

## Transcript of Juanita Miller Interview

By Catherine Oglesby, September 23 & Oct. 27, 2011

Dr. Oglesby: Ok. Let me say this is , . . . we are at , Mrs. Juanita Miller's home in Clyattville. We are interviewing her today, September 23, Friday, 2011, and Ms. Miller's going to tell us a few things about her very interesting life. So, we're just going to get started. Are you comfortable Ms. Miller?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, I'm fine.

Dr. Oglesby: Ok. , first question about your childhood, I'll start with your childhood and adolescence and then we'll go from there. What is your first conscious memory as a child?

Mrs. Miller: Playing around in the country side in "Berrien County." Playing hide and seek. And Mama.

Dr. Oglesby: You remember Mama?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Oglesby: Ok. I'll get to some questions about Mama. How many siblings did you have?

Mrs. Miller: None.

Dr. Oglesby: No siblings!!! You're an only child!!

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Oglesby: How did you feel about that?

Mrs. Miller: Lonesome.

Dr. Oglesby: Lonesome. You wanted siblings?

Mrs. Miller: I wanted me somebody else. That's why I reached out to other people now, I think. Because I always looked forward to having somebody to play with. Somebody to let me be the teacher and you be the student. [laughter]

Dr. Oglesby: So what about cousins?

Mrs. Miller: Had cousins but they were older, I would say. And , because I was an only child it seemed like I was the pick of the family. I was the one that everybody looked up to and decided that I should have my way. Even my aunts would do things for me that they wouldn't do with their own children, they let Juanita have it.

Dr. Oglesby: How many aunts and uncles did you have?

Mrs. Miller: I had Aunt Emma and Aunt Martha and Uncle Paul and Uncle Sillas, so I must have had four.

Dr. Oglesby: On both sides? Mother and Dad?

Mrs. Miller: ...Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. So did you spend most of your childhood or all of your childhood in “Berrien County?”

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you didn’t move around?

Mrs. Miller: And in Lowndes. Lived in Lowndes. And in Lowndes county.

Dr. Ogelsby: Can you remember , when you think back to your childhood. What is the most significant thing you recall happening as a child?

Mrs. Miller: Was going to church and playing church and pretending to sing. And...

Dr. Ogelsby: Pretending to sing.

Mrs. Miller: Yes. And worshipping and being in Sunday School.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, Church was a big part of your life as a child?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, yes. Listen to my Uncle Paul preach Sunday School, teach Sunday School. I remember that he was the teacher and we were the students. And we kind of looked up to him because he was the one who opened the Church, it was an old church house, and he would be the person who would pick us up and take us and he would be the person who would give us some raisin and some milk, some from the government, I think, put that , after Sunday School we had raisin and we had milk, I remember that distinctly...Every Sunday. Of course we enjoyed that.

Dr. Ogelsby: So your parents didn’t take you, your Uncle picked you up and...

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: Was that your mother or your father’s brother?

Mrs. Miller: That was my mother’s brother.

Dr. Ogelsby: So Church was a big part of your life as a child?

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok, , how would you describe your childhood?

Mrs. Miller: Interesting. I think it was encouraging. I think it was fulfilling.

Dr. Ogelsby: Fulfilling?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, fulfilling. I think my childhood was pretty much , occasion to look forward to Christmas’s and Easters. Things that children enjoy. I remember that Christmas time was fruit and a baby doll and , waiting for Santa to come and enjoying life. I didn’t know about city life. It was just country life. I remember the Rolling Store...The Rolling Store came by with fruit and candy and eggs.

I remember that, that was a great part. When the Rolling Store came, everyone ran to the road where the mailboxes was, because there was this Rolling Store man who would give us fruit, apple, orange, whatever. And we would-if we had money we would pay. If we didn't have money we gave him eggs.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, Rolling Store, did he come by on a-

Mrs. Miller: It was a truck.

Dr. Ogelsby: A truck. Kind of like the Ice Cream Man?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, uh huh. Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: So your memories of childhood are positive?

Mrs. Miller. Yes. Pleasant.

Dr. Ogelsby: You think that...How much of that do you think was because you were the favorite?

Mrs. Miller: I don't know. I don't know.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you get a sense that your cousins resented that?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. They loved me though. They still to this day. They live in New York but they call me about once a week and they want to know what they can do to help me and they come when they can.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did I ask you already how many cousins there were?

Mrs. Miller: There were about eight.

Dr. Ogelsby: Eight of them. Ok. Who were your heroes as a child? It sounds like your Uncle Paul was certainly one.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. And I loved my daddy too.

Dr. Ogelsby: Were there people outside your family that you really admired , felt as a role model or-

Mrs. Miller: Yes. I loved my aunt, my Aunt Emma, and my Uncle Johnny. That was my Mama's sister and her husband, Johnny. They were pleasant people and they had no children. So, I tried to lean on them and took advantage of them because they, they were willing to give me whatever I wanted. So, I had a good life because of them and my Aunt Martha who had eight children was somebody who reached out to me in spite of me being the only one. She had eight children, she would always reach out and say, 'Give it to Juanita' or when I went off to college, , she bought me the clothes, the dress-I remember that she had eight children, but she took me the town, the day before going to Atlanta and bought me a black outfit.

Dr. Ogelsby: To go to college?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. My first dress. My Aunt Martha-and I always felt close to her and I thought that was very kind of her because it didn't bother her that her children didn't go to college, they didn't have to go to high school, but it didn't bother her. I was going. So, that made the difference. They all seemed to be proud of me and I like that idea.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, yeah.....Do you want to say anything else about your childhood before we move on to life as a teen and adolescent? What about your parents, , your mother and father, did they both work outside the home?

