

A Community Remembers

Interview: Deborah Taylor

Laura Browder: There's one... And there's the other and now we're recording. And, Deborah, can I ask you to hold this like it was a lollipop.

Deborah Taylor: Ok.

LB: That's perfect. And can we start off by you telling me your name and where you went to high school.

DT: Sure. My name is Deborah Brunson (?) Taylor. I attended Armstrong High School here in the city of Richmond, graduated in the year 1972.

LB: Perfect. Now... why don't we... start by talking about... your childhood? Your family, how you grew up.

DT: Ok. I had, um... uh, an extended family. I was a only child and my mother passed away when I was eleven. And at that point, my aunt and uncle took me in with their other four children. Uh, we were always close anyway. Um, but I became their fifth child. Um, at that time, um, that made them have four girls and one boy... in one household. And we were very very close as children. Um, we... never realized how fortunate we were then. We just assumed that we were just typical everyday kids. Um, both my aunt and my uncle worked full-time. Um, my uncle worked in the post office. My aunt started working for the school system... and later she worked at the, um, dietary department at Saint Mary's Hospital... when they first opened up. So we were, um, very close. Uh, we all attended public schools. We all were high school graduates which was, um, a norm. That's a necessity in our family. Both, um, parents -- my aunt and my uncle -- were high school graduates. Um... my mother, uh, deceased, had a certificate in, um, before she passed away, she was a dietician. So my whole family were, um, pretty strong in education.

LB: What neighborhood did you grow up in? Where--where did you live with your parents, first of all?

DT: Um, we lived in Church Hill. My grandparents lived on Nine Mile Road, at the corner of 25th and Nine Mile Road. Um, my mom and I lived in the Marshall -- between Broad and Marshall Street, growing up. And then my aunt and uncle lived not far from us, we were in the Chimborazo area. We lived off of 37th--well, *on* 37th Street. In the, uh, east end of the city of Richmond. So most of my life has been in Church Hill.

LB: Ok, and for years I've lived at 33rd and Marshall. My husband still has his workplace there. We used live a--above it and now we live on Libbie Terrace, so... I know all the places you're talking about [laughs].

DT: [Laughing] ok. Yeah, so. Um, all of my adult--well, childhood was in Church Hill. Um,

my mom's sisters, they all lived in Church Hill. Um, not far from each other. I--sort of like a nucleus. My grandparents' home was the nucleus for the family.

LB: And that was your mother's parents.

DT: Yes. Mm hmm. My father was in the military. He and my mother were not together. Um, he traveled a lot, but his mother -- my paternal grandmother -- lived in, um, Church Hill as well. She lived on 32nd Street. And, um, so... growing up, Church Hill was basically all I knew.

LB: Tell me about Church Hill when you were growing up.

DT: Growing up, I remember the viaduct. Which is no longer in the city of Richmond. It was a wooden bridge that connected, um, Church Hill, East End, to downtown Richmond. Um, you could see people walking the viaduct daily. Uh, those who didn't ride--rode--*ride* the bus, walked across the viaduct. Um, underneath the viaduct, which I recall... as a child, we were told was the Church Hill, uh, caves. Um, I was told as a young child that my great-grandfather used to work down in that, uh--the part that caved in. And he didn't work that particular day that the cave-in happened. He was home with the flu. And, um, so we were always familiar with the caves, or the, um, railroad that went underneath the viaduct. As children, we were always taught that Granddaddy survived that day because he was sick, didn't go to work. But I remember the viaduct, walking across. Really, my parents didn't like us to walk across but we would save our bus money... and walk across the viaduct.

LB: So I've never heard of the viaduct before. So where did it go from and--cuz I--I know exactly where that train tunnel cave-in is.

DT: Ok. The viaduct went from... 21st, uh, and... um, I wanna say Marshall and VEnable, right where that, uh, intersection is. And it went all the way across that area. And it ended across at MCV, uh... right where now, I guess would be where the Massey Cancer Center is.

LB: Ok.

DT: That--that stretch was what we used to call the viaduct. When you go across that end, you were at the bottom of Saint Philips. Well, it used to be Saint Philips or E. G. Williams, one of them.

LB: But then it continued up in to Chimborazo?

DT: Uh...

LB: Or--or near there?

DT: No. Near that.

LB: Yeah.

DT: The viaduct was just the connector, um, from Marshall to downtown.

LB: Ok.

DT: Right.

LB: That's interesting. So what was your neighborhood... like. I mean, you had so many relatives around everywhere... What--what are some of your memories growing up?

DT: Um, my memories of my best friend, um, lived directly across the street. We went to elementary school together -- Nathanael Bacon. All the way to high school. Through Armstrong. A lot--now kids don't have that bond. But my best friend lived across the street. Uh, she now lives in Greensboro. Um, but, my neighbors, uh--we were all friends. We all grew up together. Um, even my older siblings' friends were our friends. They--we--they looked out for us younger... kids. Um... my neighbors on 38th Street, we also played together. We used to go to the playground in the summertime, play four-square and baseball. We did the normal kid things. However, we, uh--our families depended on each other to make sure that the kids were safe. Uh, if we all went to the playground together, we had to come back together. So it was a--a--a bond in our--in our neighborhood.

LB: It sounds like a nice way to grow up.

DT: It was. It was. And, uh, most of the people that we came out of high school with, we still are in touch with each other. Either our parents still live there or... used to live there, they're de--maybe deceased, but that--that was the norm, that you would see your neighbors and wave at them and... walk to school together, and play together and if you're not home, then your mom knew to call who else's mom to find out where you were.

LB: Are your aunt and uncle still alive?

DT: My aunt is. My uncle passed away, uh, six years ago. From, um, brain cancer.

LB: Is your aunt still in Church Hill?

DT: She's still in the same house.

LB: Wow

DT: ... in Church Hill. Um, my brother lives with her. And, um... her neighborhood has changed a lot, um... Our best friends' mom is still in her home. Uh, one of her sisters lived with her mother. Uh, they're both up in age. Um, there are some... I consi--they're

about still four neighbors... that are, as I call, original neighbors. Uh, I do remember when my aunt and uncle first moved into that home. It was still a--a mixed neighborhood. There were still white people living... in--in that area of Church Hill. Now, um... it's kinda changing back again. Uh, sh--the neighbors to her right are white. The house next to her is vacant. But the... third house down is still the original lady. Um, and her daughter, still living in that home. So it's... it's... evolving, I guess you could say.

