

## **Part I**

**Catherine Oglesby:** Okay it is Saturday afternoon November the 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 and I am in Hortence, GA in the home of Mrs. Iris Middleton Smith and Mrs. Smith is going to share with me a few details of her life so we will get started. Mrs. Smith I am sorry we do not know each other better than we do but I think maybe coming with somebody you have known at least all of her life that's Emily who is a student. Maybe you have a little bit of trust in my intentions which are really just to hear about your life so. So what I will do is start with a few questions about your childhood and sort of the developmental stages of your life and then we will talk about more specific categories like marriage children and then your jobs and that sort of thing and end with some general questions that reflect on the whole of your life so. I will start with a question of your childhood. What is your first conscious memory?

**Iris Middleton Smith:** I really don't know what the first conscious memory was. The overall was just growing up in that big house in Atkinson with mama and papa and Lillie and all of my siblings I was the baby. The youngest of the group and everybody said I was spoiled but that's their fault I didn't come here that way. And then I married at an early age. I was just 17 but I married Joe Smith. Much to my displeasure my parents I was in college at Abraham Ballwin in Tifton and I ran away from college to get married. They had wanted me to get a college degree in home economics but I didn't want to do that I wanted to get married and start a family. And then I did. And I had six children, 5 of them lived, one of them is deceased and most all of my children live in this vicinity except the oldest one and she lives in Pivion, South Carolina. I am a grandmother and I am a great grandmother I have three great granddaughters; two of them live in Hortence and one of them lives in Tennessee. And all of my children have done quite well for themselves.

**CO:** Mrs. Smith before we get to your children, because I want to hear something about each of them, can we go back to you as a child. Could you describe yourself as a child? You just said people told you that you were spoiled but how would you describe yourself?

**IMS:** Probably somewhat selfish. Because I had three brothers and the middle boy, Harry, was my pick. He always humored me. Carried me around on his shoulders so I begged for Harry to carry me on his Jodie's. And if I would fall in the yard, stub my toe on a root or something, I would lie and I would cry and I would want Lillie or Harry to come pick me up and if someone else came to pick me up I would go back and fall down again in the same spot. And they let me get by with that. If that would have been me I would have torn mine out of the frame.

**CO:** And so your parents let you get by with that as well?

**IMS:** Sure yeah. Everybody would just humor me to death. My papa would say that I was an old fash girl, old fashioned and I would say Me Me papa old fash girl because I would cry at night. I would not want Lillie to pull my clothes off and bath me. I would just want to sleep in my clothes. So I would run to papa and he was already...he was 56 when I was born, so he was

[Iris Middleton Smith,1]

on up in years and he'd hold me tight and pretend that he would keep me from having to bathe and he'd say just tell them you are papas old fahsioned girl. That old fashioned girls didn't bathe every night. And so that's where I got the Meme papa old fash girl business. And my brother Vernon was going off to school, college, in Bamberg South Carolina in bombing school and he begged my mama to not make me stop saying that before he came home from college. He thought that was so cute.

**CO:** And now in the birth order, I see that you were the baby, you were born in 31, when was Julian born? Oh I know Julian was born in 1920? Right? In august in 1920 because that was the same year that Lillie came to live with your family. So you were 11 years younger than your oldest sibling. So you remember being indulged and you happily admit that. Can you describe your parents for me, your mother and father?

**IMS:** Mama was the disciplinarian. Papa was so staunch. We just knew how to far to go with him. We didn't know papas vengeance, even though we never saw it displayed. My sister said one time that papa hit me on my hinny with the back of a hairbrush because I sassed mama but I don't remember it.

**CO:** Oh she remembers s hitting you on the behind?

**IMS:** My sisters did.

**CO:** but you don't remember it?

**IMS:** No I don't remember that.

**CO:** So you remember your mother as the disciplinarian and your father was staunch but you didn't experience that through discipline?

**IMS:** No, he'd never whip the boys or anything like that.

**CO:** So what was your relationship with them like? As a child. When I say child I mean child up to the age of 12?

**IMS:** With both of my parents? It was very good. I had a good relationship with them. Of course I recognize that mama would be the disciplinarian. If I would misbehave she would be the one who, oh she would make me go out in the middle of the field. There was no plum tree out there and we would have to walk out to the middle of the field and get a switch off of that plum tree and it had to be the right size or she would make you go out and get another one. And one time I brought a little old tiny switch and she said, "Iris this is not large enough, go back and get another one." So I had to go back to the plum tree crying all the way back but that switch...and I would be breaking every little twig off of it all the way because I didn't want it to sting too bad.

**CO:** So how frequent were your spankings?

[Iris Middleton Smith,2]

**IMS:** Oh I don't know. I don't have any recollection of how often they were. They were just every time I needed them.

**CO:** You had more than one or two?

**IMS:** Oh yes.

**CO:** What about your extended family? Was it a big extended family aunts, uncles, cousins that you were? It was? And would you get together often?

**IMS:** Well my papa's older siblings were already gone for around here, but his older brother was a doctor and he got started in Florida and the youngest half-brother was Doctor O.D. Middleton and he lived in Lewisite.

**CO:** Medical Doctor?

**IMS:** Medical Doctor. Mhmm. And we drive up to Lewisite maybe once or twice a year and visit him. But he would come to Atkinson more often because he owned quite a bit of property in that area.

**CO:** So you really, most of your growing up life was in Atkinson. Do you remember much about your mothers' mother?

**IMS:** None, she was dead long before I was born.

**CO:** Did she talk about her very much?

**IMS:** Not a lot.

**CO:** Did she say what kind of relationship she had with her mother?

**IMS:** No. My mother's parents lived up where that gray house is when I was a girl and my mother's brother Cecil got this part as his inheritance and he built that house where Lillie lives. And eventually Joe and I bought that from him. And when we moved back from Tennessee we lived over there for a few years, three or four years, while we built this house here. Now...

**CO:** How many children did you have when you were building this house?

**IMS:** All of them.

**CO:** In your childhood, again, about up to twelve, what is the most memorable event you can recall as a child?

**IMS:** They were pouring clay dirt on a volley ball court by the school in Atkinson. We lived not far from the school. Close enough to walk it. And my mother let me walk down there to watch. And my oldest brother Julian was pushing a wheel to pat that down and turned over and it fell on

his legs and broke one of them badly. And I had run all the way to our house which was as far as from this house to there or a little farther and tell my mamma to come quick, that the wheel fell on Julian and he was hurt. So I remember him getting all bandaged up and him coming home and lying on the bed in one of the bedrooms and I'd go over there and sit with him and talk with him while he was in the bed. There was no television because there wasn't even electricity back then. So I guess that was the most...

**CO:** So your brother's accident. Was there any permanent damage from that?

**IMS:** No really

**CO:** So did it break both legs?

**IMS:** Just one, where it hit on.

**CO:** Did you feel important that you had to go and make that decision?

**IMS:** Oh Yes. It was a frightening experience.

**CO:** Sure that's why you remember it so well. Yeah that is what I am talking about it obviously left an....

**IMS:** Indelible impression.

**CO:** When you were growing up you said that you lied. You left college to marry but when you were growing up did you have something in mind that you wanted to be as an adult. Something to do? An ambition? A particular ambition?

**IMS:** Oh I thought I would enjoy being a home economics teacher. Because I've always liked to cook.

**CO:** Did you share that with your family? Did they know that that was what you wanted to do?

**IMS:** Probably so.

**CO:** So they were willing for you to? Your parents were. Did your parents support the girls in the family as well as the boys for careers? So they didn't make a distinction between boys and girls?

