

Ballard Historical Society Oral History Project

Narrator: Izetta Hatcher

Date of Interview: March 23, 1988

Location of Interview: Seattle, Washington

Interviewer: Sonja Kammerer

ORIGINAL

I am speaking with Izetta Hatcher. And there is nobody else present.

I spell my name I-Z-E-T-T-A. That's the first. The last name is H-A-T-C-H-E-R.
And --

What was your maiden name?

Spearman, S-P-E-A-R-M-A-N.

Okay. Where did your family come from before they came to Ballard?

Okay. My father, Elihu Spearman, E-L-I-H-U, came from east of the mountains, Yakima Valley. But that was just his homestead. He was -- his birth home was Georgia. My mother lived in the Rainier Valley, and her birth home was Hannibal, Missouri. And her name was Vivian DeMirl Boston.

Do you know what years your parents came to Washington?

The year?

Approximately. Was it before 1900 or after 1900 when they came here?

I think it was after 1900 or probably just at the turn of the century, 1900 --

Okay. What year were they married?

1917.

When did they move to Ballard?

They moved to Ballard in '17 and built their home.

Is that -- that's not this house?

No, the house is next door at 7334 12th Avenue Northwest.

Okay. Now, is that where you were born?

I was born there, yes. I was born -- the only child -- there's four of us, three girls and one boy. And I was born at home. I'm the third child.

So, you were born at home?

Uh-huh.

In those years, some people were born at home, and some people were born in hospitals.

That's true. At the time, my mother, having two children that weren't in the best of health, decided that the third birth would be at home. And our family doctor was Dr. C. C. Tiffin, T-I-F-F-I-N, a very renown doctor here in the Seattle area. He had his office downtown, the Stimson Building. And so he was very honored to come and be at the birth at home. And as the story goes, when I was born, he threw me to my father, and my father almost missed me. He says I was inches off the floor. Now, whether that's an actuality, I don't know.

Well, it makes a good story.

He also delivered three of my own children, which was quite a phenomena, too.

Not in the family home, though?

No.

Where were they born?

They were born in Columbus Hospital, now Cabrini. And he felt quite honored to do that.

That was your first three?

Actually, I'm not telling it truthfully. It wasn't the first three. It was the first, the third and the fifth, because the second child was born in California. The fourth child was a boy, born at Fort Lawton. And the sixth child was a boy, born at Fort Lawton.

Your husband was in the Army at that time, right?

Right. So that if I would have known they were having boys, I would have gone to Fort Lawton much, much earlier. Consequently, I have four girls and two boys.

How long did you live in the family home?

I lived there until I was 21 when I got married. That's what you were supposed to do if you didn't leave home. You stayed home until you were married.

Did you move back into the house then, later on, or --

I did off and on during my marriage when my husband was overseas and was away. Yes, I came back and lived at home.

Now you live next door?

Yeah. We built a home -- we built this home in -- it was completed in '54, started in '53.

So you've raised your children right here.

I had three children previous to the home and three children after we've been in this home. And I've been here ever since, except for travels to Japan and travels to Germany. So we've been here steadily since 1964.

What about your family home? Who lives there? Has that been sold, or --

No, the home is still there, and my older sister lives there. She's all alone. My mother and dad both died in that home. And my brother lives in Renton. And my other sister lives on Mercer Island.

Okay. And that's all of you, or is there one more brother?

No. There's three girls and one boy.

Three girls and one boy?

Uh-huh.

Okay. Your family must have been unique being a Black family in Ballard?

Well, we were in a sense.

Were there other Black families in Ballard?

There was another -- there were others, yes. There was a family -- it was a woman that I can recall, living close to 73rd on 13th Northwest. Her name was Mrs. Famber (phonetic). And there was a family down on 65th, kind of between 11th and 12th, facing 65th, the Taylor family. No children. These people I'm speaking about had no children.

And there was another family north, called the Despinisis (phonetic), and they had one daughter, Hermina (phonetic). And then the other family that had children were the Dean family on 9th Northwest between 70th and 73rd. And let's see.

So the families were fairly close?

Well, those two families were with children, yes. And then, if there were other Blacks in the area, I'm not aware of them. Or we had -- oh, yes, there was one other family that lived on 10th Northwest, between 70th and 73rd. They were the Harringtons, and they had no children.

So the families that had children, were those children close to you in age?

Some of them were and some of them weren't. The oldest Dean girl, well, she was older than my sister. And there was a boy, and then another girl that was my age. And then, I think they had about three or four after that, and I don't know how close they came to my younger sister, Irene. It was kind of interspersed between my brother and my other sister.

Did you all go to the same schools?

Yes, we did, uh-huh. Whittier was the grade school, James Monroe and Ballard High.

What years were you in Whittier?

Oh, dear. My birthday's July 7th, 1923. And I started school when I was six. I must have gone to Whittier from '29 to '35, approximately; James Monroe, '36 to '38; and Ballard, '38 to '41. I graduated June 10th, 1941.

Are there any special -- did you feel that you had any special problems in schools in Ballard in that you were the only Black family? Did that affect --

Well, when you say "problem," I don't like to speak to problem. I could relate to situations. And I'm not sure whether it was because I was Black or whether it was

just a sign of the times. The schools were staffed by spinsters. I can't remember ever having a male teacher until I got to Ballard High. So that -- your spinster-type teachers were different, and they were strict, not very patient.

And basically, I can say I think the teachers liked me. I always have been an outgoing, free speaker. I've never held back what I was thinking. I always spoke out. And I think some of them, I think, resented that because I wasn't submissive. But I remember one teacher in Whittier, and I can recall her name was Tennison (phonetic). She was nice, but she was firm.

And she threatened to spank children if we didn't behave. And I can recall it was with a ruler, she'd give them a whack. But she never had to do that to me. And in my mind, I always thought if she did, I'd hit her back. But I can't recall any behavior that required that kind of punishment. In the other vein, because I was not bashful and was outspoken, I think some of the teachers tried to suppress my speaking out, that I should be quiet and submissive, and because I wasn't --

Also, it was my older sister preceded me, and she was quiet and submissive, never had much to say. And I think you can find this true in schools now, that -- the difference in siblings. They have a little difficulty if they don't follow in that same pattern, so I don't think that's anything unique. And I can remember them saying, "Well, she's not as quiet as her sister." Well, you know, I'm not my sister, so . . .

