

Part I

Catherine Oglesby: We are here today, and today is November 11th 2011, 11/11/11 a historic day and I am privileged to be at Ms. Lily Mae Watt's home in Hortense, GA. With us is Emily Crews who introduced me to Ms. Lillie and I'm really pleased to be here. I'm going to ask Ms. Lillie about some things about her life, she just celebrated her 100th Birthday last month, September, remind me Ms. Lille, September 15th, so we will get started asking Ms. Lille some questions about her childhood and we will just go until you get tired Ms. Lille okay? And then we will come back again tomorrow if you are up to it. Okay? One thing that I'm looking for as you talk, as you tell me what you recall about your life is turning points, events or just things that happened that are significant in that you recall them as a before and after kind of something that happened that your life was very markedly different after it. So if something like that comes to memory, if you will just make, clarify that as we talk, so I will just tell you that up front, but we want to start with your childhood and so I would ask what is the first conscious memory you have as a child?

Lille Watts: My childhood. Well we lived in a little house, in a little town. We had one little store. I remember my oldest brother. When we had to have something we would go to the store and I remember one time I had a whole nickel to spend for candy. That's stuck in my mind.

CO: How much candy could you get for a nickel then?

LW: Oh we used to call them licorice. You could get a lollipop for a nickel.

CO: Do you remember about how old you were?

LW: I was about six.

CO: Alright, walking tthe store, to get candy, okay.

LW: Yes mam and we used to go crabbing. And that was fun back then. But back then it was a source of food. When the tide would go out we would get our buckets and go down in the marsh and catch crabs. We

would have a forked stick, like boys have when they make a slingshot; well you would have a little stick like that only it would have a little handle on it. And you would catch those crabs, pin them down by their claws and catch them and put them in a bucket. And I remember doing that, when I was little. We did things like that.

CO: But what do you do with crabs?

LW: You eat them!

CO: You eat crabs, okay. Alright. Pardon my ignorance.

LW: Well back then you practically lived off of fish. And shrimp and crab and oysters and things like that because we lived on the coast near the creeks we called them.

CO: So you were with your brothers, okay.

LW: I say now that I didn't realize until I got older that my oldest brother was my care person because he never went anywhere without me. If he went to hunt cows, I was with him; if he went to cut wood I was with him.

CO: Is this the brother there [pointing at a picture]?

LW: Yes he passed away four years ago.

CO: That's Wesley?

LW: Wesley.

CO: Okay. Alright.

LW: My younger brother died two years before this one.

CO: And what was his name?

LW: He was Alexander Watts.

CO: Was he with you? Did he go with you crabbing?

LW: No he, when our family broke up, another black lady took him. My sister, Stella and Wesley went to live with an aunt and uncle. And they

took his name, Wellman. But Alex and I kept our name Watts. There are a lot of people who thought the Middletons adopted me. Even people who lived in Atkinson thought that I was a Middleton, (laughter) because they took me in, but I never took their name. And I tell them that the first time I ever rode in an automobile was when I came to the Middletons. We used to run when we would hear the mail man coming and I can remember running to get to where we could see the car pass. But I never got in one. Until the Middletons brought me home.

CO: So you were at least eight before you had a car ride?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: Okay. Alright. Can you describe yourself as a child?

LW: Well. I was a little runt.

CO: You were small?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: Were you mischievous? Were you...

LW: I loved music. I can remember when I got to the Middletons. They had a phonograph, they called them back then. I had never seen one of those before. Iris was the baby. She was about 10 before I got to doing other things. You know like little chores around the house. But my chore was to take care of the kids. From morning until night. To put them to bed. Just take care of them. And by the time I was 10 or 12 I was big enough to wash the diapers and things like that. That was my job because the Middletons hired a cook that did the cooking, and helped Ms. Middleton out with the cooking. I would play houses and ride them in the wagons and that was my job.

CO: Sounds like you did as much playing with them as you did taking care of them?

LW: I did haha. I really did. We had fun.

CO: Are your memories of early childhood up to eight when you went to live with the Middletons? Do you recall very much of that?

LW: Not much. I was big enough to pick up sweet potatoes and things like that I did a questionnaire for one of the granddaughters that graduated from college. She called me and asked if she sent me a questionnaire would I fill it out about my life and my childhood. So I filled it out to the best of my knowledge and sent it back to her. She called and said I got an A on it! Haha. She was so tickled she said I got an "A" on it! But anyways I don't remember too much except just playing and doing small jobs

CO: And you said...

LW: I didn't go to school until after I went to live with the Middletons.

CO: Okay so you said you recall that only four of your siblings were at home before you left? Is that right? Okay.

LW: That was Wesley and Alex and Stella and I.

CO: Alright, and then you all left once your mother died?

LW: Alex went up north after he got grown and we didn't see him for years. But Stella lived in GA out from Darien until about 20 years ago when she moved to Miami.

CO: Now how far north did Alex go?

LW: New Jersey.

CO: Okay now that's pretty far north. Alright.

LW: He never married and I never married. Stella married and has four children. She lost one. She has four living and she is 102. But her health has been really bad for the last six months.

CO: Okay do you remember your mother and father very much? Could you describe them?

LW: I don't remember anything at all about my dad. But I remember my mother. She was real light skinned. And slender. And it seemed like my last memory of her was that she was sick a lot.

CO: Now how old was she? Do you know?

LW: My mother died when she was 46.

CO: Oh my, okay, do you know what happened?

LW: We tried to find out a few years ago. Hazel was writing an article about me and she wrote to Camden County. She was also trying to find out what took her baby brother and they just gave that as crib death. And my mother's death was just natural causes they said. I think she had too many children too quick. Nine was too many back then.

CO: Was your father...was he your same mother and father for all nine siblings?

LW: As far as I knew.

CO: Okay yeah, and you say your mother was light skinned, was there mixed blood in her?

LW: I think she had a little bit of Indian in her.

CO: Did, the four or five other siblings you don't recall very much, had they left home by that time?

LW: Yes mam. They were working on Jekyl.

CO: Okay, do you know what they were doing?

LW: House work, boat work. Back then the only way you could get to Brunswick from where we lived was by boat.

CO: I'm not really clear on the geography surrounding Brunswick. Why was it the only way you could get there was by boat?

LW: Because they didn't have all of these bridges that they have now. See that was in the 20s. But you could go from Waverly or Woodbine or

another place by car, but back then it was a dirt road. Then later it was paved. But to get from where we lived in Honey Creek and down there over to Brunswick was by boat.

CO: There is a retreat there; the Episcopal Church has a retreat center that is at Honey Creek. I am wondering if that's the same do you know about it Emily, Honey Creek? I wonder if that is the place you were born.

LW: Honey Creek is in Camden County.

CO: Well I think it is I am pretty sure it is.

LW: Well they have a Dover Bluff. A lot of rich people have bought that and they have summer homes down there and it's changed.

CO: Yeah well this is a retreat center owned by the Diocese of Georgia, the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia and so I am not sure if it's Honey Creek because that is the name of the municipality, I am not sure about that but I know that it is Honey Creek so I wondered when you said that.

LW: Because that is where I was born. Only thing that is standing that I know of is a church. Of course they rebuilt it, but it is in the same place and the cemetery is there.

CO: How far is that from here? Where we are right now?

LW: Have you ever been to Dover Bluff?

CO: Do you know how far it is from here?

LW: I don't. It is about 50 miles east.

CO: I was suggesting that maybe we could ride out there but perhaps not.

LW: Yeah it is at least 50 miles if not more. Because the Middletons used to own most of Dover Bluff and they sold it Mr. Middleton and his dad sold it to people from Waycross. And then they sold it and it is different now than what it used to be. Iris and I went about six years ago we drove out there one Sunday just to go. It's different than it used to be.

CO: How about your extended family did you stay in touch with them after you came to live...No? So aunts and uncles and cousins...

LW: No mam I've done more of that in the last 50-60 years.

CO: Sort of reconnecting with the past years but basically growing up and...

LW: Growing up we never saw each other. My sister Stella was in Camden County and I was in Brantley County When I say I can't remember playing with Stella as a child, she says, "No I wasn't at home." "Mama had already sent me to live with the Wellmans."

CO: So when did you and Stella and Wesley reconnect?

LW: Well, Stella and I reconnected after Mr. Middleton died. When I got 60 I bought a car and learned to drive it. And when she was living in Darien we visited and Stella never learned how to drive but I would go spend a few days or a weekend with her and she'd come to see me.

CO: Was she still working then? At 62?

LW: Stella? Oh yes, and I worked part time after Mr. Middleton died. Ms. Middleton didn't need me all the time so I got to working at the lunch room. I substituted in the lunch room. And then one of her daughters in law [Mrs. Thelma] insisted on me going to cooking school in Brunswick. It was called the Manpower Program. I went there for the cooking class and when finished, there was a lady who wanted someone to help her two days a week. That lady was Dr. Smith's wife. She had full time help. Her children were old enough that she didn't need full time help she just wanted someone a couple of days a week. So Ms. Thelma took me by Dr. Smith's home for an interview and I got the job. Ms. Thelma was working at the unemployment office in Brunswick, so she'd take me to the office and Ms. Smith would come there and pick me up on Mondays and Fridays. Her baby was five and the little boy was seven, and I worked for them two days a week for 25 years. I missed a few weeks when Ms. Middletons health was bad. And then Iris and Hazel, her two daughters, told her that I needed to get out and needed to go back to work, so they would come and

stay with their mama one day and one the next. Because of this arrangement Ms. Middleton stayed at home--- Seventeen days is all that she was out of her own home. She was in the hospital 17 days before she died.

CO: Now is that, are we on the property now where she grew up?

LW: No mam I grew up in Atkinson. If you go on Highway 110, just before you cross the railroad track there is a white house. Now that home is used as a gap house.

CO: What does that mean?

LW: It is a place for troubled people. And they meet there.

CO: And so was that the place where the Middletons home?

LW: That was the Middleton's home where I went to and then they moved to Waverly, GA to live there four years. Mr. Middleton was a turpentine man and he had property in Brantley County and Camden County. So we lived there and then we moved back to Atkinson. He died in 1955. She died in '85. She lived 30 years after he died.

CO: Now how did Mr. Middleton know your mother and father?

LW: He got to know them through my sister Hattie that lived with my uncle in the country. Well my uncle was a farmer and he would grow vegetables and the Middletons would go out and they would buy vegetables. He also raised their for Thanksgiving or Christmastime from my uncle.

CO: So was this your mother's brother?

LW: My mother's sister.

CO: Your mother's sister [Lydia] and her husband [Preston]?

LW: Lydia married Preston. And his name was Preston Easton. And the Middletons would go out there and that's where they met Hattie. So that is how she got in the Middleton family.

CO: And Hattie was in the birth order, which sister was Hattie?

LW: Hattie was number six.

CO: But you don't really remember her growing up at home?

LW: No mam. I can remember her being at home for visits before she met the Middletons.

CO: So she came to live with the Middletons. And then had she gone on by the time you came to live?

