

Storer College Oral History Project
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Interview with William Pinchback by Steve Warrick
Lanham, Maryland
August 27, 2013

Steve Warrick: Okay, this is Steve Warrick. I'm working on the Storer College oral history project with Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Today's date is August 27, 2013. Today I'll be interviewing Mr. William Pinchback at his home in Lanham, Maryland. This recording is HAFE OH-Pinchback.1.2013. And Mr. Pinchback, could you state your full name for me?

William Pinchback: My full name is William Percy Pinchback, Jr.

SW: Okay. And when and where were you born?

[00:00:46.24] WP: I was born in Danville, Virginia on December 22, 1930.

SW: And was that where you grew up? Did you spend most of your time there or did you move to somewhere else?

[00:01:05.13] WP: When I was three years old, my parents separated, and she moved back to her home, which was—she was born in Robeson County, North Carolina near Lumberton, NC. And I had a sister who was born October 24, 1933, who I think she was pregnant with at the time that they separated. So, I didn't have a two-parent family home. I was raised by my mother and her sisters and brothers, I was the only male.

SW: And it sounds like you had a large family.

[00:02:05.13] WP: Oh, we did, on both sides. I told you about my father's side, my grandfather on my father's side, sixteen children. My grandfather on my mother's side had thirteen. And the last one of those thirteen has passed. In fact, I'm probably the patriarch now of the oldest of all of the, my grandfather's grandchildren.

SW: And where have you lived the longest part of your life?

[00:02:48.17] WP: I've lived right around here in Washington, Prince George's County. The rest of my life, I don't want to say the rest of my life. I came to Washington in '47, and I've lived in Washington and Prince George's County the rest, until now. And this is not my first house in Maryland. I lived in Glenarden, Maryland for, oh, I guess eleven years. And then the last, I've been here now—oh, I came here in 1970. So, that would be thirty plus thirteen. So, I've been here—no, I came here in 1970. I've been here, it will be thirty plus thirteen. It will be forty-three years. And before that, I had lived in Glenarden for eleven years. So, most of my life has been here. I can be in Glenarden in ten minutes from here.

SW: So close by.

[00:03:55.07] WP: Close by, yeah.

SW: So, once you moved here, you were here a few years, and then you began attending Storer.

WP: Oh, no, you mean, moved to Washington?

SW: Yes.

[00:04:09.22] WP: Oh, I started attending Washington. In fact, I attended Storer at the same time my mother was living in Washington at that time because she'd come here to get a job during the war, and she got finally hooked in, I think, with the Treasury Department, and she worked with the Treasury Department until, I guess, after I had finished college [bird whistle].

[00:04:38.19] And at the time, she was a lower grade. So, we didn't have any money to spare, and I actually worked a lot at this school. I worked in the kitchen and washed dishes and worked everything, and during the summer, I'd come home and try and find a job in DC and around. I remember working down on Connecticut Avenue as a salad man and peel so many shrimp on Connecticut Avenue. I can't think of the restaurant, but anyway, the people would come in there and order shrimp cocktail. That was one of my jobs, to make the salads, and after dealing with those shrimp, I don't eat shrimp, practically any seafood.

[00:05:37.02] But I was able to get through finally and graduated in '50 and didn't have any debt. What I did have was I graduated at the age of nineteen, and that was during the time of the Korean War. I don't know what they were drafting at that time, but I know I grew to the edge. I had greetings from President Truman in 1951. I received my greetings, but at that time, I had started working with the Census Bureau for the 1950 census. I worked on this old electromagnetic—you know, card machines and stuff like that, sorted and made listings and stuff like this, but everything was by card. We didn't have the technology that we have now.

[00:06:52.06] But I seemingly enjoyed it, and I worked for the Census Bureau for a short period, and then they had a reduction in force, and I was one of the last to come and the first to go. But then, fortunately, I was lucky enough to latch on with the Veterans Administration at the time. They had a lot of World War II veterans returning, and they had plenty of work. I mean, plenty to do. So, I worked down at one of the temporary buildings. In fact, I started working at the admissions building down on Constitution Avenue, and eventually they needed the room. So, they moved us over behind the reflecting pool.

[00:07:42.18] In fact, I didn't have a car at that time, but we had bus transportation, and the bus fare downtown, I think, was ten cents or something like that. [laughs] It was a minimum amount. You could ride all around town, the city.

[00:08:09.21] But in December of '51, I had a reduction in force notice from the Veterans Administration, but at the same time, I got the notice from the Veterans Administration that they were reducing their force, I received greetings from President Truman in December and January. I was at Fort Meade. At that time, they were just beginning the desegregation of the Armed Forces in World War II. I think all of the guys were segregated, I guess, for the whole war. I'm not sure. But I know that when we went in at Fort Meade, we were segregated at the—when we first got to Fort Meade. But then we went on to basic, and they said that we wouldn't be segregated any more. So, that was my first integration. I mean, in the sixties is when the schools and everything were desegregated, but there was just a few schools that I knew about.

[00:09:44.23] Now, my mother, the reason I was able to get out of Storer at the age of nineteen was because my mother had gone to one of those normal schools. A federal state normal school at that time is now, I guess, a federal state college or university. But at that time, it was just a normal school. Most of the grads wound up teaching school somewhere.

[00:10:23.01] So, my mother had—I don't know how she managed to do it, but she—wait a minute, she had already completed normal school before I was born. So, I still to this day haven't figured out how she was able to do so much with so little. But we somehow made it through, and I was—I remember being in the eighth grade when World War II started, December 7, 1941. I was in eighth grade, and the other reason was that we only went to the eleventh grade in North Carolina at the time. They didn't have the twelfth grade. So, that, you know, that would take a year off of you there.

But I made it through and came out the valedictorian in the class. I applied at Johnson C. Smith, and my high school principal had graduated from Johnson C. Smith. So, he recommended the school, and that's where I went for the first year.

