couldn't eat. (laughs) I began to get nervous then because it hadn't dawned on, I got to stay with this man, I got to sleep with him. All I was thinking about was I'm getting to stay out here, you know (laughs). And then it dawned on me, "Oh, I got to sleep with this man." (laughs) And then I started getting nervous. Oh, and so that day we went to the beach. After we saw my parents off. 325

They went on, they let me stay and they went on back home, drove their car back to Texas. And so my husband, and his same little friend with the car had come over, his name was Byrd Briley. So we just got in the car and went to the beach. Spent all day at the beach.

K: Which beach?

W: Santa Monica, same one where that picture was made.  
(Referring to photo in LA STYLE magazine - A-006-630) Santa Monica Beach, they call that little spot where we could go the "Ink Well," you know, because it was a segregated part of the beach where we colored could go.

K: And that's what you called it?

W: Yeah, we called it the Ink Well. All the colored people called it the "Ink Well." "We're going down to the Ink Well."  
(laughs) 336

338-350            Arthur and Verna look for place to stay for first night of marriage. Arthur hadn't made any arrangements.

350-356            Arthur's work as porter at automobile place, baker by trade

356-366            Arthur's bakery business failed, age 19- before Verna met him

366-383            No rooms available for newlyweds, they go to Arthur's grandmother's house to stay in spare room rented out to border

383

Arthur and Verna find own room nearby

387

Parents move back to L.A. to be with children,  
1925

401 Los Angeles wasn't as nice as he (referring to her father) thought it was going to be because he came with his cash money and he bought a house, paid cash for the house. He bought it in an area where they didn't want colored, but he didn't know it.

K: Where was this?

W: East 58th Place, between Central Avenue and Hooper Avenue, just south of Slauson Avenue was a little strip that belonged to the County and the mailing address was Los Angeles, but when you needed the police, you used the County Police. You couldn't use the City Police. So this house he bought was from a white family. And it was not restricted, they had not signed the restrictive covenant, but all the other houses on that street were restricted. But he didn't know anything about any restrictions anyway. But he bought the house and paid cash for it, \$3200, paid 32-hundred dollars for it. That was the price in 1925. It was a cute little bungalow house and my mother, being real light, they didn't know colored had bought the house because I didn't move in with them right away. So they were there about a month before I moved in with them, my husband and I moved in with them after they were there about a month. And they hadn't seen my father, they had only seen my mother around there during the day because he would get up early every morning and go to work. He had opened his own garage business here. So he would leave home early every morning and they didn't see him around, they only saw my mother. So they didn't know colored people had bought the house until I moved in. And then I was there every day with my mother. 429

So they came, a committee group came, and talked to my dad and said, they don't want any coloreds living in the neighborhood and they would like to buy him out. (K: the neighbors?) Yeah, some of the neighbors, we didn't know who they were. And so, papa said, "Yeah, I'll sell it to you, if you don't want me here, I'll sell it to you." And they finally got around to the price and he wanted 42-hundred for it, he had paid 32-hundred and he wanted 42-hundred. They said, "But you didn't pay but 32-hundred." He said, "Well, I have to have some extra money for moving expenses." Says, "I can't sell it to you for what I paid for it because I'll have to go out and probably pay more." Because he had looked all over town and that was the best bargain he could find. And it was, because he looked at houses that cost 9,000 dollars, that wasn't even better than that one. But he got a good buy on that one, you know. And so he said, "Well, I can't

sell it for the same price I paid for it." And they said, "Well, we'll think about it."

So they thought about it and so instead of coming back and saying that we'll give you 42-hundred -- they just came back, a group of them came back, 50 of them came back and stood on our lawn and rang the doorbell. Two of them came up and rang the doorbell and told us to move, we had to move before daylight in the morning. 453 And they weren't going to buy you out, "And we're not going to buy you out. We're not going to pay you more than you paid for it. But you have to move, and move before daylight in the morning." Well, my dad wasn't home when that happened. My mother was there and I was there and my husband was there, and a young couple visiting us were there, and my brother was there. And so my brother answered the door and my mother answered the door and so she was there talking to them and when they told her, she saw those 50 people out there, that frightened her. So she started shaking, you know. Oh boy, they just looked like to me-- they just gloated over that. "Oh, we got her now, you know." And then they got real big then talking like, (Verna changes her voice) "Get out before daylight in the morning." And mama just said, "O.K," you know and shuts the door. And they went on away. They jumped in their cars and drove away right quick, did it all real fast.

And while they were there, we were there calling the police and that's when we found out we were not in the city. We couldn't use the city police. We had to use the county. And they didn't come until two hours later. It took them two hours to come. And we had an Italian family on one side and a German family on the other side of us. And they were very nice and they were very friendly. And they told us, well, "Some of the sheriffs were in the gang that came there. That's the reason it took them so long to come back when you called for the sheriff." Took them two hours to get there. By the time they got there, my father was home by that time.

But before they got there, we called my uncle who was instrumental in us moving to Los Angeles, and my uncle was home and he came out, he came out right away. And he looked like white too, because he was a light colored man, it was my mother's brother. And they had the same father and same mother and they both were real light. So, my uncle came out and was just walking up and down the street. Every white man he would meet, he would stop and catch him in the collar of his shirt, and ask him and shake him, "Were you in the gang who run the niggers out?" (laughs) and they were trembling, "No sir, mister." They knew nothing about what had happened, they were just people coming home. They didn't know anything about those 50 people that had been there. But my uncle got his bluff in, and the word got

around, "There's a white man out there sticking up for them."  
(laughs)

So, but anyway, about two hours later my dad came home and the sheriff got there about the same time and my dad was cleaning his Winchester, he had a rifle from World War I, called a Winchester. He was cleaning that and had it laying on the dining room table, cleaning it and getting it loaded. 504 And then the sheriffs, when they came in, the first thing they did was go and grab this gun from my dad, didn't say, "What is the problem? Can we help you?" Just go and grab the gun and takes it away, "You don't need this." And papa cursed him out and grabbed it back and told him, "I'll be damned if I don't need it. If I had been here there would have been some dead ones laying out there on the lawn, too. It's a good thing I wasn't here." And so they gave him the gun back and they got out of there. They didn't even ask us what had happened because they knew what had happened. See, they were in with the gang. They just left, but they went back and told the -- spread the word, "That he's a bad nigger, you'd better leave him alone." But we didn't know that for a long time that they had said that. Because one of the neighbors told us later that that's what they said.

619 But just as a precaution, Papa went down to 12th and Central, that was the black business section at that time, 12th and Central Avenue. He went down there and gathered up the people who were standing around on the street. I have a very warm feeling for those type people because they all volunteered to come out and help us protect our home. And they came out every night for a whole month and sat with us. They took turns at sitting up watching and waiting for them to come back. If they had come back it would have been a race riot. Because they were ready. They had their guns and those who didn't have guns, Papa got guns for them. And they sat up every night waiting for them. And Mama would do the cooking. They sent me away, over to my husband's grandparent's house, because by that time I was expecting my baby. I was pregnant. And I was expecting my baby. So they didn't want me to be around and all that. So I'd go over to my grandmother's house, my grandmother-in-law's house and sleep every night and I'd come back home during the day and stay there with my mother, you know. But nobody ever came back. So - after a month Papa figured, "Well, I guess this has died down." In fact, the neighbors next door said, "Well, they've given up. They've decided they're not going to bother you anymore."

So we stayed there and then my son was born, and he was the first colored kid to go to that school in that area. It was called Mira Monte. It's still there. 547 I think it's at 62nd and Hooper Avenue. And my son was the first colored child to go to that school. And my mother used to take him to school and go back and get him to keep anybody from bothering him, you know.

So one day she was going to pick him up and she saw some little boys on the sidewalk waiting for him, "Waiting for this little nigger boy," as they said. And Mama said, "What are you going to do to this little nigger boy?" "We're going to beat him up." "Who told you to beat him up?" "Our mothers told us." And see that, their mothers teaching those kids hatred to beat this little boy up because he's colored. So my mother went to the principal of the school and told him what was happening. And the principal didn't know anything about it until my mother went and told him. And he assured my mother that, "Nothing would happen to your grandson. Don't you come after him anymore and I'll assure you that nothing will happen to him." We don't know what he did, but whatever he did worked because nobody ever bothered him anymore. So he went to school there and finished grammar school there. And then I finally moved away out of the neighborhood and then he started going to another school. 575

575- 598            Arthur Sr. worked as delivery man for Hollywood Drug Store

606-615            Verna joins married couples' club; activities included luncheons, sewing, and playing with babies

617-635            Verna and Arthur Sr. were members of Westminster Presbyterian Church. Verna was a choir member. Verna played piano and Arthur played violin at church for special programs.

635-342            Arthur Sr. teaches Verna to cook because her mother never taught her

642-652            Sunday visits to friends was customary

652-665            Taking day trips with parents to San Bernadino, beach, parks, house parties on weekends

665-673            Duties of having a baby

673-715            Husband gets sick with tuberculosis and dies after 3 years of marriage, Verna stays with parents

715 So I was still with my parents when he died and then I decided, "Well, I got to get me a job now." I had never worked before. My husband didn't want me to work, and before I married my father didn't want me to work. So I said, "I'm going to get me a job."

K: How old were you then?

W: Well I was 20 then.

722

END OF CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE A

000

BEGINNING CASSETTE TAPE 1, SIDE B (CORRESPONDS  
WITH DAT TAPE 1)

002 I was 20. I decided what I wanted to do. I said, "I think I'd like to be a telephone operator." So I went to the telephone company which is in the same location now, down on Flower street. I think it's 2nd and Flower, 1st and Flower-- anyway, it's still there wherever it is. I went down there to fill out an application to get a job as a telephone operator. Then they gave me the application, and let me fill it out, tested my voice and played it back. And said, "Oh, you have a nice voice. You'd make a nice telephone operator. But, we haven't decided to hire colored yet." They built me up for an awful let down. They went to all that trouble to let me take the test and fill out the application and they wouldn't tell me that. Oh, I was so hurt.

K: Were you aware of that when you applied?

W: No. I wasn't aware of that because you see I had never worked before and I didn't know about all these prejudices about work conditions. I was naive. I just didn't know any better. I just thought, well, if I qualify they'd give me the job, you know. Well, it wasn't legal but we didn't have any NAACP then, you know. And nobody was pushing them to hire blacks. I went on home heartbroken, no job. And my dad was telling me all the time, "You don't have to work. You got a home as long as I got a home, you got a home." I wasn't satisfied with that. That was their home, I wanted something of my own. So I said, "I don't want to live here and let my folks take care of me and my child." And some of them old dumb people, I call them dumb, came telling me, "You don't have to work, you can get on the State because you have a child. You're husband is dead." I said, "I don't want to get on the State. I'm able to work. I'm going to get me a job."

030 It just so happens shortly after that, a Japanese man who had a theater across the street from my dad's garage, he had his garage at 23rd and Central Avenue. And there was a little theater called the Gaiety Theater right across the street and he had a white cashier and he was a Japanese owner though. And all of a sudden he fired his white cashier. I never did know why he fired her. And he ran over to my father's garage and asked him, because he used to let my dad work on his car, so he knew my dad. And he said, "Deck, do you know a nice little colored girl I could get to be my cashier?" So Papa said, "Yeah, my daughter." (laughs) So he called me at home, it was at night, the girl had gone to work and he got angry at her about something, I don't know what, and fired her right on the spot. And he needed a

cashier right then and there. And so Papa called me and I was home. And he says, "Can you come down right away? I got a job for you."

And I rushed and got dressed and ran down there. And the man put me in the cashier's booth. The tickets were only 10 cents. He stood there and watched me to see if I knew how to make change, you know. Well I was good in math, even though I hadn't even finished high school. I married before I finished high school. But I was good in math and I knew how to count money. So he was satisfied, "Oh, you can handle it." So he went on off and left me in there selling the tickets and handling money, you know. And I didn't make any mistakes and so he was satisfied. That's how I got the job. 049

And so that was my first job, cashier. And I was the first colored cashier in L.A. And the California Eagle, was the colored paper then and they had a big write up about it in the paper about this Japanese hiring the colored girl, the first colored cashier in L.A. So I made the papers then. (laughs)

K: That was a big deal.

W: Yeah that was a big deal is right. Yeah, (laughs) and it was a nice little job. 055

055-076            Job description of work at Gaiety Theater, 1927-1929

080-086            Goes to work for Lincoln Theater across the street as "experienced cashier" and makes more money. 1929-1931.

086-100            Tivoli Theater, 43rd and Central, changes from "all-white to colored" in 1931, Verna gets job offer as cashier. All staff is African-American.

100-113            Verna gets interested in real estate

113-126            Learns the trade from friend, then goes to night school and gets license -- sells real estate for 45 years.

K: Do you remember your first sale? 126

W: Yeah, my first sale, a guy came into the office looking like a tramp. He had just come from work and he had come out here by himself from Louisiana. And he wanted to send for his family. And he couldn't find any place to rent because we hadn't built all these apartments we have now and so buildings were scarce so people had to buy in order to get a place. So he decided, "I'm

going to buy me a house so I can get my family out here." So he came in the office with his dirty work clothes on and nobody wanted to be bothered with him because he looked so bad. Well, I was used to people with greasy clothes on because my father was a mechanic, so it didn't bother me, you know. (laughs) So I said, "Well, I'll take him." So I went and took him and I said, "Can I help you sir?" And he said, "Yeah, I want to buy a house." I said, "What size house you want?" He said, "I want a two bedroom house." "And how much you want to pay down?" "I've got 1,000 dollars to pay down." And so I went and looked at my list of listings that we had and I picked out two that we had that I figured would fit his pocketbook. 144

So one looked worse than the other, so I showed him the worse looking one first. Then when I showed him the second one, oh, that looked real good. You see, neither one of them were real nice, but one was better than the other one. So when he saw the second one he said, "Oh, I'll take it, I'll take it." And I said, "O.K. We'll have to write it up and you have to give me a deposit." And he said, "How much deposit do you want?" I said, "Well, a couple hundred will be O.K." He said, "What about 1,000?" (laughs) He pulled out the whole down payment and gave it to me. 1,000 dollars down. That was what it was, 1,000 dollars down. He gave me the whole thousand. He was carrying that money around in his pocket. And I said, "You shouldn't be carrying all this money around in your pocket." He said, "Well I decided I wanted to buy a house and when I found one I wanted, I'm going to put the money down on it before I spend it for something else." So that was my first sale. And those people in the office, they were sick because they didn't take him. (laughs) Because that was such an easy deal. That's all I ever had, that was that easy. 160

- 160-174            Commission of sale was 40%, because it wasn't her listing.
- 174-188            Develops strategies for getting real estate listings to get 60% commission
- 188-225            Buys house with Al Maddox, "black millionaire" real estate broker and resold it to make money, 1944, grossed \$1200

K: How did the restrictive housing covenant affect where you could buy and sell?

230 That's it, we had to sell the houses mostly on the east side. There weren't many on the west side that we could buy and sell because they were restricted. But a few people on the west side would sell anyway, the whites, because they decided, well if one black family got in, well they decided, "Well, we're going to

move," and they'd sell it anyway and the blacks would take the chance on buying it, knowing it was restricted and they'd say, "Because we can rent it out anyway. We can't live in it but you can rent it."

K: What would happen if you lived in it?

W: They could make you move. Legally, they could make you move. Because the restrictions said, no blacks could occupy it. So some, a few would take a chance on it. But we also had some Jewish people working with us, and they'd buy and then they'd sell it. But of course, they were still restricted, but they would sell it to blacks, they didn't care who they'd sell it to as long as they got their money. And some black people got sued. 245 And they had to go to court, like in the Sugar Hill area. The blacks bought in there. Like they'd buy a big house for 7,000 dollars that same house now would be like 200,000.

245-261            African-Americans begin to buy in Sugar Hill area, Ethel Waters and Hattie McDaniel bought there and got sued, but won.

261-290            Bought first house on Hooper Avenue on east side, "my stepping stone" house

291 So this vacant lot was for sale over on Gramercy Park, cute little private street, built on a circle. They had a big colonial style house next door to it. And they wanted to sell the house and the lot together and they couldn't do it so they decided they'd sell it separately. They'd sell the lot for 3,500 and the house for something more. I don't know. But I didn't want the house, I just wanted the lot. So I said, "Oh, this is just what I want." Oh, I got all excited and I called up the agent. It had a sign on it. I called the agent to buy it. So when I gave her my phone number, it was on the east side, and she assumed that I was colored. Because she couldn't tell by the way I was talking that I was colored, up until I gave her my phone number. Then she said, "Oh, are you colored?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, we can't sell it to colored." And I got so mad, but not to her. She didn't know I was mad. Within myself I was mad. So I made up my mind, I'm going to get this lot one way or the other. (K: And the year was?) That was '46, 1946. And the reason I got mad, I said, "I'm sick of these," I said "peckerwoods, (laughs) trying to keep me from enjoying life and having what I want and I'm willing to work and pay for it." 314

There was a Jewish fellow, no he wasn't Jewish, (pause) I don't know what nationality he was. He might have been Irish. But he was working in our office too. And he was a speculator. He would buy properties and resell them. And he was very nice. And

I went back and was crying on his shoulders, telling him that I really wanted this lot. Well, he said, "Well, Verna, I'll buy it for you." (laughs) So he went and bought it for me.

I put up the money, however. And he bought it in his name, well, in his girl friend's name. So the woman, the salesperson for the lot, she had been warned ahead of time that this white man had a colored woman over there looking at this lot. Because, see, I took him over to show him the lot. I said, "Because when you call to talk about buying it, you want to know what you're talking about." So I took him over and showed him the lot. And one of those nosy neighbors, who was a prejudiced white man, saw us. And he called the real estate agent. He took the man's license number from his car and found out who he was and gave the salesperson the man's name and license number to his car. And said, "Now if he calls you about this lot, don't you sell it to him because he had a colored woman over there showing it to him."

