

Sonya Ramsey: The neighborhood where you grew up as a child?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, I'm presently living in the house that I grew up in. And the neighborhood at that time of my growing upwards, we had lots of kids. We used to play in front prior to paving of the streets, of course. I grew up as a tomboy, so I used to play football with my brothers and his friends up front, and they used to tackle me just like they did the boys. And I went to Peabody School, which is about four blocks from here. And one of the things I remember they did in school was to, as a way to discipline them, they used to have a paddle about an inch thick, and if you needed discipline, they would either give you so many strokes in your hand, you had to move your hand out, or you got strokes on your buttocks. This is what the teacher did and they told your parents.

Sonya Ramsey: What would your parents do then?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Got another beating when you got home, of course.

Sonya Ramsey: Were there other people in your neighborhood that could punish you if they found he or she was misbehaving?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. There were some people that did that, but my greatest fear was the neighbors telling my parents.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: You see, my father died when I was quite young, so this is how I came to live with my mother. Well, my brother and I are here to live with my grandmother and my aunt. So there were two other people other than my mom that heard about anything that my brother and I did wrong, you see? So we were always getting, my parents and aunts were always getting reports of anything we did wrong.

Sonya Ramsey: Could you talk about any special remembrance you have of your grandmother? Did she ever tell you anything about her life?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Very little. Very little. I think one of the things she did was to, she came up from South Carolina with her.

Sonya Ramsey: What part?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I really don't know. But my mother could answer that better than I. But I think she came up in South Carolina and for a time, I believe they lived in Pittsburgh and then they came back here to live. Pittsburgh, PA.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: And they came back here to live and this is when my mother was young and she grew up in this house, as I said before. And I also grew up in this house, which I will celebrate my 65th birthday, the 28th of this month.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, congratulations.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Thank you.

Sonya Ramsey: Happy birthday. Okay.

Sonya Ramsey: Was your neighborhood a segregated neighborhood?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Of course. They were all Blacks that live in—no, no.

Sonya Ramsey: There weren't any Whites living in your neighborhood?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No way. The closest Whites lived about four blocks from here.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Did they have children?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Some of them, yeah. In fact, I went to babysit when I became a teenager. I was in junior high when I went to babysitting. About 14, I think I was, when I went to babysit this lady that had three girls. I used to babysit for about two hours in the evening while she went out. And on Saturdays, I babysat all day and had to clean her house on Saturday.

Sonya Ramsey: Do you ever remember playing with White children when you were a child?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. No.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. I only played with those kids because I was babysitting for them. But no, we never played with White kids. In fact, when we went to school we had to cross path like this and this was always a fight.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, really? Would anybody get in trouble from those fights?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No, because they would call us niggers and coons and different names when we crossed. Because this was when I was going to junior high and they were going to high school, which is still

in existence.

Sonya Ramsey: When you were growing up, who were some of the people in your neighborhood you looked up to?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, in the neighborhood—

Sonya Ramsey: Or in your community.

Camille Gantt Alexander: I would say more likely in the community. School teachers, of course, were the main ones we looked up to. And the minister, that's just about it. School teachers and the minister.

Sonya Ramsey: You said you played football with your brothers when you were growing up. What other kind of games did you like to play?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, I played jumping rope and jacks. Of course, that's the ball and those—I shot marbles. Heard of that, right? I shot marbles and we used to raid fruit from trees like plums and grapes and cherries. We'd always go around the neighborhood to raid the fruit trees, even though we had a peach tree in the backyard here and a mulberry tree. But the fruit trees that we didn't have, we would always raid the other people. It was fun because the people that owned these trees would run us out, of course. And most of them would have BB guns just to scare us off. It didn't last long because we go right back again the next day.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. I need to ask, what were some of the occupations of the adults that lived in your neighborhood?

Camille Gantt Alexander: If they weren't school teachers, they were factory workers, farm workers, of course, housekeepers. My grandmother took in washing and that was part of our chores to go pick up these clothes. I hated it.

