



Interview with Henry Teman Donaldson and Laura Shepard Donaldson

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Wilmington (N.C.)

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Rhonda Mawhood: You were telling us about work that you did as a brick mason.

Henry Donaldson: Yes, I'm a brick mason by trade. From 1946 through 1950 this is the kind of work that I did up and down the east coast. When I came out of the Army I was discharged on the 5th of February of 1946 and I resumed my masonry after coming out of the Army. Construction work was scarce around here so I went to the Marine base in Jacksonville, North Carolina and worked awhile for a dollar and fifty cents an hour. That was top wages in 1946 for a brick mason here around North Carolina and especially in this area. Then we got a twenty-five cents raise and went to a dollar and seventy-five cents an hour. And about this time the work began to get scarce on that Marine base so I left Jacksonville and Wilmington and went to Gadsden, Alabama the first of 1947. For then we made big bucks, two dollars an hour. That was the top wages at that particular time for masonry on that end of the road. During this time black brick masons and white brick masons did not work together on the same building. It was a housing project being built by the federal government. During this time in North Carolina we worked together even though they had better breaks on the job. They could take a break but we could not. But on this particular job in Gadsden, Alabama we would all go to work, blacks and whites would go to work at eight o'clock. About nine thirty the whites on their building they would take a fifteen or twenty minute break for coffee or a drink or whatever not. But the black brick masons could never have a break. We worked from eight until twelve o'clock. For lunchtime

we had thirty minutes off for lunch. And the only time we could possibly get a break is when we'd go to the privy, as they called it, and we mustn't stay more than five minutes or else the foreman would come by and kick on the door. You're not sick in there are you? (Laughter) No, everything is alright. Better get back on the job. Then he would go on. So we would go back. We worked hard. Full eight hours every day. Maybe I'd say about ten, no more than fifteen minutes for privy time. But during that time we were making a lot of money and I had a real nice room where I boarded and my room and board was ten dollars a week. We got breakfast in the morning. We had two sandwiches for lunch. And then naturally we would have a nice dinner, supper we called it. And during this particular time in Gadsden we could never get used to the, black fellows could never get used to they had, what do they call this thing, a curfew hour. No blacks were to be on the streets of Gadsden, Alabama after eight o'clock at night. You had to be off of the streets. We weren't used to that around here it was sort of tough with us. We would like to look around the foot of the mountains and see this and then sometimes we would run over. But then there was always a law officer and all of them weren't dressed in uniforms. In other words, if he had a white face, he was an officer. In other words, they called them auxiliary cops. But then you must be off of the street by that time. And even where you room and you boarded, you must be off of the front porch inside of that building by ten o'clock. You had

to be inside. In other words, this was to keep the peace and no disturbance or anything of the kind. Finally, the time that we lived down there I got used to it because I didn't want to be locked up. And you would be locked up. (Laughter) And one of our fellows, he sort of waylaid one night and they put him in jail, roughed him up a little bit to let him know that nigger, you are supposed to go by the rules and regulations. You're from up north, you don't do that up there. But we do it down here. Keep these niggers in line. So he had to stay in the balance of that night and half of the next day and that was Ed Thompson. And the supervisor from our brick job had to go and get him the next day at twelve o'clock or they wouldn't let him out. This was to teach him a lesson not, and all the other fellows, not to be on the street. But we sort of got used to it and we stayed there until this job finished and we moved with this same company which was Alginon & Blair Construction Company. They moved to another project in Atlanta, Georgia. Well, it was Alapaha, Georgia but we lived in Atlanta. This project was centered around Alapaha University. And to me someone could take you there, if you had seen Duke University up here, the buildings looked almost alike and whatnot there. So it reminded me a lot of the buildings. The dormitories and whatnot were built out of stone and it resembles Duke University a whole lot. But we were building this project there and it was built out of brick. We had practically the same restrictions there working together and we never worked together.

And this was (Laughter) sort of intimidating at times when we went there. The foremen were from Birmingham, Alabama and they called the black brick layers black scabs. (Laughter) You black scabs get on this building over here. We were unionized, had a union, but the whites controlled it. We could meet in the same building on union nights but we didn't have the same privileges as the white brick layers.

RM: What union was that, sir?

HD: Huh?

RM: Do you remember the name of the union?

Laura Donaldson: Brick masons union.

HD: It was a brick masons union but I don't - see they all had numbers like brick masons union number eleven at Atlanta, Georgia or number ten of Birmingham, Alabama. But I don't remember the number of that union.

RM: You were unionized but they called you scabs?

HD: Scabs, that's right, black scabs or nigger scabs. And that was a word that was frequently used on the job, in the streets or anywhere when you would see one of them. I know that old nigger boy there. (Laughter) He works on the job down there. And you had to accept that and go on.

RM: The reason why I asked about it is because scabs are usually, they are non-union workers who are breaking a strike.

HD: Right. They are non-union. But you see, that was the ignorant part of that. They used that, in other words, to degrade

you. We were union. We had to pay those union dues. Yeah, we had to pay those dues to work and they made sure each Friday when we got paid off on Friday evening around three o'clock then the white union leader would come through where we were working and get out name and our assessment and we met once a month. That union hall was on Peachtree Street. It was somewhere in downtown Atlanta. But we would go to meetings, all the whites would sit up front. The nigger scabs had to sit in the back and we would state our name and how much we had paid. In other words, they checked on each other. They would call this man who would come through a shop steward. He was white. And whenever he came through and collected the dues it was all cash. We would never get paid in a check. Everything was paid off in cash. So to make sure that he turned in the right report to them we would have to state how much we paid. Say if I paid two dollars, I paid Mr. whatever his name was two dollars on Friday evening, whatever date. Then they would check that against what he had turned in.

RM: And did the white man also stand and declare how much they had paid?

HD: No, no, no. They didn't have to.

RM: Just the black men?

HD: Just the black ones. They didn't have to. And whenever they would read out what was going on, see they would correspond with different local unions say in Florida, say in Birmingham. And they would always make it known about these other jobs. See

those unions they worked together. If they needed brick masons in Florida then they would check with the union in Atlanta. But it was always noted, well it's a big job going on in Florida. They wanted only white brick layers. Black brick layers were never supposed to go to Florida, never. No nigger scabs in Florida. And they were paying a dollar more per hour in the state of Florida. Florida always has led in salaries and they would always state no nigger scabs were supposed to come. But they wanted so many white brick masons to come down to work on special jobs and we were never to go that way. In fact, the only time I've ever been to Florida I was always skeptical of it. We went to Disney World, when, with Corey. No it was with Brad, our oldest grandchild. We went to Disney World and that was my first time ever going into the state of Florida. But never to go that way to work because they always warned you against that.

RM: Did any of the black brick masons protest this name that they were called, for example?

HD: No, no, you'd better not.

RM: Not if you wanted a job.

HD: (Laughter) And if you wanted to live. I'll tell you, one of the most hurtful things my experience on the job there in Atlanta. They had all white in charge of everything. Even we had a white foreman. He stood over us day by day. And the labor foremans were white. And believe me, they couldn't spell their name if they saw it in letters big as a brick. And their word was

nigger this and nigger that. Well, the labor foremans, I think we found out that they were getting something like about seventy-five or eighty cents an hour. They took care of the loading of the scaffolds, seeing to that done with black labor, building scaffolds and whatnot. But what would hurt me and here I am a brick mason, working on a corner, here's a labor foreman come up not even knowing how to pick up a brick hardly and he would come up nigger, you're making a lot of money. I wouldn't say anything because you know, it intimidated me and I'm trying to work. And they were doing something, it was sort of hot like it is now, and we had one on the job, he just didn't like me because you see these khakis I have on, I've always liked to wear these because they're cool and you know, they're clean and everything and I'd always go clean on the job.

RM: Khaki trousers?

HD: Yeah and like this until today, it's cool.

RM: White tee-shirts?

HD: Yeah. So he said one day, he said every time I look at you, you don't look like you're working hard. He said you're sweating but you're not dirty. So I said why should I be dirty. I said I came to work and I can't stand odors, body odors and things like that. I said I wash every day. So what he did, I was building a corner and he was so stupid. Now, when you're laying brick it has to set up before you can, you know, get hard. So he took his foot and put it up on my corner and knocked it over.

Well, right then I just got upset. I said, man, what you doing! I said you're tearing the corner down. I said the other brick masons will be over here and I won't have nothing. Shut up, nigger, and build it back! And the supervisor came by and he looked. What's going on over there! I said this man come over here and kicked my corner down. I said this laborer come over here and kicked my corner down. You know what the supervisor said? Go on boy and put it back. Hurry up. The gang will be over here after awhile. Well then I got upset. I really did. I walked off. I walked off I guess about six or seven paces and the superintendent, boy you want to work. And it came to me all of a sudden. Well, I'm down here. I need to work. I've got to work. So I told him I said yes, I want to work. What! Yes, I want to work. Yes sir. I said yes sir. And I went on back to my corner. But I'm telling you that thing really got next to me. Now here's this little old labor foreman and they were sort of funny to me. Every one of them would close their eye, one eye, and all of them chewed tobacco. I hated that stuff! And they'd be (). (Laughter) They'd spit all over your work, on the brick. And you know, you have to pick them up and lay them. But you couldn't say anything about it. You'd better not if you want to work. And this fellow, it seemed like he just wanted to intimidate me all the time. But I had to swallow a whole lot of times because I was from up north, that's what they called North Carolina, (Laughter) up north. But I stayed on that job until it finished. But this

is the thing that we had to put up with. And if you wanted to work, you had to stay there. I remember once one of the black brick layers from, what's the name of that place, a funny name, Alagania or something, Georgia, he was an older man and he couldn't work as steady and hard as we did but they gave him a fit on the job. Finally, he had to leave there because one of the supervisors said something to him. They were teasing him about being an old man and about how many girl friends you got and this, that and the other. You know, just running on, teasing him. So he told them, he said in the first place I've got a wife and I'm too old to have any girl friends so to hell with that. And he slapped him, this old man. This was a much younger fellow, this white fellow but he slapped him. Don't you say that to me! And that man had to hurry up and leave there because they were going to hang him up and they told him and we knew what that meant from hearing, you know, this, that and the other. When they said they were going to hang you up back during that time (Laughter) you'd better get.

RM: So he left town?

HD: Yes, he left. He went on back because perhaps if he had stayed there, and I mean that day if he had stayed there maybe a day or two later we would have probably missed him. But they were pretty tight down around Alabama and Georgia. That was 1947 and 1948. We had a job in Marietta, Georgia that we would work on weekends. That was outside of Atlanta. Now this was in 1948.

Black folks had to leave out of Marietta by five o'clock. That's Marietta, Georgia. And I would almost hate to see the weekend come because this foreman of ours, he had this little job what he called sub-contracted and he wanted his brick layers to go over there and work on Saturdays. But we'd be over there at seven o'clock Saturday morning and at five o'clock Saturday evening we had to board that truck and get out of Marietta. And people there were a little more ignorant or stupid I thought because it was right in the little town and the sidewalks go right by the job and white people would come by, young ones and the older ones, and it wasn't anything on that job. He used the black brick layers to do it. He paid us two dollars an hour. But they'd walk by and they'd be making all kinds of, you know, nasty, derogatory remarks. But other than that we got along fine. This is the only place that my wife had, we had the oldest child there. She came to Atlanta and spent a summer with me while we were down there. And let me tell you about her. She got all riled up. I told her about, you know, all of this kind of stuff (Laughter) before she got there. Well, Laura always has been a loving wife and mother and everything else. Laura and Joyce came to Atlanta and I went down and I met them. I think they were down there Easter. But she always have kept Joyce spotless. In other words, tried to have her clean clothes. So we went down on Peachtree Street. Laura, what was the name of this big store you walk across?