That happens in lots of families.

I think so. I think my grade school years were -- at Whittier were more or less uneventful. I think when I really started feeling pressures of probably my color, my race, was in junior high. And that's when an English teacher would not allow me to present an oral speech in dialect, southern dialect, of Paul Robeson. She stopped me mid -- I was reciting --

My mother was -- used to recite poetry. And she had this large book of Paul Robeson's work. And I memorized one through her tutorage, in dialect, and I do not have an accent. And I really had worked very hard. And she says, "That'll be enough. Just go sit down to your seat." And I said, "Well, I'm not through." "Well, we don't want to hear any more of that." "Really," I had said.

Really?

That's right. And she gave me a C.

The other experience I recall, I am a self-taught seamstress, and that was because of Miss. Anderson. Father, not having a professional job, he was a laborer, his work was seasonal, he didn't have a lot of money. And in order to be presentable, I taught myself how to sew. And years ago, we used to have these old ragbags. And I'd go in the old ragbag and drag something out, rip it up and make it into something.

And I think that's another area where I felt insecure is not being able to look like other people and to be able to dress like other people. But that had nothing to do with my race, it had to do with my -- our economic status. So, in my sewing class, which I was very interested and very dedicated, I was thwarted by Evelyn Anderson.

I copied everything she told me to do just exact. If I was to make a flat-felled seam, one-half inch, I measured one-half inch. And I cut it and turned it over, it was just exact. In fact, I find out that I probably am a perfectionist. And if I can't continue in that area, then I'd go the opposite. I'd just completely, flump (indicating).

But anyhow, she never gave me anything higher than a C. And I remember the teachers at junior high patting me and saying, "Izetta, you're fine. You're just fine. You're a C student, that's just -- you're okay." So I was labeled as an average C student.

I think that wouldn't happen today.

No, no.

Because you are not a C student.

And I found out much later that I wasn't. And when I got to Ballard High, that was kind of ingrained in me. And there were several occasions where I did get a little better. And so when teachers were a little more liberal, I did, I think, get Bs. I never got As. I got Bs and Cs. And my foreign language teacher, that was my first male teacher, Mr. Ryan, and I'll never forget him. He had silver gray hair, very, very thin, very nice gentleman, parted his hair in the middle.

And we had to take -- well, I took French. We had to take two years of French for college. And I was always aspiring for college. I took college prep courses. He insisted that we learn. And I used to wonder why is he so intense? Why does he really care? But he really cared. He wanted us to learn. And I attribute all of my knowledge of French and completing four years of French to Mr. Ryan, because he

took a personal interest. He tutored us. He counseled us. And I remember my brother, he took German from him. He says, "That man's crazy. He parts his hair in the middle. Anybody that parts his hair in the middle is crazy."

Was that in the '30s or in the early '40s?

Yeah, it had to be in the '30s, uh-huh. And consequently, it was, I guess, after I had completed my -- he was head of the language department. He had to have been crazy, he shot himself. He killed himself, committed suicide.

What was his last name again?

Ryan, R-Y-A-N. Carl Ryan.

So he wouldn't -- I wonder if he was half German?

Probably. No, I'm sure he was. I'm sure he was.

Was there discussion in the schools that time -- aware in that time of problems in Europe?

No. I can't remember that because -- I think it's because I wasn't ever a geography student, was not interested in world affairs. But it's -- probably there was, because if we had a war in '41, there must have been blame and must have been some upsets. That's an interesting observation.

Well... he worked so much and wanted everyone to be as interested in the foreign language that he was presenting that he was frustrated, and that's why he killed himself. That was my interpretation. He taught German, Latin, French. He did not teach Spanish, but he was -- and a lot of the kids laughed at him because he really wanted us to learn. And I admired that in him. And I felt that I had a personal obligation to try.

Do you think that you got more of your education formation directly from your teachers, or was it because of support and encouragement at home that we get this?

Support and encouragement at home. And I firmly believe that living in an area where I went to school gave me more support than if I were a transfer student or a bussed student because I had that defense. If someone would call me a name or make some racial slur, my mother taught me to be proud of what I was. And she described how we were as flowers in a garden, all different colors, and they're all

beautiful. And she says, "You are, too. And you can't help God made you the way you are and you be proud of what you are."

But she also encouraged us to aspire to encourage our intellect and encouraged our behavior and how we presented ourselves to other people in order to be beautiful. So that, without that influence, I couldn't have made it here. And whenever I have a problem or a situation -- now, you used "problem," and I said I didn't what to say problem -- but a situation, or a happening in school, I was only moments where I could come home and right now tell my mother what happened so that she -- if it were necessary to get back to the teacher, "Well, Izetta tells me this. I need to know -- get more information."

And she was that type of parent. And you'll hear me refer to my mother, more so than my father, because he wasn't available because of the nature of the work that he did. But she was home and did not work, and she always listened to us and would sift through what we said and then go to the teacher and talk with them and come up with a solution or whatever she thought was --

And you said your mother came here from Arkansas?

No, Missouri.

Missouri -- probably turn of the century?

Probably.

Where did she grow up?

She grew up mostly in Rainier Valley. She went to Coleman School. That's a grade school. I don't know. I can't remember just what age it was. And she tells me that she graduated from Franklin, but I really wonder whether she did.

Not that many people graduated from high school, so at that time --

From high school. But I do know that Coleman School was -- existed, and it was there at the time she was a little girl.

Now, at that time --

She had a mother and a father. And her mother did not work.

Was Rainier Valley – were there a lot of Blacks at Rainier Valley at that time?

No, there were Italians.

Italians? Was there an area in Seattle where there were a lot of Blacks?

Yes. And that was called the Central area. And that's around Madison Street. And they used to call it Coon Hollow. And I have learned since then it had no reference to race, but there were actually coons in that hollow, raccoons.

Uh-huh. I get them in my yard. Do you get them here?