[00:11:56.28] Well, I just felt that I was probably too young to be there because we had these veterans who had been overseas and came back and here I am, a fifteen year old there, with these veterans, and I enjoyed it somewhat, but my mother took me back to school my second year, and that time, the dean of the college was the brother of the president. McKinney had just come to Storer in, I think, '45 or '46. Anyway, he was looking for students, and I came back to school. Johnson C. Smith was pretty crowded and had a reputation as a fairly good football team and all of that stuff. So, I was there with everybody who was older than I was there. The veterans were coming back and making it even a bigger difference. It just seemed that it was maybe too large for a fifteen year old, I guess.

[00:13:38.13] But, anyway, I talked to the dean of instructions, and he asked me would I like to try a smaller school, and he told me that—at that time, I think Storer was probably looking for students because when I got there, it was nothing like the size. But I

came over and met some students, and the teachers there, being smaller classes, seemingly they had more time for you than if you were in a larger class.

[00:14:29.18] I remember in college English, we had a teacher who—I think she gave out two Cs, ten Ds, and the rest of the class—Two, Cs Ten Bs. I'm sorry. Two Bs, ten Cs, and twenty-two Ds, and the rest of the class failed, and these classes were a couple of hundred people in them.

[00:15:11.29] So, I got a C. So, I was pretty happy [laughs] and came to Storer and liked the, especially the science. I was planning on, well, I had really thought about med school, but I had to realize, struggling to, having just making it through paying the tuition for a historical black college and university, there was no way that I was going to ever make it through med school because I—all of the veterans were coming back, and they had the GI Bill. I didn't. When I came to Storer, I did find that even though I was younger, I guess a lot of them kind of felt that—you know, take me under their wing because I was the baby, although, I mean, I was progressing towards my degree and came out and some friends that I still have.

[00:16:49.13] In fact, I have, if you look under that green sheet over there, there are people there that I—in fact, that legend, I think over—isn't that a legend of Alexander or something I have there? No, that's Harambee. Okay, [William] Vollin, you remember Vollin, spoke at the—he's on there, and there's another lady on there. I mean, those are the same pictures. Vollin is the first one, sitting in the front row, and the girl that's standing by, standing in the second row was, that's Eunice Brown. They were there when I was there, and Vollin I remember, was a very fast football player. (telephone rings)

[00:17:55.29] Anyway, and the president—now, we are getting into the second generation. These are the associate members that you saw a lot of at the last reunion, the people who are really running the club now because people like me are just too old and I think sometimes are suffering from dementia and can't remember.

[00:18:29.13] But I do see a few people who I know from there. I don't know whether you interviewed Francis Washington or not.

SW: No.

[00:18:44.21] WP: He was the—at this last reunion, in fact, this was the first time I'd seen him since I graduated in 1950. So that was sixty-three years, and I remembered that I didn't try for sports because the guys who had played college—not college football but played service football, a lot of them came back and was playing for Storer, and I didn't try out in my first year there.

[00:19:25.27] But I did get the nerve up to try out, and I was so light with no experience. I certainly couldn't play in a skilled position. So, Coach put me on the line. And the most I could ever weigh when I was in college, I think, was 155, and I know that

a lot of the guys were light at the smaller colleges, but I tried to play. I remembered this Washington, I actually didn't know who it was when the money came in from him, but, you know, they asked me did I know a D. C. Washington.

[00:20:16.29] I told her, "No, I remember a Francis Washington."

I came to find out that that was the guy who was at the reunion that I knew as Francis Washington, and she said he was a reverend. I didn't know he was a reverend either. I found out that he had turned to preaching some time since then.

[00:20:41.21] This same year, I mean, this is, again, getting off of the story, but when I went in the military, I went in during the Korean War, and I was assigned to Germany. It was during the Korean War. I was sure that Germany was a more desirable place at that time than the Korean War, I mean, being in Korea.

[00:21:14.20] I went in, and I served just two years and came out and came back. I went out looking for a job. And the one thing that I remembered, you know, now veterans are having hard times, some of them, finding jobs. Well, I had a hard time finding a job when I came back although I'd worked in the Census Bureau in the Veterans Administration, but I was under indefinite appointment. So they weren't just hiring anybody, and I decided I would apply at CIA, NSA, and, you know, several, just about every agency because, you know, you'd take the civil service exam, and they would call you up, you know.

[00:22:07.08] I did find out that the Navy had an opening and called me down for an interview. I walked in and the first place, I didn't see any faces with the same complexion as mine. [laughs] And I talked to the guy and he told me that they normally use women in that little job that I was applying for. But, I mean, this was a man I was talking to, [laughs] [inaudible] [00:22:59.05], but I didn't say that, you know. Naturally made me think about that.

[00:23:04.14] But, so eventually I signed up for unemployment. I think they would pay you for twenty-six weeks, twenty-six dollars or something like that, and at that time, I didn't have any wife or children or anything. So, I could feed myself, not pay the rent, but I could feed myself. By living with my mother and aunt, I could survive.

[00:23:38.00] But eventually I was hired in August of '54, and went to, was trained while they waited for my clearance. You know, we had to have top secret clearance, and that didn't take me long because I had had a clearance while I was in service. I went to work on August the 9th, 1954, and I retired September the 1st, 1989.

[00:24:30.00] With my military service added to my civilian time, I came out with something like thirty-eight plus years. And since '89, I haven't worked. I was thinking of trying to find a job, but I came home, and my wife had been in an auto accident right up here on Good Luck Road, the main drag, I mean, just outside of the community. And she was hurt and couldn't work for, I guess, it must have been

the bigger portion of a year. Eventually I settled on that. She started to work and worked at Maryland University. She worked at the Library of Congress, DC, for—I guess she must have ten years, ten or twelve years, and then she came out and worked at Maryland for about ten years.

[00:25:51.14] In the meantime, in that time, my family was growing. When we moved in the house, I had two boys, ages six and eight, and the younger one started school after that year. The older one had been to school two years in Glenarden. But they came here, and they seemed to have done well in school, but I think my daughter did better than both of them though. The youngest boy, he went to GMI [General Motors Institute, now Kettering University] in Michigan and came out with an electrical engineering degree. But he liked computers, and he really liked computers. When he went to GMI, GMI is one of those schools that you work halftime and go to school halftime. And that way, he could pay for either his room and board, and I could pay for the tuition or part of it were covered.