LB: It is. I mean, I've been in Church Hill for eighteen years now?

DT: Mm hmm.

LB: ... and it keeps changing.

DT: It does. It does. And we were, uh, one block away from East End School. Which is now... think it's Franklin Military Academy. And I can remember we used to roller-skate. Cuz that was an all-cement area. If you had not roller-skated before, that was where you learned to roller-skate.

LB: [Laughs]. When you go to Church Hill now, how does it look different from when you grew up?

DT: They... um... houses are not as well-kept, maintained. There's a lot of blight. Um, we don't--/don't see the pride of, um, maintenance. And I guess -- a lot of it is rental property. Some of it, um, you know, the--residents are older. There unable to maintain. And then a lot of the structures haven't been maintained, and... for, I guess, lack of ownership. You know, but I--I just don't see the pride.

LB: No.

DT: Yeah.

LB: I'm surprised to hear you say that it was an integrated neighborhood back then, cuz I think of Richmond as being so... segregated--

DT: Yeah.

LB: ... at that time.

DT: Yeah, I can remember, um... one side of Chimborazo was altogether black, and one side was still integrated. And a lot of, um... I don't know, I guess a lot of people just assumed that that portion of church hill was all black, but there was still some whites still living in that area, and I recall -- and maybe now -- there was, uh, two white families on Oakwood Avenue. And I believe that older lady's still on the corner in that house. I don't know whether--it's just generational. But I can recall that they never moved out.

LB: It's unusual for the time that we're talking about.

DT: It is.

LB: It really is. Um... when--what was--what was Richmond as a city like when you were a child -- when you left your neighborhood?

DT: Um...

LB: What do you remember about Richmond?

DT: As a child, I remember, uh, back then, um... city council changing. I remember Henry Marsh running for, uh, council seat and mayor. And he being a close personal friend of my parents because they would remind us, 'well, you know he lived on P Street.' We'd go by the house and my dad would toot and wave. And, uh, them speaking of people like, um, Doug Wilder used to grow up with them, so we were used to these people as being people. People that Daddy knew. People that Mama knew. You know, they weren't, quote, the mayor, the governor. They were people to us. Um, I remember, um, going to school with just black kids as I mentioned once that... I had never been to school with white kids until high school. My elementary school days were fun. We *walked* to school. We walked across the field to East End, um, to Nathanael Bacon. And going outside of our neighborhood to school was... just something we didn't--we weren't used to. We took--we had neighborhood schools. We went to East End. And we went to Nathanael Bacon. Uh, my young--my older sisters went to George Mason. Because Nathanael Bacon, when we moved into that area, was a white school.

LB: I didn't realize that.

DT: Yes. Yes. Nathanael Bacon was a white school. My older sisters went to George Mason.

LB: Where was George Mason?

DT: George Mason is... um, at... 28th and P?

LB: Ok.

DT: The field right there where the--

LB: Yes.

DT: ...reservoir. That school was George Mason.

LB: Ok.

DT: I don't know if it's still there now or not.

LB: I don't know that it is.

DT: I don't know, but that's where it--that was the black elementary school.

LB: So I'm trying to do the arithmetic now -- you would've been born around 1955?

DT: -4. '54.

LB: -4.

DT: 1954.

LB: So when you went to elementary school, was--you went to a school that had been all white--

DT: Yes.

LB: And then, when you went, it was all black.

DT: Yes.

LB: Right, because that was the year that everything flipped really quickly.

DT: Exactly. Exactly. In Church Hill, yes. And I remember, um, catching the bus, going downtown. Um, that was a treat for us. Um...

LB: What did you like to do downtown?

DT: There was a store on the corner called Grant's. They had the best hot dogs [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: And that was a treat. Grant's Hot Dog. And they also sold peanut brittle. And my grandma used to like peanut brittle. So we would go with, uh, make the excuse that we were getting it for Granny. And we'd also get some for ourself. And we would take it to Granny later on Saturday. And say, "Oh, yeah, I been downtown. Yeah, we went to Grant's, and we bought you some peanut brittle." Um... we use to remember--I remember the Christmas parade. That was always a big deal. But at that time in Richmond, there were always two parades. There was the harvest parade, which was the Tobacco Festival. Which, uh, was during the fall. And that was always right at the beginning of football season. And the high school bands, we would always wait because at the end of the parade were the black schools, and here comes the two marching bands and the majorettes. And then in the winter, in December, we would always have the Christmas parade. With the big Santa Claus from, um, Thalhimer's or Miller & Rhoads, I can't remember which. But as children, we looked forward to that, sitting in

the street with our blankets and just waiting and waving. And I don't see that anymore. I remember taking my son to the Christmas parade and it wasn't quite the same thing.

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: Nah. But we would sit out there, but there was never--he never got a harvest parade. So they discontin--they stopped doing that in the city. Um... some other things I remember, um... there was always Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads, the big... two hub of shopping. I remember when Thalhimers had the separate bathrooms.... for whites and black. Um, I remember I had an aunt who used to work in Miller & Rhoads Tearoom, and she was maybe one of the first blacks... to work, um... work the cash register, um, there. And, um... but those are some of the things that I can still remember very well. Um, growing up Richmond. I remember the old City Hall. Which, um, when we... would come downtown, that was such a structure. Um, and I always thought it was just so huge. But now working downtown, it's just a normal building, *now*, you know. It's not used for that, but I always thought that that was such... a *huge* building. I can remember when they built City Hall. Um, I believe that was, like, in '72. When we first came out of high school, that--that building was pretty new there.

LB: Do you remember when you started to notice changes taking place in Richmond? Because you grew up during an era of *such* incredible change.