Sonya Ramsey: I was going to ask you about chores.

Camille Gantt Alexander: I hated that. Go pick up these White folks clothes and bring them for my grandma to wash. And that was part of me being a girl, having to hang them up and iron them and then deliver them to the back door of the White folks. Hated that, really hated that.

Sonya Ramsey: Did your mom or your grandmother ever teach you about when you were growing up about segregation and how to act around Whites?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, that's one of the reasons I left home so early because me, I was so mouthy, they were fearful of me getting hurt because I always spoke my mind. I didn't like segregation and I never rode the buses because of that. A few times I rode the buses, I went long distance and I hated getting on the

bus and walking to the back. And if you tried to sit down, the bus driver, get to the back, nigger. Oh God. So I walked most of the places I went.

Sonya Ramsey: Where did you think you developed that attitude that, because a lot of people didn't have such an outspokenness. Where do you think you got your courage from?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I don't know. I just didn't like it. I knew it wasn't right. Well, 'cause I was a human being, if you stuck a pin in me, whatever, I bled just like the White man. So I just didn't like it. It just wasn't right. Just didn't seem right. Then in school, we were taught also that we were human beings like the White person. I think it came from some of the things that we were taught in school and I got to see right and wrong. We were taught in school how we were brought over here in chains and treated so badly. How we didn't know our ancestry because of the White man not letting us be a family or know our ancestry, how they kept everything from us. And then what little we had in school, it didn't come from the books because the few books we had were used. We never got new books. Never, never got new books. We always got the old books from Whites and oftentimes they were dirty, greasy, page missing. And this is what we had to learn from then.

Camille Gantt Alexander: I knew that was wrong. With all this I had to go through, why not get that attitude? I didn't have to be taught that attitude.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Did every go downtown and shop in the stores? And how did they treat the Black customer?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, you couldn't go to the counters to eat and you would have to stand around until the Whites were served. Then when they finished doing whatever they were doing, then they would come over, can I help you? Oh God. And if we went to Woolworth's to get a soda or anything, we had to wait down at the end of the counter. Lots of time, a lot of us would go in, you know how when teenagers get to be at a certain age, you travel in packs. So we would go to Woolworth's, and hope I'm not getting in trouble for saying this.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh no.

Camille Gantt Alexander: But we used to take little things from the counter, so nasty and so this and so that, so we used to take little things off the counter just because they were White and they were nasty.

Sonya Ramsey: You feel like you were getting back at them?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah. That was a way of getting back at them. Yes, yes, yes.

Sonya Ramsey: I wanted to ask you about what were some of the values that your mother tried to instill in you growing up?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, to be truthful, not to steal, of course, to strive for the best. Try to live a God-fearing life because we spent practically all day Sunday in church from Sunday school to church to BYPU. And then evening service, which they don't have now as a rule.

Sonya Ramsey: Could you tell, what is BYPU?

Camille Gantt Alexander: This was the young people's group.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: That met about four or five on Sunday afternoon.

Camille Gantt Alexander: They would teach us the values of God and how to be God-fearing, how to love your fellow man, even though they were sometimes treating you wrong. I couldn't see into that because how would you love someone that was mistreating you as a human being? It's another place I got to [indistinct 00:13:31]. (laughs)

Sonya Ramsey: Was evening service like regular service?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah. Yeah, but not as long as the morning service. They usually started about seven and about eight they were over.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you participate in church activities aside from Sunday?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh yeah. I belonged to, let's see, I sang in the choir, the youth choir. What else was I involved in? It was such a long time ago. I remember I sang in the choir. I think they had some sort of sewing club. I think I belonged to a sewing club or something like that, in church.

Sonya Ramsey: Did they have programs for children?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh yes, the usual. Christmas, Children's day, whatever special came along.