Mrs. Miller: Not exactly. We were in the country. They did farm, farming. My daddy worked one time for a company called Hercules Siding Company. And , my mother worked for not much, worked for the working. I remember them talking about they went to Miami and worked for-and I was left with my grandma for a while but , I don't think they had any outside jobs that much.

Dr. Ogelsby: Do you remember what year-how old you were?

Mrs. Miller: Oh no.

Dr. Ogelsby: No. Ok. All right. Well, is there in your mind, is there , a real distinction between childhood and your adolescent years, your teen years?

Mrs. Miller: It's not very much different, no. Not very much difference. I continued to be the favorite.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you didn't have a troubled adolescence.

Mrs. Miller: Right. No.

Dr. Ogelsby: So there...Were there times as a teen, twelve, thirteen, fourteen year old little girl that you had conflict with your mother?

Mrs. Miller: No, I always did what they said. I was smart enough to know that.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok.

Mrs. Miller: They were big on whipping you then. And I didn't want any whippings. I always thought I was very fragile for whippings and so I tried to do the right thing.

Dr. Ogelsby: And I have questions about being in a household with siblings but since you don't have siblings that's not...Was there every any question in your household about , expectations of you as a girl who would become a woman...Did your parents want to , abide certain expectations that were you know, that were certain expectations for a woman?

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: What were those have been?

Mrs. Miller: They wanted me to be polite and they wanted me to act honest and they wanted me to go to Church. That was a big thing in our lives. Praising God and , doing what elderly people said do. And being smart in school. Do your lessons primarily.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did , when you were young as a child and a teen, did your parents , encourage you to go to college?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, yes. They talked about me going to college and so I thought about going.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. When you were , living at home with your parents, did you think much about the world outside beyond your home in “Berrien County” was there much talk about what was going on beyond the household or outside the family circle?

Mrs. Miller: Not a lot. We talked about Atlanta, cause we talked about Mark Brown, college where I attended, initially, but it was not a lot of talk about world traveling and all that. What I did know was that after I had taken French in school, high school, that I was going to Europe one day and I did go and I took my students with me and my family.

Dr. Ogelsby: I saw those pictures. They look like fun.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Yeah. We had a ball.

Dr. Ogelsby: , do you recall as a young woman questioning any of these values of your parents that you would be polite and you would-

Mrs. Miller: Never. You did what you folks do. Yeah, whatever parents said, that was the go.

Dr. Ogelsby: Do you recall anything from those years , any historical events that were taken place in the 30's and 40's? Was that-were you conscious of that or anything going on, The Depression, The War, or anything in those years as a child and as a teenager?

Mrs. Miller: No, no I don't remember very much. I remember that my Mama and Daddy were not getting a long, they were bickering and fussing and arguing. That had an impact on me cause I am confused, even to this day I can't take it. It is a bother to me and when they didn't get a long it made me feel terrible. I couldn't figure out what was going on with them, but , my Mama was a quiet person but my Daddy started arguing and arguing and that bothered me. So, I ran away from home, that was historical because...

Dr. Ogelsby: I was wondering how we were getting around to history but I see that now. Ok. For a little girl who obeyed and did everything she was told that was definitely historical. Ok. Did you run very far?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, I went to Wilmington, North Carolina.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, that was far.

Mrs. Miller: My Aunt Mary lived up there. Mary and Martha were twins. Mama's sisters. And Martha lived in Valdosta, she was the one with eight children and Mary lived in Wilmington, North Carolina and she had married a minister. But anyway, because of working in the field in tobacco and cotton and whatever, I had money and I bought a ticket. I went to the Atlantic Coach Line Railroad Station and bought me a ticket for Wilmington, North Carolina. Called my Aunt and asked her if I could come and she said, “Yes,” and cause she had no children so it was fine with her. And I slipped down there

and bought me a ticket and I called the cab and I told the man, “don’t go, I’m coming out the house to meet you and I’m going to the Atlantic Coach Line Train Station, I need you to take me there.” And I slipped and got my clothes and packed ‘em up and trunk and I was-had a trunk because I was getting ready to go to college, but because my Mama and Daddy were not getting a long I didn’t know- I was just confused at the time. Of course, I got the cab man came and did just like I said, I told him to park outside and I would look out the house for him. It must be two or three o’ clock in the morning. But anyway, I went on out there and got in the cab and he took me, he knew I was running away, or something was funny ‘bout it, but then anyhow, I went to Wilmington, North Carolina, and I distinctly remember that train stopped in Savannah, Georgia, and you know, for just a train thing, and then the conductor on the train asked me where I was going because I was a little girl, and I was scrawny and very little, so said, “Where are you going? You traveling by yourself?” And I told him, “Yeah.” And he wanted to know where I was going, that kind of stuff. And he said when we had a layover, and he would take me to his house, and I said, “Ok!” And he did and luckily he was just a fine man, who had a wife and a family. He carried me to his house and they gave me dinner and got me ready to catch the train coming on to go to Wilmington, North Carolina, and I went on to Wilmington, got off, and a taxi took me to my Aunt’s house. She lived 911 North Street, Wilmington, North Carolina. I memorized that because I didn’t want to get lost. I didn’t have sense enough to be afraid of anyone bothering me.

Dr. Ogelsby: Obviously not, going home with the conductor, but was the conductor White? Was he a White man?

Mrs. Miller: No, he was black. But they were fine people. Thank God.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you were-were you a teenager?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: But a small person?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: Have you talked about this to people? Have you-

Mrs. Miller: No! No!

Dr. Ogelsby: We are so privileged to hear it.

Mrs. Miller: I’m privileged to give it. Because I never told anybody. My cousins know about it, in North Carolina, and when they come, we talk about it, we laugh about it now.