**IMS:** Yeah back in those days if there were college loan...I'm trying to think of another word, we didn't know anything about it. Because we didn't need it. Papa had plenty of money. In fact I have a little paper over in my office reflecting back on my grandpa Middleton. Said that he could not drive his horse and buggy from Atkinson to Hortence and stop and get out and put food on any land that he didn't own. That was 12 miles. So I remember when Joy and I married papa still owned nearly all of Hortence. He divided it up lots to sell it to get it habituated.

**CO:** So by the time your mother died was there still a big deal of property?

**IMS:** Yes.

**CO:** Who are your heroes as a child? It can be anybody people you knew. Well there weren't movie stars perhaps but someone you knew about it could be anybody just anybody.

**IMS:** Well I guess my brother Harry was. He was drafted in the service during WWII and he wrote to me and I would answer his letters and of course they were all censored and his would be...

**CO:** Do you know where he was? Just what theater he was in?

**IMS:** He was in Belgium.

**CO:** Oh okay alright

**IMS:** And my husband had a brother in that same area over there too.

**CO:** And did he get letters?

**IMS:** Mhmmm.

**CO:** Do you have any of those letters?

**IMS:** No. Unfortunately. Saving things like that back then were not important to me.

**CO:** Well I think most people didn't realize the value of letters. What were some of your struggles. It sounds you had as an adult baby of the family that you had a fairly happy childhood. Did you have any struggles as a child as you recall?

**IMS:** No I was always too happy go lucky.

**CO:** Except for when mommy tells you to go get a switch?

**IMS:** Yeah (laughs)

**CO:** Okay there is so much written today about the experience of turning from childhood to adolescence. Do you recall that being an issue for you when you became a teenager? No, it wasn't. You didn't resent your parents authority or?

**IMS:** No really.

**CO:** And you didn't have any issues with your mother as a teenage girl. And as teenagers did your brothers have any privileges that the girls didn't have. Were your parents more protective of the girls than the boys? Like did the girls have to be home at an earlier time than the boys did?

**IMS:** I would suppose so. And I can remember that they had the privilege to drive the family car to the basketball games. And we were not old enough to go.

**CO:** The girls weren't? Oh okay.

**IMS:** And none of them wanted their sisters tagging along anyway.

**CO:** Yeah I see I didn't realize it but your mother had three boys and then three girls so...alright okay so they got to drive. Did the girls learn to drive as teenagers? You just didn't get the uh...

**IMS:** ...Privilege of driving the car.

**CO:** You talked about your brother's accident as something that happened as a child. Did anything equally as memorable happen as a teenager? That you recall? Anything? No? Except perhaps running away to get married?

**IMS:** Yeah.

**CO:** And so do you recall at all at any point in your adolescence disagreeing with or questioning your parents rules or values or...?

**IMS:** One time I was sitting at the piano, and we wanted to get out of washing dishes, we always ran to the piano because if we practiced our music that was a safeguard. And I remember mama coming into the living room and saying something to me about hearing that I was slipping around the with Joe Smith. My best friend Ramona cruise lived in the jail because her dad was sheriff and if I wanted to go to a ball game or anything they were having I would go spend the night with Ramona and we would go to the gym and Joe would be there. And I remember kind of sassy like saying well you know I love him. I don't know why you make such an issue of that. And she said ha! You don't know what love is and I really didn't at that age but I thought I did. And that's the only time I remember smarting off to mama on anything like that.

**CO:** So how old were you and Joe when you started Dating?

**IMS:** I was 15.

**CO:** And was that when she told you that you didn't know what love was?

**IMS:** Yeah.

**CO:** So he is the only one that you seriously dated?

**IMS:** Yeah

**CO:** When you were at home do you recall your family being conscious of events outside of the household, anywhere from the community to the world. Was that something that you discussed...?

**IMS:** Well we were aware of it. Like things that went on in the community. We were always aware of it. Because everybody came to talk to Mr. Grooms. That was my papa. He was kind of the head hauncho of the community.

**CO:** And so what about world events?

**IMS:** No.

**CO:** Except for the war?

**IMS:** The war when my brothers were drafted.

**CO:** Alright. When you left home, when you got married and you left home, what was that like for you?

**IMS:** I didn't go far. Joe just moved in with us. Actually we lived in a small house with Joe's brother and his wife and the mother because you know I ran away to get married and when we came back we went to Harry and Pats house in Ahunta. And I can remember papa driving by one day and saying well, he always cleared his throat you knew something serious was coming. He says it's time for you to just move back home. So I did and we lived there for almost two years.

**CO:** What was that like?

**IMS:** It was wonderful. Lillie did all the cooking and the dishwashing and mama bought all the groceries. Papa would have thought of it and she'll buy anything in the way of groceries. We always had desserts. My mama saw to that. Joe never had desserts in their home. They never had desserts. Their desserts would be biscuit and gravy. Take a big ole biscuit stick a finger in it make a hole and fill it with syrup. So he thought that he'd died and gone to hog heaven when he got to her house. Because there was always lemon meringue pie, fruit cake, apple spice cake, something always.

**CO:** Now did Lillie bake the cakes?

**IMS:** Mhmm. And mama would get into the kitchen sometimes and do the desserts.

**CO:** So now where, did you work in those years? No? So what did you do during the day? Your husband worked?

**IMS:** Uh huh. I did finger work.

**CO:** and stitching? Cross-stitching?

**IMS:** Setting stitch embroidery. I have a beautiful tablecloth in there that I embroidered. That I have never hemmed and never put edging on. I do that when I was pregnant sit around embroidering.

**CO:** and but your husband at that time a line man?

**IMS:** No. Part of that time he worked as a 1:26:07-1:26:05 and worked at the office. Two years and then he went out in the field as a lineman. In fact that radio tower that he and his brother built. I think it's a hundred and twenty feet high.

**CO:** Did your family have pets when you grew up? Were pets and important part of your family?

**IMS:** I had a little kitten on the back.

**CO:** What about friends. We talked about family a little bit did you have friends like you are still living in the general area that you did as a child. Did you sustain friendships for most of your life?

**IMS:** and even when I was in school in Ahunta back then girls would go spend the night with each other. And I would have girls come home with me and spend the night and they all remember Lillie. They all remember Lillie's cooking to this day.

**CO:** They were into Lillie?

**IMS:** Oh yeah.

**CO:** So you don't really, you don't have a memory that involves your family without Lillie. Because she was part of the family?

**IMS:** yeah and because I was the youngest. She chose to come up here and live by me.

**CO:** Was there ever any resentment because of having an extra or was she just part of the family what was your...

**IMS:** She was like part of the family. I remember begging, when I was small crying because I wanted to sleep with Lillie. And mama wouldn't allow it.

**CO:** Did you have to share a bedroom with sisters?

**IMS:** Mhmm. Yeah I had a single bed and they had two double beds. The two of them slept in a double bed.

**CO:** I drove out and saw the house yesterday. Yeah it's a big nice rambling home.

**IMS:** Yes it was.

**CO:** What did your family do for fun? You said you and your sisters played the piano? Did the boys play piano at all?

**IMS:** Howard, the youngest boy took music but he didn't play any.



**CO:** Is that, would you all play for fun?

**IMS:** Yeah uh huh.

**CO:** was music a big part of the family.

**IMS:** Yes even as far back as when my papa was young. Joes grandmother told me that he used to play the 1:23:11-1:23:09.

**CO:** So it was important to your parents that you played.

**IMS:** But we played ball.

**CO:** So you also liked sports? Even the girls?

**IMS:** Yeah but the ball we played was a softball. Not a sponge but an air ball. On Sunday afternoon all of the children in the community would gather up and go to our house because it was such a big house and we would play hell over hell over send the ball over. They would have a leader two leaders and they would choose sides. And we would get on one side of the house the other crew the other side and one and one crew would have the ball and we would holler hell over hell over send the ball over so they'd say ready, ready or not here it comes well somebody in our group on the receiving end would look underneath the house to see their feet. See which way they were running which way they were coming from and then we'd run the opposite way because the object was for them not to catch up with us because even if they could throw the ball and hit one of us we were out. So we'd run to miss the team and just fun games like that.