I've had one. And my son that lives on Northeast 84th, he says, "Mom, I can't stand it, there's a raccoon in my yard and it's a big one." So they've been in existence for a long time. But that's where the Blacks -- and the Whites would move out, and the Blacks would move in.

Did your family, for social reasons, as adults go to the Central area?

Yes, uh-huh. That's where our church was, on 14th between Pike and Pine. And all of the social activities with people were in that area. And that was encouraged as a family that we keep our relationship with our own. So we didn't have a social life here in Ballard. We were welcome to go to churches. And if there weren't -- there wasn't money or a car available to take us to church, we used to go to the Ballard Free Methodist, and I used to go to Emmanuel Tabernacle on -- south of Woodland Park, Dayton.

And we were welcome. Never had any problems, except I don't believe in that really being saved bit. I mean, that's just a personal thing. It was kind of a frightening religion. And I recall how frightened I was because I went to movies, that God would really strike me dead if I went to a movie.

Well, if you went to Emmanuel –

Uh-huh. Emmanuel taught that. And my mother would allow us to go to movies. And I think she recognized the fact that since we were isolated and lived away that there were some things that we could have. Even so, our church didn't believe in it either as a First African Methodist Church. Our discipline says no card playing, dancing, and I think at the time, it said movies. But we danced. We played cards because she said that was okay.

Did you go to theaters here in Ballard?

Uh-huh. West Woodland and the Ballard.

The Bay?

Well, it's the Bay now, but it wasn't then. It was the Bagdad, I believe.

Oh, okay.

I think it was called the Bagdad.

And it was one at West Woodland?

Uh-huh.

I didn't know that.

Uh-huh. And it turned -- it went from the West Woodland Theater to a skating rink. In fact, I think it's a tavern now. But it's got some connotation to roller tavern, and something to -- it's right down 65th not too far from Division, I think.

Oh, really? Is there still a Division Street?

Uh-huh. Division goes from 65th to 70th. That's as far as it goes.

That's interesting. I'll have to look for that. Did you walk then from here?

Uh-huh. We walked. And everywhere we went, we walked. We walked to the Ballard Library. That was another activity. The Ballard Library is down -- it's an antique place now right on Market Street. And there was a lot of woods. There was a path from my house, kind of cut and wove around through the woods down to 14th and 70th where there was a store. It's a little business area where there still is, but that was called the end of the line because that's where the streetcar used to go.

We were outside the city at that particular time until they increased it up to 85th where that's the city limits or was the city limits. So we were outside the Seattle city limits. And we'd go out to 14th and kind of weave around on down to Ballard to the library to check books out.

And then we shopped at a little meat market there at 14th and 70th. I remember my mother sending me for ten cents' worth of beef stew, lean and no fat. The meat man would say, "You tell your mother, Honey, they don't make animals like that, all lean and no fat. There's got to be a little fat."

But you didn't have a car?

Didn't have a car.

Your family didn't have a car.

My father had a car. We had -- always had, that I can recall, was a Chevrolet. And it had isinglass windows, which you snapped in and out. We never had a Model A Ford. Our neighbors did. We never had a Ford; we always had Chevrolets, I remember. And I remember our first car that had automatic windows that you rolled up. And it was a Hudson. And I don't know how we got that. But you wound the windows up and down, and boy, what a change.

My father always chewed tobacco. And with these isinglass windows that would flop at the wind, he'd spit out the window, and we'd, 'cause we were sitting in the backseat, get sprayed with tobacco juice.

What did your dad do?

My father was a lather. That's the wood slats you put on the wall that you plaster to. Before that, I think he tried to be a stevedore down on the waterfront and just a to. General -- I mean, he was a hard-working man. Did anything to earn money. He was a good man. He never drank. He never swore. He never mistreated my mother, very kind.

And he came from family of hard workers, so anything that required hard work, he was willing to do. He was just kind of a self-taught man. If he really didn't know how to do anything, he'd work around and try and experiment until he could do it. He could shingle a house. I'm sure he could build one.

Did he get most of his work here in Ballard or did he have to travel a long distance?

There was an occasion where he had to travel. He worked in -- had to be away from us. He had to work in Bremerton. So he was gone all week and came home

on weekends. That was in order to take care of his family. And that was his pride and purpose was to take care of his family.

Now, you have gone on from school. There's a gap in your education, and then you went to school later to become a nurse?

Well, there isn't really -- well, the gap was with marriage. But as I said before, we were always encouraged to further our education. And we always came up with the idea that we'd go to high school, graduate and go to college. And the promise was that we'd get our first year of college paid by our family, our parents, and then we were on our own after that.

Well, my sister, being the oldest, graduated from high school and she went to the University of Washington for her year. And I don't know why she didn't go on. But she only went that one year. Then my brother was the second, and he graduated. He graduated in the School of Engineering. And then, I, being third, I went, but I only went with the idea that someday I was going to get married.

So that was in 1941 that you started at U-Dub?

Uh-huh, September of '41. And I went the full year. And then after that, I went part time. I attended the university for three years.

What was your major when you were there?

Arts and sciences, dress making and designing. And that's another unique experience that was, I think, even more prejudice in the college. And it was strictly racial. I recall a -- my biology teacher speaking and saying that the Blacks, at that time were Negroes, never advanced beyond the age of seven, that our brains didn't develop beyond that age. And I used to wonder, well, what am I doing in college if I hadn't advanced to seven. But you had to play the game 'cause I've learned that through the years. Life is a game. And in order to get a grade, I had to write down what he taught, whether I believed it or not. And it was composition --

That must have been very bitter?

It was hard. It was hard. And at that time, you know, you were Miss Spearman, you weren't a child. So you didn't come crying home to Mom, like I did when I was in grade school. You'd talk it over, but you'd do the best you could, and you continue on and go on. Don't knock it.

And composition was with Miss Mann (phonetic). That's a teacher, female teacher, an old spinster. I'll never forget her. She used to be a proof writer for the paper. I don't know whether it was the *Seattle Times*, *Seattle Star*, whatever. It doesn't matter.