LD: Rich.

HD: Rich, it was a large department store, Riches Department Store. And we went down one Saturday. She loved to go shopping and looking and whatnot. So Joyce, well we called her a pretty little girl and she always has been knowledgeable. She didn't meet any strangers. And she was just spotless clean and everything so we went in this store and Joyce was running around playing and one of the sales ladies came over and Joyce was just talking to her, jabbering away. This sales lady told another one, ooh, ain't she a cute little nigger baby. (Laughter) Boy she liked to had a fit! I had to get my wife out of there before we all got killed. Laura got so mad she was just jerking like that.

She wanted to go and get on this lady but she would have been put in jail the next second and beaten too. So I got her from downtown Atlanta. We went on back over on Auburn Avenue where we stayed. In other words, I was sort of used to that. I mean she could have said it with me, if Joyce had been with me and I would have kept going. But she burnt her up! (Laughter) She said ooh, ain't she a cute little nigger baby. Look at her, clean and boy, my wife, I had to grab her and get out of there right quick. And it just tickled them, you know, because they weren't used to that kind of thing. But that was an incident we had with her. (Laughter)

RM: The sales woman didn't speak to you, Mrs. Donaldson, directly?

HD: No. No, she was just talking about Joyce.

LD: She was talking to my baby.

HD: Yeah, talking to Joyce. Ooh, she's the cutest little nigger baby! And she blew up. Said girl, you can't do that down here. They'll lynch you. They'll hang you. So we got out of there. I got away from there and finally I sort of calmed her down. But every time she went shopping, I made sure I was there with her because that one's got a temper. But it went so far. And then the next thing, we never did have any, in traveling from here to Atlanta and Augusta, I worked in Augusta, we traveled by bus. We didn't have a car or truck or anything. We traveled by bus. Wherever the bus would stop it was never no restrooms, never no place to get water unless they had a pump, had a pump handle outside. But if we had to go to the restroom or something we had to go out around the bus station over in the woods. And if you were hungry you'd have to go to what they called the hole in the wall. I guess you've heard of that. That's where you'd go and stand there and wait until somebody in the little cafe would come over and probably sell you a hot dog. But that's the way we would have to eat. But most likely whenever I would leave here to go to Atlanta, she would fix me a lunch enough to last me until I'd get down there. So seldom if ever I had to go to the hole in the wall to get anything. I'd always carry enough sandwiches to last me until I'd get to my boarding place. We had to go to ourselves in the bushes. We'd have to go around the back of the place. There always was a wooded area somewhere. But I lived through that and

never was once arrested or beat up because I always tried to adhere to their laws and whatnot because I heard so many different tales about people being lynched and hung and the people that we would always stay with and each time we would go, the black brick layers would go say to Augusta, we would go to the YMCA to find the best place in town for us to live. God blessed us through those times because anywhere I've ever gone I found a nice place to live. We'd always go to that YMCA every time we would go to a different town. And when we went to Atlanta we went to the YMCA and they would tell us the best place to live and the places that you ought not to go. In Atlanta, Decatur Street at that time, that was oh, my land, that was a rough place. We weren't supposed to go there. I belonged to Ebenezer Baptist Church here in Wilmington all of my life and when I got to Atlanta and got this particular room I wasn't too far from the Ebenezer Baptist Church there. The Sunday that Martin Luther King, Jr. preached his trial sermon I was as close to him, I was on the front pew, as close as from here to the stairway. And the little young fellow walked up on the rostrum, his father came, he was the minister there at the time and he was telling people about his son and how God has changed him and he's going into the ministry and he's going to do his, they called it trial sermon, and naturally it was the initial sermon. And he stayed up there about thirty minutes. He read some scripture and he talked and to me it was just another young preacher going into the ministry. And as the time went on I never

did think or dream that I was looking at and was as close around one of the world's most noted persons.

LD: Pardon me for interrupting you, I thought while you're on King, you might mention the fact that where we lived was just about a block and a half. As we walked in the gate the little yard space had a little fence around it and you looked directly on the King porch.

HD: Front porch.

LD: And we used to see mother King, Alberta King, sitting on the porch.

HD: With all the children. They were all small during that time, little things.

LD: Just a block and a half from their house. We were on Hoagg and Hoagg runs directly into Auburn and Erwin was between.

HD: I think it was Erwin Street. In other words, the old King homestead is a two-story building.

RM: Yes, I've been there.

HD: Yeah, a two-story building. I attended church there at Ebenezer the whole time we were there. And then after I left there I worked my way on back up this way. I stopped in South Carolina and then I worked in Virginia and this was when he started all these sit-ins and walk-ins and whatnot down on that end of the road. And today there is a church, Shiloah Baptist Church over here on the north side of Wilmington here, Reverend Vaughan, I met him here during the time when King was doing all of

this marches and whatnot, Reverend Vaughan over here was working with him just like Abernathy. Reverend Vaughan was over there at Shiloah Baptist Church and often we have sat down and we have talked about you know, all of those things but I was away from there then. Reverend Vaughan until today, he likes to talk about how he assisted the young man in these marches and things to Alabama and all these kinds of places.

RM: You said Mr. Donaldson, that Decatur was a rough place and you weren't supposed to go there.

HD: Decatur Street.

RM: Decatur Street, alright not Decatur, Georgia. Did you know anyone who did, any black man who did go there?

HD: Yes I do. One of our brick layers went over there and liked to get his head knocked off. There was a section on Decatur Street and there's one in Augusta, Georgia too that there was a white store that had a large department store and he only hired fair black women to work there. Now if a black man would go in there and get out of line with one say like she's pretty and I may want to say something to her, you weren't allowed to do that. And this fellow, he's dead now. His name was Gus Mickens. He saw this girl in this department store and he went over there and he was, you know, getting what they called smart with her. He wanted to know her name and whatnot. And this man that owned the store hit him with a blackjack and liked to knock his head off. Nigger, get out of here! That's my woman. Get out of here. And

Gus did. Bill Boykins went over there and came back all beat up.

In other words, our land lady told us, said don't go on Decatur Street for nothing. Stay away from there. Anything you need to have, go anything else.

RM: Now your friend Gus Mickens, was the woman who he spoke to was a light skinned African American?

HD: Light skinned working in this particular building. She was one of the sales ladies.

RM: And the white man who owned the store said that's my woman?

HD: That's my woman. There's a place on Gwenette Street in Augusta, Georgia. When I had a room there the lady told us said don't go to that drugstore down there for anything. All those girls that work in there they are mistresses to whoever this fellow that owned it. And I didn't ever go that way. I was always afraid. I didn't ever go that way. They would pick these pretty, what we called our pretty girls and that was theirs and you just didn't say anything to them. Not a black man, no you'd better not because they'd hang you up (Laughter) in a minute or beat you up. And there was nothing never done about it. So when Gus got hit he got a little upset about it. He said he went in the store to buy something and this man walked up and hit him with a blackjack. He told a cop. The policeman told him boy, you need to learn how to stay in your place. So that's all there was, you know, to that. The land lady told us, said I warned you, don't go

down there. But I was always a little timid of those kinds of things even though I had feelings but I never would go. And I was just afraid anyway, you know, to participate in any of those kinds of things. But back during that time, the 1930's and the early 1940's, all the way through the 1940's, it was sort of rough throughout the south. In other words, if you came from North Carolina you came from up north. (Laughter) You were branded. In other words, all the people up this way, the Negroes, they were supposed to be listed as smart. You go down there, they'd put you in your place and mostly your place was hanging on one of those trees or beat up or dead somewhere. But in all, I was blessed I didn't ever get arrested or wasn't ever beat up or anything. So when I came from down that way I think we have been through there about once or twice because the first year our oldest daughter was in college she went to Talladega. I persuaded with her not to go down there because she was a little mama's girl around the house and she'd never been out. But Joyce's first year to Talladega there ended because the middle of the year the Ku Klux Klan ran through and they set the buildings afire there at Talladega College. They had a white lady instructor there and something happened and this is when they paraded, the Klan paraded across the campus and the officials there notified us not to come down there. Joyce would call and she would cry but we could not go to Talladega to see about Joyce. She would let us know what was going on and as long as she stayed in the building she would

be alright. So at the end of that school year we went and got Joyce and Joyce (Laughter) didn't go back that way. She went to North Carolina Central up here in Durham and that broke off Talladega. Well, Joyce, that was supposed to have been a hand picked college as they call it.

LD: She gave up that scholarship.

HD: Yeah, she had a little scholarship to go there and nothing could go there unless they, what do you call it, unless their record was high and Joyce's fitted that so they gave her a scholarship to come there. But at the end of that year we didn't have no more worry with Joyce about Talladega. She came back here and went to North Carolina Central University.

RM: Around what year was that?

LD: Joyce went there in 1962.

HD: Here's her some kind of book right here from Talladega. Oh Lord, she got everything out of there.

LD: It was 1962.

HD: This is a picture of the college. Where is all the information that was in there?

LD: She probably took it out.

HD: Joyce probably come in here and got it and just left the book back but that's the school.

RM: That's a beautiful building.

HD: Yeah, un-huh.

LD: It just seems like it's so much beauty and so much pain.

HD: They had one white instructor there. She was a Dr. somebody and the Klan didn't want her on that campus teaching or something. And they started all this rigmarole. They shot into some of the dormitories and the kids could not come out.

LD: They couldn't go shopping unless one of the instructors went with them.