Sonya Ramsey: What was Children's day?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Children's days where the youth, the choir sang, the kids ushered and said prayers. They ushered, and of course, they took a collection and they read scripture. They did everything except preach on that Sunday.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: And they just honored the children of the church.

Sonya Ramsey: How do you think those activities and programs helped in your development?

Camille Gantt Alexander: It was a big thing in my life. It helped me spiritually. It helped me to grow spiritually, is about the best thing I could say it did.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Could you talk about, you went to Peabody Elementary School. What was that school like?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Regular elementary school, I would say.

Sonya Ramsey: Was it a brick school or—

Camille Gantt Alexander: It's still standing.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: And in fact, I'm doing volunteer work up there in Head Start now.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh that's.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, still standing. It's a pretty good school.

Sonya Ramsey: Do you have any remembrances of any special teachers?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I think one or two teachers and the principal. One of the teacher's name was Moore. She was quite strict. I remember her. Another one was Perkins, tall, light-skinned lady, used to call her the witch. God rest her soul. She was pretty strict also. She would get on your case for doing something wrong and then give you a nice big smile. You know you're a nice sweet young lady or a nice little boy, [indistinct 00:16:46], (laughs) but they were shaping us for adult life.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. I was going to ask you.

Camille Gantt Alexander: As I said before, it was in elementary school that they had this paddle that they used to discipline us. We had to stand in the corner. We had to sit on the stool in the corner.

Sonya Ramsey: What merited getting, having to do that, misbehaving?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Talking while the teacher was talking, chewing gum, not being on time, fighting were some of the things that you were disciplined for.

Sonya Ramsey: Aside from discipline, did the teachers do things for the students, aside from just the regular teaching jobs?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, if you needed some sort of academic help, they would help you there. You would have to stay after school to—Part of the afterschool program was to say if you were needed discipline during that day, you had a behavioral problem, you had to stay after school and write a thousand times, I won't do this again, I won't do that again. Or they would give you some extra work with math, which I always had trouble with math.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you ever notice that any of the teachers give preferential treatment or negative treatment to light-skinned children or dark-skinned children?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I can't say that I did, no, not really. We all were treated alike to tell you the truth. I can't say that.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you notice it any later in high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: The only preference I would say they gave to any of the light-skinned children was if they say were outstanding, singers or extra smart kids. And that would happen whether you were light or dark. No, I don't think I went through that. I can't really say that I did.

Sonya Ramsey: Did Peabody go to—

Camille Gantt Alexander: Sixth grade.

Sonya Ramsey: Sixth grade. And you went to junior high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes.

Sonya Ramsey: What junior high school did you go to?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Williston.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. And what was Williston like?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, it was a broader academic field in that I met a lot more people, became friends with a lot of people. And then they were fights too.

Sonya Ramsey: Why were they fighting?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Because one of the reasons we used to fight, my brother and I, I being the oldest and my brother youngest, I had knock knees and he was bowlegged. And one of the things that would start a fight with us was the kids would say, here comes O X. Here come O X. And that was a fight. Like that. Since my brother was younger then I used to fight his battles. When I got home, I used to get a beating for fighting.

Sonya Ramsey: How many years younger than you?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Two.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, that's all? Okay. Did he ever come to your aid?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, when we got older. Then after we got older, because he was much smarter than I. He's one of those persons who could look at something and he got it. But with me, I had to get down and study hard.

Sonya Ramsey: Do you have any remembrances of any teachers in junior high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: In junior high school? The same teachers, if I remember correctly, the same teachers would teach junior high and then high school. I may be wrong because it was a long time ago.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Then you went to Williston High, senior high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah. [Indistinct 00:21:27] school, yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. And could you describe Williston? What Williston was like?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah. By the time I got into, this was early forties. And by that time the war had started and things had gotten better for us financially with the Second World War. And my mom had gotten a better job. And my aunt, at that time, we got electricity in the house. We had an indoor bathroom and we ate better.

Sonya Ramsey: Why do you think your family did better because of the war?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Because the jobs.