But she'd take my composition reports, and she'd use this either black or red pen, and she'd cross out words, rewrite, change anything that I had written. There was no way I could correct that paper. I had to rewrite it. And she'd do that continually. That meant that I had to do this four or five times. And I think I got a C or a D. I never got good grades 'cause she was a toughie. And I don't think I shared with other people as to whether they were going through that or not because by that time, I was working. I only spent this amount of time, take my classes at school and go to my job.

What was your job?

That's very interesting. I had a hard time getting a job. Number one, I'm not very tall, never have been. Always looked much younger than what I am. And I think in applying for a job, they thought I was just a little kid. I never got hired. When I finally got something -- I can't remember whether it was my first job or not. I can tell you my first job was baby-sitting, 25 cents an hour. Never got any higher than 50 cents an hour.

But the actual job in a business was in a spring factory. And that was bed springs, where you -- the coils were made. But in order to hold the coils, you had to thread this wire. And that's what I did. And that was on Denny Way near Westlake. I don't know how long I worked there. And then my next job was what they called the chenille operation. It was a power machine.

In fact, I saw the company the other day called the Benco Company. And that stood for Benjamin Colby, short for Benco. And he did athletic award letters and insignias. And I did the chenille. He'd cut them out on felt, and then we'd put the - and this machine went like this.

Kind of around and around

Round, yeah.

And sewed the chenille in?

Yeah, sewed it in. It wasn't hard work. It was boring. And yet, Mr. Colby was a very easy Jewish gentleman, whether that has any significance or not. But he was very kind. The working conditions weren't all that great. It was dirty. But I got my money, and he complimented me on the work. He taught me a lot of little techniques. And it was along the line of my area of interest, sewing. I think that was my last job until I got married.

Did you stay here in Seattle when you got married, or did you leave right away?

I was married in '44, December. And we traveled to San Antonio, Texas, the first week after marriage, because that's where they reassigned Black officers. My husband was a second lieutenant, and he had just returned from overseas. And we had to go to San Anton for his assignment.

How long was it, then, before you came back to Ballard?

Gosh, it was only like three months. He was on his way overseas, again, and I was pregnant.

So you were back to Ballard?

Uh-huh. Back to Ballard.

So that's where your first child was born, at Columbus?

Columbus, uh-huh. Her name is Vivian. We call her Vicky.

As far as being different? Sure, I was different. I was Black. And not only was I Black, but I was dark complected. Black people, or Negroes in that day and time, were different colors, also. And like the flowers that my mother described, and I have alluded to previously, when we were referred to as Colored people, I accepted that because we were all colors. There's the lighter Blacks, the darker, and all of the shades in between.

So that walking in Ballard in a predominantly Scandinavian area where you have your blondes, white skin, blue eyes, naturally I was different. And people would look at me. "Oh, there's a dark cloud." And I never answered to "there's a dark cloud," because my mother always said, "You have three names, first, middle and last. You only pay attention to that."

But certainly, it would make me churn inside. I learned not to be embarrassed. But you can't help but be bothered by it in constantly being pointed out as different. But as I remember, it was mostly boys that did this. I can't remember girls ever pointing a finger at me and calling me a name or making me out to be different. They'd shun me, but they never made any overt, loud retorts. And I think -- just thinking back, that's quite interesting.

Now, my friendships, there weren't that many families or children my age. But the ones that were, and the girl that actually lived on my block was Betty Barrett across the street, three homes down. She's like a year to two years younger than I, but we were good friends. And it's probably because there was no one else around to be good friends.

Her uncles were my uncles, my aunts were hers. We shared -- she'd come and eat at my house. I'd eat at her house. We slept together. We walked to Woodland Park. We had picnics. We did fine until we went to James Monroe, the junior high. I think that's when I started feeling my hurts. And now that I understand what age group that is, I understand why. Everybody's having a difficult time.

Changing hormones.

Yeah, the changing hormones, puberty, the whole bit. And the girls were noticing the boys. They didn't want to be different. They wanted to be accepted. And they certainly didn't want a minority to be their friend if their boyfriends didn't accept them. So I remember, this girl that we'd spent all of our childhood together, and I met her in the hall, and I said, "Hi, Betty." And she didn't answer me.

And I learned a lot. Went home and told my mother about it. She tried to explain. I can't remember what she said. But she says in essence, "Don't speak to anybody until they speak to you, and then you're not hurt." So I learned not to speak until -- or I caught their eyes or some mannerism where I knew that they were going to speak to me first. But when did this change? When we went to Ballard High.

It was just like night and day. I'd see Betty in the hall. "Hi." We weren't quite as friendly, but we did resume the speaking relationship. And I noticed a big difference in everyone else. Now, they didn't ever want to get real close to me, like going places with me, like Betty and I, we'd gone swimming together, and well, like I said, picnics and the whole bit. But that we were on a speaking relationship, and we related in the activities that we did together.

And I was very athletic and belonged to the Big B Club. And I was accepted as to my abilities that I could perform and the talents that I may have had. I think the other area was that we did not have a lot of money. And I don't know whether there were a lot of people in Ballard that had a lot of money. But because we didn't and I was minority, and we had to pinch pennies I felt inferior from that standpoint. But it wasn't racial.

Well, I think in the '30s, everybody was kind of broke.

Yeah, they probably were but maybe not quite as broke. I can't remember when we had -- it wasn't called welfare then. It was something else where we got subsistence and help, food, clothing items. Whether that was the junior high, which was a hard time, or the high school, but I remember how embarrassed I was to have to wear shoes that were given to us.

And I'd look around, and I'd see other people with those same shoes. And we knew where they came from. They were identical. Or some other clothing item. That was hard for me to accept. But I did it.

And then, if I go back to when I was much younger -- just kind of flashing back and forth -- I remember how kind our neighbors were over on 13th. When -- they never really knew that we might have been bad off, but I remember them bringing a basket of food around Thanksgiving with fruit, which was a big item when I was a kid -- oranges were just like gold -- and candy around Thanksgiving and Christmas.

And we've always been, more or less, on a speaking relationship with all of the -- or most of the neighbors in the neighborhood. As I say, we weren't on an intimate, but it was, hi, hello, or some sort of thing like that. Or they just never bothered us.