DT: Yeah... um, I think noticing the change, maybe, when you're going to school, you know, you--y--uh... preferably more so when we went to middle school, junior high school. Um, things changed, um... a lot of our friends or--they went to different schools, which you were like, why you gonna go that school? Your sisters went here. You know? The opportunity to go to Chandler. Um, Norrell. Uh, which, you--we weren't used to people going outside. You know, you lived in Church Hill, you went to school in Church Hill. Um, or parents moving away from our area, you know. It was like, my friend is gone, where are they going? You know. You--you didn't understand the concept of moving--moving up. You know. Um, 'you've always lived here!' You know. 'Why your mama wanna take you on that side of town?' You know, but, as an adult you understand those things now. But then it was like, wow, they're taking your friend away. You know. Um, those type of changes, I guess people were getting better jobs. And they were able to do better for their families. Uh, I remember going to school and, um... when the school changing, uh, we never got, uh, a sixth grade graduation because they cut off, uh, the sixth grade. You're just gonna go on over to the middle school because it's changing. And then when we got to the eighth grade, we didn't get a ninth grade graduation because ninth grade was going into high school. They changed the role (?) in high school... um, I remember my brothers and sister didn't go to high school until tenth grade. We went to high school in ninth grade. That was like, we didn't get a graduation from elementary school, we didn't get a graduation [laughing] from middle school. But those were the things that changed, to me in my life, you know, the--the--the things that related to school.

LB: And your aunt and uncle stayed put in Church Hill.

DT: Yes. Yes.

LB: Did you all talk about where you would go to school? Or was it just... understood that...

DT: It was understood.

LB: Yeah.

DT: We had no conversation. It was understood.

LB: Yeah.

DT: Yeah. Pretty much. Um, when busing came about in the, uh... ninth and tenth grade... there was no question for us. We knew we were going to Armstrong. Um, there was concern because when they were drawing the boundaries, that we may have had to go to another school. But... the subject was wherever they send you, that's where you're going.

LB: Because I interviewed, um, someone -- Royall Robinson--

DT: Mm hmm.

LB: ... who grew up in Church Hill, and he went to Wythe--

DT: Ok.

LB: ... for high school.

DT: Mm hmm.

LB: You know, again, the same time period, but he was zoned a little bit differently.

DT: Different, right. I had a friend who lived... on... Mechanicsville Turnpike. And half of them went to Maggie Walker. I think that area may have been split up three different ways. Um, Maggie Walker, John F. Kennedy, and Armstrong. So, I--the boundaries there--and then there were still some whose parents wanted them to go to certain schools so they made it happen. Yeah.

LB: So was there a tradition in your family of going to Armstrong?

DT: Um, my uncle went to, uh... Armstrong--no, both of them went to Walker. Only the kids--all of us went to Armstrong, yeah. [Laughs.] So our household was divided back in the day when they used to have the Armstrong-Walker classic, the two adults were for Walker and all the kids were for Armstrong, yeah.

LB: [Laughs.] Did you still get to sit together or did you split up in the stands?

DT: Um... they never went with us to the games. We--that was the one time that we were allowed, um, the older ones had to take care of the--the--the younger two. Um, we always went to the Armstrong side. We were allowed to catch the bus. We had a curfew to be back home. [Laughs.] So that was the one time that we could go out with--without the adults but we had to be back at a certain time.

LB: Now what was Armstrong like when you were there, because that was a time when the school was changing so much, I would think.

DT: Um, it was different. Um, well... not really different, they... still had the same principal, Mr. Peterson, who had been the principal at Armstrong for years. Mr. Peterson was still the principal there when we went there. Um... he had... two assistant principals, which--I'm thinking, at that point, that was new. Normally, they only had one assistant principal. And... um... the administration probably changed, um... thinking back, I--you know, probably didn't pay attention to who was in the office. Um, but, I think they tried to integrate the administration. He may have had--I think he had a white assistant principal, and then a black... um, one of each. And, um... the staffing changed, the teachers changed... Um, we as I stated with one, um... we had never had white teachers at Armstrong. Uh, that was a norm--well that... was a first. And s... and--in that, '68, '69. Um... th--uh... they... probably was, um, transitioning--I don't know whether they were coming from other schools within the city. Just never paid attention to that. But that was the big difference.

LB: What do you remember from Armstrong -- were you involved in extracurricular activities?

DT: Yes, that was a must in my household. You must be involved. Um, we were involved in church, school... um, outside, um, I... joined the dance group. Um, I was in modern dance. I did, um... I remember being in the french club, and the science club, but, um... in high school, I was in modern dance. I wasn't--too short to be a ch--uh, majorette. Tried out. Too short. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: Even though I took dancing outside -- my parents sent me to dancing school, but I just--was too short to fit in a uniform. Um, but I did modern dance. Um, up until the time... I believe eleventh grade I got a part-time job. So...

LB: Where did you get a job?

DT: Um, I got a part-time job at Saint Mary's hospital, carrying trays after school. Um, and I worked during the summer time as many hours as I could. But that was, um, a part-time job to pay for seniors--you know, when you get into your senior year, the--the--

uh, cap and gown, the ring, prom, senior dues, and--with four chil--four other children in the household at that time, my two older sisters were in college. So, you kinda knew that if you wanted some of the other things, you had to kinda get out there and work for it. So, I took, um... uh, went to work at Saint Mary's. But prior to that, when I was in... um... junior high school, I used to work at a beauty shop on Fridays, Saturdays, and--Fridays and Saturdays, washing hair. So I always had a little part-time job. Babysitting was not my thing. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: So I worked at a beauty salon on, uh, Fridays, uh, after school and all day on Saturdays. Um, with a little tip jar... and everything.

LB: I imagine that, as a junior high school student, that must've been an eye-opening experience.

DT: It was [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: It was. Um, I worked for an older lady. And she was, um... a really, I guess she was a big beautician in the city. So she, um, had these clients that would come in and they would, uh, 'Aw, the little girl.' And they put my little tip jar, I'd be like, [high voice] "Oh, thank you!" [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: But it--it was--it was interesting to see women coming into cuz we couldn't afford to go to the beauty shop wi--with four kids, you know. We--my mom did our hair in the kitchen. Um, but, um, you hear ladies talking and--and that was my first experience of beauty shops. So, that, um, that was interesting.

LB: Cuz I imagine that they talk about everything.

DT: [Simultaneously] Everything. People, places, and it--and--this was how I found out, um, a lot of things that, you know, your parents don't talk about in front you. But ladies would be talking about what's going on at this church, or what's going on in this block and, uh, who's seeing who and I'd be like, "Mom, did you know--" "You're not supposed to be listening to those people." [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: But it was fun.

LB: I bet it was. So when you think back on... high school, uh, what are--what are your memories of your education during this whole period?