LW: She stayed about a year after I came. They had built her a little house in the yard. Then when Hattie left, the Middletons said I was too young to stay out there by myself so they moved me in the house.

CO: And so where did Hattie go? Did she marry?

LW: She got married. She left and went back to Camden County. And then she got married and went to Miami and that's where she lives the rest of her life.

CO: So and then your primary job was to take care of the children?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: How many children were there in the Middletons house-hold?

LW: There were two from the first marriage that were still at home.

CO: And how old were they?

LW: The boy was seven.

CO: Just a little older than he was?

LW: Just about a year older than Vernon. And the girl Agnes was grown, so she didn't stay long. She wasn't there all the time. She was teaching. Another brother was off at school and he would just visit at home. That was Perry.

CO: Now did their mother die?

LW: Oh yes. Their mother died in childbirth.

CO: With the 7 year old? The one that was 7?

LW: No the baby died too.

CO: And then he remarried and that is when you came to live?

LW: I lived with his second family

CO: Okay and how many children in that family?

LW: There were eight, six living. There were two boys and a girl. And the girl died at nine months. And then there was another boy. And then there was Alice, Hazel, and Iris. Three girls.

CO: Now how old was Iris when you came to live with them. Was she born yet?

LW: There wasn't any of them born. I was 20 years old when Iris was born.

CO: And you were still taking care of the children okay?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: So how many generations of children have you raised?

LW: I have to count and see haha. Well when I went to the Middletons home; Mr. Middletons dad and his stepmother was still living. And Mr. Middleton had one whole brother and one half brother. And he had two sisters. Two whole sisters and four half-sisters. And one half brother. But the generations...

CO: But you didn't take care of any of them right?

LW: No I just took care of the one that raised me, I stayed there.

CO: The Middletons?

LW: Yes mam. But the three was the grandchildren let's see. How many generations of Middletons are there? Four aren't they? Four generations?

CO: It's about time you retired isn't it? Ha ha. Do you feel yourself retired now? Do you consider yourself retired?

LW: Yessem, my legs tell me that. Otherwise I get along good except for my legs.

CO: So your childhood up to 12 is kind of divided at your mother's death and really you change families at eight. What would you consider the most significant thing that happened in your life up to the age of 12?

LW: Up to the age of 12? I don't know...(Death of mother and changing families at 8.)

CO: And what about as a teenager you know, adolescence is, some people consider...

LW: I didn't have time for that.

CO: You didn't have time to be an adolescent alright...haha.

LW: Ha! I didn't have time. My niece asked me, where was one of the places I would hang out as a teenager, and I told her that there wasn't no such thing as hanging out.

CO: But now you must have watched the children that you, in a sense grew up with, but then you began to take care of them as they came along. But you had to see them through their adolescence. Did you notice a difference in their going from their childhood to their adolescence? Did they act or react differently to you as they went through adolescence?

LW: No, you know I never had any trouble with any children. The only child that I have had trouble with not liking me is Iris's great granddaughter and she doesn't want me to touch her. She's three years old and she is the only one. And I have handled dozens. When she was tiny her grandmother would bring her and we would go shopping and she was in the car seat. But when that kid got about six months old I went out there one day and she started screaming. She doesn't cry now but she still doesn't want anything to do with me. Her great grandmother says don't feel bad she doesn't like me either. So it's just her, she's just sweet as she can

be. She will tell me “bye” and I’ll just say “are you going to give Ms. Lillie some sugar?” And she’ll say, “NAH.” Then she will tell me goodbye.

CO: Wow, now that’s a record.

LW: Somebody asked me one day how many times I spanked and I said I’ve never spanked the first one. I said I’ve had permission from the parents to spank them if they needed it. And I said “no I will let you do that.”

CO: So okay we are not at that part yet but I’m going to ask anyway since you brought it up. How did you do that? Because you know today you hear about so much discord amongst families, so much disharmony and children...

LW: Well back then parents made their children mind. And if they would do anything wrong all I would have to do is tell them “I will tell your mamma and she will spank you.”

CO: So they didn’t challenge you?

LW: They knew they would get punished if they did wrong but by their parents and I never had to tell the mamma on them. I never had any trouble with them.

CO: So they didn’t challenge your authority? They just accepted that?

LW: Most of the time. Adults gave the kids things to do. They had jobs to do chores to do and when they got a chance to play, they played.

CO: So what kind of chores would they have to do? Did the boys have certain things to do and the girls have certain things to do.

LW: Yes the girls had to shuck and shell corn for the chickens and the boys had to feed the pigs and go get the cows do things like that, and when they were too little to go by themselves one would go with me one evening and one would go the next evening.

CO: And did they want you to help them? Did they want you to help them?

LW: Oh yes they would.

CO: How old did they start? Like when did a little girl start shucking corn, how old was she?

LW: When she was about six or eight she could go to the barn, play mostly, but she would learn how.

CO: Now did you have to teach them that or did their parents teach them that? You?

LW: Yeah we'd do it together.

CO: Do you remember in those years when you were taking care of those children teaching them how to shuck corn, and the various other things that they did, did you have a dream to do something on your own? Did you want to go to school?

LW: Oh I've always loved to go to school I didn't go very far because Iris's mother was a teacher and she helped me. I went to school for three years.

CO: But she taught you at home?

LW: She taught me at home. Helped me with my reading. I finished the... I really didn't do anything but finish the second grade at school. .

CO: What did Mrs. Middleton teach?

LW: She would help with my reading and the spelling.

CO: But when she taught school would she teach small children or...

LW: When she taught she had five or six grades. One place she taught she taught in a one room school house. She had all the grades.

CO: That was a job.

LW: Yes.

CO: When you were living with the Middletons did you just consider them your family? They were pretty much your family?

LW: Yes mam. I got the same treatment as the other kids got as far as clothes and food, shelter.

CO: Okay. So you stayed there you didn't leave? And go? And try to work anywhere else?

LW: No, not until after Mr. Middleton died and I had time to look for other work. Ms. Middleton raised broilers a few years. She built a broiler house and we did that for a few years. After she quit doing that, that's when I got to doing other work.

CO: So what kinds of other work? Did you just continue working with children?

LW: I did some; I worked after I moved here to Hortense I worked for four years for Dr. Tonge.

CO: In his home?

LW: ...Yes in his home. He was an eye doctor and his wife worked with him and I worked for them four years, keeping the children they had. Two and then when the third one came they moved to Athens.

CO: And then where did you go after that?

LW: I didn't keep any children regular after that except just to keep a baby in the afternoon for somebody.

CO: So that was in the late 50's? Late 1950's?

LW: No that was...It must have been in the 70's.

CO: You said Mr. Middleton died in 1955? And then you took care of Mrs. Middleton for the next few years?

LW: We had the broiler house for several years and then after that I got to working, I substituted at the lunchroom in Hoboken, GA for several years

CO: And where did you live when you were working there?

LW: At the same home in Atkinson. I was there all the time and then I moved to Hortense. I moved to Hortense in December of 85.

CO: Here?

LW: No I lived down there in that house first. And Ms. Iris's son had this house. After he moved she fixed it up she moved me here.

CO: The house I can see? The second one...

LW: Yes. That's where I lived when I first came here.

CO: And what about, we talked mostly about family, have you had friends that have lasted a long time in your past?

LW: I have but they are all gone. I had a group from church that was six ladies around my age. I'm the only one left out of the girls.

CO: Now did you go to a church that was a white church or...?

LW: No it's a black church. The one that I am a member of is a black church. Fancy Bluff.

CO: Did you have any awkwardness with your friends, about your living with a white family?

LW: No. Those Middleton kids would tell people I was their sister.

CO: How did people react to that?

LW: I don't know.

CO: You weren't with them. (Laughing)

LW: But I've never had any problem. I remember when I first got into the Middleton family, we came here to Hortense because Mrs. Middletons parents lived right across the road there, and she had come to her mother's and brought me. Mr. Middleton's cousin Mary Middleton asked what was my name and I said Lillie. And she said it ought to be "Niggy." I didn't understand but I never forgot how she said it.

CO: Now who was this?

LW: This was a cousin of the Middletons. And she said it should have been Niggy. Because I was black instead of something white like a Lily. I got a few things like that when I was coming up.

CO: Did your family know about that?

LW: No I don't think that I said anything to them. But then one time later Ms. Middletons sister-in-law saw me in McCrory's in Waycross. I had ridden the bus and gone shopping and she saw me in town and she said, "What are you doing in town!" I said "shopping." She said, "Looks like Estelle would have enough work for you to keep you at home, if not you can be working for those children. Her children are all grown and married." I got back home and told Ms. Middleton, "She acted like I was a slave and that I wasn't supposed to be in town." And other things like that. And it was just a few people that's ever showed any disrespect. And right now I have a whole lot more white friends than black friends. When they had my first 100th birthday party, Gloria Davis did most of the planning, and she had the colors black and white because she said, "Lillie has two families a Black one and a White one." But I'm treated by white people just like I have never seen any difference.

CO: So how were you treated in the black community?

LW: Coming up I was treated more *off* by my black family, I mean community, than the white, because they were jealous. They thought because I was with the white folks that I was getting extra attention that they weren't. It didn't make a difference to me.

CO: So how did that feel to you when you felt like they were jealous of you?

LW: I just let it slide. I mean I didn't...

CO: Did you feel like you had a privileged life because of that, because you were living in circumstances that you were..

LW: No, I didn't. It never made much difference. As long as I felt like I was doing what I was supposed to...

CO: Which was taking care of children?

LW: Yes, doing what was expected of me, I didn't let it bother me and I still don't.

CO: Was there ever any work that you wanted to do? Other than taking care of children or taking care of people?

LW: No just helping out with sickness and new babies and grandkids and things like that.

CO: So maybe did you ever consider being a nurse? Something like that?

LW: No. When the youngest son's wife died, he had two boys that were older and his daughter was 10. And I would go early in the morning and stay until he came in at night. Keep the house and do the cooking and stay up with the little girl. And I did that until he married again. Which was in a couple of years.

CO: What did either one of the families do for fun?

LW: Back then you worked, there wasn't much time for fun. The boys I would take fishing. We would go fishing and we'd go berry picking, and things like that. But on Sunday afternoons like this time of the year they'd go just strolling in the woods...

CO: Well you said at one point that you really liked music; do you remember as a young woman what you liked to listen to?

LW: Anything that was music (laughs). I still like music. I like pretty singing and just music.

CO: Did you have a favorite singer or favorite...?

LW: Oh on TV I liked Perry Como. Frank [Sinatra] also. I can't think of the other guys name back then. I don't like the sound of that boom boom boom banging stuff, but I just like soothing music.

CO: Did you ever get records for gifts or have your own...?

LW: Oh yes I used to, yeah. My CD player tore up and my VCR is torn up now.

CO: Sounds like you need a new one?

LW: These new ones are too smart. They are smarter than I am! You know all the buttons I push and I push the wrong button and then the thing won't work.

CO: What about sports did you ever want to play any sports, or basketball, softball?