HD: Yeah. And they definitely told us to not come down there. You parents, in other words, anybody from North Carolina don't go that way. Naturally we suffered here until the year was over. I hated it happened like that but I told Joyce, I said Baby, I have been on that end of the road working and they'll call you nigger, they'll kick you, they'll do anything and they'll spit on you and you can't do anything back. No, daddy, I've got my scholarship and I want to go down there and they have high standards. I said well, you're not going to like it. And sure enough it came to pass. She didn't like it. It wasn't a thing that we could do about it and she left there once. They took so many of them from Talladega and carried them to Atlanta to some kind of conference thing they had there but they were pretty well guarded. And she went back. But that's the only time Joyce left Talladega that first year that she was there. I was so glad when it was over with and they did tell us school was out and we could come and go. We went on down and picked her up and we got her away from there (Laughter) and I haven't been that way, you know, down in there. But anybody from North Carolina, that was from up

north, smart, this, that and the other. It was rough during that time. I came up on this end of the road, I went to Washington, D.C. in 1950 and I worked up around Maryland laying brick in Bethesda, Alexandria, Virginia. I lived in the District. She didn't ever come up to me there. And at that time our other two children were born so she stayed at home with them. In 1953 I worked in Norfolk, Virginia and being, I call it, up and down the road and living in other folks houses, I just got tired of staying away from home. I told Laura, I said Baby, I'm coming home. If we don't have but five cents we're going to enjoy that together. I'm just tired of rooming and working on jobs and work was slow around here and I couldn't hardly make ends meet. This is why I worked up and down the road. But I came home in 1953 from Norfolk, Virginia. At the time things began to look a little brighter around here so far as working conditions. In 1954 this waterfront here in Wilmington, this always has been a port city, shipping. So then things escalated up and I went to the Longshore Association. They were wanting men to work. They even sent to South Carolina. This is when they opened up this ammunition depot on the waterfront over here in Brunswick County. And oh, my land, this is when I started leaping. I went and I joined this union, ILSA, International Longshoreman's Association. It cost me a hundred and ten dollars. I went to work there on the ships loading and unloading ships and I made more money then than I had ever even dreamed of. They were paying four dollars an hour. Now

brick masons weren't getting but two dollars and twenty-five cents an hour. They had gone to two twenty-five out here whenever you could find a job. So this just suited me. I laid my trowel down, aside. Of course, I never put it away. Right now I lay a few brick ever once in awhile after retiring. So from 1954 I went out and I started loading ammunition and they started sending it to these war zones and from time to time we got periodic raises. So from four fifty-four, at different times the different ammunition we would load over there I have made as much, and I'm not exaggerating, on a particular day, one hundred and four dollars an hour. And I worked one day six hours. Now this was handling this gas, poisonous gas, that the Army would use. See, this was dangerous work. All of it's dangerous. This is why they paid so much. But on this particular project that's as much as I've ever made. I guess I ought not be talking about that too much but the fact they were getting rid of some of this gas, the Army, and this is what they paid and we all () down and this down and the other, gas masks and whatnot, you know, for our safety. They sent that stuff away from there. But we would get paid during that time, whatever your hourly rate was after five o'clock in the evening you got double time or if you worked at night. And I have made in one week that I would work, I didn't work long hours because for my own benefit, but you could make two thousand dollars a week if you wanted to work that long.

LD: He didn't see many of those days.

HD: No, un-uh I wouldn't work because when I would get tired I was sort of jittery of that work because it was so dangerous. You could stumble and fall and get killed just that quick. But when I get tired I come away from there. And one week I worked enough to make fifteen hundred dollars in I believe it was three and a half days. In this particular year I made forty-one thousand dollars in about five months. Now this wasn't working every day. You didn't need to do that.

RM: In the 1950's?

HD: This was in the 1960's. And I made good salaries down there. When this war started over here, what did they call it, Gulf War?

RM: The Gulf War.

HD: Yeah, some of those fellows made a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I wasn't there then. I retired in 1988. I made thirty-two years and nine months. From 1954 to 1988 I worked down there. The most I made on that waterfront in one year was forty-one thousand dollars. I'd always average around from twenty to twenty-five and thirty and thirty-five. Now I could have made far more than that had I pushed myself, worked night and day. But I wouldn't do that. And a lot of the fellows I noticed they would work until they'd fall out and some had strokes and some had heart attacks. You know, working after all that money. But I didn't ever do that.

RM: Mrs. Donaldson, did you worry about your husband doing

this work?

LD: Yes, I did.

HD: A whole lot more than she should have.

LD: I guess I was his guardian angel and to me, but now bear in mind, these large payrolls were not a weekly thing. He didn't do that every week.

HD: Do that every week.

LD: So when you average it out on a yearly basis, it was nothing like that amount. It was just that hourly, the pay was very good. But it didn't come every day. It didn't come every week. So that made a difference.

HD: But it was so much farther, more than I'd ever made. And whenever I would, you know, we would put it to what we called good use.

LD: He had his brick masonry job to fall back on.

HD: Yeah, always.

LD: In the time when there was no time on the port.

HD: Now during that time they had some awful strikes. Ships didn't sail. Sometimes, I remember once we had one that lasted three months. During that time I would go back to my brick laying job. And the fellows that didn't do anything but work on the waterfront, they suffered. But I always had something to fall back on. And this was something else too. My people, they're some of the durndest folks there is in the world. I'll put it that way. They're jealous. A lot of them are hateful. And they

don't want to see you, when you hear the word, they're like a lot of crabs. You know, you ever been crabbing and catch some crabs and put them in a bucket and one try to get out and one pull him over? (Laughter) This was the way it was on that waterfront. The guys hated to see you excel and they would do everything they could to pull you down. In other words, get you not to have anything. And alcoholism is one of the main menaces there is down there. A lot of those guys they'll go out and say they'll make a thousand dollars this week. They'll spend the biggest of that drinking and whatnot, especially during that time. And I didn't ever fool with drinking with them too much around there because I knew how treacherous they were. And then they put a brand on me well, you think that you're more than anybody else. You don't associate with us. But I couldn't put up with the things that they were doing because...

LD: He was hen pecked.

HD: Yeah. I was always looking forward to one day retiring and having something that I could be proud of. So they always give me the hard end to go and finally as God would have it, I worked and stayed there and I took all of that because I knew one day if I retired this would be good for me. And finally the last ten years that I was there I worked up to be what they called a header which is a supervisor over the men. Then they had to adhere to me then (Laughter) because they wanted a job. I could hire them. But I always would treat them like I wanted to be

treated because...

(End of Tape 1 - Side A)

Tape 1 - Side B

HD: ...didn't have cigarette money.

RM: Did you see a lot of that, Mr. Donaldson?

HD: A whole lot of it, a whole lot of it. Some of them would buy automobiles but the average one would not buy a home. In 1973 when we built this home here, I say we, my wife and I, and me a brick mason knowing what I wanted, and they really skinned up their noses at me then. What do you want with such a big house? You're not going to stay in it. And this day right here, this is the sixteenth day of July, isn't it?

RM: Un-huh.

HD: We moved in this house and hadn't done another thing to it the sixteenth day of July in 1973. We had it completed, we moved in, my wife had all the furniture here, everything paid for and we moved in this house and this day right here will make us twenty years right here in this house.

RM: Happy anniversary.

HD: (Laughter) Thank you. And I'm saying this is all yell to Jubilee like the Israelites used to have. They went () fifty years to Jubilee and at the end of that time they weren't supposed to owe anybody anything. All their debts were forgiven. But what I'm saying is this year is our Jubilee year.

LD: We did have an older house we had bought and remodeled.

I've always been a tomboy. If it was something that I wanted and Don gets on me now about wanting the best. But we bought an older house and we remodeled that.

HD: Sold it.

LD: Sold that and came here.

HD: Put that in this.

LD: Together with his brick masonry and with my father having done brick masonry and carpentry.

HD: Her father didn't do any brick masonry on this house.

LD: No, no, he was dead long before then. I had neither parent when I married Don. Both of them died when I was just a child, both my mother and father.

HD: What she's trying to work up to is she learned how to do a little carpentry work and she helped carpentry on, you know, the little things she could do.

LD: I put down most of the hardwood floors and made all my drapes.

HD: Yeah, she did all of her sewing.

LD: All over the house.

HD: So this house if I had contracted it out to real estate they wanted at the time fifty thousand dollars to build this place. By me knowing what we wanted and how it was supposed to have been done do you know we got in this house lacking one hundred dollars from being thirty thousand dollars. Twenty-nine thousand nine hundred, we were in here and like we are now. And

now they have the tax value on this house as a hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

RM: It's a lovely house. Has many rooms.

HD: Yeah. The second floor up there, that's our living quarters. We have four bedrooms up there and a large walk-in closet. We have two and a half baths here, half downstairs and two full baths upstairs. So it's just a comfortable place but I'll tell you, it took a lot of work to do it. The guys prophesied that I wouldn't stay in here two years. (Laughter) But now it has ended up this day, twenty years and we hope to continue.

RM: Mrs. Donaldson, where were you living when your husband was working through Alabama and all those other places?

LD: Staying behind being lonely. But I'll tell you...

HD: She lived in the project, the housing project.

LD: Lived in Hillcrest.

HD: Hillcrest. Then we left Hillcrest after we moved out of there, now this is where I was working, and running up and down the road and she was living in Hillcrest at the time. From there when I came in we bought, built this housing project there on Eighth and Dawson over on the south side of town. This is when we bought the home, our first home, on the north side of Wilmington at Tenth and Camel. During that time work was sort of scarce. I paid thirty-seven hundred dollars for that house. It had three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen.

LD: We remodeled that completely.

HD: We remodeled that completely. I paid three thousand seven hundred dollars for that house and in 1971 we sold it cash for ten thousand five hundred dollars. This is what bounced us this way. We sold out, got out, we stayed with a friend one year and, not quite a year and in 1972 I came out here and I put the foundation, the blocks in for this house.

LD: And it snowed.

HD: It snowed. Had two big, awful snows the last of 1972 around Christmas and then I got a carpenter to come and frame it up, put the top on and we took it from there.

LD: We did all the interior.

HD: I had friends to help me. Her brother sprayed these ceilings and a fellow working with him put up the sheetrock. She painted every wall in the house and she put down the floors while I was, that's marble out there in the foyer there. I laid every bit of that. I did masonry work around the house. I just knocked off. I was working on the waterfront at that time.

LD: In the meantime I was laying away furniture so that when we moved in we had paid for everything in here. So that was no problem. With his working and with my working we were able and you know, my thing has always been if you want something badly enough and you're willing to work for it, all things are possible especially when you have a strong faith. And faith is what has sustained me down through the years because I was only ten when my

mother died. And when I was just short of seventeen my father died. And there was a brother who was younger than I that I had sort of had to mother him ever since my mother died and before over the last three or four years. She had breast cancer and didn't have the medications to control that as we have today. So I've never really had time to be a little kid. It has always been planning, working and even now the brother, the younger brother who was little when my mother died, I not only had to mother him but I had to be the mother of the whole family. The others were grown and gone. So it just fell my lot to step in. So maybe when I get to heaven I can be a little kid.

HD: Yeah, through it all we came through the gun but God has blessed us to this day to come back, come through all of that and to come and to just sit down and just wait.

RM: Did you have other family members here, Mrs. Donaldson? Aunts or uncles?

LD: I had brothers and sisters here but bear in mind during the 1940's if you were black unless you were one of the fortunate ones who had had the rare opportunity of a college education if you were a woman you worked in Miss Ann's kitchen and that paid little or nothing. So this was the era that I came to Wilmington under. But at home after my mother died the few years that my father was there, he had taught for a long time in their early marriage. He was also a brick mason and carpenter so that made it a little easier. I knew nothing about the farm life because I had

not seen cotton until I was sixteen and at that time I thought I was looking at a large field of okra. We went to Snead's Ferry which is a few miles from Wilmington to visit one of my old teachers and I told my daddy I said look at the okra. I've never seen so much okra in my life. And he laughed. So a few minutes later he said Baby, what did you call it? I said okra. And a little later, what did you call it? And by that time I was getting sort of exasperated with him. I told you okra! He said Baby, that is not okra, that is a cotton field. (Laughter) But there was cotton growing within two miles of us but it was on some white person's farm. My uncle farmed but he did not raise cotton.

RM: And where was this ma'am?

LD: Verona.

HD: That's just this side of Jacksonville, North Carolina up 17.