But anyway, he made it through in five years, no problems, and stayed on honor roll most of the time. My older boy did quite well in school until he was old enough to get interested in girls and sports. In fact, you see that picture on the wall? He drew that. I don't know whether you can see it from where you are now, but it's right on the wall when you went downstairs. He drew that from a photo that they took of him in the jail.

SW: Oh, that's very nice.

[00:27:54.12] WP: He showed a couple of people who were artists at Maryland University. They all suggested that maybe he should go in that field. But he instead still hangs out with basketball. He trains kids starting from a very young age right on up to some pros. I mean, not NBA type pros—I guess they could be NBA because he has one or two now playing overseas. He's still involved in sports. But he's fifty-one now. So, he's out but...

And Dawn Burke has also written a book. I think she mentioned me in the prologue, beginning of the book. I had gone up to Harpers Ferry and was looking for some information about Storer College, seeing if Storer College was in there. This was, oh, I guess, twenty years after I graduated, but I thought there should have been more written—Storer should have been included a little more, and the Harpers Ferry [inaudible] [00:29:37.04], they had—I went to the bookstore there and couldn't find anything on it.

[00:29:45.17] So, I mentioned this at one of our meetings once I started attending the reunion meetings, and I don't know where Dawn—maybe she had a similar experience, but for some reason, she was the—oh, she was working on her PhD at the time, and she noticed the same thing, that there wasn't much said about Storer in the bookstore. So, she wrote that book. I have it over there on the table.

[00:30:31.13] You know, and she mentioned me in there. I don't know exactly—I can't remember exactly what the wording was. In the prologue, she did mention me, and I went to—when I was at the reunions, my outfit from '53 to '88 was still functioning in Germany, and had basically the same functions that they had when I was there. But with the technology changing, it seems that communications and computers were becoming more and more—basically needed the same skills, both of them, and when Reagan was president, I guess [inaudible] [00:31:47.04] just a tight outfit, was not needed any more. So, he discontinued the outfit.

[00:31:57.29] So, some of the guys decided that they would have, form an association and have reunions every year, and starting in '88, 1988, they got in contact and had their first reunion in 1988. I was one of two African Americans who had been assigned to my particular unit of about, I guess, about twenty people in that unit, and when I went there, there was only one, but I became the second one, and the second one left, and then I was the only one. But shortly after he left, they brought in another. So, I thought two was probably the quota. [laughs]

[00:32:57.05] But we had a good time there, and I—they didn't find me until 1997, nine years later. I received a card, and the guy told me that they just had a reunion, and they just found my address. They were having one, the next reunion in Colorado Springs.

[00:33:34.16] And I went to that one. That was the first I'd heard about it. So I went to that one, and I was the only African American at that one. [laughs] But I did meet some guys that knew me. In fact, I met my sergeant, the sergeant of the outfit that I was in at that one, and I haven't seen him that much since then. And he was from West Virginia. He lived in West Virginia.

[00:34:16.23] But then I went to the one this year. I had been to eight, at least eight of the nine last reunions, eight of the nine. I missed one the year that I had surgery for colon cancer. I missed that one, but I've been able to feel good enough to go to the reunions and this one, eight of the nine—I've been to eight of the nine, but I saw a guy this time that I hadn't seen since 1952, sixty-one years ago. I didn't recognize him. I mean, I didn't know that it was him. I noticed that he had the features of this guy, and I knew that we were having someone this year in Iowa, and I knew that he was originally from Iowa.

[00:35:14.06] And we were in the hospitality room one night, and I walked up to him, and I said, “Are you Jim Kirk?”

He said, “Yes, and who are you?”

He didn't know me. [laughs] And I told him Bill Pinchback. I probably had the best time this year of any time that I've been despite the fact that I had a bout of gout just before going on that trip, and they, of course, they had to wheel me through the airport. I couldn't. It was that bad.

[00:35:51.18] But I was able to make all the trips that they went on, and every day, we went somewhere. And what surprised me is that in Iowa out there, they had mentioned Tuskegee Airmen, the Buffalo Soldiers, and I actually went on the base where a lot of states used to train the National Guard. I can't think of the fort. I think it's Fort Dodge, they called it, something. It was in Des Moines, Iowa. And then went to museums, and they talked about the Niagara movement, how this was started, and I was just surprised at how much interest in it this was.

[00:37:03.15] Another place that I enjoyed was we went to St. Louis, and I had never been to St. Louis, and I didn't go up in the Arch or anything like that because I think I was really beginning to feel the effects of the cancer because I didn't have a colonoscopy until I was seventy. They tell you to have it fifty or earlier, and my kids are now having them. My youngest son, he will be forty-nine in October, and he's already had one. My older son is talking about it, but he's fifty-one. I told him, "Don't wait."

[00:37:56.15] But, fortunately, things seem to be looking up. I don't see my oncologist now until next year, and I've had high blood pressure since I was forty-five. And now it seems to be easier to control than it was when I was forty-five.

SW: Do you recall how many students were at Storer College when you were there?

[00:38:29.29] WP: I don't recall the exact number, but for some reason, I think they had about four hundred at one time has been the largest one. In fact, I think my class was the largest graduating class in '50. In fact, I don't know what I've done with the pictures. I don't think it's in Dawn's book. I probably could show you. And you were asking me about Dewitt Jacobs, what year.

SW: Was he a little ahead of you?

[00:39:09.29] WP: He was a little ahead of me. I don't know whether it was '49 or '48. He was there when I was there, but I know that he graduated before I did.

SW: Were you there from '47 to '50?

[00:39:22.20] WP: '47 to '50, yeah.

SW: And at that time, was it all African Americans or were there whites on campus?