LW: We played drop the handkerchief and ring around the roses and hail over, and hide and seek. The kids played basketball. They had a basketball ring out in the back.

CO: Did any of them play at school? Did they?

LW: One of the boys did. I don't think the girls ever played.

CO: Did you go to school and watch any of their games?

LW: No, no mam. I went to one football game for one of the grandsons and I thought that was awful. I don't care to watch it on TV.

CO: Well it is pretty violent. But you say that you know that you finished the second grade but other than that you didn't have any formal schooling. You were taught by Mrs. Middleton. When she taught you to read did you like to read fiction? Was there...

LW: I liked to read. I used to read story books and bedtime stories to the kids and that kind of stuff. But then I liked to read...I liked fiction. Mysteries and that.

CO: That seems to be the favorite genre for most people. They love mysteries.

LW: Yeah I love mysteries. I like mysteries on TV. They have the program of mysteries and I like that better than I do other programs.

CO: Do you read now? Stories?

LW: Yes mam. My eyes are not so good, I can't read like I used to. It takes me a while. I just finished a book. It was Amish and it was a picture story. It was good. I don't think the Amish are as strict as that book says they are.

CO: You didn't marry, how did you do that?

LW: Easy.

CO: Did you ever come close?

LW: No mam. I never had a date. I was asked a couple of times but I didn't respond.

CO: So you didn't have any desire to date or marry or have your own children?

LW: No mam.

CO: No?

LW: The circumstances were different than they are now.

CO: But there aren't a whole lot of women who just didn't marry, you know so...

LW: Yeah.

CO: It is...

LW: I never even think about it. I say why mess up a good thing? I had everything I needed.

CO: You certainly didn't miss family you had plenty of that. But you didn't have any desire for your own children?

LW: Not when I was younger. I think that as I got older, I didn't think about it.

CO: You had eight siblings, there were 9 of you. How many of you did not marry?

LW: Two.

CO: Only two of you didn't marry?

LW: Two youngest ones. My younger brother and I. The rest of them married.

CO: What did he do for a living?

(Phone call interrupts)

CO: You mentioned the theme at your birthday party was black and white, were there equal members of black and white people there?

LW: There were four...six [blacks]...my niece and her friend from Jacksonville and my nephew and his wife and my God-nephew and his wife.

CO: There were only six black people there and the rest were family from the Middleton family?

LW: The ones at the church were mostly community friends. It was just a kind of community thing. But the one in Jesup was mostly family. There were no blacks there except me.

CO: And so the members of the church weren't there? Of your church. No?

LW: They had a mix-up. They were invited but they got mixed up somehow. And some of them said they didn't know it until it was all over. But they got the dates mixed up. No one from my church came except for six members of my family.

CO: I already asked if you considered yourself retired now and you said only because your legs wouldn't let you work. What does it feel like to be retired? My goodness.

LW: I have not worked in, I don't know how many years, 12 or 15, in a long time, I haven't done anything except...I used to work in my yard but I don't keep them anymore. I do a little piddling outside in the yard.

CO: Besides church are there other things you do away from home?

LW: Not anymore.

CO: What about before? Were there any organizations that you were a member of or any?

LW: Hortense Missionary Women's club.

CO: Do they meet very often?

LW: They used to meet once a month, but now they sometimes skip a month.

CO: One thing that affects so many people is money. Do you feel like you have achieved for financial ambitions or did you have financial ambitions as a young person?

LW: I just wanted to be able to pay for what I bought, and not buy something that I wasn't able to pay for.

CO: So you didn't buy a lot of things on the installment plan?

LW: No I never bought anything that I didn't pay for.

CO: So you paid cash all your life?

LW: And when I go into the stores they will say, "You gonna get this on your credit card?" and I say I don't have one, and they say, "Well do you want one?" and I say "No mam," and "Well if you get one you will get so and so and so and so" and I've said "I've tried but they won't give me one because I don't have a credit." "What do you mean you don't have a credit?" and I said "That's why I don't have a credit card." You have to have credit to get credit. So...

CO: What about bank accounts have you gotten by without having to have bank accounts?

LW: Yeah I have bank accounts.

CO: But they try to give you credit cards too?

LW: Now they want you to do everything automatically.

CO: That's right and you have been able to avoid that?

LW: I am going to start it the first of the year to pay my telephone, TV, and security device.

CO: And you don't have to have a computer to do that. You don't have to be on the computer?

LW: No you just give them your card at the bank, and they'll take the check number and they'll take care of it.

CO: How do you feel about that change, are you okay with that?

LW: Yes mam because I'm getting so forgetful, and I have to have somebody help me sometimes with it. That way I don't have to worry about it.

CO: Well I've already asked you about romance and marriage.

LW: It aint too late. [Laughter]

CO: Well now I would love to talk about that. What are you looking for?

LW: The perfect man; one that likes to garden, plant flowers and do all that good stuff.

CO: So somebody that's good out in the yard and takes care of the yard.

LW: Nobody that I have to take care of.

CO: Well and you probably need to be out in the community. Would you care if it was a younger man?

LW: Nope, that wouldn't matter. But I don't want one period. No I think I've put it off long enough. So I better leave well enough alone.

CO: When you were younger did you? It's unusual not to think about it as a child and as a young girl you didn't think about meeting someone?

LW: No mam. It never crossed my mind. When I got through with chores and got those babies bathed, and put to bed, if I had a chance to do anything I'd read a book. I never thought about dating, or what other girls were doing. Things like that just didn't cross my mind.

CO: Well do you have images of what a good mother is? Did you feel like you were a mother figure to the children that you took care of? What did you consider yourself in their lives? What role did you play?

LW: I reckon a kind of care taker; I felt like those kids knew that it was my responsibility to see that they didn't get hurt. I would take care of them and that's what I would do.

CO: What did they call you?

LW: Lillie.

CO: Oh okay so they just called you Lillie? So clearly their parents must have thought that you were a good motherly type person because you took care of them. What do you consider, how do you consider your care for them and that of a mother? What was their mother able to do for them that you didn't?

LW: Nothing except nursing.

CO: So you really feel like by taking care of so many children that that is why you didn't feel that you needed your own family because you were...?

LW: I guess so, I guess I felt like I was in a real family and I enjoyed what I was doing and I don't regret any of it.

CO: So you did enjoy taking care of children.

LW: Iris would tell you that when we built play houses she was 10 years old.

CO: So you grew up kind of with Iris, and then you took care of Iris's children?

LW: Yes.

CO: So how many children did she have?

LW: Five.

CO: Five. And now Ethan that's here is a grandson?

LW: He's her middle grandson.

CO: How would you describe what a good mother is? What is a good mother?

LW: Well I think anyone that loves her family and takes care of them and sees that they are fed, cared for, knows where they are. I think that a good mother and a good family needs to know, especially with teenagers, where they are.

CO: Were there ever any problems with the teenagers, because this family was a large family?

LW: They never had any trouble. They had rules and the children knew to be there. Unless they were with a group, they needed to be home at the same time.

CO: Was religion important in that family?

LW: Oh yes.

CO: So they went to church?

LW: Oh yes they went to church and Sunday school 'til they got grown enough to choose their own.

CO: Did any of them go on a different path? Did any of them choose something other than the Baptist church?

LW: Do you mean the white family? The white family were Methodist. Well Iris chose Wesleyan Methodist, and the others are still AME.

CO: Did you ever go to church with them to the Methodist church?

LW: Yes after I got grown I did.

CO: Did you have a hard time at a white church?

LW: No mam. I go to white church here now. At least 3 Sundays out of the month.

CO: Is it a fairly integrated church or are you the only...?

LW: I'm the only black...

CO: The only black person there? How did that feel?

LW: It didn't bother me. Everybody treats me the same.

CO: Yeah I've been to a church where I was the only white person there and I felt really odd. I felt like everyone around...

LW: Well I guess I would if I didn't kind of grow up with these people, most of them. There are very few people who attend the church that haven't known me for a long time.

CO: So it sounds like you may have had more trouble with the black community than the white community.

LW: I did. Growing up I did. The schooling I got at the black school and after I got grown I went to cooking school class.

CO: Do you remember what years that was when you went to cooking school?

LW: No but I have a paper with my name on it.

CO: So you have a little...

LW: I think it was in the 70s.

CO: If you have a paper that has some of the dates spelled out...

LW: I think it has. I worked in a restaurant for months but I didn't like that.

CO: And you didn't like it? You cooked at the restaurant.

LW: Yes mam.

CO: And what did you not like about it?

LW: The hours mainly. And I just didn't like it. I liked the cooking part. It was alright, but I didn't like the fact that I was always saying there is a dirty end of the dish rag and I got it every time. We were supposed to leave the kitchen, the grills and stoves and everything clean for the next shift, and when it would come my time I would have to clean it before I could do anything.

CO: So what kind of cooking did you learn to do? What did you learn that you didn't know when you went to school?

LW: Nothing.

CO: And you got the certificate.

LW: Well we learned how to do all of the fancy stuff, you know what they fix for the restaurants. You learn how to fix stuffed pork chops and pineapple chicken and all that.

CO: And now Mrs. Middleton wanted you to go is that right?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: So she wanted you to go, did she have something in mind for you? Did she want you to have a career?

LW: It was something to do, and it paid something, so that I had extra money and her daughter in law was working at this unemployment agency and they needed so many for a class, so she called and wanted to know if I would be interested and Ms. Middleton insisted that I take it and I rode back and to with her...

CO: With the daughter in law?

LW: Yes.

CO: Did you enjoy that?

LW: I did. I enjoyed the fellowship; of course there were a few rotten apples in the barrel.

CO: Now that was 1970; was it integrated?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: The class itself was integrated?

LW: Yes mam. We had four white ladies and I think there were about 15 black.

CO: Was there anything else you can say about the role of mothering? You don't feel like you missed that you did plenty of mothering?

LW: I don't think I missed anything. I really have done and gone places that I wouldn't have done and gone if I'd had a family.

CO: What about your nieces and nephews you said you didn't really keep in touch with your siblings until you got grown, but since then have you been in relationships with their children?

LW: Yeah I have, for several years we'd go to different ones of the grandchildren, I mean my brothers and sisters children's homes for Thanksgiving. The last two Thanksgivings we didn't do that. Two of the girls, one lived in New Jersey and one in Delaware and we would go there. Dorcas had moved from New Jersey to Delaware. She lived in New Jersey for 30 something years and moved to Delaware. So we went to her new house and that's the last time I went. That will be three years this coming Thanksgiving.

CO: So what do you do now for Thanksgiving?

LW: They kind of broke up. It was supposed to have been the girl who lives in Glynn County's turn two years ago but her house burned so she couldn't have it then. That kind of messed things up. They haven't had that get together.

CO: So what do you do for Holidays now?

LW: I go different places. Last year I went to Jesup with Hazel's grandson. And Wynell has invited me to her house this Thanksgiving.

CO: And who is this?

LW: This is Iris's baby daughter that lives about three miles from here.