**CO:** Were there any sports in school that any of you were involved in, the organized sports?

**IMS:** No. I am sure they had them back then. I know they had basketball.

**CO:** and your brothers did they play basketball or football? No? Artists? Any artists in your family?

**IMS:** Not my immediate family, papa had a sister that was an artist

**CO:** What was her medium? Would she paint?

**IMS:** Mhmmm pictures.

**CO:** Okay do you have any of her artwork?

**IMS:** Lillie had some at one time but I don't know what she did with it. All of her pictures included the Satilla River. Because she grew up in Atkinson as all the others did. And so every painting that she did had water.

**CO:** Did she sell any of those?

**IMS:** I don't remember honey.

**CO:** What about your sisters played the piano do any of you ever want to do that professionally was that something that you perhaps considered...

**IMS:** I took a few lessons after I went to Abraham Baholing to school. But I never wanted to do it professionally. That's just something I did to please mama and papa.

**CO:** Among the three sisters which of you played more?

**IMS:** I suppose I did.

**CO:** Do you still play?

**IMS:** Oh yeah.

**CO:** Did you ever play in church.

**IMS:** Oh yeah until the last six months.

**CO:** What about your children did you...

**IMS:** Oh all three of my children, all three of my girls took music. But Gloria developed her talent. She is a church organist now. Or the organ player. She's not a professional organist. And now the youngest girl in the organist at or plays the organ at 1:19:18-1:19:16. Now my oldest daughter Evangeline she was always too busy helping me in the kitchen and helping do laundry and that kind of stuff. She didn't get to pursue hers to go thought of her own but she leads to singing and her...

**CO:** She's the first born?

**IMS:** uh huh. She leads the singing in her church.

**CO:** So she sings. Did she take voice at all in school, no? What about educational background? You went to school in Ahunta did you say, and did you go straight to Aback from high school? Did you choose Aback for a particular reason?

**IMS:** Yeah because it is close to Joe Smith. But mama and papa didn't know that. If they'd have known that they would have tried to get me to go to Syracuse or New York.

**CO:** Well now did they get over that after your parents? They just wanted you to get an education? Now...

**IMS:** And Joes daddy was a moonshine maker. And never aspired to have or do much with his life and my papa was an entrepreneur and they thought I was marrying beneath my standard. But after we married they fell in love with joe.

**CO:** Now that was your educational background now what was Joe's educational background?

**IMS:** Just high school.

**CO:** Okay...

**IMS:** In fact he was drafted in the service. About the time he graduated I imagine.

**CO:** It sounds like education was highly valued in your household by your parents. What about their background. Your mother and fathers educational background? What was that?

**IMS:** My mother went to school in Sitra, South Carolina but I don't know that it was college back then as much as it was HS. They had to go away to make it to boarding school. When she finished it would have been the equivalent of high school.

**CO:** So they wanted you to get your degree. So did they expect that you would use that degree once you married and had children. Did they imagine their daughters being in the work world as much as their sons?

**IMS:** I don't know about me but they expected Hazel to. And she did. My sister Hazel taught until she retired. She was a teacher of the year in Ware County before she retired.

**CO:** Well did you ever regret not finishing school and getting that degree in home economics?

**IMS:** Oh yes. Many times when money would get scarce.

**CO:** So did you then...you didn't teach home ec but did you work outside of the home at all?

**IMS:** I was the number one substitute at Brantley high school for 18 years. I would work about 15 days out of the month.

**CO:** Did you enjoy that?

**IMS:** Oh yes I loved it. I love working with children. High school children.

**CO:** So most of it was at the high school?

**IMS:** All of mine was.

**CO:** If you could have gone back to school. If you could have done anything that you wanted to would you still like to have taught home ec?

**IMS:** Yes I think so. Not math I was never much for math. I liked English.

**CO:** Did it ever occur to you that you may like to teach music. Was that something that you would have possibly considered a degree in?

**IMS:** Probably not.

**CO:** Alright. So your parents seemed to have expected that Hazel would be independent but not so much you. Do you get a sense of why they had so many more expectations of her than of you?

**IMS:** That she would teach and she did.

**CO:** And what about Alice did she?

**IMS:** Alice got married pretty early.

**CO:** and she didn't work outside the home?

**IMS:** No.

**CO:** do you have any, was it just in Hazel to be a teacher? Do you think that's why when she finished college and taught that she just wanted to teach that badly?

**IMS:** I think so.

**CO:** Okay so you married and your first born was, let's see...

**IMS:** Evangeline...

**CO:** Right and she was born a little over a year after you married. She was born in February and you married in December. She was born in February 50 and you married in Dec 48... So 14 months after you married...

**IMS:** No, November.

**CO:** I'm sorry...

**IMS:** I married in November. February 24<sup>th</sup> 1948.

**CO:** this date is incorrect but its not...

**IMS:** November the 24<sup>th</sup> 1948.

**CO:** It's got December 24<sup>th</sup> 1948 but that's okay...alright. Did you, after you had got married and had children, did you have different expectations of your daughters than your sons where education was concerned? Did you expect your daughters...did you encourage them to go to college?

**IMS:** Oh yes. Vangie went to nurses training at Brunswick. It was a Jr. College then. I don't know how many months but she went several months. And then she dropped out and got married. Gloria would have only finished college. Well she didn't go to college she went to

Ware Tech and took bookkeeping and got a degree in that and she worked in bookkeeping for years.

**CO:** What about your sons did they go to college?

**IMS:** Both of them went for a while but Barry dropped out and went to pot fitting school and became a pot fitter. Darryl went to college for a short time and bought a small trader, and actually it was a travel freighter, and moved to Atworth, GA and he went to school there to study to be a lineman I think with the power company.

**CO:** But do you have a sense that you whether consciously or not encouraged your sons to be more financially independent than your daughters? You did? Because you expected your daughters would marry?

**IMS:** Marry somebody that would support them.

**CO:** In your years since then have you ever questioned that? That maybe they might have faired better if they had been better prepared to be independent? At least financially?

**IMS:** I don't know. I don't ever think of things like that?

**CO:** Okay. So you yourself have not had work outside of the home except substitute teaching, now did you retire from that? Did you just stop that at some point?

**IMS:** yeah when I was 68 years old.

**CO:** Okay and what was that like. Do you miss it?

**IMS:** Yeah I sure did.

**CO:** and what is the, what was retirement like for you. I expect at this point you had grown accustomed to it but what was it like back when you first retired?

**IMS:** Well I miss that getting up in the mornings and getting dressed up and going out in the public because obviously I dressed nicer to go to work than I do when I am at home. And just at home it was just so um...

**CO:** Did you find some way to be active after you've retired? Have you managed to stay busy?

**IMS:** Oh not really with any money making job? I stayed busy sewing cutting and sewing.

**CO:** Did you sew for your girls when...

**IMS:** Oh yes

**CO:** Yeah you enjoyed sewing?

**IMS:** I sewed everything they wore except underwear.

**CO:** Did you sew at all for your boys?

**IMS:** well they were wearing those silky shirts, you know they had a season of that I would buy fabric and make bows. I remember Grace Joiner she was assistant principle and my dear friend and she said Iris I used to envy your boys. They would come to school with those beautiful shirts on and I would say “where did you get that” and they would say “My mama made it.”

**CO:** and so they didn’t have a problem with wearing something homemade?

**IMS:** No they were proud of it. I made corduroy Jackets and put those grip fasteners, those metal kind, silver on some and gold on some depending on the color of the jacket.

**CO:** Because some kids in a later generation did not want to wear something that was made at home. How did that feel having them value their clothes like that?

