Effie Erwin Woods: Anything that you want to ask in between that. When my youngest son was a little boy, I believe it was around Christmas time or sometime, I carried him downtown because it was important to take him in order to fit some clothes on him or shoes or something, but he wanted to go to the bathroom, and of course, he did not know any difference. Children don't know these things, they have to learn, grow up, and they get to the point to see this is different. Why is this? But he didn't know it, he wanted to go to the bathroom.

Effie Erwin Woods: Well, I knew I could not take him to the bathroom. What am I going to do? So, to keep from letting him stand there and wet his clothes, I took him outside the store and let him urinate on the street. I had no other choice. That's what he did. And then he would want a drink of water. We'd go buy a water bottle. "I want some water, I want some water." "I can't have no water." "Why can't I have any water?" So if it was not a Black fountain, then he didn't get any water.

Karen Ferguson: I'm sorry, go ahead. I was just going to ask, how did you explain that to him?

Effie Erwin Woods: It was very difficult. The only thing that I remember that I would say to him, was that I really don't know because I don't think I would just come out and tell him, "Because you are Black, you can't drink that water." I would tell him something to try to satisfy him, but I did not tell him that. Now tell me what— Well, what you want me to—

Karen Ferguson: I wanted you to tell me, you said you were the first person who in your family who went to high school, did they need you on the farm? Did you have to struggle to be able to go to high school?

Effie Erwin Woods: Not really. The reason I was the first, because there was no high school.

Karen Ferguson: Right, right.

Effie Erwin Woods: No, I don't know how we managed it, but we worked it out some way that I went to school, we were still on the farm, but I went to school. I believe when I first started high school, they would split the term. Okay, if school, like early spring, whatever was time for the crops to be planted or start to work, school would close and then open again in the summer for about two months, I believe. Like I say, April and May, maybe school would close, and then June, July you would go back to school and then you would not— In the fall, when it was time to gather the crop, you would be out again about a month. But they would make that time up after the seasons of the farm by splitting the seasons, because most of the children went to school that lived on farms.

Karen Ferguson: Did you learn any Black history in school?

Effie Erwin Woods: Very little. We had some, because we didn't have any books. Now I remember our

principal was very concerned about us learning, but he had some material that he would get on his own and he would read to us about some of the Black people that had done different things and give us names and this sort thing. But we didn't have books where we could have hands-on studying or reading because maybe he didn't have one group about this particular thing and one about something else. There was not a class that you could be taught about Black history.

Karen Ferguson: Did you have books for your other subjects?

Effie Erwin Woods: Yes.

Karen Ferguson: Okay. Did your teachers used to discipline you?

Effie Erwin Woods: I didn't need any. I never got a spanking in my life in school. Well, they used to get spankings.

Karen Ferguson: Yeah.

Effie Erwin Woods: And in high school, I never got in trouble. I didn't need any.

Karen Ferguson: Did teachers play favorites? Were there some students who they let get away with things?

Effie Erwin Woods: Yeah, they did, but that didn't bother me either. For some reason, I don't know, a lot of people have called me strange, weird, but I have always been, what I call, sort of a private person, and I had my own thoughts, my own ideas, and I didn't worry too much about the others. I had about three good—Three, maybe four friends in high school, and that was my group. It wasn't that I disliked or didn't get along, but close friends. I was not a type of person that liked to be in the midst of everything or be everything to everybody. I had a special group and usually we had something in common, and this is what I enjoyed. Well I've sort of gone all the way through my life like that.

Karen Ferguson: You said teachers did play favorites, who would've been their favorites? What kind of people did they let get away with things?

Effie Erwin Woods: Pretty ones, and some that were relatives, and this is what I can remember in my class, and others that were, say, more outspoken. Sometimes you talk your way through almost anything. Well, I didn't do any of those things, but I was not the dumbest person in the class. I knew just about as much as anybody else. I wasn't the top student in the class, but I did pretty good.

Karen Ferguson: Were these men or women teachers who played favorites on the basis of being pretty?

Effie Erwin Woods: I think most of them were women.

Karen Ferguson: What kind of girl did they consider pretty?

Effie Erwin Woods: One with longer, nicer hair, lighter complexion, and pretty clothes.

Karen Ferguson: I guess we can't go— leave this, your childhood, without talking about the church that you went to, which you said was the basis of your social life. Can you tell me the church you went to?

Effie Erwin Woods: McClintock Presbyterian. It's down in the rural area. I still go to church there.

Karen Ferguson: How was your church and the minister of your church involved in community affairs outside of the church? Was there anything that they did outside of the congregation for the community?

Effie Erwin Woods: Well, the only thing I remember would be, the minister would go visit the families, go to the different homes. And of course, there was always an ongoing, people were very close. Excuse me. If someone was sick, everybody went and helped. And if there was a death, they did the same thing. They would go to the home and stay and cook and take food and all this sort of thing. This is the type— but I don't remember any type of special program, if this is what you mean, that was involved, it was just the families. As whatever situation would arrive, that the minister and the congregation would be involved.

Karen Ferguson: What kind of church organizations did you belong to?