[00:39:34.20] WP: I think somewhere down the line—I don't know what the—there were some whites there during the summer, but I don't know what it was, what the program was that they were under. For some reason, I'm thinking it was a school in Pennsylvania that came down, but I was away in the summer trying to earn some

cash to clothe myself for the winter, and I wasn't there, but I did hear that they were. So, I can't say that I saw any of them.

SW: And while you were at Storer, you said you worked a little. Do you recall how much you had to spend on tuition or textbooks or anything like that?

[00:40:24.14] WP: No. I don't remember the exact amounts. In fact, people would have probably thought they were free almost if—compared with what prices they're paying now. But I do know that before I came, when I was entered in Johnson C. Smith, I don't think we were paying something like thirty or thirty-seven dollars a month for rent and board. But, you know, it's a different day now.

SW: Were there a lot of rules at Storer? Did you have to follow a lot of rules there?

[00:41:14.10] WP: We had to follow a lot of them, but at that age, you know, you just try and follow them and make excuses and lie a little to get out of them. And occasionally—I mean, I've seen a couple of instructors who made it to the reunions. In fact, Dean Johnson, who was a dean when I was there, his wife, I'd say, has been there probably within the last six or seven years, but I understand from her niece that she's now a hundred, and she says that, you know, she gets around, but I mean, she can't make it up to—

[00:42:20.17] And I had, I thought I had anyway, maybe I don't have it here, but I could find it, I guess, a write-up of a lady who died outside of Charles Town. Elkins, that's where she was. They had the funeral, but the obituary was in the paper. And she died I know within the last two years. Her nephew, I guess he must live up there because I think she moved from—she was in Philadelphia. Her name is Naomi Schaeffer, and she moved over here to—I guess that's Landover, and then she moved to Charles Town.

[00:43:18.08] And I know that within three years, I have seen her at the Sunday service at Storer. So, I mean, I know that she was ninety-seven or ninety-eight at that time. And I didn't see her nephew who was responsible for her when she was here in Landover, and also I guess he was responsible for her in Charles Town. I didn't see him this past year, but he was at the banquet the previous year, and I didn't remember him because I had only seen him at the services, the Sunday morning services, but he remembered me and called me Mr. Pinchback, and he told me who he was, and then I remembered him then.

[00:44:21.21] I saw—her obituary was, I believe, in the Charlest Town paper as well as they had a hundredth birthday party for her at some church there. I don't know. I believe it was in Charles Town. I'm not sure if it was in Charles Town. If it wasn't, it was nearby. And a lot of people showed up for that.

SW: Now, when you were there, were students allowed to live off campus?

[00:44:55.00] WP: Yes, a lot of students did live off campus. I mean, they were living at home and commuting, and in fact, I'm not sure if Dewitt Jacobs commuted or not, but I thought he might have. And Jug Bernson from Shepherdstown also. Jug was a councilman on Shepherdstown for a long time.

[00:45:29.12] I know that—of course, I don't know whether you remember—what was his name—March Craven, we called him, but what was his name? His wife is still, I think she's still in Harpers Ferry, Ruth Craven, but I went to his funeral in Harpers Ferry, and Wheeler, I don't know if you know the Wheelers or not, but Calvin Wheeler was in my class, and he married the daughter of—not the daughter, he married the—I'm not sure what relative she was to Dean Johnson, but her name was Marion Wheeler. She died. So, I mean, you probably won't hear anything, but she was married to Calvin who was the assistant coach, football coach, and he's died, but he has a daughter that was at this past year's reunion, and she's the one who had the picture of Goldie Johnson who was Dean Johnson's wife.

SW: Now what about the classes you took there? Did you have a favorite subject?

[00:47:02.07] WP: My favorite was math, but they didn't offer enough for me to major in it. So, I minored in math, but I had a major in social science because they seemed to have plenty of social sciences and the electives that you could take with them that really counted towards your major was astronomy, and Dr. Schumaker had more people in his classes, I think, probably than anyone else there. While it wasn't my favorite, I did take some of those courses. One of my favorite instructors was really one of the hardest instructors there. He came across with—what was it? The author I think he gave a B. The guy who his instructors, he gave a B. He gave a C, and about the most you could hope for is a D. He'd tell you that when he started out there, but he'd also challenge you. He'd give you some problem to work, and then if you worked that problem. He gave us one. I was testing measurements because I didn't know what I was going to teach. And there was some math involved in that, statistics and [inaudible] [00:48:50.04]. So I liked having statistics and stuff like that. So, I took that, and he challenged us with a problem on the day the class got started and told us that, if we solved the problem correctly, "You don't have to come in class any more. I'll give you an A."

SW: That's a pretty good incentive.

[00:49:17.26] WP: So, I came to Washington that weekend, spent the day at the Library of Congress, found the formula that would work that problem, but I made the mistake, algebraic, of not changing the signs inside the parenthesis if you had a negative. You know, $C - D - A + B$, you're supposed to change the plus to a minus, and I didn't do that and came off just a fraction off, but he saw that I knew enough, and he gave me an A that year. I attended class the rest of the year, but he gave me an A out of it. That was real interesting, and I would have taken more

classes with that because the trip to Washington was—my mother was here. So, I would come home and see her and my aunt and cousins and just enjoy the weekend.

SW: And what was this professor's name?

[00:50:38.07] WP: His name was Moutham. I believe he lived in Cook Hall. The girls used Cook Hall as an economic place over there where they learned how to sew, quilt, and cook and all things like that. But he also, I think, had a room there.

SW: Now do you recall a lot of people dropping out of school at Storer?

[00:51:16.18] WP: Not a whole lot. You know, they had rules like no gambling and stuff like that in the dorm and stuff like that. If you were caught there, you might probably be put off campus, and some guys didn't graduate because we had the veterans back who once the paycheck came in, they gambled. One guy, I saw him on my class picture, and I was told that they held his degree up. I don't know. I can't be sure of that.

[00:52:06.10] And you were required to go to vespers at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, stuff like this. But I mean, they didn't expel you if you didn't go.

SW: You mentioned some of the things there on campus, the gambling. What was dorm life like? Did you have a dorm parent or a supervisor there?