**IMS:** Well actually I was proud of my work. And I wanted to do something that would make them proud of what they were wearing. If not necessarily proud of me.

**CO:** Now when you were in school did you learn to sew in Home Ec?

**IMS:** I took home economic but the teacher I had didn’t teach us anything. I sat in home ec class and sewed for her. I could sew as good as she could then. And she had a daughter and Id cut off and hem her skirts for her daughter. I got a good grade.

**CO:** I bet you did okay. You’ve already talked about how your father was financially secure have you, has your life felt financially secure? Would you say that you achieved your financial ambitions that you had as a child, a young woman?

**IMS:** I suppose so.

**CO:** Could you say something about how money has shaped your circumstances of your life?

**IMS:** Well I feel like I am pretty well financially secure now. I own this home 1:05:41-1:05:39 and just sold that one down to Christies parents probably about 12 years ago and I own about 23 acres of land here where my house sits.

1:05:41

**CO:** So you do feel financially secure. And have you felt that was most of your life?

**IMS:** about all my life.

**CO:** Do you ever, Do you feel that you’ve been able to share that with your children? Do you think they feel equally as secure?

**IMS:** I would think so. Gloria the middle girl, the one that taught, well she ran a Christian academy for a number of years but her son, all the time her son was in school down there because she transported him back to the school with her and her husband was a boiler maker and he's retired from boiler making and has a pretty good income and 1:04:24-1:04:24 husband is a pipe fitter, he is a foreman by the way is the 1:04:18 of Brunswick and he has a fabulous salary. Whoa. And they have a beautiful home. If you don't believe it you ought to drive by there during Christmas she put up here Christmas decorations now. I forgot how many HUNDREDS of Christmas bulbs they put up. She has a musical revolving Christmas tree in her front yard that people drive from Waycross and Brunswick to see. It's so pretty and last year she had a train that she pulled with her lawnmower that drove around and around her house and on her property. Showing all the lights and it was four children but she said mama was an old fat behinded woman that came out there because she's bigger than you. And crawled out of one of those things and she said I thought she was going to break the seat and push the sides out. There were single cars pushed together and I said why didn't you tell her? I would have told her honey that's for children you're too large? She said well I didn't want to hurt nobody's feelings. I said well I wouldn't have cared. If she'd had one of judge her on that somebody ought to tell her she is broad behinded.

**CO:** Well this category of questioning is about children and motherhood. You were the baby and your parents had expectations for you, was romance something that you, whether they explicitly talked about it or if you read books romance books did you have a picture in your mind of what romance was?

**IMS:** Sure I read all of 1:02:0-1:02:00 books.

**CO:** So you had these romantic images.

**IMS:** Oh yeah.

**CO:** Do you think your sisters did too?

**IMS:** Yeah.

**CO:** What about your mother do you think she did?

**IMS:** I don't know about her. She might have?

**CO:** So you did have images about what romance was and certain expectations. And do you think that you're romantic notions or your own experience in meeting your husband and your dating, how much of that dating did you have to do behind your parents back?

**IMS:** All of it. I never had a date where Joe came up to my house and got me.

**CO:** So when you ran away to get married were they shocked to find out who it was?

**IMS:** Uh huh. I guess maybe. Anyways I had already told you my best friend was daughter of the Sheriff. And she was in college at Douglas and she was in college at Tifton. So, her boyfriend was in college at Tifton and Joe was in Ahunta and worked for the REA but even before we married. So Joe came to Tifton and spent the night in the boys dorm was 1:00:27-1:00:25 and then they got up Wednesday morning before thanksgiving and drove by the girls dorm, picked me up and went on to Douglas and picked her up. So the four of us rode to, and the girl that I was rooming with Francis Waters, who lived in, I can't think of the name of the place, little town just out of Atlanta. So we went home with Francis and she took us hunt in a one legged ordinary. And that's who married joe and me. And then uh Ramona Joe and I went to the same motel, er hotel and spent the night and that night I sent a telegram to mama and papa. "Got married last night be home later." So mama was a post mistress so although it was Thanksgiving Day she had to open up and accept the mail. The mail came on a bus that ran from Waycross to Brunswick morning and evening so she had to go over there every morning and evening Thanksgiving Day to beat the bus. To get the mail. So when she opened up that letter Lillie said she went home just a shawling and papa said what's wrong with you. She said we got this letter says Iris got married last night. And papa said who did she marry? Joe Smith. So he didn't do a thing in the world except get in his car and drive to the jail in Ahunta to talk to sheriff cruise because he knew that sheriff Cruise's daughter would know something about him. So he asked sheriff Cruise what kind of fella Joe Smith was. And uncle Cruise told him that he was a fine fella. Papa said he doesn't drink? Mr. Cruise says no, he doesn't drink a drop! He said he's a bookkeeper at REA. Works in the building at REA. And papa said well, I reckon he's as good as any of them. And he told him that Iris went ahead and got married.

**CO:** So 57:59-57:57 was a big value in your fathers household?

**IMS:** Yes oh yes.

**CO:** So he didn't drink. He didn't allow that?

**IMS:** No no! Did not allow that whatsoever. In fact my boys smoke, my brothers smoked. But they knew better than to light up a cigarette in front of him. They went outside to smoke.

**CO:** So your father, you never saw your father take a drink or smoke?

**IMS:** and he chewed.

**CO:** Do you think those values came from his religion? Was it religious impulse?

**IMS:** Probably.

**CO:** So alright, that's really romantic in itself running away to get married I mean that's...



**IMS:** We went up in the mountains in NC and stayed at an old motel that was one of those rambling ones. And they were butchering deer. The men had been hunting and had killed some deer and those hunters were outside skinning and cutting up that venison. Very romantic.

**CO:** Well when you were reading these romance novels and you were dreaming about your own family, or your future love, did you have a family setting in mind or a certain number of children you wanted? No? But you knew you were in love with Joe Smith?

**IMS:** Oh yes.

**CO:** Now when did you know that?

**IMS:** I don't know. See he dated Ramona first. They were at the sweetheart dance one night and she danced with someone else and made him mad and he walked off and left her. And she came as true the next day telling me all about that and I said I wouldn't date that cuss again. I wouldn't look at him if I was you. I wouldn't have a thing in the world to do with him. Oh I just raved and raved. He had done my best friend wrong and that was just all there was to it. So when he came up to me that night at the dance and wanted to walk me home, he still teases me about it, I said well I have to go ask Ramona first. I wanted to see if she'd be mad at me. And I was kinda hoping she would say no but she didn't. She told me she said it's your decision if you want to. So I let him walk me home. And I remember he tried to kiss me. And I wouldn't let him. Because back then you didn't dare kiss on your first date.

**CO:** Sure.

**IMS:** Noooo.

**CO:** So did Ramona have a problem with it after that?

**IMS:** Well mama didn't know about it.

**CO:** No, Ramona?

**IMS:** Oh Ramona nauh. No.

**CO:** So then did it just kind of escalate after that?

**IMS:** Well we went together from November to December we had 2 years.

**CO:** Okay. Alright. So you had your fist child within the first year and a half. How did mothering change your life? Becoming a mother.

**IMS:** A lot because I nursed my child and I think you form a bond that way.

**CO:** You nursed them all?

**IMS:** Oh I did. I nursed one I skipped the next, I nursed one I skipped the next.

**CO:** Well let's see the first one was born in 50. In the 50s they quit, there was beginning to be an encouragement to bottle feed. And you say here that you had all of your children at the Ware county hospital. But you weren't born in a hospital I bet.

**IMS:** No I was born at home. Midwife.

**CO:** I know I heard that. And so what was your relationship with your children like?

**IMS:** We were very close. Although I was a strict disciplinarian. Oh yeah.

**CO:** Did you take that after your mother?

**IMS:** Probably.

**CO:** and was it the same in your household as in your family of origin that you did the discipline and your husband was...