Dr. Ogelsby: So what-My goodness, when did you mother find out where you had gone?

Mrs. Miller: She had called around. And of course, my cousins knew that I had planned to come, they heard me talking about it. I was dissatisfied, so they knew that, I was not happy.

Dr. Ogelsby: But you don’t remember exactly what age you were? Would you say you were over fourteen or?

Mrs. Miller: Uh huh. Yeah, I think so. Because I had a ring. I had a high school class ring.

Dr. Ogelsby: And how long did you stay with your Aunt?

Mrs. Miller: , I can't remember but not very long. My Mama cried on the telephone and I came back home.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did it help any with the home situation? Did they realize how-

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, it helped because people didn't run away from home, they thought you were looney, and sure enough, I came home.

Dr. Ogelsby: When you were , when you were at home did you tell your parents-did you know then that you wanted to teach?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, I was a teacher.

Dr. Ogelsby: You were a born teacher?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, I was a teacher. My cousins all knew to sit down and shut up because I was the teacher. I was small but I was in charge.

Dr. Ogelsby: What lessons or experiences in your teen years and child years do you think shaped who you became later in life besides running away?

Mrs. Miller: The Church.

Dr. Ogelsby: The Church.

Mrs. Miller: The Church, I think the Church played an important part in my life. I was a Sunday School teacher even then. I was young but I was in charge of the youth group and I played piano a little, I took music lessons, which made me able to play for them and I make them sing.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, I think you already told me, if you want to share anything else about your childhood or teen years, I'm happy to hear it but I want to move on to education, unless there's something you'd like to share. I don't think you can top that running away experience.

Mrs. Miller: I don't think so.

Dr. Ogelsby: , you've already told us that your parents encouraged you and sounds like expected you to go on to college, so education was highly valued in your household.

Mrs. Miller: Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did either of your parents-what was their level of education?

Mrs. Miller: My Mama went to Port Valley State College for a day or two but she didn't stay, so all I heard was how she went and came back home. My Daddy didn't go anywhere.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , so, you went to your public school in Barian County (sp), and , and then your went to Mark Brown, and I believe you told me earlier that you graduated in '54?

Mrs. Miller: '55.

Dr. Ogelsby: '55? Ok. All right. Ok, , did anything happen at college , that-what do you think you learned mostly from college other than obviously preparing for your career? What else would you say?

Mrs. Miller: Became a sorority member. And , that was a big step at that time because , they had competition on the campus about who was in charge of whatever and who was doing what and I was on the newspaper staff. The Wolverine Staff, that was Mark Brown newspaper at that time. And , I was always apart of whatever group was going on, the Spirit Squad, the College Choir, and I was a part of that. And one time, I got a little job working off campus because one of the teachers thought that I could be helpful to them, so I started helping her with her work, her notes and papers and whatever. Because she thought I could and I did and I enjoyed that. And because I got a scholarship from the Church to go to Mark Brown, then , that made me close to the Bishop of the Church and I did one or two days of work with them. And I got a chance to get around Atlanta because they were- would take me about and I became interested in Atlanta and got around to meet a lot of folks. I enjoyed that.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you ever want to live there?

Mrs. Miller: No goodness! I wasn't that wild! I was heading back to Valdosta, Georgia and they tease me all the time in Atlanta about living in Valdosta because the temperature was always higher in Valdosta than it was anywhere else in the world. I thought about it a lot because " you from Valdosta, Georgia, where in the world is that? Oh yeah! I know that's that hottest place in the world!"

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, we certainly had that experience this summer didn't we?

Mrs. Miller: We sure did.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, it sounds like those were really great years.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. I enjoyed them.

Dr. Ogelsby: But you were single the whole time?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you have-was dating a big part of college life?

Mrs. Miller: No. I was a skinny little girl. No one was interested in dating me. Which was fine because I finally met my husband, which was great and he was a wonderful person.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, I want to hear a lot more about him in a few minutes. If there's anything else about your education and I know there's plenty because your whole life was about education. I'm going to



come to that when we talk about your-you know your work and your career. But right now I want to talk about something that I know is important to you because you've already said that and that's about religion and church. Are you still able to go?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Well, not as much but I don't go to St. Paul's in town because they took my car away from me and they won't let me drive. And I have to depend on somebody to take me. But Velma takes me. I still go to church out here and I still go to St. Paul's one Sunday out of the month.

Dr. Ogelsby: That's in Valdosta?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, yeah. Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, could you talk about- a little about your religious beliefs?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. He was our sovereign. I always thought that Jesus was Lord. Always. That He was in charge. That stayed on my mind. That if we were gonna make it, it was gonna be through Jesus. Of course, then they talk to me now and say, "Look at you. You can't do this and you can't do that!" I don't let that worry me, I still know He is still in God and this is my part of the world and in due time He'll awaken me up if he wants to and if He doesn't, He is still in charge.

Dr. Ogelsby: Have you , experienced something in your life that you would consider a miracle?

Mrs. Miller: A whole lot of things turned out to be a miracle that nobody killed me or hurt me when I ran away from home. That was a miracle. It's been a miracle that my family thought well of me in spite of-you know I was the smart one that tell them what to do. So, and they didn't resent me- they never fought me. They were always ok. And they always agreed with me. If I said it was ok it was ok. You know, they didn't hate me for it, like some families would do.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, sort of related to that um, have you had or could you identify your most profound spiritual moment in your life?