So sure enough when the man called about the lot she knew all about him over there with me looking at the lot. And she said, "Well I'm sorry. I can't sell you the lot." He says, "Why?" "Because you had a colored woman over there looking at the lot." He says, "A colored woman? What do you mean I had a colored woman over there looking at the lot?" "Well, one of the neighbors said he saw you over there with this colored woman over there looking at the lot." He said, "That was no colored woman, that was just a dark-haired white woman." (laughs) "That old man needs to change his glasses." (laughs) It was about dusk dark, you know. And he could have made a mistake and I'm not all that dark anyway. And so she fell for it. You know, she believed him. She believed him, because he got mad. He said, "Oh, she'd get insulted if she knew she was called a colored woman." (laughs) "She's just a dark-haired white woman." And so she went on and sold him the lot.

354 And naturally when he buys the lot, he signs the deed over to me right away in the same escrow to protect me in case he dies or something, so I've still got my lot, you know. But I didn't record it right away. I waited a while. I waited until the escrow closed and then I recorded my deed. And she kept watching it because she got a little suspicious after she went on and sold it to him. She kept watching it and when my deed was recorded she found out that I was the lady with the same phone number that had called her before. She was really on the ball all right. And you know, she called me up and told me that, "Well, you bought it but you know you can't live in it, don't you?" Here it's just a vacant lot, it had nothing on it. I wouldn't expect to live on a vacant lot. And I just said to her, "Well, if I can't live in it, I have some white relatives who can." (laughs) Oh boy, she shut up then. She didn't bother me anymore. So that was in '46.

372 Well I wasn't able to build yet anyway. And I knew the lot was restricted and I had made up my mind, "I'm going to build on it if I have to live there as the maid." Because I was just determined to, that was the last straw that broke the camel's back, because I had been looking for years to buy a lot in a nice neighborhood so I could have the kind of home I wanted. And every time I'd find one that I wanted they wouldn't sell it to me, you know. And so I decided, "Well I want to get this lot before I get too old to enjoy it." So I wasn't going to build anyway. But it so happens that I'm waiting to save my money up to build the house which was two years later, the restrictive covenant was broken down in 1948. Because I had bought the lot in '46 and so then I just rejoiced and jumped for joy (laughs) that I could build my dream house now. And I built a modern redwood house out of California redwood. I always wanted a California wood, because I had been up where they have the redwood trees. 388

- 380-401            Restrictive covenant broken, builds "dream house" out of redwood on lot, lives there for 30 years. Later Verna feels that house was out of place with older houses on street.
- 401- 411            Marries Mr. Williams and he dies in that time period.
- 411-420            Sells house in 1949
- 421-432            Leimert Park opened up (previously restricted) and Verna bought present house in area she always wanted to live in.
- 433-440            Black Dalia case, girl's body found on land where Verna's house located
- 444-449            Feelings of contentment about present house

K: 449 After the restrictive housing covenant was lifted, were there still problems even though that legally you could buy a house anywhere you wanted? Or was it wide open and African-Americans were buying houses anywhere they wanted?

W: No. There was still a problem because the real estate brokers would get together, the white real estate brokers would get together and say-- have what you call a gentleman's agreement. They wouldn't say, "Well, we can't sell it to you because you're colored." If they were having open house, they'd let you look and if you were interested in buying it, they would say, "Oh, I'm sorry I already got an offer on it." They were lying, they didn't have an offer, but they would just say that. And some of them would accept that and some of them would call

ahead on it and got caught too. And got sued for doing it. So we still had a long ways to go. Another thing they did when we'd go around soliciting listings, one man told me this to my face, "Well you folks insist on taking over our neighborhood, and we're going to let you have it, but you're going to sure pay for it." And that's when prices started going up. They started charging more to the blacks than they were for anybody else. If they were selling a house for 3000 dollars for just the people they wanted to sell it to, a black would come along and they'd say 5000. And the blacks were pouring in here so fast and so desperate for houses that they were paying it. Because they thought they couldn't do any better.

K: Before 1948 was it really hard if you were black to find a place to live? You were saying before there weren't many rentals available, why was that?

W: 486 Because you see, they hadn't started building the apartments and there weren't many houses available to sell to colored. We were restricted. We had to buy and sell east of Avalon Boulevard-- was the line then. Then finally they opened up Avalon over to Main. Soon as they'd open up, well, the houses would go like hotcakes because a new area had opened up and the whites started running. And see, they'd run from the east side, those whites who were living on the east side, from the east side to the west side. So when the restrictive covenant broke and the colored started coming to the west side, well the blacks started running from the west side up into the hill, that's when Baldwin Hills and View Park started. The blacks were selling out to us here on the west side, and, that was all vacant land up in there. I remember the first house in Baldwin Hills. This Jewish fellow who was working in our office, he had one of the first houses built up there in that area and he got it for twenty-five-hundred, now those houses sell for four and five-hundred thousand. 509

502-526            Baldwin Hills developed, 1948

K: How did World War II affect you and did you know people who went off to the war? What was it like during that time?

W: 531 Well, things got good then because lots of jobs opened up for blacks. They got jobs working in the shipyard and that's why so many blacks were coming in here to get these jobs at the shipyard-- and building planes. So there were lots of jobs open. And they even started hiring colored girls to run the street cars. They hadn't started with the buses, we had the street cars then. And they had colored girls as conductors running the streetcars too. So there were lots of jobs opened up.

544 And lots of people were rooming. I made lots of money in my real estate just finding rooms for people. And one lady had a house with a big yard and she had all her rooms filled and she'd rent space in her yard for people to come and park their cars and sleep in their cars. Some people would come out here in their car and they'd have to sleep in their cars because they couldn't find a room even. And so this lady she had a big yard and she'd let them park their car and she'd charge them to park the car and they'd sleep in their car, come in her house and use the bathroom, you know.

K: Where were they coming from?

W: The south mostly, you know, Louisiana, and Texas, Oklahoma, mostly Louisiana and Texas people were coming out. But as I say, everybody was renting rooms then too. I even had my house full of roomers. (chuckles) I also said roomers paid for my house, my house on the east side, you know. I had a three bedroom house. The one I got for twenty-one-hundred. I had three bedrooms. I rented out two of the rooms and then I slept in one room and my son slept on the service porch, I had a long service porch glassed in, so I had him on a studio couch out there. I always said my roomers paid for my house. And I hurried up and paid for it too, because my dad always taught me that, "Nothing is yours until it's paid for." So that was my goal, to get my house paid for, so when I got that one paid for it was easy for me to get something else because I didn't have to pay bills on the one I already had.

- 577-612            Memories of World War I, eating whole wheat bread. Father's brother went to war and brought back Winchester gun for Jule Deckard
- 613-630            The Depression was not a hardship for Verna, she bought her 1st house
- 630-640            Strategies for saving money in the bank, son saves money too.
- 640-690            Buys first house during Depression, borrows money from son, and friends for down payment, including friend who was waiter at Club Alabam
- 690-                Renovates house and rents out rooms to pay for house
- 724                END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B---STORY CONTINUED ON TAPE 2

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CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE A -- FIRST INTERVIEW CONTINUED  
(CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 1)

000                    Silence

W: 004 And I saw this sign on this house in the same neighborhood, it was a nice little neighborhood, same neighborhood, for sale. And I went over and said, "Don't you want to rent it?" He says, "I can't. I'm about to lose it. I've got to sell it. I'm trying to get a little equity out of it." So that's why he let me have it for 300 down, because he wanted to hurry up and sell it before they foreclosed on him, you know. So, I could see, "Well I could rent out the rooms for five dollars a week." Let me see, yeah, five dollars a week, or was it more than that, no, nine dollars a week. Rooms had gone up then, nine dollars a week. And my payments were only 18 -- nine dollars a week -- that's 36 dollars right there. And I said, "Oh, I can just rent out a room and keep up my payments. And I'll get a job." I just knew I was going to get a job, but I didn't have one at that time. But I didn't try to buy the property in my name because I knew they wouldn't sell it to me since I didn't have a job.

I bought it in my parents name and they already had their home paid for. So the people selling it to them thought they were good risks because they already had their home paid for, you know. So I bought it in their name. And then later they transferred it to my name when I paid them back. I wouldn't let them give me the money. I just said, "No. I'm going to do this on my own." Not that they had it to give me, but Papa would have found a way if I had really needed it. Because he was always nice like that.

K: 023 I know you worked on Central Avenue in the theaters and that Central Avenue became a very big center for entertainment. What do you remember about that?

W: That Club Alabam, that was the place to go. And that's where lots of people went for amusement. And the theaters, you know. And they had lots of little night clubs there, but you know. Let's see, I was working at the theater. Then the theater had to close for renovation. I was working at the Tivoli Theater. It had to close for renovation. So that put me looking for another job. So I got a job as a demonstrator for the Kraft cheese company. 035

(035-037 Pause for two minutes-- Machine turned off. Verna had something in her eye)

037 The theater closed so I called Betty Hill, we had a political study club. And I was president of the political study club. I was the junior president. That was trying to get jobs opened up for colored boys and girls who'd finished college. Mrs. Betty Hill -- She was an uneducated woman as far as book learning was concerned, she had good old common sense and she had a way with these politicians, you know. She could go down and talk them into hiring colored if you were qualified. But she wanted to make sure you were qualified. She wouldn't say hire someone who's not qualified.

So anyway, I called Betty Hill up and said, "Miss Hill, I need a job." By the time all this happened I had gone back to school and finished high school. So I was only a high school graduate. So I told Betty Hill I wanted a job. She said, "Well, Verna, you're just a high school graduate. I can not get you a political job because you have to be more qualified." And she said, "But they're having a home show out at the Pan Pacific Auditorium and they need someone for ten days to work with a lady in a glass house. Would you like that?" 053 "And they pay three dollars a day." I said, "Sure." And so I went to work for this work for ten days, three dollars a day. That's thirty dollars I'm going to make. People were offering you like six dollars a week to work in their little stores that they had on Central Avenue where you could get a job. They'd want you to work all week for six dollars. So three dollars a day, that was a good job. And ten days -- I could do lots with that 30 dollars. And so I took it.

And it was working with this lady in this glass house. She was advertising food products like Kraft products and Pillsbury's products and Globe A-1 Flour -- All the different company's food products. She had this glass house and we'd be cooking every day and using some of these products and the public would stand outside the glass house and watch us. And see what we were using. So it was a form of advertisement. 064

And so while I'm working with her in this glass house. Oh, and I was dressed up real cute. She let me wear a little plaid dress that I had made. I had taken sewing in school. And I had made myself a cute little plaid dress. And then I had a little white apron to go over this little plaid dress. And a little white headband to wear. You know, a little maid outfit. But the dress was plaid, it wasn't black and white, because I didn't like black on me. And she was very nice and she said, "Well if you don't like black, I don't care what you wear. Just so long as you look nice." So I had this cute little plaid dress and just put a little white apron over it and a little cap. So everybody thought I looked so cute.

073 So the man from Kraft cheese company came in one day. He came in the house. See, she'd let the people from the companies come inside the house. But the public had to stand outside and watch us. She'd let me make whatever I wanted to make. "Whatever food you want to work with today. Work with whatever you want to work with." So I decided I want to make these cookies with Philadelphia Cream Cheese out of Kraft products, because they sounded so interesting. So I was making the cookies and this man from Kraft cheese company came in while I was making the cookies. I just said I always had a guiding angel because I didn't know the man and he didn't know me, but it just so happens that he came in at the time I was working with his products. So he kept watching me and he stayed there until I made the cookies and cooked them and served them. That was at least 45 minutes (laughs) it took me to do that because I was doing other things while I'm making the cookies too. I'm making that and something else too, you know. Because I had to keep busy all the time and so when I served those cookies and tasted them -- Oh they were so delicious. He thought I was an excellent cook. All I was doing was following the recipes (laughs). So he got real interested. He came back in the kitchen and he says, "Oh, these are delicious." He still hasn't told me he's from Kraft cheese company. "What did you make these out of?" And I said, "Philadelphia Cream Cheese." And I opened the package, showed it to him, (laughs) and I said, "This is the best cheese on the market." I'm just boasting Kraft cheese (laughs). And he said I was a natural born salesman. And so pretty soon he pulls out his card and gives it to me (laughs). And I said, "What, you're from Kraft cheese company?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Oh, I'd love to have a job with your company." I said, "I'm looking for a job. I'm just working here temporarily." He said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I'd like to be a demonstrator."

I used to see the white girls demonstrating in the colored neighborhoods, you know. Giving out little samples of things. (K: In the grocery stores?) Yeah, in the grocery stores. But they weren't hiring any colored girls to do that you know. And that's what I decided I wanted to do. So I told him that's what I'd like to do. He said, "You would?" I said, "Yes, I would." He said, "Well you're a natural born salesman. I bet you'd be good." So he said, "Call me in a month. We have a new product coming out." That was Parkay Olio margarine. It hadn't come out yet. And this was in 1938 I think it was. And he said, "We're going to have this new product coming out and we're going to have lots of money to spend for advertisement. And we're going to hire new demonstrators by the week." And says, "I'll have a job for you." He said, "You call me up in a month."

So two weeks passed and I hadn't called him because he said call in a month. So two weeks passed and he called me. "I thought you were going to call me." I said, "Well you told me to call

you in a month." I said, "It's only been two weeks." He said, "Well, can't you come down right now?" And I was in the bathtub taking a bath, getting ready to get dressed to go out and look for a job. And he called me just at that time. And I rushed and got dressed and went down there and got the job. And he said, "We got a home economist from Chicago coming out to make a movie." Then they advertised the commercials like we get on TV - - They advertised them in the theaters then and they had to make a movie to show this commercial in the movie houses, because we didn't have TVs then. So we were making a commercial for the movies. And we were just dealing with foods. And this home economist was coming out to make this movie. And I was her helper. So he hired me to be her helper. And we worked at the studio. And he gave me a company car to pick her up every day. She was staying at the Hollywood Hotel. And I'm living on the east side in this house I bought for 21-hundred dollars. So I had the company car, the Kraft cheese company. And they let me keep it. You know, I kept it at nights because I had to go early every morning and pick her up and go to the studio. And then when I needed gas I'd go to the company and they'd fill it up and clean the car. Oh, I was a big shot, driving the Kraft cheese company car (laughs). Taking her to work everyday and working with her in the movie. But only our hands were showing. We weren't showing, just our hands, you know. 131 And we made some beautiful foods. And I learned lots more about following recipes. I worked for a whole month out there. We were a whole month making that.

And I got 30 dollars a week. At first they were just paying me-- they started me off working at 18 dollars a week as a demonstrator in the stores. I was making 18 dollars a week. And he put me out there with her and was still giving me the same 18. So the white girls that I was working with--they found out that I was just making 18 dollars. And they said, "Girl, you shouldn't be doing that. You should be getting as much as we're getting. We're getting 30 dollars a week. You shouldn't be working for 18." So this man who had hired me, he was always bragging about how good I was, you know-- what a good salesman I was and how everybody liked me. I said, "Well Mr. Roe," I think his name was Roe. I've almost forgotten his name. But I'll just say his name was Mr. Roe. "Mr. Roe, if I'm all that good then why can't you pay me 30 dollars a week like the other girls are getting?" (laughs) 147 (K: Perfect timing). Yeah, he just made me a good opening for me to bring that up. Because I was so timid. I was so glad to have this job for 18 dollars a week and I wasn't going to complain (laughs). So he turned so red, but he laughed, you know. He said, "Well, Verna I got to give it to you." And said, "Well the other girls are getting it and I'm doing as much as they -- or more. I'm doing more than they are because I'm going back picking up the lady everyday and bringing her to work."

Because those girls didn't have to pick up anybody and bring them to work. And so he gave it to me.

But when I went back to demonstrating, he gave me 21 dollars a week. And I kept that job for a year. It lasted a year. See, when their money ran out then the job played out.

K: And they were just demonstrating the new product, the olio?

W: Well everything. They had me selling everything, but they were pushing the new product, Parkay. But they also had me giving out samples of cheese too. So I'd give out samples of the cheese.

K: How would you do it? Did you set up in the store?

W: They set up a little booth like and dressed it up with all the advertisements and literature and stuff. It was a cute little display, you know, a big display. The company would make a nice display and I'd be dressed in a -- I have a picture of myself someplace around here in the costume. I had on a white uniform and then I had cute little trays there. I could fix it any way I wanted. I'd fix up the little trays dainty and give out the samples to the people who came along. "Have a sample of a new margarine called Parkay. It's not made with--" what was it made out of then? Coconut oil. "Not made with coconut oil. This is made with vegetable oil. It's healthier for you." Because you see the vegetable oils were better for you than -- they were making it out of some old stuff like coconut oil. And it wasn't as digestible as the vegetable oil, you know. And it was for 20 cents a pound and the other margarine was selling for 10 cents a pound. So I had to do lots of taking to get them to pay twice as much, you know. (K and W laugh) 180 And they would usually buy it because I was such a nice salesman and I was a colored salesman too. And they were trying to help me out, you know. And then I'd put cheese there and give out samples of cheese. They'd push whatever cheese they wanted to push -- Velveeta. They were pushing Velveeta. And the people would usually buy it and I'd show them it was better. Which was true, it was better for them to buy the better grade, just like now, you don't buy -- Oh, I know the other olios were made out of animal fat and this coconut oil. But the vegetable oil was better for you, more digestible you know, which is a fact. It's a known fact that that's true, you know. That's why lots of people have hardening of the arteries. They use too much animal fat and your arteries get clogged up. So it was really a good health point that I was bringing out. 191

So by that time, by the time that job played out that's the time this man had talked me into studying real estate, or did I have

my grocery store -- Oh, see from this demonstrating job, from being a demonstrator--

K: Can you hold on for one second?

W: Sure.