[00:52:37.09] WP: Yeah, first year we had a lady named Mrs. Ash. She was kind of a dorm mother. And one of the reasons I remembered D.C. Washington, she had a meeting of the people who were staying in Brackett Hall at the time, and this guy complained of the lack of soft toilet tissue in the bathroom. [laughs] I don't know whether you saw him or not, but I mean, he was sitting in the front row when Vollin made the speech at the, when they put the porch. He was there sitting on the front row, and I didn't mention it to him, but I still remembered him and everybody laughing about here you are, a big 200 and something [pound] guy complaining like a female about soft tissue.

[00:54:04.18] I still will run into quite a few of Storer's in Washington and Iowa. A lot of them are dying. I talked to two yesterday. In fact, I don't know whether you interviewed her, but the lady, Ramona Gross, I talked to her yesterday, and Catherine Gaines. She didn't come this year. She'd been, most of them, even before I started coming, they used to conflict with my family reunion.

SW: How about the instructors on campus? Were there a mix of male and female, of black and white?

[00:54:58.04] WP: It was a mixture of complete—in fact, most of them, seemingly most of them, other than African American, seem to be foreigners from Germany. We had Dr.

Gunther from Germany and a Dr. Wallach It seemed like we had another one, a math professor. I'll think of his name once you leave. I just can't remember, but I remember having a German instructor. His name was Dr. Wallach, and I remember him having reading exercises where we were reading the German, and I remember him critiquing me and saying, "Mr. Pinchlach You have a rotten German accent," and the way he pronounced my name, I felt like saying, "Dr. Wallach, you have a rotten English accent." I assume, he just interpreted my "b" as an "l." I didn't say anything. [laughs]

SW: And now you mentioned Dr. McKinney.

[00:56:33.10] WP: Dr. McKinney was president at the time. And Dr. McKinney actually I think was the one of the sponsors of Dawn in writing her book, and Brooks was also—Brooks went on to get a PhD in chemistry. He also was—this is Houston Brooks—sponsored Dawn. And I attended Dawn's ceremony when Dawn was—what do you call it? What do they call it? When they give you the—when you actually receive your doctorate. I can't remember what they call it, hooded, during the ceremony.

[00:57:38.19] And we went out to, again, I can't think of the name of the school it was, but I know it was in Northern Virginia. She didn't go all the way down to—I think she got it from BPI. Was it BPI? BMI, one of the—

SW: I can't recall. It was one of those.

[00:58:00.22] WP: Let me see. I have them right here.

SW: Okay. And we're looking at Dawn Burke's *American Phoenix* book and...let's see, Virginia Polytechnic. And also at that time, what was your opinion of Dr. McKinney when you were at Storer?

[00:58:44.11] WP: Well, my opinion of him was that, you know, there were several layers between you and the president of the school, but my opinion was that he was trying, but he knew that he probably could not raise the money because of the circumstances of the students. Most of them could not pay except the veterans, and the veterans, you know, times were changing. Of course, I mean, it was later that times changed, and we could go to other schools, but I'm assuming that West Virginia University, the one at Institute, the historic black college, was more attractive and probably had better facilities and everything, and it was just, he was competing when he didn't have the funds to compete or trying to compete anyway, and he, I mean, I certainly had no problems with him.

SW: And you've mentioned Dean Johnson and some of the others, but how about the college maintenance staff? Do you remember any of the maintenance staff?

[01:00:29.02] WP: Yep, I remember the maintenance staff. Of course, they didn't have that

much of it, but they had Johnny—what was Johnny's last name? I can't remember Johnny's last name. And they had another cook. I knew Chef Robinson an, oh, Spriggs. And there was another one, but I can't remember his name. Sixty years ago is a long time.

[01:01:05.03] But, you know, you had a night watchman, and you had—I'm trying to think—we cleaned the building ourselves and painting and stuff like that. They would hire students to do it. So, they didn't have a big staff. I'm trying to think. But I really didn't have that much of a problem with any of the staff, and it was small enough for you to know them all, and I saw them regular. But Johnny lived right on—he lived in a house right there on campus. I think it's back where the library was.

[01:02:15.14] And I'm trying to think who else, Spriggs, he lived in town. So did the guy—I can't remember his name. And, oh, I guess there were instructors that I can't remember their names—what did he teach? And did I ever take any courses? I don't think I did. There was this one guy, I didn't take any courses from him. [bird noise]

[01:02:50.08] But one of my jobs, I remember waiting on the faculty. I would serve the faculty as a waiter. And when I wasn't doing that, sometimes I would wash dishes and do whatever jobs needed to be done.

SW: And you mentioned played football. Was there any arch rivals? What schools did you compete against?

[01:03:19.14] WP: Well, we usually, we weren't strong enough to compete against most of the CIAA schools. So, we had, we were in the Eastern Intercollegiate Athletic Association, I think, EIAC. And we had schools like Bowie State was in it, and Princess Anne. Now, I mean, these are schools competing in the CIAA, but at that time, they were smaller, and they competed against Storer.

[01:03:57.18] And one year, we tried to schedule, I understand these coaches tried to schedule Howard University, but Howard wouldn't play us because they felt it would be embarrassing to lose to Storer because it seems that they had gone out—the coach had recruited a lot of graduates from Parker Gray High School and Parker Gray had had some good teams, and that's where Earl Lloyd, the first black—I believe he was the first black in the NBA, he's from Parker Gray, and he came out and then he went to West Virginia University. That was the black founded institute not [inaudible]. I'm trying to think of—Morgantown, not Virginia.

And we competed also against Miner Teachers College and Coppin State in Baltimore. And I guess Coppin State is still open. I'm not sure. I know that we competed, and I remember this D.C. Washington scored forty-eight points against Coppin State, and Coppin State didn't have that many on their team. I think they might have had seven or eight players, but they fouled out, and they were down to where they were going to have to play with four.

[01:05:50.09] But I remember that game. We were beating them so bad, they just said, “You go on it. Let the last guy foul out.”