Mrs. Miller: Graduating-being the Valedictorian of the class and saying my speech and doing the Emancipation Proclamation. And I memorized it and said it because I didn't know you didn't have to read. I thought that if you memorized it and they gave it to me and told me that on January 1 that I should say the Emancipation Proclamation and I thought they meant memorize it and I did and said it. Everybody in Valdosta who were there and that was all the Black folk and some of the White said, "That little ol' girl is smart." So I liked that. I ate that up.

Dr. Ogelsby: This was graduating from high school?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: And you identified that as a spiritual moment?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, it was.

Dr. Ogelsby: Oh. , have your spiritual or religious values changed over time?

Mrs. Miller: Not really. I love people. I always have. And I love children. I don't know why I thought I could do so much for somebody else. It's always been on my mind. Let me help you. You know, you need help. Let me help you. Lord have mercy on me! But that was a part of me then, is reaching out to others, it's very few people in Valdosta that I haven't helped, White or Black. I've done what I thought was the right thing to do for 'em whether they asked me or not.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, given what you've told me , I don' t think it would-we would guess at the answer as to whether or not you believe in an afterlife?

Mrs. Miller: No. I for real know there is. Yeah. There's a Heaven. There's a Hell.

Dr. Ogelsby: Have you , have you had like what people describe as a "death experience?" Where you come close to dying and had that experience of -

Mrs. Miller: I wouldn't call it that. No, no, at one time there-at the dormitory I could feel that all the blood was flowing out of my body. And I thought I was leaving, that my spirit was leaving my body, but it was telling me I had a joke on my back, so it wasn't anything. I was asleep. I was tired and I had gone to the dormitory, that was when I was doing my graduate work. I was not at dowler then, at that time.

Dr. Ogelsby: Was that at Morris Brown?

Mrs. Miller: No, that was at Atlanta University.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. All right. Well, I didn't ask you about graduate work. Sorry, so you did a six year or a Master's degree at Atlanta?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, at Atlanta University.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you go straight from Morris Brown to-

Mrs. Miller: No. I married and had a child and then I went there.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. All right. Well, can you tell us what you think when you envision and afterlife, what you think that will be like?

Mrs. Miller: Beautiful. Wonderful. I think being with Jesus will be outstanding. Miraculous. I think everything in life centers around Jesus Christ and His love for us and when we don't do what He says and do our own thing we have to take the punishment for it. I think from the beginning we need to be taught the right thing and we need to follow it and the right thing is in Jesus Christ, I think.

Dr. Ogelsby: Have you experienced some of that , punishment that-have you experienced that?

Mrs. Miller: Well, we call it punishment having a stroke-would be classified as a punishment if I let it. But I won't let it. Because I just believe that what God has for me is for me.

Dr. Ogelsby: But your Church would identify the stroke as possibly as punishment?

Mrs. Miller: People would. Some of them would.

Dr. Ogelsby: But you don't?

Mrs. Miller: No I don't. No.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , when you meet God what do you want to say to God?

Mrs. Miller: Finally made it! Thank God!

Dr. Ogelsby: What do you want God to say to you?

Mrs. Miller: Well done! You did what you could.

Dr. Ogelsby: All right. , so you've already kind of said-already kind of addressed this but I'm gonna ask, what do you believe are the most vital religious values for me to observe?

Mrs. Miller: What is the question?

Dr. Ogelsby: What do you think are the most vital religious or spiritual values that people ought to observe?

Mrs. Miller: Do the word of God, whatever He says. Following the scriptures. Following the word. Being obedient to Him. I think that's vital. We don't pay much attention to it, we do what we want to do but like keeping the Ten Commandments and whatever, we have our own thing. And we do our own thing. But that's not the way.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , can we talk a little bit about marriage and children?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , your parents , you talked a little bit about what their marriage was like but did they , did you have impressions from them about what romance was, what to expect from dating or from meeting somebody and falling in love? Did that come from your parents?

Mrs. Miller: I don't think so. I don't think so. They were times when they were fussing at one another but , they were- they had spiritual backgrounds both of them, you know. But , they would not as mindful of the things of God as you would expect and-because they only had one child they didn't have much teaching going on and everybody else was my parents, so...I guess they figured its-she'll be all right.

Dr. Ogelsby: , did you have as a child and as a young girl romantic notions about love and courtship?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. I had notions about it. Yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: , so, in what ways did reality for you measure up to what you had-to what you notions were-what romance would be?

Mrs. Miller: Well, I lived around the corner from somebody who turned out to be my husband and he had been in the Korean War. Ok. And , he came by one day and said he liked me. I thought that was a good idea. And will I go to the movies with him and I said we'll ask my mama and of course, she

said yeah, and that was great. I stayed on Patterson Street, not far from the Patterson Theatre. That was the next block from where we lived, so that was all right. I thought that was great. And of course, going back to school to tell everybody that I had a date was-that was something too.

Dr. Ogelsby: So your parents were living in Valdosta at the time, your parents moved from Barian County to Valdosta?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. That was great. And this person had lived in the Army. So that was big stuff.

Dr. Ogelsby: Yeah, I can imagine. So, was that the beginning of your courtship with him?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, yes. I had one boyfriend. The one I married.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you think that as a young teen that's how things would be or did you see yourself dating?

Mrs. Miller: No, I didn't think it would be that way. But I was grateful that it turned out that way.

Dr. Ogelsby: , when you were a young girl did you think about having children? Did you want children?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. I thought about it.

Dr. Ogelsby: And did you want more than one after having grown up-

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, I wanted a boy and a girl. That's what God gave me.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , so you just wanted two?

Mrs. Miller: Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you ever consider not having children?

Mrs. Miller: No. No.

Dr. Ogelsby: And so, ok, , you weren't married when you went to college?

Mrs. Miller: No.

Dr. Ogelsby: So did you retain that relationship with your boyfriend while you were away? Were ya'll-

Mrs. Miller: I married him after I graduated from college.