(195 DAT TAPE CHANGED -- BEGIN DAT TAPE 2)

W: 197 So when the Kraft cheese company demonstration job ended I had been demonstrating in this market, the fish market there at Vernon and Central. So this man who had the master lease on the building, he thought too that I was a good salesman, so he said, "Verna, why don't you take over this little grocery concession here." He had that divided up into four businesses and in one building he had a meat department, a vegetable department, fish department and a grocery department. And the man with the grocery department, he had an old sour expression on his face and he wasn't doing much good, you know. So, he said, "He wants to sell out because he can't make it being a grocery clerk." And I said, "Well, I don't have much money. How much does he want?" He said, "You just buy his merchandise from him. You don't have to pay him anything for his business because he doesn't have any business." And so, he had about 500 dollars worth of merchandise, but that wasn't enough to run a successful grocery store. I said, "Well, I have a little money but I don't know, how much is the rent?" He says, "35 dollars a month for that concession." He said, "But you can pay me at the end of the month. You don't have to pay me in advance because I'd like to have you in there." So I said, "O.K., I'll take it." Because I wasn't working then and I had just gotten my real estate license but I hadn't started trying to sell. I just decided well, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I was timid about this real estate business because you didn't make any money if you didn't make a sale, you know. I didn't know it was so good. So I said, "O.K. I'll take it." So I went and bought the man out, 500 dollars worth of his merchandise and instead of me taking money out everyday when I'd make a sale I'd go buy more merchandise and pretty soon in about two weeks I had my supplies built up to buy anything you wanted in a grocery store, I had it.

If I had to go to the wholesale house twice a day, I'd have it because I didn't ever want to say, "I'm out of something." Because I had gotten this idea that most colored people who run a business they don't know what they're doing. They never have anything, they're always out. "Just out, just out." And I said, "I don't want to ever tell anybody I'm out." And I bought me a -- I had bought a little station wagon. So I had a station wagon and the delivery trucks only came once a week. I couldn't wait for once a week because my little store was small and I couldn't buy whole lots because I didn't have much storage space, you

know. And I'd buy five cases at a time. If I'd had more storage space I would have bought ten cases at a time. It would have been cheaper. But even five was cheaper than buying one case at a time, you know. So I'd buy five case lots of stuff so I could get it a little cheaper. And I had to keep some of it at home because my little storage space wasn't large enough down there, you know. So it really worked me hard because I had to move the stuff twice, you know. But I could see that I'm not going to make any money unless I buy in bigger quantities, you know. And to keep from being out I'm going to run to the store and wholesale house and get the stuff myself. And so I did that. And so I got the reputation of having everything anytime you wanted it. "She's never out. She's always got what you want."

And the bread man was so nice and friendly. I was friendly with them because, see from being a demonstrator I picked up on lots of little pointers for running a successful business. When I was demonstrating giving out samples, the bread man would come in the store with their arms full of bread and those old managers would make them stand there and hold that bread until they finished talking to a friend. It wasn't business, you know, just talking to a friend. This -- Oh, you're beneath me, you can wait, you know, that attitude. And I used to feel so sorry for these bread men because they were cursing under their breath that these managers were being so inconsiderate of them, you know. So I picked up on that so when I got my little store, if the bread man came, I would quit waiting on a customer to count the bread, because he's supposed to let you count it before he puts it on the shelf. And so I would tell the customer, and the customers didn't mind waiting because it didn't take me that long to count, you know. I said, "Pardon me just a minute, just help yourself, decide what you want while I count this bread." And nobody ever got offended at me doing that. And the bread man was so appreciative of that. They started changing my bread everyday. I never had any old bread. I always had fresh bread (laughs). And so I got the reputation of having fresh bread, you know, in some stores you can buy and it's old, stale, and you thought you were getting a fresh loaf of bread and it's not fresh. So they said, "Oh she always has fresh nice fresh bread, fresh eggs." I was lucky on the eggs too. But anyway, the bread man would change my bread everyday and so I got so I'd sell out of bread, because the fish market was the drawing card. They flew that fish in from Louisiana and they advertised, "Fresh fish flown in daily from Louisiana." So people would come from all over town just to buy the fish. When they found out that my prices were the same in my little grocery concession, as they were in the big stores. Well, they'd trade with me. So I had so much business I couldn't hardly handle it. My place was so little, you know.

K: What year was this?

W: '42, '42, 1942. That was during the War and so I couldn't get any men to work for me because they were all going to the army. So I had to get a girl and this girl, just the same as I was, we couldn't lift too heavy things, we'd have to do it together, you know, like a case of pineapple, a case of vegetables, a case of juice, a case of anything is heavy for a woman to lift, you know. So we'd find ourselves lifting it together to put it on display for sale. So it was very hard work but I said, "Well, I'm sure making good money." Because I started making like a hundred dollars a week for myself. And that was the most money I'd ever made, in a week, for myself. Because I hadn't gone into real estate yet, you know. So I said, "Well I got to stand it for a little longer." So I stood it until I got me a good nest egg. I saved up about 5000 dollars and then I decided, "Well, I'm going to kill myself doing all this hard work." Because I was beginning to feel so tired. Didn't feel like doing anything else. And so a man came along and wanted to buy it and I sold him the business.

296 And I already had my real estate license so that's when I went to this black millionaire's office because he used to be a customer. He'd come over there and buy that fresh fish. So that's how I met him. See he'd come in there all the time and we'd talk. And I told him I had a license but I wasn't working at it yet. (K: Is this Maddox?) Yeah, Maddox. So I told him I had a license. I said, "But I haven't started working in real estate yet." He said, "Well you ought to come on and work for me. When you get ready to come and work, come and work for me." And so when I sold the business, I went over to see him and sure enough he gave me the job. 307

So I worked there until I decided, "Well I better come over on the west side." Because all he had -- He wasn't so interested in listings. He was interested in speculating because he always had plenty of money. And if I'd get a listing on something that was good, he'd buy it and I didn't get a chance to sell it and make more commission. By him buying it, I wouldn't make as much, you see. So I figured I was holding myself back by staying with him.

So one day I was driving up Jefferson, near the church I attended. I attended the church on Jefferson and 3rd Avenue, Westminster Presbyterian Church. And all of a sudden I got to 4th Avenue and Jefferson and I looked over there and saw that neat little real estate office. It was a Japanese company. And I put on the brakes all of a sudden and stopped. I said, "I'm going to go in here and see if they don't need a salesman." And I went in there and talked to him and they said, "Yeah, we'd love to have a black saleslady." They didn't have any blacks, they just had all Japanese in there. So, I started working with them and they were so nice. And you see if you get a listing then, well he would advertise it and you'd sell it because he wasn't a

speculator like Maddox was, you see. So I started making much more money by working for him. And I'm still with him. I've been with him since, let's see, '56 I started working with him in '56. I still have my license with him. But since I've been doing this movie work I haven't been concentrating on real estate as much, you know. 331

K: Movie work?

W: Yeah, I do extra work in movies. You didn't know that?

K: No. Tell me about that. What's that?

W: You know, like when you see a movie star talking you see whole lots of people in the background? Those are what you call extras, you know. So I've been an extra for a long time. I've been doing that. And I was on "Living Color," do you ever look at that? That's a comedy on Sunday nights. About three Sunday nights ago they had my picture, not this new one, (pointing to a recent framed portrait on her table) but the older pictures I have of myself. (K: A portrait?) Uhuh, on a placard. You know they had these placards with Bush and Clinton and all the candidates that's running for election now and making jokes about them, you know. And they had my picture on a placard (laughs). And I've been established with them as Mrs. Perkins and I think she said, "I wonder what Mrs. Perkins thinks about these?" It was something comical she said, I'm not sure what she said. But anyway she just wondered what I thought about these candidates, you know. And it was so cute. 350

350-370 "In Living Color" anecdotes about Mrs. Perkins

K: 370 Do you ever get speaking parts? How do you get these jobs?

W: By calling on the casting companies, different casting companies. They've got lots of casting companies here and you register with them. I'm registered with several of them and that one, let's see how did I get that. Well one of the casting companies called me on that one. I think it was Central Casting that called me on that one. And I got a commercial with McDonald's once too. I have an agent so, for that. I got a big commercial with McDonald's. (K: really?) That was nationwide. A lady in Chicago, and one in New York called me and said they saw me on T.V. That was a year ago in April, April 1990 when I made that commercial. And I had speaking lines in that and got a big price on that. Got residuals from that.

K: 383 How did you get into this? When did you start?

W: A Japanese lady started me. You know I've been lucky with Japanese people. My first job I had was by a Japanese man who had this little theater and then when I -- My most successful -- I guess I was more successful with Maddox because I speculated there. But did very well when I started working with Saito Realtor, that's the Japanese broker that I worked with. And this Japanese lady used to come in the office all the time for other businesses. And so the casting companies used to call her and tell her to "Bring ten people, bring three colored and three Chinese and three Japanese, and Mexicans," and all different races. They'd tell her to bring them, you know. So she came in one day and asked me wouldn't I like to go and work with her because they told her to bring some colored people in. So I was the type they wanted. So I went with her and worked (laughs). And that's what got me started.

K: When was that?

W: That was like, 1957.

K: Really? So you've been doing this a long time.

W: Yeah, just bits and parts. I wasn't concentrating on it then like I am now. So you know, after I got older I decided well, "Maybe I better slow down." My kids keep telling me, "Don't work so hard. We can take care of ourselves now. You don't need to work so hard." (laughs) Because they all figured they're capable of taking care of themselves now that they're educated and got their jobs and things. But I used to say, "I'm working to educate my kids." They say, "You can't say that now." But I say I work now because I'm trying to stay young. Because if you sit down and quit doing anything well you'll just get stiff, you know. So of course I use the money too. 411

411-418 Works to stay young and support grandchildren

418 Goals and future plans are to stay healthy, earn money

K: One thing I wanted to ask you about, throughout your time in Los Angeles have you been involved in politics? 433

W: Throughout my time you say?

K: Yeah, just throughout the time that you've been here, have you been involved in politics?

W: A little bit, not too much. When I was working with the Women's Political Study Club I was the junior president of that. And we worked to open up jobs for the colored kids who were qualified. Yeah, I worked very hard with them.

K: Did that club have a name?

W: Yeah, it was called the Women's Political Study Club. And Betty Hill was the leader of it and she was the one who started it. And I have some literature on that too. Then I was appointed -- And of course I've always worked as an inspector for the election board. I still do that. I used to work for the candidates, but I haven't done that lately.

K: Were you involved in the Civil Rights movement?

W: 450 No.

K: What do you remember about it? Do you remember any local events during that time?

W: Well like when Martin Luther King would come to town I'd always make it my business to go and hear him (K: Oh, yeah.). Like when Mayor Bradley was running for office we used to give little coffee clutches for him to raise money, you know. I always helped for those kinds of events. Helped to raise money for the candidates who were running. But I haven't done that lately.

464 I knew Mayor Tom Bradley when he was a detective. He used to come in Maddox's office when I was selling real estate. He used to come in there all the time. So I knew him then as a detective. Then when he started to run for councilman, well, I used to help to get him elected. And then when he ran for mayor I worked to help to get him elected to mayor. And then I've always worked on election boards. And I'm still inspector for my election board. 473

473 Election board worker tasks

481 Verna's home was a polling place, stopped because it was too costly and they didn't pay enough

510 Changes in Los Angeles: size, foreigners, crime, - drugs, graffiti, single mothers

570 Contrast with own experience as a single mother

K: 587 How has the African-American community changed or stayed the same since you've been here?

W: Well lots of the people have improved themselves by moving away from the east side as we called it. Because I remember when I lived on the east side before I moved away, my next door neighbor, I call it "low brow" person, low brow person because she was jealous of me having a nice lawn. I'm on the east side

but I'm still trying to have nice living conditions, you know. So I had a gardener and kept up a lawn and I watered my lawn. She didn't even have a lawn. But she was renting. She wasn't buying her house. She was renting and I guess the rent so cheap that the owner didn't worry about having a lawn or a garden. But anyway she lived there so long I thought she owned the house. But she didn't have a lawn and she was jealous of me having a lawn. So one day I went out and picked up her old stinky garbage can that had rolled over on my lawn. She wouldn't even put paper in her garbage can. It smelled. That's when you put the garbage out in cans then. Her garbage can smelled because she would never wash it and she didn't put paper in it. I put paper in mine then when the man would empty it, I'd rinse it out and put new paper in it. But her's -- she never changed it. So one day her's had rolled over on my lawn when the man threw it after he'd emptied it. And I went out and set it up in her yard. Oh, she cursed me out. "Why don't you get a job working for the city if you want to go out picking up people's garbage cans." But I was expecting company and I didn't want my company to smell that old stinky can and she balled me out. And that's when I found out she's jealous of me having a lawn. So she never tried to improve herself at all. So I got sick of her and that's what made me want to move away. I said, the people don't want you to improve yourself.

So I moved away and moved into a neighborhood where people took pride in their property. So those of us who wanted better things, moved to the neighborhoods and we tried to keep up with the neighborhood. And do like the other neighbors. But a few moved into the nice neighborhoods and wouldn't try to keep up with the other neighbors, you know. They just go and start wrecking things and so we'd get after them, you know. By then they'd get mad at us. "You think you're better than we are." I said, "Well I do want to live better than you do." (laughs) I said, "I don't see that that doesn't make sense. You don't want to pick up your garbage can, you don't want to clean up your lawn and pick up your trash." But some people just don't -- aren't thoughtful enough about their surroundings I guess.

K: 656 What would you say have been the most important events in your life?

W: (pause) Hmm. When I got that McDonald's commercial. (laughs) (K: Really?) That was important.

K: How so?

W: Because I was seen all over the United States on T.V. (laughs) And I made big money out of it. And of course, when I built my new home. That was important.

K: This one or the redwood house?

W: The redwood house, you know when the restrictive covenant was broken. Oh, that was a thrill. Ohh, boy. (pause) Let me see now -- What else? And when I married Mr. Williams because he was a good catch. (laughs)

K: Tell me about him. 676

W: He was a wealthy black man from St. Louis. He came out here and as soon as he got out here his wife that he'd been married to for 14 years divorced him.

K: Did she come out here too?

W: Yeah, they had moved out here, he and his wife and two children moved out here from St. Louis. Because his mother and father and sister and brother were already here. So he finally moved out to join them and brought his family. But they were getting along poorly, he said, before they got here. So when they got here she put in for a divorce and divorced him. So I happened to meet him right after -- three months after he separated from his wife. And so he was afraid to go out with me at first because he said, "If I'm seen out with you, she'll be saying that I was sleeping around with you before we separated and so he was trying to protect me. So we would only go places like a theater. We wouldn't go anyplace like, if I was invited to a party. He didn't want to do that. 705

705-715 Verna and Mr. Williams don't go out in public until divorce is finalized

715 Lots of other women were after him too, because he was a good catch, you know. He was well established and had lots of property and he was a former vice-principal of a high school in St. Louis and had gotten on teaching out here, but he didn't like teaching. He wanted to be-- (story continued on Tape 2, Side B)

720 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE A

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CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE B (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 2)

000 Silence

003 He wanted to be a principal. Well they wouldn't let him start off being a principal since he's in a new place. You've got to start off at the bottom and work up. And then he had a real estate office. He was a real estate broker too. (K: Oh, what year was this?) '56. I met him in '56, 1956. So he was

very prosperous and very nice and congenial, highly educated and everybody thought he was a very nice catch. So he decided to marry me. I figured that was a good catch. (laughs) So I was naturally thrilled, you know.

K: And when were you married?

W: In '64.

K: So you had a long courtship.

W: Yeah. It took him about three years to get his divorce settled. They were fighting with each other back and forth. So it took them about three years to get that settled. Then naturally after he got the divorce he didn't want to jump right back into the fire. He just got out of fire. He didn't want to jump right back into it. And by that time he figured he had me figured out by then. That I wasn't marrying him for what he had. You know some people will think, well, you're marrying him for what he had. (laughs)

K: Well you were established on your own.

W: Well I was real established myself. That's another thing he liked too. 018 And also I was the economical type. That's what he admired most in me he said. The first time he came over to see me. I mean, not the first time, but the first time I had him over for dinner -- I cut the napkin in half. I have a habit, when I buy these big napkins I would cut them in half. I'd say, "I don't need to use a big napkin like this." And I had my napkins in a drawer all cut in half and so I picked up one of them and served him with it, unconsciously. I wasn't thinking about the economic part of it at that time. I just unconsciously did it. So when he realized that he thought was the cutest thing. (laughs) I said when I realized it, "I'm sorry I gave you half a napkin." "Oh, that's all right," he said. And I told him why I cut them in half, you know. And he just laughed. He thought that was so cute. He said, "I'm economical but I think you got me beat." (laughs)

031 And he said, "Let me see your vacuum cleaner." My broom closet was in the kitchen. This was in my new home. So I opened the door and showed him the vacuum cleaner and I had the cord wrapped around the vacuum cleaner like you're supposed to do it, you know. He said, "Most women, they just throw the cord over there. They don't take time to wrap it around there like you got it." So he got the impression that I was a neat person, you know, from that. Just from that. Now, he'd already seen how I'd kept house, but anyway. The house wasn't all that clean, but it was in order. He was testing me on that I guess because I didn't

know why he wanted to see it. But I had nothing to hide so I showed it to him. (laughs)

K: Then where did you live then, after you were married?

W: That same house. 041

042 Moves to present house in 1982

K: 046 You told me that you went back to school to go get your degree in college.

W: Now that's when I married Mr. Williams, you see, so after I married him, he'd be talking about things --I didn't know what he was talking about. Yet, he knew I hadn't finished school. He wasn't marrying me for my education. He was marrying me for my personality. (laughs) So I said -- I didn't say it to him-- I said it to myself, "Oh, I think I need to go back to school." Because sometimes he'd be talking about something I didn't know what he was talking about. I didn't want to ask him. And then sometimes I'd blab it out and ask him. He would tell me. He had patience. He'd tell me and he'd laugh. So I decided I wanted to go back to college. So I asked him, was that all right with him. He said, "Yeah, that's all right if you want to go." "There will be lots of studying," he said. So I went and enrolled at City College. And it took me three years to get my degree my A.A. degree. I got an A.A. degree, but I stuck it out until I got that degree.

K: What was your major?