Effie Erwin Woods: The Sunday school and the choir, that's about all we had. And I used to go to young— Well, this was sponsored through the Sunday School. Our church was Presbyterian and they would have youth—, during the summer, youth conferences, I guess, and Sunday School conventions, and I would get to go to some of those and that would be where other churches would send delegates and all would meet there. And I don't know what we did, but I was there.

Karen Ferguson: Did you belong to any other organizations when you were in school, and high school, elementary school?

Effie Erwin Woods: In elementary school it was basically about the same thing. But in high school, I was involved in— I sang. I always loved to sing. My daddy, my granddaddy singing this. I loved to sing, oh, and I played in the band.

Karen Ferguson: What did you play?

Effie Erwin Woods: A saxophone. I sang with the girl trio, Sex Cat, and the Girls Chorus and the Mixed Chorus. I sang with everybody. And I was on the dance team, and dramatics team, and couldn't play basketball. I tried to play, I was too short. And a couple of my girlfriends played basketball, because that hurt my feelings, but I didn't make the team. I was too short, really. I wasn't good enough. If I'd been good like Mugsy— Oh, but I was very active in high school. I was into a lot of things.

Karen Ferguson: What kind of songs did you like to sing the best?

Effie Erwin Woods: Well, it didn't really matter, it was whatever we were singing, and at church, we sang hymns. We were not really exposed to— Being a Presbyterian church, I don't know if you know anything about how Blacks became Presbyterian. You don't? Oh Lord, this would take a year. Well, let me tell you a little bit about my church, about the beginning of it. I don't remember this, but this is what was told. After slavery, right after slavery or some before slavery ended, the Whites would allow the Black people that lived on their plantations to go to their church, sit in the balconies or these special areas.

Effie Erwin Woods: Okay, after slavery was ended, the people in the Steele Creek community went to the White— That wanted to go to church, White church, and they would sit in the balcony and they would listen to White ministers. And so, they learned the White way, the Presbyterian way. So they say the White people got tired of the Black people going to church with them, so they decide to build them a church. White people built our church.

Effie Erwin Woods: Now, it was built along the same time that Johnson C. Smith— the same people that helped construct Johnson C. Smith, helped build our church. It was during the same, in the same period. But they started, at first they said, "Meeting under a tree, having Sunday school," and this sort of thing. And so, they finally assigned a minister there, and then that minister helped organize, and with funds from different people giving, constructed that church. The land was donated by somebody and the church was built. But it has been remodeled, I don't know how many times. It was first a frame-built. It's not the same outer structure, but some of the—

Speaker 3: Walls.

Effie Erwin Woods: Walls and all. Because it's brick now, it has been brick, then new, it's carpeted and all of this stuff now, but it's the same original inner structure that was built there right after slavery. And I grew up going to church.

Effie Erwin Woods: Oh yeah, back to the songs that we sang. We sang out of the same hymn books that the White people sang out, because they furnished us with books. So we sang the hymn, the Presbyterian hymnals. So, and my granddaddy new music, he would teach. We did not have musical instruments, but our choir could sing anything in that book because he could teach the different parts and we would sing. So after, as time moved on, and then we got a piano and got an organ.

Effie Erwin Woods: And we still use the Presbyterian hymnal, but the minister we have now, he is changing our program. He has ordered different— We still have the Presbyterian hymnal, but we have other books too. And they have began to sing more Negro spiritual gospels and that sort of thing. But when I was growing up, we didn't sing any of that. We sang hymns and in high school we sang mostly Negro spiritual. Now in high school, that's what we sang, Negro spirituals.

Effie Erwin Woods: And so, that's about my music. And we did do some music that were not spiritual. Most of it was, but we did some, I guess what you could classify as tiny anthems, getting into the little higher type of

music. Because our music teacher was a music major, and of course, she was very good and she could teach us to sing anything.

Karen Ferguson: Did you used to go to the city as a child? Did you used to go to Charlotte as a child?

Effie Erwin Woods: I had an aunt that lived in the city. We would go and visit my aunt, we would go to town to shop. We would go, but that's about all we didn't go. Well, now after I got a little older, we would go into town to the movie. They finally built a Black theater so we could go to the movie. But yeah, I would go into town, wasn't very much there. Well, later on there were, say, Black restaurants, Black cafes, and that sort of thing. But some of them kids had no business being there, so I didn't do a lot when I was very young, but as I got older, then—

Karen Ferguson: When did you move to Charlotte?

Effie Erwin Woods: Well now, when I got married in 1942, my husband was going into the Army. I was 18 and he was 20, right after high school. And after the war, well, I worked while he was in service, and one of my ambition was, I want to own my own home and that was what I was striving for. While he was away and I was working, I saved as much money as I could, because when he comes home, we're going to buy our house. So when he came home, we bought three acres of land and it cost $100 an acre, and we still own that. Now, it was not in the city at that time, it is now. It's between here and the airport that was still in the county. And we had, do you know what a prefabricated home is? That's what we had erected on that three acres. Pretty fair house, there was four rooms. Well, by that time I had one child. I had one child born while he was in service and my second one was born in that house we were living at, that house.

