

A Community Remembers

Interview: Glennys Fleming

LB: I got two of them because I'm always nervous about a technical glitch. Cuz you never know.... Alright... There we go, we are recording. And, Glennys, I wonder if we could just start off by having you tell me something about how you grew up and tell me about your family.

GF: Ok. I grew up – I was born 1954. I don't have a lot of memories of where I lived when I grew up, but I remember I moved to a neighborhood that is somewhat similar to what is today's project environment, but it was not to us at that time. It was Brookfield Gardens, and in that environment – it was just a lot of families, you know, close families in the neighborhood. A lot of them stayed together. We grew up in the churches as well. And so, for me, that was my safety net, just being there with my family.

LB: Tell me more about your family – who was in your family?

GF: Ok, in my family I had parents—mother and father. And I have a sister who was older than I am, Renee. And that was it. We were a very small family, and I do have grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, that type of thing, but growing up in those days, we really did not spend a lot of time with our families like more people do today. And I finally have realized in recent times just the fact that we probably didn't because we didn't have transportation to go visit one another. So, we made the best of what we could do. Sundays, we would go visit family. And we would see each other maybe at church activities. But other than that, everything we did was pretty much in the neighborhood.

LB: And your parents attended different churches, right?

GF: That is correct. My mother was at Ebenezer Baptist Church where I grew up, for the most part, but then we also had attendance at a Presbyterian church because my father was Presbyterian. So that dynamic was very interesting because it also helped to shape me more, I was more like my father, and I did a lot of things more similar to him. And I think because of his background not being raised by his parents, I think that also helped him to have a different sense of working with people. And for me, that's my big thing is I'm about people.

LB: So he wasn't raised by his parents?

GF: No, he was actually adopted by a lady in the community in Bowling Green and she raised him because... I don't know all the specifics of the family, but his father was not able to do much. His mother died about two years after he was born. So, the lady that ended up taking him in, because he was the youngest of the children, he was taken in to be raised and, he was much more successful than his siblings were, I think, because of that. So, she was very encouraging, very supportive of him.

LB: And I know he was a very successful man.

GF: Yes. Yes, he was a bank president, which we are all very proud of. And he worked his way through the banking system to actually obtain that position, so that is something that for me was very important because it is good to see that everybody doesn't just have that silver spoon in their mouth. He had to work his way up to that. And just knowing his family background, I think, that was a big accomplish—a major accomplishment for him. So, I was a proud child [laughs] – *am* a proud child.

LB: [Laughs] What was Richmond like when you were growing up?

GF: I can't say that I can say a whole lot about Richmond because I was just a part of it. I didn't really feel that I was aware of my surroundings. So, I don't know a lot to say about it. Um, except, just when I think of one incident, I remember going downtown with my grandmother, we had the stores, shopping in Miller & Rhodes, Thalhimers. And I do recall the differences then from where I was at my age, that people treated my grandmother with a little different respect than I expected from them. And so I didn't understand that because she was Regina instead of Mrs. Gnarl (?). We actually had to call her "grandmother." We could not call her "grandma" or "granny" or anything. We had to call her "grandmother." So it really bothered me that people called her Regina because, why not call her Mrs. Norrell – you know, call her by her given name. But that was what people did at the time and I think it was more because whites were there, in the stores, you know, working in the stores, and that's the way they viewed her. So that's where I had my most interesting experiences was in the stores... because it was different for me.

LB: Tell me, Glennys, more about what you remember in terms of what you did for fun when you were growing up, how you spent your time...

GF: I don't have – I have some troubles with my memory right now, so I don't have a lot to share right now. We did take some trips and I'll share the things that I can remember. We did take trips as a family. One in particular that I recall was going to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I know that we went to Canada but I don't have memory of that one. But Harrisburg I do have more memories because it was – we went to Hershey Park. We had family in Harrisburg so that was a part of... um, the main reason why we went there. And so for me, that was something that I – I liked going away with my family and doing fun things with them. So, we didn't do a lot of it, but the Hershey Park, going to Canada, and I think we went some other places, I just don't recall all those right now. And then I had some family in D.C. that we would go visit pretty regularly, and they were my special family because they always just spoiled us, they didn't have children. And so we were like their children. They took us in and adopted us as their children, so, that was it.

LB: So how did you and your family decide where you went to school?

GF: I'm pretty certain it was decided based on where we were living. And growing up, I stared out at Norrell Elementary because that was the school in the neighborhood, or the closest to our neighborhood. And that was fine, but when my parents moved, that was when they did have to make some other changes because it wasn't gonna be as convenient for us to get back and forth to school. We didn't really travel, we didn't have school buses, and we didn't have a way for my parents to get me back and forth to school, so I was gonna have to walk to school. So when we moved to Northside area, more the Northside area, Ginter Park area, I guess you'd call it – we ended up having me walk to school and I went to a school that was already integrated, and...