LD: It's interchangeable with Jacksonville now. But anyway, he had said remembering from his childhood days, he said that he had rather for a man to spit in his face than to ask him to let one of his daughters work in the cotton field. So even though we were that close to cotton I never saw cotton because he would not allow his daughters to work in the fields. So that meant that I knew nothing about it. And I told my husband and I told my children about my first time seeing cotton. And it was just one of those things that he did not allow us to go that way.

RM: Did your father pick cotton in his years?

LD: No, not to my knowledge. His was a hard life. I never saw either of my grandparents on either side of the family. But his father died when he was small and my grandmother, of course, had to work in the fields because my daddy said, I don't know the, and this is something that I regret, I don't know not having seen either of the grandparents, there was no one and I'm curious about the past. But there was no one really to feel me in on things that I really wanted to know. But many times he told us that he was so small my grandmother would take him to work with her, he could not do anything but he said that the, and bear in mind this was right after the turn of slavery because he was born in 1880 but Gran

ma would take him to work with her and the plantation owner would put him on the horse and tell him where to go. He couldn't work but he could take messages. But they wouldn't send him walking to take messages. They would put him on the horse. You go down the road and you stop at the first house this side - wherever they were sending him and he would take the messages to them, to the people the next place. This determination to learn was there and as he grew older he, well even after he married my mother, even after they were married, he said that this burning desire was in my family to learn. And bear in mind that right after the turn of slavery especially in the rural areas there was not the opportunity to really go to school. You went a few months out of the year. But that desire to learn was there. So he said that

his principal, the principal of his school told them well, Shepard, I've taken you as far as I can go. But he still wanted to learn so he kept pestering, I want more, I want more. So he told him, there is a school if you're that determined, there is a school, I don't know the name of the school but it was in Syracuse, New York and he said if you want more I've carried you as far as I can go and now I dare say you know more than I do. But if you want more I'll give you the name of this college in Syracuse, New York. So he did and he took this correspondence course. Upon completion of this course they sent him crepe paper. Do you know what crepe paper is?

RM: Yes ma'am.

LD: They sent him his cap and gown made out of the crepe paper. So he called all the neighbors, got them all together and the house was too small for the gathering so they build this big bonfire out in the yard. So from that I know it had to be in the fall when he had his graduation. Built this big bonfire and they were all out enjoying themselves and congratulating him on having completed his college course. Well, the wind blew a spark which lighted his cap and gown (Laughter) and he had to beat a hasty retreat and pull the thing off to keep from being burned. So this with me has been a strong thing to see that my kids got an education. And I worked hard. While Don was working, I was working also. And we succeeded in getting all three of them through college. To me this is the crowning achievement of my

lifetime because I could not go as far as I wanted to go with both my parents having died. But this thirst for knowledge is there and to see that my kids got it was the most important thing in my life. So thank God, we did it. And when they wanted more we were there to see that they not only got the basic college education but they went on. Lana and Joyce both have their master's. Jerome, he is a minister now. He's working otherwise because at this point in time he does not have a church. He has a little computer business of his own. With the crunch that has come about lately with computers and with a family he can't rely just on his computer business so he's working with another firm. But he also keeps his little business going because he too has three children that are going to have to have an education. So as I told them, if you do nothing else see that your children have an education. The oldest daughter has only one son as he, as my husband told you, is a graduate of Harvard. Jerome's Corey will be sixteen in August and she is a very good student. But even before my children could sit they didn't know what I was talking about but I was reading to them. They knew the pictures and to them it was the pictures because before they could sit I was pointing out pictures to them. Lana loves books better than anything in the world. So they came up, I said I breast fed them with milk but their main diet was books. (Laughter)

RM: And they are librarians now, the two of them.

LD: Yes. But that was very important because in the country

when I was growing up, when you're living out in the country there's nothing to do but go to church or the children to play. But there were books and more books. You read books. You didn't look at the book and put it down. You read books in my house. And sitting by the fire at night, the long winter nights, my parents read to us. So the thirst for knowledge has been there and as I tell them, I can't do - it's I will do. So it has paid off and I can look back now with no regrets at having tried to be the best mother that I possibly could for them. The little ones think that I'm the greatest grandmother who ever lived. But it hasn't been easy but I'm grateful that we have had a very good life. And when I look around and see so many others, it's not from the standpoint of boasting but as I told my children, just because you don't have everything you want, I can't give you everything you want, I can't give you everything I want you to have but I can see to it that you have the basic tools that what I can't give you, you can give yourselves. So there was never a question about not going to school. It was you will go to school. You will learn. So I am grateful that they listened. And as I told them, I'm not asking you to do this for me but do it for yourselves. And a lot of times I would tell them like when we moved in here, five years before Don even agreed to build this house Mr. Sutton down here at Sutton () Furniture, I was laying away furniture. He said Baby, I can't do it. I can't do it. We've got these children. That's why we got these children.

They're not responsible. We have to take care of these children. But there's also something for me. I can remember when I was just a little kid growing up in the country my uncles, two of my uncles, well three of my uncles, one of them died before I was old enough to remember him, but his house was directly across the road from our house, they had two-story houses and when we would go to visit my uncles my mother had no problem with me because I was climb up and down the stairs. And I can remember when my legs were so short that I couldn't get up to the, I would have to hold on to the little spokes in the stairwell there. I had to hold on because if I tried to raise my foot on my own I would tumble. So I learned if I held on to the side, so when we went this is what I did the whole time, up and down the stairs, up and down the stairs. So my mother didn't have to worry about my going to sleep when I got home. (Laughter) My little short legs would be so tired. But this was my dream and I told Don. He said don't lay no more furniture Girl! Don, I'm going to get my house.

RM: Two-story house you wanted?

LD: Un-huh. And this house we bought over there, ever once in awhile I think about, do you like poetry?

RM: Yes ma'am.

LD: Oh, I love poetry. I even write a little poetry. It may never get published but it's a very thing. And the long winter nights that was something we did at home when we were - I remember my mother reading and my father reading to us. And I

loved to hear them read poetry. And I do the same thing with the grandchildren. I did it with my children. So I like writing a little poetry. It may never get published but I have the satisfaction of knowing that I can put a verse together. We would sit and read and even after Joyce has been grown when she would come home she would say, Mother, just read to me. You are a woman now. But I just remember when you used to read to us so read to me now. But this house over there we bought it and Don said Baby, we can't make it. Don, we can, we can do it. I don't mind working. You can see from my stubby fingers that I must have done a lot of work. But we knocked down all that old plaster walls that was in there and we put up sheetrock. Then we had someone to, the walls, well, we got the () and we got in there and we did that and I did the painting. Every room in this house I've painted. And the sheetrock when we were putting this up, we just paid the man to do the framing. Don would hold up a piece of sheetrock and I would go up the ladder and nail it. And while he was getting another piece in place I was coming down the sides nailing it because you've got to nail it all the way down. I was coming down the sides with the ladder nailing it down. So I pity a person who says I can't because if you want it badly enough you can. So this is the story of my life believing that it can be done. And if you really want it and you have the faith in yourself and in your God that if you try that He's going to help you see the fruition of your dreams, it happens. It happens. So

Don many a night would say Baby, we can't make it. He's always, ever since we started dating, started calling me Baby. Baby this, Baby that, Hey, Baby this. Don, we can do it. No we can't. And I love antiques. The sofa that I bought for this house is out there in the garage because this type thing you don't see anymore in the stores.

RM: Like the love seat.

LD: Un-huh. I bought this and had it reupholstered because it wasn't what I wanted. But this is how we have managed for fifty years now, fifty long years. But when you look back it seems like just yesterday when we were holding hands and we still hold hands. (Laughter)

RM: ()

LD: She was a very sweet old lady and I have a bracelet upstairs that she gave to me that's sterling silver. She used to call me her daughter. Well, during the lean years I used to make all of my clothes and all of the children's clothes, all the girl's clothes and it was where did you get this, where did you get that. So I did a lot of sewing in addition to working. I did a lot of sewing to help get the things we wanted. Once I was ill and she called me and she said what's wrong. I told her well, I'm sure you can bearly hear me because I'm so hoarse. She said get off the phone, Daughter. Get off the phone. She said I'll be there, I'll be there. And I've never felt so humbled or so elated. She lived about two and a half blocks, well actually

about three blocks all total from where we were. And a few minutes after I had hung up the phone here she was, the doctor's wife, one of the oldest doctor's in town. She came in Daughter, you just lie right there in that bed, you just stay right there. I had gotten up and given the children their breakfast and sent them to school. Don had gone to work. But I was too sick to do the dishes. I was going to do them because I hate dirty dishes but I had gone back to bed. I said now who in the devil is this as badly as I'm feeling. Went to the door and here she was. Daughter, just get right back in the bed. Get right back in the bed. She came in my house and washed my dishes, put them away, got the broom and swept my kitchen and there I am with a temperature about a hundred and three and she's back there. I have never felt so elated but at the same time so humble to know that she thought this much of me. She told me about a lot of her experiences as a doctor's wife. They were very fair people, she and her husband. Dr. Avant came from Southport, wasn't it Don?

HD: Un-huh.

LD: Somewhere over in that area. But she was just a wonderful person and she told me about when he started his practice she was a nurse in Philadelphia. So she met him while he was away in medical school. But she told me when they came back when they came to Wilmington that they were so poor he could not afford an office so there was this little shack that they fixed up and this is where he started his practice.

RM: Where was that located? Do you know, Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: On Redcross Street between McCrae and Ninth on Redcross Street. It's a large two-story brick building on the, well, if you're going toward downtown it would be on the right hand side of the street. Right across from that diagonally is the Shelton's home. But back during that time they were, I think hers was the first black family, well, they were not black. They were not even teasing tan. If you saw her or him their complexion was just as fair as yours. But because they had that eighth or whatever of black blood in them, they were still considered Negroes or blacks. But if you saw them on the street you would not have known the difference. Her hair was a brighter color than your hair and so was his. He had the green eyes. I mean green, green eyes. But they knew well, if you had that grain of black blood in you no matter the complexion, they were not racist. The point that I'm making is that they too were of the black race but they were those folks who tried to make a difference and they encouraged others to try too. They only had one child. Sarah is still living. She's somewhere in D.C. Her husband died not too long ago. She became a teacher and her husband went back to school and became a lawyer. He was a lawyer there in D.C. They had one son who is a doctor now. He is practicing somewhere in Pennsylvania. But they were just people who were trying hard to reach back and pull someone else along the way to help them. In other words, they were progressive people and wanted to see the race move forward rather

than to stagnate. So I count it a blessing to have known them and certainly I will never forget the day that she came and washed my dishes and swept my floor and dared me to get out of the bed.

(Laughter)

HD: Were there are some questions that you had maybe in your mind that you'd like to ask that we might be able to elaborate on?

RM: There's something I'd like to ask. You've told me so much that we haven't asked it's wonderful. But you did mention having gotten together in high school. I'd wondering if you would mind telling me about how you met, a little bit about that if it's not too personal.