Sonya Ramsey: There were more jobs created?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes. Because in Wilmington here we had a shipyard, an army base, naval. And the only one that's still running now, Camp Lejeune, that's the only one. So the town was filled with a lot of new people because there were such great job opportunities going on here. One of the other things that stands out in my mind during that time was, during the Second World War, across the street from the school, they brought German soldiers.

Sonya Ramsey: Really?

Camille Gantt Alexander: And I thought that was the worst thing they could have done. And they put them right across the street. The school was here and the camp was here. And they kept the prisoners. They had an electrified fence here and a regular fence there. And the principal told us never to cross the street. Never ever, ever cross that street. However, our activities in school didn't bring us to the front of the school until, say, possibly maybe recess or when we came to school.

Sonya Ramsey: Is this the high school or junior high?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, high school. Yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah. And these prisoners would come to the fence and they would call us all kinds of names. They couldn't speak English. Say, "Nigger, nigger, nigger."

Sonya Ramsey: They knew that word?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh, did they ever. Oh, did they ever. And then some of us would, as the principal used to tell us, and our teachers used to tell us, don't speak to them, which we didn't. We didn't have to because as soon as we were going into school to start the day, they would rush to the fence and start with the name calling. Whenever school was over, they would rush to the fence and start the name calling, and that was so degrading.

Sonya Ramsey: Did anybody ever say anything back to them?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, we would say, you know, swartzas. They would call us swartzas or we would call them names, but it didn't bother them. But they seemed to get joy out calling us names.

Sonya Ramsey: Were they there during the whole war or—

Camille Gantt Alexander: They were there, let's see, I graduated in '46. May of '46. I think it was that year. Prior to graduation, they moved them. Yeah, they were there for at least a year or more.

Sonya Ramsey: Did your parents protest them being there or—

Camille Gantt Alexander: What good would it do?

Sonya Ramsey: Do you think they put them there 'cause it was a Black neighborhood?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Why not? Why not? It was spaced down—The White school, they didn't put them there. They put them right across the street there from us. Right across the street.

Sonya Ramsey: In your high school, aside from academics, did you participate in any other activities?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, I was a cheerleader.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: In my senior year, I had gotten on the college bound team. I was in the sewing club, craft club. I guess you would call cooking, craft club too, then, I guess.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. I wanted to ask you about being a cheerleader. Why did you want to be a cheerleader and what was the process?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh, it was with the dance.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: On the dance—

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: —group. I did a lot of dancing in school. In fact, I still do like dancing. Being on the cheerleading squad, I think I was chosen to be on that because I was so mouthy, my teacher said. And then I enjoyed being on that because I got to get into the football games free. And I got to travel with the football team and the basketball team to different places to play the games. So I enjoyed that, I really did. I enjoyed that.

Sonya Ramsey: Your fellow cheerleaders, were there camaraderie or were there conflicts and things like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. No, no, no, no. We didn't have that. No. One of the nice things about that, that the Williston football team and the basketball team had very good coaches and very rarely we lost a game.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: So when that happened, on Friday nights, we would have a dance in the gym afterwards and we would do lots of swing dances, everyone is trying to learn to do now, which I'm an expert at.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: I still am, to tell you the truth. Those were good, those get together.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you ever want to be a professional dancer?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I did. In fact, when I graduated from high school, I asked my mom, I only wanted two things. One way to get to New York to visit my aunt and luggage. And that's what she gave me and that's what I did.

Sonya Ramsey: I wanted to ask some questions more about the social life here at Wilmington. What did young people do for fun when you were in high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, most of it's centered around school. Like I said, with my being a cheerleader and we had the basketball games and then we had the meets, and then we had the different dances like the sock hop, then the different clubs that met after school. And then we would go to the beaches.

Sonya Ramsey: What were the beaches, were they Black beaches and things like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Only Black beaches.

Sonya Ramsey: What beach?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Sea Breeze.