LB: What year would this be? Approximately...

GF: Approximately, '63, '64.

LB: It was already integrated.

GF: Yeah. It was. Stuart School was already integrated, yeah. But because of some of the things that were happening, I think, during that time, we – '63, yeah, because I went there when I was going into the fifth grade. So I was – probably... maybe '64, '64, '65. I'm still trying to remember the age [laughs] – the age. I said fourth, it was fifth grade. Fifth grade, sixth grade. So maybe ten, eleven, '64, '65. Somewhere around in there. And... um, that was definitely an interesting experience for me because I had never experienced being around whites in that capacity. But for me, they were people, and I had no problems mingling with people. So, like I said, I'm a people person, so for me, that was just – they're just more people. And I didn't look at it as much with differences. I looked at it as: these are different people that I have to come to school and be with. But they're no different than I am. And that's just the way I saw it.

LB: So, what do you remember about your education during that time?

GF: Fifth and sixth grades were great. I really don't have anything but good positive memories—I had a teacher in the sixth grade, Mr. Yearwood was his name. And I really enjoyed him. He put a lot of life to our class. And one of the things that does stick with me is, we had – he came up with a play, he wrote a play. And Happy Household Tale was the name of the play. So, I do have some memories [laughs]. I told you, very select memories. Happy Household Tale, and my name was Annabelle, as one of the main characters. And – I could tell you later, I can't think of it right now, but I was the one that actually started the lines in the play, and whatever it was, was very corny kind-of-a-thing. But I was the one that got to start the play out. So that was a good experience for me and I think it was just – we all got along so well, that I, like I said, I didn't see differences in people. Got to Junior High School – that's what we called it at the time, I was at Chandler Junior High – and the only differences I saw were the way some of the teachers treated people. I didn't see a

whole lot, but I felt some things, especially when it got to PE and the science class. I was not strong in that area. So I did see and feel a few differences, but nothing that bothered me or concerned me that much. I think the PE was because I wasn't a good athlete, athletic person. But I didn't feel like I had to be, but I felt some pressure to be more than I was. That went from – that actually happened in junior high as well as in high school – *more* in high school. It actually got worse in high school.

LB: The treatment by the teachers.

GF: Yes, yes. In fact, one teacher – I can't remember her name right now, but that one teacher in high school—and this is why I think I always watch the Olympics because that one teacher had me so angry, I actually tried to walk out of class one time [laughs] because she insisted that I had to do a backwards roll on the balance beam. My body was not going to do that, so I said, "I cannot do it, I will not try to do it," and I left the classroom. Of course I got in a little trouble behind that, but I just didn't feel like that was what my body could handle at that time. And it was her nastiness, and how she said it to me that made me think that, "You gotta do it, you can do it!" So I just said "No, I won't be able to do that today." Um...

LB: And where did you go to high school?

GF: I went to John Marshall High School. The Mighty Justices. JM Justices. And went there in... '68. 1968[...] But, '68. And one of the things that I—we, we were there '68 and '69... and then in 1970, that was the big year of change. That was when busing became a part of Richmond Public School System. And with the busing, what was decided by Congress I believe, with segreg—integration, I'm sorry—they said that we had to integrate the schools, the kids had to ride a school bus, and they had to go to their neighborhood school. No choices there anymore. And so a lot of classmates were living in other areas of town, but they would ride bus—the city bus, to get to John Marshall, whichever school they chose to attend, or the parents took them back and forth. For me, I was in the zone school so it didn't matter for me. But in 1970, the ruling came down and what they did was, they grandfathered the students that were the juniors that year, they didn't have to make a change for the following year, which would be their senior year – they didn't have to make a change. But the jun—the sophomores and below, we were gonna have to go to our neighborhood school the next year. And, actually this year is our 40th year. And so what we have come up with is... I and two other ladies and I had talked about, back in the early part of this year, we just started talking about trying to get the seven high schools together to do a reunion. Which, that has helped me to try to identify some of what did happen for us back in those days. And I don't want to jump ahead too far yet, but that has been a good experience for me in some ways. I recently come into a major snag for us with the planning of this reunion because it is our 40th reunion – we've come into a little bit of a snag that's really gonna hurt us in some ways, because it almost looks back like it did 40 years ago – some people not wanting to be a part of this citywide reunion. And I'm still optimistic even as of today. I saw a lady from one of the schools... I don't... that, the school that is having some difficulty wanting to be a part

of us for the reunion, and she is gonna do some more talking with the people to see if there's any way we can still all seven schools try to work together and be a part of each other at this reunion because, we're getting older. And we've never really identified our feelings about those days—

LB: Mm hmm

GF: ...and how things impacted us. Because it didn't just impact a few of us, it impacted everybody, it impacted the teachers because many of the teachers were shifted around to the different schools. It just impacted everybody. It impacted families. A lot of families moved away if they weren't comfortable with their students going to the school. So it just really had a lot of impact. We have been doing a lot of research trying to find classmates. We're finding some, we're still not finding all of them, but we are trying to find a lot of the students to come back with us for a reunion. And our goal is to have at least 300 from seven schools. 300 students all together. And considering that one of the schools had 300-some students in the class, it sounds like it should be a small accomplishment – I mean, I *big* accomplishment, but it's a very challenging accomplishment—

LB: I bet.