DT: Um, very strict. Um... we took education seriously. Um, particularly, I think, the time period that we were growing up in, you *knew* the only way you were going to be... successful, or make it in life, was to have an education. We knew and had seen enough with--to me, with family members who didn't complete high school... uh, what it's like to struggle just to, you know, keep a roof over your head, food on the table. Um, I've always believed that, you know, more is caught than taught. So if you can see what's going on and I kinda instill... instill that in myself and in, um, my home more, you know -- you don't have to... just pretend that things don't happen. So to me, education--and in our family, it was important. As I said, all--all five of us completed high school. Um... I remember going to Armstrong, being afraid of the english teacher Ms. Bettis (?). She had a reputation of being very, very strict. And Ms. Bettis was one of the best teachers anybody could ever have. She taught outside of the norm for, um, an english teacher. She made us read Shakespeare. She made us recite Shakespeare. And, during... my senior year, I was in honors english. And I'll never forget, stating, "I am not gonna pass honors english, cuz Ms. Bettis is gonna kill me." But... it was interesting. Uh, we were prepared--she prepared us for college. Whether we went--or not. You cannot say you were not prepared. I don't believe, um... I don't know if english is taught that was today. Um, she was a strickler [sic] for pronunciation. She was a stickler for being able to stand up straight when you talk. This--and she was a little short lady. But she would put the fear of God in you. I remember that. Ever so much. I think Ms. Bettis instilled a lot in a lot of people... and she probably didn't realize it. You know, by just being the strict disciplinarian that she was. I remember that, um, I remember having taken, um, my first black history course... in Armstrong. With, um... oh, I can't remember his name now. But he used to... uh, this teacher taught history. And he used to announce the football games after school, you know, for the classics. And I remember a lot about the camaraderie of the students. We used to have pep rallies before the games. There was a lot of pride in our football teams. Um, there was a lot of pride in the way that we represented it--our school. And I don't--you know, today, I don't know if the kids even understand what that's about. Being proud of--of where you are, and who you are, and especially representing yourself outside... of the school.

LB: I think that is something that's really changed, when I talk to people who graduated when you graduated, and around there. So many people talk about that.

DT: That pride.

LB: That pride.

DT: Yeah. And we had school pride. We were proud to say, you know, uh, "Yeah, I went to Armstrong," or "yeah, we go there, we--" you know, pep rallies and--and things like that... I don't think they do that anymore. I remember we used to have sock hops in the gym.... last time a kid talk about a sock hop. Um, we used to pay twenty-five cents and we'd have a DJ and we'd dance in our socks in the gym [laughs]. Wow, I don't know where that came from [laughs.] But we had sock hops, um, to raise monies for the student council. That was the way, um, we was to have fundraisers and we'd have a

sock hop after school.

LB: Now when you think back on that time--cuz clearly you have so many memories--

DT: It's coming out [laughs].

LB: It's wonderful! Um, what are some of the interactions that you had with fellow students or teachers or administrators that really stand out in your mind?

DT: I think our teachers and administrators felt the pride in their jobs. They did not mind staying late. Um... they took pride in what they did. And, you know, a lot of times it--I don't think it is now so much the money? We have teachers, uh, or there are teachers where money is foremost. You know, back in--in--in that time, I believe... there was pride in what you did, you wanted it to be--represent you as well as the school. Um, we had teachers who didn't mind, um, staying back, um, putting up funds, uh, if this child didn't have lunch money, uh, they... ju--it was just something that they did. I remember, we had a teacher who would c--who came by the house because my sister didn't come to school. And wanted my dad to know what she was doing, you know, or to ask that question. So I'm not really sure that a lot of the people have that, um, intuitive today.

Someone in background: Do you guys have a water fountain or bathroom...

DT: Through there... So, um... I don't--I--you know, the teachers, I just think that--and the administrators... uh, they would be at school for hours, after--you know, after classes are gone. And I guess now it's a, you know... it's about, um, sticking to a contract or whatever. I--never even heard a teacher talk about a contract back in that--you know, those days. Uh... they weren't concerned about, am I gonna get paid--at least they never... you never heard it vocally. But it was a forethought, you don't know. Yeah.

LB: How about interactions with your fellow students?

DT: Mm...

LB: What sticks out in your mind?

DT: We all knew each other. You know, it's nothing they--ver--very seldom you went to the hall didn't know who somebody was. You might not speak to them because they were older. But you knew they were from that side of town or the lived around the street. You know. You knew who was in your school. Um, even when we bused, um... you knew the kids that... I would say, you knew which kids got on a certain bus because they announced the bus and you paying attention, who's getting up going on that bus. So you knew, um--I think we knew who belonged in the school and who didn't belong in the school. There was no need for the security that they have today. You knew if somebody was out of place. Um, I think it's just, um... just knowing who's in the environment. Um and even with the busing, you--you became familiar with the faces.

Um, you might not know everybody's names. But you knew the faces because of the way, uh, the classes were, even when we came in in the mornings, we'd go to our lockers. I don't know if kids still have lockers today or not, but, you know, you'd talk around the locker, you're waiting, um, for the buses or whatnot. And you pass these people, in and out, so I think that's a difference.

LB: It's definitely a difference.

DT: Yeah.

LB: But I imagine during seventy... or se--seventy--seventy-one, seventy-two when busing was going on. There'd be a number of white kids coming to the school. Right?

DT: Yeah. In Armstrong, they were, uh--the whites were bused in. As I said, *we*... those of us who lived in the, uh, East End area, we stayed in Armstrong. The white kids were bused to Armstrong. Most--some of them, I believe, came from, uh, Williamsburg Road, Fulton Bottom.

LB: Mm. Mm hmm.

DT: I believe some came from the south side. Um... I'm not sure--was very few that may have come from the west end, um, but the majority of the whites who came to Armstrong were from, um, Fulton area. Uh, the f--uh, lower Williamsburg Road, and... um, from Southside. We had, um... they weren't very active... in school activities. We had, uh--I remember a white guy serving on our city council. Uh, student council. And, um... Armstrong had the first, um, Miss--uh, white Miss Armstrong as a runner-up. They stepped out, you know. And--and the ones who wanted to be active were active. I'll just say that. And we knew them because they were always, you know, being vocal and forefront. And as I said, we had a--our first runner-up--runner-up for Miss Armstrong in '72 was a white girl. And we had a--a student council representative, uh, was a white guy. And his name was Robert Maxi (?). And, um... they were very active. But those were the only two names that you ever really saw--

LB: Wow.