HD: Well, no it's not all that personal. When she came to Wilmington I got a glimpse of her but in high school during my younger days I played football and I was one of what they called during that time dap fellows on the campus. I was a good sportsman and naturally all the girls, you know, they went for those kinds of things. So I had a string of girls. (Laughter) But anyway, when she came to Wilmington the first time that I saw her I saw the, we all called them country girls, you know, and I thought she was the cutest little thing I'd ever seen. Well, usually I would have my way, what I wanted with whoever it was or else I just didn't be with you. But she was a little different. (Laughter) And I guess it was because she'd just come out of the country and she was afraid. That's the only way I would put it. She wasn't all that shy but, you know, she was afraid of different

things. So I would play around with her and I took up some time. Well, naturally during that time buddy, I was a sexpot. (Laughter) If I went out with you then that was it. But that was no. (Laughter) No, no. But as the time went by I would take her to the movie and whatnot. That was next subject, you know. So I would just leave you alone. I had other girls, you know. That was my thing. Well, I didn't pay too much attention to it until after awhile it began to, you know, to yearn on me. Well, you'd better cut the thing off because I'm fixing to tell you something. (Laughter)

RM: Do you want me to leave it on or turn it off?

LD: I don't care.

HD: I'm going to get me some of that. Yeah, I'm going to get me some of that. (Laughter) And I just sat down and we talked about it and she's says no, I can't afford no children. If ever we get married then I'll be yours but until that time no. Well, me being the progressive guy that I am, well, I'm going to get me some of that. She can say what she wants. And she still held out - if we ever get married. So I come to the conclusion one day, yeah, we'll get married. All the other girls because I had my way with them like I wanted to any time I wanted to. It just didn't matter. But whenever I talked to her, no. Well, okay, he's this and he's that. Well, my family was of a poor family and at the time I was considered, you know, with the little girls handsome and I didn't ever have any money but I just had

that mouth, that gleam as they called it and I ruled. But I didn't rule there. And finally that day came around. We got married. And then she was mine. And it scared the devil out of me after we got married because the first time we had sex oh, my land, I thought I had killed her. She bled like everything. And we went to the doctor, same old doctor over there, Dr. Burnette. My wife is bleeding and he sat there and he listened at me and looked at me and he started laughing. Well, I'm all upset and everything. I want to know what's wrong with my wife, man. He said boy, you found a cherry. (Laughter) I said what you talking about, man? I didn't know. He said she's alright. She'll be alright. Just handle her easy. And from that day until this one yes, I married a virgin. I had never had that experience with none of them because they, you know, knew what it was all about. And I didn't and being young and foolish well, I didn't ever know.

LD: My friends used to tease me. Laura Shepard the (). I would hear the girls talking about we went this place and did this and did that and they started this thing about un-uh, Laura Shepard is just as scared of a man as I am a bear. (Laughter) But see, I used to hear my mother talking to my sisters who were much older than I. I didn't know what she was talking about. She would tell them about always be a lady. Always be a lady. Well, I knew I was supposed to be a lady. Well then as they, they sisters were gone by the time she died but this thing about being a lady just grew up in me and then Don was really the first

serious boyfriend that I ever had. You know, you talk about this is my boyfriend and all the boys would say this is my girlfriend.

And the one person, the only other person that I think I possibly could have married of the people that I have known, he and Don became good friends. He used to tell me you just wait until you're eighteen and I'm going to marry you. We corresponded when he was in the service but when he went overseas, this was before I met Don, even after he went overseas I heard from him. Then suddenly there was nothing. When he came home, by the time he came home, I had married Don. Well, I didn't know what had happened because just suddenly there was no more letters and there was no answer. I didn't know if he was POA. I just didn't know.

You heard so much about prisoners of war. POW, I said POA. I didn't know if he was a prisoner of war. I just didn't know and I couldn't afford to run back to Jacksonville all the time. I went occasionally but after I started dating Don I didn't go as frequently as I had gone. So when he came home Don and I had been married oh, about three years or more because by then we had our first child. And he went to my sister's house and my sister was devilish. She wouldn't tell him that I was married. She told him where I lived and he came and when I went to the door and opened the door he was so glad to see me he just picked me up. Oh, here she is! Here she is! And picked me up and Joyce said put Laura down and pick me up. Put Laura down and pick me up! And I'm pushing him away. And I said () and he said well, I'm so glad

to see you. Now we're going to take up where I left off and we are getting married. I said () wait a minute, I'm already married. (Laughter) What! And I said I'm already married. How in the world could you do this to me. You know I told you ever since you were a baby I was going to marry you. And I said well, I didn't hear from you so, and after all this long time having not heard from him, see almost six years had passed. I had gotten an occasional letter from him when he was overseas. And I still have a picture of him. But when I started dating Don I realized well, this is it and so I had told Don all about him and the fact that I wasn't actually going with him because my daddy didn't allow me to take company and I came here while () went in service. So it was just one of those things. But we were best of friends and he and Don became best of friends. And () had two wives after then but he did not marry until after he came home. But the first wife left him and the family all said that she told him that she, I knew that he was a good guy and had it not been for fate I probably would have been his wife. But the bottom line was he had the same values that I had and there wouldn't have been any problem just like there was no problem once we started dating and I let him know the ground rules. You can kiss me, you can hold my hand but thus far no further. So with him it would have been the same type of relationship. But after he came back I told Don that he had come and I wanted him to meet him but he went on back to Jacksonville. We went up to Jacksonville to see him. He and Don

became the best of friends. During his long illness we would drive up to Jacksonville and see him. So when he died, it's been about three months ago now, hasn't it?

HD: About three months.

LD: They called me. We had been to the nursing home to see him several times and Don was always, sometimes he would say let's go see (), we haven't been to see him lately. So there was nothing. My life is an open book so far as romance is concerned.

Don knew that he had nothing to fear from (). By the same token, () knew that this is a closed chapter. So they got to be very good friends. So when they called us, Don was getting ready, I was cooking breakfast, Don was getting ready for Sunday School and I told him Don, () is dead. He said oh, no. So he said I've got to go to Sunday School but get ready. So we got ready and went to the funeral. So you know if there had been anything amiss, he would have said no. But I'm going to Sunday School and you just go ahead and get ready, we are going up there.

So we did and when I look back my life has been a sort of Cinderella story in that Don is my Don, Laura is Don's Laura and that's it. There is no in between. It has just been the two of us. And in the country I knew nothing about football. I'd read about football but I knew nothing about it. And he would say, first time he wanted me to go to a game well, I had to work. So the person that I was working for said aren't you going to the game. I said you know I've got to work. He said no, I want you

to go and see the game. Don was playing football and Don was elated when I told him I was going to get off to go to the game. When the game was over the football field was across the street from Williston, we were at Williston. The football field was across the field so when the game was over I just walked on across the street because you know when you're coming out of a game everybody is all mixed up. When he came he said where were you, you didn't wait for me. I said wait for you for what. (Laughter)

HD: She was a stupid little thing. (Laughter)

LD: I wanted to walk across the street with my girl and I couldn't find her. (Laughter) But I didn't see any big deal about walking across the street with him from the game but he had to go down in the basement and change clothes so I had gone on around the front. He's looking all over for me.

HD: Yeah, she was a stupid little country gal. I guess we were around with her about two years before the time ever come and finally I settled down and that was it and it's been ever since. In other words, we've been married fifty years but pretty close to two years, you know, I wouldn't fool with her. I would just go on out and do my thing and come on back. But it has been sort of rough at times but we made it through to this point, made it through.

LD: The only separation has been when he was working away and that wasn't a legal separation it was just that his work took him. Wherever he was he managed to come home at least once a

month, at least once a month. He will tell you proudly in all the years that he worked away, he has never once called home no matter what hour it was, when I didn't pick up the phone on the second or third ring. And no matter how intimate the conversation might have been, he knew blame well that as modest as I was that I would not say the things that we would say to each other had there been anyone present. So that's the way it has been down through these years. This late in the day, there's nothing out there that I'm looking for and there's nothing out there that's going to tempt him at this late date. (Laughter) On that I'm sure. It hasn't been all roses. When I say that, we were from poor families. But the standards have been high and we have expected high standards out of our children and a lot of times when, you know, Don would say we can't do - Don, we have an obligation. We've got these children, we are going to equip these children's life and we do that by seeing that they get the education that we didn't have the opportunity. Because I would liked to have gone further. But when you look back and you've got a clean record behind you and you have reared three children and no one has a child before they are married, you've got to have done...

(End of Tape 1 - Side B)

Tape 2 - Side A

LD: ...most of the time. And when he does it the song Nat King Cole did about Lord, I'll pray that you'll listen to my plea. Keep her close to you until she comes back to me and calls me

Baby. Well, he has called me Baby down through the years. About the only time that Don calls me Laura is in an introduction. But other than that it's Baby this, Baby that. Well, right away I started calling him Don. Henry is okay but to me he was more than just Henry. He was my Don when we started going so his name being Donaldson, I just shortened the Donaldson. Instead of saying Donaldson I started calling him Don. Now practically everyone else calls him Don because I've called him Don down through the years. But it has been Don and Baby for all these years. So if he gets to heaven and I'm already there he's not going to come around looking for Mrs. Donaldson or looking for Laura, he's going to look for Baby. (Laughter) And somewhere around the throne I hope he'll find Baby. And if he goes first that's what I'm going to go looking for, Don. RM: I'd like to ask you just some questions, we have forms that we try to fill out with all of the people whom we interview and it's just family information mostly so that we have the same kinds of information for everyone. We ask about the names of your parents and church memberships and things like that. We'll try not to let it take too long. Will that be alright?

HD: That will be fine.

RM: I'll do one for each of you so I'll ask one the question and then the other and try to do it efficiently. It's not as romantic as you've been telling me recently but we'll try to get through it. Mr. Donaldson, your last name is Donaldson. Do you

have a middle name sir?

HD: I have one but I never use it. My middle name is Teman but I've never used it or it's not on my correspondence or anything. Henry Teman Donaldson.

RM: I'll note that you don't use that. And your address is 4821 Gordon Rd. And what is the zip here please?

HD: 28405.

RM: And when your name appears on the tape, Mr. Donaldson, and on the transcript, how would you like your name to appear, Henry Donaldson?

HD: Henry Donaldson. Very few people know about my middle name. Very few.

LD: They all use my name for him, Don.

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson, do you have a middle name?

LD: Leola. And my maiden name was Shepard.

RM: And how would you like to be known on the printed materials, Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: Laura. Don is the only one who calls me Baby.
(Laughter)

RM: Okay, I won't put baby on it.

LD: During that time he called me Tangerine a lot at school. I was his tangerine and then he narrowed it down to Baby.

RM: Why was it Tangerine?

LD: I guess it was that popular song that was out.

HD: And I liked them so well.

LD: And he loves tangerines.

HD: I used to love those things. If there was one anywhere, I'd get one. I could eat a half a dozen. I love tangerines until this day.

LD: I started out as his Tangerine but as time went by I became Baby and Baby I will die.

RM: Do you want to be Laura Shepard Donaldson or Laura Donaldson?

LD: You can use the Shepard. I'm proud of that too.

RM: Now Mr. Donaldson, could you tell me your date of birth. You told me a minute ago.

HD: August 22, 1923.

RM: And you were born in Wilmington, sir?

HD: No, I was born in Brunswick County.

RM: Not far.

HD: Winnabow, subdivision Lebuca. That's where I was born but out from the little headquarters of Winnabow, North Carolina. That's in Brunswick County. And then right out from Winnabow is Lebuca. That's a place right outside of Winnabow.

RM: And your date of birth, Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: July 1, 1923.

