**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Lois Hunt West**

Interview Conducted by

Tanya Finchum

August 9, 2014

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Tanya Finchum

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Lois Hunt West is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on August 9, 2014.

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**About Lois Hunt West…**

Lois Hunt West was born in 1932 in Rogers County, Oklahoma, near what is called Bowlin Spring today. As a young child she attended a rural school and when she finished the eighth grade she attended Attucks School in Vinita, Oklahoma. While a student at Attucks, Lois enjoyed most of her classes and established lifelong friendships. She graduated from Attucks School in 1952.

In 1950, while still a student at Attucks, Lois married Edgar West. They enjoyed sixty-one years together prior to his passing in 2012. They had two children, Grover Lee and Jackie. As her children became older, Lois joined the workforce first working for a private family and then at Eastern State Mental Hospital. She trained as a psychiatric aide and was selected as Aide of the Year once. Lois retired in 1987, ending a twenty-six year career at Eastern State, and continues to reside in Vinita, Oklahoma. She has five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The Attucks School District was established in 1900, and Attucks School, a two-story brick school was built in 1916-17. It housed grades one through twelve and served the educational needs of African Americans in Vinita, Oklahoma. In 1939 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built a gymnasium for the school. Following the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, the school was desegregated. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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| **Lois Hunt West**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Tanya Finchum  August 9, 2014  Vinita, Oklahoma |  |

**Finchum** *Today is August 9, 2014. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University, and today I’m in Vinita, Oklahoma to speak with Lois West. This is regarding our Attucks School project, so thank you for coming today.*

**West** Thank you for inviting me.

**Finchum** *Let’s start with learning a little bit about you. When and where were you born?*

**West** I was born in Rogers County. I was born out in the country like. It was called Pryor Creek, but now it’s called Bowlin Spring. When I was little it was Pryor Creek, and I went to school there until the eighth grade. Had some wonderful teachers out in the country. It was just, you know, just a country—we just had a school and a church there. It was a pretty big community though.

**Finchum** *What year were you born?*

**West** December 11, 1932.

**Finchum** *In that little country school, was it a two-room?*

**West** No. It was just one-room and a kitchen. It had a kitchen.

**Finchum** *Okay.*

**West** And the teacher taught the first grade to the eighth grade.

**Finchum** *And how many students were with you?*

**West** I don’t remember. The school was full, though. I was thinking though, from first grade to eighth grade, one teacher taught all of those.

**Finchum** *That’s a lot isn’t it?*

**West** Uh-huh.

**Finchum** *So how many were in the grade with you? Same age as you?*

**West** Let’s see. I remember Lee Elmer Bowlin and Clara Downing. That’s the three I remember. We all graduated the eighth grade together and came to Attucks. That’s the only three I remember in our class in the country. There was probably more, but that’s the only three I can really remember. Like I said, we all came to Attucks together, those three.

**Finchum** *Did you grow up on a farm?*

**West** Yes.

**Finchum** *What did your parents do for a living?*

**West** My grandfather, after my mother died, my grandfather and my step-grandmother raised me. They had a farm and stuff. He had horses and cows. I had my own horse. It was a long way to school. It was about three miles to school, but my grandmother, she would ride my horse and she would bring me to the Berrys. They lived close to us. I would get with them, and then we’d walk to school. It was a mile to the school from the…

**Finchum** *The Berrys.*

**West** Yes. I grew up with them.

**Finchum** *You rode a horse part of the way?*

**West** Yeah, yeah.

**Finchum** *Do you remember the horse’s name?*

**West** My horse was name Rody.

**Finchum** *Rody? Okay.*

**West** My grandmother would bring me—we’d ride the horse together, and she’d leave me at the Berrys and she’d go back home. If she wasn’t there to meet me, Mrs. Berry’s son, he’d always see that I got home. His name was Calvin Berry. He lives here outside of Vinita. He does woodcarving or whatever. They were just like my family really.

**Finchum** *And you lost your mother young?*

**West** I must have been about six when she accidentally—She was watching my two cousins. She’d put the gun behind the divan and they had come in from playing. She went to pull the gun out from behind the divan and it went off and accidentally killed her. That was always a tragedy, you know.

**Finchum** *Sure.**Were you an only child?*

**West** Yeah. I was the only child. My dad had three more children. He went to the Army and he married my stepmother, and they had three children, but I never got to meet them, you know. So, then he accidently—He had a tragic death, too. When he came from the Army, he came and got me. He was in Pawhuska. That’s where his mom and dad, my grandparents [were]. His mom and dad lived in Pawhuska, so when he came from the Army, he came and got me. I went and stayed with them for a while. I was always visiting Pawhuska. My grandmother and my cousins all lived there. Then he wanted me to go to Dallas with him, but my grandfather wouldn’t let me go. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *He had got used to having you.*

**West** Uh-huh. He had raised me. After my mother, he took care of me.

**Finchum** *What was the name of that school where you went first through eighth?*

**West** You know, I was just thinking, I cannot remember the name of that school. It was just a country school. I can’t remember. That’s amazing, of all the things, I can’t remember the name of that school. I remember all the teachers. We had so many different teachers. Ms. [Wilda] Wickliff, she was the last teacher we had. That’s when I graduated. See, I graduated that year when she was the teacher, from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. I can’t think that school. Was it Booker T.? You know, I can’t remember. (Laughs) It’s been so long ago.

**Finchum** *It may come to you. When the transcript comes you can put it in there.*

**West**  Yeah. Okay.

**Finchum** *Did the school just go to the eighth grade?*

**West** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Then you had to go…*

**West** Yeah, so we came to Attucks. Then we needed to go to Attucks school.

**Finchum** *What did you think of that?*

**West** I really liked that. The first year we came we lived in the country, and we drove back and forth. My husband, he wasn’t my husband then, but Edgar West, he came home from the Navy, and he was driving us back and forth from Pryor Creek to Vinita every day. Then Professor Blye asked him if he wanted a job. He decided to take the job and finish school. He went to school and worked. We drove back and forth from Vinita to Pryor Creek every day. We did that for a year. Then after that, I moved in with my aunt. I stayed with my aunt and went to school.

**Finchum** *So you got married while you were in high school?*

**West** Yeah, but nobody didn’t know that. (Laughter) I had this best friend. Her name was Joyce Swain. Then they said that you couldn’t be married when you went to school, so I went to Edgar’s mom and dad, went to my grandmother and grandfather, and we told them that we wanted to get married. So they gave us permission to marry. We went to the courthouse and got married. I can’t remember the judge, some judge married us and I remember my husband asked him—I got the marriage license now. I can’t think of his name. He was old then, whoever the judge was. My husband asked him, “Don’t put it in the paper.” He promised he wouldn’t. He didn’t put it in the paper. So nobody never knew we was married. Joyce Swain was my best friend. She’s the only one that knew. His mom, my grandparents, and her, they’re the only ones that knew. I went to school and he stayed one place and I stayed another place. I still went by Hunt. (Laughs)

We got married in 1950 and I graduated in ’52. I remember that we went to Ms. Holly, our teacher, and we went to our prom. We was, me and my husband was out in the car kissing, and she came out and really got after me. She said, “You know you’re not supposed to be out here doing that.” Ms. Holly, that’s my teacher, got so mad with me and stuff. My friend Joyce Swain said, “Let’s tell them you’re married. Let’s tell them you all are married.” I said, “No. I can’t do that. We can’t do that. I want to graduate first.” (Laughs) It was really crazy, you know.