So there was none of the troubles that erupted like in the '60s, which --

No. The war, and I think the uprising of the '60s probably called my Blackness to people's attention where they had accepted before. Oh, sure, there's some Colored people living on 12th. They're nice people. But once these things started happening, then they began to look at us in a different light.

Was it different for you here, then, too?

Yes.

And for your kids in school?

Uh-huh. Definitely. I remember in the '60s, I had children on campus, and they would just be walking around campus. And they were told to leave. And I remember as a sympathizer, my son was in probably junior high, and he was just there. And a policeman took a billy club and whopped him and said, "Get off the campus." And he wasn't even a student on the campus at that particular time. It was just because he was Black.

But it was a learning experience for all of us because I came up being a Negro and Colored. And it was during that time when we were to change, be Black. That's not very good English. But it was hard for me to change from being Colored, which I accepted, and being a Negro, which I accepted. I didn't want to be a Negra, but I wanted to be a Negro, to being Black.

And I had arguments with my own family. My children told me how old fashioned I was, and I was -- if it had been up to me, that there would be no advancement in the world at all because I would sit back and just accept things as they were, that I wasn't willing to grow. And that was very hurtful. That came from my own children.

Yet you've changed?

I've changed, but not to the extent that they did. And I don't mean my kids, per se, but I mean my race.

But you didn't do it militantly?

No.

You did it intellectually.

Olympic Hotel has been around for years and years. And we were never allowed in the Olympic Hotel, and I never wanted to go in the Olympic Hotel. As far as I was concerned, I could live and die in Seattle and never set foot in it. It didn't matter. They didn't want me there, I don't want to go. My biggest discrimination, as far as places to go, was in Chinatown. The Chinese were the most discriminating people. That's right.

I belonged to the YWCA. I was a Girl Reserve. And every year we had our formal. And this was a time when we, as girls, could ask the boys to take us. And

we dressed up in our formal, we got our little flower. It was a gardenia. And we went to our dance. After the dance, we'd want to go to dinner.

And we'd go down to Chinatown to go to a Chinese restaurant. That was the big thing, big social event. Walk in. We could look over the head of the man in charge. "There's no room. Sorry, we can't take you." There's all kinds of places available. Chinese. Now that's what I remember at...

[Side B.]

...because I went to the Bagdad Theater. I sat any place in that theater I wanted to. I went to the Woodland Theater, and I sat any place I wanted. I wasn't up in the balcony, like my counterparts, themselves . . . We may have had to go to the back. It's funny I can't remember that, so it must not have been significant.

I do remember when I started going with the man that I'm married to now, and that was in the '40s, we were on our way to church -- can't remember the details, but the bus driver or the streetcar conductor got real smart, threatened to put me off. And as he pulled up at 14th and Pine where I was to meet my fiancé, I told Mel, I said, "This man has been very rude to me. He threatened to put me off the bus." Mel grabbed the bus -- the door, and he started up and drove off with Mel still holding onto the door.

But I recall, too, that if there were any infractions, that all we had to do was to take the conductor's number and report him if he was rude. But it wasn't until we were married, and we went to San Antonio, Texas, and we bought first class reservations as far as Denver, Colorado -- I'll never forget that -- we went down to the King Street Station, got first class reservations. And when we got -- I believe it was to Denver, we were asleep in our -- I forgot the terminologies.

Sleepettes or berths?

Berth, yeah. The conductor came, shook the berth, awakened us and said, "We've passed the Mason and Dixon Line, you got to get up." We said, "We got to get up? We have first class reservations all the way in to San Antonio." "No, you've got to get up and go to the Jim Crow car." And I was very nervous because my husband had been overseas, and he was really kind of on edge and -- but we got up, put on our clothes, carried our baggage. And it must have been ten or 12 cars back to the Jim Crow car. And we were discriminated into San Antonio.

Now that was 1944, '45. And when we got there, we always went to the Black areas in strange cities to find housing. We never, ever tried to find housing in any other place. It was just an accepted fact that you go to the Negro area and find out where you could stay.

When you were growing up in Ballard, did you consider that it was very different for you to live here as – different from the Central Area. Did you wonder why your parents moved here rather than to be in the Central area or stay in Rainier Beach?

Rainier Valley?

Or Rainier Valley?

I didn't wonder that until much, much later because I always accepted the reason my mother said that she came was because of better education. She thought the schools were better. It wasn't necessarily, the location, but she always mentioned schools. And I at that time wasn't that aware of whether the schools in that area were that different from where I was.

I had to give much thought to it as a mature person as to why and how they might be different. And so I accepted that. But I still wonder why anyone as social as my mother would come this far and to be this isolated from her friends. I still wonder.

In 1917, that's a long way.

It's a long way. And it took a long time. I mean it was two streetcars. You caught a streetcar to downtown area. You had to catch a streetcar to the Ballard area, and then you got off that streetcar and you had to walk because the streetcar only went to 70th. And you were walking through the woods.

So it was at 70th and 15th?

70th and 14th.

70th and 14th? 14th was the streetcar line?

Uh-huh. That's what they called the end of the line. And I -- as I got older, I -- why? Why would you want to live that far? And yet she thought those people were great. And especially, the professional people. We had, at that time, a dentist -- one Black dentist. We had, I think, maybe one or maybe two Black doctors. We

may have had one Black attorney. I'm not sure, I'm just guessing. I think there was one Black policeman.

This was in all of Seattle, you mean?

All of Seattle. At that time there was only 1300 Negroes in the city of Seattle. What we considered the good Negroes lived north of Jackson Street. Anybody that lived south of Jackson Street, you didn't have anything to do with them.

What about your mother's family, then, in Rainier Valley? Isn't that pretty south?

Yes. Yes. But they didn't live, per se, Jackson Street; they lived in the farm country.

I see.

But that's a good question. That was just kind of swept under the carpet.

Jackson was the tracks, then?

Jackson was the tracks, right. And then, of course, you had your Chinamen down there, too, and Chinatown and questionable behavior in Chinatown. It's really a strange evolution that happened during that time. I can only guess that there was something that happened in my mother's life that caused her -- what I call, run. She was running away from something or hiding from something.