RM: And where were you born ma'am?

LD: Graytown. No I was born in Verona but the little community I was born in was called Graytown. My mother was a Gray prior to marrying my father. And it was such a large family they

called it Graytown.

RM: Have you been back there recently?

LD: Oh, yes. I can't, they bought up our property for the marine base, a lot of our property. We had a hundred and twenty acres back in there. During the 1940's when they were building the marine base up at Jacksonville they took over this. Actually, the whole area became known as Jacksonville but there's still a little marker there and a little depot that says Verona. In our neck of the woods back down on the river it was Graytown because there were so many Grays. One of my uncles had twenty-three children. This was by two wives. The first one died.

RM: I was feeling sorry for the wife. I feel better now that I know there were two. (Laughter)

LD: The first wife died so the second wife took up where the first wife left and there were twenty-three children in his family. Uncle Sam had about eight. But this is where it is. If you blink your eye you'll miss it but there's a small marker there that says Verona and we were born, our place was back down in the area. Because there were so many Grays down there, they called it Graytown.

RM: The hundred and twenty acres that your family had, was that from your mother's family?

LD: When my parents married they had, my daddy bought this fifteen acre plot. Then when the first child came along, this of course was all before my time, he bought a second plot. Then in

the latter years he bought this additional eighty acres of land. And to show you the change in things from then and now, both of them were dead when the government took over this property. When we went to settlement for all that property we got than a thousand dollars for all of this property. There were a lot of people who had, well, my daddy after he stopped teaching he did a lot of building and he also had a blacksmith shop that he did a lot of, well I think we were about the only one in that area who had what is known as a forge. Some call it a billars. You turn this thing to make the flame and he used to shoe their horses and repair their carts and wagons and things like that. We didn't have money but I would say because of his having taught for so long and with his being such a needed person in the community, if it were a chimney he knew how to lay brick. If it were a mechanical thing like needing a tire repaired or the rim on the cart or something, this metal thing that goes around it, he had this forge that he could weld this thing and put it back on. So he was just, well as the Bible says he was well known in the gates because he was a person who was needed in the community. Looking back it was an interesting time. It was a painful time because as I told you, my mother died when I was young and then suddenly he was killed just before the takeover of this property. A lady's name, Mrs. Winnie Wiffis, he was standing by the side of the highway and she veered off the road and struck him and killed him instantly. So this is how Don got his Baby because I came to Wilmington with my sisters.

But looking back, some of the memories are painful like losing both of them. When we went to settlement this was before I married Don. We had to go back to Jacksonville because the government was taking over all of this area. They started at Camp Davis then they moved on up into the Verona-Jacksonville area and took that in for the marine base. So I was in school here then. I had to get out of school and go to Jacksonville about this property because all the heirs were supposed to go. I remember this lady's name, Miss Allen, but when we went they wanted for all of this property, they wanted to give us two hundred dollars and I said no and my brother was trying to shush me up because then if you were black back then they didn't call you black unless they did it in a derogatory way. You were a Negro or nigger which I didn't like but I accepted the classification of Negro but I could not abide nigger. But in most instances you got called this. But my brother, when I stood up the judge said what. And I stood up and I said I refuse to accept this. Gal, what do you mean you refuse to accept this? I said I refuse to accept giving away the property that my father worked so hard to leave for his children or two hundred dollars when we have over a hundred and twenty acres of land back there. He said what do you mean? I said I just told you. So my brother's pulling on my dress. Sit down, Sis. He called me Sis. Sit down Sis, sit down. I said no. He said what do you mean? And I said I resent you telling Miss Allen, she was white, that you only - this lady has a big farm and

her husband is dead and left her with all these children and you're going to tell her that she can only have three hundred dollars for her farm. My brother, sit down Sis! Sit down. And he said well what do you know about property. I said I know that my daddy worked too hard for it and I know that Mr. Allen worked too hard for his. So he said well, we'll call a recess. And this was the first time. We had played with, in our community, it wasn't as racist as some and we had grown up playing with the white children and we were used to them coming to my house where we were living in the country. But this was the first time that an adult white person had ever embraced me. And then I was afraid she was going to drop some of the snuff. She dipped snuff, this brown stuff. But she grabbed me and she said Honey, thank you so much. Thank you so much. I didn't know how to talk to him like that but thank you so much and the Lord's going to bless you because I didn't have nobody to talk for me and I couldn't afford a lawyer. But thank you so much for telling him for me. I don't know how much she got but when she came out when they went back, she was happy. I didn't know what we were going to get. They notified us months later by letter. But he got up off the little bit that he was offering and we came out to like about a thousand dollars which still wasn't enough but it was more than we would have gotten. But with my brother with him being older, being the oldest one in the family, and he knew about Jim Crow. I was too young really to know because we had not been exposed. We younger

children had not been exposed as he had. But with my daddy's background of having taught, I can remember when the white people because of his educational background would come if they had a business letter that needed to be written, they would come and ask him to write it for them. And as time went by I can remember them coming under cover of darkness because as I grew older I could imagine how humiliating it was that here is someone you consider beneath you but because they had the perseverance to push forward and to learn you have to come to them. But on the other hand they were friendly with us in a lot of ways because we kids played together and thought nothing of it. But when it comes down to you've got something of importance that has to be attended to, here you have got to come to someone you consider beneath you to do your correspondence. But so be it. This is the way it was. I never felt superior and by the same token I did not feel inferior but I felt that we're equal. This was the way that my daddy, he always told us you are just as good as anyone and don't ever let anyone tell you that you are not just as good as the next person. So I grew up with that feeling that I was just as good. And even though they were with me for only a short time I appreciate and pass on to my children the things that my parents taught us. So end of story.

RM: Thank you very much. That's a wonderful story. Mr. Donaldson, could you tell me your mother's name please sir.

HD: Blanche E. Brinson Donaldson.

RM: Her middle name, I'm sorry I don't know how to spell that.

HD: Brinson.

RM: And was Brinson her maiden name, sir?

HD: That's right.

RM: And do you know your mother's date of birth, sir?

HD: No but I can get close to it. Mama was fifty-three years old in 1948 when she died.

RM: So she was born about 1895.

HD: Yeah, something like that. About 1895. She was fifty-three years old when she died December 13, 1948.

LD: Wasn't her birthday a May day?

HD: It was in June.

LD: June.

HD: June 6. I remember that. My daddy was born in 1882.

RM: And when did your father pass on, sir?

HD: He passed January 5, 1939.

RM: Where was your mother born, Mr. Donaldson?

HD: Columbus County, Chadbourn, North Carolina.

RM: And for her occupation, what should I write, sir?

HD: Well, Mama was a teacher and I say that was. She went to school here in Wilmington to the eighth grade and during that time they could go out to what they called a Rosenwald school and teach from the first through I think it was the sixth grade. And this is what she did for awhile. And I don't remember the year

but there came a time that teachers had to be certified. They had to get a certificate. They were to go over here to this Fayetteville State, it's Fayetteville State now but they called it some teacher's college. But anyway, it was three hundred dollars to get this course and Mama didn't have the money. So she had to come out of the school and go into the white people's kitchen to cook for them. And that was a great milestone for them. Got me a nigger school teacher to cook for me. (Laughter) So anyway, Mama taught from the first through the sixth grade over in Brunswick County, over at Winnabow at the Rosenwald school as they called it. And at that time teacher's made a lot of money. I think it was something like about sixty cents a day when they were in school. School didn't last as long then as it does now. I think it was three months of the year for something like sixty cents per day that they got for teaching. She taught all of her children except my youngest sister. All of us went to school. Mama was the only teacher at that time over in that section. I don't know whether it was the county or the state or who it was that built this little one room building and all of the classes, it was half as, say from there to there, in this little narrow place. Great big heater sitting in the middle of it and chairs sitting around it.

RM: The Rosenwald school?

HD: The Rosenwald school.

RM: A made named Rosenwald who is the president of Sears,

Roebuck donated the money. He was a northerner but he donated money for African American children in the south.

HD: That's right. They named the school out there Rosenwald, that's right.

LD: There was one right out here in Market Street.

RM: On Market Street, I've heard about it.

LD: In the Hampstead, not Hampstead, a little further up.

HD: Camp David area. A tall building.

LD: In the Scotts Hill area? Is it beyond it?

HD: No. Out the ().

LD: Out there beyond where Roland lives.

HD: Is that one of them?

LD: That's one of them. Rosenwald school has the high, high walls. I think it has a marker on it that says Rosenwald school. Go right out here to the end of this road and ...

HD: She would never find it, Laura because of all of that building around there, she'd just see a lot of little buildings.

LD: Should we have time we'll jump in the car and run you down there and let you see it.

RM: If we have time when we finish with the forms I would like to.

HD: I've got to do some eating too Sweetheart.

LD: I'll run down there with her right fast if you don't.

HD: You couldn't even find it.

RM: I know how to get to Market Street. I might be able to

look for it on my own or with the other researchers.

LD: Do you know where Whitebridge is, this exclusive neighborhood?

RM: No, I don't. I don't know any exclusive neighborhoods in Wilmington. (Laughter)

LD: The () live back in there. It has this little sign there that says Whitebridge community but this is before you get there and it's on the right hand side of the road and it's one of those tall, the building is almost as tall as the one-story building.

HD: Baby, the one you're speaking about is at Camp Davis up there where we built the big white brick house where Lillie Mae taught and the building is still there right in the yard of Manhollow Church. That's where you're talking about.

LD: This one over across from Manhollow.

HD: That's where you're talking about. But that's way up there at Camp Davis. You've forgotten where it is.

LD: No, it's before you get to Nick's house. Never mind but we know where we're talking about.

HD: If you take her out there to Scott's Hill you're not going to see no Rosenwald school.

LD: I know it when I get to it on that road.

HD: Well, it's all the way to Camp Davis. Go ahead with your questions.

RM: We don't work tomorrow so maybe some of us can take a

look. We've been sort of taking tours around Wilmington looking at all the places. What was your father's name, Mr. Donaldson?

HD: Leonard Marselenni Donaldson. Where that derives from I don't know. I never have heard him say.

RM: And where was your father born, sir?

HD: He was born at Winnabow in this same Lebuca section. Mama met him when she went over there to teach.

RM: And what was your father's occupation, sir?

HD: He was an old farmer, plowed the mule.

RM: Did he own his land or did he rent?

HD: He owned his land and it came down through the family. He had about eighty acres handed down from his grandfather. Actually he was the oldest one so it came down to him. He divided it up between the other brothers.

RM: Mrs. Donaldson, I forgot to ask you in what county Graytown or Verona is.

LD: Onslow.

RM: What was your mother's name?

LD: Mary Alice () Gray. Just put Mary Alice Gray because back then when a baby was born everyone said name her this, name her that, name her so she got tagged with all of these but Mary Alice Gray was the maiden name. My father's name was Edward Willie Shepard.

RM: Do you know your mother's date of birth ma'am?

LD: February 5, 1880. My daddy is September 19, 1880. She

had him by a few months.

RM: And your mother passed away in 1933?

LD: Un-huh, September 19, 1933, 11:19 at night. That time is burned indelibly in my brain.

RM: The time of my father's death is too. We remember these things. Your mother was born in Graytown?