Sonya Ramsey: Sea Breeze. Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: That was the only Black beach we could go to here. Over at Greenfield Park, I assume you've seen that since you've been here. We weren't allowed too much to go into that park. However, a lot of the teenagers would go over to that park. And we used to swim in that lake when we couldn't go to Sea Breeze, because Sea Breeze is like 10 miles from here. So we would run over there and one of the fellas had put a rope up in one of the trees, but we would swing out into the water. It dropped down. We were taking a big chance doing that because there were moccasins in the water. Sometimes they'd say, here comes the moccasins, and boy, we would cut out.

Sonya Ramsey: Nice. Did Sea Breeze have restaurants there and things like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh yeah. They were what they call restaurants and dance hall. There was a pier that ran out into the water. It wasn't a beach, it was like a lake. So the water wasn't, by today's standard, the water wasn't that clean, but we all went in the water. In fact, Sunday School would have picnics down there. We would go down there because we had to go through the White area to get there. And lots of times, a lot of kids not having any transportation, we would all get into a truck and every time the police would stop us. Where you boys and girls going? Or, where you niggers going? We'd say we going to Sea Breeze. In fact, prom night we jumped into one of my classmate's truck and rode down into Sea Breeze because they had little dance halls with one light in the ceiling. Sawdust on the floor and have a good time done there. Really would do a little drinking, we couldn't do otherwise.

Sonya Ramsey: What was dating like then?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, dating was going to maybe Sea Breeze or going to Little George Street or that were in the outline areas, mosquitoes eating up out there, going to the movies wherein, of course, we had to go in the Colored section and we had to walk up about 4,000 stairs to get to, 'cause they had us way up in the balcony there. And if we made too much noise then the ushers would come and throw us out. Tell us to be quiet and throw us out.

Sonya Ramsey: If I wanted to ask, if it was a popular movie and a theater was really crowded, would Whites sit up in the balcony?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Never.

Sonya Ramsey: Never?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Never ever, ever, ever. And if we got crowded, we had to wait outside until seats were available. Never ever, ever were we mixed. No way. Sometimes if we got a little noisy, like sometimes Blacks will do, even today if something is funny, they will talk to the movie, or not funny, they would still talk to the movie and somebody would yell up from the White section, "Shut up that noise back there, niggers. Shut up that noise."

Camille Gantt Alexander: We were never addressed as a human being. It was always niggers or you coons, shut up that noise. If they had the orchestra and the mezzanine and we only had the balcony, only the balcony.

Camille Gantt Alexander: On Saturdays, we used to sneak into the Bijou. We used the side door because one of our friends worked in maintenance there. And he would leave the door unlocked, quite frequently.
(Ramsey and Alexander laugh)

Camille Gantt Alexander: We would sneak into the side door and sit up in the Colored section, as they called it.

Sonya Ramsey: The Bijou, was that a movie theater too?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Mm-hmm.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Those were the only two until later. Another one opened up one Third and Market. Those two movies was down on Front Street and the other movie was on Market Street.

Sonya Ramsey: They had a Black movie theater?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, the Ritz. In fact, when you get a chance, it's now Studio Four here now. One of the fellas grew up here went to New York and made money. In fact, it's been open about two months. That was another movie we went to. That's over on Fourth Street there. Fourth and Bladen.

Sonya Ramsey: I wanted to ask you, what would happen to a girl in your high school if she became pregnant?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, the families would send her away. Keep her home. She'd disappear for a while, come back. She never went to school. No, that was a sin. Most of the time they just took her out of school.

Sonya Ramsey: What happened to the boy that got the girl pregnant?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Same thing as today, nothing. (laughs) Nothing. That poor girl was shamed, you know?

Sonya Ramsey: But he wasn't?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Are you kidding? What happens today?

Sonya Ramsey: Nothing (laughs).

Sonya Ramsey: I wanted to ask, change gears a little bit. Ask where did people in your community go to? Did they have Black doctors to go to when they got sick?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes.