**IMS:** yeah I did most of it.

**CO:** Okay do you think that it turned out that way because that was your family model?

**IMS:** Mhmmm.

**CO:** what about Joe's family. What was that, his experience of family discipline, like?

**IMS:** I really don't know. It was probably his mother though.

**CO:** How many siblings did Joe have?

**IMS:** well. There was four girls, four boys and they lost a girl but all four of the boys lived.

**CO:** So they had a big family. Okay.

**IMS:** and they were very poor. Very poor.

**CO:** So your financial security today is more related to your father's financial security than your husbands is that pretty much...

**IMS:** Mhmm

**CO:** Do you think that that has in any way affected your relationship with your husband?

**IMS:** I don't think so. I never tried to lord it over Joe. That my family had more money than his.

**CO:** How many grandchildren do you have? You sort of told me and you've got great grandchildren now?

**IMS:** Mhmm.

**CO:** How different is it to grandmother than to mother?

**IMS:** Well I think you become very attached to the grandchildren, especially those that are close around. That you are with a lot. But let's see. I have a grandson and three granddaughters in Tennessee. I have two grandsons and a granddaughter in SC, and I have one grandson in Hortence had two and they lost one. But he was almost 28 years old. He was in college at Statesboro. And it was what they thought was Bronchitis because he coughed a lot and he just got sicker and sicker and they ended up taking him to Mayo and he was there 2 weeks before he died. And it was Vasculitis. Ever heard of it?

**CO:** No.

**IMS:** Well they hadn't either, neither have the doctors in Brunswick. Just before they transferred him from Brunswick to Jacksonville one doctor came in and said they feared that it might be vasulitis. And when Ellen and Charles said well what is that? And all he'd say is that's not what we want it to be. That that's not what we wanted it to be. So when they got him to mayo they knew why. They finally, he was there five days I believe and nobody could diagnose it so they took a tissue out of one ankle or the top of one foot and a piece of muscle out of the other thigh and they told him, we'll know by Friday, positively what it is. When it came back it was Vasculitis. And he suffered oh my. It ravaged his body just like cancer would.

**CO:** All that in a matter of days?

**IMS:** Actually, he was at Mayo. 47:52-47:41 cell phone I can't tell you the total number of days he was at Mayo.

**CO:** and when was this roughly?

**IMS:** I should write things like that down.

**CO:** Now that's okay. But its been within, whose son is that?

**IMS:** Winnell.

**CO:** Winnell's son. Okay. So its been within the past 20 years?

**IMS:** Oh yes. Uh huh.

**CO:** Do you believe that mothering has gotten easier today or has it gotten harder than it was when you were raising your children.

**IMS:** Well personally I don't think they do as good a job. These young mothers have a non-chalet attitude.

**CO:** So what do you mean by that?

**IMS:** I don't think they discipline them enough.

**CO:** Not enough discipline okay. Why do you think that is? Why do you think discipline is not as important as it used to be?

**IMS:** I don't know. Maybe they resent being strictly disciplined I don't know. There just like I'm not going to treat my children like my parents treated me.

**CO:** Did you get the sense that your children thought that way?

**IMS:** No. Not the older. Maybe back then they thought they got too many spankings but now they say that they appreciate it.

**CO:** And do you think that they have regrets about not being more disciplined with their own children?

**IMS:** I don't think so.

**CO:** You've got 5 surviving children right? What are the things you admire most about each one of your children? Evangeline to start with.

**IMS:** Well she manages her household wisely. She's brought a lot of her children up in a fear under the fear and fellowship of the lord. Kept them on in church, Sunday school and church religiously. And they've all turned out well. Out of their three children, the daughter, middle child is a daughter and she's married. She's the only one of the three and she says she never wants any children and has said that since she was a child. And the boys are not either one married. So I don't know if she will get any grandchildren or not.

**CO:** Is that Ethan's mother? Okay. And what about Gloria? What is it that you most admire about Gloria?

**IMS:** Her spirituality. She is very deeply spiritual. A very devout Christian. And as far as Mika marrying I don't think that Mika is marrying quality. He's not mentally stable.

**CO:** And Mika is her son? Oh okay alright. So you admire her spirituality. How does she express that? Is it just in the way she lives her life or does she...

**IMS:** yes that plus she is very active in the church. She teaches a sue class. She's the organist. Always faithful and active in other phases of the church.

**CO:** Baptist church?

**IMS:** No Wesleyan. We used to be Wesleyan Methodist and then they just changed it to Wesleyan.

**CO:** Can you explain what that is and why they don't identify as Methodist now?

**IMS:** Because the Methodists got so worldly. Mainly they started accepting lesbians in the church and we are very much opposed to that. Same sex marriage only. No. They believe in same sex we believe in opposite sex only.

**CO:** So Wesleyan would be more traditional and Wesleyan Methodist would be more...

**IMS:** Liberal...

**CO:** alright. What about Whinnell.

**IMS:** Well Whinnell left the Wesleyan church and went to the Baptist but they have a good doctrine too. She joined rivers Baptist and she plays the organ over there.

**CO:** So what do you admire most about Whinnell?

**IMS:** Well Whinnell is, she's very. She decorated that hearth. She's does a lot of my interior decorating. And she does a beautiful job of decorating cakes. I see her decorating cakes...

**CO:** So she's creative?

**IMS:** Oh very creative, very.

**CO:** Well that is very pretty. And is it Barrett. Barrett your son? What about Barrett what do you admire most about him?

**IMS:** Well he's been a very strict disciplinarian. He has a daughter. Three daughters and one son. That live in Tennessee. And he and his wife take care of a badly retired boy that's about 12 to 14 maybe.

**CO:** and so that is admirable to you?

**IMS:** Oh to me it is.

**CO:** So is it their son or did they adopt him?

**IMS:** No they haven't adopted him. His dad, see his mother died at childbirth, and his dad, the boys grandmother, the dad's mother own half of several. They own the Dixie stampede company and all that stuff.

**CO:** So your son and his wife agree to raise this child. Okay.

**IMS:** I called up there one day and I seldom ever catch them at home because they stay there with hat boy and I heard a child in the background. And I said you must have one of your grandchildren with you. He said no mam that's the little boy we keep. She called his name and said 39:50-39:49 and I had to do some things at the house so we had to bring him with us. So which we seldom do. They don't like him to leave the house. So that was one occasion when I knew they had him over at his house with him.

**CO:** What do you admire most about Darryl?

**IMS:** taking care of his mama. He's my standby. He's my caregiver.

**CO:** So he lives close by?

**IMS:** He lives here with me.

**CO:** Oh he lives with you okay, alright.

**IMS:** I don't know what Lillie and I would do without him.

**CO:** So he helps take care of Lillie too?

**IMS:** If anything goes wrong we holler Darryl! Come fix this!

**CO:** Now does he have children?

**IMS:** No. He was married before but they divorced but thank god there were no children. That woman was half crazy. I told him that before he married her and so did Grace Jordon the assistant principle. She was a hypercondriact and everything.

**CO:** Well we don't have a whole lot more left. The next category of questions is about the experience of loss and the most obvious loss would be through death. So what has been the most difficult loss you have experienced through death?

**IMS:** Luke. Gloria's son because when we was in the hospital for the birth of Mika and Whinnell was keeping Luke and she was supposed to be watching Luke and so her husband Charles had come back from work and wanted to go outside and plow in the field and cut some dirt and Whinnell said well you're supposed to be watching the boys and that included her two sons who were not six and eight at the time. And Luke. So she told him to be on the watch out for Luke. And they said okay. Well they're just six and eight years old so they went out the front yard to play ball. And while they were out playing ball Luke went around the house, around that board fence, privacy fence, and fell in the pool. So having to, Whinnell, go through with Whinnell with her guilt and getting guilt and grief and Gloria, the grief, it was a time.