GF: ...because we have some resistance right now.

LB: What do you think that resistance is all about.

GF: Race. I really do believe that it's a racial thing because [sighs]... this— the three of us that started the idea, we started in January. We've been working very hard, having regular meetings since January. Planning an event. In about June, I believe it was, a white male from one of the schools got on board because of some information I received about him and someone invited him to, you know, communicate with me, so we did. And in his communication, he had realized that – I believe it was actually July, but anyway – it was such that he was just realizing that we were in the 40th year. And so he was looking at – somebody had asked, “Well, are we gonna do anything for 40 years?” So that's when the lady introduced him to the citywide opportunity, and when I talked with him personally, I asked if there was any way he could assist us, because he seemed to have had a lot of knowledge and experience maybe in planning some other reunions. And I think he was more engaged in getting some of the whites involved. So... I thought he would be helping us, and I believe one day he was going to come to our meeting, and I think he just couldn't locate where we were meeting, the meeting spot.

LB: Mm hmm. It happens.

GF: It happens, and it was a difficult location to find. But, I didn't think he would change up his plans after that, but just last week, I got word that – and I got it in writing – that they have created an event for a reunion for the ones – the one school.

It's two weeks prior to our reunion, and that was very disheartening because it told me that we're still not able to unite. And when we first started talking about this, for me, my thing was, "oh, we gotta come up with a theme!" And my thing—theme—my idea of a theme, and it wasn't *my* theme, but it was a suggestion that I was gonna use was, "Once Divided, Now Reunited." Because I felt like that's what happened, we all were divided. We were sent away, doing different things. And a lot of the classmates had known each other from elementary school days. Elementary, went to middle school together, junior high together... and they had started in high school with people. But for the last two years were forced to go to a different high school

LB: Although it sounds like you went to integrated schools starting in fifth grade.

GF: Right, that is correct.

LB: And your sister, too.

GF: Yes. Well, she started in junior high.

LB: Junior high.

GF: Right, she started junior high. And so I think it's just one of those, we're working through it.

LB: It's difficult!

GF: It is. And I'm hoping that something else – I'm hoping that people will still consider doing both events. Some of them will, because we have one lady from John Marshall who is white – she's been to every one of our reunions, and she is the only white person that has been to every reunion with us.

LB: But wasn't Marshall primarily white at the time?

GF: Yes. But... Well, it wasn't – I think it was probably a real good mix of 50/50. It was—well not 50/50. I would say 65/35? And with the forced busing, it became closer to a 50/50 kind of a relationship. Thomas Jefferson, our rival school [laughs], was not quite that way. They were more white.

LB: Yeah.

GF: And so I think that was one of the differences there. But, one of the other experiences that I can share with you was, um... and it's a hard one for me, is the one in high school, and I don't recall when it was because I was there for the whole four years. But I took foreign languages. I took French and Spanish. And both of the teachers were white men. One was much older than the other. And it was one of the things that I recognize the Spanish teacher just didn't seem to know how to talk to people. And he didn't seem to be a fair person with grading. No... very few people—

I'm not even gonna say the whites didn't get great grades, but I know that the blacks did not get grades that we probably deserved. And I worked very hard at his class to try to earn an A, but I never could get an A. It was fine, I got used to that. The French teacher, though, was probably a little more relaxed kind of a guy in some ways... until the one day in class and it was on a Friday and he was asking something to us and he said, "Oh. That's right, today is Friday. It's the negra's Christmas Eve." And I was just like, "Excuse me?" I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to do and I said, "What did you just say, sir?" And his response was repeating what he had said about the negra's Christmas Eve—I said "What does that mean?" because I really... I was not brought up to be known as a negra. I was a negro. We hadn't even gotten to African American at that time. We might have been called blacks a little bit, but we were negros or blacks at that time. So that term was almost like calling me a nigger. And so it was very offensive to me. And I said, "Sir, I don't know what you mean by that" more the statement about it was our Christmas Eve versus even using the term, the negative term, I was like, what is this about? You know, because, it just comes out of the blue for people. And he was saying that—he was trying to say that blacks go party all the time. Well, I think a lot of people do on Friday – they're relaxing after the workweek. And at least that's what I see a lot of people do, they go on Fridays to the beer joints or wherever they go, they just relax on Friday evening. So it was very offensive to me, but it's a thing that has stuck with me forever. Just... I've always been cautious with dealing with people because of those statements that are made. They might not mean harm, but it does—it can become harmful because it's one of those 'be careful what you say out of your mouth because you can't retract them.' And so that's where I've always been – tried to be very careful of what I've said to people because I don't want to be offensive.