Maybe your mother was part of the pioneer tradition, which in -- Whites in this country is looked upon as pioneer tradition, to keep moving west. That's what happened in my husband's family. And it's not thought strange to get up and move several states away. Your grandparents must have done it from Missouri to here. That's pretty daring.

That's true. That's very true. But if the Rainier Valley was okay for her as a child, why didn't we get property in the Rainier Valley? Or why didn't we -- or maybe, it wasn't available. See, our church is between -- is on Pine Street, between 14th -- no, it's on 14th between Pine and Pike. Maybe we couldn't live there, but we had a church there. And then anything east of there, that was considered the segregated area. That's where the Blacks live. That's the Central area, or Coon Hollow. No, Coon Hollow was really down in the Valley.

Like on Union?

Like down below 29th, 28th, down. It's actually a little valley. And yet my husband's family, they lived in the Madrona area, but that was much later. I don't know. I don't know. Maybe -- there's another factor, though, that maybe this was something that they could afford and live --

Because it was in the country.

Because it was in the country. Now, surprisingly, if I can remember, our home in 1917 cost \$1500. Now, that would probably be equal to your 70 to \$80,000 home now. It was a lot of money. Now what the lot cost, I don't know. Now maybe there was a real smart developer, too, that was trying to build this area up and sought my parents out and talked them into this growing area and offered them a good deal,

And I know that much of the home was completed by my father. It was just a house with two bedrooms, a living room, dining room. There was an indoor bathroom, a kitchen. No basement. I don't know what the lot cost, but it was through the years that my father dug out under the home and put in a basement and added onto the house. But it was just a basic structure that they got.

So did he buy this property then next door separately, or did that come with it?

No, the property that we acquired was what they called tax title property. And it was being sold because of back taxes. And they got it very, very reasonable. And my father and mother, both being progressive people, thought it would be a good investment, and it didn't cost very much. I think it only cost like \$200 --two or \$300.

And what they did -- both lots weren't theirs. The one that my house sits on belonged to my sister. They talked her into buying it in her name. And the other one on the other side, they bought themselves. But my mother considered it her property.

On the north side?

Right. They bought on the north side, my sister bought on the south side. And my mother put it all in flowers. Now, that's another thing that you'd probably like to know. My mother was quite a gardener. And not having to work, she had time on her hands, so she spent a lot of time in the yard. And for the times that my father could, he kept the lawn, cut the lawn.

So our home was admired. We had people coming from miles looking at our home. It was gorgeous. And whenever I'd say I lived in Ballard, "Oh, there's not many Black people in Ballard, is there? But where do you live?" And I'd tell them. "Oh, you must live in that beautiful house. Oh, that garden's just so gorgeous." So we had become to be known as the Blacks with the yard, beautiful flowers well kept.

Did she grow vegetables, too, with those flowers?

Yes, uh-huh. My father and mother always had a little vegetable garden. It wasn't as visible. It was kind of hidden.

Was it enough for the whole year, or was it just vegetables for the summer?

Some was for the whole year, string beans, until canning got to be dangerous. You know, the techniques, and especially green beans, you had to be very careful how you put up string beans, or you got botulism. But I remember sitting in the kitchen watching my mother boil these jars and preparing the vegetables and preparing the fruit.

And that was the funny thing. We always had blackberry bushes that just grew. They were wild. And she'd make blackberry jelly. But sometimes she didn't make it well, and it turned into wine or it didn't set up. And what was embarrassing was to go to school with these sandwiches of peanut butter and jelly, and the jelly had soaked through the bread, and I had these soggy sandwiches. I'm not a sandwich person to this very day.

But no one -- I was the one that kind of hid it and didn't want anybody to see. And I never shared my lunch with anybody 'cause no one would want my sandwiches. But by the time I had my children, I was really cognizant in that you put butter on the bread before you put the jelly, and it didn't soak through.

Well, you didn't have the plastic bag in those days. Of course, a leaky sandwich, you'd have to have wax paper, maybe.

Didn't have plastic. Or paper, just old brown bag. I remember the brown bags.

Did you carry a thermos or did you buy milk at school? Did they have a milk program at school?

Well, I think when we were on what I want to call welfare, but it wasn't called welfare then, we did get our milk. But you see, I lived so close to Whittier, I never had to stay for lunch. I'd come home for lunch. It was only when I moved to junior high or went to junior high that I had to be concerned about a lunch.

And I can't -- well, by that time I think I was baby-sitting. And at 25 cents an hour, I could squeeze out and save maybe two cents, because I think a quart of milk only cost ten cents. You know, it didn't cost very much. And if it was milk that I needed, which I think I did, I thought I -- I think I could always buy the milk and then took my little old dried up sandwich.

And then, by the time I got to Ballard, things had improved to where, I think, there was an occasional time where I could buy a lunch or even run home. And then my mother -- you hear me talk about my mother. She had a great deal of knowledge for a person that wasn't educated in that line. She always thought that a good breakfast was so important. We always had a hot cereal every morning. And that would last. And she said, "If you've got a full tummy, you can learn and be more receptive to learning." So we'd have either oatmeal, cream of wheat or rice. I remember eating rice as a hot cereal in the morning. So that the breakfast and dinner were important meals in our lives, not the lunch.

Did you go visit grandparents and aunts and uncles in Rainier Valley very much?

I only had a grandfather that I can remember, my mother's father. My grandmother died before I -- in fact, she died before my mother was married. And then, my grandfather and my mother's sister and her brothers continued in that family home, which still is sitting there. It's 1807 26th Avenue South. That house is still there. And yes, we did.

My aunt worked in the rich people's homes, like Broadmoor. And she always had -- because those people were really kind to her. If they had a good person to work for them, they were kind in return. And they gave her a lot of extra things. And even trips. She went with them on trips to Europe and other places like that. So that she would -- and having a farm, chickens and so forth, invited us over for -- it was usually on Sunday.