**Finchum** *Yeah.*

**West** I graduated in ’52. I remember when I graduated I said, “Thank God. I can go by West now.” (Laughs) You know you think of all the crazy stuff you do.

**Finchum** *Was he older than you? Did he graduate the same year or before?*

**West** No, he graduated in ’51, him and his sister. There was four of them that graduated; Julie Ramsey, Izola West (my sister-in-law), Edgar West, and Fred Riley. It was four graduated. Julie, she’s the only one that’s still living. She lives in Denver. She was talking—we talk all the time. We was talking the other day, she was telling me that when they started out they was the biggest class. She said that was the biggest class they ever had. It was just them four that graduated. All the rest of them left or something she said. She don’t know what happened to the rest of them. When they started out she was saying that it was a big class. She’s the only one that’s living now. She lives in Denver, Colorado. She’s a Ramsey. I know you know the Ramseys, probably. Oh, you don’t, because you’re not from around here. I’m sorry about that.

**Finchum** *That’s okay. I think they are coming next, so I will know them. (Laughs)*

**West** Yeah, Ramseys. Her son’s coming next, yeah. Well, that’s Rob’s sister Julie.

**Finchum** *Well, how many were in your class?*

**West** Let’s see, it was Joyce Swain, Eva Thomas, Billy Thomas, Lee Elmer Bowlin, Clara Downing, and Jess Markham. There was six of us in our class. There’s just three of us left. Eva, she lives in California, and Joyce Swain, she’s my best friend, she lives in Detroit, Michigan, and me. We the only three that’s left in our class.

**Finchum** *How do you keep up with each other these days?*

**West** Oh, I keep up. Me and Joyce, we’ve been best friends ever since the ninth grade. We call one another all the time. I went to visit her one time in Michigan, and she came to our first reunion we had in 1987. I think she came to two reunions. Now I called the other day and tried to get her to come home for a visit. (Laughs) I get tickled at her. She said she don’t like to ride the airplane by herself. She’s been really sick. Now she’s so much better and doing real good. She lost her brother and a sister. They both went to Attucks, too. She lost both of them. I think she’s the only one left in that family. Yeah, we talk all the time. We try to get her to come and visit, but she don’t want to fly by herself. My son told her the other day, when we talked to her, “We will drive up there and get you and bring you back to Oklahoma,” he told her. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Well, did you meet your husband when you started at Attucks or did you know him before?*

**West** No, see the Wests lived right across the street from the school. I remember when he came—I was in the eighth grade when he came home from the Navy. I remember it was Edgar, and Grady Downing, and Joe Landrum or Houston one. I remember they come walking. They were in the Navy, all three of them I believe. They had their uniforms on. We was in the schoolyard when they came home. Of course, I knew the Wests because I was raised up out there with them. So he came home. He always took us everywhere. His sisters would always come to Vinita. We lived in the country so we’d always come to Vinita and stuff. So I remember the first time he wanted to, what was it? My sister-in-law was coming to Vinita for something. He came and asked my grandmother if I could come with them. My grandmother said no. She said no. Her mother was there. I remember what she said. She said, “Jennie, now you know Reverend West and Sophie. You know they good people.” So she said, “You know Edgar be good to Lois.” So my grandmother called him back and said, told me that I could go with them to come to Vinita.

**Finchum** *Well, he was young to go into the Navy.*

**West** Yeah, he was really young when he went to the Navy. At least I think. I don’t know when he went. He always said he went to be in the Army, but when he got there they wanted him to go in the Navy. They changed. That’s when he ended up going to the Navy. He must have been maybe eighteen. He was real young, I remember him talking about that. He got out, must have been ’48 when he got out the Navy. I got all those papers though. He was stationed—he was on a ship most of the time.

**Finchum** *He served before he graduated?*

**West** Yeah, then he came back home and went to school and graduated.

**Finchum** *How long was he in the Navy?*

**West** You know I don’t remember. It had to be ’48, because we was in grade school and we graduated, me and my sister-in-laws graduated. Yeah, that had to be ’48, I think, when he came home. He got an honorable discharge from the Navy.

**Finchum** *That was the tail end of the World War II. Had he served a little bit of time during World War II?*

**West** Yeah, he had to. His dad was in World War I, so it had to be World War II. He spent most of his time on the ship.

**Finchum** *He looked sharp in his uniform?*

**West** Oh, yeah. I should have brought the picture of him. He was in Hawaii, and I got a picture of him. He was setting in this place with this Hawaiian girl in his Navy suit. It was all white.

**Finchum** *You got married in high school, but you still graduated!*

**West** Yeah, I graduated in ’52.

**Finchum** *Did you have a favorite teacher at Attucks?*

**West** Miss Hollis. She was the homemaking teacher, and I really liked her. I don’t know. I think about Miss Marilyn Ford. She was from Muskogee, no, Wagoner. She was a real good teacher. They were all good teachers but Miss Hollis, I remember she got after me. I wouldn’t go to the store. We would have homemaking, and you know she wanted everybody to go to the store and get the groceries and get stuff, for we was going to cook. I wouldn’t do it, so she made me go and order the stuff, and I didn’t want to. Something she always said, “When you go out, always go looking your best. Don’t care if you just step out on your porch, you should always go looking your best.” That’s something she said. She was a good teacher. She was from Tulsa. I really liked her.

**Finchum** *Well from Tulsa, did she live here or did she commute?*

**West** She lived here. I think she got a room maybe at Ryan’s Hotel. Remember, oh you don’t. (Laughs) The Ryans had a big hotel and they rented rooms out to teachers and stuff. I think she went home on the weekends. She lived in Tulsa. I think she came and stayed the week and then went home. Her husband might have picked her up. I can’t remember. It’s been so long ago. I remember she was here all week. Maybe she went home, maybe her husband picked her up.

**Finchum** *Did she teach you to sew?*

**West** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Good or bad?*

**West** Yeah, good. She was the best. Me and my friend always think about this. Me and my friend was having, Joyce Swain, my best friend, we was in homemaking one day and Junior Hicks, I always remember him, he was making some pajamas and me and my friend, we ran out of our bobbin, so, you know, how crazy kids are. We ran out of our bobbin, so he had just left, and he had just put a new bobbin in the sewing machine. We switched his bobbin, (laughs) his full bobbin, put our empty one in there. He came back and sewed the whole leg of his pajamas up. It wasn’t no bobbin in there. He pulled up his pajamas and first thing he said, “Joyce and Lois, I know they are the ones that did that,” he told Miss Hollis. (Laughs) It was really fun going to Attucks.