LB: What do you remember about your social life at the time, who you spent time with, who your friends were?

GF: Actually, for me, I was... I said it early: I'm a people person. I mixed with anybody and everybody. I... because actually when I started looking back and thinking about what I did, that's why I think right now a lot of my classmates don't know me. And that's because I was in more of the advanced track with classes. Therefore, I was in classes with more whites than the blacks. And that was fine, and but yet it was also getting some social opportunities to be with them also. And that was partly because of my father's association at his church – there was a group that formed.... I can't say exactly how they said it but it stood for "No gaps allowed" and they sort of mixed the word into one: nogapsallowed. And that was a group that came together with young people to try to help heal and relax the racial tensions that were there at the time. And I recall we went camping a couple times... and I am not an outdoors person, I don't like bugs, I don't like to sleep on the ground, but I did go. And so, for me, I was putting some things that I was uncomfortable with aside to deal with this because I felt like this is something that I might need to know how to experience. So socially, I mixed with anybody and everybody because I liked people. And I was in organizations in school, I... didn't get into the ones that I wanted to sometimes because I felt like I was not being accepted. But it didn't bother me, like

talking about it. It bothered me a little bit at first. But then I got past it, said, “that’s ok. I’ll get in it if I wanted to.” There was one group in particular – was it Tabs (?), I don’t remember what that stands for. But it was a girls club. And you were supposed to be a higher... st... oh, edu—what is the word, educating... you’re a highly achieving – achieving highly in school. And I guess I just wasn’t up to par. It’s sort of like, to me, it was sort of like the National Honors Society thing. And if you’re not on a certain level, you’re not gonna be recognized. I finally did get accepted in the group, and so that made me feel good when it happened, but that didn’t matter. The thing that I found very interesting was, for me, I know there was one young lady that was going to University of Virginia for college. I had never heard of University of Virginia. And when I got to that college opportunity, I was looking around at where I wanted to attend. Well, I only knew of one school that I wanted to attend. And when I applied, I got rejected. So I was very hurt by that. That was one of the historically black colleges, Howard University. So I was very hurt by the fact that I didn’t get accepted there, but I had to move on. And so I said, ok, well let me just apply to University of Virginia. And I got accepted. And that was fine, but I really knew nothing about the school. I was going because of this lady that was one of my classmates that was going, and I said, well, if she’s going, I can go, too. And I wasn’t gonna room with her or anything, I was gonna—I had another friend there that was gonna be my roommate, but I figured that we’d be alright... And it was definitely—that was where I started seeing some differences. More differences than I’d ever experienced. First year: the biggest difference for me, and I think the best thing, was, um—in a leadership capacity—was my RA? Resident Advisor? To be at University of Virginia in 1972 and to have a black RA in the dorm, and she had responsibilities for two suites... which totaled about 20 of us, was remarkable to me. So I was very impressed with that, and of the 20, there were only two of us that were blacks: my roommate and me. So, that was an experience for me. And I lived in the dorm with, in my suite, there were ten of us. And definitely some diverse people in the group. But the one thing for me that still stands out—*still* stands out, I’ll never understand it because it’s just not my cultural type of thing—one of the things that was a tradition at University of Virginia was called Easter’s Weekend. I don’t even know if you’re familiar with that. Easter’s Weekend was a big gathering in the spring, and I don’t know the historical background to it, but the big thing for Easter’s Weekend was a mudslide. We’d—they’d go to this hill and everybody would roll around in the mud. That’s nasty. [Laughs] I’m sorry, but for me, that was nasty. You don’t roll—that’s what pigs do. And I just did not—and so it didn’t mean a lot to me when they were going to do it, but when they came back, because several of the people in my suite, they came back with all this mud on their bodies, and they were going into the bathroom—whoa, stop. I’ve got to use that bathroom also. I said, “Can you go back outside, rinse yourself off” because they were bringing a lot of mud into the shower stall. No, I’ve got to get in that shower. And they didn’t understand my concern. Well, that’s just nasty in my opinion, you know. And so, that’s the type of thing over the years, I’ve always tried—in dealing with others... races, other nationalities—I’ve always tried to be respectful of their cultural, our cultural differences. But that was one I just couldn’t work with because that’s not cultural, that’s just nastiness, and, you know, I always think of what’s in mud. There’s a lot of dirt, people do all kinds of

things in mud, so it's not pleasant. That was not a pleasant memory for me at all. But we actually got into a little tiff, I think, with some of the suitemates because, 'what is wrong, what's the big deal...' but we got through it, you know, and that's when the RA did have to become involved with us, because I was uncomf—my roommate and I were very uncomfortable with that situation. And I think because we were the only blacks there at the time being impacted by-- they didn't understand.