W: Home economics. It's a funny thing. When my first husband died I hadn't finished high school and I went back to finish high school and this teacher -- I mean the counselor, advised me to take home economics. I wouldn't take it at that time because at that time the white counselors would only suggest that you take that. They said, "You shouldn't take college preparatory courses. You don't need to go to college. Because you can't get a job doing anything else but housework anyway." And invariably she would advise all the colored girls to take home economics, so I had a resentment there. And I didn't want to take it just because she said I should take it. (laughs) Because she had in her mind and in my mind too, well, if I take home economics the only thing I can do is get a work in that line. So I refused to take it. I took a college preparatory course. It's good that I did, otherwise I might not have been able to get into City College.

But when I got into City College you had to choose what you wanted to major in. Then I looked at all the things and at my age, well I wasn't planning on making a career to get a job

because I was already established in real estate. But I just wanted to better myself. And I found out, well, home economics was the best course to take to make a good housewife. And right now, I would suggest that all girls take that course. Not just because they're going to get a job in that field, but because it makes them a better housewife. And it really has made me a better housewife because I realized how important it is to give your family proper foods and to be clean about it. You know, cleanliness is next to godliness. 083

076 Decides on Home Economics, values on being a good housewife, overcooking food, domestic aesthetics, sewing

K: 103 What have been your greatest successes in your life?

W: Greatest success? (K: Yeah, it doesn't have to be just one) (Pause) Dealing with people -- (chuckles) Selling -- real estate.

K: And that's a theme also through your whole life, your gift for selling.

W: Uhuh. Natural born salesman. I found that out by myself. A lot of people have told me that too. If I'm sold on something I can sell you on it. But I have to first be sold on it myself because I'm an honest person. I wouldn't try to sell you something if I know it's no good, you know. If I knew it's no good and you wanted to buy it I'd tell you it's no good. And tell you how you can improve on it. Like if I had a house that had a poor foundation. That's the first thing I'd show the person. I'd say, "Now this house needs a new foundation but you can have one done for so-and-so much, you know, and that's why they're selling it so cheap because the foundation is bad. You've got to have a new foundation put under it." Or you need a new roof. I show the bad points first. And that way they had confidence in me because they figure I'm not trying to hide anything and so there's always a way to improve on things, you know because everything's not going to be perfect. Even a dress, you buy a perfect one and there's something going to be wrong with it. You might have to alter it or something.

K: What have been your greatest disappointments?

W: When my husband died. (K: Arthur?) And Virgil too. Virgil my last husband. He had a heat attack at four in the morning and then like on Tuesday morning at 4:00 he had a heart attack. Tuesday night 12:01 he died. Well that would be considered the next day because it's after 12, you know. But it looked like it was in the same day to me but they dated it another day. And

that was a disappointment. He just had this nasty heart attack and died.

K: When was that?

W: In '77, 1977. Let me see now. And of course when my father died. My father had cancer. That was very heartbreaking when he died because he suffered so much. They hadn't found a -- Well they still haven't found a cure, but they could have helped him much more now. Well I guess they have found a cure for it because some people have gotten over it. But my dad, he suffered a lot. And then another thing too, (pause) Well, I don't know.

So many disappointments I've had in life, but they don't stay with me. I forget about them because Papa always said, "Don't stand there and worry about spilt milk, get busy and clean it up and go get some more." And that's the way I look at disappointments in life because we're all going to have some disappointments. Life is not perfect. When something happens, well, just don't stand there and start worrying about it, just get busy and try to do the next best thing, you know. That's how I look at life.

K: And that's what you've done.

W: And also I don't hold any malice in my heart for mean things that people have done to my dad. Sometimes I'd cry. I think about the things that were done to him, you know. Because he tried so hard in his little way to break down the segregation. See, he was dead before all this came about. Before we got our - - Before the restrictions were broken down. You know, like they are now.

K: And now, it even continues into the present situation. I mean, we don't have the restrictive housing code anymore, but we have the Rodney King verdict. (W: Yeah.) I wanted to ask you -- That's kind of where I wanted to end up, was to end up right now in the present and ask you what your experience was over the recent rebellion over the Rodney King verdict. 159

W: (pause) (crying) Very sad. (pause) When I went up here (sniffle) where the Thrifty Drug Store is, you know. And Boys Market (voice trembling) and just stood there and cried. (crying) It was so heartbreaking. And when I -- Over here at Sumotomo Bank that's right at my front door. They burned all those places down. The little Dynasty Restaurant, I think Koreans must have been running that. They burnt that down. I used to love to go in there and eat. And right here on Bronson, one of those apartments caught fire and the fire was right in my front yard. And it looked like the blaze was going to blow over on our

houses. We had to evacuate our houses for three hours because they were afraid the gas was going to explode.

K: Where did you go?

W: 177 Well, I went to a lady's house over on Broxton about five blocks away. One of my neighbors, two doors down -- She has a sister who lives over there so we went to her house. And we stayed about three hours and then came back. It didn't explode because the fire department got here, but they were so long in coming they were afraid that the fire was going to cause the gas to explode. (crying)

And I went over on the east side and a man that was having a -- Oh, and my son, he lost a cigarette machine, no a jukebox. He has jukeboxes, that's his sideline. He has jukeboxes in places of business and he had one in the Golden Bird Chicken place, he had a jukebox in there. They went in there, the one on Adams, broke up everything in there, including my son's jukebox. And my son has an income tax office on King Boulevard, near 3rd Avenue, it's right at 3rd Avenue and King. And they broke in his place but that was after the riot, they broke in his place and stole some stuff. They didn't set it on fire because he had a sign there, "black owned." (laughs) I think that might have helped, I don't know. And he has a Korean tenant. See because he owns the whole lot and he built his little office at one end of the lot and there's a little fast food stand in part, and then they have parking on the other part. But his tenant is a Korean, and they're very nice people too. And so they didn't bother their place, but they did break in and steal stuff, you know. But they didn't set it on fire. But so my son he lost quite a bit there.

But anyway, I went on the east side where I was dealing with a man. I was having some bars put up on a house that I was selling out in Watts area. And so the place right across the street from this bar business was a liquor store and a grocery store combined and they had burned that down. Oh, that was so sad. And then the little place over near USC where I used to get my xeroxing done, it was a little shopping mall and that xerox place is where I used to go. And all that was burned.

Oh, it just broke my heart. I said, "They're just cutting off their nose to spite their face," really. Now those type people that started that's the only way they know, I guess, to get attention. They call themselves getting attention I guess. Of course it was unfair, the verdict was unfair. But I don't see why they felt they had to do all that just because it was an unfair verdict. I sort of believe in the Bible, God says, "Vengeance is mine." And he'll get them (crying). He'll get these people. But you have to have the patience though. And I guess these young people they say, "We're tired of waiting." But

it's just so sad, I'm telling you. And they cut out lots of jobs, you know, by doing what they did. And lots of people can't walk to stores and they don't have cars to go to the store. They burned out the little neighborhood grocery stores and so it's just really sad. I'm telling you, I just cried. I can't even talk about it hardly without crying (crying) because it's just so sad. And when you try to reason with some of these people, I haven't talked directly to anyone who actually did it, but I talked to some people out in Watts that stole the doors off the house that I'm selling. The owner had bars put up and metal doors and they went in and stole the metal doors off the house. They didn't take the bars but they stole the metal door. They wanted to show us, "Well, we can still get in the house if we want to." 232

232        People stole metal bars off house in Watts, describes incident

K: 265 What do you think will happen now, that so many things have been destroyed? What are you thinking about or what are people that you know thinking about rebuilding and starting again?

W: Well lots of people are chipping in to help. That's one good consolation. We're all pitching in to help because, you know right after the riots lots of them volunteered their services to go and help clean up. And I was glad to see that. And we've been giving away food at our church for the people who were burnt out of their homes and the grocery stores are gone, you know the neighborhood grocery stores are gone. And so I've been helping with that, helping to sack up the food. And then I took some food to two families that I knew that needed it. But I didn't know any more so they're supposed to come to the church and get the food. They seem to be changing their attitude. People are friendlier toward each other. Before they act like you didn't even exist. Now they do notice you and they want to be more friendly it seems like.

K: Who is "they?"

W: The other races, the white races, white people. I noticed they're more friendly toward the blacks now. I notice that when I'm out. The blacks are more friendly too, you know. Those of us who think it was terrible for the blacks to do what they did. Well, they're getting to be more friendly too, with the other people, you know. Of course, naturally the blacks were mad at the Mexicans for coming in and taking their jobs, you know. But so many of the blacks don't want to work. I sort of blame them. I try to tell them that lots of time, like we used to have lots of black waiters and waitresses in places of business. And now it's mostly foreigners, you know. Because the people used to

say, "Well, we can't depend on the blacks." It got so they don't want those jobs. They want better jobs, you know. So the Mexicans that come in are taking their jobs. Well they didn't want them in the first place because they said they could make more being on the County and on welfare than they could taking those little meager jobs, you know. And I guess welfare has lots to do with it too. Maybe they shouldn't be giving so much, I don't really know exactly what's going to solve the problem. But I do know the attitude is getting better and we should all change and help each other. (Crying) Because it's a sad world. (pause) And that's one reason my grandson moved away from here. He didn't want his children to have to go to school with some of the kids which they had to go to school with. He says "Too much drugs on the school grounds," you know.

K: Where did he move to?

W: Palmdale. 310 He moved to Palmdale. And my daughter-in-law, she wouldn't let her kids go to school by themselves. She'd take them to school. Those that couldn't be bused, one of them, he gets to go on the bus. But those that didn't get bused, she'd take them school and go back and pick them up. One had to go to Santa Monica because he was handicapped. He's partially sighted so all schools didn't have the equipment for him to go to so the nearest school to them for him to go to was in Santa Monica. So he couldn't be bused way out there so she had to take him every day and then go back and get him. Also, one went to John Bourhgs (?) Junior High School so she took him because she didn't want him to have to ride the public transportation with these bad kids, you know, that shoot each other on the buses and cut each other and exchanging drugs and all that kind of stuff. She didn't want them to be exposed to that so she just -- Lucky she didn't have to work because my son made enough income for her not to work. So she was available to take them, but most people are not available and can't afford to take their children to school. They have to let them go, you know, publicly. But those who can, they just try to let their kids not mix in with these bad kids as they call them. It really makes a big difference. 337

I just pray for guidance and for protection because God says he will protect you and he will provide if you believe in him.

K: O.K. Thank you very much, Verna.

W: Oh, you're welcome. (K: Yeah, I think we got through a lot of material) We sure did. And I've enjoyed every minute of it. (laughs)

K: Me too.

WILLIAMS, Verna -- 42

344 to end      Blank tape-Silence

724                END OF CASSETTE TAPE 2, SIDE B

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Part II- Photographic interview

Second interview with Verna Deckard Williams, Los Angeles,  
California  
May 27, 1992

Interviewer: Amy Kitchener

K: Kitchener

W: Williams

CASSETTE TAPE 3, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 3)

000                Silence

K: I wanted to ask you how important photography has been in your family because you have so many photographs of your life and I was wondering about the history of taking photographs in your family. 008

W: Well, I guess I'm the only one who has done that because my mother didn't even have a picture of her mother. So I guess they didn't think it was very important. But I got very curious and wanted to know who my ancestors were so I wanted pictures. When I get one I just keep it and I put them away. I was very careful with them so I guess I'm the only one in the family who did that.

K: Don't you have a few photographs of your grandparents? Do you have those? 015

W: Oh, yes. Of my mother and father and her father, but I don't have one of my mother's mother. Their house got burned in Texas and her mother's picture got burned and she didn't have too many in the first place so I guess that's one reason I don't have any of her. So --

K: When did you start taking photographs?

W: Oh, as a teenager, on Sundays that was our hobby. We'd go what you call "Kodaking." We'd take our little camera and go walking around the town and go to some little outing and take pictures of each other. And we lived in a little town called Terrell, Texas. There was an asylum there and we didn't have a

park we could go to but they'd let us come on the grounds of the asylum and talk to the mentally ill people. Those who were not harmful. So we'd go around talking to them and we'd take pictures. We didn't take pictures of them though. But we'd take pictures of ourselves on the grounds, you know. Because it was like a park to us. So I was a teenager when we started doing that. And then we'd take pictures on the school ground. But the school ground wasn't very pretty like this ground where the mentally ill people were.

K: 033 And what did you do with your photographs after you took them?

W: Well, I put them in a little Kodak album which I still have.  
(K: Uhuh.) I still have my little Kodak album.

K: Do you have a family album -- a larger album where you've incorporated photographs from your whole life?

W: Yes. Yes, I do. But the album is so old that all the leaves are coming apart and it's not really in chronological order because the leaves have come apart, you know. But I do still have the pictures.

K: When you put the photos in, did you organize them in any certain way?

W: Yes, I did have them organized. But now I just have them but they're not organized because the pages came apart.

K: Did you organize them chronologically or by subject matter? Do you remember?

W: More or less by subject matter.

K: 045 When do you look at your photographs?

W: (pause) Oh, when some members of the family are around and want to see some old photographs.

K: Do you then tell stories about the photographs? Which members of the family? Your grandchildren?

W: Oh, yes. Mostly my grandchildren so they'll know the history of the family.

K: I know that I've seen sort of a poster that you made of photographs from your life. Could you tell me about that?

W: Oh, yes. That was made on my 80th birthday. I had those on display at a party that my son had for me on my 80th birthday.

And that was more or less, I guess you'd call that chronological order from -- I think I have my baby picture on there and when I finished high school and college and all different phases of my life.

K: And you put that together yourself?

W: Yes, I did that myself.

K: And what was the response at the party?

W: Oh, people just thought that was wonderful. They said, "When did you have time to do all this?" (laughs) I said, "I just took time and did it."

K: Are there certain photographs that were in your family or that you'd seen before from your life, that you don't have? That you wish you had?

W: Something I don't have that I wish I had? Well, I can't think of any right now. Well, my grandmother, my mother's mother, I don't have her picture. (K: Right.) Yeah, I wish I had that but that got burned up in the fire when Mama's house got burned.

K: 068 And then the family photos from your family from your parents. Did you get those photographs. Do you have those?

W: Well, let's see. Well, some of my aunts. That's right, I wish I had more pictures of my aunts, but I guess they must have gotten burned too. Yeah, that's right. I don't have any of my aunts too, that I was very fond of. They've all passed on now.

K: Do you have plans for your photographs?

W: Plans? (K: Uhuh.) (pause) No. No special plans. I just want to hang on to them. (K: Yeah.)

K: 076 Well let's look at some of your photographs.

(Entries in bold are the photo identifications from accession books recorded when photos were copied)

1. A-006-182. Jule L. Deckard and his daughter Verna in front of his garage and blacksmith shop, Texas, ca. 1910.

K: 077 This is the first photograph here.

W: Oh yeah, that's my dad and me in his first little car that he bought. That was probably about 1909. And this was the little town where I was born, Tatum, Texas. There were only three cars

in this town and Papa owned one of them. And the two doctors owned the other two. (laughs) And he had me driving when I was seven years old.

K: How old are you here?

W: I was about three there. And there was really no danger of me driving the car because there were only two other cars in the town. People were still using horse and buggies, you know. And then my dad took me with him every place he went. So I watched him drive and so it was easy for me to learn how to drive. And you just get the wheels in a rut, because we had dirt roads. And just hold the wheel and it would guide itself, you know.

K: And the two other doctors who had the cars, who were they? Were they very prominent in the town?

W: 092 Yes, Dr. Menefee and Dr. Young. Dr. Menefee is the one who delivered me when I was born.

K: Were they black or white?

W: They were white. And Dr. Young was white too. They both were white.

K: And what is this building that you're in front of?

W: Oh, that's my father's blacksmith shop. That's his little blacksmith shop and so when he bought this car, he tore it down put it back together, taught himself how to fix cars. He was a blacksmith at first, then he taught himself how to fix cars. So this little shop was too small to fix cars and shoe horses too, so he built a larger building across the street. He owned the land across the street. He built a larger building across the street for his auto repair shop. So he had two buildings. He had a little blacksmith shop over here and an auto repair shop and the first gas station in this little town. A little circle drive where you drive through and get the gasoline, fix his cars. And he painted it, painted the building so that made it the best looking building in the town. Because there was only one street with businesses and so his business was right on the main street.

K: How did he come to be a blacksmith?

W: 110 Well, when he first got married, he was about 18. He had been raised on a farm because his father and mother had 11 children and they farmed. But he decided he didn't want to be a farmer so he went to this little town. Of course there was a sawmill there and the man who ran the sawmill was an Irishman and he gave my father a job working in the sawmill. And Papa was a hard worker, a fast worker too. And he was working in the

sawmills on one of those hot days and he stopped to wipe the perspiration off his face and while he's standing there wiping his face, the foreman came up and hollered at him, "Get to work nigger, get to work nigger." So Papa got so angry that he went to the boss man, Mr. Parish was his name. He said, "Mr. Parish, I'm going to have to quit." "Quit? Jule, what are you going to do? You're married now. What are you going to do if you quit? You've got a wife to take care of. What are you going to do? And why are you going to quit?" "The boss," or what do you call him -- the overseer, or whatever, "called me a nigger and told me to get to work because I was just wiping my face." And he said, "If I stay here I'm going to get in trouble because I can't stand for nobody to call me a nigger and indicated that I'm lazy. Because I wasn't lazy, I was just wiping my face." And he says, "I don't blame you, Jule, but I don't see what you're going to do though, if you quit." And he said, "Well, I don't either but I can't stay here." He said, "Well, Jule, you know how to shoe horses don't you?" He said, "Yeah, my dad taught me that when I lived on the farm." He said, "We need a blacksmith shop here in this little town. Why don't you open a blacksmith shop?" He said, "I don't have enough money to open a business." He says, "See that spot over there in the corner?" "Yeah." "Well go over there and get you some lumber and build you a shop and pay me when you can." (laughs) So he did that. He went over there and got him some lumber and got a carpenter to help him and they built this little blacksmith shop. 141

K: Mr. Parish must have really liked your father.