Miss Kelly, she was a teacher. Sometimes she would let me come in her room and teach the kids. She’d take a break or something. She was the music teacher. She was from Tulsa, too. She would always let me come in and teach the kids while she was taking a break. We really had some really good teachers. Mr. Ryan was our teacher. I enjoyed Juanita Willis, Diane’s aunt. She lived somewhere else, but she would always come home on vacations. Mrs. [Juanita] Ryan, she would come to school as a substitute teacher while she was on vacation, while she was home. I really liked her. She lived in—I don’t know where. She lived in Louisiana somewhere. Her and her husband would come home on vacation. That’s Mr. Ryan’s sister.

**Finchum** *Who was the principal?*

**West** Mr. Blye. Yeah, S.A. Blye, he was the principal. He was a mess. He was always on me and Joyce. He had a long old stick like that. (Gestures) If we did something he would do that (gestures) with that stick. (Laughs) He was really good. I really liked him, him and his wife. He was the principal. I always think about her. She was old, but she was trying to go back to Langston and go to college. Do you know her?

**Finchum** *No.*

**West** She went back and went to school, graduated. Think she was already— She was the music teacher anyway, but she went back to get something about our music. She told music lessons. She taught my daughter, she taught all the kids music lessons.

**Finchum** *Piano or voice?*

**West** Yes, piano.

**Finchum** *Piano.*

**West** Yeah. She was really—Him and her were both really nice.

**Finchum** *Well, did he paddle students?*

**West** No, I don’t remember him ever paddling anybody. He might of, but I don’t remember.

**Finchum** *Not you?*

**West** Huh-uh. He would always get after me and Joyce because we was always doing something. (Laughs) It was really nice going to Attucks. I really liked that.

**Finchum** *Did it have a cafeteria?*

**West** Did we have a cafeteria?

**Finchum** *What did you do for lunch?*

**West** You knowwhat, that’s crazy. We had a big gym. I can’t remember no cafeteria. I don’t know what we did for lunch. That’s crazy. Did we bring our lunch? I can’t remember. I remember going nowhere and eating. Then, I don’t remember having a cafeteria neither. You know it, that’s crazy. I can’t remember. The big gym—that’s crazy. I don’t remember no cafeteria. I don’t remember us eating in a cafeteria. I don’t know what we did. You’ll have to ask somebody else about that, you know.

**Finchum** *Bring a sack lunch and eat it at your desk, I guess.*

**West** I guess, probably, I can’t—There was no cafeteria down there that I know. We had a big gym.

**Finchum** *Did you have a library?*

**West** Yeah, I think we did. Seems like it was upstairs. Ms. Armstead, she was the English teacher. She came from Kansas. She was a good teacher too. She made sure you knew that English. She could be tough on that. We had some good teachers. Let’s see, Miss Ford was the last, when Miss Hollis left, Mrs. Ford came and she was the homemaking teacher. She came from somewhere way off. Idabel, I think that’s where she came from, Idabel. Then, Miss Marilyn Ford, she taught bookkeeping and she came from Muskogee. The two Mrs. Fords couldn’t drive. My husband taught them how to drive. Mrs. Marilyn Ford, her husband would bring her back and forth from Wagoner, so Edgar, my husband would teach them how to drive, both Mrs. Fords. And Ms. Barker, she was a teacher, too. He taught her how to drive. Mrs. Ford, she was so tickled. She got her driver’s license, and she started driving a car to Vinita and would go back and go home. Drive back and forth here. Been a long time ago…

**Finchum** *Sounds like the students had some relationships with the teachers outside of school.*

**West** Oh yeah, I remember after I graduated, I had my son in ’54 and the teachers, they were so tickled that I was having a baby. They all wanted to name him. The two Mrs. Fords wanted to name him. They sent home, before I even had my son, they sent names home by Edgar, because he was still working. They would send names home for me to name my son. It was really funny. They named him, oh what name did they send? Oh, Grover Don, that’s the name that they wanted me to name him. My husband was named Edgar Herman Lee West. So we changed the Don and named him Grover Lee. The teachers, they were so proud. That was the two Mrs. Fords that named him.

**Finchum** *You say he was working, what was he doing?*

**West** He was the custodian.

**Finchum** *Custodian. At the school?*

**West** At the school, uh-huh. When they closed the school, he went to all schools. He went to Vinita High School and worked when he left Attucks. Then he ended up at the junior high. Then he ended up at the Vinita High School. He worked at all the schools. He did everything. He was sort of maintenance. He put in telephones, fixed telephones, do all kinds of stuff. He was a head custodian. He was the first custodian to get a Teachers Retirement. We went to Oklahoma City when he was thinking about retiring. We went to the place where they—I can’t think. It’s wherever the Teachers Retirement was. We went there. You know what she told my husband? She said, “If you’re going to retire, you’re going to be the first person that retired from Vinita schools on [Oklahoma] Teachers Retirement.” That was really nice. Every time the teachers got a raise, he got a raise too. That was really…

**Finchum** *That was good.*

**West** Uh-huh. We was married sixty-one years. He died February 8, 2012.

**Finchum** *That’s a long time.*

**West** Uh-huh. Yeah.

**Finchum** *Any secrets to making one last that long?*

**West** No, not that I know. We just trusted one another. You know, when we was coming up, people was always trying to say stuff about you to break you up. This is a little town and people just, you know, would just—me and my husband made up our mind that we wasn’t going to listen. People would call me and say, “I saw your husband this and that, this and that.” I didn’t believe nothing nobody said. One time somebody called me and said, “I saw your husband somewhere.” I said, “Don’t never call me anymore.” So me and my husband made up our mind that we wasn’t going to believe nothing nobody said about us. He said he would have to catch me doing something, and I would have to catch him doing something. (Laughs) We stuck with that. But people would try to break us up.

I had this friend, and I tried to tell her, but she would let people tell her—People would call her and tell her stuff that was not even true. I would try to tell her, “You can’t believe nothing people say.” She’d come and she’d say, “Ah, they said my husband was at somebody’s house.” I said, “Well he was right over here with us. You can’t believe nothing nobody say.” You can’t believe what people say, because people are, I don’t know, bad at trying to break you up. That was the biggest thing I had problems with. Like I said, she ended up divorcing her husband just listening to people said. Me and my husband both tried to talk to her.