LB: There must have been very few blacks at UVA at that time, and even not that many women, I would think.

GF: No. We had, in my class, I think we had, probably between 70 to 100 that may have come in in my class. And women... Well, I would say that the majority of the blacks that came in were women at that time. But overall for the school, it still was fewer women there than—I don't recall the ratios for that. So yes, that was a dynamic. And then still I was going through some things even with the professors there because... they weren't as helpful as you thought you would get from a professor. When you say that you needed some assistance, they *may* help you, they may not help you. And I did have one bad experience which changed my thoughts on what I was gonna major in because I had intended to major in accounting. But because of the lack of support when I went in to a professor one time, talking and trying to get some assistance in my class, it turned me off, because he was of not help and I said, "If this is what it's gonna be like, I don't want this as an experience." So I ended up majoring in Spanish. It was my fallback because I was very strong with the languages. And that was pretty good for me, with the languages, and it actually gave me an opportunity because I was sort of weak in the speaking, I did end up in my junior year having to go to Mexico to get an experience in conversing in the language. So that was very helpful, like I said, I love people, so for me, I've had a lot of cultural experiences—Oh, another one that I didn't share with you was – and this was in the community – we had the Richmond Youth Symphony, which still operates today, and it sad to me the way I look at it now because back in that time it was a privilege and an honor to be a part of something like the Richmond Youth Symphony, and that's when several of us as blacks were getting involved. You actually took private lessons with a musician, and I had one of the best who's no longer with us... um... I'll get his name out in a minute.

LB: What was your instrument?

GF: Violin, violin. And... [laughs] He—but he was excellent and he encouraged many of us to go into the youth symphony. But—Joe Kennedy, that was his name, and Joe Kennedy was an excellent jazz violinist. But... we got into the youth symphony but we also – because of that experience, we got to have other experiences traveling around and you having to stay at different people's homes. So that's why I said, I think for me, I'm more flexible because I've lived in homes with others, whites, other nationalities and it didn't bother me, you know, I always felt like I was accepted. Maybe because of the circumstances but I was always feeling that I was accepted. So I have good feelings but I also have some bad feelings in how things—how I've been

treated over the years. I don't let any of it hold me back and that's because of my faith. I know what my faith has done for me that that has always kept me above water with people because people don't always know what they're doing and I don't worry about it anymore.

LB: Tell me about some of your personal turning points.

GF: Personal turning points...

LB: During this time when you were growing up.

GF: Um—oh! Yeah. I think the one, and you're not looking for this, I'm sure, but for me, it's been the beginning of my health crisis. I have had a lot of health challenges. And I think that's why I'm a stronger person because of some of the—because I haven't had anything that people were familiar with. Everything I've ever experienced in health challenges, at the time, they were unknown illnesses—slash—disease, whatever you want to call it, at that point, and so, 'what is that?' [Laughs] And the first one that I can recall was Bell's Palsy. I was at the prime of my age of 16 – who wants to be sick at 16, your mouth all turned up, twisted up and all, Bell's Palsy being somewhat like a stroke. It's similar to a stroke. But it affected my whole left side of my face. And I drooped, my mouth drooped, everything was drooping, and I actually had to go for shock treatment, I can't remember what they called it, but a type of treatment that—and I was having to go three times a week, before I got to school. And I was driving at that time so my mom would let me keep the car so that I could go to—you know, I would drop her off at work, go through my appointment, and then drive on over to school. Then of course in the evening pick her back up. But that was definitely an experience for me because, whose heard of Bell's Palsy, none of us had ever heard of it in my family, close friends, no one had ever heard of it. And then I was actually going through this identity crisis because I knew I was looking bad, you know, so I was shameful and all that. And there was no reason to be shameful, but I was. Thankfully, from that, the treatments were excellent, and I've never heard of anyone else who's had the Bell's Palsy that's had the same treatment. So I felt like, well if this doctor recommended it for me, knew what he was doing. Because it was very helpful to me.

LB: Where did you have your treatments done? Was it still St. Phillip's (?) then?

GF: Uh uh, no I was at, um... Stuart Circle. And, yeah, because, I don't have any recall on St. Phillip's. I was born there, that's the only knowledge I have of that. Everything else I ever did was pretty much at Stuart Circle, as I got older. And, like I said, that for me was a big turning—turn around for me because it looked like that was 16, the next thing that occurred was, when I was in college, I don't recall my age at the time, but I had a polynoidal (?) cyst. 'What is this,' you know, so [laughs], and I'm not gonna go through all of the things, but the types of things that started occurring—I had to do my own research and I am a researcher on things that start happening in life. I need to understand... I just res—do a lot of research with things. So what I

found out from me – and I’m glad I did – was that a lot of these things were neurologically related. And, so I’m trying to learn from the things that I’ve experienced. What can I do differently? Some of it is diet related. Most of it is not. A lot of it is environmental. Nothing I could do about the environmental. The only other one that really [laughs] – and I was much—I was a little bit older, I was in my twenties, I was actually...probably about 25... Yeah, about 25. And I had something happen to me. No, I was actually 27 cuz it was after I had my son. So, it was 27, I [had had him?]. But, there’s this thing called, sarcoidosis (?).