SW: And were there any other activities you participated in on campus?

[01:06:13.03] WP: Not really, you know. We'd go to the dances and stuff like that that they had, but coming from a small school in the South that didn't have much of an athletic program. Well, we'd organize and play intramural softball and stuff like that, but that's baseball. In fact, I remember playing a team—I don't know whether it was—I'm sure it wasn't organized as a team that represented some organization, but we went over and played a school in Charles Town, and we won, but I don't know who.

SW: Now, did you have a—where was the football field? Did you have a practice field?

[01:07:14.28] WP: We practiced at the high school field right there before you get to—I'm trying to think where. You go down to Harpers Ferry. You're going down to the main drag in Harpers Ferry. Well, there was a high school at the top of the hill. We'd walk up there and play on their field. And then we had the barn. I guess you heard of the barn.

SW: I heard a little bit about it, yes.

[01:07:51.03] WP: [laughs] The barn, we'd shoot through the rafters, and the other teams, there weren't too many of them good at shooting through the rafters. So, the rafters was our advantage. We had some guys who could really hit through the rafters, and I got pretty good at it.

SW: That was the basketball court.

[01:08:10.06] WP: Basketball. With girls' teams, too. But '49 was when we had the best team I think ever, and we—Virginia State had come up and beaten us badly one year. [electronic message in background]. '49 we went there.

SW: So, what was the score of that football game?

[01:08:57.03] WP: Oh, against Virginia State? We beat them 7-0, but it seemed like their first game, they had beaten us 6 or something—I'm not sure it was them. Somebody beat us 6 or 7 to 0 that year, and I think that's when they decided they were going to go out and get some football players.

[01:09:17.29] But I don't know if [William] Vollin was on that team or not. I know he was on one of our better teams.

SW: And you mentioned the dances.

[01:09:36.28] WP: Yep. Usually we had some type of social event about every week or something on Friday or Saturday night or something. We'd have a dance or a movie or something that were shown in the auditorium.

SW: And the auditorium was right there in the—

[01:09:55.14] WP: Anthony Hall.

SW: Which is now the Mather—

WP: The Mather Training Center, yeah.

SW: And do you remember any dances in particular? Was there one that stands out in your mind?

[01:10:12.03] WP: Not really. I mean, sixty years is a long time. [long silence]

SW: How about other social events or plays or different things?

[01:10:49.15] WP: Well, we would go and take trips. I remember coming down to Washington, DC. You know, we had a history club or something and we'd come down, and I remember when Sammy Davis was just starting out with his uncles coming down and going to the Howard Theater and seeing him.

[01:11:15.24] And we saw Mary MacLoud Bethune. We went down to the Capitol. She had been coming out of somebody's office at that time, and we saw her. And we'd go to places like Gettysburg. What's the place? I'm trying to think. It seemed like there was—I remember going somewhere in Pennsylvania, but I mean, these were usually just a few people, not a busload or something, because busloads would go to football games.

SW: And how about, what did you do with your free time there? Did you go to the movies or anything like that?

[01:12:09.23] WP: Well, I was there when they opened the theatre in Ranson, and I think we'd go there occasionally through the week. But the one thing that I remember though going down with the history club, and this was before things were integrated, and they only allowed African Americans to sit on the left side at the theater in Ranson. I don't know where the theater is now, but I know it was in Ranson. We thought when we heard, when we heard some more entertainment or something, but we didn't go much after we went down with the history club, and they whisked us on the left side. A group of us said, "Well, we're not going to sit on the left side." In fact, the whole group, I think, said that, and they finally put us out. And we asked for our money back, and they gave us our money back, but

we'd seen most of the movie at that time. [laughs]

[01:13:21.03] So, but that was—[front door opens] and we also had the PX under the—it was in the Mather Training Center in the basement there. I don't know—I guess that's where when you come in the back way, I'm not sure, [front door opens] but we would go to the PX, and they had the drugstore, what's the drugstore? Rathbone's Drugstore was down there. We would go there, but that was just to pick up sodas and refreshments and stuff like that.

SW: And did you go to any other places in Charlestown or Ranson? Was it segregated at that time?

[01:14:19.16] WP: Yes, it was very much segregated at that time. I don't think—the first thing I would do that was integrated was, after I graduated and went to work over there, I had been to work several years and had gotten up to where I had been a technician basically, but they got management. They would send us there for management training. In fact, what is now—where we stayed this last time, right up from the park.

SW: Is it the Hillside?

[01:15:08.15] WP: Hillside. It was Hillside at the time that we were staying up there, but then when I started—you know, got management training, they would go up there and we'd stay up there a week sometimes. At that time, it seemed to me to be a very nice hotel.

[01:15:35.26] And that was prior to '89, and it seemed like the services hadn't been quite as good as they treated us up there. I know they won the contract, and management was paying dearly for this. I'm trying to think of who the guy was that owned it before. Oh, what the heck is that? [silence] I don't have a card here. [looking for card] Romaine. She didn't hear me. What was the hotel we stayed at at Harpers Ferry?

R: Quality Inn.

WP: The Quality Inn. Well, it was at least—I think it's changed hands two or three times, at least twice since we—the government had the contracts for management training up there, but we would go up there and we'd stay up there, but we usually came up on the bus, and we didn't have any transportation. So, we had to go to Charles Town, and this was—people from all over were Storer students. In fact, I don't ever remember being with a Storer student, in a class with a Storer class there at that time.

SW: What about the campus? What did you like best about the campus?

[01:17:46.11] WP: The smallness of it. [laughs] And everybody knew everybody. I mean, four

hundred people, it's not very difficult to learn the names and remember them. And the faculty were all friendly and right there. You were confined to what is now basically the buildings that you still see there. I think the barn has been torn down, hasn't it? I don't think I saw it the last time I was up there. The tennis courts were right out in front of the Mather Training Center. But we also were using that field for football practice.

SW: What did you like least about the campus?