Effie Erwin Woods: And we lived there, my children grew up there, so they had plenty of space to run and play basketball, football, baseball. So that's the kind of life that they know. They never knew anything about farming, they don't know anything. They're like you, they don't know anything about— They didn't know about chickens, and horses, and cows, until they got big enough to take them back to let them see farm animals and that sort of thing. Then, we have been living here 26 years, we bought this house. But we still own that property, and that house, we continue to upgrade it, do this to it, do that. So it's rented now, people still living there. And so, let me tell you just a tiny bit about how I got to be a nurse, and then if there's anything else you want to ask.

Effie Erwin Woods: Well, in the back of my mind, I sort of thought when I was in high school, I'd like to be a nurse. But after I got married, that took all of that away. Long time ago, you could not be a nurse if you were married. Because see, I could have gone into nursing while my husband was in the service, but I was married, I couldn't go. So, but I didn't brush it out of my mind. Somehow, someday, some way I thought I'm going find something. There was a school in Durham that I wanted to go to, but I was going to have to leave home. My husband said, "No."

Karen Ferguson: What school was that?

Effie Erwin Woods: In Durham?

Karen Ferguson: Yeah.

Effie Erwin Woods: I don't remember, but it was a school, it was like a community college. See, most of the nursings were in the hospital, but until they started community colleges or into the colleges, where there was degrees, then only married people could go into nursing. So after, I could not go to Durham, and then Central Piedmont finally started a school of nursing in Charlotte. So I applied there and started the school when my son was a senior in high school, because I felt I needed some form of income that was dependable because I wanted to send them to college if they wanted to go, they had expressed. My older son, he always said he was going to college, he wanted to go to college, so I wanted to send him if he wanted to go. So he went on to college and I went on into nursing. So I finished nursing and I worked at Carolina Medical Center for 26 and a half years. I've been retired four years.

Karen Ferguson: What were the jobs— Just one last question, what were the jobs that you had while your husband was away during the war?

Effie Erwin Woods: I worked in defense. I worked for— It was a place that called the Shell Plant. I made 40-millimeter anti-aircraft shells. I didn't make them, I wasn't expecting. That was another thing, there was a lot of people— See, I was fresh out of high school and a lot of people did not have the opportunity to go to high school that was in my age group or older. And you took a test, you had to be tested, so whatever they graded your test, was the type of job that they would offer you. So most of the other people that went with me when I went, they got jobs on production, I got a job as an inspector. So that's all I ever did. I walked up and down the line, checking. I was miss QC, Quality Control.

Karen Ferguson: Now, were you inspecting— I've heard several people talk about the Shell Plant, were there White and Black people working?

Effie Erwin Woods: Yes, but you had a White building and a Black building. They were doing the same thing, but the Whites had their building, the Blacks had theirs.

Karen Ferguson: So you weren't expecting the work of White—

Effie Erwin Woods: No, but it was same work, same type of work.

Karen Ferguson: Right.

Effie Erwin Woods: Except they had a different building. White would be in a building, me and the Blacks would be in the building over them.

Karen Ferguson: Did you all have any dealings with each other, the White workers and Black workers?

Effie Erwin Woods: We didn't come in contact with each other.

Karen Ferguson: Was that a well paying job?

Effie Erwin Woods: It was some of the best that was going. At that time, now that was in '42, '43. When did I get that job? You had been gone about a year, I guess it was 43, but I was making about $40 a week and most people were making 10 and 15 and this sort of thing.

Karen Ferguson: If there hadn't been the war, what kinds of things could you do with a high school diploma? What kind of work could you have done?

Effie Erwin Woods: I really don't know. Well, it would have been, say if you could have gotten a job in maybe a restaurant or a store. A lot of Blacks worked in the department stores and all, except you could not be a clerk. You could, say work with stock or help with almost anything other than— But it was a better opportunity than not having a high school education, because even you could not do that if you couldn't read, and write, count. Because you've got to know how much of this you're going to put here, what you're going to do with that. You would need to be able to— But after the war closed, was over, that's when I accepted this job at the 5 & 10 cents store, and of course, I was working with food there. And after that I went to work for a bakery and I did that type of work until I went into nursing.

Karen Ferguson: Who kept your children?

Effie Erwin Woods: My sister lived next door to me. She had two girls and I had two boys. And of course, she was not working at that time, and so she would keep all the children and I paid her. And when they got a little large, they got into school, we worked at our— Because I had always worked. I've worked all of my life. From the time I got married, the only time I didn't work was when my youngest son was born and he was born with asthma, and I had to stay home with him because it was very— He would have these attacks. It was very difficult leaving him with anybody and plus he was allergic to so many things and I had to deal with that. Nobody else could because they didn't understand, they didn't know that.

Effie Erwin Woods: But after he got larger, and then my sister knew a lot of these things, she could do what I would tell her he could or could not do. But then after he got to school age, then my husband and me worked it out to where one of us would be home. And so, we worked split shifts for a long time. He'd work mornings and I'd work evenings. Seven to three, and I worked three to eleven, because there were no such thing as daycare and this sort of thing. So that's how we managed that.

Karen Ferguson: I think if you want to go ahead— Thank you very much for helping us. Should we do the forms for her?