CO: Now you said after your mother died and you came to live with the Middletons and Wesley and Stella they went someplace else?

LW: They went and lived with the Wellmans.

CO: The Welmans. And how long were they? Is that a White family?

LW: No that was a Black Family.

CO: How long were they together with that family?

LW: Until Stella married which was, I don't know how many years.

CO: and Wesley then left and did he marry?

LW: Yeah he married and he lived in Florida a while. Then he came back and lived at Jekyll, until he bought the place in Fancy Bluff.

CO: Can we talk about the experience of loss. It sounds like you have had plenty of births in your life you have helped through that. Did you by the way, did you serve in any sense as a midwife?

LW: No mam. I never had to do any part of that. My job was to keep the kids away.

CO: But I'm sure much of that early period the children were born at home?

LW: Yes mam, all of them.

CO: And did they call a doctor or did they call a Midwife?

LW: They called a doctor. When Iris was born they called a doctor. She got there before the doctor did, but the midwife was there and delivered that one. And then with the baby they lost, they didn't call the doctor. They had a midwife, so they didn't call the doctor until they got in trouble then they called.

CO: Was that the last baby?

LW: That was the last baby.

CO: And how old was Mrs. Middleton do you know when the baby was born?

LW: I don't know exactly. Mrs. Middleton was 26 when she married and she was 92 when she died. But I don't know just how old she was.

CO: They don't speculate on the death of the baby? They don't know?

LW: The one that died had the cord wrapped around its neck.

CO: So you saw a lot of babies. Did you actually care for the infants when you were a young girl like 10 or 11 and 12?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: You did? Were you scared of them at all?

LW: No. But I could remember when the first baby was born and Mrs. Middleton had a cowhide chair with a little ring and she put that baby in that chair on a pillow, and I sat down and watched it when she was cooking. Then when I got a little older and the baby got a little bigger, she put it in my arms and let me hold him.

CO: You were never worried about that?

LW: Never.

CO: Well what is the most difficult loss that you have experienced through death?

LW: I don't know. I guess it was losing my brother.

CO: This brother Wesley?

LW: Yeah because he died unexpectedly. He got up Thursday morning and raked his back yard, went to church that night, went home, went to bed, and never woke up. He wasn't sick. And I guess I had just always depended on him so much. All my life. Even though we weren't that close

until after I got grown. He went to see me a few times when I was in the Middletons home, but I guess that death was most shocking to me.

CO: How old did you say he was when he died?

LW: 97.

CO: Do they know what was...

LW: It was the heart.

CO: Oh it was the heart. Did you learn lessons about grieving and the process of loss from that? You say that it was very hard and it was a surprise?

LW: I think people getting killed in an accident and dying like that is easier than if they are sick and you know you have done all that you can for them. It's really easier in a way than to suffer and be sick a long time like that. And I hope that I'm never a burden, and my brother would always say this, he hoped that he never had to be a burden to anybody. He just hoped that when his time comes that God just takes him. So that's how it happened.

CO: Did that give you a sense of comfort?

LW: Yes it did because I knew he was ready and I knew that that was his wish because every time we talked he would say that.

CO: What about his family, were they also aware that he had reached that and...

LW: Yes all the children say that that is the way dad would have had it. He didn't want to be sick and he didn't want to be a burden. He would always say that he didn't want to be a burden to anybody.

CO: Now when did his wife die?

LW: She died about 4 years earlier and she was sick the whole time. She had Parkinson's. Had to be fed and cared for.

CO: Now where are their children?

LW: Well two of them are in Brunswick, one's in Jacksonville and two are in Delaware.

CO: Do you see the ones from Brunswick and Jacksonville very much?

LW: Yeah. Well the one that's in Brunswick came up to my party and then he came one Sunday to a Sunday school meeting since then. The one in Jacksonville came to my party. The two in Delaware haven't been since August I think. And one of the girls, well both of them their health is not good.

CO: When you and your brother would get together after you were both grown and he had a family and you were established in this community, how did you all reconnect when you sort of your lives together as siblings have been you know just...

LW: My brother knew more about everything. He was older and had the memory of an elephant, so he knew more about the people and everything than I did.

CO: So you would talk about that?

LW: Yeah we would talk about that. A lot of people interviewed him, I don't know how many times because he was the oldest one that worked at Jekyll with those rich people. Descendants would come to him wanting to know things about their parents and grandparents.

CO: Now how old was he when he retired?

LW: He was about 90.

CO: Oh my goodness and he was on Jekyll all that time?

LW: No he moved to Fancy Bluff. There was a white professor from the Brunswick college that would take him places and get his interviews because he would do, kind of like what you are doing.

CO: Did your brother enjoy that?

LW: He did. He used to work in the gardens. He had pictures of his floral gardens. That is what he did. Wesley's employer didn't have any children and when his wife died, he was just left there. He used to play golf and Wesley was his caddy when he was younger and he would drive. They just did things, his garden work, just anything.

CO: So he stayed on and kind of cared for him after his wife died?

LW: Yeah and then when he died he left Wesley, and each one of his servants, money. He left Wesley 25,000 dollars and back then Wesley built a house with that money. Now you can buy a garage for that...

CO: Yeah you can build a room. Do you remember what year it was or what decade?

LW: No I can't. My memory is not that good.

CO: Well it sounds really good. So did his memory stay good until...

LW: It did. He could remember and tell you things. This young man here took me down there one Thanksgiving to dinner and he was supposed to come back to his Granny's for dinner. They waited and they waited and Ethan got to talking and listening to my brother and they said they didn't know what happened to Ethan.

CO: Well if you are interested in that sort of thing it is better than being at the movies. Hearing it firsthand.

LW: Wesley could remember all that. He started out working at Jekyll's big restaurant as a bus boy. On his 94th birthday, or 97th, birthday they had him back for a luncheon.

CO: Now what about his children what have they done? Work wise?

LW: Well two of the girls are school teachers and one is a nurse and the boy worked at the unemployment office and he liked that. He was in the service 20 years.

CO: Which branch?

LW: I think he was army. And then he got out of that and he taught a while and now he's with some cable company. And we tease and he said, when I turned 60, I swapped my position for a J-O-B. This old man is climbing ladders and going under houses installing their cable...it took a little getting used to.

CO: Well yeah I guess it did. What about their children. What are their children doing?

LW: One of Thomas' sons is in the service. One of them is a computer freak and I don't know what the third one does.

CO: Ha. Computer freak, okay. Well we were talking about loss, what about besides death have there been some other losses in your life that you recall other than losing someone through death like ill health, divorce, separation, that kind of thing?

LW: Well they had that in the family but it didn't affect me.

CO: What about the experience of aging. You are so incredibly healthy for someone who has passed her 100th birthday?

LW: Well I have been real lucky I guess and blessed. Up until the last 6 months I have been able to get about and walk. I haven't walked over to Iris's in ages but other than that I am diabetic, I have high blood pressure and arthritis but nothing serious.

CO: Do you remember when you were younger what you thought about old people.

LW: Oh we used to think if you were 60 you were old.

CO: Right, how old do you feel today besides having these few ailments. In your mind how old do you feel?

LW: Well I don't feel any older than I did 10 years ago. But my eyes, my memory, and my body tells me different.

CO: And so besides the pain what has been the most difficult part of aging?

LW: My memory.

CO: The memory?

LW: My eyes are half gone. I can't see hardly at all out of this eye.

CO: Have you had to have any surgeries?

LW: I have a stunt in this eye. You can tell it's larger than this eye.

CO: Alright, what advice would you give to younger people on the best way to age?

LW: To take care of themselves and to rest.

CO: Doesn't sound like you have a whole lot of rest in your life?

LW: I have always gotten the right amount of sleep.

CO: So you haven't had trouble sleeping ever?

LW: I do now that I'm older but I don't let it bother me. If I can't sleep at night, I sleep in the day time. I think that most young people are under too much stress. They put themselves [there]. I don't know some of them expect too much of themselves and some of them just throw themselves away. They abuse themselves.

CO: Have you ever been around people who have substance abuse?

LW: No, never, but I have 3 great nephews who just abused themselves. They are smart, and all three of them are college graduates, but instead of trying to do something with that knowledge, they took drugs and burnt their brains out so they are not fit enough to even find a decent job now.

CO: But they have college degrees?

LW: They have college degrees. One of them had a good business in Atlanta as an architect. Now he is home and he has gotten back to doing that. Instead of having an office, he's living with his mother and doing his little work out of her home. He can't keep a car because he can't stay off of

drugs to keep a license so somebody has to take him back and to. And he is smart. Well he was.

CO: So did he have a family?

LW: No, he never married. Now one of them has married and has three children but he and his wife are dope bags so his mother took the youngest child to raise and her parents took the other child and they lost their children.

CO: And that is strictly from drugs?

LW: Yes

CO: And so how did these three young men make it through college? Did they not become abusers until after they finished their degrees?

LW: After they finished college they got a good job and worked in a court house in Jacksonville for years and had a good job, but they just got going down the wrong path.

CO: What age do you recall the most nostalgically. What period of your life do you look back on as maybe the best years?

LW: I guess the years as I got 60 and I got a car and learned to drive when everybody thought I was too old.

CO: So maybe the decade of your 60s you remember with the most favorably? Because you could drive?

LW: Yes I went to Drivers Ed and took the course, got my driver's license and bought a car, bought a Maverick.

CO: Would it be the decade 1970. You didn't drive to this course right?

LW: No I had the girls take me because I couldn't drive and if they couldn't take me I would ride the bus.

CO: But shortly after that is when you turned 60. So you would have learned to drive were you in your early 60s when you learned?

LW: It was after I finished that course that I got the car.

CO: Now if you never had any credit, did you pay cash for the car?

LW: Yes

CO: Oh my goodness!!!

LW: I bought three cars.

CO: Only with cash!?

LW: Two of them, I bought new and one of them second hand. The last one I bought was an 88 Oldsmobile from Dr. Smith's son's wife. She was expecting her second child and she had to have a bigger car. She wanted a van. She hadn't driven the car much and I got it for \$5,300. I gave up driving when I was 90 and I sold the car to my niece for \$2000. The back seat was just as clean as when I got the

CO: Now have you had a car since then?

LW: No.

CO: So where did you go in your 60s?

LW: Well I would go to Waycross...

CO: To visit?

LW: To shop, go to the doctor and things like that.

CO: But there is something about having the independence of your own wheels right?

LW: After I got that car Mrs. Middleton and I would go places. I'd bring her to church on Sunday or we would go shopping, and she got to feeling comfortable with me driving. But I never will forget the first time we drove to Waycross. Mrs. Middleton was nervous about getting across the bridges. So by the time I got to Waycross I was a nervous wreck.

CO: Now did she drive also?

LW: No mam she never drove.

CO: She never drove? Okay.

LW: When we got to Waycross I stopped at Pick N Save. Hazel, her daughter, was living in Waycross at this time and she had told us how to get to her house without going through town. You had to go around by the stadium. I said I'm going to go in and call her because I couldn't remember the directions exactly. I went in there to call her and left Ms. Middleton in the car. She decided that she was going to go in. I had left the key in the car. So she got out and closed the door with the key in the car and I didn't have another one. So I called Hazel and her husband came out there and they said take a coat hanger and unlock the door.