We had went on a trip. Her stepfather had died. They had six kids so I said—me and my husband always went to Dallas every summer. After her stepfather died, I told her, “Why don’t we all go on a trip together.” So we decided to go on a trip together. We went to Dallas, all of us went to Dallas. They drove their car and we drove ours. We went to Dallas and spent the weekend, a couple of days. When we got back, I was really surprise, when we got back, she come over and told me, “You know me and John is getting a divorce.” I said “What?” I said, “What happened?” She didn’t say. She just said, “We’re getting a divorce.” I said, “Can’t you all make up? You been married this long and you got all your kids.” I said, “Can’t you talk to one another?” She said, “I’m not going to talk to him.” Then Edgar tried to talk to him, you know, and try to tell him why don’t they try to talk to one another, but they wouldn’t do it. That was sad for me because, like I said, she always listened, and people would tell her anything, and she would believe it and stuff. You can’t believe what people tell you.

**Finchum** *In a small town, too.*

**West** Yeah, right. That’s true.

**Finchum** *Well, when you were in high school did you go to the basketball games?*

**West** Oh yeah, uh-huh. We’d go to, let’s see, Pawhuska, Ponca City, and let’s see, go to Joplin I think. Uh-huh. When we went to high school, me and my husband we never went anywhere here. We always went to Kansas or Missouri. I never went to—I think I went one time to the movie here. I never went to nothing here. We always went to Baxter Springs (Kansas). My brother-in-law, he liked to skate. He liked this girl that lived in Baxter Spring, so we’d go up there and pick her up, and we’d go to the Galena (Kansas) and skate. We’d go to Kansas or Missouri, that’s where we’d go. I had an uncle that lived in Neosho (Missouri). That’s where we would go. We’d go there on weekends. This man had this club for teenagers, and we’d go there on weekends.

**Finchum** *Vinita didn’t have things like that for you?*

**West** I guess, I don’t know. I just remember me and my husband we always went to Missouri or Kansas.

**Finchum** *Did you go to Boley any?*

**West** No, I never went to Boley. My grandfather had some family that lived there.

**Finchum** *They had clubs for teenagers too. That’s why I asked.*

**West** In Boley? Oh, probably so. I don’t know why we always went to Missouri or Kansas.

**Finchum** *How did you start your day at Attucks? Did they have the “Pledge of Allegiance” or a prayer?*

**West** Yeah, it seemed like we always did that and had prayer. Mr. Blye was really, you know, he was from the south, so he just believed in everything being just right. Yeah, he was really a good principal. Yeah. Everybody loved him, I think.

**Finchum** *Did you have perfect attendance?*

**West** Yeah, I think so. I don’t know. I doubt it. Sometime I’d sneak down cause my husband’s dad had bought them a house so they would have a place, like when we was driving back and forth and if we didn’t go home right then. His dad had bought a place there, so we would go there and stay until we went back to the country. Of course his mom and dad they lived in the country. They have a farm out there. His dad went to college. He had went to Tuskegee. Then, he went to—where did he go? Somewhere in Louisiana he graduated. He was the agriculture teacher. He married Edgar’s mom. She was from Pryor Creek. He met her through some teacher, I guess, when she was in Langston or something. They started writing together, writing to one another, I guess. I don’t know if he came up here, or if she went there, but I know that they moved to Tuskegee, and that’s where my oldest brother-in-law was born, in Tuskegee. I remember my mother-in-law said that when George, that was his name. They named him after his dad George.

They said, what’s that man? I can’t remember, George Washington Carver. Yeah, rubbed my brother-in-law’s head, and said that he was going to be a genius. You know, he was so smart. You wouldn’t believe how smart he was. He got the chance. He moved to New York. He got a chance to get a job at this Harvard University, and he wouldn’t take it because he didn’t like to be inside. You know what he did, he took pictures like the movie stars come in New York. That’s what he did. He took pictures. That’s what he liked to do. He never would drive, he walked.

We went to New York to visit them and they had this great big house. He got up early that morning and start out going, because if any of the movie stars or anybody was coming in he would go to the airport and take pictures. That’s what he did, took pictures. He married—he got a chance to get this job at the university but wouldn’t take it. So she was real disappointed in that, but he was happy doing what he did. That was the main thing. He ended up working at the post office. He took pictures and worked at the post office, because he didn’t like to be inside. He said he could not stand to be in no classroom, so…

**Finchum** *Well, you have a window. So once you graduated from high school what did you do?*

**West** Well, I worked for this doctor and his wife. They had this little boy, and she wanted somebody to babysit. Her name was Bea Byron. I went out to interview for the job and she said, “If little Douglas,” that was the little boy’s name, she said, “If he likes you, you can have a job.” When I went out to interview, he came and climbed up on my lap. She hired me. The main thing she wanted me to take care of him. He ended up being just like my kid. I didn’t have any children then, and he would beg to come home with me. He had come home with me because she was a lab technician. He was too. They had a lab in Vinita. He also worked out at Eastern State, because that’s when they used to do surgeries out there. They would come from Tulsa.

I remember Steve and his wife come from Tulsa. They were going to do surgery and I always fixed dinner for them when they came home. The main thing was me taking care of him, Douglas. That was his name. I would have to get in the bed with him to get him to sleep and just one thing after another. Now, he just got to be my baby. I wouldn’t let them—I’m the one that bossed him around. They’d get mad at me. They’d say, “Lois, you think that’s your baby. He don’t listen to nothing we tell him to do. He listens to you.” Don’t care what happened, he’d always want to try and come home with me, and I’d bring him home with me every evening.

When I got pregnant, I was working for them when I got pregnant with Grover, she begged me. She said, “Please have your baby on Douglas’ birthday.” She begged every day. She’d tell me that. You know what? I had my son on his birthday, that little boy’s birthday, September 30, the same day. He’s in Kansas. He lives in Kansas. He always calls me. He always sends me something for Christmas. His mother, I remember the day his mother died. Her and her friend was going to Grand Lake for something, because they were lab technician. He begged to go with her. She said, “No, you go home with Lois,” and he grabbed her leg and hugged her leg. She said, “No, no. You go home with Lois this evening.” Good thing he did, because she got killed that same day in a car accident, her and her friend. He calls me. He’ll call me now. He will say, “You are the only one that really know about my mother,” and he will ask all kinds of questions about his mother.

You know what is really crazy? When I got pregnant I thought, “Am I going to love my baby as much as I love this little boy?” It was crazy, wasn’t it? I asked her before I had him, “When I get pregnant, do you think I’m going to love my baby as much as I love Douglas?” She said, “Oh yeah you will.” (Laughs) He’s just like—He calls me all the time now. Him and his wife, they got one son. He’s graduated. He just retired. He had a sister, Lacey. She lives in Tulsa. I always took them to the dentist or wherever they had to go. I just really took care of them. After his wife died, her mother came and babysat, took care of the kids. Then she left and went back to California. Then his mother come. She lived in Washington, DC. So his mother come and took care of the kids.