LB: I’m very familiar with that.

GF: Ok. And what happened, the doctor called me one evening to tell me—to diag—tell me what the diagnosis was, cuz I had done some tests, and the way he presented it, I was eating dinner, and the way he presented it, he started off, he said, “Well, there’s this thing that... that is known by whites in Europe – in Europe it’s known primarily with whites.” And he was going that route and I’m sitting there like, “Well, I’m not white so why you telling me about this?” He said, “But, in America, it’s more prevalent for blacks to have this, sarcoidosis.” And I was just like, “Oh... ok” So, it was just that historical factor with it, that I was like, “ok, so why am I getting this?” But that was more of an environmental thing, I think. And I felt that it came about because of where I was living at the time. I was in Southside, but I just felt that maybe it was something in that environment. I don’t know still. But, I’ve been through some challenges with health. [Laughs] And it was happening, looked like—we started looking at it, my mother and I really paid attention – it was always happening on an odd year. Didn’t necessarily happen every other year, but it was in... I’d say ’83 or, you know, that type of thing. What is going on?

LB: Did your sarcoidosis go away or does it still come back?

GF: It’s in remission and I just leave it there in remission. I pray about it regularly so that it stays in remission. Because it did come back once. I’d say about... no. About a year or so after it was first diagnosed. What happened – I was on a high dose of medicine, extremely high dose, too high a dose, and I gained a lot of weight because of the medicines that I was taking. I really didn’t like –

LB: The steroids, yeah.

GF: The steroids. Yeah. I gained 60 pounds in 6 months. And today I’m still carrying most of that. I’d say about 30, 35 to 40 of those pounds I’m still carrying because I just did—I didn’t know what to do as far as the eating part. And so I’ve always tried to guide people, educate them about, it’s ok if you have to do steroids, just be mindful of what you’re eating, because it is—the steroids do cause it based on what you’re eating. A lot of the salt in your diet. So, once I learned it, the second time when I had to go back on medicine, I did a different thing, I didn’t eat anything with salt. I ate—people just can’t believe that I can eat popcorn that has no butter, no salt on it. I can do it. It’s no problem. You learn through those kinds of experiences and

exposures to things that you have to survive some kind of way and that's what -- I'm a survivor.

LB: So you've been through a lot of challenges and a lot of ups and downs. You were a Spanish major at UVA, you were struggling with your health. What happened after that? In your life.

GF: Um, I guess the next thing was my son came into my life. I was actually 33, which seemed late at that time and in those years it was late having a child.

LB: Now it's early. [Laughs.]

GF: But now it's early, right on time, whatever. But, he was good for – it was good for me. As a single parent—it might not have been good from a single parent perspective, but I was a strong person and I knew I could make it and do what I needed to do. So for me, he put a lot of joy in my life because I had somewhere to put my focus. Not on myself with my health challenges, or down—ups and downs in career because I was having struggles getting somewhere that I wanted to, you know – doing something that I wanted to do. I recognized that I had to accept what I was doing in life as far as work because I needed to be able to provide for my son. And that's really, for me that was the bigger thing was making sure I could provide for him. Thankfully today, he's 25, he can do for himself, and even help mommy out some because I'm on disability now, so he's my helper some now. Um... but, definitely was a struggle and I think it helped to make me stronger—it also—what really helped me was my... my reintroducing myself to my savior. Because when my son was probably under two years old, I had all the excuses under the sun for not going to church like I had grown up doing. And I just always had some excuse for not going to church. And yet church was always a place I enjoyed and being and participating in activities in church. So what I did was, I stopped giving myself excuses. I learned a poem when I was in college and joined a sorority. There was a poem that I learned, and if you don't mind I will say that poem. It's not even a poem, it's a statement: Excuses are tools of incompetence, which are built on monuments of nothingness. And those who practice them in their use are seldom capable of anything else. So I brought that back to my mind and my surface and I said, no more excuses about going to church. I said, I give all these excuses to God, but yet God wakes me up every morning, helps me do what I need to do, and get back to doing what I need to do to take care of my son. So I stopped having excuses. And from that point on, I never had another excuse about attending church.

LB: Which church did you go to?

GF: Ebenezer Baptist, my home church, the church I grew up in, and I brought him up in it, and I'm so thankful that I did because he is very strong with the lord also, and so I'm very thankful for that reality that...

[Interruption: Intercom message about meeting room closing]

GF: So, the, uh...