Dr. Ogelsby: Oh, ok. So, I was thinking the way you were talking, I was thinking you were in high school.

Mrs. Miller: No. We didn't do much courting in high school. They did but I was the scrawny little girl that didn't have a boyfriend. I was the one you go to for your lesson to help you out with your lesson, not to go to the movies with.

Dr. Ogelsby: So this was after-and you still felt that after you had graduated from college you still felt like you had to ask your mother if you could-

Mrs. Miller: Yes, of course! Yeah!

Dr. Ogelsby: So you might-must have been like twenty?

Mrs. Miller: I don't care if I was thirty, you still have to see what your parents say.

Dr. Ogelsby: All right, , so, how long did you and your boyfriend date before you married?

Mrs. Miller: About a year.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. Well did you have a job? Were you teaching at the time?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, I had a job, right.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, were you teaching full-time when your first child was born?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: Was there ever any , ever any-did you ever feel any guilt about having to leave your child?

Mrs. Miller: No.

Dr. Ogelsby: So what did you do?

Mrs. Miller: My mama took care of them.

Dr. Ogelsby: Your mama took care of them.

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. And , what did your husband do?

Mrs. Miller: He worked in the paper mill down the road.

Dr. Ogelsby: Oh the same paper mill, ok. But did you all continue to live in Valdosta?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. Then we moved out here.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , can you describe-

Mrs. Miller: I'm getting warm, I need to turn on the air...

Dr. Ogelsby: (speaking with assistant) Can you turn on the air? You want us to get a fan?

Mrs. Miller: No. I'll be all right.

Dr. Ogelsby: You want to take your jacket off?

Mrs. Miller: Not yet. If he turns the air on. Just turn it to cool. I think it's already set.

Dr. Ogelsby: I think I feel it now. Can you describe your relationship with your children?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Wonderful. You think we were a circus when we get together. We talk about the trip to Europe and who did what and how he lost his camera, my son couldn't find his camera and how my husband was cutting his hair, when it was time to go to Europe we realized that he hadn't had a hair cut, and my husband decided that he would cut this boy's hair. And he took the scissors and took a big pluck out of his head down to the scalp. And then he passed out. He plucked and plucked and plucked and tried to cover it up. So we get together now and laugh. The funny thing was when my husband did that and the hair fell on the floor he picked it up and tried to pat it back on.

Dr. Ogelsby: Your son did that?

Mrs. Miller: No, my husband was cutting my son's hair. We laugh about it right now.

Dr. Ogelsby: I bet he didn't laugh then did he?

Mrs. Miller: No he didn't laugh! He was furious! I thought I was gonna have to go Europe and leave him here in Valdosta.

Dr. Ogelsby: How old was he?

Mrs. Miller: I don't know. He was in about seventh grade, I guess.

Dr. Ogelsby: So both of your children went and you took a long several students. I saw those pictures.

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: So your whole family got to go.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, uh huh.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you have any , different standards for your daughter than for your son?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah.

Dr. Olgesby: You did.

Mrs. Miller: I thought my girl ought to be in at a certain time. I thought my girl ought be at-don't be out at twelve o' clock. My boy could be out till twelve. When he was of age maybe. But , I never cared much about loose living. I think families ought to be close nit and I think parents ought to keep up with the children. I know we decide that they're of age let them do what they want to do, no I don't! That's not my thing. I just believe that they need some guidance. They don't know, just because they are twenty doesn't mean they got sense.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well did you-so you had different curfews for your daughter than your son? What about around the house? Were they-Did they both have responsibilities around the house?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: And did your daughter do different kind of sorts of things?

Mrs. Miller: Right. Right. She did the kitchen work and of course when it came to it he did the-my boy was a part of it. And there was something that came out called an Easy Bake Oven that one time. And I bought my daughter an Easy Bake Oven and my boy enjoyed that thing just like it was his.

Dr. Ogelsby: That explains why he opened the restaurant.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well , and you have grandchildren now?

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: You've got-

Mrs. Miller: Both of them finished high school. The last one just finished.

Dr. Ogelsby: And they're only children, ok?

Mrs. Miller: Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Is grand parenting a whole lot different from parenting?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, it is. Because I don't worry about them. I go to sleep and don't worry about the grandchildren. I let their mama and daddy worry about them, but when I had my two I had to kind of over see them myself and worry about them and that's part of my character too. It's over worrying. I want to tell you what I want you to do and I want you to do that.

Dr. Ogelsby: Right. Ok. Yes. Did they resist that as children growing up?

Mrs. Miller: No. They talk about it now how they wanted to, but they were afraid to.

Dr. Ogelsby: So still afraid to you reckon'?

Mrs. Miller: No, they wouldn't scare much. They got their own now. So, my girl has. They are not afraid of anything now. But you tell them anyhow.

Dr. Ogelsby: Do you think that mothering played a role in shaping the person you became as a mature woman?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. Yes, I think so.

Dr. Ogelsby: I wouldn't really if you would just kind of expand on that. I would like to know what your ideas are about mothering and about how different things are-you know how different mothering was over time...You know how different is it now for instance, would you say?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, there was a time when parents were parents and the children were the children. And the mothers and the fathers gave the orders and the children received them. And pretty much

lived according to how-what their parents wanted them to do. If they wanted them to learn they'd learn and they felt good about it. But , times have changed and children would dress-I look at my granddaughter the way she changes clothes-she changes into short shorts up to her navel but , she is in line with all the rest of the folks. And you know that during my time with my children were coming up, that was not allowed. You could wear some shorts but , they were decent. There doesn't seem to be anything that is indecent anymore. You just do what you want to do. Wear what you want to wear. And that's too wild, too far out. And we let our children get out of line and can't get them back in anymore. They got a taste of doing their own thing and it's hard to get them knowing and understanding that you want what's best for them. And that-that wild living is not good. But , mothering and fathering played an important part in the lives of children. They act like they're not concerned but they want to be told what to do. You have to tell them anyhow, they won't like it and they'll swell up and grumble but you have to let them do what they want to do and you do your part and do what you know is right. That's what I think is wrong with our country today. They let the young folks get out of hand.