Sonya Ramsey: Did most people go to doctors or did they try to get better—

Camille Gantt Alexander: They do it themselves. Herbs.

Sonya Ramsey: Really?

Camille Gantt Alexander: We didn't go that often ourselves. Mom gave us different herbs to take. Spring was the herb time. Winter was herb time. Summer of was herb time. You know, you took tonics.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay. That's what that means. Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: To ward off any problems.

Sonya Ramsey: What were in those tonics?

Camille Gantt Alexander: The only thing I remember is it was sassafras tea and there was, my mom could answer that better. We had to wear—if we had a cold, we had to wear asafetida bag around the bed. You smelled to high heavens.

Sonya Ramsey: What was asafetida?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Asafetida. I don't know. That's what you got to ask my mom about that. People were screaming, get around here. It stunk.

Sonya Ramsey: Did all the children have to wear that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: A lot of them did. A lot of them did. Even though I had it on, I would take it off.

Sonya Ramsey: What was it supposed to do for you?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Ward off colds, whatever. And of course, we took castor oil and three sixes.

Sonya Ramsey: What's three? What's three?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Three sixes.

Sonya Ramsey: Three sixes?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes. It was six, six, six. That's why they call it three sixes. And that was for colds.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Bitter. Bitter, bitter, bitter. Bitter. It was. And of course, castor oil. Yes. You were giving the spoon or two of that and half an orange was shoved in your face and "You better not bring it up [indistinct 00:37:49]." (Ramsey laughs)

Sonya Ramsey: Do you think they worked?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, I'm here today. (Ramsey laughs)

Camille Gantt Alexander: My brother would probably be here too if he hadn't gone to Korea and died from a piece of shrapnel in his head.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh goodness.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: I wanted to ask you about World War II. Did you know anyone that had to go fight in World War II?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I knew of them, yeah. But they were, a lot of kids joined just to get away from here. But the Army was still segregated, but at least they got away. They had a chance to get away from here, to go into non-segregated towns. That was most of their reasons for joining, really. Just to get away from segregation.

Sonya Ramsey: Let's see, do you have anything else you wanted to say about your high school year, anything before we move on that I forgot to ask you? Oh, did you have any part-time jobs after school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: The babysitting.

Sonya Ramsey: The babysitting?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, I did.

Sonya Ramsey: And how did they treat you?

Camille Gantt Alexander: I didn't have any problems. They were pretty decent people. Really were, but they had to adhere to segregation. I had to go in the back door and come out the back door. I didn't have any problems. We got along pretty good. I got along with the kids pretty good. No problems.

Sonya Ramsey: And you said you were in the dance club. Did they have dance performances?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh yes.

Sonya Ramsey: Things like that. And what kind of dances would they do at those performances?

Camille Gantt Alexander: We did the Carmen Miranda type dances from South America. I don't know if you heard of the Death Dance wear we all went black and movements of the Death Dance. We did the jazz interpretive dancing and we performed in school.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you take dance lessons, anything like that before you were in high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No.

Sonya Ramsey: No?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. It was all in school, high school.

Sonya Ramsey: Did they have dance class for you or just—

Camille Gantt Alexander: Oh, yes. I joined the dance group in school. And for the four years that I was in high school, I was in the dance group.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you have to audition to get into that class?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes.

Sonya Ramsey: Was that really hard to audition or—

Camille Gantt Alexander: No. The teacher just said to play music and she said, get out there and do whatever you feel like doing.

Sonya Ramsey: Really. Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: And that's what I did. If you did something that you like, if you were creative and you were chosen to be in the troupe. And my mom made a lot of the outfits and I made some too because I was in sewing class.

Sonya Ramsey: Being a cheerleader and a dancer, were you pretty popular as well?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, I was.

Sonya Ramsey: Did they have little social clubs? I remember, I was talking to someone and they were a member of the Aristocrats Club or something like that. So did they have those clubs then when you were there?