[01:18:41.15] WP: What did I like least about the campus? Oh, well, probably at that time was the rule that we had to attend church on Sunday. [laughs] I had a good time for the most part.

SW: How about some of the buildings? We were talking about that just a little bit ago. How about the college library? Did you spend some time there? Could you describe it?

[01:19:22.07] WP: Yeah, I don't know whether it had the number of books and references that we needed, but it was usually—I guess the instructors took this under consideration when they were assigning their assignments, but it seemed to be adequate.

[01:19:55.23] And we weren't that far from DC. So, I mean, you could catch a train up here. I think you pay \$4.60 or something to come down and go back. So, for nine dollars, you could make a round trip. If you didn't have anything to carry, we walked up the hill. I think they had a taxi there at the time. I don't think that I caught it except when I was coming in, like I'd bring in my stuff back into summers and stuff like that.

SW: So, you took the passenger train from Harpers Ferry to DC?

WP: Uh huh.

SW: Did you do that a lot?

[01:20:37.20] WP: No, not a lot. When we did it, it would be a group of us because we were all coming back from Thanksgiving or from Christmas or something like that or maybe Easter, too, but you know what time of the year.

SW: And how about, what do you remember about the Lockwood House?

[01:21:04.04] WP: The Lockwood House, I only remember, passing it by on the way to Jefferson Rock. We would go straight through there somewhere and go down the hill and up the hill. I don't know, we'd go over to the rock.

SW: And how about, what do you remember about the Brackett House?

[01:21:27.23] WP: Brackett House was the dormitory that the freshmen and a lot of the upperclassmen women lived, and I made lots of trips over there.

SW: What was the inside like, do you recall?

[01:21:45.10] WP: Inside of Brackett? Well, we were only allowed on the—in fact, I don't think I've ever been above the first floor in Brackett, and the cafeteria and the heating room, the boiler room was in the basement, on the basement level.

SW: What do you remember about the interior of the Morrell House?

[01:22:20.22] WP: Not at all.

SW: And, of course, we've been to the church several times.

WP: Oh, yes, several.

SW: And how would you describe the interior of the Baptist Church when you were there?

[01:22:37.13] WP: Well, at that time, that was prior to air conditioning. You know, everything was air conditioning, and I think mostly my complaint was the fact that, you know, it got hot in there in the spring and when you first went back in the fall. It was hot in there. But other than that, no real problems.

SW: And how did you do anything after the services on Sunday? Did you get together with other students?

[01:23:12.26] WP: Basically, I went back and studied, socialized, that's all. It depends upon what I was doing. We played a lot of cards and stuff like that, too.

SW: Where would you play the cards?

[01:23:28.12] WP: Lots of times right now, rooms, if you didn't have, if you weren't overcrowded with roommates, and if you didn't play in the room, we always had a day room downstairs that you could go in and play.

SW: And do you remember your roommate from college?

[01:23:52.14] WP: Oh, I had several. But who was my roommate? Every year, I managed to have a different group, and I think my first year was probably, we had more in the room than we had later because that was the veterans returning. I think there was about four in a room—two double bunk beds, and the rooms weren't that large.

SW: And what about Harpers Ferry itself? What do you remember about the

town?

[01:24:43.21] WP: The town itself. I don't remember that much because I don't think there was that much really down there. A beer joint and, Dr. Pope, we'd call. But I was beneath the age that I could drink, and I don't even remember them, and if they had an eating place, we probably couldn't go in them anyway. So, I didn't.

SW: So, certain places were off limits in Harpers Ferry?

[01:25:35.19] WP: Off limits, I wouldn't say they were off limits, but at that time, you know, you knew that you might have trouble, so you tried to avoid it.

SW: Is that what most of the students did? They tried to just—

[01:25:56.02] WP: I think that was the case. In most instances, I think that you just—you didn't want to get in trouble with the faculty, and Dean Johnson was the guy who would probably decide, make the decision, he or Dr. McKinney on whether you committed something that you could be expelled for or something like that.

[01:26:24.01] And I remember one or two, but not that many.

SW: Now did the, what was the relationship between the town and the school? Was there any interference from the town?

[01:26:40.24] WP: I wasn't aware, but I don't know because basically I was, I just felt that we could survive there on campus. Basically we had the food and housing accommodations.

SW: And how about, did you see your instructors outside of school?

[01:27:08.04] WP: Outside of school, not really. I don't recall seeing any of them unless they had—the instructors you might see walking down the hill, and we had one barber shop there. I don't know whether there was, whether it was white or not.

SW: Do you recall what the name of the barber shop was?

[01:27:38.03] WP: No, I don't, but I do know that—oh, what the heck was the lady who served—she served as secretary for a long time, but I can't think of her name now. She died. Oh, the guy who owned the barbershop was her sister's husband or the one who was secretary for a long time, but I—I just can't think of her name. And no sooner than you leave, I will probably think of it.

SW: It always happens that way, yeah. Now, while you were there, were there any big national issues that were coming up while you were attending Storer?

[01:28:37.24] WP: I think the sitting-in stuff was probably beginning to start at that time, but

they didn't get into full swing until after I'd gone. In fact, I'm trying to think of exactly when they started sitting in at A&T and places like that.

[01:29:04.22] And then, of course, and I'm trying to think of when Emmett Till was murdered. Of course, I mean, I know it was much later than that. I'm almost sure it was much later than '50 when he was murdered. But I know a guy, in fact, I have his address, of a guy who helped get the guy who—I think Emmett Till was hung. The guy who lives in Baltimore now and worked—in fact, he worked for the *Afro American* publication for a long time. He went to Storer his first year. He might have even gone two years, but I know he was there for one year. And I talked to him not too long ago, trying to get him to come to a reunion. And he was my roommate one year, but I'm still not sure—I know he was older than I was, and I guess he must be probably eighty-four or five now.

[01:30:50.11] But he went out to Missouri to journalism school and came back and worked for *Afro American* paper. I believe it was in Memphis. I can't think of what it was. But then eventually he came to Baltimore in the Washington area and worked for the *Afro American*.