He didn’t get married for a while, but his mother came. Then he got married. He married Julie. Her name was Julie. When Jackie was little and Grover went to school, I always took Jackie, my daughter, to work with me every day. [Nan Byron] was a teacher or something. She was some big something in Washington. She was a teacher, too. She always took Douglas and my daughter and made them read every day. She would teach them every day. She was a wonderful person. They all had moved out on the lake, then they moved to Kansas City. Their daughter, she got married. They invited us to her—we went to her wedding. Then when Douglas got married, he got married in Kansas City. He invited us to the wedding, but it was snowing so bad we couldn’t go. I didn’t get to go his wedding. He always sends me something for Christmas, always calling me. Now he calls me anytime, because he’s retired now.

**Finchum** *Well, is he black or white?*

**West** He’s white. The doctor, they were white. I don’t know if—No, you don’t. (Laughter) They run a lab here, him and his wife, they were lab technicians. They had their own lab. I worked for them and the other doctors and stuff.

**Finchum** *How long did you do that?*

**West** Let’s see, when he married again, I still worked for him. That’s when his mother came and took care of them. His wife decided to go to Louisiana. She was a lab technician, but she wanted to get more education so she went there for a year, and I worked for them while she was gone. Then while I was there, I decided to go work at Eastern State. Mr. Byron, he worked out there anyway. I told him, I think, while Julie was gone. She came back home, and she had these two little girls. He already had two, the girl and boy by his first wife, and then him and his second wife had these two little girls. I took care of them, too. Then I decided I wanted to work at Eastern State. I told him, “What about me going to work at Eastern State?” Well, I worked for them, but I got tired of working for them, so I decided to quit working. My grandfather paid off all my little bills so I could quit work.

Julie told me, she said, “You’re not going to like quitting work.” I stayed off, I don’t know, a month maybe. Then I went back to work for them. When I went back I told him, “I’d like to work out at Eastern State,” you know. So he told me, “Well go ahead and put your application in,” but he said, “You won’t like it.” You know what he told me? He said, “You will be working with the lowest class people you ever worked with.” He said, “They’ll be calling you names.” He got me prepared to go to work out there. I said, “Well I’d like to try it anyway.” He said, “Go ahead and try it,” so I got a job at Eastern State. I really liked it, you know. I didn’t really have no problems with anybody.

**Finchum** *What did you do there?*

**West** I was one of the aides. After I was there, I went to school to be a psychiatric aide. You had to go to school a year to be a psychiatric aide. So I did that, and then I got to be the Aide of the Year. That was really something, and I got to go to Oklahoma City to meet the governor. I can’t remember who the governor is. I got a picture of all of us together. Different town’s mental hospitals picked out certain people for the Aide of the Year, so I got to be the Aide of the Year. Then, I’m trying to think. I met this woman from Norman. She was the Aide of the Year from Norman. There was another place. There was three of us there. We had a big dinner with the governor. Had a big dinner for us. The nurse went with, and the minister from the hospital, we all went together down there, and my sister-in-law went with me, too, because I wanted to really look nice. My sister-in-law was a hairdresser and she did my hair. I wanted to keep my hair to looking good so she went with us, too. (Laughter) We had a big dinner at the governor’s. They had a big banquet for us.

**Finchum** *Do you remember what year that was?*

**West** No, you know what? That’s crazy. I got all of those pictures and stuff.

**Finchum** *In the ’60s it would have been Henry Bellmon.*

**West** No, it wasn’t him.

**Finchum** *George Nigh and that’s about all I know.*

**West** I’m trying to think. Who was the governor? It wasn’t Bellmon. It seems like it would have been Nigh. Must have been.

**Finchum** *Nigh was right in that same time period, somewhere in the ’60s. I don’t know for sure.*

**West** I think that’s who it was. I have a picture of all of us. Since my husband died, my husband put everything up and I can’t find nothing you know. That’s really crazy, ugh.

**Finchum** *That was an honor, though, to get chosen for that.*

**West** Oh yeah. I got all kinds of different pins and stuff. Yeah, it was really an honor. I got to spend the day there and get the Capitol and everything. Yeah.

**Finchum** *How long did you work at Eastern State?*

**West** Twenty-six years. I retired in ’87. I wasn’t going to retire then. My husband he had already retired. He kept asking me why didn’t I retire? I thought, “I don’t want to retire yet,” you know. I thought, “What am I going to do?” Me and my friend, we had just put in, we was going to get a raise. We were put in for a raise. We got our papers all filled out and put in for a raise. My brother-in-law just dropped dead. Had a heart attack on labor day. He died. That really scared me. I went right then because my husband had been trying to get me to retire. I thought, “Life’s too short.”

They didn’t even think about I was going to retire, so I came home from work. I was coming home from work and I went by—well, I’d already been to Oklahoma City to see that I could retire a long time ago, before that. So I went by the office and I told them, “I’m going to turn in my retirement.” They couldn’t believe that I was going to do that. The nurse on my building, she said, “You are not old enough. How you going to retire? You are not old enough to retire.” I was. I was old enough to retire and get that—when you get that eighty years—and you got so many years [of service plus your age] and you got eighty years, I decided. That’s what made me decide to retire on account that my brother-in-law had just died suddenly like that. I retired in ’87.

**Finchum** *You saw lots of changes during that…*

**West** Yeah, right. Uh-huh.

**Finchum** *…during that time at the hospital.*

**West** Yeah, lots of changes.

**Finchum** *Were most of the patients adults or children?*

**West** Most of the patients I worked with were adults.

**Finchum** *Adults.*

**West** I did work on one ward where they had the kids come in. I think that was Eight Building. There was lots of kids came in. I remember they was on drugs and stuff. I remember this one boy—because the psychologist, Vernon Baker was his name, and we’d have meetings with them, with the kids. I would always set in on meetings, and this one boy was telling us how he was setting in his car and it just melted and run down the hill or something. Of course that was on account of the drug. That’s when they were using—what drug was that? It was for mental patients really. I can’t remember what it was. Then people started selling it to kids and stuff. I saw a lot of stuff, the kids came in there really messed up because of drugs. Then, I seen kids come in and get better and go home, never come back, too. Uh-huh.

**Finchum** *Well, what about adults? Did you see some of them go home, too?*

**West** Uh-huh. This one girl she was young. She was really smart. She got on some drugs and stuff. Her dad brought her out there and he couldn’t get, she wouldn’t do nothing. He couldn’t get her to work, just got really, I don’t know. I guess the drugs just made her really bad. She came out there and the doctor put her on some medicine. Do you know she went home and never came back. I worked on one building. I remember that, I worked there.

I always remember this lady came in and she had killed her little boy. We really get to be good friends. She told me that she had been going to church, and she thought this preacher had told her—I don’t know how she got [this idea]. I said she was a religious fanatic, I guess that’s what you’d call her. She told me she’d went to church that night, and the preacher had told her to kill her kids, so she came home and killed the little baby. The oldest boy, he got out of the house and went to get help. She ended up out there. So we got to be really good friends. She would always talk to me. She was a teacher. It was so different out there then. I was going on vacation. I was going to California on vacation. She decided to make all my clothes for my vacation. (Laughs) She did that. It’s so different. Now you can’t do all that stuff. My patients would always help me with anything I had to do and stuff.