Camille Gantt Alexander: We had clubs. We had clubs for different parts of the town like—

Sonya Ramsey: Oh okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: This part of the town ran from, in fact, it still does. The north side, they say runs from Market to the railroad tracks. The other side of the railroad track was called Brooklyn. So the people in this part of town, we all belong to the club here. We called it, I don't remember the name, I really don't. But we all belong to the club. We went different places together. We'd meet on the corner. There was a store over there on the corner. That woman allowed us, a candy store. She allowed us to sit around there and meet. And when we got too noisy, she throw us out and we'd meet on the corner. Sometimes we used to have little fights with people that come from Brooklyn came from the south side of town would come over and fellas didn't want them dating the girls on this side of town. They would be little fights, not serious fights. They would try a thing, they would approach, say, a fella and they'd say, "I bet you don't believe that

Juki can hold all these fellas and you get on top." Juki was a big fella.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Biggest fella.

Sonya Ramsey: Juki?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: You know we were famous for different names, nicknames. Anyway, he would lay on the bottom and then one of the other fellas and they would like that. And the one that didn't believe they could hold them would be on top. Of course, they would be the other standing around. And the one that got on top, they didn't believe, they would beat him on his butt when he got on top because he didn't believe it. That was funny. It was.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay. Okay. And you said for high school graduation you got a one-way ticket to New York City?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: And why did you decide on New York? Because your aunt lived there?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Mm-hmm. My mother's sister. I had to go somewhere, where I knew someone 'cause my mother wouldn't let me just go helter skelter.

Sonya Ramsey: Your mother thought you were getting a little outspoken and things like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah, she was little fearful.

Sonya Ramsey: What led her to believe that? Did you have any confrontations with White people or anything like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Not that much. It was just that it's the way my attitude, you know. Was abig thing, right? Why are you talking to me like this, I'm a person like you. I would project that type of attitude and my mother was a bit fearful of that.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you take the train or the bus or the plane?

Camille Gantt Alexander: No planes at that time. I think I took the train. The train used to come here.

Sonya Ramsey: What was that experience like?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Well, it wasn't anything new because the same aunt used to send for my brother and I in the summer.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: We spent our summers in New York.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: And we would come back here to go to school.

Sonya Ramsey: Do you think spending the summers in New York helped influence your attitude?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes.

Sonya Ramsey: About segregation?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yes, it did. My brother and I both, it did.

Sonya Ramsey: In what ways?

Camille Gantt Alexander: We knew there was a better life, that we have to take the garbage that the White man was giving out here. Because New York was a free state and that helped influence us a lot. In fact, I worked in one of the defense plants making the ponchos for soldiers. Yeah. That's the most money I ever made. 'Cause I think I was 14, 15, summer. I'd do something different. One summer I worked in the defense plant.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay. This is while you were in high school?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Yeah.

Sonya Ramsey: Oh, okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: When I went to New York for the summer. Another summer I worked in a flour plant, tore up my fingers. You had to hold them here and lay them here. Another summer, I was a ripper. What was, with the threads from garments. And this was in factories, all of this was in factories.

Sonya Ramsey: How did you go about getting those jobs? How did they get selected?

Camille Gantt Alexander: My aunt helped me to find them.

Sonya Ramsey: Okay.

Camille Gantt Alexander: Because this was during the war years too, and there were a lot of jobs and she, they were kind of close to home or she would write out of the direction. So I would take the subway to the jobs.

Sonya Ramsey: So I was going to ask, how did you adjust to living in New York? But you were pretty used to it already?

Camille Gantt Alexander: See, school let out here in May. So when we got to New York, school was still going on in June. So June, July and August we'd come home the end of August. Right.

Sonya Ramsey: Did you make friends in New York and things like that?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Some.

Sonya Ramsey: Did they tease you because you were from the South at all?

Camille Gantt Alexander: Just the way we talked. That's the only thing they teased us about.

Sonya Ramsey: After you moved, after grad—