W: He did. He just thought of him as his extra son. And so Papa built this little shop and paid him later. And Mr. Parish was just like a father to him, you know. So he started up and did very good because he had no competition. He was the only person who had a blacksmith shop there. So he did all the horses that came to town. He was the man to go to. (laughs)

K: Was Mr. Parish black?

W: No he was white. And he had this sawmill business. And he had lots of children too. So we all loved him. I have a picture of him. I have a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Parish. They had lots of children also.

K: This is the second photograph.

2. A-006-196. Jule L. Deckard's auto repair business, 2322 S. Central Ave., L.A. 1927.

W: 151 Yeah, now that's my father's garage in the second town we lived in -- Terrell, oh no, that's out here in Los Angeles. That's the shop here in L.A. on 23rd and Central Avenue. This

looked like the one he built when he moved to the second town in Texas.

K: This was your father's gas station here?

W: Yeah, uhuh. Yeah, he had a blacksmith shop at 23rd and Central Avenue, near where the Lincoln Theater is now. That's a vacant lot now. They tore the building down and it's just a vacant lot in there now.

K: O.K. Here's the third photograph.

3. A-006-617. Jule L. Deckard in L.A.

W: 163 This is the car that my father drove out here from Texas. When we came to Los Angeles in 1924, we drove two cars. This was a Ford touring car and then we drove the Ford coupe (K: Which was yours.) That he bought me, yeah, that was mine. And this was Papa's car and I drove the little Ford coupe all the way by myself. I didn't want anybody driving my new car. You know how kids are when they've got something of their own. They don't want anyone else to touch it, you know. But we stopped every night. We brought our tent along and camped every night in the tent. And Mama had a little oil stove, we'd do our own cooking. Just like a camping trip, it was really fun.

K: Is that how everyone traveled then?

W: No, most colored people didn't have all that extra equipment, but they had to sleep out -- You couldn't stay in the motels so you had to sleep in your car the best way you could. Because you couldn't stay in a motel. But Papa had planned on account he knew it was going to take us a long time to get out here.

K: Do you remember any events on the trip or what it was like travelling through Arizona and coming to L.A.?

W: 181 Oh, yeah. We had several different incidents. Some of the people were nice and some weren't. Like when we got to Arizona, uh, well the first thing my dad would do when we would drive into a service station -- He would find out if we could use the restroom, because we had a problem using restrooms. And some of them would say, "We don't have restrooms for colored." So he wouldn't buy any gas if they didn't have any restroom for us to use. And the way he got around not buying the gas, he carried an extra five gallon can of gasoline in his car so he wouldn't ever run out of gas and he wouldn't have to buy gas. And he'd always stop and buy gas before he'd run out. So we got -- If they would say "Yes, there is a restroom." Then he'd say, "Fill it up." He'd buy the gas and he'd still have his extra five gallons in there.

And so one place though in Arizona, we stopped at a place and they had a restroom, they let us use the restroom. He was getting the gas and they had a little eating place on the side too. And I loved milkshakes. Malted Milks. And so they had a fountain in this place and while Papa was getting the gas I went in there to get me a milkshake. And so I sat down at the counter where everybody else was sitting so the man said, "You have to sit at the table." Well, I'm out of Texas and I didn't realize that I was being segregated and when he said I had to sit at the table, well, sitting at the table, it looked like I was getting special service, you know. I didn't realize I was being segregated. (laughs) So I went over and sat at the table and he came over and waited on me right away, you know. (laughs) So Papa came in looking for me and he saw me sitting at the table drinking this malt and he says, "What are you doing sitting over here by yourself and everybody else is sitting at the counter?" I said, "Well, he told me to sit over here." "Well, you shouldn't have bought it. You shouldn't have bought it." He realized right away what they were doing, you know. And I said, "Well I paid for it now." "Come on. Let's get out of here." And was loud talking them and so we left and had to leave some of my milkshake because I hadn't finished it. But he was so mad. And this was Arizona, too. He didn't know Arizona was prejudiced like that. And so we had to go on. And so he gave me a good lecture, "Don't you ever buy anything when they start doing you like that." And that's the way we did when they wouldn't let you use the restroom. He wouldn't buy the gas. So we came out to Los Angeles.

K: Did other black people do that same thing? They wouldn't patronize business that were prejudiced?

W: No. I don't think so (K: Or they accepted it?) They didn't have that strategy. My dad was just so proud. That was his own little way of trying to break it down.

K: It's powerful.

W: Yeah, that was just his way -- He satisfied himself and another thing -- He wouldn't call a white man "Mister." Because they wouldn't call him "Mister." But he knew not to tell him, that "I'm not going to call you 'Mister' because you won't call me 'Mister.'" Because he knew he'd get in trouble if he did that. He was shrewd about it. The way he would get around it -- He would call him "captain," "doctor," whatever title he could think of other than "mister." (laughs) That satisfied him, you know. So if they called him "Jule," instead of "Mr. Deckard," well instead of him calling them "Mister," he'd call them "Captain so-and-so," "Doctor so-and-so," "Lieutenant so-and-so," "Corporal," any title he could think of. And that gave him satisfaction, you know. 247

K: O.K. Here's the next photo, number 4.

4. A-006-632. "Papa and his Fords lined up for Texas." Getting ready to return to Texas after Verna's wedding, 1924.

W: 249 O.K. Now we had been out here (pause) three months and this is the day Papa was getting ready to go back to Texas. And this is the boy he brought along with him to drive my car and I wouldn't let him drive it.

K: So he came along just for the trip?

W: (laughs) He worked for my dad in the garage, you know. But he brought him along so I wouldn't have to do all the driving, but I wouldn't let him touch my car. And that's my brother there and my dad and that's Nap, this might be my mother, I can't tell who that is. But they were getting ready to go back to Texas that day. We're getting ready to leave that day to go back. And I think my little Ford coupe was there, right there. That's my Ford coupe.

K: Were they going back in one or two cars?

W: One, just one. My brother was just going to go part of the way with him in my car to help see him off. I guess this is the car they were going to go in. But they were lined up out in front of the house to say goodbye.

K: This is photo number 5. 271

5. A-006-631. Sweet 16 Club on Verna's Ford Coupe, Verna and Anna Louise Griffin on top.

W: Oh, that's my little Ford coupe. And the little girls that I had made friends with here. Papa made me go to summer school when I first came here. And I'd take my little car to school everyday. And all these kids would get in my car, we'd have about four of them inside -- two, four -- there's eight of us here. We'd have about four inside and the other four would be hanging on the outside on the little -- (K: Running board?) Yeah, the little running board. Until one day the cops stopped us. He was so nice. He didn't arrest us. (K and W laugh) He just stopped us and told us it was against the law to do that. Told us not to do that anymore. (laughs) They would all try to get in this one little car. It was a one-seated car, you know. And three would sit in this -- I guess we must have had five inside, because two would be sitting in somebody's lap. So we must have had five inside and three hanging on the outside, you know. So these were "Sweet Sixteens." We were "Sweet Sixteens." Is that what it says? Oh, "Joy Girls," joy girls. (laughs)

K: And they were all from -- which school was it?

W: Oh, we all went to Polytechnic High School. It was a summer school and that's where I met all these kids at summer school.

K: What do you remember about that summer school? 296

W: Well, the kids came from all over town because they only had one summer school open that summer. And so that meant kids came from the west side, east side, north side, south side. So I met the cream of the crop. They just came from all around since they didn't have schools open in different districts they just had that one opened. So everybody had to go. This was my main little friend, she went with me when I sneaked off and got married. She's deceased now.

K: What's her name?

W: Anna Louise Griffin. Her father had a mortuary. He was in the mortuary business.

K: And where would you go out in the car?

W: 307 Oh, I went to school in it everyday. I drove to school everyday and then we'd go to the beach after school was out. We'd go to Santa Monica Beach, the "ink well." (laughs) And anyplace else we had to go. We'd get in my car and go. If we had to go downtown we'd go in the car because you could park on the streets downtown then. And go visiting. You used to visit people a lot then. Because you didn't have radios. So that was popular, to go visit each other. And this girl was my good friend. I have a picture of her someplace around here. She's moved out of town but she's still living. (pause) And we had this club called "Sweet Sixteen Club." And we had lots of fun and had little house parties every weekend. Somebody would have a little house party.

K: And who would come?

W: All the youngsters that we knew. We'd invite everybody to come to the house party. And we'd have a free piano player. Whoever could play the piano, all we had to do was invite him. It would be a boy and they all turned out to be professional musicians. Haven Johnson was one, and another fellow named Johnson, was another, I can't think of his first name. But he went to Seattle, Washington and became a professional piano player. But anyway, they were youngsters along with us. And we'd invite them to party and then when they'd get there we'd beg them to play the piano. (laughs) And they'd sit down and start playing and we'd have to beg them to quit. (laugh)

K: Did they play dance music or music to sing along to?

W: Yes, well dance music. They'd play jazz dance music and they could really play. See, they got their practice in on us. So they became professional players.

K: And what time period is this?

W: This was '24 and '25. Yes.

K: This is photo number 6.

6. A-006-616. Val Verde Park. l-r: Mrs. Nealy, Jule and Eula Deckard, Verna Williams, and Verna's son, Arthur Lewis, Jr., 1927.

W: 343 O.K. This is when Val Verde Park opened. This is up by Saugus, California. (K: What year?) About 43 miles from here. That was about 1927. And my husband had died then. That's my little boy right there and that's me and that's my mother and my father and a lady friend of ours, Mrs. Nealy and that's Arthur Jr. His father had died so Papa took us up there to the opening of this Val Verde Park. It was a beautiful place. It's about 43 miles from L.A. That was the opening of it.

K: And who went there?

W: Mostly blacks. It was a -- It belongs to the County, it's in L.A. County and it was a County park opened for blacks. It was started by a black man named Sidney Dones and they sold lots for 100 dollars each. The lots were like 25 feet by 100 feet. Yeah, most of them were 25 by 100 feet. A few of them were 40 by 100, or maybe 50 by 100. But most of them were 25 by 100 feet. 100 dollars. And I bought one up there oh, about, about ten years ago for 1800 and I kept it a year and sold it for 18,000. So they've gone up now.

K: So it's still a popular place to go?

W: Yeah, and lots of Mexicans have moved in now. And they have built lots of nice little houses. But they won't let them build them on a 25 foot lot. They have to buy two of those lots. For a 25 foot lot, you can buy one next to it so you have 50 feet, let's see. So it's pretty nice up there. The park has always been nice they have a beautiful recreation center with a clubhouse there. And swimming pool. They always had that. And these little houses built around it, you know. So it's a nice recreational area called Val Verde Park.

K: O.K. Here's the 7th photo.

7. A-006-197. The Paramount Club, group portrait, 1925.

W: 385 O.K. This is a young married women's club that I joined after I got married. My husband was still living then and these women were older than I but we were all married women. And that's me but my son wasn't born yet. That's me right there. And this is Woodley, Jr. He became a famous football star for the Rams. Made lots of money. Let's see. This is Berthella Brooks. Her father was a black detective. One of the first black detectives we had here in L.A. I think they called him Sergeant Brooks. And this girl's father, Blodgett, he had the first black savings and loan company, Blodgett Savings and Loan.

K: So there were some very prominent women in this club?

W: Yes, uhuh, and this lady was a teacher. She's deceased now, and she's deceased, she's deceased. (pointing to individuals in the photo) Now this one's living, I'm still living, (pause) I believe they're all gone except just the two of us.

K: But they were also a lot -- they were older than you were too.

W: Yeah, they were older. Uhuh.

K: What kind of activities did you do?

W: Oh, we would meet. Now this was on the west side of town. A few blacks lived on the west side but most of us lived on the east side. And this was --

K: What are the boundaries for the east and the west side?

W: Well, the east side then went up to McKinley Avenue from Ascot, not Ascot, (pause) oh, Compton Avenue. Compton Avenue over to McKinley Avenue and then Slauson Avenue south up to about 12th, well, no, I guess 9th Street. No, 6th Street. Because I knew some people lived down on 6th Street and Ceres Avenue, but it was all east side stuff. And then on the west side there was a strip on the west side, east side of Jefferson. Not the north side of Jefferson, just the east side of Jefferson, down to about 37th Street and -- Normandie, up to Normandie up to the east side of Normandie Avenue and Vermont, up to about the west side of Vermont. Just a little strip in there and this was on 35th place, near Raymond Avenue. They had a big house there. This was where my husband's grandmother lived. Mother Sally Lewis. This was out on her front yard. It was at her house but she wasn't in the picture.

K: So you would have meetings, and what would you do at the meetings?

W: Oh, we would have lunch and we would bring our sewing with us and those who had babies would bring their babies and bring our sewing and we'd sit around and talk and play with babies and do our sewing. (laughs) I was going to say, my baby wasn't born yet. And then, later after my son was born, it wasn't interesting to me anymore because I liked to play cards. I wanted to do more than just sit around and talk. So I joined another club where we played cards.

K: Did this club have name?

W: Call it young married couples club.

K: And then your card club, did that have a name?

W: Oh, yes, this did have name, it was called the Paramount Club, the Paramount, yes, the Paramount Club. That was it.

K: Did you do other things besides have the meetings where you talked and sewed and played with the kids?

W: Like at Christmas time we'd have a meeting and have our husbands come and have a special Christmas party and have a regular big Christmas dinner, turkey dinner, you know. And they had extra guests.

K: And how did you become a member?

W: Well they invite you to join. You know. So when I got married this particular girl here, (pointing to the picture) who was a teacher, she invited me to join. And she also -- when my husband died, see I was only married three years and he died. She came over to see me. She was very smart. She was a teacher. And she knew I hadn't finished high school. So she came over to see me after my husband died and she said, "Verna, I think you ought to go back to school and finish high school." And she was my influence, you know, to make me decide to do that. Because I'm living with my parents and they were telling me, "You don't need to work as long as we got a home, you have a home." See, I could have just listened to them and just not done anything, you know. Been lazy. (laughs) But she influenced me because she was up and going and very smart and progressive. And so I wanted to be like her. (laughs) So I decided well, I'm going to go back to school. Better my condition. She showed me those points and so I always appreciated her. And she played the piano too, beautifully. She could really play the piano.

K: So you went back to high school where?

W: Jefferson High School. And I didn't tell them that I had a baby because I lived close to Jefferson. See I lived off 58th

Place near Hooper, and Jefferson was on Hooper and 41st. And I could walk to school but most of the time I'd drive. And I didn't tell them I had been married and my husband was dead because I looked much younger than I was. But they found out -- some kind of way they found out. And when they found out they kicked me out of school. Because they had a rule then you couldn't go mingle with the young kids if you'd been married and had a child. So they kicked me out. (laughs) And so I wasn't so disappointed because I found out the rule. But when I did it, first did it, I didn't know what the rule was. All I knew was I just wanted to go to school. Somebody just said, "Don't tell them." But I found out what the rule was when they kicked me out. I wasn't so hurt because I knew I was doing wrong, you know. So but later, I went to this school where it was O.K. for dropouts to go. Metropolitan High School is the one I graduated from. And you could go four hours a day, for that one class. They'd have English four hours one day a week. Only had to go to the English class one day a week. I went every day but each day I had a different class. And I spent four hours in each class every day. And so that really made it nice and you got more out of it that way too, because you really spent lots of time talking about English or what ever class you were in, you know. So I really enjoyed that.

K: Here's photo number 8.

8. A-006-180. La Vera White's 18th birthday party, 18th and Central, 1928.

W: 554 Oh, yeah. This is my best friend's 18th birthday party. La Vera White. That's La Vera right there. (pointing) See right up in there that's La Vera White. See, her mother gave her her 18th birthday party and she invited all the young kids. That was the young crowd in L.A. and she had some good music. I've forgotten who played that night. But it was good music, it was a dancing party. Let's see, that's me right there. And then let's see where's the fellow I was with. I was with a fellow who was a dancer, a professional dancer. And his name was Samuel Warren. Oh, he's standing right in back of me. Right there.

K: Is this when you first came to L.A.

W: No, this was after my husband had died.

K: And was this kind of party common, or this looks like a very fancy party?

W: Yeah, it was common for people to give little house parties, you know. But this was a fabulous house party because she had -- as we called it, "the cream of the crop" there at this party.

And that was probably 1928, I guess. Because my husband had died in '27.

K: Was this then at their home?

W: No it wasn't her home. It was a home on 18th and Central Avenue that they rented out for parties. That building is torn down now. It was across from Mrs. Ross's Sweet Shop. This fellow here, he became a dentist. Everybody here was going to school then. But he's dead now.

K: Was that then the Jefferson High School students or Metropolitan or a mixture?

W: They were all at different schools then because we went to that one Polytechnic High School -- there was only one school open during the summer. But when schools -- the regular schools opened, people went to different schools. Some went to Manual Arts, but most of them went to Jefferson because most of us lived on the east side. Those who lived on the east side had to go to Jefferson High. And some went to Manual Arts High, some went to Fochet High and they had a school called 20th Street School that some went to. And then some of these didn't go to school at all. Like this fellow here, (pointing to the picture) he didn't go to school at all. He had finished I guess. Or he was too old to go to school.

And there was a fellow here I remember who was studying to be a doctor. He was here visiting from Berkeley. He's over in this section. I remember him in particular, that night. Because he was flirting with me and I found out he's only going to be here that night. He was leaving the next day. (laughs) I didn't want to get interested in him because he didn't live here and was going to leave the next day, you know. But he eventually moved back down here. He married somebody in Berkeley and moved back down here and practiced. Ishmael Flory -- He finished UC Berkeley. He went to college in Berkeley and now he lives in Chicago. He's still living.

K: How do you keep in contact with these people?

W: Well, his sister and I were very good friends and we still write each other at least once a year. And whenever I go to Chicago, I look him up. Because his sister and I are still close. But lots of them are dead now. Now this good friend of mine, she died young. She died in 1936. And this girl went with me when I got married, she died young too.

K: O.K. Here's photo number 9.