Then after she got out, I went to visit her in Muskogee, and her son. I always kept up with them. Then, me and Miss Fish, she was an aide too, and we worked together. When she went out she went to Muskogee, so we decided that we’d go— let’s see, her name was Mildred Gore. So me and Miss Fish—her name was Dorothy Houser. They was good friends. She got out. She wanted to go visit her. Me and Miss Fish got together. We got Mildred out of the hospital, they let us take her, and we went to Muskogee to visit her. Yeah, it was so different. Then you could go visit patients. Miss Fish, (laughs) she was a mess. I’d be off from work sometimes and she’d sneak the patients off. I’d be off on my day off, and she would sneak some patients out and bring them to visit me on my day off. I said, “How did you do that?” (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Or why, too.*

**West** Uh-huh.I loved Miss Fish. I think about her. She was a wonderful aide there.

**Finchum** *The doctors treated them with medicine or with therapy?*

**West** Mostly with medicine. That’s when they would use thorazine. They used lots of that. I had this one patient, I’m always thinking about her, Lorena Fay, and she was a schizophrenic. She’d get behind my back and just talk and stuff. She was hearing voices. The doctor got her on some medicine and it worked real good.

I remember this one patient. She was pretty big. She’d always like to lay in the bed. I’d always make her get up. I would say, “You need to get out of the bed and stuff.” I mean me and Nancy Owens, we was working together. That’s on one building a long time ago. We was coming down the steps and she was just a very big woman. She grabbed me by the neck and started choking me. Nancy thought she was playing, so she finally turned my—I thought I was going to die. (Laughs) So she finally turned me loose. I said, “Why did you do that?” She said, “You made me so mad making me get up this morning. That’s the reason that I was choking you, for you making me get out of the bed all the time. That’s the reason I was choking you.” So she said, “I’m sorry about that.” (Laughs)

This one girl would always go downstairs. We had a coke machine. She’d always come and say (It was an open ward and they could go out), she would always come and say, “Lois, you want me to go get you a coke?” I’d say, “Yeah.” So she would go get my pop and she would open it up. Them girls, later on, them girls said, “Did you know every time she got you a pop she would drink out of it before she gave it to you?” I said, “No.” (Laughs) They said, “That’s the reason she always wants to get your pop every day.” So I enjoyed working there. I really enjoyed. That was the best job I had.

Then on the end, before I retired I ended up working on Twelve Building. That’s where they send patients that’s been, you know insanity, did a crime, come there to see if, you know, if they could be able to stand trial, if they was mentally sick. This one guy, he had, I’m always thinking about him. He had ended up there because he had cut his mother’s heart out. You wouldn’t believe the stuff that, you know…

**Finchum** *Yeah.*

**West** …So he came. I thought, “Now he had to really be sick to do that.” I’d always talk to him. We got to be really good friends. He got on medicine and really got better and stuff. They said, “Oh Lois, you believe anything somebody tells you.” I said, “Well he had to be really sick to do that to his mother.” I said, “Don’t you think that he was really mentally ill to do that?” They said, “Well, some people just mean.” I said, “Well, he always talked to me and stuff.” He told me how his mother had never done nothing to him or nothing. He just really got sick.

Then someone would come there—I mean this one guy came, and someone would come trying to get out of going to prison and stuff. This one guy came there, and he was getting better and stuff. I told the doctor, the doctor would come and check you know, to see if they was getting better, to go to court. This one guy, he was there, and the doctor came and asked me, “How is he doing?” I said, “He is doing lots better.” When the doc left he said, “Why’d you tell that doc that.” He said, “You know I’m not getting better,” but he was. He didn’t want them to know it. I said, “Well you are getting better.” He didn’t want to go to…

**Finchum** *Go to jail. Go to prison.*

**West** Uh-huh. I worked there on Twelve and I really liked that. They got into a big fight out there, these guys. I went out there and got in the middle of them. They just stopped fighting. The doctor got so upset with me. He said, “Why did you do that? It’s a wonder you haven’t got hurt.” You know I was lucky. I never got—all the things that really happened to me, this is really funny. When I was working on the women’s ward, this little bitty little woman—oh, it was at the dining room. I had a sweater on, and she grabbed my sweater and got my hand. You know how you got a sweater and she got my hand. “I guess I might get my hands on that sweater.” (Laughs) We got down on the floor. She was holding me. The girls couldn’t get her off of me. It was really funny though, little bitty little woman, but they finally got her off of me. I didn’t get hurt, but she was kicking and cutting up while they were trying to get her off of me. It was real funny. I asked, “Why’d you do that?” She said, “I don’t know.” (Laughs) I guess I was just lucky because all the years that I worked out there I never got hurt or nothing.

I jumped in the middle of the fights and everything. I remember this one girl, Geneva, she was on an open ward. It was Nine Building. No, Eight Building. No, it was Nine Building. She was black. Her and her friend they were both from Muskogee, and she’d always help me with everything. She would come by, went out, went down, out on the porch, and came back in with a glass. Had broke a bottle and come back with a glass and she was going to cut this other girl, this black girl. I jumped in the middle of them. I said, “What are you doing?” She just dropped the glass. She said, “I don’t know.” That was the exciting job I ever had, working there, because every day you didn’t know what was going to happen.

**Finchum** *True.*

**West** It was something new every day happening. That was really exciting. I really liked that job better than any job I had. Nobody could believe that I liked working there that much. I’m probably talking too much.

**Finchum** *No, not at all. You’re doing really good.*

**West** Well, my son, he works out there now. The new place, it’s called Rose Rock. He works on the alcohol and drug program. He’s been out there twenty-eight years. He really likes it. He works with the women. They got a new building. They built a new building, and he works there.

**Finchum** *Were you on shift work? Like eleven to seven or seven to three, or whatever it was?*

**West** Yeah, I worked from six thirty in the morning until three. Yeah, sometimes I would work overtime. Sometimes you would have to work overtime. Sometimes I would work overtime. I didn’t like second shift. When I first started I worked third shift.

**Finchum** *Get paid a little more.*

**West** Uh-huh. I could not stay awake. That was awful. I worked on the Building Three-Three. That’s where all the bad patients was. They sent me down there to work. I told the nurse, I said, “I cannot stay awake at night.” This one woman on there, this one patient, she would get up and try to choke me. I told her, “I cannot stay awake.” She said, “I’m going to send somebody down there to work with you and you all both stay awake.” So we went down there, and she went to sleep and I did too on this building, that’s where all the bad patients are.

The nurse called me. I guess the nurse, she was bad to sneak around and see if we were sleeping and what was going on. The next day she called me to the office. She said, “I’m putting you on day shift. I sent somebody down there to keep you awake and you all was both setting up there asleep.” (Laughs) She put me on the first shift. What was her name? I can’t think of her name.