(Phone rings)

Dr. Ogelsby: You want to answer that?

Mrs. Miller: Mm Hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: (talking to assistant) Pause it. Ok. I think we're running again. Ok. All right, , so, I may come back to the mothering. That's really important but we just move on to money. Ok?

Mrs. Miller: We never had enough.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. That was one of my questions. Would you say that you achieved the financial ambitions you had as a child or a young woman?

Mrs. Miller: Mmm, yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: You did?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. I wasn't making too much out of school teaching. I knew that school teaching wasn't gonna be no big high paying job. I knew that was just gonna be , help others if you can job. Get paid whatever they give you. And of course my husband worked at the paper mill and that was different because he made more than I made and I was grateful for that.

Dr. Ogelsby: , how do you-how would you say money has shaped your life?

Mrs. Miller: Well, not very much. I never had much of it to-But I thank God for what I had and I've always known that have to be given. I missed the boat on paying tides. I always thought that I was involved in so much that I could get paid for what I thought was right. But the scriptures said pay ten percent of it. And I ignored that and said, "What? I'm paying ten percent!" Because I give to the wholeway house and give to here and here and here. But He didn't say nothing about the wholeway house and here and here and here. He said give ten percent to the Church to Him, to Jesus, to His



service. And of course, I wasn't taught to pay ten percent. I thought if I was paying what I thought was right then that was ok. But that was not fair.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, when did you change your mind about that?

Mrs. Miller: , about five years ago. Took me awhile to learn my lesson.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you, in your thinking, the money you gave to wholeway was not part of your-

Mrs. Miller: It shouldn't have been part of my tides. My tides should have been just for Church.

Dr. Ogelsby: And you-did something happen to make you think differently?

Mrs. Miller: No, I was always praying about doing the right thing and The Lord revealed to me that I-ten percent is what I'm asking for.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you've come to some-come to terms with that?

Mrs. Miller: I have.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok.

Mrs. Miller: Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well, can we talk about a job? Your work, your profession in life?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: , and your only job throughout your life was teaching?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. Did you ever have a problem in , balancing your work and home everything-all your responsibilities?

Mrs. Miller: No. My husband was a kind of person who-who was just like my cousins. If Juanita needed things then it was ok. So...

Dr. Ogelsby: So he did a lot?

Mrs. Miller: He did. Right. And if I came home and told him that we got to go to Atlanta this weekend, he said, "Ok. What time ya'll leavin? You want me to gas the car up?" Do this or do that. He was that kind of person and he made living easy for me. Because I was the member of this club and that and this whatever but it was ok with him.

Dr. Ogelsby: So he also did domestic things to make life easier?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. Uh huh.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. So he respected your professional life?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, he did, he did.

Dr. Ogelsby: , did you consider your livelihood a job or a career?

Mrs. Miller: Career. I considered it. It was something I had to do and I wanted to do and I was satisfied with it.

Dr. Ogelsby: So there-was there a time you wished you had chosen something else?

Mrs. Miller: No. I always wanted to be in charge.

Dr. Ogelsby: So did that mean you-did you have issues at times with people over your like superintendents and principals?

Mrs. Miller: No, I knew they were in charge and I knew when to say “yeah” and when to say “no.” They had no problem with me. This is the superintendent right there and I’m the teacher, so I know what my position is, yeah.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you never did want to be the principal?

Mrs. Miller: No, never!

Dr. Ogelsby: You were satisfied in the classroom?

Mrs. Miller: Yep. I never wanted to be in charge of just being a doctorate degree. You know some people think that I got my doctorate and I never wanted a doctorate I just wanted be what I was.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. , do you think today or have you ever thought there were certain things women should not do?

Mrs. Miller: No, I think women ought to do what they want to do. I just figured that if you’re female and you want to do a male’s job go to it.

Dr. Ogelsby: Does that include military?

Mrs. Miller: Yep.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. Where do you think you got that because you grew up in a time when that wasn’t-

Mrs. Miller: I don’t know I just thought it wasn’t fair that you are a human too and you got a feeling to do what you want to do. It’s all right.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you never had any gender conflicts?

Mrs. Miller: No.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did you-do you think that you passed that on to your daughter and your son that same sort of , open mindedness about what women-what’s right for women and what’s right for men?

Mrs. Miller: I think so.

Dr. Ogelsby: , is there some significant accomplishment in your work life that caused more sacrifice than it seemed to be worth? Were there times when your work life was just more demanding than-or you went through a particular-possibly a difficult administration at school?

Mrs. Miller: No. I always learned to make the most of it. And , if somebody was doing what I was doing I could always talk to them about it. I was the department chair person for the English department at Lowndes High School. And I was the Black person and I was the department head and , folks thought that was gonna be a problem. It would have been if I had made it a problem. I just decided to do my job and let other people do their job. Now as far as what is right or wrong about it, I just lived through it. And I never been the person to think if you try to mistreat me I always thought well of people. I always gave them the benefit of the doubt. If she doesn't like me that's too bad her loss, but I like you.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, when- do you remember when you were the head of the department and-were you the only Black woman or the only Black person in the department?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm. At that time.

Dr. Ogelsby: Do you remember when that was?