LB: You know what I want to do, Glennys, if it's ok with you because I know we're a little tight on time, I want to ask you a couple of questions that I really want you to answer and then we can talk about some of these other things.

GF: Mm hmm.

LB: How do you think your experiences growing up in Richmond during the Civil Rights Era – how do you think they shaped who you are today?

GF: I think when I mix family, education, and church together, I think that combination has helped to make me the person I am today. And it also includes the experiences I've had in dealing with the ups and downs. I think some of the struggles, challenges, that I experienced with people of different races – they've just all shaped me and made me stronger and made me aware that I don't want to be like that, I don't want to be hateful or anything unless – I want to always just love people, because that's what we're supposed to do. We're here for a purpose, we're here to love one another and help one another. And so for me, personally, that is my mission, I'm always out here to help someone. I don't know if my sister shared with you anything about me, but she will tell you, children are my life. And I got that honestly, I got it from my grandmother because my grandmother was a director of a nursery. I just love children. I've worked with her when I was a little girl, and I'm continuing to do that now. I actually keep a set of twins right now on occasion, so...

LB: And you've got a young lady with you today.

GF: I have someone with me today, who has been with me all day – because I couldn't get her back home. But I'm a mentor to young folks and that's what I do and that's my personal drive in life is the young people because they need to see some positive role models. I always had—I felt that I always—I feel that I always had positive role models in my life, be it my grandmother, my parent, *some* of my teachers. And they were always very positive and encouraging me, and I just want to be that same type of person to encourage and lift someone up to different environments because a lot of them that I do work with... a lot of times they are from environments that they did not have an opportunity to experience things. This young lady that I'm working with now, she's... just today, we went to an activity, she got very excited, it's something that I think, it'll be very good for her... and very meaningful for her. And a lot of times the children are from families that cannot do these oppor—give these children the opportunities that I can possibly offer. You know, at least expose them to. So that's my mission in life is to do this.

LB: How did you get started with that? I mean, I know, growing up with your grandmother and working with her, but is this something you started after college as well?

GF: Oh, *in* college.

LB: In college.

GF: In college, I was doing Big Brothers Big Sisters and... I guess that, even in high school, I was doing groups—*missions* type of thing. And so I like where I can be of help, be of service to someone else, because someone helped me to get where I am in life, so I just like to be to give something back to someone else at point in any way that I can.

LB: And are you doing it now through Big Brothers Big Sisters, or different organization?

GF: No, I stopped doing that. I do it through my sorority a lot. And my sorority is a very service mission—service-oriented organization. Um...

LB: Are you an Alpha?

GF: No no no – ho *no no no no no no no*. [Laughs.] Excuse me, I'm sorry.

LB: [Laughs.]

GF: Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. But... [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs] Excuse my faux pas –

GF: [Laughs] That's ok [laughs].

LB: I can never remember the colors! Which one is red?

GF: Red. Red and white. Delta Sigma Theta. And that's, I actually went to a meeting this morning with the sorority. And that's where this young lady that I'm with, that's with me, she's gonna be a part of a program that the sorority does. We have about – in fact we talked about them today, we have five or six different programs that we work with young folks. And I'm always doing that. And I pledged the sorority in 1976, my last semester of college. And I been doing something with them pretty much ever since. I did take a hiatus – how do you say it, hiatus? – for about five years, four to five years when my son was in high school because I needed to get him prepared for college. So I took a time away from the sorority but, everyone in the sorority that knew me when I was, when my son was born, they still know him because he grew up in the sorority [laughs] *with* me – he had no choice.

LB: So has that been your main focus?

GF: Between sorority and church, as far as working with young people, yes. Those two places are where I work with young people the most. Every so often I will do it in other capacities but someone has to introduce me to that. Schools, I will do a little bit to help out.

LB: Now let me ask you another question because this is one that I know I want to ask you. Two questions really. Are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know? And are there things that you feel that we as a community need to particularly remember that we may be in danger of forgetting.

GF: Ok. The thing that I want kids to, um, today's kids to really know growing up is that... there's always someone that can help them be what they want to be. Someone that can guide them, someone that can support them, someone that *loves* them. And I'm not saying that I'm that person, but I do love *all* children, I do love them. I do think that they need to recognize that there are people out here that are here to help them at all times, and to be there to love them and care for them. As far as a community, of, um, what we're in danger of forgetting, I think the one thing that we have—that we tend to forget and yet this country was founded on Christian principles, and I do feel that we have lost that with our children especially, and if there's any way that I can do anything—in fact, the young lady that's with me today, I had a conversation with her because of something she's experienced, and she said she really doesn't know how to pray. So that has become the thing in my heart that I will be working with her on I – I'm not gonna be pushing, I don't push religion on people. I try to guide them on things that they can do that are Christian-based. And so for me, if that's the one thing is families have gotten away from it, it's not important anymore, but yet in a time of crisis, people do call on someone to help. And so for me, I call on someone to help me, whether it's a crisis or not. And I think that's what we have forgotten is, whoever you—we, we serve, we should be able to call on them in times of good things happening and times of crisis. And we just need to help people to remember that a little bit more and that we can all love one another. Because, like I said, that's the biggest thing is we don't love each other enough.