**Finchum** *Well when you retired, about how many patients did they have?*

**West** Oh then? I don’t know. There was a bunch of patients when I retired. Then, you know, my daughter worked in Tulsa and she told me way before, she said, “You know what? I heard that they going to turn Eastern State into a prison.” I said, “Really?” That was a way long time ago before, you know, I guess we hadn’t even thought about doing that. She worked in Tulsa. She told me that she had heard that. I said, “I don’t believe that.” I said, “Why would they turn…” She said, “Well that’s what the word is.” That’s what they ended up doing.

They put so many people out that really needed help, you know. That’s sad. You go to Tulsa now and see people on the streets living in the street. I met this one girl and she’d had a good job and stuff and she’d lost a job. She was living under a bridge down there. You know it. I said, “We don’t know what’s going to happen to us.”

**Finchum** *Well, when you were at Attucks, had you had psychology as a class?*

**West** No, huh-uh.

**Finchum** *No.*

**West** We had biology. I didn’t like that, so I got out of that class and went into typing and bookkeeping.

**Finchum** *Did Attucks have a woodshop?*

**West** I don’t think so.

**Finchum** *Thought maybe with home ec they had to have something for the guys.*

**West** I don’t think so. The guys took home ec.

**Finchum** *Oh, did they?*

**West** That’s where Junior Hicks was taking home ec and they was learning how to sew and stuff, and cooking and stuff. They didn’t have woodshop. When they went to high school they got a woodshop, in Vinita High, when they integrated the school.

**Finchum** *That happened after you finished?*

**West** After I graduated, yeah. I think it was—what year did they integrate the school. I think my brother-in-law was the last class that went there. Charles Kirkendoll, I think they was the last class that went to Attucks.

**Finchum** *Fifty-six, fifty-seven, something like that.*

**West** Yeah, I think so. I believe it must have been that.

**Finchum** *Did the community change much when that happened?*

**West** No, my kids went to—let’s see. My son went to Southeast. They changed the title to Southeast. My son went to school there. Then, when my daughter got ready to go to school, she went to Will Rogers. They was integrating the school and my husband worked at the school, so the superintendent wanted to know if we would send our kids to Will Rogers, to start integrating. I didn’t want them to go. My husband said, “Okay.” They went to Will Rogers. Then, when they went to Will Rogers, they sent all the black kids to Southeast. My kids, the superintendent wanted my kids to stay there at Will Rogers. They did. They had Miss Wicker, was my kids teacher. She was real nice. I really liked her. So my kids stayed at Will Rogers and went to school there for a while until they started gradually putting other black kids there.

My husband said the superintendent asked him if we could leave, and he worked for the school, and you know how that is. So, my kids, they liked it there though. My daughter got to be real good friends, let’s see, Duke Logan, their daughter. She was real good friends with my daughter. This one little girl, she always tried to stay all night with us. Then Jackie would go stay all night with her. Then I got to thinking, “I don’t know if I want…” You know when you away from home so much, stuff can happen. (Laughs) But my kids, they always really get along with anybody and stuff.

**Finchum** *Did you live in Vinita at that time?*

**West** Yeah, uh-huh. We lived in Vinita.

**Finchum** *So you’ve lived in Vinita ever since you got married?*

**West** Yeah.

**Finchum** *For the most part?*

**West** Yeah, uh-huh but we lived in the country. I got a place in the country that my grandfather left me. I try to keep it, and the Wests have all that land out there. They got a hundred and some acres out there, but nobody lives out there. Let’s see. My sister-in-law lives in New York, my brother-in-law lives in Michigan. The rest of them live in Tulsa. Everybody want to buy the land, but my mother-in-law, she said she wanted to always keep the land in the West name because her dad gave them that land to start with.

That’s the reason Edgar’s dad, he decided that he wanted to be an agriculture teacher. He raised peanuts and all kinds of stuff. He did. He’s originally from Alabama. We’d go down there and see them all the time. Redus, my husband’s cousin, he played for the Pittsburg Pirates and the Texas Rangers. He’s retired now. I just called the other day. She wants us to come down there. They live close to Huntsville, Alabama. They live in a little community outside. I told my grandson, I want him to—Edgar’s [grandfather] had built a steeple on that church there in Alabama. Nobody couldn’t build a steeple on that church but his [granddad]. His granddad had to build that steeple on that church. It’s really something to see.

The first time I went to Alabama, Edgar’s dad wanted to go back to visit, and nobody never took him. We had went to California on vacation, and came back and when we came back, we still had time. So Edgar said, “I’m going to take Dad to Alabama. He always wanted to go back home.” So, Edgar asked his dad, “Do you still want to go to Alabama?” He said, “Yeah.” We went there. He showed us all around. He took us all around and showed us his church that his dad had did the steeple. He showed us where he sat when his dad was building that steeple. He showed us the steps where he would come and eat lunch with his dad every day. It was nice. My grandson, I want to take him there because I’ve been there. We had a family reunion there two times. I’ve been there. My grandkids, my granddaughters, my two granddaughters have been there for the last reunion. My oldest grandsons, they haven’t been there. Then my grandson, he lives in Lawrence, Kansas. He said he wanted to meet his papaw’s family. I want to take him down there when I get a chance.

I just had the Hunts reunion. The first time that I had met some of my family that I didn’t know. We had that in June. My, they live all around. My cousin, she lived in New York. She’s the one that decided to have the reunion, but she moved from New York to Atlanta. She’s the one that decided to have this reunion for all of us. I never met any of them, so me and my family had a chance to meet all of them. They was so different, I mean you know, the Hunts, they was so, I don’t know, they was just sort of stuck up. You know how you meet new people. Well, maybe it might have been me because I’d never met them before. You know, how you meet kind of dreading, because I had never met any of them. That was my first time of meeting them.

We had a really good weekend. She got this place at Oklahoma City, she got this motel and it was beside where the Thunder was playing and stuff. It was really nice, but then on the end, it ended up really bad because we had a banquet there that night. It was really sad, because we had got there kind of late, they had already started eating. The chicken was raw, the steak was tough, it was awful. That was supposed to be a first class hotel. It was Courtyard by Marriott, I think that was what it was. It was right downtown in the middle of everything. She lived in Atlanta, I think she just got on the internet and just picked a place that was close to the airport. It was in the middle of everything. Everything was full there. She was trying her cousin, let’s see, one of my cousins lived in California, Sacramento, her and one in Atlanta, and the one that lived in Wichita had got the reunion together, and they didn’t live there. They didn’t really know, but I had one cousin that lived in Oklahoma City. They should have really got her and tried to, you know…

**Finchum** *Coordinate?*

**West** …but it turned out okay. They ended up crying cause one of my sons said that they was out in the hall crying because the food was so bad. They had the hotel send out somewhere else. They had to send out somewhere else and get food. They was—it turned out okay. I got to meet them. They going to have the next reunion in Dallas. I got a cousin that lives there. They want to have it in 2016 in Dallas. My grandson, he really was the life of the party. How old is he? Ten, eight, nine, or ten, I think. He is so smart. His grandfather was a doctor here, a psychiatrist, Dr. Coonfield, that’s his grandfather. He is so smart, he lived let’s see, his mother’s place, she’s married again now. They live in Lawrence, Kansas. He is so smart that they’re going to send him to a private school in Kansas City, I think. He wants to go to Alabama and meet the family there.