Mrs. Miller: Oh...I can't remember but I guess I could look it up.

Dr. Ogelsby: No, that's ok. I would-I would like to get your thoughts and your thoughts on it you know in any thoughts on it and also just recalling your own experience of segregation and then desegregation? Do you feel like talking about that?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm. Well, I never had much problems with it. Because I always said that I was gonna do my job in whatever the situation was. And I got a long with people because I love people. And , as I said I always want to give you the benefit of the doubt and I always walk away if it was gonna be some confusion. I didn't want to be a part of it. And of course I knew to respect the person in charge. I knew when it was my time-the wholeway house, I'm in charge, and Lowndes High School the superintendent of the Lowndes County Board of Education is in charge. And I knew who was in charge of whatever. And I kind of put my life to make it fit my situation and to as part of being segregated , not being respected I never had that problem because I always wanted to pay my bills, I always didn't but I always wanted to. I always wanted to do what was right, especially toward the other person and far as thinking that they mistreated me because I'm Black I just let that ride and never worried about it.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did , so your own experience of desegregation was not troubled?

Mrs. Miller: No. Not trouble.

Dr. Ogelsby: What was your sense of that experience for most people in Valdosta both White and Black?

Mrs. Miller: Well, I figured that people gonna bicker about whatever. It doesn't matter whether you White or Black and when integration came and we the Black teachers were transported from the

Black school to the White school that , we were gonna get a long. There were gonna be White parents that didn't want their children to have Black teachers and vice versa. But , my thing was, do your job and watch what will happen. You do a good job, do the best you can and don't discriminate, you'll be ok and they will too in due time. I think a lot of parents start teaching their own children you know, home schooling came into being because they were shunning some of the Black teachers but , I think that if you do the right thing and do your job well then folks will have to respect the fact that you know what you're doing and doing it wisely. But um-

Dr. Ogelsby: You felt respected?

Mrs. Miller: Yes. Yes. I did.

Dr. Ogelsby: But you obviously were aware that some children were not doing as well as they-you wanted them to?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, so that when Camp Relitso was convenient. I knew they needed help but I wanted them to understand that you can't say she doesn't like you because you're Black. You just do your work and some students understood it finally that she ain't pickin' on you. We would like to say she's pickin' on me because she's Black and all that kind of bunch. Do your work and then she can't talk about you pickin' on you. But , people didn't see it that way. And I know all people aren't gonna be right and they not gonna preach it right, anyhow, it doesn't matter what you do. With some people you can't do enough, it doesn't matter, they're just mean and hateful, and you can't change them, you just have to move on and do the best you can. One thing helped me was I had good principals, principals who understood what the situation was and when they said that this is a Black person here and Black person right here, then they put the foot down and said that "You respect the Black person," and that helped me.

Dr. Ogelsby: You didn't get that the other teachers in the department-did you sense an attitude or-

Mrs. Miller: Oh there was some that had an attitude. But , it vanished. Yeah, it vanished. It went away. One thing too was the smartest children came from the base, from Moody Field, and those people who had been around and seen different places and seen several Black folks, they weren't as prejudiced as local folk were. So, that made a difference too. Because when it was time to go to Europe and I sent a notice home that I was going and we were going to take the French Club, and people sent me a notice and let me know if your child was going in that time. The word got around that I was Black and some of them decided that my children can go because the woman in charge was a Black woman. Well, after we had a meeting and we talked about it, then they decided that some of them came to their mind that it was gonna be all right, some did not come to mind that was all right too because it was their loss.

Dr. Ogelsby: How many White kids went?

Mrs. Miller: The majority of them were White. About eight or nine of them.

Dr. Ogelsby: So when you were teaching as-when you were the department head that was-was the school fully integrated by that time?

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: And what percentage of-do you remember percentages of White/Black in those years?

Mrs. Miller: No, I don't remember.

Dr. Ogelsby: And how do you-if someone asked you to , assess or evaluate Camp Relitso through its-it was-I'm sorry to ask, I just forget when you opened it-was it in the 70's right?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: , how would you-

Mrs. Miller: It was the 70's I think.

Dr. Ogelsby: Yes, I thought I had to guess. How would you , evaluate Camp Relitso?

Mrs. Miller: I think it did wonderfully. It did wonderful for our community because , our children that were left behind and were slow learners had some help because some people decide that after one time they don't get it oh you didn't get it a second time, well that's too bad. And , some children need more than one time, needed to hear it more than first time, they need to hear it the second time and the third time and however long it takes, just stay with them. And I think the parents in the camp work wonders and I meet people today and I have people calling me today to ask me when you're gonna open that camp again?

Dr. Ogelsby: Well in the pictures it looks like it's an integrated place. That you have White teachers and White students.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, we did well.

Dr. Ogelsby: You also provided child care for , for mothers who wound up pregnant or ...

Mrs. Miller: Just needed help.

Dr. Ogelsby: Yeah.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, that was the part of me trying to be helpful.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well it looked like they were asking for it because I remember when I was out there you had just this huge room of , cribs for babies.

Mrs. Miller: Yep. Yep. They need help.

Dr. Ogelsby: And so what about Wholeway House, do you?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, it's still operating.

Dr. Ogelsby: I thought it was.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, it's still operating. They are doing wonders.

Dr. Ogelsby: But are you still considered the director there?

Mrs. Miller: Yes, uh huh. There's a person that operates it, who runs it. But ...

Dr. Ogelsby: Do you ever get over there? Do you ever get to visit?

Mrs. Miller: Occassionally. Yep. They come out here, they come to help me do the yard and do what they can for me.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. How are you doing Mrs. Miller? Are you ok? Do you want to take a break? Do you want to stop and set up another time?