CO: That's a helpless feeling isn't it?

LW: When we were ready to leave, Hazel drove as far as the highway home and her mamma rode with her. But that was an experience.

CO: So did she ride with you again after that?

LW: Oh yeah we rode after that, and we went home and she didn't say a word.

CO: Well did she feel bad about locking the keys in the car?

LW: No. I have done it several times. Not that time but since then I finally got more keys made and had one to put in my billfold and one to hide under the hood. That's an awful feeling

CO: But having that car...

LW: It was good for both of us because she had the beginning of Alzheimer's and she would want to go home and go see her family. I did take her in the car and just drive her down the road. We would drive down 110 and sometimes she would want to come down to Hortense. I would bring her to Iris's and we would get there but that wasn't in her mind, so when Iris said "Mamma lets come in," her mama would said "no we have got to go home we've got work to do. She was always saying that "we've

got work to do.” If she got restless, we would get in the car and I would drive her down the road and when she would get back home, she would be content.

CO: And how old was she when she started to get Alzheimer’s?

LW: about 90

CO: But you were here in this house?

LW: No I stayed with her until after she died. She died in May and I moved here.

CO: In the 80’s?

LW: 85. She died on May the 8th 1985. And I moved here in December of 85. I stayed there in that house until then.

CO: So you had your car there? Which was probably a good thing? Probably her family felt good about you being there...

LW: Oh yea the girls tell me now that if I hadn’t been there, that their lives would have been much different.

CO: So you went to Brunswick, you went to Waycross to go shopping. Were you ever able to drive yourself to see any of your family?

LW: Oh yeah I drove to my church, the Fancy Bluff church, and I would bring Mrs. Middleton to Hortense to church on Sundays when she felt like coming here.

Part II

CO: We’re back at Ms. Lillie’s home. It’s Saturday, Nov. 12. Before I go on I would like to go back and ask a couple of questions about some things you said yesterday. You told us about Hattie your sister and I asked you where she was in the birth order, and you said 6th that would have been Alex, you, Stella, Wesley...

LW: No Hattie would have been third...my oldest brother was David and my oldest sister was Janie. And then Hattie and then Johnny. Hattie would have been the third.

CO: Do you have any idea of when she was born?

LW: No...

CO: But she lived with you after you moved to the Middletons for about a year? And you described her. But when I asked you to describe yourself you just said you were just kind of a runt.

LW: Well I was...

CO: But when you described Hattie you said she was bossy.

LW: She was bossy...ha. She admitted that was why Mama sent her to live with her Aunt because she was so bossy. She was mean to us runts.

CO: Did you and Hattie come to live at the same time at the Middletons?

LW: No mam. She brought me after mamma died and we lived in the little house in the yard until she got ready to leave and then the Middletons moved me in the big house.

CO: She left to get married or did she just leave to go to work?

LW: No she left to get married. She went back to Honey Creek and she married a man from there. They went to Miami and I didn't see them for years.

CO: So you didn't stay in touch with her?

LW: No not for a long time, but my sister Stella did. In later years she took me down there and we spent a week with her.

CO: Were you an adult at the time?

LW: Oh yea. I can't remember what year. It was probably in the 50's, because it was after Mr. Middleton died. I remember that much.

CO: and he died in 55?

LW: Yeah he died in 55.

CO: Did Hattie date while she lived with the Middletons?

LW: Yeah she did.

CO: How did she meet her husband?

LW: Well he was raised in Honey Creek and they knew each other growing up. Her second husband she met in Miami. And I can't think of his name. She died kind of young from a Diabetic Coma. She was a bad diabetic and she died suddenly. She had a bad spell and before she got to the hospital she died.

CO: And she had how many children?

LW: Hattie? She didn't have any.

CO: Was that by choice?

LW: I don't know if it was by choice or if it was whether she couldn't. And my next sister Janie, the oldest one, I never heard from her from the time I left home.

CO: Janie and David you didn't hear a thing from them? What about Johnny?

LW: Nothing. Nor Johnny. In the next set of kids Wesley was the oldest one. No Mamie was the oldest and then Wesley.

CO: Who is Mamie?

LW: There was Mamie and Wesley and Stella and Lillie and Alexander.

CO: Now you told me about Alex moving to New Jersey, what did he do?

LW: He started out in construction work. He worked in a restaurant and I think that was the last thing he did.

CO: And he died when? Did you see him very much after he moved to New Jersey?

LW: He would come down about once or twice a year and then we went to see him 3 times before he died.

CO: How did you like New Jersey?

LW: I didn't. When we went it was snowy. Oh my stars. I told them they could have it. One time we went and it was summertime and it was pleasant but I wouldn't want to live there.

CO: Do you know why he settled on New Jersey?

LW: No he just wanted to break his ties I think. For a long time none of the family heard from him and finally he got in touch with my older brother. Wesley got me coming to visit him especially after he retired. Alex died of cancer. When we went to see him, my niece had gotten power of attorney because he didn't have any near kin and she kept us kind of posted on his condition and told us that he had lost a lot of weight. Finally they put him in the hospital and then Wesley and I decided to go see how he was doing. We were so shocked when we got there because he was nothing but skin and bones, and he didn't know us he didn't know anything. We got there Friday and he died Monday morning.

CO: So you wonder if he knew you were there?

LW: I don't think he did. I don't think he knew that we went. And it got my brother so bad because he said he reckon nurses get used to seeing sick people and you know they're kind of used to it so to Dorcas it wasn't as bad as it was for the rest of us seeing him for the first time in that condition. He was so poor. You could see the pacemaker and he didn't know a soul...

CO: Have you heard people say that the last faculty to go is hearing so he may have heard you?

LW: He may have and we would talk to him and he might have and so in the one time it seemed like he was trying to say something.

CO: He probably did know.

LW: He probably knew we were there.

CO: I know you don't know the year but was that...

LW: It's been about 8 years at least.

CO: Oh so it hadn't been that long? You were traveling. You just said went on some cruises other than that have you been outside the country?

LW: No, the two tours were in Canada. And I have been to Montana the center of the country, Yellowstone Park. I went to the Bahamas on a cruise twice.

CO: Well some people consider the south another country.

LW: I've been to Washington a couple of times and...

CO: How'd you like Montana?

LW: I liked it a lot! Oh the deer! The doctor had a log cabin and the deer would come out of the grass in his back yard. When we would go out to ride around and the animals were just everywhere.

CO: So you went there, were you on a vacation or were you with somebody?

LW: I had worked for this doctor and they had a cabin in Montana where they would go stay. They were there and they would make the arrangements for me to come. It was my first Plane trip. We just went site seeing, went to Yellowstone Park and saw the geyser, Old Faithful, and every day we would go somewhere different. I stayed 10 days.

CO: That's a good vacation.

LW: It was good.

CO: So you went with the doctor and his wife?

LW: No I went on a plane by myself!

CO: You went by yourself?

LW: Yes mam. They met me in Bolderman?, Montana at the small airport. When I got to Salt Lake City, I changed planes from Atlanta and got on a smaller plane and it took me to Bolderman and they met me.

CO: Did you look at Salt Lake City from the air?

LW: Oh yes.

CO: Isn't that amazing?

LW: And then we went to Canada. Our plane was delayed for hours. When we left Boston it was just before Christmas and that was the most beautiful thing. Everything down below just looked so pretty. It was worth waiting to see that.

CO: And this was in the past 20 years that you made this trip?

LW: Oh yeah, when I went to Canada it was my 90th birthday. And when I went on my last cruise it was my 92nd. My nieces took me. My black nieces.

CO: You said you went to school for a couple of years. You finished two grades. When you went to school, who took you to school?

LW: I walked.

CO: How far was it?

LW: Well one of them was about a mile. The one that was in Camden County was about a mile and the other one was about as far as from here to that little station Paiges.

CO: Was there a time when you might have gone back to school? You just were satisfied to learn from the Middletons home?

LW: Well there wasn't a choice; it was just one that was made for me. I had babies to take care of although I didn't birth any of them. But anyway I didn't miss anything, I reckon. I still cannot stand children that had the opportunity but just didn't want to go to school.

CO: You said you didn't work for a long time but you said you went to work in the lunch room in Hoboken. How did you get there?

LW: That was after I learned to drive.

CO: You said you were in your early 60's when you learned to drive?

LW: Yes mam. That was in the 60s or 70s when I was working in the lunch room.

CO: And you said in the early years after you moved in with the Middletons your brother Wesley visited?

LW: Yeah that was after we came to live in Waverly four years he came to visit me a time or two. And later came to visit me a time or two. And later on when we moved to Atkinson he came a time or two. He and his wife came. But when I was younger we didn't communicate much.

CO: So you didn't reconnect much with him until you were both grown?

LW: No mam.

CO: Now you have talked about having some insensitive people say something to you about living with a white family. Do you remember as a child when you became aware that it was significant that there were color differences in people. You realized that white people were treated one way and black people were treated another way. Do you remember becoming consciously aware of that as a child?

LW: Well where we grew up there were no white families in our neighborhood. There was a white man by the name of Kirkland and he had a little store, and I remember that he said that he accepted black people to go in the store. On our little corner Bob Atkinson, a black man, had a little country store that sold the same things, and we went there mostly. Mr. Kirkland catered more to the White people.

CO: So you say your first conscious memory as a child was walking to the store. Which one of those stores were you walking to?

LW: Mr. Bob's. Bob Atkinson's.

CO: So the only white person you knew was the owner of the store Mr. Kirkland.

LW: Yeah because we didn't interact. There were Kirklands and Whiteheads and Lincolns, but that was more in the white section which we never entered.

CO: You said that your uncle sort of struck a deal with Mr. Middleton that you and Hattie could go work with his family is that right?

LW: Now what?

CO: Is it your uncle?

LW: No my mother told the Middletons that when she died I could come live with them but my uncle let Hattie go and live with them. That is how the Middletons got to know Hattie was through my uncle that had the farm because the Middletons would buy things from them.

CO: So your mother had allowed you. Now up until sometime in the 1920's there were still legal arrangements where children, not just black children, where parents could agree to have their children not adopted but become apprenticed to other. Do you know if there was a legal agreement or if it was word of mouth?

LW: I don't think it was legal. No because they didn't adopt me.

CO: Well this wasn't adoption but it was a legal relationship and it was to my knowledge called an apprenticeship.

LW: Well I don't have a birth certificate but I have a transcript from the Census of 1920 with the Middletons signature on it.

CO: Verifying your birth date?

LW: My mother had agreed for my brother Alex to go live with the Agets. Wesley and Stella went to the Wellmans and they took the Wellmans name, but Alex and I kept our name.

CO: And if you didn't have contact with white people how did it feel to suddenly wake up and find yourself to be living with a white family.