DT: ... over and over again. So...

LB: How many white students were there? I mean, it--it wasn't like half white, half black--

DT: No.

LB: ... or anything like that. Was it?

DT: No. They were in the minority.

LB: Yeah.

DT: But still, the activities were there. Uh, we had an after-school activity bus... that would take students. So it was a matter of, if you wanted to, you know, you could--

LB: And most did not.

DT: And most did not. And I don't know whether it was for--from fear. Um... or just... lack of interest. Because they were forced to go there. It never dawned on me what school they would have gone to if it hadn't been for busing. I... would assume they would've had to catch a bus somewhere. So...

LB: I would think so.

DT: Yeah.

LB: Now... when you think back on this era, can you give me an example that you experienced of good leadership, and an example of leadership that was not so good. And you can take that question *anyway* you wanna take it. In school, out of school...

DT: Good leadership. Um... I wanna say my first, uh, growing up, would be when Henry Marsh... ran for, uh, the mayor. For the city of Richmond. The first black mayor. Um... I thought his leadership at the time... was excellent. Um... to have to step forward in that era... and to maintain, uh, the city government, um, that he had to. And to keep it, um... going. You know, um, to me, that--that took a lot of courage. Um, from somebody from that era. Um, I would say... not so good leadership... um, I think the school system failed us at that time. Um, I don't think they... they were too--I'm not gonna say it was the school system, it was maybe just... the... government as a whole. Trying to make things right by numbers. You know. Cuz that's what it was about. It was about numbers. I don't think the way they went about busing, um... to me was a--a poor decision at the time. I understand, um, separate-but-equal wasn't working. But... the way they, uh, did the numbers for drawing the busing--I don't think that was done, uh, fairly.

LB: How--how do you think, looking back, it should've been done?

DT: I don't know [laughs].

LB: I mean, I--I know it's--it's a--it's a hard question, but...

DT: Um... I think you--basically first, maybe should've gotten input... from the neighborhoods. And maybe input from the teachers. Uh, I don't know if they had input on where they could teach. And a lot of--you know, a lot of teachers may not have wanted to be where they were. And to me, when somebody's not where they are, wanna be, they don't give their best. Um, but, I'm thinking that that whole busing could've been done, um... differently. I don't know how. Maybe input... from those who were in the system itself. I don't think the school system had that much input in the... the

procedure. You know, they to make the numbers balance. And it's not--all the time--it's not all about the numbers. Um, and but that's what the whole, to me, the whole thing was about was numbers. So...

LB: Mm hmm. Now... how were the changes that were going on in Richmond at this point discussed in your home?

DT: We didn't discuss it.

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: As I said, we just did.

LB: Yeah.

DT: Um, I don't, um--the only discussion... we ever may have had was achievements. Um, like when, um, Mr. Marsh became the mayor, we discussed achievements of that. Um... we discussed, um, Martin Luther King and--and what all that was. And we discussed, basically, our parent--my parents did ask us, you know, do you want to go to school. You know. So, if you want to go, then you can go. My brother, it wasn't that much of a choice, you either went to school or you went in the Army. Because at that time the draft was out. So he knew... he didn't have a choice. If he didn't go to school, he was gonna get drafted. He went to school and he still got drafted. So... um, th--you know, he had a double-edged sword there, cuz he went to school, he went to college for a year. But because he was in ROTC, he was drafted. Yeah. So, um, those were the--I think were the only things we basically discussed. Um, I have to say, my parents weren't so... I remember, um, my mom--we would always have to have dinner ready. The girls would--that was our thing. We had to have dinner ready by the time she got off that *bus* in the evening. And of course, you know--kids, we play around. You know, until we knew it was five minutes before that bus came down that hill [laughs]. You know. So it wasn't a lot of, um, table talk. Uh, w--dinner time, we would discuss if you had homework... um, you know, does anybody need to help you. And there was a lot of that because we had around table. Our dinner table was round. So after you ate, you clean off the table and we all sat and did homework. So it was up to the older... ones to help us younger ones with our homework if we didn't understand. And my older sister would always say, "Well, who helps us?" [Laughs.] My mom would say, "Well, I can draw a picture, you know, but other than that, don't ask." But those were the only basic conversations we had. And it was about homework or current events. Nothing, you know, like I said, it was, if you wanna go to school, you can go to school. But you must finish high school.

LB: What were some of your personal turning points growing up?

DT: Um... Personal turning points.... I'm going to say, um... I remember when I went to, um, East End, which was, um... the middle school. And... I had a phys-ed teacher. Um, and she introduced me to sports that I didn't think girls did. Um, we played archery. Didn't think--never had that. Never thought that as a sport. We did, um... field hockey.

Never saw that. And I think that opened my eyes to things that weren't just, um, for white girls or things that girls didn't do. I never saw a girl shoot a archery bow. Until I was showed how to do it. Then all of the sudden I'm looking in magazines and I'm saying, "Oh, I know how to do that." Um... all I knew was dancing. And I thought that that was gonna be my way out of this world was I was gonna become a dancer. Um, even though I wanted to be Tina Turner, but, um... [laughs].... That wasn't happening. Um, but I only thought, um, my way of expressing myself was through dance. Um, and then, when I got to high school, and... I realized that I was real into hi--black history. And I wanted to be a black history teacher. And my turning point in life was when we had a science teacher come in and say, "I have scholarships for earth science. You all are in honors--" We were in honor--earth science. He had scholarships to Virginia State University for geology and earth science. And the majority of our class got scholarships. So the turning point was when I realized I wasn't gonna become a dancer. And I wasn't gonna study black history. I was going to study earth science, geology..... Not that that was what I wanted to do. But I have also understood it was a struggle for my parents to pay for my college education. Cuz they already had two other kids in college. And one coming out the same time as me. So I realized then if I wanted to go to school, I had to take that... scholarship. I studied geology for four year, Virginia State. And realized that was not my calling in life. I enjoyed nature. It did bring out the nature buff in me. I *love* nature. I... went on a rock climb. I went down to the Appomattox River, identified rocks. Then one day, the instructor said, "Your next course is gonna be... um... mapping." Where we're gonna go out in the field and we're gonna draw a map from the rough, and I'm like, "Oh, no, not me!" [Laughs.] This is it! So at that point I put in to transfer, had no idea what I was gonna transfer to. I knew I could not go home without a plan. Because that was gonna be your first thing is asking me, what are you gonna do, who's going to pay for it. So the turning point was, I had to learn how to have the answers before the questions came. So I think that was my t--uh--these things in my life, I had been given some doors. But I had to... learn how to... put them in order. And to me, that was, I think, my becoming an adult. Um, I had to accept the responsibility for what I wanted to do. I took the scholarship. But that was not what I wanted to do. It opened my eyes to some things, but, you know, um... I still have not gotten to that point in life to doing why I *truly* want to do. Now I'm at that stage of life where I can weigh those things and say, well I did this, I've done that. What's my heart telling me to do now? So...