Mrs. Miller: How long-

Dr. Ogelsby: How much more do we got? , we may be about half through so we still-

Mrs. Miller: Let's get halfway through.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok, let me ask you one more category of questions and then we'll stop because after that I have some questions about history and regional identity and that sort of thing. This kind of gets through the family and relationships. So, , about death and loss, these questions deal with the most difficult loss you've experienced through death.

Mrs. Miller: My mama and my husband. My mama and my husband.

Dr. Ogelsby: Want to tell us about that? Tell us-when did your mother die?

Mrs. Miller: Bad news, I forget it, I can't remember. Disagreeable things I put way back.

Dr. Ogelsby: But it was before your husband?

Mrs. Miller: Yes.

Dr. Ogelsby: Because he died in '97?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm. Yeah. And she died before then. I got them an obituary back there somewhere, I can get it out, what I can't remember.

Dr. Ogelsby: Have you-did you learn what you consider valuable lessons about grieving and bereavement and the process of loss-did you learn things that you could pass on?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah. Yeah. In life we are still among death and death is likely to come at anytime. And to make ourselves satisfied with whatever God's children is for with , we know that everybody is going to die at sometime we know also that we should be interested in living so that when we die we'll go to Heaven. I know a lot of people don't believe in Heaven and Hell and they don't think it exists but it does. They'll be sorry that they didn't understand that , God has a place for us and to make ourselves satisfied with where we're gonna be. Doing the right thing will cause us to go the right way and that's what we have to learn on. Always do the right thing. It doesn't matter whether the other person does, you do what's right, now.

Dr. Ogelsby: It sounds like your experience of loss has a silver lining.

Mrs. Miller: Yes

(Dr. Ogelsby's phone rings)

Dr. Ogelsby: I'm sorry. I thought I turned it off. You had very-already had very deep faith and religious convictions when as a young person-it sounds like these experiences with loss just made that stronger. Did it ever make you doubt?

Mrs. Miller: No.

Dr. Ogelsby: No.

Mrs. Miller: No. I always knew that there was a God. There IS a God. From a child I knew that. I , put it in my mind and my spirit that , there was always something greater than man. And it must be Jesus Christ, must be God. And you couldn't tell me as a child there was not. I can remember my Catechism Class as a little child with the pictures of Jesus on it, that was a big thing. I couldn't miss that class, had to be there because...I had to see what Jesus said. And I always wanted to know the right thing. I didn't always do the right thing but I wanted to know.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you could tell everybody else? Sounds like they listened.

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, they listened. I have knack for attracting mayhem. The children in school said, "Mrs. Miller liked the boys better than she liked the girls." I tell you what boys pay attention better than girls-girls are so flaunty.

Dr. Ogelsby: Did they give you a hard time about that?

Mrs. Miller: Yeah, they did, they did, they said, "You always like the boys better," well boys you tell 'em sit down they sit down, girls you tell 'em sit down or they get up and you slip their butt around.

Dr. Ogelsby: See I had a different experience of that. My experience was always that girls would behave better than boys.

Mrs. Miller: Oh no.

Dr. Ogelsby: So you have , so the girls didn't like that?

Mrs. Miller: No. No. They have to come down to saying that it was all right. They wouldn't understand that I wasn't being prejudiced. I wasn't being mean or anything that's just the way it was.

Dr. Ogelsby: So they had to admit that you were right about how they acted?

Mrs. Miller: Mm hmm.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well besides , loss through death, can you recall significant losses that caused a similar kind of grief?

Mrs. Miller: When my cousins he lived here and moved away. Because they were my kinfolks and they were my backbone and they went away, moved to Virginia first. They were doing farm work and my Aunt and Uncle took them with them to work on the farm and they kept on migrating and migrating until they got to New York. And that's where they are now. And they-that's my Aunt and Uncle died there and one of my cousins. So, that was a loss to me so I figured I never see them again, but of course I did, I have seen them.

Dr. Ogelsby: And how old were you or just how roughly old were you?

Mrs. Miller: Seventeen or eighteen.

Dr. Ogelsby: So, still a teenager?

Mrs. Miller: Right.

Dr. Ogelsby: Was anything else about loss or death or grieving or you feel that has enriched you or , affected the quality of life for you in any way? Anything you want to add?

Mrs. Miller: I can't remember anything that would have that dramatic experience as death unless it was death from my mother-in-law and others who died in the family but you learn to live with life, you learn to live with death and I always said that success and death come in the door at the same time when you think-Victor Hugo said that, when you think you're just about arrived, then pack up because you have not arrived, it might come anytime but God is in charge.

Dr. Ogelsby: Is that how you felt when you experienced the loss of your mother and your husband that you were close to some successful-

Mrs. Miller: Right. Right. Say I'm about to make it so I'll be lookin' out for what's gonna happen till the clock done slapped me back, gonna set me back. That will keep you from growing, that kind of thought, it'll keep you from growing because you figure that , I just made it and lookin' there now will I didn't just make it I got a leak up there in the ceiling, I thought I had it made I said, "Well, this'll be all right! We'll see how it is!" It aint all right, things just happen especially when you're not lookin' for them to. You think you're ready, you know you're not ready.

Dr. Ogelsby: Well Mrs. Miller you've talked about a lot of things , childhood, adolescence, , religion, marriage, education, children, anything you want to say about any of that, any after thoughts, course I'll come back and if something occurs to you, you can , you can cover it then, but if anything has come up.

Mrs. Miller: Ok. I can't think of anything right now but I probably will.

Dr. Ogelsby: Ok. All right. Well we will stop here and we'll set a time-we'll set a time to -

(end of first half of recording)