**CO:** So how old was Luke?

**IMS:** Two and a half.

**CO:** That must have been hard on all the family.

**IMS:** It was. It was hard on everybody. Because Charles and Whinnell felt like they were to blame. And although Gloria never held it against them.

**CO:** and so she was in the hospital having the other baby?

**IMS:** She would have come home the next day. And she and Ron lived here with me so Luke had been staying with me. But I just had a Goiter removed in here and still had staples. And I wasn't supposed to lift him so Whinnell took him to her house. To keep him. So that was very hard for all of us because naturally Gloria would have pictures of Luke sitting out everywhere and when Whinnell would come over here and shed see a picture of Luke she would pass out. Just fall to the floor. And Wade Strickland is Whinnell's brother in law. His wife was Joe's sister. And Wade said that was Whinnel's way of blocking it out. He said if that mechanism hadn't kicked in shed have gone crazy. So we ended up having to put Whinnell in the hospital for about four days for her nerves.

**CO:** How long did it take for the family to grieve through that? I'm sure as you say you never really get over it but what, how did that process work itself out?

**IMS:** Time. Time is the greatest healer.

**CO:** So you believe that from experience?

**IMS:** Mhmmm

**CO:** Well you suggested that something might be, that Mika the son that Gloria had and Luke that she went to the hospital to have died. Do you think that created problems for her to mother? Was he a special needs child? Mika?

**IMS:** We didn't know that to begin with. We didn't know that to start with.

**CO:** Do you think having an infant, how do you think that affected Gloria's grieving?

**IMS:** I'm sure it was very difficult for her. Very difficult.

**CO:** So what did you learn about bereavement from that death? Did you learn something about it that's helped you since then? When did that happen by the way? Do you know roughly?

**IMS:** Honey I don't remember. Mika is 29.

**CO:** Okay then it happened 29 years ago...

**IMS:** Mika was 29 on the 27<sup>th</sup> I guess.

**CO:** So it's getting on three decades. Alright. And again back to that has that given you any kind of wisdom or just experience with deaths that occurred since then? Do you learn something about grieving by grieving?

**IMS:** Well see I'd already lost a little boy myself.

**CO:** How old was he when he died? Did he die at birth?

**IMS:** No he was about 10 months old.

**CO:** Your first?

**IMS:** Yes he was my first child. Myron. He was the second child.

**CO:** Okay yes I see that. And did they know what caused his death?

**IMS:** His temperature went too high and seared the brain. But he was in the hospital. They just didn't keep him packed in ice like they would today. To get that temperature down. They didn't have the expertise back then that they do now.

**CO:** So was the loss of Luke reminiscent of the loss of Myron?

**IMS:** I can truthfully say I've been there. I know what you are going through.

**CO:** So you've been able to help people maybe at church or friends or family that have experienced...

**IMS:** Yes, very much so. Very much so.

**CO:** and some people like to suggest that that kind of pain and suffering has a silver lining was that true for you?

**IMS:** Mhmm I would say so.

**CO:** and what would that be?

**IMS:** Well the fact that I came through it victoriously and didn't have anybody to blame. I know that god had to have a will in it. It had to have been his will, his way or he could have stopped it. Could have kept it from happening.

**CO:** So accepting it, you came to the point where you could accept it. And that was your silver lining. And being able to help others is that...okay. What about other than death that is an obvious loss, but other than death have you experienced some losses that have, like separation from family members or divorce or health or something that is a loss.

**IMS:** Joe and I are divorced now.



**CO:** You're divorced? When did that happen?

**IMS:** I don't remember. We've been divorced about 7 years I guess.

**CO:** Oh my goodness so its fairly recent?

**IMS:** But we are still friends. I tell him I love him all the time and he tells me he loves me. But he was jealous. Oh insanely jealous. I couldn't go to the post office and see anybody, stop to talk 5 minutes and come back home because he thought I'd been off to meet somebody. And I just lived in it, lived in it. I've lived in it for 15 years. Until finally we had some friends that came to visit from Michigan. The Wesleyan church has what they call chaperelles. For senior citizens. And anybody could go you didn't have to be a Wesleyan. But it's basically for older people. And on one of those trips, we met three couples from Michigan. And we visited some of them and invited them down here to go to St. Simons and see Allen. So we took them out sight seeing and on one of those occasions one of those couples was here visiting and Joe accused me of getting it in the night and going across the hall in a spare bedroom and meeting one of those woman's husbands. And I said Joe, as jealous as you are and as hot tempered as you are id be less than an idiot to do something like that. What if you woke up in the night?

**CO:** So now could you just clarify for me. You were advanced age and he was still insanely jealous?

**IMS:** Oh yea. And she's just 5 and a half years older than me.

**CO:** So had he been that way all of your lives all of your...

**IMS:** all of our married life. I had just lived in it and lived in it and so they wanted those people over till Wednesday morning and I was sitting here Joe was there and we had a glider rocker there that he liked and wanted so I finally gave it to him because he wouldn't shut his mouth, although it was mine and anyhow that morning I sat here and I thought, I don't think the lord expects me to live in this the rest of my life so I got up went and stood in front of him and I said Joe, he's very hard of hearing, I said would you listen to me. It wasn't as bad then as he is now. And understood every word I say. Cause just as soon as I can I'm going to pack me some clothes and go to south Carolina and stay at Evangeline's a few days. And while I'm gone I want you to get you a good attorney. Because I made up my mind I'm going to give you your freedom. You've told me that living with me and my conduct is what is driving you crazy and I've never done any of those things that you've accused me of but I'm going to give you a divorce. He said do you want a divorce or do you want a separation? I said no. I'm going to get a divorce from you if it's the last thing I ever do. I'm going to set you free. So you go out there and hunt Ms. Perfect and if you can find her you marry up to her. I want you to find somebody that can make you happy because evidently I haven't done it. So I walked out went down to my room got me some clothes out and packed me a suitcase. And I left. And while I was at Vangies. I did go to Vangies. But before that I walked across the whole yard and said Lillie I

want to tell you something. I said I'm going to divorce Joe Smith. "IRIS! You what!" I said I'm divorcing Joe Smith! She said "No you not" I said Lillie you don't have a clue what I've lived in. I've never told you because I didn't want to trouble your mind but it's been hell on earth. And I said he's accused me and accused me "Accused you of what?" She's so innocent. I said of running around. I'm supposed to have had 19 boyfriends. I said if id of had that many boyfriends I'd of looked like a porky pine. With so many stiffs stuck in me. Oh man, so while I was at Vangies I called her a lawyer at Alma. And he told me sure he'd represent me. And I said alright. It might have been at black shire. I did call a lawyer in Alma but he told me he was my friend. And he told me he didn't handle divorce cases anymore. To call I can't remember the man's name in black shire.

**CO:** but now this has just been 6 years ago?

**IMS:** 7 or 8.

**CO:** So you were in your 70s already.

**IMS:** Mhmmm or pushing 70. Anyway. We went to the court house. And my sister in Jessup wanted to go with me I said nnoooooo uhuh. Some of my children wanted to go and I said never. I said Joe smith will hate whoever goes with me till the day he dies. Because he will think you are supporting me. I got in to this for myself against my parents' wishes and I'm going to get out of it by myself. So I didn't let a soul go with me.

**CO:** He didn't fight you? He didn't fight it legally?

**IMS:** To begin with he did. To begin with he did a counter suit and he awarded the place. I don't remember all it was. And I said well we will just go to the court house to see what trial people say. I said whatever they tell me is what I will do. Because I'm determined to be free from you. So I was in the court house sitting on the back on the right side and I'd taken a reader's digest or something to read and his lawyer came in there. It was lunch time. And he said well I have good news. I said you do? He said yeah, he's dropped his charges. He's not going to try to take anything. He said he didn't want anything out of that house. You can have it all. And I said okay. If that suits him that suits me.