LB: What is your heart telling you to do now?

DT: Right now, my heart is saying, I want to work in the community. I, um... volunteer for a breast cancer group now. Uh, Sister's Network, an African American survivorship group. And I like talking to people outside--making them aware of, uh, choices that, uh, you know... there are things--you don't have to not have health insurance, there are programs out there. So I like going out and making people aware. Um... I like to help people to see that they can uplift themselves, you don't have to depend on somebody to uplift you, but that comes from within. So I'm stuck between, um... going back and getting a--an additional degree... to work in the community, or do I want to just go work in the community as it is.

LB: But now I'm still in suspense--

DT: [Laughs.]

LB: ... from after that first year at Virginia State. What happened next?

DT: I transferred. I--as I tell people now, I understand the plight of a college student. You don't know what you wanna do. I tell people now, don't--don't get mad at your children. I went from Virginia State, I transferred to J. Sargent Reynolds was opening up. I transferred to J. Sargent Reynolds. Went there for two years. Uh, got a, uh--didn't even get the associate, but I took transferred courses. Because I wasn't sure. Um, I knew I wanted to--I *thought* I wanted to be an occupational therapist. At that time, VCU had very few blacks... in that field. There was only one black female, Claudette Black McDaniel (?). And she was in, um--I wanted to do what she did. And I applied to the school. I also applied to East Carolina University because they had an occupational therapy.... My parents couldn't afford to send me there. I only got eight hundred--I'll never forget, I got eight hundred thirty-five dollars, which was not [laughs]... gonna pay for room and board at East Carolina University. So that was out. Um but VCU, the application required a picture. That was back then. And I knew what that picture was for. So I got very discouraged. And I did not pursue it. Um, right now I am thinking about their masters program in occupational therapy. Um, but I transferred from J. Sargent Reynolds to VCU and the school of rehab services, so I have a bachelors degree in rehab services. And I think that's where that help field, you know, that comes out in me. Um, I did work, uh, in that, uh... I worked for the state library for the blind as the, uh... volunteer coordinator for--through a special program back then. The government had cedar programs, which were government educational--well, government employment programs that, uh, they funded monies through. And I worked in the cedar program for the state library for the blind for.... uh, a year a six months, I believe. And what I did was recruit volunteers for their reader taper services. Um, that job gave me the opportunity to go to the Library of Congress and to see their library reader taper services. I learned a lot, um, on how to recruit volunteers, so the job in itself helped me. Um, from there, I, um... got married, then I went to work for a bank [laughs]. But I lived in New York a year. Left my husband. Um, I, worked, um, there at an insurance company. So my background has always been--kinda been a customer service related, uh, area, or talking to people. Uh, so right now I've been with the city of Richmond--we moved back from New--from New York back to the city of Richmond. And I've been, uh, with the city for twenty-one years.

LB: Wow. That's a long time!

DT: [Laughs.] Yeah. I'm not ready to retire. [Pause.] Can't afford to retire. [Laughs.] Long story short: I can't afford to retire.

LB: Well, and... and you're not even sixty.

DT: No.

LB: So.... So those were some of your big personal turning points. What did you see as turning points in your school?

DT: Um, Armstrong? I think that... they didn't--well... I don't know whether they had.... First I remember Mr. Peterson... retiring. He had been, um... an--a--a--anchor at Armstrong for years. When he retired, uh, I believe when we came out, uh, there was, um, a white principal, Mr. Geiger, if I'm not--if I'm calling it right. I believe he took over. And I don't think, you know, when you're having outsiders come in, you don't get that support of your staff. I--um, as a--as a younger person, you--I'm--you know, you don't pay attention to it, you know. They're just people. Um, but when you think back now, uh, he probably didn't have the support of his staff. Um... it was probably a real change to have a--a white principal at the helm of a predominantly black school. Um... and I'm pretty sure he had challenges as well. But that was one of the first things I see changing. The other thing was that, um, they--they discontinued the Armstrong-Walker Classic. That's been going on for years, how are you gonna stop that, you know. So, where was the pride, you know. There--we have nothing to--to--to be proud of. That was a f--a really change to me. Uh...

LB: And so that happened when you were in school.

DT: Yes. Yes. They discontinued it--I believe our class may have been the last class for the Armstrong-Walker. And the--it was probably noted that when they said that, that this was the last Armstrong-Walker Classic, in '72.

LB: [Whispering] wow.

DT: So here again, you're noticing change. Um...

LB: And--and what was that game like? I can't even imagine.

DT: Oh, millions of--people came back from years. That was always the, uh, activity after Thanksgiving, that Saturday after Thanksgiving, that was always the big thing for black people. We would go to City Stadium. And I'd--um... it was always just packed. Um, you could just en--feel the--it's just like a--a homecoming... uh, so to speak. At the football field. Um, people of all ages... uh, coming back. One side for Walker, one side for Armstrong. But by then, you have to think that... um, we were going to different schools. A lot were going to John Marshall. You had blacks going to Walk--uh, George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson. So, you know, you can think now, ok, I see why. But you still said, why?! You know. It was always a big--y--your parents even got excited. Um, you could go by the stores and people were selling green and white ribbons or orange and blue ribbons. And it was just something that blacks did at that time. We went to the Armstrong-Walker Classic. If you didn't go, something was wrong with you. You know, but I think... that was a major change... um, that I saw... uh, with the schools, uh, at that time. Um, you're taking away something that had been historic. I understand *now* why because the schools were change--you know. You don't have the population in

those schools. Just like Armstrong is not there anymore. You know, so I--I think that was a big change that I noticed.