LB: The impression I'm getting from you, Glennys, talking to you, is that you went through a lot of different things growing up. But in many ways, your focus was your spiritual growth. In part because of your health challenges. So maybe some of these questions that have to do with turning points for the community and Civil Rights, they maybe weren't your focus so much at that point. Is that—am I hearing it right?

GF: Mmmm... I guess... I guess I have that subliminal knowledge with the spiritual side because of my family. You know, it was engrained in us, but it wasn't pushed. And this is what I try to do with people is you don't have to quote scriptures, you don't have to do all of that to let people know. You live the life. *Live* the life that you want people to understand because if you live it, then they can hear it and see it for

themselves, they don't have to hear the scriptures preached at them 15 times a day or anything of that sort, so that's what I really fought for.

LB: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about. I know we had this gigantic list of questions.

GF: Yes. I can't think of anything in particular. Um...

LB: I guess one thing I'd like to ask is – of course I'm curious because I asked Renee all these questions, too – how do you think your experiences at that time were— everything that the community was going through, how do you think they shaped your family?

GF: Well... I think my family, and I think it was more my father than my mom – my mom was more of a quiet person with things – but I think he was, my father was more focused on making sure that we knew right from wrong, that's the first thing. But he also wanted to make sure that we knew how to speak up... and be able to defend anything that we believed in. And I *do* remember that very emphatically because that was on of the conversations he and I had when I was probably in high school. I was a crybaby kind of a person. And he just reminded me that in order for you to survive this world, you've gotta be prepared when people, when you ask a question, and the question may be something that's gonna respond with a 'yes,' or it might resp—you might have a 'no' response. He said, you just have to be prepared for either answer. And if you're prepared for either answer, you can deal with what the results are. And it taught me a lot, I've shared that also with other people because... it doesn't bother me. You can tell me 'yes' to this, you can tell me 'no' to the same question that I really wanna hear 'yes' for – but I'm ok. I've learned that I was pre—because I was prepared, and that's one of the things that I do when I have to go into tougher situation, brace myself for whichever answer, cuz I actually have one experience, and this is just one I can think of, even in my job, that was very, it was a haunting experience for me, because I worked for a lady that was very insecure is my term for it.

LB: What were you doing?

GF: I did administrative work at um, I'm not gonna name the company. But I was doing administrative work and... she was very insecure and I think because in that—at that—during that time, it was in the 80s, 90s, the company, the department I was in was still predominantly white. Even though the organization itself was not that white, it was, that part of it was. And I was the only black there, but I was the— one of the few members in that department that had an educ—had gone for a higher education. And think in some ways, even though she had her degree, she did not get it like right after high school, so I think it was, you know, she had achieved her accomplishments later. But she was very threatened by me and I actually worked in another environment several times I've worked in environments with white women that seemed to be threatened by me. I felt that—I *feel* that a lot of that came from my

strength because I'm very strong and comfortable in who I am. And I apologize to them if they're not comfortable with who they are, I'm sorry that they're not because that's on them, that's not my fault. But this lady was very ugly, very... ugly. [Laughs.] Just—best way to say it. And I think when times got really bad for me on the job, I just continued to pray. Because at one point I was actually accused of saying some racial term to someone, and I'm like, "*Me?* Of all people?" [Laughs] Just like, I am not that kind of person, and it really was very insulting to me but she was so adamant about that and we ended up having to go through some other levels of management to discuss it. And I talked with someone in my church and they gave me some advice that I'd taken to heart and I took it to the meeting and the main thing was I just was a little more silent. And I'm not a silent person, but I allowed them to do all the talking, and it changed the whole situation as far as how they perceived me. Because they knew that I always ha—well they *thought* in their mind, they thought that I was a combative person. Which I wasn't - I would defend my opinion. So I've learned when to speak and when not to speak to people with situations like that because... it can hurt you in some ways, it was harmful but in the long run, um... it turned out in the last—I've been disabled since 2006, and in about —and a lot of it because of that same person changing my job situation, or *causing* the job situation to be changed for me. And because of that, I ended up not being to work, I got so sick. But in about three years ago—

[Interruption: Intercom message about meeting room closing.]

GF: ...she ended up getting her due because she got fired, because she had ruined a lot of peoples' lives over the years. And I think that was where the reality hit for her. But I never know—I'll never know because I don't see her or talk to her. But, it does come back around.

LB: It does.

GF: It does!

LB: Glennys, thank you so much, I think they are kicking us out.

GF: I know! They are. We can take it outside.

LB: The parking lot interview...