**CO:** What do you think changed his mind?

**IMS:** Seeing me. Seeing me in that court house by myself. He got to feeling guilty and he knew I wasn't guilty. I told him that, you'd have never stayed with me that long if you would've thought that I was guilty. It was only your imagination.

**CO:** but somehow or another after all this time yawl have become friends?

**IMS:** Oh yeah.

**CO:** Okay now back to the subject of loss. That was a different kind of loss than death; losing your son and your grandson. How was that by comparison. Because often people will compare divorce to death. Was it...no not by...

**IMS:** it didn't bother me at all. I felt such a relief oh my goodness.

**CO:** so it was positive then.

**IMS:** Very much so. I just I'll tell you what I lived in it so long and felt so bad about it that I thought, if I have to sell everything I've got it would have been worth it just to be free.

**CO:** Now have you had friends or anybody that you've been able to help from your own experience with that because it's a common problem. You know have you, were you able to talk about it with friends or nobody knew of it?

**IMS:** Sure sure uhuh.

**CO:** So your friends knew what you were living in?

**IMS:** They never dreamed, never dreamed it. They said Iris we never dreamed Joe was treating you like that.

**CO:** What about your children did they know?

**IMS:** Uh huh.

**CO:** Your children knew.

**IMS:** Uh huh, all of them knew and understood. And all three of the girls said mama I wouldn't have lived in it as long as you have. I wouldn't. She says you have a perfect right to get out of that.

**CO:** Now did it affect their relationship with their father?

**IMS:** No, and I never tried once to turn them against him. Never once.

**CO:** Does he live nearby?

**IMS:** Yeah he lives down 301 just a short ways...which way do you come in from Hortence?

**CO:** From that direction...

**IMS:** Patterson? You come from Ahunta? Okay well when you leave here when you get to the caution light the next place down would be what is called the Sulk house. Joes trailer is on the right just before you get to the Sulk house.

**CO:** So he does live nearby.

**IMS:** In fact that was my land that I had gotten from my father's estate and I owned it for a long time before I let him buy it. I did it for me just because I told him if you go out and marry another woman, I don't care who you marry but you better get ready to snatch that trailer out of that lot because you ain't going to live there with another woman. I don't put up with that. Not that I cared. But I said as much as you put me through I don't want to see you be happy. But since then I've sold it to him. But you won't even think about dating another woman. His sisters have tried to get him to date somebody else. In fact they set him up with a woman named Hazel to go bowling with and he told them, let me tell you something. If yawl get it rigged up for me for somebody to go with you then forget it. I don't wanna go with her.

**CO:** and what about you have you had any?

**IMS:** No, nobody has ever asked me and I...it's just a closed book I think everybody knows that. I think we just, wont either one consider it. I can't imagine me going to bed with another woman. I don't know how these women do it.

**CO:** But what about just the company? You just don't need it?

**IMS:** No I have Darryl here and I have Lillie across the yard. And I have friends.

**CO:** Yeah you have a full lot.

**IMS:** very much so.

**CO:** Well mentioning Lillie takes me to the next subject. Which is really about the south and regional identity and so forth. I told Ms. Lillie this morning that when I found out yesterday when I met her I mean I knew that it was an African American woman who was turning 100, Emily told me about her back in august. And she may have mentioned that she was raised by the Middleton's but I didn't have a clue what, I didn't, it just did not I had no idea she had been raised by a white family. So when I found out yesterday when I walked into her house and Ethan introduced himself as her grandson I'm like him...from...I'm just in this mode of trying to process what does this mean ya know...

**IMS:** You know he is the only one that calls her grandma?

**CO:** Okay well he certainly does so sincerely. And seems to...

**IMS:** Oh he loves her to death... and he asked one time if she objected and she said No, no...

**CO:** well it seems to be a good relationship. I think he appreciates being able to get cooking. Well it certainly was not unusual for white families to use the help of...

**IMS:** Black people...

**CO:** black children...but the longevity of your family's relationship with Lillie and the nature of it is certainly unique. How did that feel...what was that like growing up in a region that is so identified with its racial opinions? What was it like to grow up in a household with another child who was let's see...you were born in 31 so she was 20 when you were born. So she was...but she was still a part of the household. What was that like. I mean when you went to school and friends came home with you, I'm assuming it was common knowledge that Lillie watts lived with B.G. Middleton's household. What was that like?

**IMS:** It never bothered me. In fact I felt a little proud that we had Lillie.

**CO:** and so why? What about it made you feel proud?

**IMS:** because she was such a help in the home. For all of us.

**CO:** Did anybody, white or black but white people especially give you any hard time about that question it did you ever have any kind of ya know flack about having a black person living in your home?

**IMS:** No. I think that Lillie being there was almost county knowledge. Because we certainly didn't try to hide it from anybody. And uh...nobody ever condemned us for it that I know of.

**CO:** Do you think that that had anything to do with your opinions of race?

**IMS:** Well I'm sure it did. However we were never allowed to say Nigger to anybody.

**CO:** From the parents?

**IMS:** Oh they were colored people. You didn't say Nigger to anyone. You didn't say Negro either. They were colored people. However, later on they resented that. They wanted to be called Negro.

**CO:** and then even that becomes inappropriate. It goes through stages so...okay. If you didn't have any personal experience of...did you ever hear your father say or did you ever know of your father ever having problems in the community about that?

**IMS:** Oh heavens no...

**CO:** because your father was such a prominent person? So people would never question his decision. Well do you think that, in any way sort of had an influence on the racial opions in this community? In what way?

**IMS:** I think they all accepted black people more readily.

**CO:** Than people in neighboring communities. So you think having Lillie in your home...

**IMS:** and just kind of growing up with all of us...

**CO:** did you get a sense that uh... what was your relationship with her like?

**IMS:** Oh I loved her to death. If anybody said anything about Lillie I would have stomped the life out of them.

**CO:** So was that pretty much the opinion of most of your siblings?

**IMS:** Oh yes... we used to laugh and say people could talk about my sisters and me and get by with it but they better not ever say anything about Lillie and let the boys hear it.

**CO:** Do you think that that's why you never heard anything because people just simply know that that was a line they didn't cross. Okay. Has it ever occurred to you...have you traveled much in your life?

**IMS:** Well when we lived in Kingsport, Tennessee we took Lillie with us two or three times maybe four times and back then there was still segregated bathrooms. So I told, I took Joe off by himself and said Joe when we all have to stop and go to the bathroom you have to find one of the newer stations that has a black bathroom. They'd have a men's white, woman's white, and one black one. The blacks, both of them had to use the same one. So he watched he was very cooperative about that and then Joe and I have taken Lillie on more trips than anybody else that know of. Gloria graduated from college. We have a Wesleyan college in Ballston, Oklahoma and we took Lillie out there with us before Gloria graduated to help her pack her clothes. And I told Joe the same thing then. That's a long ways and we have to make sure that we stop at a service for black people. And I remember that when we came back that night and Joe couldn't find one so we stopped at one that didn't have one but it was dark so Lillie just said...I said come on in Lillie come on I'll watch this door for you. "No no no I will run right around here." So she ran around the back of the toilet hiked up her dress pulled her panties down and peed.

**CO:** How did that make you feel?

**IMS:** I felt sorry for her. And I used to feel sorry for Lillie when we went to Waycross because the only place that had bathroom accessible for blacks was Tibo Street. And that was for black people. That's where black people lived and shopped. That was black district. Even after McCrowry's was built they had three bathrooms. Women, men, black and one for colored people. And I used to just think that there was just so much injustice. Even back then I thought I don't blame black people for having an uprising. The way they had been treated was less than humane.