LD: Yes. It was better known as Verona. On the address it said Verona but Graytown was in Verona.

RM: And your mother's occupation, ma'am?

LD: Just housewife.

RM: And your father was a teacher?

LD: Un-huh.

RM: And was your father born in Verona?

LD: Yes, he was.

RM: Mr. Donaldson, could I ask you the names of your sisters and brothers please sir.

HD: I'll start at the oldest sister. Thelma McFadden, that's her married name.

RM: And if you know the years that they were born, if you remember that I'll put those down too.

HD: Thelma - I need to go upstairs and get the Bible but we can figure it out right here. Thelma is seven years older than me. She'll be seventy-seven August 6. I will be seventy August 22. She's seven years older. I was born in 1923. Seven from twenty-three would be what?

RM: Sixteen. 1916, okay.

HD: Alright, that's Thelma. The next one, a brother, Leonard James Donaldson. There's two years between our ages so you figure from that.

RM: He's older than you by two years?

HD: He's older than me by a few years. When I said that, there's two years difference between his age and Thelma's age.

RM: Okay so 1918.

HD: Right. Now there's another sister that's two years younger than he, Sadie Mohammed. She turned Muslim on us.
(Laughter)

RM: And where does she live now?

HD: She lives in Fayetteville. She went to New York and stayed a long time and got up with some Muslim guy there, came back with a new name, Sadie Mohammed. She lives in Fayetteville.

RM: How did the family take that when she came home with a Muslim?

HD: Well, we didn't like it too much but we've never discussed it too much. We just brushed it off as one of those things. Then there's another brother that's a couple of years younger than Sadie, Laverne. Then comes me born in 1923. Then the youngest girl, sister, Ernestine. She's a couple of years younger than me. She's sixty-eight this year. Ernestine James. So that's the family, three boys and three girls.

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson, if I could ask you the same

question, your brothers and sisters.

LD: Percy Gerald Shepard, Harvey Shepard, Roy Edward, Mary Ellen.

RM: Does she have a married name?

LD: Armstrong. Annie Louise Sellars. Victoria Jane Wells. And Lowell Edsell Shepard. I'm between, well he's the youngest one. And I'm Laura Leola.

RM: And one question you have in common is your children. So the names and dates of birth of your children.

LD: Lenora.

RM: Her married name?

LD: Allen.

RM: And when was she born?

HD: March 10, 1944. We got married in 1943 and she was born in 1944. Alright, Edward Jerome Donaldson. He was born March 14, 1949.

LD: Alexis.

HD: Lana (). May 20, 1948.

RM: So she's between?

HD: No, she's the youngest. Lana was born in 1948. Jerome was born in 1949, right?

LD: No.

HD: No, no, no. Lana was born in 1950. That's right because I was working in Washington, D.C. when Lana was born. I keep thinking about Mama's death in 1948. But Lana was born in

1950.

RM: And they were all born in Wilmington?

HD: All of them born in Wilmington.

RM: And how many grandchildren do you have?

HD: Four, three little girls and a boy. The grandson belongs to Joyce. His name is Arnold Bradford Taylor. That's the grandson.

LD: Joyce has been married twice. The three girls are Corey Michelle. You aren't taking the grandchildren's names are you?

RM: You could say them for the tape. I have been writing down their names. Corey Michelle?

LD: Un-huh. Dominique Sada. Lauren Caree. They condensed my first name and her other grandmother's first name.

RM: And the young man who just graduated from Harvard?

HD: Arnold Bradford Taylor. Brad Taylor. Due to the economy he hasn't landed offers yet.

RM: I hope he will find something soon. I know it's hard these days. Okay now Mr. Donaldson, where did you first go to school please? I'm going to list the names of the schools that you've been to.

HD: Well the first was the Rosenwald school over at Brunswick County. Then from there I went to Brunswick County Training School at Southport, BCT. That was the high school, the only black high school in Brunswick County.

RM: In Southport?

HD: In Southport. Then we moved to Wilmington in 1933. It was Williston Industrial High School.

RM: Okay. So you started there in 1933 and when did you finish?

HD: No, we moved into Wilmington in 1933. I didn't go to school that year. I was out of school about two and a half or three years. In other words, three school years I was out of school. This is what made me graduate later in the class of 1943.

The Depression was during that time and they just couldn't afford to buy shoes for us so I stayed out. When school was on my first year I think was 1936, my first year there in Williston. I went from then on until I graduated and that's where I took up the trade of brick masonry.

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson, where did you go to school?

LD: Town Creek. That was in Verona. Then I went to Georgetown High in Jacksonville and ended up here at Williston.

RM: And when were you at Williston?

LD: I came to Wilmington in 1944.

HD: No, Baby. 1941.

LD: 1941. I'm skipping ahead. Yeah I went to Williston. That was my first year at Williston, 1941.

RM: And you finished there in 1943?

LD: In 1944, 1943.

RM: The year you married?

LD: Un-huh.

RM: And Mr. Donaldson, I took notes while you were speaking. You worked as a brick mason from 1946 to 1954 and a longshoreman from about 1954 to about 1988?

HD: 1988 about.

RM: Okay so I have that. I'll write that over again later. Mrs. Donaldson, what would you like for me to list for your work history?

LD: I worked as an office nurse for Dr. Upperman.

RM: Dr. Upperman, we interviewed him.

HD: Thirty-two years and how many months?

LD: Many months. (Laughter) He's getting old. He put thirty-five years because I had worked occasionally when someone was out prior to that so he lumped all the years together.

RM: So when was it that you retired?

LD: It's been two years now.

RM: So 1991.

HD: June 28, 1991.

RM: Thank you.

HD: They gave her a plaque.

RM: That's very nice. I'm sure he appreciated your work.

LD: Well, it was a pleasure working with him. He's one of the kindest, most unassuming people one could ever hope to meet. To see him in the street you would never think that he had the credits under his belt that he has. But he's just a down to earth person and it was a privilege to work with him and a privilege to

know him. I worked there so long he treats us like family. We are just a family so-to-speak. His daughter was here from California, she and her husband, to see us Sunday. He often has said to me, Mrs. D., Donaldson is too long so he calls me Mrs. D. He has said to me many time, Mrs. D., you know I never had a sister. So we have just been family. He lost his son a couple of years ago and they kept up with me. Anytime they would call and anytime Linda calls now if he doesn't sound right, she'll call me. Well, I talked to daddy. Was he sleepy or was he not feeling well? It's just a wonderful relationship, wonderful. And in all the time we worked he has never yet yelled at me. He has never scolded me. He has always treated me with due respect in every sense of the word. So I count it a privilege to have had the opportunity to work with him for the many years that I did.

RM: Thank you. Are there any offices such as church offices maybe or awards that you would like me to list either one of you.

HD: I'm a deacon over at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church. I'm a Sunday School teacher. I am a chair person of the judges nursing home ministry for the church in Wilmington. Ebenezer sponsors that ministry there.

RM: For people who can't get out to go to church?

HD: That's right. First, third and fifth Sundays we go over and have service with them. And also I'm a volunteer for Mother Hubbard's Cupboard to feed the hungry. They're the only offices that I know of.

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: I'm on the deaconess board. For many years I had a Sunday School class and B.T.U. class. And for about forty some years now I'm in charge of doing the announcements for the church, welcome the visitors and doing the announcements.

RM: You have such a nice voice too for that.

LD: Thank you.

RM: So you are Baptist?

HD: Yes.

RM: You both are members of the Ebenezer Church?

LD: Right.

HD: We've been there over forty years.

RM: And were you a member of any other church before that?

HD: Yes, Bethlehem Missionary Church in Brunswick County during my childhood days. My dad was a deacon there.

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson, your past church membership.

LD: I'm currently a member of Ebenezer. My first church was Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Verona.

RM: Besides the ones that you've mentioned, are there other organizations that you belong to?

HD: I was a Mason. I went as far as the Shriners and Mason's Lodge.

RM: Which lodge are you a member of, sir?

HD: You might not put that down because I'm not affiliated now.

RM: Okay. When were you a Mason, sir?

HD: This was from 1946 through 1961. I belonged to the Blue Lodge, Lodge #2. Then I went to the Shriners to that same organization but then I...

End of Tape 2 - Side 1

RM: And Mrs. Donaldson.

LD: I was a member of the () Chapter Order of Eastern Star for a long time. I am not active now because working as I did, working in a black community for the longest kind of time, my office hours were split, night and day. The meetings were at night and I couldn't continue as a member of that because of the office hours that I had to deal with. So that was the only thing that I did, Easter Star.

RM: Approximately what years were you a member ma'am?

HD: From about 1950 to what? Up into late 1960's.

RM: Is either one of you a member of the NAACP?

HD: Yes.

LD: Oh, yes. I was a member of NAACP. I was the secretary of our local chapter of NAACP until my work kept me away from that.

RM: You were secretary of the local chapter in the 1960's?

LD: That was back in () day. That was back in the 1950's.

RM: And when did you join the NAACP?

HD: Oh, Lord years ago. Years ago.

LD: I used to take the kids when they were little to the meeting.

HD: Let's see, Joyce is forty-nine now. Say about, you joined when you first come here or shortly after that.

LD: Way back.

HD: You were there when they were paying just ten cents but you could. In other words, if you were Willistonian you had to go.

RM: Okay.

HD: Had to stand for the right.

RM: Did the teachers bring membership forms to class?

HD: Oh, yes indeed. Yes sir. If you had three sets () it was for a cause. In other words, that's just something that had grown in our lives.

LD: When he mentioned that I thought about the other day I was going through an old bag of pictures, box of pictures that I have and back then the kids bought the stamps. What were they? I have my ten cent book and my twenty-five cent book that I was never able to fill.

HD: That was for World War II. Buying those savings stamps, you know. They would keep them so long and they would amount to something.

LD: It was the junior war bond and we couldn't afford to buy the war bond but you bought the little stamps for victory. I had a ten cent book and a twenty-five cent book.

HD: But that NAACP, that was a must for every child that went to Williston.

RM: The pictures and things that you've been looking through, Mrs. Donaldson, are there any of those, I don't want to keep you now but at another time before we leave in a week would it be possible for me to maybe look at some of them with you? Would you be willing to have some of them copied to go into the archives?

LD: Don, I think I have your class group. Most of these are just family pictures during that time. I have no objections.

RM: Maybe once we finish with this I could see you and I could come back.

LD: I'm usually here practically every day. I run to the mall. Right now I'm in the throes of preparing for this fiftieth anniversary. Other than that, usually I'm a home body. I don't care much for - I like church and Don stays so busy now we haven't been to a movie in ages but I like movies. But I don't mind sharing with you.

RM: Thank you very much. What I'll do is I'll get back to you. One of our team members is making appointments for us today. She's trying to. She's calling people. I'll get in touch with Sonya and ask her when, if she hasn't blocked me off, when I'm free. Give me a couple of times and then I can get in touch with you about when would be convenient.

LD: Okay, well, I'm usually here.

HD: You want some pictures of certificates and things?

RM: Things like that, sure. Pictures of your family. Maybe you could look through and see which ones you might be willing to share and then I could go through them with you and see which ones would be appropriate to go into the archives. The last question that I had to ask you, I got all excited when you mentioned that, was if there is a favorite saying or quote or Bible verse or hymn or something like that which you would like to have associated with you, that you would like me to write on the sheet? Sometimes people have a verse of poetry or they want me to write the name of their favorite hymn or something like that.