9. A-006-183. Benefit hay ride for Westview Hospital given by Verna Williams. Some of the Mills Brothers' children in picture.

W: 659 At one time we were trying to build a hospital called the Westview Hospital because the colored doctors could not practice in the white hospitals and the colored patients could not go to the white hospitals and mingle with the other patients. They'd let you come, but you'd have to get a private room. You couldn't go and be put in a ward with other patients. Well, the average colored person couldn't afford a private room. So the colored doctors decided, well, we'll try to build our own hospital to help the people who can't afford a private room.

So we had a drive on to build a new hospital, a black hospital. So this was a hay ride we were giving to raise money. It was a fundraiser and these horses -- This wagon had hay on it and we were taking kids for a hay ride. And that's me standing on the side there. And these are the Mills Brothers' children. You know the famous singers, the Mills Brothers? They were my neighbors at this time when we had this hay ride. I lived around the corner from one of the Mills Brothers, Don Mills. He had about six children. (laughs) And about three or four of his children were on this ride. That's one-two-three of them right there. And so we stopped at Vernon and Central Avenue and this picture was made then. So this is the wagon that was taking us on the hay ride.

K: And then did the hospital get built?

W: No, it didn't because we never did raise enough money. We had a company that was going to lend us the money. But we had to raise a certain amount ourselves. And we just never could get that amount raised. But we bought -- We raised enough to buy the land and pay for the land. The land was paid for. And they did get the basement of the hospital put in, but they never did get enough to put the building on top of it.

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W: 004 They did get the basement of the hospital put in, but they never could get enough to put the building on top of it.

K: Where was that located?

W: 54th and Main Street. They have-- I think it's an ABC market there now. They ended up selling it to the ABC Market. By the time all that was dealt with the other hospitals opened up and decided they would let blacks come in and be mingled with the other patients. So it do some good by them trying to do that.

K: Because it showed-- How did it do good?

W: Well, the other hospitals decided to let the blacks be mixed in with the other patients, you know. You didn't have to get a private room. You could have a roommate, no matter who it was according to their illness. You know, they'd pair you off according to your illness.

K: About what year is this?

W: That was about 1951. About 1951.

K: Photo number 10

10. A-006-633.2. Beauty Contest. Sportswear section of contest representing Maybell's Cafe at 12th and Central.

W: 018 Oh, this is the bathing beauty contest. That's part of that bathing beauty contest when I was a -- This was 1928 up in Corona, California.

K: How did you get involved in that?

W: Well, whoever was in charge of it asked me to be in it. And I found out that this was all cut and dry and the prizes were already decided before the contest, who was going to get the prizes.

K: Why was that?

W: Carolyn Snowdon was a popular chorus girl then. She had lots of chorus girls dancing for her and all of her chorus girls won the best prizes. I got one of the prizes but I called mine an insignificant prize that I got. (laughs) Because all the better prizes were given to the chorus girls. I wasn't a chorus girl. I was just an unknown person but oh, the audience all said, "Well you should have gotten the first prize. You are better looking than that girl who got the prize."

W: I think I got about the 7th prize. (laughs) Which was just nothing, really.

K: Did you ever enter any other contests?

W: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any.

K: What place was this at in Corona?

W: It was called the Corona Country Club. And, boy, those policemen really gave us a hard time. Most everybody who went up there got a ticket. See, they didn't want colored up there. They had agreed to sell this clubhouse to a group of colored people. Corona, California is, I guess, about 25 miles from here going toward Pomona. And, oh, it was a big crowd then, people were just so excited about it because it was a nice place. And, but so many people got tickets they didn't come back and support it anymore. They said, "Oh, we can't afford that," you know.

K: So they were giving tickets to discourage the blacks from coming up there?

W: That's right. Uhuh. And they didn't deserve those tickets. They weren't going that fast. They weren't breaking all those rules, you know. They just pretended they were. So it didn't last very long. But that one day, everybody had a good time.

11. A-006-633.1. Beauty Contest. Center, Verna.

12. A-006-643. Verna at Beauty contest.

W: 055 And this is me standing alone that day of the contest.

K: And what did they have you do in this contest?

W: Oh, we marched around and the people applauded for us as we were marching around.

K: You're all wearing bathing suits here.

W: Yeah, we were all wearing bathing suits. And then, well, they had a few people supposed to be wearing sport outfits. Now like this girl right here -- she got the prize for the sport outfit. Now you would think this one would have gotten the prize for the sport outfit. But they gave it to this one. See, there was no justice at all there. Because her outfit didn't even look like a sport outfit. But they just had her picked out before the contest even started that she was going to get the prize.

K: So they were judging on -- Now did all the girls make their outfits, or the judges were judging on your taste in your sporting outfit or how you looked in it?

W: How you looked in it, I think. Because you didn't have to make them. (K: Right) So I guess it was how you looked in it. See, she didn't even have on a hat. She didn't look like she had on a sport outfit. She looks like she had on an "after five" outfit. This one was definitely the one who should have had it. Because she had on a hat, and a sport outfit, the shoes and she had a purse too, but you can't see it in the picture.

K: What's the difference between a sporting outfit and an after five outfit?

W: Well, this was sort of like a dainty dress. It was a crepe dress, you know. Sort of a sheer type dress, afternoon dress. Nothing sporty about that but she got the prize for the sport outfit. People said, "Oh, boo!" you know. They said it was so unfair, you know. And everybody said I had a better shape than the girl who won the first prize. Let's see if I can see her on here. The large picture I can see her. (pause) Well, you can see her a little bit here, that's the girl who won the first prize right there.

K: And this is number 13.

13. A-006-618. Parkridge, Corona California, 1928. "The largest colored country club in the world."

W: 083 That's the clubhouse. The Corona Clubhouse in Corona, California.

K: Photo number 14.

14. A-006-181. Orange Julius stand owned by Verna Williams and son, Arthur Lewis at Vermont and Central, 1952-53.

W: 086 Now this is the Orange Julius business that my son and I had. We bought the franchise with the Orange Julius business.

K: When was that?

W: That was about 1952, I think.

K: That was during your real estate years?

W: Yes.

K: And where was that located?

WILLIAMS, Verna -- 60

W: Vernon and Central. Same place where I had my little grocery store. That was a lucky corner for me. And you know, Jack in the Box was there during this recent riot and then they burned it down. (K: On this spot?) Uhuh, same spot.

K: What do you remember about the orange juice stand there?

W: Well, it didn't go so big because the people seemed to -- In that neighborhood they seemed to want beer and wine and stuff. (telephone ringing)

K: Do you need to get that?

099 (Tape turned off to answer phone)

K: Julius

W: Yeah, That's a devish good drink, that Orange Julius. It really is good and healthy for you because it's made with fresh orange juice, you know. And we paid fifteen-hundred-dollars for the franchise. And it has a secret formula -- a powdered formula that you mix in with the fresh orange juice and crushed ice. And it really is a devilish good drink. But the people in that neighborhood just didn't seem to go for it, enough. We sold quite a bit. We didn't sell enough to make enough profit out it to stay in the business, you know. Because our rent was high by the time we went in there with that. They'd rather buy liquor and beer. (laughs) Instead of Orange Julius. And that's all we could sell because the man who had the lease on the building he had a delicatessen in one department and he had a liquor store in another department and we had this little Orange Julius business there.

And I wanted to sell donuts too. But I couldn't sell donuts because the delicatessen had the donuts. So all I could sell was the Orange Julius, so in wintertime I couldn't sell enough to make it so I had to go out of business, so luckily my son was inducted into the army and that got us out of the lease because we had signed a lease with this guy. So by him being inducted into the army we could break the lease. Because otherwise I was going to be stuck with that big lease and that big rent. Because our hands were tied that we couldn't sell but that one item, and - that just wasn't enough to stay there.

K: And why was your son -- he was drafted?

W: Yeah, he was drafted into the army. He went in and stayed two years.

K: During wartime?

W: Yeah, during the war. (pause) I guess it was '42. He stayed in two years.

K: And is that during the time when you went and worked in the shipyard?

W: Yeah, when I went out of business there I went and worked in the shipyard.

K: That was the next job that you had?

W: Uhuh.

K: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

W: 132 Yeah, O.K. You know they paid you to learn how to be a welder and they were hiring women. See, because the men were all going off to the army. So they used women and they would teach you how to be a welder and pay you at the same time. So I was good. I caught on right away. But I had a lady friend who's husband was a doctor, and he told me I better not do that.

"That's not good for a woman's nerves. That will just shatter your nerves. You find yourself another job. Don't you keep that job." So he talked me out of it. That's the reason I didn't continue it. So my teacher, he was so disappointed when I quit. I didn't work very long, about two or three months, I guess. Because, I decided well, "My health is more important to me than money." (laughs) I needed the money but I figured I could do something else, you know. So I gave it up and he was so disappointed. He said, "You're my best student. You were going to be able to graduate pretty soon." I told him, "Well, I'm sorry but my doctor says that that's not good for my -- a woman's nerves," you know.

K: Where was this?

W: Down in Long Beach. Worked at the shipyard in Long Beach.

K: Do you remember the name?

W: No I don't but I probably have one of the check stubs tucked away someplace. (laughs) But I don't know where it is right now.

K: Did you like this work?

W: Uh, no, I really didn't. I really didn't like it. Because I had to wear these glasses over my eyes to protect my eyes, you know, to keep the sparks from getting in my eyes. And a big old heavy hood over my head to protect your hair. And pants, I had to wear pants. Oh, and they had lots of people working.

K: Who else was working down there?

W: Oh, lots of women, but I didn't know them. But they had lots of women working down there. Everybody was pleasant, you know, that I was working with. And you'd go on the -- I think they had the Red Car running then. I didn't have to drive down. I went on the Red Car. But --

K: What were you welding?

W: You were just practicing welding so you could learn how to weld the ships. They just had you practicing on metal, you know. So I quit that and that's when -- Oh, right after that I guess I went into real estate. Started working in real estate.

K: Here's photo number 15.

15. A-006-636. Edna Kirby's Glass House. Pan Pacific Auditorium, 1938. Verna Williams on left, doing demos, on right, Edna Kirby.

W: 174 O.K. This is the Glass House exhibit. Now that's the cute little uniform I was telling you about. This doesn't show it but that was a cute little plaid dress that I had on underneath there. I made that little dress myself. Edna Kirby, that was her name, Edna Kirby. She was certainly nice to work for. See, this was all glassed in. And the people were standing on the outside and would watch us. See, whatever products we were working with, they could see what we were working with. So that was our form of advertising the products, you see. And I was working with Kraft products that day -- That's when the Kraft cheese man came along. But that only lasted ten days.

K: So people would come here to the auditorium just to see the Glass House? Or were there other exhibits there?

W: There were other exhibits too. But this was one of the exhibits. The glass house. And she had foods from Globe A-1 Flour, Kraft cheese company, and all the different food companies, you know. You can't see it, here's the whole house. The bathroom, the dining room, it has a living room section too. So I would be in the kitchen making the stuff when I'd get it finished I'd take it in here and serve it to them, you know.

K: Serve it to who?

W: Edna Kirby and her husband, or her guest. Sometimes she'd have some of the people from the companies -- representatives from the company. They could come in and sit down in the glass house and then I would serve them whatever I was making. We'd always cook something. We would represent the different foods

and cook something from some of the foods we had represented. And then I'd serve it to see how they liked it, you know.

K: Do you remember any of the other exhibits they had there?

W: (pause) Just any food you could think of that's on the market. Different flours, Globe A-1 flour and Kraft cheese company. And the reason I remember them is I used that a lot. Jersey Maid milk, we used the milks. Just anything along the food line. And butter. You know like Challenge Butter, we'd use their butter. And different ice creams we would have. Just anything. And they paid her, you see, to advertise the food. And I got three dollars a day. (laughs) For ten days. 30 dollars. Big deal. That 30 dollars went a long ways, I'm telling you.

K: Here's the next photo, number 16.

16. A-006-637. Group photo aboard ship, (l-r): visitor, Gladysce, captain of ship, Verna, trip to Catalina.

W: 225 Oh, that was a trip we went on to Catalina Island. This friend took me and this lady, she was visiting here from Louisiana. She took us on this trip to Catalina Island. This was one of the workers on the boat.

K: Was that a popular place to go?

W: Oh, yeah, that was a popular cruise to take. One day cruise. You could go over there and come back in the same day. She's sick now, but she's still living, but she's in coma. Been in a coma for years. I don't see how she could still exist. And they just have to feed her through a tube.

K: Here's photo number 17.

17. A-006-178. Portrait of Arthur Lewis Jr. and his mother, Verna Lewis, 1927. Insert is Arthur A. Lewis, Sr.

W: 238 Oh, that's me and my son and that's his father insert there. He had died when this picture was made. And we had never gotten around to taking a good picture of him. So I had to just insert that little Kodak picture of him in there. So he was just like a little brother to me. I could just take him anywhere because he was so nice and everybody enjoyed having him around because he wasn't a bad child. He'd go to people's houses and he wouldn't be trying to pick up their things and play with them. Because I'd tell him, "That's a decoration, you don't play with that. That's not a toy, you don't play with those." So, I could take him to play bridge with me, take old cards for him to play with. He'd sit on the floor and play with the cards while I'm

playing bridge. So he was a good little boy. So I'm very proud of him and he turned out to be a nice son. He went right straight through school and college and everything. And when he got out of the army they gave him a nice job with the army as an auditor. He worked as an auditor for the government. That's what he did while he was in the army. He got inducted into the army. They had him working in the office because he majored in business administration and accounting. So they needed someone in the office. So he just worked in the office while he was in the army. Didn't have to leave the state, worked in San Francisco. And then when he got out of the army they gave him a job as an auditor.

18. A-006-193. Arthur A. Lewis posed in goat drawn cart, 1932.

W: 263 And that's my son again and the little wagon with the little goat. You know they had photographers going around with a little goat in the wagon taking pictures of children. And oh, he certainly thought that was cute. (laughs) Riding in the little wagon with the goat. His father had died then. He doesn't remember his father because he was just a year and eight months old when his father died.

K: And you lived at your parents' house?

W: Yeah, this is in front of my mother's and father's home.

K: Was he very close to your father? Did he see your father sort of like his father too? (telephone ringing)

W: Oh yes.

(tape stopped for Verna to answer phone)

K: O.K. Here's photo number 19.

19. A-006-179. Halloween Party at the Lavada Ballroom, 1929.  
l-r: Mable A. Brown, Verna Deckard, Maria Phillips.

W: 275 Oh, yeah. This is one where I thought I had -- See the one on the wall over there? (pointing to a picture on the wall) That's me alone. But that was taken the same time this one was taken. The three of us -- We went to a masquerade party -- a Halloween party. That was our Halloween costumes, you know. And so I think this girl is deceased, but this one moved out of town. I still have her address. And we keep in contact. I was supposed to go visit her. She's supposed to come down and visit me. So we were all friends when we were youngsters. And we used to have lots of fun together.

K: And what kind of costume are you wearing?

W: That was our Halloween costume. We went to a Halloween party at the Laveda Ballroom which was on Vernon Avenue, near Wall Street. Over on the east side. That was a place -- It was an apartment house building but they used the basement for parties. They used to rent it out to people for parties in the basement. So they had lots of little parties going on down there. So we went over there to a Halloween party. And that's where we were going that night to a Halloween party.

K: And was it usual that when you were all dressed up or going to a party that you would -- This is taken in a studio -- You would go and have your photo taken first?

W: I think we had this made afterwards, after the party. Because we decided we thought our costumes were so cute we wanted a picture of them.

K: But that was sort of a usual thing to do? -- is to go to the photo studio and have your picture taken?

W: Yeah, no, everybody didn't do that. We just used to do that because I mean, our little group used to do that but, everybody didn't do that because they didn't have that extra money, you know.

K: So it was kind of an expensive thing to do?

W: Yeah, uhuh. See, we were all living at home with our parents. And we didn't have whole lots of expenses because my husband was dead, but I was still living at home with my parents. She was living with her parents and I think she was too. We all had little jobs and what little money we had we could spend it the way we wanted to.

K: And did you make your costumes or did you rent them?

W: Well, I sort of put it together. Now, this was a yellow organdy dress I had underneath. And this top part was just a little short dress that I rented because I didn't have that. And just rented that and put it over my yellow organdy dress because I thought it was too short for me. (laughs) That would be a dance girl dress. (laughs) A dancing girls' dress.

K: And their outfits match.

W: Yeah, I guess they rented theirs. We probably got that in a rented costume place. (laughs)

K: Here's photo number 20.

20. A-006-620. Verna and son.

W: 325 Yeah, well this -- One summer some friends of mine were visiting from Texas and we had been out, you know, sightseeing, and they brought me back home. And this was in my mother's front yard and that's my little boy, Arthur, Arthur Lewis Jr. standing in the background. (chuckles) He was always trying to get in on the pictures. (laughs) So these young men were taking pictures of me sitting on the lawn.

K: You're really smiling there.

W: Yeah, I was having fun that day. We'd been sightseeing. I was showing them around Los Angeles because they hadn't been here before. I said we'll stop by my house to take pictures and for them to meet my mother and my little boy.

K: Here's photo number 21. 340

21. A-006-627. Verna and Sidney, Santa Monica Beach, segregated section, 1931.

W: 340 Oh, that's another day at the beach at the "ink well," (laughs) it's down in Santa Monica. This was, trying to think of his name, that was a young man that took me out after my husband died. West, his last name was West -- I can't think of his first name -- Sidney, Sidney West. That was Sidney West. And we went to the beach that day.

K: Did you go to the beach a lot?

W: Yeah, we used to go to the beach a lot. Believe it or not, I never did learn how to swim. But I used to love to go there and play in the water. And then get wet, and then come and cover up in the sand. That really made you feel good to get real wet and then cover up in that sand. And when I first came out here I had rheumatism in one of my knees and by doing that, getting in that salt water, and covering up with the sand. It seemed to have drawn that rheumatism away. I didn't have it anymore. It just went away. And I think that's what did it -- going to the beach.

K: Is this the same day, number 22.