**CO:** So do you think having Lillie with yawl helped you see that?

**IMS:** Yes defiantly so.

**CO:** So obviously you lived through the civil rights era. Your father died after brown vs. board of education but did he have an opinion about that? Do you remember? It was 1954, do you remember that at all the decision that lead to desegregation?

**IMS:** My papa died in 55 but I don't think that was a big issue then.

**CO:** Ms. Lillie told us 56 but I'll check on that. But by the 60s of course late in the 50s and then on in the 60s it becomes an issue. How did your family regard the effort to desegregate?

**IMS:** They didn't agree to a degree.

**CO:** The disagreed with desegregation?

**IMS:** To a degree. They just didn't think it was right for black people to be so pushy. Pushy for everything their way. But they realized that blacks had rights too.

**CO:** Would you say that, did your father, coming from another generation, an earlier generation, how do you think his racial opinion was? He wouldn't let your family use the N word what do you think his opinion was of race relations in the south?

**IMS:** Well I don't think that he didn't think blacks and whites should marry. And neither did Lillie's dad. Lillie's uncle? Lillie's brother! Lillie's dad died before I knew her but her brother Wesley didn't approve that he had a grandson that married a white woman. Up north. And he didn't approve of that at all.

**CO:** But obviously your father didn't mind living in close proximity because Lillie lived inside your house so...

**IMS:** But she didn't eat at the table with us. She had came and went through the back door. Never came in and out the front door.

**CO:** So and Nobody had questioned that? But does...when did that change and how did that change?

**IMS:** Well it changed when Lillie...well let's see papa died in 1950 and mama and Lillie were living there by themselves and she continued to eat in the kitchen and mama continued to eat in the dining room at the table by herself and one day she said Lillie! Bring your plate in here and sit at the table and eat with me! "No I'll be alright right here!" that was always her expression. But finally mama kept coaxing and pleading and one day I was down there and I said oh Lillie bite the bullet and come on in and eat with us. So she did and that kind of broke the ice for her.

**CO:** So do you think it was harder for her than it was for Yawl?

**IMS:** Oh yeah. Oh she felt her place and was never one to step her rights.

**CO:** Now what do you think made Lillie have that kind of attitude compared with people who were willing to protest? What do you think was the difference?

**IMS:** Humility. She would never have been that aggressive.

**CO:** And so are you the only person in your family you think that has this sort of sympathetic attitude against the people who did protest. You said a few minutes ago that I understand why probably after traveling with Lillie and understanding what, just how much trouble you had to go through to find a bathroom. Do you think there were others in your family that felt that way? Sympathetic to the cause?

**IMS:** Probably.

**CO:** What about your husband?

**IMS:** Uh not as much so. But he really could never object it. He better not object it around me. And his mother would have been...she's an old hussy. And I told him that she better never call Lillie a Nigger around me or she'll have an uprising. And I'm sure Joe told her. Because she never mentioned Lillie ever being in our home or anything.

**CO:** Obviously living in the south you probably heard others being derogatory like that what did you do if that ever happened. Would you just ignore it or?

**IMS:** I don't remember hearing that.

**CO:** What about when you saw it on television. You saw the race riots and...

**IMS:** I didn't approve of all that.

**CO:** Well that was so much of the 60s. Let me go back and pick up historically. What is the most important historical event in your own life that's affected you directly?

**IMS:** I don't know! (bathroom break and tape change)

## **Part II**

**CO:** So I'm trying to cover as much ground as possible so I can get home, at least half way home by dark

**IMS:** Where are you going?

**CO:** Valdosta

**IMS:** Oh, that's a 90 mile drive.



**CO:** I know. Well I have a lot of questions on the 40's, 50's, and 60's but I think I'm just going to cut to another. We talked a little bit about the civil rights movement. Following that was the women's movement, do you remember that?

**IMS:** Uh huh

**CO:** Did you ever hear of a book titled *The Feminine Mystique*?

**IMS:** No

**CO:** What did you think about the women's movement?

**IMS:** Well it's kind of like the black movement, but I thought they were pushing for more than they were asking for then they could bite off

**CO:** Did you have any, how'd you feel about the cause they were struggling for? The cause of equal pay for equal work?

**IMS:** Well I thought that was so good because so many women have to work to support themselves, it wasn't fair for them to work with meager fare.

**CO:** So you believed in equal pay for equal work?

**IMS:** Yes

**CO:** What were your ideas about, your attitudes toward it? Had they had more to do about the way women were going about it than they did about the cause itself?

**IMS:** Uh huh

**CO:** Did you have an idea of what women ought to do, to gain?

**IMS:** Not really

**CO:** No, you didn't feel yourself particularly constrained by gender roles?

**IMS:** No

**CO:** No, what do you think explains that? What do you think made women discomforted?

**IMS:** Well so many are having to be the breadwinner, they had to get out of their homes and work, they had children at home that they had to hire somebody to keep and then they had to come home and cook supper, do all those tricks. In fact I had 3 whole brothers and a half-brother living in Atkinson at the time Lillie was going to move up here and he said Iris, "Those people take Lillie one night while you're asleep and they'll tar and feather her." I looked at him and I said Julian those people respect me more than that, they wouldn't think of doing that to Lillie. They don't even know her, but they know me and they know what I stand for.

**CO:** So your brother wanted her to stay in Atkinson?

**IMS:** Yeah.

**CO:** And that was like she moved, you both moved here in the 80's? We kind of got that date...

**IMS:** No, I lived here a long time before Lillie came up here.

**CO:** Okay, but she moved here in the 80's to be near you after your mother died.

**IMS:** After momma died, momma died in 85. She lived in Atkinson at least a year after that before started coming up.

**CO:** So where did your brother want her to live?

**IMS:** Next door to him

**CO:** Because, did he think people in Atkinson were more open than people in Hortence?

**IMS:** I don't know, Lillie said Julian wants to boss me and I don't want a boss.

**CO:** She didn't think you'd boss her?

**IMS:** Uh uh, I had never had.

**CO:** Would your brother have bossed her?

**IMS:** Probably

**CO:** So she wanted to move here?

**IMS:** Yes, very much so, it was her decision.

**CO:** So right living is important to you, that defines your religion is living...

**IMS:** I'm not a denomination the rest I have friends in all denominations, I work with all of them well.

**CO:** Have you had something or have you experienced something that you would you know, practically anybody would classify as a miracle? You yourself?

**IMS:** I don't suppose so. I have 4 severe back surgeries, serious back surgery but I don't suppose you'd consider it a miracle that I'm walking, that's what I had surgery for to correct my back.

**CO:** What about a profound spiritual experience something internal? Have you had something you recall?

**IMS:** No

**CO:** Have your religious values changed over time?

**IMS:** No

**CO:** You feel like you have the same values your mother and father had?

**IMS:** Yes

**CO:** Do you believe in an afterlife?

**IMS:** Oh yes!

**CO:** You do, what do you think it will be like?

**IMS:** Well I think if you live right and righteously to please God, you'll go to Heaven, and if you don't, the Bible clearly says you will go to eternal damnation, and I think that's Hell. And I don't think you just go there for 3 days, burn up and that's it. Eternal means everlasting.

**CO:** What has there been, you wouldn't necessarily call it profoundly spiritual, what experience has given you the most joy in life?

**IMS:** I don't know, I guess my ability to play and sing.

**CO:** Music?

**IMS:** Music, because I stayed in the music department in my church.

**CO:** Do you feel at peace?

**IMS:** Yes

**CO:** You feel at peace with yourself. How did you achieve this?

**IMS:** Righteous living. I think that if you do something wrong, during the day God will remind you of it at night, I don't think you'll be able to go to sleep without God bringing it to your remembrance. Cathy would you like a cold coke?