**Finchum** *Well, take him on.*

**West** Yeah, I will. He is anxious to do that. He is so sweet.

**Finchum** *Well, do you have a favorite memory or two from your days at Attucks?*

**West** Oh…

**Finchum** *Besides getting married.*

**West** Yeah, I think the best memory I have, me and my friend Lee Elmer [Bowlin], his mother—I always remember this. This is the best memory I guess I had. His mother was going to have a baby. She was going to have twins. I remember that day just as good. Me and Joyce, we was coming down the steps, and Lee Elmer was coming up the steps. He said, “Momma just had twins.” Me and Joyce was upstairs, he was downstairs. He said, “Momma just had twins.” He said, “Guess what she named them?” He said, “Linda Lois and Brenda Joyce.” We just screamed and ran down there and hugged him. We told him, “She named them after us.” That’s what we said, “She named them after us!” We went all over school that day telling everybody. That was Edgar’s aunt. We went all over school telling everybody that Mary [Bowlin] named them twins after us. Mr. Blye said, “Oh, she didn’t name them after you all neither.” We said, “Yes she did too.” (Laughter) That was something.

**Finchum** *Good friend, too.*

**West** Yeah, that was really something.

**Finchum** *Well, anything else you want to add before we close out?*

**West** Oh no, I think that I done said enough, probably.

**Finchum** *On no, you’re great. Attucks was a good school for you.*

**West** Oh yeah, it was really. Yeah, I really enjoyed it. The teachers—we had some wonderful… We all had some wonderful teachers, but I think about Miss Holly. There was one teacher came from Ponca City, I cannot remember her. Miss Curt was her name. She was a homemaking teacher, too. I think Miss Holly was the best homemaking teacher that I had, that I knew. Miss Ford though, she was a homemaking teacher, too. After Miss Holly left, I think Miss Ford came. There was two Miss Fords. There was Miss Ford from Wagoner, then the Miss Ford from Idabel, the other Miss Ford. Dorothy Ford and Marilyn Ford, and Edgar’s the one that taught them how to drive. After I graduated they was still there. Edgar’s the one that taught them how to drive.

**Finchum** *Straight shift, probably.*

**West** Yeah.I remember I used to drive, we had a pickup. Edgar learned me how to drive. I never did get my license and I’d drive everywhere without any license. So when I worked for the Byrons she said, “Lois you got your license?” “No.” She said, “Well you going to have to get your license, because I want you to take the kids to Tulsa to the dentist and stuff.” I remember they had this pink Cadillac. (Laughs) So I went and got my license. I told her, “I got my license.” “I want you to drive that car.” I remember they had that pink Cadillac. “I want you to drive that and take the kids.” I’d take Lacey to Tulsa to the dentist. We’d go everywhere.

**Finchum** *In a pink Cadillac.*

**West** Yeah. I always remember that.

**Finchum** *Well, Attucks must have been pretty good to draw teachers from all over the place.*

**West** Yeah, everywhere, yeah. Like, let’s see, we had a Ms. Harris. They came from Tulsa. Ms. Kelly, I don’t know where she came from. Ms. Holly, I know she was from Tulsa. The two Ms. Fords, one of them was from Wagoner, and one from Idabel, somewhere way down she was from. Then Ms. Curt, I remember her. She was from Ponca City. Mrs. Barker, she was from Vinita. She taught at Attucks, too. Ms. Clara Hardrick, she taught there too, because Mrs. Barker taught me out in the country before I came to town. She came out there and taught. I remember that she came out there and taught, because her daughter was little. She’d bring her daughter, she lived in Vinita, but she would come out in the country and teach. She would bring her daughter with her. We would make her a bed in the sandbox. You know, we had a great big sand thing, and we would put blankets in there and make her a bed there, Mrs. Barker’s daughter.

**Finchum** *Probably slept pretty good.*

**West** She came to the last reunion. She came—she lives in, I don’t know where she lives, in Atlanta or where.

**Finchum** *Why is it that you think people are willing to come back to the reunions? What is it about it?*

**West** I don’t know. Everybody just likes to come back. I don’t know. The first reunion, we really had a big one. The first one we had in ’87, everybody came back then. There’s so many people have died since then, you know. That was the biggest one we had and we had it at Shangri La. It was really nice. Yes, so, then we’re going to have another one, let’s see, it must be 2015 I guess. I just got a letter. They are having meetings now. So, yeah, we try to have one every two years. Like I said, so many people have died here lately, so they’re trying to get the kids to keep it going, and they was talking about trying to close it out but Reverend Swain, that’s Joyce’s brother, he just died not long ago. When he come, he said he wanted to keep the reunion going. They’re trying to get it like our kids and keep it going you know, the younger generation. Keep it going. So I try to get my kids really interested in it.

**Finchum** *Well it was a significant part of this town and your life, really, too.*

**West** Oh yeah, yes. I think my step-grandmother, she went to school there. She said when she went there it was just one room I believe she said, Attucks. That was a long time ago when she went there. She remembered going to school there. If you don’t write nothing down you can’t remember. She told me the professors’ names when she went to school there and that was a long time ago.

**Finchum** *I think they built that in 1916. Does that sound about right?*

**West** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Finchum** *So, it’s almost a hundred years old.*

**West** Oh yeah. Right, uh-huh. I’m glad they’re probably keep it up there. We try to really keep it up. It’s on the historical.

**Finchum** *And you were there four years.*

**West** Yeah.

**Finchum** *It’s on the* National Register [of Historic Places]*.*

**West** Oh yeah. Yeah. Uh-huh. I went there. I must have come there in ’49 because I graduated in ’52. I think that’s right. I remember ’48 because that’s when my dad died, in ’48.

**Finchum** *Then you got married in ’50?*

**West**  Fifty, uh-huh. Went to school all that time and nobody didn’t know we was married, even my sister-in-law. Nobody didn’t know except my best friend Joyce Swain. I met her when I came out here in ninth grade. I met her then. We got to be best friends. We’ve been best friends all these years and still best friends.

**Finchum**  *That’s pretty neat to stay friends with someone from your high school days.*

**West** Oh yeah. We’ve always been really close.

**Finchum** *I think that’s a good place to end, don’t you?*

**West** Oh yeah.

**Finchum** *Thank you for sharing.*

**West** Thank you, very much.

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*