LB: What about in the community? What would you say... the turning point or some of the turning points were for the community?

DT: Um, I believe blacks were moving away from that, we were leaving, um, uh... the community. Uh, as I said, we... moving, we're getting better jobs. They were leaving Church Hill, moving to the county. Um... just, I think, to me, that's the biggest change I recognize. Um, moving away from the city. Um... That and--and then... I guess when you move away from the city and--and then you were, um, moving your families, not doing the same activities. And once you move away from where you were rooted, uh, we met people in churches. And when you move away from where you were, normally you would change churches. You know, we were used to seeing people at the churches that we were brought up in, but when you move to the West End, so now you're going to a West End church, you're not going to a church in the East End. Because it's closer to home. You know.

LB: What church were you brought up in?

DT: Um, we were brought up in Mt. Olivet at 25th and S Street.

LB: Mm hmm.

DT: Um... and like I said, you move away. And when I came, um--grew up, I went to Mt. Ol--I was married there. My son was dedicated there. But when my husband and I moved, uh... we moved away from the city and we moved to Goochland for a while. So that was a commute, you know. On Sundays, you think about that, 'am I driving all the way to the city?' So you--you attend a church closer. So I'm thinking that, you know, most people did that. But right now, I'm here at Sixth Mount Zion. Um... I came here with the group visiting with my breast cancer group. And I liked the pastor and his vision. And I decided to join here.

LB: And you live in the city now.

DT: Well, no, I live on the outskirts--

LB: Ok.

DT: ... I live in Henrico.

LB: Ok.

DT: I live just off of Darbytown, um, just as it become Henrico.

LB: Oh, alright. Yeah.

DT: Not far from my mom, so [laughs].

LB: That's nice.

DT: Yeah.

LB: So... are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

DT: Yes. Um, as I tell my son, I'm--I--wanted him--and my son went to Richmond Public Schools. Um, he's a graduate of Open High School. And... I always tried to instill (?) or liked to remind him that, um... Richmond... really, I always tell him the state of Virginia is a commonwealth state, you must remember that, first of all. You live in a commonwealth state. And--and in Richmond, you know... and as I told him, life is about choices. But here in Richmond, there is so much that is hidden. The history is hidden. You have to research it if you really want to know it. Um, like you didn't know about the viaduct. And to take advantage of things that are free, because they have so much to offer, that when you pay for it, you still might miss something. If it's free, not everything that's free is good. But there are activities and places here--the state library... has a--it's right downtown, it's very resourceful. Um, but there are places like the slave trail. Those things are full of history. Um, we didn't realize, uh, what rockets landing... was and he, you know, I--I explained to him that there are things that we can explore as adults... that we didn't know as children. I--I had no idea Rockets Landing was part of the slave trail on the canal. And Richmond itself is so full of different types of history. Um, you've got your confederate history, you've got your black history here. Um, my son and I went to the confederate museum together and it was a eye-opener for both of us.

LB: I still have not been. In all the years I've been in Richmond.

DT: You need to go. You should go!

LB: I should go.

DT: It's an eye opener.

LB: Mm hmm.

DT: There's a lot there that you don't get in the history books. And that's another thing that... I feel, um, has failed our--our school system. When I was in school, elementary school, we took Virginia History. They don't teach that anymore. So your children don't know the history where they're growing up in. There's a lot in the Virginia history books that relate to Richmond. And... if we don't tell our children, they won't know because it's not taught in school anymore.

LB: I'm interesting int eh black history courses you were taking at Armstrong -- had

those always been there or are they a sixties....

DT: It was a--

LB: ... innovation

DT: I believe it was a sixties and seventies innovation. Because we had the teacher who, um... I cannot--I can see his face now but I cannot say his name. He was an expert. Uh, he, I guess, had his masters in Black History. And he could--he just taught it so... passionately. Yeah. And, um, but, we don't even get that, um, anymore. Um, but there's a lot that the school system has cut out. Um... and... you have to research it, or if you get a good instructor, who's willing to take the time, um, to--to, uh, bring it up. And--and show the kids. And as I said, that's--that's my--what I would like to tell children or young people in the school system. Don't be afraid to explore the--the--what's here in your backyard.

LB: Well, related question: Are there things that you feel that we as a community particularly need to remember that we may be in danger of forgetting.

DT: Yeah. Um... that Richmond *was* a--a slave city. We were built on the port... um, of, uh, where they brought the slaves in. I think we... tiptoe around it. Um, and I think we also need to remember that Richmond is a tobacco capital. You know, people don't know that. You know, you got your Philip Morris here. We used to have, um, the other--there were more than one cigarette factory here in Richmond. And we need to understand that. Uh, the--the city itself financially was built on tobacco.

LB: Why do you think that's important. I mean, I can think of a number of reasons--

DT: Yeah [laughs].

LB: ... but I'm interested in yours.

DT: Um, a lot of--a lot of friends and their parents worked in Philip Morris. Um, when they laid off--one time they laid off and it effected some family members of mine. Um, and when they went back to work--and they were... unprepared for it. I guess to say. Because you just think you're in Richmond, this is the hub, they'll never lay us off. And they got--they were laid off and it was devastating. And, um, we take things so much for granted. And I think for them, that was the first eye-opener of, ok, I need a backup plan. You know, I didn't--a lot of them had never finished high school because you went straight... uh, if you got a job at Philip Morris, your first thing was, well why do I need to finish school? So there was a lot of, um, people who did not complete high school... working in the factory. And I think that was a norm. You know, if I can get a factory job, I don't need to finish school. And that's why I think it's so important... for education, cuz you need a backup plan.

LB: Deborah, is there anything that I haven't asked you--

DT: [Laughs.]

LB: ... that's on your mind.

DT: No... no, I think I--I get carried away [laughs].

LB: No, it's fantastic.

