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Georgette Gardner: I did my high school and college work at— F&M College. I got my Master's Degree at Columbia University. I taught in the elementary school about seven years and then I was sent to Middleton [High School] for one year. Then from Middleton, I was sent to Robles Park school as principal. I was there five years, and then from there I was made Coordinator of Elementary Education for Hillsborough County. I visited the schools in the city and out of the city. From there I was sent to Lomax as principal, and I was principal of Lomax Elementary for seven years. And I retired from Lomax, that's about all.

Ah, do you want to know my children? Well, I have four boys, two of them are doctors. One is practicing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other one in Brooklyn, New York. My other son is supervisor of personnel for the Hillsborough County School System. And, of course, I had one that passed, and before he passed he was working in a bank in New York City. I think that's about all.

Herbert Jones: Okay, what year was it when you came to Tampa?

GG: Uh?

HJ: What year did you come to Tampa?

GG: I came to Tampa, I guess about maybe 1930, something like that.

HJ: What were the conditions of Blacks here during the Depression?

GG: Yes, very much so, the Depression.

HJ: Could you tell us, what was the living conditions, the working conditions, of Blacks here in Tampa at that time?

GG: Well, I think that there has been much progress since that time. The living conditions were very poor and, of course, just as now, there were many people who were unemployed. Of course, naturally, discrimination was at the highest at that particular time. And there was much discouragement on the part of the Black people who really didn't seem to know what it was all about. But they felt and they understood they weren't left out, and even though of course you know, Negroes, for most part, have always been very religious. Even so, that didn't do much to help them come from under that depressed feeling. But as the years passed, things seemed to get better and the living conditions improved. Evidently employment improved because they began buying homes, renovating and fixing up their homes. Seemly they, all at once, got some pride from somewhere. And they began to be very proud that they were Negroes.

And, of course, you know how it is now. I think it is much better now than it was during that particular time. And you have progress, slowly but steadily, from that depressive state. Of course too, they have been more politically minded in these last years, which I think has been much for them because they have become more political minded. There was a time, of course, there was such a long time, that the colored was not allowed to vote. And naturally, there was an apathy when it came to elections, and be elected in the light, and improvement in every respect, economically and naturally it got so that they could—they became more concerned and they felt better, felt like they were really somebody. And I think now they even feel it more. Because I think really, now, we have made much progress, and I am very proud of the progress we have made thus far.

HJ: Mrs. Gardner, what was the conditions of the schools, say when you first started?

GG: Well, let me see. When I first started to teach, in many instances we had to use old books that were really out of date; very often that happened. And the salaries were very low, but of course, during that period later on, we were able to achieve equal salaries. Then of course, the schools we not integrated, naturally.

But as I said, quite a number of those years were during the Depression and the children did not have many of the things they have now. But the mothers, the parents, in many cases, worked hard to give them what they could give them. There was not the crime among children that there is now. Children, back in those days, were much better behaved than they are now, and what has happen now, much better behaved. But of course, during the Depression and after the Depression, there was many ghetto-like sections, but after a while, as I said, they began to improve. And naturally, you know that the children, many of them, because of their parents' conditions, were not able to afford, to have the things that they should have, and, I say, later on things began to pick up. There's always, I think, in my areas, in my particular categories, a very good relationship between teachers, principals, supervisors and pupils, very good relationships. I look back on those days, there were some very pleasant memories and they're interesting ones.

HJ: Did you participate in the equalization of salaries?

GG: Beg your pardon?

HJ: Did you participate in the equalization of salaries?

GG: Yes, I did (inaudible). I think practically all of the teachers did, because it was very interesting and it was something that concerned them. Now I remember when Thurgood Marshall came down here (inaudible) it was about that equal salary situation. And many of us were summoned to go to the courthouse, and we had to go before a group. Well at that particular time, I think, they had raised some of the salaries and some they had not raised. And I never will forget, when it was my time to go in with Thurgood Marshall, he wanted to know—and I think I happen be one of the ones whose salaries had been raised—and he wanted to know what I think about the situations. I'm quite sure he thought I was going to say that I thought it was fine.

I never will forget, I said to them, "Well, I tell you what. I would like to the see the thing done that is best for the greatest number." And I didn't think I had made any great statement, I remember that was just the way I felt. So that night, Mr. Griffin and this one, calls me and say, "Oh my, I'm just telling you, they just talked about you. Thurgood Marshall just thinks you are great." I said, "What you say?" He said, "You want to see the thing done that is best for the greatest number." I didn't think I had done anything great, but that was just the way I felt about it. I will never forget that particular piece. That's about all. Nothing terrible happen during those days.