And I remember her going out in the yard, getting the chicken, killing the chicken, feathering it, bringing it in, frying. And we'd have a big chicken dinner. She'd also have us over -- the kids, especially, for breakfast before church. And she had a car. And she drove. My mother never drove. So she'd take us out into the country and drive us around and all around Seattle area.

She was also instrumental in seeing that my bowlegs were taken care of. When I was born and began to walk, I was bowlegged. And I understand now, it's familial, because I've had two children with bowlegs. I have grandchildren with bowlegs. But at that time, the only way they corrected that was through surgery. And I was a patient in Children's Orthopedic Hospital, which was up on Queen Anne Hill. And they broke both my legs and straightened them. And I have scars on my legs.

And I think that's what instilled my interest in nursing, because those nurses were so kind to me. And I remember them doing foot care and bathing me and patting me and doing a lot of things. Even though I was very young, those things I remember. And to this very day, I am fastidious about trimming my toenails and keeping my feet -- and I think that goes back to those years when I had that individual attention, because I don't think there were -- probably the only Black patient in the hospital. And they thought I was cute. And the way my mother described, "They just spoiled you. Those nurses just spoiled you." But I'd say, "They liked me."

And so, it was my aunt that took me up to the hospital without my mother's permission and showed them my legs and said, "What can we do?" And they said, "Well, we'll take her right now," and took my clothes off and kept me.

Instant admission?

Instant. They said, "You got her here just at the right time." It was before my -- the skeletal structure -- and I have to tell you the way they told me -- had completely formed. The bones were still soft. And they said, "This is just -- wait another month, it's too late."

Pretty good. How old were you, then?

I think I was only like a little over a year old, a year and a half. I don't know. I can only guess.

Oh, it isn't like you were four or five, and you got concerned about it --

Oh, no. No, but I remember.

(Continuing) -- the bone ends or something like that?

Yeah. I remember. And I remember when they used to have the parades to entertain the children. And I remember this drum major walking in my room with this big thing up on his head. And I was frightened, and I hid myself under the covers. I remember that. Nobody told me that. And I can see it right now.

How long were you in the hospital for your legs?

I don't know, a week, two weeks. I think they did one leg at a time, and I had to go back.

My goodness. They couldn't do both of them and put you on a double spica like they do now?

Uh-huh. But see, it's funny, my daughter, my oldest daughter, she outgrew hers. I only put special shoes on her. With my son, who's younger than she is, they put his legs in casts, and he wore a splint to bed. And he's still -- he's not bowlegged, he's pigeon-toed. But the kids just kind of outgrow it now. They don't do anything.

So, then, when your aunt -- when you'd take a bus or the trolley down there and then drive in the country, she'd bring you back out here?

Uh-huh, uh-huh. And we always sang that song, "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam, to shine for him each day. In every way try to please him at home, at school, at play." And I remember this. It was a big Studebaker. And it had the hard windows in it. And we'd ride along, singing these songs. And she'd pack the most interesting lunches. It was just a wonderful time.

You didn't get peanut butter sandwiches?

No peanut butter, no soggy sandwiches.

No leaky jelly.

No leaky jelly.

Okay. Well, you have to go, and I have to go. Do you want me to come back another time if you see some more things?

Well, if you want to. I think I've just about told you everything, though.

Okay. Well...

Maybe I should tell you a little bit about after my father -- when my mother and father came to this area, chose the lot and built the home, which is situated on 12th Northwest between now what is 73rd and 75th. All the streets are not in, like 72nd, 71st and so forth. I don't think this was actually a planned area; it just kind of grew. And it was primarily in the woods. And the only homes that I think were here before ours was about four, five at the most in this block, 73rd to 75th.

The streets weren't even in, because I remember as a child when they came in and paved the streets and cemented them so they were roads. And we had -- we were actually outside the city limits. The city limits was 70th. The streetcar came to what was called 14th and 70th, and it was always referred to as the end of the line. The stores that were there, we had to walk from our home at 7334, down the road, across what would be 73rd, through the woods over to 14th and 70th to either catch the bus to go to other areas in Seattle or to shop.

And being the woods, we had -- well, I don't know whether anybody ever sold trees, but we always had a Christmas tree available because they were in the woods. And we'd just pick out our Christmas tree every year some place in the lot. And then, as things started to grow and change, there were homes that would crop up. And it was usually by one builder. He'd come, find an area and he'd put in two or three homes.

And during that time, my father being in the building business, he worked on some of the homes. And I remember watching him work, going down, seeing these houses evolve. And that brought more people into the neighborhood, and that's how things started to change.

And when the streets were paved, what makes me remember they had to keep the cement wet. And they had the sprinklers out. And we'd run out and -- in our bathing suits and run under the water.

Do you remember how old you were when the streets were put in?

I think I was only like four or five.

That recalls a bell. And then there's one other significant thing. There was a Ballard Hospital, always a Ballard Hospital. But I think it was more like over by Salmon Bay Park. I'm not sure. And I remember the ambulance coming to our home and taking my mother to this hospital. And it wasn't until years later, because you didn't tell children what actually went on, but my mother had a

miscarriage after me, and that's when they took her to the hospital. It was Ballard Hospital.

So you might find in your history someplace where this actually -- old Ballard Hospital used to be. I'm not sure where it was.

Different things have moved around.

Well, I remember one home that went up across the street down at the corner. And my father got the job. I don't know whether he was actually a lather at that particular time or whether he was just helping with the construction work. But he allowed me to come down and just kind of walk around and watch. And I'd pick up little pieces of the wood and some of the old nails, and I'd make them into sailboats and play with them -- or little cars.

And his spitting became more knowledgeable to me because I found out why he chewed tobacco. And that's when he actually put the lath on for -- before the plaster went on, and he had -- he threw the nails in his mouth. And I'd watch him reach in this keg. It was a wooden keg. Get the nails, throw them in his mouth. And then he'd grab the lath. And he's pulling the nails out and he's hammering them on there. It was like a rhythm. And then he'd spit.

Well, these nails were covered with a protection to keep them from rotting, and you couldn't swallow it. It was very poison. So it was important that he chew so that he'd have --

Zinc?