22. A-006-628. Verna, Sidney, Gladys Babinaeu, Theopolis Smith.

W: 361 Yeah, that's the same day because that's the same fella, yeah.

K: And these were your friend?

W: Yeah, these were my friends. Theopolis Smith, Gladys Babinaeu, Sidney West and Verna. And he died just about a year ago last December. He died. She's still living. He's still

living. But I don't know where he lives now. But that was the same day down at Santa Monica beach. I don't like to go to the beach much now. I'm too cold natured. I freeze to death almost.

K: Here's photo number 23.

23. A-006-629. Verna and ?

W: 371 Yeah, this is -- oh, that's a different day because that's somebody else.

K: This is the same place?

W: Uhuh. Same place. I can't think of his name. I guess I had his name on the back of my picture, huh?

K: We probably have it.

W: I got on that bathing suit that says Hollywood. (laughs)

K: Why is that?

W: I was still wearing that bathing suit, you know, that says Hollywood. The one I had on in the bathing beauty contest. I still have that bathing suit.

K: This is the one you wore in that contest?

W: Yeah, that contest.

K: And why does it say Hollywood on it?

W: Well I bought it out in Hollywood. It just had Hollywood on it. I wasn't representing anyone in particular so I just let the Hollywood stay on it. (laughs) Let people think I was from Hollywood.

K: Here's number 24.

24. A-006-630. Arthur and Verna, 08/02/24.

W: 389 Oh, yeah. That's the famous picture that's in the magazine, L.A. Style magazine, huh. Oh, that's really nice. That was August the 2nd 1924. We weren't even married then. We married August the 18th of '24. And that was August the 2nd. And that's the first time I ever hugged up with a boy out in public. Ohhh, my dad saw that picture -- He really balled me out. "What are you doing hugged up with a boy out in public like that?" He just thought that was terrible. So I said, "Well, Papa, I didn't do that. He just grabbed me." (laughs)

K: You look pretty comfortable. (laughs)

W: I didn't look like I was trying to get away, huh? (laughs)

K: How do you remember the date?

W: Well I had it written on the back of one of my pictures.  
(laughs)

K: Do you remember anything else about that day?

W: Oh, yeah. I was just happy as a lark because I had just met him, you know. I met him -- I had only known him about two weeks when that was made and we had been seeing each other every night. He worked during the day and every night he's coming over to see me because I only had a month left to stay here. See, I was out here visiting from Texas. And I had been here two months. And I had one more month to stay. Because we came out here for three months and I just had one month left when I met him. And so he's making hay while the sun was shining. (laughs)

And he's the first boy my parents let me go out with. Because they thought he was so nice, you know. Before, if I'd go out with a boy my brother had to go along, you know. But they thought he was a nice young man that they let me go out with him. And there were lots of little house parties going on. And the first place he took me when he took me out was over to meet his parents. He was living with his grandmother. And I got a good impression of him because he wanted me to meet his parents and I liked them and they liked me. And I liked him too. So, every night he'd come over.

K: What is this fence here?

W: Oh, that's the private club next door. Club Casa. You see, we only had that one little spot we could go to. That was the segregated part of the beach in Santa Monica. And the blacks could only go to that one little section. And all those other parts of the beach had signs up there, "Private," they were private clubs. Unless you belonged to that club you couldn't go over in that section at all. And naturally you couldn't join the club, you know. So we just had to go to this little spot which we called the "ink spot."

K: How big a space was it?

W: 443 Well, I guess it was about 100 feet wide. And one day -- I mean that same day I think it was -- We were playing beach ball with one of those big beach balls that you play with at the beach. And my ball went over that fence and I ran over there to get my ball. And a little old white lady comes running

up to me saying, "You got no business over here." And I just looked at her, didn't say anything. I just took my ball and went on back over there in my spot, where I belonged. (laughs) Laughed to myself, you know. Says, "Poor thing, she doesn't know any better." But we had lots of fun there. But now they say you can go anyplace you want to go now. But I don't care about going to the beach now, I'm so cold natured that I freeze to death when I go down there.

K: Here's number 25.

25. A-006-635. Santa Monica Beach, Irma Banks baby, Verna

W: 463 Oh, that's another time at the beach, oh boy, I really used to go to the beach. (laughs) And I got that Hollywood swim suit on again. That's a friend of mine's little girl. And that was about 1931. Because I remember --

K: And this is at the same beach?

W: Yeah, same beach.

K: When did the beaches become desegregated?

W: I'm not sure when that happened. But that used to be the place to go, you know. Because it wasn't so interesting going to the parks here because -- They even had the parks segregated. You couldn't go to -- like Exposition Park and go in the swimming pool when you wanted to. You had to go a certain day and that was the day before they changed the water. Like if they changed the water on Friday, well, we could go on Thursday and use the pool because they were going to change the water the next day. So the parks weren't very popular. Because I didn't want to go to the park anyway. I figured the water was dirty if we had to wait until the last day before they were going to change the water to use it. I said, "I don't want to go in that old dirty water." So we didn't go to the parks very much. So we ended up going to the beach all the time, you know.

K: Do you remember other instances of segregation in L.A. during those times?

W: Ch, yeah. In the restaurants. You'd go in the restaurants and it was against the law to segregate you. But if they could get away with it they would. The way they would do it -- I remember we went in a french restaurant downtown once and the waiter met us at the door. He says, "Follow me." He didn't say, "We can't serve you," he just said, "Follow me." And there was nobody in there. All the tables were vacant except one or two. He took us to the very back and seated us in the back table so the lady who was taking us there -- After we got back there, she

realized what he had done. So she said, "Oh, no, we're not going to stay here." So we just all got up and walked out. We didn't say anything.

K: Like your father would have done.

W: Yeah, that's right. We just got up and walked out. Ordinarily, if they're not trying to segregate they'll ask you, "Where would you like to sit?" you know. He just said, "Follow me." And we followed him, you know. Until he seated us. (laughs) And then we just got up and walked out.

And, lets see, oh, we sued a company at Slauson and Central Avenue. There used to be a drive-in restaurant that had, oh, had the best barbecued sandwiches and malted milks. After the dances we used to all go there and have a sandwich and a malted milk because their food was delicious. And we just thought it was fun to sit in the car and eat the sandwich and have the malt. But we heard that they wouldn't serve you if you'd go and sit at the fountain. But we'd been going there for years before we heard that. 530

So when we heard that we decided we'd test it out to see if that was true. And seven of us got out of the car one night and went in there and sat down at the fountain -- at the counter to eat. Sure enough, they told us they couldn't serve us at the counter. "We'll serve you in your car, but we can't serve you at the counter." And told us why. Because we were colored. See there was nobody else in there but us. So there was nobody else to hear him say it but us. And of course we got up and walked out and we quit going there for drive-in too. We didn't go there anymore. And we got up and walked out.

And we sued them but we had a dumb, dumb, lawyer. This lawyer had all of us to sue him. And he went and paid some witnesses to say that we came in there loud and boisterous. And he refused to serve us because we were loud and boisterous. He didn't say that he'd refused us because we were colored. He said, "They were loud and boisterous. And that's why I refused to serve them." And his witnesses cooperated. See, we didn't have any witnesses because all of us were suing him. Well, if he'd have been a smart lawyer, he'd have some of us to be a witness.

K: Do you think he did that on purpose? I mean do you think he knew that if he had you all sue them that there wouldn't be any witnesses?

W: You mean the lawyer?

K: Yeah.

W: No, he was colored lawyer. I just think he didn't know any better. That's the reason I said he was dumb. Because he was a colored lawyer and he wanted us to win. But he just didn't know any better. And this owner just outsmarted him because he didn't have any idea, I don't guess that the lawyer was going to pay somebody to get up there and lie. Because they was nobody else in there. He didn't have any witnesses. We were the only customers in there.

K: And what year was this?

W: That was about 1934.

K: Was this a common occurrence for people to stand up and take it to the law?

W: Uh, yeah. And lots of people would win and that would break it down. See, when they'd win that would break it down. But you see lots of other people had better lawyers. They'd have some witnesses. But we didn't have any witnesses because this dumb lawyer had us all suing him, you know. So they would win. But we lost the case. I said, "I can't believe it." Because it was against the law for him to refuse us in the first place just because we were colored, you know. But anyway, that place the drive-in place, where he refused, he started serving colored the after that, even though we lost the case. It did break him down. He started serving people. But we never went back there anymore anyway.

Like you know, the Brown Derby, they wouldn't serve you either. When they were over there on Wilshire. Wilshire near Normandie I think it was. They wouldn't serve colored in there. And even after they started serving colored I never did want to go there to them, you know. But they will serve you now, I hear. But I didn't care about going there. See, lots of the southerners would come out here and bring their prejudices with them even though it's against the law for them to do it. But if they thi they could get away with it, they're going to get away with it, you know. Because it's against the law, automatically, for the to do that.

604 And one day I went to 7th and Central Avenue to a little drug store, on the corner -- 7th Street and Central Avenue. That's right on the east side. And all of us lived on the east side. But this was sort of a commerce section where they had lots of businesses and I had a little job running the elevator one of those business buildings over in there. I was cashier theater at night and running the elevator down in there in the day time.

And so I decided I'd go in there and have lunch. They had a nice little lunch counter there, you know. And I wanted a tuna sandwich. That was my favorite sandwich -- tuna sandwich. And they were 15 cents on the menu. And the counter was just full and I was standing behind the other people waiting for someone to get up, you know. And so a lady got up and I sat down and the clerk said to me right away, "What'll you have?" I says, "Tuna sandwich." "That will cost you 35 cents." And I had just looked at it on the menu and it said 15 cents. Well I knew that meant that he was going to charge me more because I was colored. Well if I had been smart I have gone on and ordered it and just paid him 15 cents. But I was sort of timid and I just got up and left. And never went back anymore. But I should have just gone on and ordered it and just paid him 15 cents. But I never was the kind to try to make trouble, you know. I'd rather avoid it if I could. So I just got up and left. But that was a form of segregation right there.

K: And so what did you do after that?

W: I just never went in there anymore. But I guess, pretty soon they started serving colored because I used to see colored in there. But I never did go in there anymore. I just took my lunch with me everyday. Make my own tuna sandwich at home and bring it with me. (laughs) Eat lunch over there in the building where I worked. And I was in the habit of doing that anyway in the south because I knew that I couldn't go in these places and eat. So we had a habit of taking our lunch with us anyway, you know.

And right now it's no big deal for me to go out and eat. Lots of people think, oh, that's just wonderful. "Let's go out to dinner." But to me that's no big deal because I never was in the habit of doing it when I was growing up. And to me that's no big deal. I'd just rather go to somebody's house and eat, rather than to go out to a restaurant to eat. My son, he likes to do that. He likes to go out and eat.

K: Let's look at this one, number 26.

26. A-006-184. Antique Art Club garden party, 1933.

W: 664 Oh, that was a nice afternoon tea and this was on the east side. This was when all of us lived on the east side. This was about 1937. And this is Lionel Hampton's wife. You know Lionel Hampton, the famous --

K: Her name is Gladys?

W: Yeah, that's his wife there. (pause) And that's Leon Washington's first wife -- No, this one right here was Leon

Washington's first wife. Leon Washington was the one that started the L.A. Sentinel.

K: What do you remember about him?

W: Leon Washington? Oh, he's the one that started the Jewish people on Central Avenue hiring blacks, you know they had those businesses on Central Avenue and weren't hiring any blacks at all. And Leon Washington started picketing them and saying, "Don't trade where you can't work." So then they started hiring blacks. (phone ringing)

K: And so he organized the community to follow that?

W: Yeah.

(tape turned off for Verna to answer phone)

W: Washington, huh? Yeah, I used to tell him all the time, "You're just a trail blazer. You're blazing the path for others to follow."

K: There was a newspaper before that.

W: California Eagle.

K: And how was The Sentinel different from The Eagle?

W: Well, it was more progressive than The Eagle. See, The Eagle was run by Charlotta Bass and she was an older woman and her husband was an older man too. But Leon was a young man, you know, he had more energy, more nerve, you know. He was more of a go-getter, so it was more successful than The Eagle. But The Eagle was a good paper. Oh, and this girl, she used to write for The Eagle. She was a social editor for the Eagle.

722 END OF CASSETTE TAPE 3 -- CONTINUED ON CASSETTE TAPE 4,  
SIDE A

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CASSETTE TAPE 4, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 3)

000 Silence

K: 007 Do you remember her name?

W: Yeah, Gladys Greenaway at that time. But when she got married her name was Gladys Clark. And I wrote for The Sentinel for a while. I wrote the social column for The Sentinel for a while. (phone ringing)

(tape turned off for Verna to answer phone)

K: You were telling me you also wrote for The Sentinel.

W: Yeah, but just a little while because it wasn't paying anything. I told him, I said, "That takes up too much of my time to write and I have a son to educate and,"

K: What were you writing?

W: The social column. See, I went around to lots of social affairs and I'd have to get the -- write down the people's names and the events and it took time to do that, you know. And while I'm doing all that, well, I'm missing out on a job where I could be making some money. So I finally told him. I said, "I'm sorry I can't do it anymore because --" I said, "Well, why can't you pay me?" "Well, I haven't started making any money yet." Well I said, "Well, I'm sorry. I just can't do it any more."

K: So having afternoon tea parties like this -- was that common in this very elite social circle?

W: That's right. Now this was in a lady's yard right across the street from where I lived on Hooper. This was that section where I bought this house with 300 dollars down. That was the nice section along in there for blacks. And so this lady had a nice little back yard and she had a little canopy, see in her back yard. And we were back there in her back yard. And this lady here she was manager of the Laveda Ballroom where I told you we could have the parties in the basement of this apartment house. This lady's husband was a dentist. This lady was -- her daughter was a foot doctor. Her daughter was a foot doctor. Oh, this girl's husband was popular too. Her name was Hazel Washington. I've forgotten what he did. Washington. But he was quite popular too. (pause)

And this little girl -- She was a pretty little girl raised by a -- living with her father, her mother had died and she lived with her father. And she joined a little club that was sponsored by an old wicked lady. 039 And this lady -- I joined the club for a short while because she would get young girls to join this club and we'd go to her house. Her house was the clubhouse. And we had to put in like 50 cents every meeting to buy liquor with. Because she loved to drink. And she'd drink up all the liquor and I didn't even drink. (laughs) So after about four meetings I said to the old wicked lady, I says, "I don't drink. I don't

think I should be putting in money to buy liquor." "Well, you're a club member. You have to do what the others do." And the way she said it made me mad. I says, "No I don't either." I says, "I just won't stay in the club then if I have to do what the others do and I don't want to do it." I said, "I think we ought to have a vote on it." And she wouldn't let us vote on it, you know. Talking about I had to do it because I'm a club member. She was just making us buy liquor for her, you know.

K: Did the club have a name?

W: Yeah it was called We Moderns Club. We Moderns Club.

K: We moderns?

W: Uhuh.

K: Was this during prohibition?

W: Yeah, you could buy liquor then.

K: Oh, it was legal?

W: Yeah, it was legal to buy -- Yeah, and she had us buy liquor every night. And we'd meet at her house. And she was a wicked old woman and she'd invite single men. We were all single girls. Of course, my husband had died. I was a widow. And she'd invite single men over to meet her girls. We could have turned out to be bad girls if we hadn't had character of our own, you know. Because she was setting us up. But I guess we all had sense enough to not fall for what she was trying to make us do. Because I got out. I didn't stay in there very long.

But I was going to tell you about this little girl. So one night she asked for -- She didn't drink either. And she asked for a glass of water. And that old woman went and gave her a glass of gin. And gin looks like water when you put it in the glass, you know. And she was so timid and naive. She stood there and drank that whole glass of gin to make them think that she thought it was water. See it was dumb. And then when she finished drinking it everybody just laughed. And she says, "Ahhh." And everybody just fell out laughing. And that girl went home that night and died -- from the results of drinking that straight glass of gin down. And I called her father and told him why. But he never did anything about it. But that old wicked woman -- And she didn't do a thing about it. She didn't tell her father she was sorry or anything.

So next time I saw her I wouldn't even speak to her. And she says, "I wonder what's the matter with Verna? She won't speak to me." I didn't have nerve enough to tell her why. But I should

have. I should have told her why. But I was so mad at her. And I was mad at the girl's father because he didn't do anything about it. Poor little girl. Just lost her life because this old dumb woman gave her a glass of gin. Uhh.

K: Here's number 27.

27. A-006-194. Bridal Luncheon. (l-r counterclockwise):  
Laverne Hardy, Velma Stewart, Laura Slayton (hostess), Verna Deckard, Vivian Howard, Sept. 1934

W: 084 That's the brides. Four brides. Laura Slayton, she was a popular young lady who loved to start clubs. She started many social clubs around here in L.A. She started the Orchid Girls Club and California Clubs and she always started lots of social clubs.

K: She's there in the center.

W: Yeah, Laura Slayton is her name. Oh, and this is Leon Washington's first wife. And we were all young brides and she gave this luncheon for us.

K: What's her name?

W: Laverne Hardy was her name at that time.

K: And she's up on the top left. (W: Yes) And below her is -- you don't remember her name?

W: Let's see. Velma somebody. I can't remember all their names. (pause) If I hear them I would remember them. And that's me and this is -- I know her but I can't think of her name either.

K: O.K. That's O.K. And what was this occasion?

W: It was a bridal luncheon as she called it. It was a luncheon for the new brides. We were all new brides. I had gotten married again then.

K: When was that?

W: That was 1934.

K: And who did you marry?

W: I married a doctor. (pause) Dr. Everett O. Cox. (pause) But he was working as a postal clerk, but he was a dentist. He had come here from Arkansas and in order to practice dentistry he'd have to go back to school out here. But he didn't -- He got

on at the Post Office, so he didn't go back to school to get his license to practice dentistry here. In fact, he said that dentists weren't making much money anyway. He could make more at the Post Office than practicing dentistry. So he was a postal employee. But he really was a dentist from Arkansas. Dr. Cox. (pause) Moore, this girl's name was Moore, Velma Moore was her name. Curtis Moore was the fellow she married. I think he worked at the Post Office too. Curtis Moore. And I can't think of this girl's name. But we all had just gotten married. And she had just married Leon Washington. Publisher of The Sentinel. Laura had this luncheon for us. Called it the bridal luncheon.