HJ: Okay, back there during that time, were there any program designed—

GG: Beg your pardon?

HJ: For that time period, were there any programs designs particularly for slow learners, like remedial programs?

GG: No, not any particular programs that I know of designed for slow. We did quite a bit of group things in those days, too. And the teachers were impressed to give quite a bit of attention to slow learners, we did quite a bit grouping, grouping according to their ability. And remember, when I was at Robles Park, I was not only principal, but I taught the fourth grade; it didn't go any further than fourth grade. I had a little group of pupils who were very slow learners. I gave them special attention, and I think practically all the teachers did, and they were impressed to do that. They gave attention to slow learners in those days, in their particular classroom.

HJ: How many high schools were there?

GG: Uh?

HJ: How many high schools was in Tampa, say in 1930?

GG: Well, I know Middleton, I know (inaudible), of course, it was Don Thompson a bit

later after Middleton, and then from Don Thompson to Blake. You mean senior high schools? There were only two, as I can remember. Middleton and Blake and, of course, Don Thompson, but I say, they moved from Don Thompson to Blake. But when I was at Middleton, there was no Don Thompson. Later on they had Don Thompson and I think that I—you know when the school burned, Middleton High burned, the building, and they moved the senior high school to Carver, to that building. It was there just a short while, while they rebuilt Middleton, and that was that one year I taught at Middleton and Ms. Rimer was principal then, and I didn't know (inaudible).

The next year, I don't think they stayed at Middleton, at Carver, but just that one year, they were suppose to go back, go out there to the new school and he wanted me to be the dean. (inaudible) And he had Ms. (inaudible) advised to be dean of girls, and I liked that very much. And I thought I would have liked it, and I was very disappointed when they made me principal of Robles Park, I was really disappointed, and so much so that my husband said to me, "Well, Georgette, I'd much rather you would be over the school, I'd much rather be over a school, you'll be the big horns."

I didn't see it that way. Of course I went, but I really didn't want to go to Robles Park. I preferred going to that new school as dean of girls, I thought I would like that very much because I've always been inclined to be a counselor. I was inclined that way, I used to want to be—I thought that I wanted to be a social worker. I thought that I would have a wonderful opportunity to help people. So naturally when Mr. Brown spoke with me as to going to Middleton as the dean of girls, I just thought that would be wonderful. A wonderful way in for me to help people and nobody knows how my heart just really sank when I had to go to Robles Park. I really didn't want to go, but, oh goodness, I didn't think about how it seems to be a principal sounded or something, I didn't even think about that. But I enjoyed it, I did.

HJ: Were there any organizations that catered particularly to Black teachers during that time?

GG: No, I know while I was a—do you mean civic organization?

HJ: Civic organizations? It could be civic organizations or (inaudible).

GG: I don't particularly—that was geared especially to Black teachers. I just can't recall at the moment.

HJ: So basically, the Black school teachers, to a certain extent, were controlled, basically, by the School Board?

GG: Say what?

HJ: The Black teachers, to a certain extent, were controlled, basically, by the School Board?

GG: Yes, and you know we had a supervisor, a White supervisor, and then Mr. Miles, who was supervisor, quite a while, Supervisor of Negro Education. That is one thing that I didn't approve of too much. But that was just the way it was.

HJ: Can you think of any other Black officials that was in the school system?

GG: Say what?

HJ: Any other Black officials that was in the school system during this time?

GG: Black officials? You mean to say administrators?

HJ: Administrations?

GG: No, Mr. Stewart became—after Mr. Miles passed, Mr. Stewart became supervisor of Negro Education.

HJ: Is this G.V. Stewart?

GG: Uh huh, yes.

HJ: Do you remember the soup lines?

GG: Beg your pardon?

HJ: Do you remember the soup lines during the Depression?

GG: Depression? I don't really know so much about that.

HJ: Can you tell me anything about the Black businesses that were on Central?

GG: On Central?

HJ: Yes, ma'am.