LW: It would have been harder if Hattie hadn't been there, but she had been there and I just sort of molded in. At that time Mr. Middletons family from his first marriage, his son was 7 and we fit in fine. I don't remember ever getting into any fights.

CO: So did you have any problems understanding what was permissible?

LW: No, I didn't, because Hattie had been there and I did what she did. She knew the rules and what to do and what not to do.

CO: And what were those? What were those rules?

LW: Well you didn't sit on the front porch, and you kept your place, you ate in the kitchen and there were just certain things that black people did that white people didn't do.

CO: Yes. One custom that was very important to observe was eating. Where you ate.

LW: We ate in the kitchen. of course.

CO: You didn't eat with the?

LW: No I never ate with the white folks until after Mr. Middleton died and it was Ms. Middleton and I. Then I ate at the table right with her. When I became old she would tell people that I was her companion.

CO: So you feel like you sort of learned this by observing Hattie?

LW: Yes mam. I just knew by her being there and she had been there several years so she knew the rules and what to do and what to say and when to say it.

CO: She had been there for a few years?

LW: Oh yes.

CO: Oh I thought I understood that you came close to the same time.

LW: No, Hattie had been working for them. That's how my mother knew about it because they knew mama had more kids and they asked about wanting one of the girls, wanting me. And mama told them that they could have Mamie, which was my older sister. And they said no she's about grown, she would be leaving soon, too. We want someone who will grow up with the family.

CO: I wonder if they had a clue as to how long you would be there.

LW: I don't think anybody did. But least of all me.

CO: But then Hattie was there for roughly a year but by then you felt like you knew the ropes even as a young girl at 9 years old you kind of knew.

LW: Yes, mam. I knew what to expect and what not to.

CO: So you've been outside the South a few times you've been to Montana, New Jersey, You've been outside the country 3 times. But that has been fairly recent right?

LW: Yes mam it's been about 2 years since I've been to Delaware. We used to go every summer and Thanksgiving, but it's been about 2 years. I told them that that was a little too much, unless we were going to stay longer. We would go Thanksgiving and come back Saturday night.

CO: When you're outside of the south do you notice a different in just anything. Well, obviously there is a significant weather difference but culturally do people treat you the way people treat each other. Is that apparent to you when you're outside the south?

LW: It seemed like in some places they are a little more cultured, than others, but I think I've been real blessed I haven't run into any unpleasantness with white people.

CO: Well, one reason I asked is that I lived outside the South myself for a few years, and so it was a jarring experience for me.

LW: Well the South used to be real segregated [means probably segregated] here but now it is not like it used to be.

CO: Well in some ways that is very good but... Throughout your life, did you personally or your family, the Middletons, were they aware of events going on outside of the house hold. Were they really concerned about getting the news every day?

LW: Oh Mr. Middleton did, because back then you didn't have radio. He got the Savannah Morning News as long as he lived and he would come in from work and the girls would want to read the paper and get the funnies. They knew that when they got that paper it had to be folded and put back. He was Representative of Brantley County he was really into politics.

CO: So he was political?

LW: Oh yes.

CO: So did he talk about it at the dinner table to the family about what was going on in the news?

LW: He might with the boys.

CO: So he didn't consider that stuff girls ought to hear?

LW: No that wasn't girl talk. He would talk to the boys about things like that.

CO: The need for help with childcare is obvious but do you think they ever considered perhaps having one of your brothers live with them because there was plenty of work to do on the farm?

LW: No my brother had his own job. Mr. Middleton worked in the turpentine business and he had black men working for him. He had a lot of people working for him. There were two in particular. One was Jerry Merrit that the boys just loved to death and they would trust him with them. They'd go camping and hunting and do things with Jerry.

CO: Well you have lived through a lot of history. Do you recall anything about WWI?

LW: Well Ms. Middletons brother was in WWI and through conversations and stuff like that...

CO: You knew that he was away.

LW: And the man that Stella married, I mean Hattie, had a brother that was in WWI and I remember when he came home safe how happy his mother was. I remember her coming over there with Kevin, and being so happy, that he'd come home.

CO: So what did he do? Do you have any idea?

LW: I have no idea. I just remember that he was in the war.

CO: And this was African American right, because there weren't many of them that went. Is there in your thinking a historical event that directly impacts your life?

LW: No nothing drastic.

CO: Well I know that my grandfather was like you in that he didn't want credit he paid cash for everything and we just always attributed that to living in the Depression. That is a kind of hallmark of people living through the Depression do you think that that's what made you, I mean this was 1970s or 80s for you when you bought your car. Do you...where do you think that trait came from?

LW: I think that I got that from Mr. Middleton because he never bought things on credit. Didn't allow the children to. If he didn't have money to pay for it, you didn't need it.

CO: So you learned that trait...

LW: And you didn't spend any money I remember the girls will tell you now papa gave them a quarter. And tell them to bring back the change. And I said I will be sure to spend every bit of it. And I remember when they had first started serving lunch at school they called it "soup kitchen." It was 25 cents a meal. And he would give them a dollar. For three girls that would be a quarter a piece and they would split that other quarter. Two of

them would get a dime. And one would get a nickel, and next time they would pass it around. That dollar would go ???.

CO: So they got a dollar a day for lunch. And then they divided up the 25 cents by...

LW: There were three girls so one would take the nickel and two the dime and the next time they got a dollar they'd take turns with who took the nickel.

CO: Would they ever get mixed up on who got the dime and who got the nickel.

LW: They didn't. They kept that straight.

CO: Now did Mr. Middleton talk much about the effects of the depression when they were living through it, especially as someone in politics, did that?

LW: No he didn't talk too much that I know of. If he had anything that he wanted to talk about they would talk about that.

CO: Now do you remember anyone talking about FDR, Franklin Roosevelt...

LW: Oh yes I remember all about that.

CO: What were your general impressions of them?

LW: I thought he was a very likable person. He had a lot of support. He was the only one that was elected that many times. Somebody must have liked him and I thought his wife was a wonderful lady.

CO: Have you read anything about her; she is a high profile historical figure...

LW: No not like I do now of course...first lady is put on a pedestal but I used to read that she wasn't beautiful but she was beautiful inside; Mamie Eisenhower...and Ms. Truman, I don't remember any of them past Ms. Roosevelt.

CO: Oh you mean earlier?

LW: Yes earlier.

CO: Well do you recall much about the 40s and 50s because it was I mean...

LW: The 40s I do because the Middletons middle son was in the service in the 40s.

CO: And did he actually wind up...

LW: He wound up in yes mam?

CO: Do you have any idea where he went?

LW: He was in Athens and other than that I don't know. He never talked much about it; he didn't want to talk much about it. His children said that daddy never wanted to talk about it.

CO: Now is he still living?

LW: No mam. He died in 92.

CO: Okay now and he was a son?

LW: Yes he was Iris's brother. A second one. Well both of her older brothers were in the service. The oldest one didn't ever go overseas but Harry did.

CO: So the decade of the 40s was kind of consumed in the household by the war and having someone in the war. About after the war do you recall the ways, did life change any for the family?

LW: No but Harry came home safe. He worked a while but he never wanted to talk about the war. And I reckon there was about two or three years or a couple of years at least before he married. And I remember after he got married, he said "boy did I mess things up." Because Iris was younger he was the only one home. He says "I was at home with everything no one to feed, but Harry went and messed it up and all those responsibilities..."

CO: Sounds like you took those lessons to heart. So the 40s, other than the war were not a special decade? What about the 50s? Do you recall anything about the 50s?

LW: Well things were better.

CO: Okay so you would have been in the 40s in that decade? You were living with the family and things were still pretty busy?

LW: I was living with the family, and there was always plenty to do. We gardened and had chickens and cows for a long time. Pigs.

CO: In the 50s there probably weren't too many bomb shelters in deep south GA. Do you remember the nuclear threat and the bomb drills? The alarms for?

LW: Yes mam they had one in Woodbine, GA. [a fallout shelter] But I don't know what year.

CO: Yeah I remember even into the 60s that was an issue and we would have to do that at school ya know. We would have to drill as though a bomb had been dropped. [as though] A nuclear bomb had been dropped and we were scared. What about the 60s? Now typically that is thought of, and people have strong feelings about the 60s now do you remember that? Oh there was just so many things going on in the country, in the state, throughout the south throughout the whole world do you remember the 60s? Do you remember it in any way?

LW: You mean as a turning point? About the only thing I remember about it is that that's the year I bought my car and I learned to drive.

CO: But I am talking about the 1960s, the decade of the 60s. 59:

LW: I guess during the 60's is when Ms. Middleton bought the broiler house. And we raised broilers 7 years until the storm came and broke in the broiler house and then she never rebuilt it.

CO: Well while you were busy with the broilers it seemed to many people that the world was coming apart, and especially in the South it was a very

tumultuous time. Do you remember much about the whole effort to desegregate, to integrate the schools?

LW: I remember hearing people talk about it but I didn't participate or have anything to do with it.

CO: It didn't seem to affect you directly? Did the people around you, the people you knew have strong feelings about it?

LW: Some did. Just like they do now. Some that like things how they are and some that don't. But I never heard too much.

CO: Do you remember hearing about, for instance the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Do you remember that?

LW: Oh yeah. I remember hearing about that and King's marches and about the Kennedy brothers being assassinated and all that stuff. I think that was awful for the family.

CO: Did you have an interest about things that were going on?

LW: Yes mam, I still do. I watched TV some but I managed to know what was going on.

CO: I'm asking now; when you either read about it or saw it in the news did you have strong opinions about it?

LW: No mam, I just figured that whatever. There is this old saying that you should just go with the flow. When there are things that you can't doing anything about you don't worry about it.

CO: That was how you sort of looked at that...

LW: Yeah it wasn't anything I could do anything about. There is a higher power than mine that can change that.

CO: Do you remember the assassination of JFK, President Kennedy?

LW: Yes mam, I remember them bringing him into the office and how he changed things.

CO: So for you was that a good change?

LW: I felt that it was. He was young and he had ambition.

CO: He was handsome...

LW: Yeah. And he had a handsome son didn't he? And of course that was another tragedy. It just seemed that that family had the most tragedies.

CO: Yeah it has marked that family. And do you remember when Martin Luther King was assassinated?

LW: Yes I watched it on TV after I heard about it.

CO: Did you hear people talking about that? And did you have strong feelings about that?

LW: Oh well you know, you have feelings about death, especially when it was a tragedy.

CO: And shortly after he was assassinated Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

LW: Yes mam

CO: Do you remember that?

LW: Yes mam and I really felt for that family.

CO: Do you remember after the 60s and the efforts on the part of people to bring about change in race relations and to integrate schools and that sort of thing, that the Movement went in a different direction especially after King's death and became the black power movement emerged and the Black Panthers emerged do you remember that?

LW: Oh yes. I remember it yes mam.

CO: Did you keep up with that?

LW: Somewhat.

CO: And you have lived a very unusual life. Have your ideas about race relations changed at all over your life?

LW: No mam.

CO: No. Could you describe what they are? What you think about people of different colors, different cultures people living together?