K: How long were you married to Dr. Cox?

W: About four years. (pause) We didn't get along so well. He was too much of a dictator for me. But that's when I went back to high school and graduated. He let me go to school. I went back to school while I was married to him and graduated from high school. And when I graduated he gave me a trip to New York, my son and I -- We went to New York for a lovely trip. And while I was gone he remodeled the house and that's what made me fall out with him. He remodeled the house. He was buying a house before I married him and while I was gone he remodeled the house and didn't tell me he was going to remodel it. In other words he sort of treated me like a piece of furniture. He didn't want me to have any say about anything. He wanted his ideas. You know, I think a man should let his wife put some of her ideas in on something, you know. So I said, "Gosh, I think I should have had something to say about this." So I said, "Well, if that's the way you want it, you can just have your old house." (laughs)

K: Number 28.

28. A-006-175. L.A. Urban League Guild, Fantasia Ball, ca. 1956.

W: 142 Well, oh, this was still a group working to help build that hospital, the colored hospital that we were trying to build. And we had a what we used to call these -- the Fantasias Ball -- costume, people would dress up in different costumes and it was a fundraiser too. You'd pay so much to come and we had dancing and food and a show. It was usually enjoyable and everybody really enjoyed it. That's me right there.

K: You've got a hat on.

W: Yeah, made out of a tray. I took a little tray that's made of straw and made a hat out of it. And that was out at the Friday Morning Breakfast Club. Out in Glendale.

K: What was that?

W: It was a place that they rented out for parties and things.  
(K: And it was called?) Friday Morning Breakfast Club in Glendale.

K: And which group was sponsoring the fundraising for the hospital?

W: It was the Westview -- The name of the hospital was Westview. We called it the Westview Guild -- It was called the Guild, Westview Hospital Guild.

K: And you all were doing the fundraising?

W: Yeah. I was president of it. (K: Oh.) We had two or three presidents but near the end I had been elected the president.

K: Number 29.

29. A-006-192. Members of the West View Hospital Women's Guild at the "Club Alabam," about 1938, Verna 5th from right.

W: 167 This is another fundraiser we were having for the Westview Guild. We were having a fundraiser at the Club Alabam. This was a dance at the Club Alabam. The Westview Hospital Guild at the Club Alabam. That's the orchestra. And that was over on Central Avenue.

K: Do you remember what year this is about?

W: Well, let see. (pause) I guess that would be probably, in the 50's I guess. Somewhere in the 50's.

K: You must have raised a lot of money for the hospital.

W: We did. We raised a lot. (K: You had a lot of events.) It took lots of money too because in the meantime we were working raising the money, we had the expense going on because we had a secretary -- a paid secretary, paid out 300 hundred a week because we had to have a secretary for the hospital to keep up the records and everything, you know. And she was very good. She was working long hours for that 300 a week.

K: 300 a week was a lot then.

W: Well, not really because people were working in the shipyard making more. Making more than that.

K: Who was working in the shipyards?

W: Oh, lots of women had jobs working in the shipyards in those days, you know.

K: That must have drawn a lot of people to come to L.A.

W: It did. That's what made lots of people come in here. Yeah, and we felt lucky that she stayed with us, but I guess she didn't want to work in the shipyards.

K: Here's number 30.

30. A-006-176. Phys-Art-Lit-Mor Club, 1973. (l-r): Lois Carr, Verna Williams, Montana McNealy, Bessie Davis (president), Theressa Johnson.

W: 196 Now this is the Phys-Art-Lit-Mor Club. This is the oldest black women's club in L.A. I think this club started in about 1910. So this is one of their club meetings we had at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

K: And what did this club do? What was the goal of this club?

W: Well, Phys means physical, education they worked -- They'd have people come there sometimes and teach about physical education. And then about art work, Phys-Art-Lit, and literature. Art-Lit-Mor, now what was the Mor for? It was to improve the body of the members and the minds, you know, of the members. And some of the old timers started it, you know. And this lady, she's one of the older members.

K: What was her name?

W: I think her name was Bessie, Bessie Davis, I think.

K: And what kind of things and activities did the group do?

W: Oh they gave lots of teas and they always had programs at every meeting. They'd have someone to speak about literature or read a play or a story, tell a story. And then if it was about art work, they'd have somebody bring their art and show it. And they'd have someone to come and demonstrate physical fitness, about how to reduce or how to keep your body in good shape. So it was for improvement, you know.

K: Did it have a large membership?

W: Yes, they did. They had a large membership. And I was a member for a while but I got tired of those old women. (K and W laugh) I was getting old myself (laughs) but I still was younger than they were. (laughs)

K: Is it still in existence?

W: Yes it still is. They meet about once a month and they have lunch, have a lovely lunch. They go out to places like the Dorothy Chandler or some hotel and eat. And you pay so much, each member pays for his lunch, you know. And then they have a lovely program. They usually have a nice program. And you can invite a guest and they pay extra for their guests. And then they have a garden party once a year in this garden party, they have nice program and refreshments. Sort of like a tea, you know.

K: Here's number 31.

31. A-006-195. Golden Key Stroke Club, 1965

W: 245 Now this is the Golden Key Stoke Club. This is a group I've worked with. We work with people who've had strokes and they're recuperating. And they're able to stay at home and so we help the family with the members. Once a week we have a program in a church recreation room where we fix lunch for them, for the strokees so it gives the family a relief. You see, like if you got a strokee in your family you can bring them over there to this meeting once a week and they can stay there for about three hours and gives you relief, you see. And then we give them lunch and have a program for them and then once a year we have a luau. They dress up like this with these leis on. The long colorful dresses and they call them luaus, you know. And have nice delicious food. And we charge for that too. That's the way we raise our money, in order to give them this free lunch once a week, during the year. Now, attorney Audrey Jones started this group because her husband had a stroke. He died, but he lived a long time and she was just saying how nice it was to get relief once a week, you know.

K: And she was an attorney?

W: Yes, she was an attorney. Trying to see if her picture's on here. She should be.

K: And when was this group started?

W: This group was started about 1964.

K: And it's still going.

W: Yes. It's still going.

K: Are you still a member?

W: No, I got tired. That's me right there but I don't see Audrey. She should be there somewhere. I got to tell you, when I broke my leg. I said, "Oh, I'm too decrepid to be around

helping other people that's decrepid. I have to give it up." I got to take care of myself.

K: Are there other clubs that we didn't see pictures of that you were a member of?

W: Yeah, there was a bridge club called E. Pluribus Unum Club. You don't have that?

K: No. These are entertainment pictures pretty much. (looking through remaining pictures) That's O.K. If you can just tell me a little bit about some of the other clubs that you've been a member of.

W: The bridge club was called E. Pluribus Unum Club. I stayed in that for about 20 years. That was a bridge club and I joined that right after my husband died. And I joined that about 1927 and I stayed in it until about 1949. No, about 1951, that's right. And it was a little bridge club and they're still going and I still go as a guest. But I'm not a member any more. And that was lots of fun. Young women. We all grew up together.

And then there was another bridge club, called the Bel Air Bridge Club. I stayed in for about 20 years. But most of them are dead. They don't meet anymore. (pause) Most of my bridge clubs, we've stopped meeting because so many people died, you know. So I don't really belong to any right now. But I still play bridge quite a bit. Because most of the members died, or got so sick they couldn't come out any more.

K: Here's number 32.

32. A-006-621. Bob Parish, singer, 1949. At Verna's house on Gramercy Park.

W: 311 Now that's Bob Parish. He's a singer. He was the guest at my home once. That was in my new home when I first built my new home. He was singing up on my little stage. I had this stage built in my playroom.

K: You did? (W: Uhuh.) Just for this sort of event?

W: No. That was my play room. It was 20' by 30', a large playroom and I always figured, well, if I have party, well the person entertaining will be up above the crowd, see, up there on the stage.

K: Wow. That's fancy. This was the redwood house?

W: Yes.

K: And you're playing the piano?

W: No, that's a friend of mine. Her husband was a minister. Can't think of her name right now. She's deceased now. She was a pianist. And he was a singer, he's a professional singer too.

W: And these are the Mills Brothers.

K: Number 33.

33. A-006-177. The Mills Brothers, 1949.

W: 328 These are the Mills Brothers. They were my neighbors. Donald, that's the one that lived around the corner from me. And that's his two brothers, Harry, Donald, I don't remember that one's name.

K: And he gave you this photo?

W: Yeah. And Brown. He wasn't their brother, but he played the guitar for them.

K: Did you go see them perform?

W: Yeah. And this one, when they were in town. He used to room at my house temporarily, you know, when he was in town. Because they didn't have room for him in their home. Since they lived around the corner from me. So this one would room there.

K: You used to rent out rooms a lot.

W: Yeah. Uhuh. I said, "All the roomers paid for my home." (laughs)

K: Number 34.

34. A-006-622. "The Four Hot Shots" nightclub act. Ameil Brown was a boarder at Verna's, 4356 Hooper Ave.

W: 342 And these were entertainers too. And this was my roomer. (K: What's his name?) Ameil Brown. Now that's the group he danced with. But he was my roomer. And he was a dancer. He was a very good dancer.

K: Was this a well known group?

W: Yeah. But they traveled around a lot. They weren't so well known right here in L.A. because they traveled around a lot. But they did dance here too.

K: Do you remember where they performed?

W: Well, like downtown, the Million Dollar Theater, you know. They used to have lots of vaudeville acts down there. The Million Dollar Theater.

K: And this was a vaudeville type of group?

W: Yeah, uhuh.

K: Number 35.

35. A-006-619. Jellybean Johnson, dancer, 5/14/31

W: 356 Now this is another one that was a professional dancer too. What's his first name? Jellybean (K: Jellybean Johnson). Jellybean Johnson, yeah that's right. Jellybean Johnson. (laughs) He was a good dancer too.

K: And how'd you know him?

W: Well, just through Ameil. Through Ameil because he used to come over to see Ameil. This is in 1931, huh. Oh, I guess I was cashier at the Lincoln Theater. I probably met him at the Lincoln Theater because we used to have lots of people dancing at the Lincoln Theater when I was cashier at the Lincoln Theater.

K: Uhuh. And then finally number 36.

36. A-006-174. Jack Johnson, given to Verna by Johnson, 1931.

W: 368 Now Jack Johnson. I met him when I was cashier at the Tivoli Theater. He was there in person one night -- I mean not one night, I mean one week. One whole week he was there in person. And so I was single and I thought he was single because he was trying to flirt with me. In fact, he flirted with me and he gave some tickets to come downtown to see him. Because when he left the theater there where I was working, he was at another theater downtown. So he gave me some tickets to come downtown to see him. And so I went downtown to see him. And then he wanted to take me out. That's when I found out he was married. And I said, I don't know what possessed me to ask him that. But I did. I asked him. I said, "Are you married?" And he said, "Yes." (laughs) And I said, "Well, is your wife here with you?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You've got your nerve wanting to take me out and you've got a wife and she's here with you." "Oh, well she doesn't care." And I said, "But I care." (laughs) I don't want to go out with a married man. (laughs) He was a big old flirt.

K: So he gave you the picture instead?

W: He had already given me the picture when he was working at the theater where I worked. I was the cashier and he gave me the picture when he first started working there.

K: And about year was this?

W: '41. About 1941. When I was working at the Tivoli Theater.

K: One thing I wanted to ask you about I didn't get to ask you was about the tablecloth that you designed. (W: Uhuh.) Could you tell me about how you thought of the tablecloth idea?

W: 404 Oh, well I had been saving proverbs over a period of years. Every time I'd see a proverb that I liked I'd cut it out and save it.

406 CHANGED DAT TAPE --BEGIN DAT TAPE 4

406-427 Silence

K: 427 We were talking about your tablecloth that you designed.

W: O.K. About 5:00 one morning I felt this spirit woke me up and says, "Get up and design a tablecloth with those proverbs you've been saving." So I went and got my box of proverbs, picked out exactly 66 proverbs that I liked. And it turns out that there are 66 books in the Bible. So I choose 66 proverbs to put on the table cloth. And I designed it and I had them screen printed on with paint and it's on a fabric that's washable. And so it really makes a nice conversation piece when you're eating. And you can plan a program around it. And you don't need any table decorations with it because that's the decoration in itself. Just reading the proverbs.

So I felt that the spirit of God directed me to design the tablecloth because it's food for the mind. I first said, "Food for the Soul." But a friend of mine says, "Well I think it sounds better to say, 'Food for the Mind,' rather than 'Food for the Soul.'" But which ever way you want to take it. It's good food. (laughs) Besides food for the stomach, it's food for the mind or food for the soul. And I sell them for 35 dollars. And it makes a nice gift for your pastor or your mother or your friends or for yourself.

So I hope to one day to get them in some store where they won't be so prejudiced. Where they won't mind who designed it or anything. Because I've had problems trying to get them in a store. I would like to have them in a store but I haven't been successful in finding a store that will handle them. But if I take time and go around to the churches I could sell them. But I

just haven't had the time to devote to them. But I'm glad you like it. You bought one of them, huh? Are you enjoying it?

K: Very much.

W: Good.

K: Do you still collect proverbs and write them down?

W: No. I haven't been doing it lately. I've been doing so many other things.

K: But that's something that you had done for a long time?

W: Yes. I had done that for a long time.

K: Are they things that you would read or things that you would hear?

W: Things that I would read. And I was just attracted to them. And I would just save them.

K: And how did you get the idea of putting them onto a tablecloth?

W: Seemed like to me the spirit of God just told me to do that. I hadn't decided what I was going to do with these proverbs. I just knew that I liked them and I had collected them. And I didn't know what I was going to do with them until five o'clock this morning the spirit woke me up and says, "Go design a tablecloth with the proverbs." So it looked like the spirit of God just told me to do that. So I was spiritually moved to do that.

K: And so far, who's bought the tablecloths?

W: Mostly churches. One church bought 25 of them.

K: And what do they use them for?

W: In their dining hall on their tables -- in their dining hall. They say they save money on decorations because they don't have to buy flowers for the tables. Because they just use the tablecloths and everybody just gathers around and reads the proverbs so they don't worry about the decorations.

K: That's really nice. Last time I was here right before I left, we were talking a little bit about the restrictive housing covenant and how in 1948 it was broken. And we were talking about how there were many more opportunities for African-Americans to buy houses in different areas, but I remember you

said right as I was leaving -- You said, "Yeah, but at the same time before that time we used to all be together," in a very sort of tight community and that that had changed after the legislation was changed. Could you tell me a little bit about that and how it was before and after that time and how you feel about that?

W: 511 It seemed like we were more close-knitted. We felt like we needed each other more, I guess, than than we do now. So we live so far apart now you have to have a car to go and visit each other and you also have to have an appointment because we didn't have T.V.s then. Now that people have T.V.s and -- So you dare not just drop in on people like you could then because we didn't have T.V.s and well, radios started becoming popular. So you could drop in on people then, they were glad to see you. But they're not glad to see you anymore. So I guess, the T.V. has changed lots of that, you know. And then of course people who don't have cars, it makes it harder to get around. And some people have advanced more financially because they have better jobs too. So they can't keep up with the Joneses. You know. If you make more money, you can't buy what the Joneses buy because you're not making that income. And there's lots of jealousy I guess. So there's lots of different reasons, I suppose, why some people get behind and lose, and don't keep in touch with each other. But I noticed the distance between friends makes a big difference. They're so spread out.

K: Uhuh. Great. Verna is there anything else you want to add to this interview? I've pretty much finished the questions I was going to ask you.

W: Well, you know I was thinking today about the different problems that my father had through life and how he had to -- In his own little way how he tried to break down the different prejudices. Well, there were people that did mean things to him and there were also people who did nice things for him. So if it wasn't for the people who did the nice things for him, I don't know what would have become of us. So I appreciate the ones who did the nice things. Because they really made us survivors. 568 And I'm glad that my dad taught me not to hate people for the wrong things they did because some people do the things out of ignorance. They don't realize what they're doing and how mean they are. And they think they're doing right, you know. When they're really doing wrong things but they don't always realize it. So I'm glad that I don't have any hatred in my heart for people. Because two wrongs don't make a right. (pause)

And I feel so sad over the events that happened in this rioting that happened here in Los Angeles in May. I just feel so sad I can hardly talk about it without crying. I was so sad that they tried to burn up Los Angeles. I said, "They cut off their nose

to spite their face," because we need to improve ourselves too. But on the other hand, we also need help along the way. And we need someone to guide some of us. Because we haven't the opportunities that others have had. So we just hope that we'll learn to live together and help each other because God intended for us to help each other.

K: When you say, "We need somebody to help guide us," do you mean like a new very strong leader in the community? Someone, you know, like Martin Luther King or do you mean more on a spiritual basis?

W: 602 Well, we need both. We need the spiritual guidance and we also need educated leaders to help guide to. You know, there's lots of spiritual leaders that are uneducated. They have the good heart and the good intentions, but they don't always know the right way to do it. You see, so if they have the educated person to sort of guide them, that would be good too. So I think we just need everybody to help each other wherever you see help is needed because we were born to help each other. That's what the Bible says.

And God also says, "Vengeance is Mine." It's not yours. So someone does you wrong, you don't try to go and take care of it. "Leave it up to me, I'll take care of it." And I do really believe that. Because I know the man that burned my father's garage down, he never had any good luck afterwards. Papa didn't do anything to him. Even the law wouldn't arrest him and they knew what he had done. They wouldn't even arrest him. But he has never had any success, so I've been told. He's always been a poor man. So vengeance was God's. He took care of him. (K: Uhuh.) 640 (pause) And my dad and the rest of us prospered and had a happy life which I'm thankful for. And I've enjoyed talking to you.

K: And me to you. Thank you, Verna.

W: You're welcome.

646 END OF INTERVIEW

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