DT: I get carried away, um--and--and it's because I'm a history buff. Um... there was a time when I could, um... I remembered, um, reading about the fire at, um... Saint Philips, the hospital where the slaves went in and I'm a big history buff on that. But that's how, um... they, eh--Cabniss (?) Hall, I believe, it was, uh, one of the, uh, churches right there at MCV on the hill, that slaves went in and saved the people from the fire. Um, I used to have a history book that I bought from the state library on, um, history -- black history in Richmond. And I let my son take it to school one day and it never came back [laughs]. But... there's a lot of history right here in Richmond. Um... and if you get the chance, visit the, um, right there at Chimborazo Park, we lived right there for years. And it took a school trip for me to understand that that building in Chimborazo Park--

LB: That medical museum...

DT: Right. Was a hospital.

LB: I've taken my daughter there.

DT: Yeah. I... my mother was like, 'oh, I never knew that.' You live right here! You know, but, um, and--and when I was growing up, we used to--the teachers used to take us on these tours. Um, like I said, we used to study Virginia history, so we got to go to Jamestown, Yorktown, Williamsburg. The kids go on that now, but they don't know why they going. You know, um... it's--it's--it's a missing piece. In our--in our school systems. And a lot of it, you know, I--you shouldn't put on the school system but a lot of parents don't know this. And if you don't give--I always believe that you should know where you're coming from. You know, so that's my thing. That's what I like to tell people. Know where you're coming from. Know what you're leaving if you leave so... you know what you're going back to. And then you can tell somebody, you know, history is what it says, it's a story. So I think it's very important that we *know* our stories. And I'm a big... promoter of family reunions for family history. You need to know where you come from and who you come from.

LB: Is your son still in Richmond?

DT: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes, he is. He is.

LB: Oh, that's great.

DT: He's, um, moved away from home, almost a year now. He turned twenty-seven last... October the third. And he, uh, works for Capital One and, someday he will finish his degree but it's on him at this point [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: I've done my share!

LB: Well... you know, when I was at VCU, the average time was eight years for a student to finish his degree.

DT: Yeah, it took me seven [laughs].

LB: Yeah! I--I've--I just think it's different now.

DT: Exactly. It is. A--and that's--he went away to school. Um, he went to Delaware State. And, uh... he... was partying more than he was going to school. And, um, my husband became ill and my son chose to come back home to help financially, even though I told him no, but... um... he came back and took classes at Reynolds part-time, so I just would like to see him complete--

LB: Take the next step.

DT: Mm hmm. Yeah. So.

LB: But I know as a part, it's--so many things are out of our hands.

DT: It is, you know, and I understand working. You know, he tried to work and do it, and, um, I said to him, in your own time. So... Yeah.

LB: Well, thank you so much, Deborah, for this interview, you--are a treasure trove of memories. You really are.

DT: I try to remember as much as I can.

LB: You do!

DT: I do. Ok.

LB: No, it's--it's, um, it's so interesting to me because I... you're interview number seventeen.

DT: Oh, ok.

LB: So I've heard--I've talked to a lot of people about this time.

DT: Mm hmm.

LB: And it's amazing to me how sometimes even coming from the same neighborhood, going to the same school, coming from the same time...

DT: Different memories.

LB: People have very different memories. How much they remember, what they remember, what they focus on.

DT: It's hard, um, when you get this age [laughs] to think back, but like I said, there are certain things that, um, stand out. Um, cuz I can remember going downtown, and my mom... we were going on Broad, and there was a Ku Klux Klan rally going down the middle of Broad Street. And I remember my mom saying to me, "Keep walking, don't stop." And I'm going, "Why? Why can't I look at the people with the hoods on?" And she's telling me, "If you stop, you're gonna get hurt. Keep walking."

LB: How old were you then?

DT: I guess I was about four or five. All I remember is her telling me, "Don't stop." There was a Ku Klux Klan rally going down the middle of Broad Street. And that's--you know, I don't even remember how we got home... all I--that day, I just remember me telling her, "But I wanna see the people with the hoods on." [Laughs.] I didn't know!

LB: No. How could you?

DT: I didn't know. But her protection to me was to keep walking and don't stop. You know. So, that I remember, too. Um... Richmond ha--has a lot of--of, um... hatred, uh, and--and a lot of the Ku Klux Klan *were* prevalent. And I--can recall when they annexed Chesterfield, the city, there were some cross-burnings at that time. I--I--that I remember, too.

LB: I interviewed a woman who you'll meet tomorrow night, Robin Mines, and she remembered in 1964, her family moved to a white neighborhood and the Klan burned a cross on their lawn.

DT: Yeah.

LB: And I interviewed a white woman whose father was a--a presbyterian minister who spoke out in favor of integration and they got a cross burned--

DT: Cross burned.

LB: ... on their lawn.

DT: Yeah.

LB: And she talked about Klan rallies in 1973!

DT: And that--like I said, I remember going down Broad Street, and there I was about four or five.

LB: So that would've been around 1960.

DT: '60. Mm hmm. Right. Exactly. Don't know if I made it to Grant's to get that hotdog that day, but [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: But, um, I can remember that, and I remember when they annexed Chesterfield there was, um, some cross-burnings...

LB: And that was... like, '69?

DT: '69, '68, something like that. When they--the city annexed Chesterfield. A *part* of Chesterfield. And that's when Huguenot became a Richmond high school.

LB: And Yolanda told me...

DT: Her experience.

LB: That--well, it--you know, I--and the whole mess right now with your high school reunion...

DT: Mm hmm.

LB: And Huguenot--

DT: Huguenot. Mm hmm.

LB: Not only not participating but the fact that so many students at that reunion didn't go to Huguenot.

DT: Mm hmm. And, w--now, I have a girlfriend who went to Huguenot. And she's gonna participate in our reunion. She said they did contact her about the Huguenot reunion and she told them no, she's gonna participate in one where it's significant. So... but, yeah. Yeah, it's a little division there [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

DT: So, I don't know why you don't want to, you know, focus--it's not a focus, but it's a celebration and it's a remembrance. You know, as I said, you can't forget the history.

You know. Whether it hurt or not. It is still a part of history.

LB: It's a huge part of history.

DT: Exactly.

LB: I mean, that was such a watershed moment.

DT: Mm hmm. Yeah.

LB: And it's very interesting that people are opting out.

DT: Yeah. Um, but to me, um... I don't know what their reasoning is, but you can't forget it. You know, you were effected by it one way or the other. Whether you caught a bus or you walked.

LB: Absolutely.

DT: It sill was significant in some respect to--to your class. So...

LB: Well, thank you -- so much. Here, I've gotta turn--