LW: That I am old fashioned and I still, and this is my opinion, I think that they should be married if they are going to live together. A man and woman I think they should be married. But that is just my opinion. It's not worth a penny.

CO: That's why I drove all the way over here. That brings up the whole subject of like following the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, do you remember all of that.

LW: Yes I saw it on TV.

CO: Do you have strong opinions about women and what women should and shouldn't do?

LW: I think women can do anything they set their mind to. I don't mean breaking any laws. I've heard some mean cracks about women drivers. Women doing the man's job and all that. They don't say anything about a woman out pushing a lawn mower. That would be considered a man's job but they don't say anything about that. Then if it's something else they think that they are smarter. It's just ego and I say that a woman can do anything she sets her mind to.

CO: So you don't have any strong gender bias.

LW: No I don't think they would want a woman for president. I think a woman would make a good president. We are much more dependable.

CO: So you didn't have any problems with the women's movement. Did you feel like it was warranted?

LW: I think that women had the right to vote.

CO: Now you were alive when the suffrage movement passed. Do you remember that?

LW: I remember it. I remember the first time I voted.

CO: And so when was that.

LW: Oh that was in the 60s.

CO: Do you remember who you voted for? You don't have to answer that...

LW: I don't remember who I voted for but I voted.

CO: How did that feel?

LW: Well, it felt good.

CO: You registered and voted and...

LW: Yes mam

CO: Now do you recall that pretty vividly?

LW: Well I remember going to vote because I think the governor of Georgia was Talmadge and the Middleton boys were for him. So they told me I needed to register and vote. They were getting all the votes they could for governor Talmadge. So they took me to the courthouse and I registered. When the time came to vote I came to the booth they had and of course I did it the old fashioned way, and I voted.

CO: Have you always voted for somebody based on strong opinions of other people or have you developed your own opinion?

LW: I developed my own opinions; I haven't voted in the last couple of years. I'm still registered.

CO: How has having a black man in the White House affected your ideas about politics or anything?

LW: It hasn't.

CO: You don't have any strong feelings about that?

LW: No mam, I think if God didn't want him there he wouldn't be there.

CO: So you'd feel just as comfortable if a woman was in the White House?

LW: If she was capable and had the knowledge. Some of them are just as smart as men. The men think they are smart. And some of them are. And some of them if they didn't have a good wife, they couldn't make it. She's a pusher.

CO: So you've witnessed that in your life before?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: Do you mind talking about religion a little bit?

LW: I don't mind.

CO: Not long ago I heard someone asking on the radio NPR what was their core value that had shaped their life. The core value they were most driven by. If someone asked you that what would you say?

LW: That shaped my life?

CO: That you have observed that value more than anything else in your life?

LW: Well in the Middleton family they attended church. Mr. Middleton and Ms. Middleton were both brought up in the Methodist faith and they never ate a meal without saying grace. They kept their children in Sunday school and church, all the time. In later years Ms. Middleton joined the Hortense Wesleyan church. The Middleton boys were brought up to keep Sunday Sunday.

CO: So they didn't work on Sundays

LW: No mam, they did not work on Sundays. They didn't even play baseball on Sunday in their yard. They had a field and all of the boys would get together and play baseball. But not on Sunday.

CO: So observers of the Sabbath is a big value. Would you say that that was the most important thing in this family that you really feel shaped by?

LW: Well, in all the years that I lived there, I never heard them have an argument. If they argued the children didn't know about it.

CO: So harmony was very important?

LW: Very important. You came to the table and it wasn't I don't like this and I don't want that. You ate what was put on the table and if you didn't like it, you just didn't take it.

CO: And were their children pretty observant of that?

LW: Yes, and the boys knew to never come to the table without a shirt. That wasn't allowed. It wasn't even allowed to be seen without a shirt unless you were about to take a bath.

CO: So meal times were important and they shared...

LW: And everybody came to the table at a certain time and ate and you were pleasant. If you had any grudges you didn't take them to the table.

CO: But then the family was that how they really operated?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: That was how they functioned in other relationships?

LW: Yes mam. I never heard Mr. and Mrs. Middleton have an argument. If they had anything to talk about that didn't interest the children, they talked about it privately. It wasn't discussed and there was no scolding. And no elbows on the table. I remember sometimes [if they put their elbows on the table] grandma would take a knife and [hit] the elbow. So they only did that once. She told them one time and if they did it again, she just took that knife and flapped it.

CO: And do you think the valuing of harmony and good will that shaped this family do you think that was due to their religious beliefs?

LW: I think it had a lot to do with it.

CO: Because not everybody who goes to church lives that harmonious life but they seem to have...

LW: Mr. Middleton never spanked any of the children; she did. She told me one time, [he said to her] “if you can’t handle them send them to me,” so she just did the discipline. All Papa had to do was look at you, and you straightened up. And they were that way all their lives. [CO: Even as a teenager?] As long as they lived at home they knew to be home at a certain time, and if they couldn’t be, they knew to let them know. But he would let the girls have friends for weekends.

CO: Did they have different expectations for the boys than the girls?

LW: I don’t think so

CO: The girls didn’t have to be in earlier than the boys?

LW: I don’t think so. And they didn’t just go out with anybody.

CO: So the parents had to approve? Did they ever talk to you about their friends?

LW: Yes. Still do. They are in their 80s and they still do tell me their secrets.

CO: If you didn’t like somebody would you tell them?

LW: If they asked me.

CO: Did you ever tell them that there were friends that you didn’t like them to hang out with? Whoops I forget they didn’t “hang out” back then. Did you have friends that you just didn’t approve of sometimes?

LW: Well their Mama came first and if there was somebody that she didn’t approve of that was it. But they didn’t date that much. I guess that was why they all got married when they were still teenagers. The girls did.

CO: So they didn’t date a whole lot but they found the right person pretty early?

LW: Yes. Alice married the Ag professor at her high school at 19. She was 19. And Hazel married a young man that lived right there and was raised right there in Atkinson. And Iris married a man when she was in college the first year. Iris eloped and married Joe Smith who lived in Nahunta. He was five years older.

CO: Did you say he was the Ag professor?

LW: No the oldest girl, the one that died, Alice, it was Iris' older sister that was married to the professor.

CO: How did Ms. Middleton take her daughter eloping?

LW: Well she was disappointed. Iris was going to school at Tifton and she called her mother, asked permission to go spend Thanksgiving with this friend so they gave it. Gave her permission to go spend Thanksgiving with her friend. Then Thanksgiving afternoon, no it was Friday after Thanksgiving; she called her mamma and told her she'd married. She had eloped. She had that whole thing planned. She had her best girlfriend and her boyfriend as witness. They got married in some little town outside of Atlanta.

CO: Did she say why she eloped? Didn't want a wedding?

LW: She knew her Mama and Daddy would disapprove. They wanted her to finish school and she did. She entered in September and "graduated" in November. That's how much college she got. So she says sometimes. I don't know what her course of study was but her daddy was aggravated with her for a while. Then he finally gave in, because she was his baby. When they got married her husband was working for REA, and of course they didn't have any house so they went and lived with his cousin. When Mr. Middleton gave in he said they had two extra bedrooms, so they came and lived with us until after the first child was born. Then they got a little apartment in Nahunta and stayed there until he got to working with the Savannah River Plant and moved to South Carolina. They lived there for several years and then came back to Hortense.

CO: Back to religion. Have you ever experienced or were you close to someone who personally experienced what they considered or you considered a miracle?

LW: Yes mam

CO: Can you tell me what that was?

LW: Well I've heard people say they've felt things, that they were thinking that someone had died, and they thought it was a miracle because after praying for them, he got so he could breathe again.

CO: So this is something that happened to someone else?

LW: Yes it has never happened to me.

CO: have you had yourself some profound, not necessarily a miracle but just something you felt that you would identify as a spiritual experience?

LW: I feel like I feel one every day that I get out of bed.

CO: Have your religious values changed at all over time?

LW: No mam.

CO: No. What would you say, what are your religious beliefs?

LW: Well I believe there is a God. And I believe that he died and was buried and rose again. And that may sound old fashioned but anyway that is my belief.

CO: Do you feel at peace?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: Do you believe in an afterlife?

LW: I hope so

CO: What do you think it will be like?

LW: Well they say that it will be peaceful. No pain.

CO: Your legs won't hurt?

LW: No my legs won't hurt.

CO: Are you certain of anything?

LW: Yes mam. One.

CO: What's that?

LW: Death. I know I'm going to die one day. The rest of it I take it one day at a time.

CO: If there is a God and you meet that God what do you want him or her to say to you?

LW: Well done.

CO: What will you say to God?

LW: Thank you Jesus for saving my soul.

CO: You know I asked you earlier what was the most pleasantly memorable time and you said it was when you got your drivers' license and became independent and could take yourself where you wanted to go. But what was the most difficult most trying time.

LW: Well I don't know. Really, I don't know.

CO: Having to answer questions for people?

LW: I don't know.

CO: What about the saddest time? Have you experienced much sadness in life?

LW: Well the loss of my siblings and the loss of my family.

CO: Well you talked about losing Wesley and how hard that was?

LW: And I guess I would say next to that was the loss of Ms. Middleton. We had become really close, and she had become really dependent on me her last few years. That was hard.

CO: So you had become really close friends [with Ms. Middleton]?

LW: Yes we had. And when she was in the hospital and she couldn't speak she would smile when I would go in, and she would let me know that she knew I was there. The nurses said she always had that sweet smile. And it was so hard after she died because I stayed there until December in the house.

CO: After she died. Remind me she died in early December?

LW: She died in May.

CO: May 8th is that right? So you were there for months?

LW: Yes I was there until December and I moved here.

CO: Did you think when you were younger and mostly taking care of her and the children, that you would ever become that close?

LW: No mam

CO: No.

LW: No mam, because as long as Mr. Middleton was living, I was kept busy. But we always worked together good. The girls used to say that Mama Middleton would get in the kitchen and we would work together. She told me what to do and we'd get a meal put together [in no time] which takes me all day now. And every Sunday she would have, her three sons who lived there in Atkinson. We would fix dinner for them and their family. She would get up and go to church and Sunday school and we would fix on Saturday and cook the desserts and stuff like that.

CO: So all their family and their children came?

LW: Yes. We would have a house full.

CO: Once a week that would be more than I could do in a year!

LW: And the daughters in law would have a vacation because when they would come, they would demand they get together and visit. After I got through cleaning up the kitchen it was up to me to entertain the kids. The children said they remember, I would get them in my room all the time and read them a story, and they enjoyed it. I said it was a rest for me. I would sit there and read to them and they were ages from 3 to 8 or 10.

CO: And how many of them?

LW: Well one of the boys had four that were old enough to play and the other was a baby, and then the other one had three, and Harry had 5 but there were two of them that were old enough to entertain themselves.