Yeah, that's what it was. And he'd spit this out. So I became very, very tolerant of my father's chewing tobacco and accepted that my father was okay because that went along with his work. And my mother didn't understand that. She never did see him work.

My other experience, after I got older, was when my house was being built and my father put the lath and the plasterboard on my house, and I saw him do it in this house. And that's one reason I can't part with it, because it's part of my life, my love, my father.

And down in the rec room, he put in recessed lighting. And I didn't know that he was in his 80s. And it explains why it's not a nice, smooth job, the plastering,

because he was not able to see as well and his coordination was off. But I'll never change it because my father did it.

Both your folks lived out their lives in the house next door?

They died in the house next door.

How old were they?

My father was 86, and my mother was almost -- well, we buried her on her 83rd birthday. And they never had to -- my mother never did go to a hospital as a sick person. She was only in the hospital to have her babies. My father was put in the hospital, Overlake, when he was bleeding. And he had -- we discovered at that time he had cancer of the bladder. But he was only in a week.

Neither one of them ever wanted to go to a hospital. And they didn't really believe in following doctors or having doctors follow them. And I think they did very, very well because they lived what I call a lifetime. Who else would expect to live much longer than 80, anyhow, 80 anything.

What about dental care?

Dental care, they did have -- both my parents had upper and lower dentures. And they did not and could not take care of their teeth. And money was always an item. The crude dental practices were another item, those old drills. And I was a victim, myself, because I had so many children that I had to let my teeth go for their sakes, so that they could have dental care. And I lost my upper teeth. And I wish I had them now because --

Well, your folks got dental care, like in the earlier years. Was there dentists downtown, or was there one in Ballard?

My father went to a doctor in Ballard most of the time. Dr. Fuget right on Ballard Avenue.

Medical doctor or dentist?

Dentist. And when he had his teeth extracted, he went to a dentist. I think Dr. Fuget recommended somebody in the Stimson Building. And I went with him that day to have his teeth pulled out. And other than that, they utilized people right in this area.

(Interruption)

... a Victrola, RCA Victrola, away to a charitable organization when the radios became popular. Get rid of that old thing. And it was --

My cousin did the same.

It was just awful.

I asked about it. She said, "Ooh, I just gave that old thing away."

And it was beautiful. My uncle had bought it for her. And I remember the wood. It was that red mahogany, shone. You lifted up the top. It had the dog, and you wound it up. You had the records.

You lifted the horn?

Yeah, lifted the horn. Yes. We insisted upon that. And I don't know why my parents didn't go up when they remodeled the home and put an upstairs. But they went down when they dug out and made the basement. And that's how we survived with three -- four of us by putting two bedrooms in the basement. My brother had a room, and then my sister and I had a room, and then my younger sister had the other bedroom upstairs. The house was just too tiny. We never would have made it.

But the other significant thing I think about my father, if I tell you where we live and where downtown, I walked with my father from our home all the way down to First and Pike, walked. And then we caught the bus and came home. We only had bus fare --and he was looking for a job -- one way.

That must have been in the '30s then if you were old enough to walk that far.

Yeah. It had to have been. It had to have been in the '30s.

Right in the middle of the Depression.

Uh-huh. It was. I don't really know whether my sister was born then or not. She was born in '32. But I remember walking along with him and not getting tired. He didn't want me to come, but I wanted to go.

That would be six to seven miles, probably?

At least. And then, it wasn't -- you know, it was unconstructed miles, you know. I mean it was kind of zigzag or whatever, because -- well, the Ballard Bridge was there. We did go across the Ballard Bridge. But I don't know what other streets. I don't know when 15th Northwest came through as a thoroughfare because 14th was our main street for years with the bus. And I don't know when 8th Northwest came in as an arterial.

...Ballard area pioneers.

They thought of themselves as pioneers, and you thought of them as pioneers.

Uh-huh. And people -- others did, too. You know, their friends. And some of them have said -- they never criticized my parents for coming out here, but they said it was good for them because they, too, would catch a bus, and it gave them some place to go to come out and visit Vivian and Elihu.

They had -- a lot of people came out to visit you?

They did. My mother had lots of friends. And if they didn't drive, they caught the bus and came out. Spent the day and had lunch.

So people came out to see you as much as you went downtown to see them?

Yes, they did. Yes, they did. Of course, you see, life changed, you know. You don't have the distractions. You didn't have the weekends then that you have now. And I was just thinking back, myself, the weekends were very, very important in our lives because you only worked Monday through Friday. Saturday was a shopping day.

But Sunday was your day to do things and visit. You went to church and you visited. We'd go over to our church, and we'd go to different friends' home over there, or we'd go back home, and so and so would come over and visit us on Sunday. So that when I married Mel, I expected that same tradition to continue. And I missed it because people were beginning to change and they didn't want to visit.

Of course, that was the '40s, though. And everything turned upside down in the early '40s.

Uh-huh. And it changed. But we still had a little bit of it.

How did things change for your dad in the early '40s, or --

They changed for the best because --

Was there more construction, or was there some kind of war work?

He went -- there was some war work where he was working around Fort Lawton. But it was through -- you know, I keep saying this word, welfare, but it wasn't welfare, it was something else where you got the work where they were -- the government, or whoever, was hiring them for this digging ditches and things like that. But the big opening came --

Was that kind of like CCC?

Yeah, kind of.

Except in the city?

Only it wasn't --

In the city?

Yeah. CCC to me, it was more with the youngers -- young ones. WPA. WPA, it came through. There it is, WPA, Works Project Administration. And the expression was "getting out of the miry clay onto solid ground." Also, the unions. When he joined the union, and I remember the big argument, my mother did not want him to join the union. But he insisted. He said, "That's the only way I'm going to make it." And that's how he did. And then he got work through the union as a lather.

And then he was taught to put the plasterboard when they went away from the lath to the plasterboard. And he encouraged my brother. He always encouraged having a trade. College is fine, but you should be able to do something with your hands.

Good.

So my brother helped with this house, too. And I tell my kids that. I've told them all through the years, I've said, "It's fine to go to college, but you should be able to do things with your hands."

I'll show you the quilt my daughter made.

[End of tape.]