LD: Poetry is my thing. I didn't mention to you, I like writing poetry.

RM: You did. You did mention that actually. Do you have any of your own that you would like to quote a little bit of?

LD: Offhand I couldn't quote but I have quite a bit that I have and I thought about, I toyed with the idea of perhaps seeing about getting some of it published. A long time ago the "Crisis" magazine I sent some of my poetry to. "Crisis" magazine way back in the 1940's for publication. Being an orphan I was not able to buy the book and they were not generous enough to give me a book of the poetry. But somewhere there are probably some of it published in the "Crisis" magazine because they sent back to me that they thought it was very good but they wanted me to buy the book. But I could not because of financial circumstances. But

even now sometimes I will jot down a line or two. So I'll pull out some.

HD: You're speaking of scripture, my favorite is Psalm 27, the first two verses. The Lord is my Light and my Salvation.

LD: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my hope. That's my favorite.

HD: That's Psalm 121st.

LD: I love that 121st Psalm because I've had to do that all my life. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my hope. My hope cometh from the Lord. That's not all of it but that's enough to give you an idea. But that is my daily thing.

HD: When I was out there in that world I used to have to be afraid of some of the fellows, especially when I was down the road. But I after I followed him and I came in and he reassured me I didn't have anything to fear and then I can look back now, I didn't even have them to fear but I just didn't realize that then.

RM: Of course.

HD: Now I'm bold. (Laughter) Ever since that day.

LD: The Lord is my Light and my Salvation and whom shall I fear. Those are my two favorite passages. The Lord is my Light and my Salvation and whom shall I fear. And I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my hope.

HD: That Psalm 127 and Psalm 121. We dwell on those.

End of Tape 2 - Side B

Tape 3 - Side A

LD: ...name was Jordn, Jordn Gray and of course, he was a slave. The family that he worked for, the spouse had died and he left a widow. Then as now there were those people who did not think that a woman could do certain things or could have certain things. And with her husband having left her with the farm, they were not a wealthy family so Granddaddy worked for them and after the turn of slavery she was still struggling with the husband dying so she told my grandfather the men of course, wanted the land that she owned. These were other white farmers in the area.

They wanted the land that she owned. But she was determined that she was going to keep it because this was something that she and her husband had in common. This was something that they had worked for. So when he died and left her a widow, she told my grandfather if he would stick with her that upon her death she would give him his freedom. So Granddaddy took her up on this. There was one other condition that should she die before she wanted him to take her home. She had told him, I don't remember the area for sure because there were so many places I heard my parents speak of during that time. Of course, this was before their time. But anyway, she had oxen instead of horse. She was one of the poorer ones and she did not have horses but she had the oxen and cart. So when she died my grandfather took her home. She promised him some land and his freedom. So he would drive by day and stop the wagon and build a bonfire at night to keep the

animals away. There were no street lights during that time because there weren't any streets except dirt roads. But anyway, she kept her promise in leaving him property. This is how the Grays came in possession of so much property.

RM: She died before Emancipation or after?

LD: After. But anyway, Granddaddy Jordn stayed with her. When I say stayed with her, he kept the farm going for her. So at her death - well, she freed him. So this therefore meant that he was still in slavery but on her death he was giving his freedom and some property. But the sad part and the loyalty, maybe this is where some of my loyalty comes from, he was loyal to her and he kept the promise to take her home wherever home was. I don't remember because I was young but I remember hearing my parents discuss it. So he was given this large tract of land. I'm not sure how many acres but she left him a large tract of land. Grandfather married an Indian woman, a full blooded Indian. I'm told that her name was Elitha.

RM: How would you spell that, ma'am?

LD: We spell it E-L-I-T-H-A. So hence the high cheek bones. But I'm sorry I wasn't around to get more of the family history. My grandfather had several children. A lot of them died before my time. But my mother, Uncle Sam, Uncle Tom, Uncle Bob also known as Uncle Robert and Aunt Hester, Aunt Fannie which they called Big Sis and one of the brothers, John, was called Big Buddy. Uncle George I think my mother said was called Little

Buddy. But anyway, this was just a part of the family history. But the sense of loyalty in our family goes way back. And even though it was a life of servitude, the fact that he had the fortitude to keep a commitment has meant a lot to the family down through the years, to make a commitment and keep it. So I'm proud of that part of the heritage. Yes, I regret very much the fact that he lived his life or the greater part of his life in slavery. But I'm very proud of the fact that he had the fortitude to remain loyal to his promise to her.

RM: You were talking about your grandfather and also about the mix in your family and you had mentioned your mother's hair. What was your mother's hair like, Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: Long, jet black, coarse, the typical Indian hair that you would think of.

RM: Straight, wavy, curly? How long was it?

LD: Very coarse and soft. It was coarse and yet it was, the texture was coarse but yet it was a soft coarseness but it was long. A lot of times she wore it in two braids like you see the Indian's hair.

RM: So you were aware of your family's background when you were a child growing up?

LD: Yes. They never held anything back to us. These were the stepping stones that you crossed in order to know that you must be the best that you can possibly be. This was a strong thing in our family. On my father's side, I did not see either of

my grandparents but my grandfather on my father's side died when he was quite small. I think I told you in the interview the other day about the fact that he was too little to work but he was able, the landlord or the person for whom they were working would put him on the horse. He was too little, of course, to get on the horse but he would put him on the horse and give him a note and tell him go to such-and-such a house. Stop at the first house or the second house or whatever. I think this was a part of my father's desire to learn because as I see it from the things that they told me it had to have been a lonely existence. There were two aunts both of whom died young. From he told us the oldest one must have been like twelve when she died and the other one was even younger. So we never saw the older children. Of course, I was way down the line but none of my sisters or brothers saw either of my father's sisters. There were three children. He was the only boy and there were two sisters. But with them having died so early they never saw them. But the memories were there and I'm grateful to my parents that they shared so many memories with us. I'm very grateful to them. It's important to know from whence you came. This way one can appreciate where they are today. So I'm grateful for that aspect of our lives.

RM: I would like to ask you a couple of questions about hair and taking care of hair in your family. Did you and your sisters all have similar kinds of hair or was there a range in your family?

LD: Victoria's, the sister who is still alive, hair was very soft. My mother's hair was very long and Indian coarse. She did nothing to her hair but wash it and comb it with a little grease. But it was very thick and very long. My sister Mary's hair was mid-shoulder length. I think she had the longest hair of any of the sisters. Victoria's hair, the sister who is still alive, her hair in contrast is very, very soft and it was shoulder length. Of course, now that she's growing older it is shorter than it was when we were growing up. My sister Annie's hair was oh, just shoulder length about like mine when I let it down. But I find it, to me I like my hair up and I wear it that way a lot. I've always liked my hair up and I still wear it that way. Now another thing, on Sundays I wear it down because we were taught never to go to church without a hat. So in church I always wear a hat. So unless it's a beret or just a little skimpy hat that I can push on the back of my head, I always wear a hat to church. I never go to church without a hat. If it's just a business church meeting I will go without a hat. But if it's a regular church service I never go to church without a hat.

RM: So did any of your sisters straighten their hair?

LD: Un-huh.

RM: They did?

LD: Un-huh. Vickie, the sister who is still alive, in contrast to the coarseness, the Indian coarseness of the rest of our hair, her hair was quite soft. Then I might add in addition

to the Indian mix there was also the white mix. So we are a trambory. We are black mixed with Indian and with the whites. So it's just a mixture and none in my family are very dark. There are no black people in my family per se, in my immediate family. Most of our skin has the tint of the Indian redness in it or the trace of the white race. Our veins are very prominent as you can see. This was from one of those traits. I'm not sure which but my family, all of my family we have the very prominent veins. We are more or less direct people. We were not allowed to look down on regardless to who it was. My daddy said if you can't look a man in the eye you're not worthy to speak to him. So we were taught to be very direct and focus on the person to whom we were speaking. You didn't bow your head. You held your head high and the most important thing, we were to be a Shepard and if you are a Shepard there are certain things that you will not do. So this was one of the yardsticks that we were reared by in my family and I'm proud of that. If you can't look a person in the eye then you aren't worthy of being the person that you should be. So it has grown up, even now I often talk with my children because I want them to know as much of the family history as I can recall. And I have been blessed with a pretty good memory that I am able to remember the things that we were taught and the things that we did and the things that we did not, dare not, better not do.

RM: I have one last question which is who did your hair when you were a little girl?

LD: For the most part, I wore braids and it was longer than it is now. As time went by Father Time has taken it's toll. But in the country you did it yourself or the cousins got together and you would do this one's and that one would do yours. And this is the way we did it. There were no beauticians in the country. You did your own or a relative did it for you and you in turn did the relative's hair. And in families where there were several sisters they got to do each other's hair. If you were not fortunate enough to have a sister at home, you did your own. And if you were fortunate, you had a straightening comb which you heated and you washed and dried and you heated the comb and pulled the comb through your hair and you did your own hair.

RM: Did your family have such a thing, Mrs. Donaldson?

LD: Un-huh, yes. The main, the best piece of furniture was an old Victrola. This was the talking machine. You might have heard of it as the talking machine. Now you call it, what is it called today, your stereo or the record player. We had the old fashioned Victrola that had the dog with the megaphone on it and his master's voice.

RM: The RCA.

LD: But this was the most prominent piece of furniture in the average home and there were many homes who did not even have such a device. And you had the old, old records and you bought one every now and then. It wasn't often. You guarded that collection of records like one guards a mint.

RM: What kinds of records did you buy?

LD: Oh, there was Bessie Smith. She was back during my day. She was one of the popular ones. And for the most part, the older folks liked the religious ones. But you have to remember, we're talking back, I'm seventy now so we're talking about sixty-five years of memories because I can remember distinctly to back when I was about four. I was sort of a family pet because I was small, very opinionated, very active, also a tomboy. I could climb a tree with the best of them. (Laughter) So it was one of those things. Albeit, it was not what life is like today but looking back I think I'm grateful for the experience because I know what it's like not to have. I know what it's like to have the desire to have. I also know what it's like to have the fortitude and the determination that if someone else has it, I too can have. As one of my cousins used to say, I want some of just as good as God's got. It wasn't the best grammatical form but this was her expression and I have sort of used that as a guide to the things that I want. If you want some of just as good as God's got and you have the determination to work for it, it's yours. So I have used that as a part of my learning tree and as my daddy used to say, whatever you are, be a Shepard. There are certain things that a Shepard would not do and there are certain things that a Shepard will do. So be a Shepard. So by the same token, my mother could very well have said be a Gray because she was just as determined as he was. They always put us first. I guess that

just about sums up the story of my life.

RM: Well, thank you so much Mrs. Donaldson. Is it alright with you if I append this tape to the rest of the interview that you did with your husband?

LD: It's quite alright.

RM: Thank you.

LD: We have nothing to hide fortunately.

RM: Well, thank you very much, ma'am. I appreciate it.

LD: Well, thanks for letting me share a little of my history with you and I hope that perhaps if it does not inspire someone else to be the best that they possibly can be at least they will know that there was somewhere someone who against all odds tried and made it.

RM: Thank you.