GG: Well, they use to have a Palace Drugstore; that was a Black drugstore, they had a lot of drugstores. They use to have a colored jewelry shop; they had the Pyramid Hotel; they had a very wonderful restaurant, the Bird of Paradise, that was heralded all over the state as one of the finest in the state. That was Ms. Avery, Ms. Inez Avery was manager and owner of. Of course, there came, later on, Dupree's Printing Press. It is still there. And well, we had the *Bulletin*, we had the *Bulletin*, and then later on it was *Sentinel*, which later on, the *Sentinel* became the *Sentinel Bulletin*, and the *Bulletin* owner has a paper that is called the *Reporter*. And let me see, go out toward—ah, of course, now we have a drugstore out there on 22nd, I've forgotten the name of it, which has come about these later years.

HJ: College Hill Pharmacy?

GG: Huh?

HJ: College Hill Pharmacy?

GG: Yes, that just happen these later years.

HJ: Mrs. Gardner, can you tell me what sort of social life in which our history call the middle class Blacks had? What kind of social life did y'all have? What sort of activities, entertainment, this type of thing, that middle class and upper middle had?

GG: Well, there were a number of social club, as there are now. And I am trying to think of the names of some of them. I know, when I came to Tampa, one that was very important, was needle craft group, that felt very important and was a very outstanding group; they called themselves the needle craft club. I just don't recall now; I was never too much of a social butterfly, so therefore—I had these four children and that's where I spent my time.

I know there were the Dictators, there was a club called the Dictators, and they were very anxious for me to become a member. I often think now maybe I should have, but the time that they met in the afternoon was the time I had set aside for my children to study. And I just couldn't see myself being a member of that club, and going, and they met every week, it was a very—they just felt they were really somebody. It was a nice club, a nice group of people, they were the Dictators. The needle crafts, I say now I just can't recall, but there were other clubs. Since then, of course, you know about the ones now that you are talking about, I guess you say in the dark ages.

HJ: Are you in a sorority?

GG: No.

HJ: You're not. What church do you belong to?

GG: St. Paul A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church.

HJ: Are Blacks today stronger in religion as they were back in the '30s [1930s], even as far back as when you were a child?

GG: Are they stronger religiously? Well, I don't know how to answer that. That's because, on most part, there always have been a number of Blacks that are very strong religiously, during that time and even now. So I really wouldn't know how to answer if they were stronger then or stronger now. It's according to the communities colored people have always been religious and a great number, and of course there is a great number of them that are not religious, and it's the same thing. And you know they might have been stronger because they had so little else but their religion.

HJ: Yeah, this is what we were trying get to.

GG: Yeah, so little else but their religion. And I think really that, I think they were more attentive to church years ago than they are now. So many other things to go to on Sundays. Because years ago practically all the churches had a morning service and evening service. It's very few now have that evening service, the churches that I know about, they just don't have that evening service. Yes, I think it was stronger. They use to be stronger than they are now because we used to have class meeting. We just don't have that anymore. I don't know what has happen, but I don't feel that we are as strong religiously as we used to be, even though it is, just as I say, it's always been a group of people who were strong religiously and it is same thing now. They have many other things to take their attention now. They can participate in many other things that they couldn't participate in because of their race, they can now.

HJ: So you have always—you've been a member of St. Paul since you moved here?

GG: Yes, always.

HJ: Okay, so, are—how was the minister there in salaries, over the salaries of ministers in (inaudible).

GG: I really don't know what the salaries were, but I think the ministers are paid much more now than they did then.

HJ: Can you think of the earliest Black church in Tampa?

GG: Huh?

HJ: The earliest Black church in Tampa? The earliest, the first, Black church in Tampa?

GG: The first?

HJ: Uh huh, Black church in Tampa, do you know the name of it?

GG: No, I don't. You know, I'm really not from Tampa; this isn't my native home. So I really don't know.

HJ: Just off the record, I'm from High Springs if you have heard of that; that's up near by Lake City.

GG: Say what?

HJ: I'm from High Springs, Florida.

GG: Oh, yeah, that isn't far from Lake City.

HJ: My father is a minister in Lake City

GG: You are from up my section.

HJ: Right.

GG: Your father is a minister?

HJ: Yeah.

GG: Who was he?

HJ: Reverend Jones, Deacon Jones. He pastors at Grants Chapel A.M.E. Church in Lake City.

GG: In Lake City?

HJ: Uh huh.

GG: Sho 'nough, he's there now, at Grants Chapel A.M.E. Church? Long time.

HJ: I need something for my biography, Mrs. Gardner, what year were you born, month, date and year? You don't usually tell.

GG: Well, I don't usually tell.

HJ: Okay.

GG: That's my own private business.

HJ: Okay, Mrs. Gardner, my name is Herbert Jones.

GG: Very nice to meet all of you. Was there anything else—

end of interview