CO: That is a lot of children

LW: I remember one time Hazel was living with her daddy. He had gotten her to move into the house so she could drive him because he had gotten where he couldn't drive. She'd gotten a job teaching in Nahunta, so she would pay me to keep her little girl 5 days a week. There were those three boys in the families, and their three wives would think well Carmen's at Grannies [Hazel's] so they thought that their little kids ought to be able to stay [that Lily should keep their children as well] Anyway this particular day they were going to a ladies meeting, a Home-Ec meeting and Doris brought her two, and Daisy brought her son, Greg so I had 6 kids, and it just happened that I got Carmen to sleep and put her in my bed, back from the kitchen, and the other kids came in and that kid slept until after they left. I had those five and I remember one of them, Nancy, cried, and cried and cried. Papa had a big old fashion watch and chain, and he could entertain the kids by letting them hold his watch. That was a treat. But it didn't work with her. She cried and cried and cried. And Greg cried. I told how they cried when their Mama came to pick them up. I had to take them out-it was a summer day-so I took them out on the porch and put them in a swing to swing them. So I never did that but once. Never had that many kids again.

CO: Was that because you said you just couldn't handle that?

LW: I told them I just couldn't handle that. They just didn't think, ya know. But Greg used to be a Mama's baby. He would cry and sweat, and get so slick you could hardly hold him. He'd cry.

CO: But you didn't have to do that again?

LW: That was the only time I had that many kids and I thought what a blessing--talk about miracles—that Carmen slept through it all. She wasn't the problem anyway.

CO: Oh I can recall many times when I thought a child sleeping was a miracle. Well it sounds like that was one? My question is what are the crucial decisions that you have made in your life? Being able to say I can't do this anymore. But what were some really important decisions that you have made?

LW: I think the most important decision I made was to buy a car at 60. When I made up my mind that I wanted one Iris's oldest brother ran an insurance business and knew a lot about cars, and he was also a mechanic, so I asked him to buy it. And he said okay okay, he'd check. But he didn't and he didn't and I said something to Ms. Middleton one day about Julian not mentioning it. And she said "Lillie Julian is not going to get a car. He thinks you are too old." So then I raised it to his oldest son, and of course his father told him "don't you dare help her, that I'm too old to get a car." So I went to Mrs. Smith about it and she said, "No you are not!" And Hazel said no you're not too old. If you want to get a car then we will help. So with Ms. Smith's encouragement and Hazel's, I did. Hazel helped me get a car.

CO: Now Ms. Smith you mean Iris?

LW: No Dr. Smith's wife. And do you know how much my first car costs? Less than \$3000.

CO: What was it?

LW: A Maverick, but it didn't have an air conditioner. It had automatic but no air conditioning. And then the next one I got had air conditioning.

CO: It makes a difference didn't it!

LW: Whew, it makes a difference!

CO: That is a big decision I think that is considered a turning point for you?

LW: Oh yes and I can understand Julian thinking I was too old to drive...

CO: And where is Julian now?

LW: Oh, he's been dead . . .

CO: And where is Miss Lillie now? [laughter] Life is full of ironies.

LW: And you know, you're talking about miracles, I guess I thought it was a miracle that I didn't have a fender bender or anything when Ms. Middleton was with me.

CO: Now who taught you how to drive?

LW: I went to drivers Ed. Hazel paid for me to go to Drivers Ed. And one of the girls would take me. And I bought the car before I got my license so we had something to drive.

CO: So someone had to drive you?

LW: They had to drive me but sometimes they weren't able to take me. There were times when I would catch the bus and go to Waycross and Hazel would meet me and I would spend the night at her house and then catch the bus back home the next morning.

CO: It was really easier for everyone though for you to have a car?

LW: Oh they found out after I got one and Ms. Middleton enjoyed it as much as I did, because we could get out and just ride.

CO: So it was her independence too?

LW: Yes mam, and I went when she wanted to go where she wanted to go and came back when she wanted to.

CO: But did you also do some of it on your own when you wanted to go you could go?

LW: The only time or place I went was if I went to church and after she got older, I mean not older, but more disabled, I would go to town to buy groceries without her and some of her family and friends would come and sit with her until I got back.

CO: Well besides getting the car which is clearly a turning point for you could you name another one or two besides that?

LW: Well the first time I went to Washington, my sister and I went and spent a week and went sight-seeing and saw...

CO: This is Stella?

LW: Yes Stella. Her youngest son lived there, but he's dead now. We went on the Amtrak. It was my first, no it wasn't my first train ride, I had ridden a smaller train, but we went on Amtrak and came back.

CO: And you were roughly how old then?

LW: I was in my 70s.

CO: Yeah that's a pretty big event. Are you satisfied with the choices you made in life?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: have there been any mistakes any regrets?

LW: Not really.

CO: If you could do it all over again, would you do something different from what you did?

LW: I think under the same circumstances I would do the same thing. Different circumstances I might make different choices.

CO: Would education be one of those?

LW: Yes education would definitely be one of those.

CO: If you could choose an education for yourself a degree for yourself do you have any idea what you might be interested in? If it were different circumstances or a different time?

LW: If I was young I would be crazy enough to want to take music lessons.

CO: Oh yeah you already mentioned that you like music yeah.

LW: I like music and if I was young and had the chance I just think it would be wonderful to be able to play a piano. I think it would be impossible now but anyway I would like that...if I return back, that is one of the things I would like to do.

CO: Did you ever consider that at any point in life? Do you ever think about the possibility of doing that?

LW: There wasn't.

CO: There wasn't an opportunity?

LW: No.

CO: Did you dance? You said you liked music as a young girl?

LW: No I have too big of feet.

CO: Has there been a single individual that has made a big impact on your life? It doesn't have to be someone you know it could be anybody.

LW: Well Ms. Middletons mother I think made a big impact; she only lived two or three years after I got in the family but I can remember how sweet she always was to me. She was always so kind, and treated me just like I was her granddaughter instead of a little black girl, and I think she made a big impact.

CO: What was her name? Did you just call her Ms. Middleton?

LW: No she was Mrs. Adams. Her name was Mary Martha.

CO: It's alright you knew her as Mrs. Adams yea. And do you think her daughter then became like her mother as she got older

LW: Yes she treated me like her....kind of like she did.

CO: But you recall her [Ms. Adams] as having the largest impact on you?

LW: Yes because I was a little youngun and I remember when she would come to visit I would stand by her chair when she would be rocking Julian, and she would talk to me.

CO: Maybe is that what made it easy to make that transition do you think?

LW: I think so. She wasn't there all the time but when she would visit or when we'd visit her she was just always so kind and pleasant.

CO: But she died shortly...

LW: Yes mam, she died before Mrs. Middletons second child was born.

CO: Where did you learn how to overcome, like having someone say something insensitive or unkind to you?

LW: I don't know. I learned I think as a child not to dwell on things and not to, like Ms Middleton used to say, "don't think about it."

CO: So you learned how to do that?

LW: Yes mam to just not think about it, you know. Not to dwell on it.

CO: Was she good at that too?

LW: Yes I think so.

CO: So she modeled that?

LW: Yes and she never complained, she had headaches and back problems and had to wear a back braces all the time, (they called them corsets back then) but she didn't complain. Sometimes she had her headache or something, but she did her work and just went on with whatever she had going on.

CO: What gives your life meaning now. Today?

LW: Well. I'm just thankful that I'm, I don't know why I'm still here. But since I am, I am glad I am able to do for myself and as long as I am able to do for myself, I think I should try to do that, and I hope I never live to be a burden to anyone else. But that's not for me to say.

CO: What has been the greatest source of inspiration for you or motivation for you throughout your life?

LW: Well I enjoy people; I enjoy doing things for others, I always have. I don't do very much right now, but that's been one of my gifts that I like to serve others.

CO: That feast of cookies yesterday was I'm sure one of the kinds of things that you're talking about

LW: I'm not so good at it but...

CO: So that's the most important...

LW: And on this place here, Iris used to grow gardens and we had a lot of vegetables to give away and they would go to waste. No way could you do anything with all of them.

CO: Did you enjoy putting up?

LW: I enjoyed it. A long time ago they didn't have freezers you canned everything. But then you got freezers and there are certain things that are so good canned, I mean frozen. And we'd fill the freezers. This year I didn't put up anything except some berries and pears. And we no longer plant a garden. Now I have a place out back that I plant peas and squash. I planted some beans but the beans didn't do anything. I have planted that little spot and had beans to can but...the dirt is worn out now.

CO: That takes a green thumb because I couldn't do it. I mean it sounds like you have been doing that for most of your life planting and okay.

LW: This is the first year that I haven't had anything growing. Now Christy came and cleaned off my garden sport....her dad used to do it, and for my

birthday she came and cleaned off my garden. I had pea vines and all that stuff. And she cleaned off my gardening spot that I hadn't planted.

CO: What are you most proud of in your life?

LW: I'm proud of the fact that I'm accepted, and that people treat me nice. I haven't met anyone that has snubbed me or anything.

CO: And what do you attribute to? Why do you think that is so?

LW: I don't know. They are kind.

CO: You don't think it is because you are easy to be kind to?

LW: They tell me that I'm special but I don't want to get the big head.

CO: Oh I think you are long over that. How would you like for people to remember you? What do you want your legacy to be?

LW: That I tried to be decent and pleasant to people and treat them as I would like to be treated.

CO: The Golden Rule?

LW: Yes mam.

CO: Is there anything that you would like for these people that have known you all their lives but maybe there is something about you they don't know is there something about you that you might want people that they might not know?

LW: I don't think so.

CO: Is there anything that we have left out that you would like to?

LW: I don't think so. I think you've done a wonderful job. Really.

CO: Well I'll think of all kinds of things I could have asked, but if somebody wrote the story of your life what would the title of it be?

LW: I don't know.

CO: Let's see if we can come up with a title. Titles are hard for me, too but your life deserves a title, your story deserves a title. What would you like for it to be?

LW: I don't know. I would like to think that I had set a good example in things that they would like to follow probably in my own race and own family. But now I have some nieces, my black nieces that'll say, "I want to be just like you when I get old."

CO: What do you think she is talking about? What do you think it is that she admires and wants to emulate?

LW: Well she thinks that I've never been one to speak my mind or talk much.

CO: And she wants to be that way?

LW: And they think of trying. I try not to say things that hurt people's feelings, and if somebody tells me something confidentially, I'm not going to repeat it. And a lot of people black and white, will come talk to me about problems they want to get off their chests but they don't want it published. And when they tell me something I don't repeat it. Because even if it is in your own family the more you talk about anything the worse it gets. Because you tell this one, and say don't tell anybody because it's a secret and then she's going to tell her friends, and say now don't tell anybody, this is a secret. And the first thing you know it's all over the place. And it's not what really happened a lot of the time. So if somebody tells me something or wants to talk to me privately I feel like I owe it to that person to keep it private.

CO: maybe a good title of your life would be at least this part of it, Ms. Lillie Watts, Confidante? Sounds like that's what you've been to so many people. Does that work? Well you can think about that and let me know later what would be a good title.

LW: Well you know, anything you put would be good. I trust you.

CO: That's a title right there, Ms. Lillie, Trusting Soul.