[01:31:20.00] And he was there probably—he was in Baltimore, I'm sure, in '58, '59, because my mother-in-law sold ads for the *Afro American*, and he was there while she was there, and I know that was probably '57, '58.

SW: And what do you remember most about Storer College?

[01:32:10.02] WP: What do I remember most about Storer College? [silence] Well, as I said, I was—came out at nineteen, so probably dating girls there, I guess, was one of the—and now a lot of those have passed on.

SW: And what ways did Storer College influence your life?

[01:33:34.05] WP: Well, I found out that just because it was small didn't have all of the facilities that some of the larger schools had. You had a faculty—I think the smallness of it, the fact that the personal attention that the faculty members could give you was a great influence. And it seemed like now we hear so much about the family. Well, Dr. Schumaker taught us a lot about the family and how we should be responsible. I mean, I remember that particularly.

[01:34:45.28] And even, you know, some of the people like the dietitians, and I've seen some of them since I graduated. In fact, we had one dietician that actually lived out here in the county, and I used to see her all of the time when my kids were small, but I don't know whether she's still living or not.

[01:35:22.13] And then there were some people much older than I was that would always try to act as a second mother, and I still, some of them, in fact, I had one girl who, she's a World War II vet that actually worked with my mother until she died. I mean,

she died before my mother died, but—my mother was eighty-five when she passed. That was in '91. So, this girl had passed several years before that. So, I'm sure that—and she was a World War II veteran, but she wasn't as old as my mother. So, I'm sure that she must have passed in her sixties or seventies.

[01:36:27.08] And there was just a lot of fun people there, fun guys there, and a lot of them—especially some around here. In fact, I attended more funerals, I think, even in the last couple of years. In fact, we had two funerals going on at the same time in a small school, and I believe both of these girls, I think, graduated in the same class, '49, the year before me.

[01:37:05.08] One had a funeral in Arlington, and the other one in Fort Washington, right across the river. They were at the same time. So, I couldn't go to both of them, but I had gone to school with one, with the two of them. I had gone to school with both of them, but I worked, spent, I guess, thirty years, at least thirty years working with the other one. So, I decided I'd go to the one that I had two reasons to go, and I didn't go to the—

[01:37:41.20] In fact, I believe the girl's husband worked at the Park Service for a while. Her name was Muriel Nunn and Robert Nunn, I think, was working at—I mean, I assume it was Mather Training Center, but I'm not sure exactly where he was, but I know they were living in Harpers Ferry there. Oh, is Paul Saunder's house still there? I guess it is.

[01:38:24.10] But you just seemingly become attached to people, and now they are dying off. In fact, I have a funeral to go to tomorrow of a guy who died—he's ninety-three though, of course, and he's a church member, not Storer. He's Caucasian. So, he's not anything to do with Storer, and he died last Friday. His obituary that the police put in is today, but his family put in one yesterday.

[01:39:10.25] And I will probably see a guy that I haven't seen in a long time at his funeral because his son worked on—he used to work on my car there, the one in the driveway there, the Mercury—he worked at the Mercury dealer over here on 415. They told me his name was Zucher. I assume that he'd know the guy who died, “That's my father.”

SW: And how about, did you have a favorite spot at Harpers Ferry?

[01:39:51.02] WP: Not really. I guess my favorite spot of mine was taking a hike down to Jefferson Rock. Jefferson said, let us to view the Potomac from across the—from Jefferson Rock was worth a trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Well, we had a different saying. To have a coed down under the rock over a trip across both the Pacific and the Atlantic. [laughs]

SW: And now, finally, what do you think about what the Park Service has done to the campus to maintain?

[01:41:01.16] WP: Well, I think that personally I think that the Park Service has done more to keep the buildings intact more than the alumnae ever would have, especially from a small school that didn't have—you know, we didn't have that many millionaires. [laughs] So, what we would contribute would be a hundred dollars here, a hundred dollars there. But I think that the Park Service has done far more than we could have done without the Park Service. And I guess, assumed a lot of the debt, I guess the government assumed a lot of that debt. I don't know how much of that was taken out from the Park Service, but I'm sure that they probably found something else to do with it, if they hadn't decided on that.

[01:42:08.02] But I have been to lots of Park Services, I mean, events, seeing what they've done, and I think that—I assume that what they are saying is true. But I felt that they've been in agreement that it would have been better had we not had to have gone through the riots and stuff like that during the sixties. And I have been quite fortunately, I have three kids, two who have completed their college, and the third one, he has an associate's, but he definitely got his—that's the one that's now training people in basketball. I don't know. It just seemed like he was going to be a permanent student for a while there, and we had two other kids, and my daughter came out with a Phi Beta Kappa at Maryland. She got her master's from the University of Georgia.

[01:43:55.02] The thing about it, they came out with no debt, the two that graduated. The only one that had any debt was the one that just has his associate's. And he went, I don't know, he didn't take a foreign language early on, and he was trying to get his in one year and couldn't pass the foreign language, and it was down in the University of Pennsylvania, and he played basketball there, and he played at Trinidad State in Trinidad, Colorado before coming to—But just a foreign language, and if he had just been at home and going to a local community college, we could have helped him with the foreign language because I mean, I had German, and my wife had had—I guess my wife had French, and my daughter took Russian. In fact, she started this—we have a high school here that specializes in science at Roosevelt High here in Greenbelt.

[01:45:42.28] She passed the exam for science, but she didn't like science. She didn't want to. But she, in order to get into—you could get into that school where, you know, it had a reputation for being an excellent school if you took a language that another school didn't have that you might decide to—in our case, she took Russian. I had had Russian not in college, but I'd taken Russian at work. I'd taken intensive Russian for nine months, and I had to pass a comprehensive exam when I came out.

[01:46:38.15] Well, I had had German when I was in college, but Russian was what they were offering, and I felt that this was one way for me to advance. So, I took that, and because of—in fact, I had learned to translate, you know, to try to, instead of saying “negative particle” for a negative, I would say “neutron, proton,”

whatever, you know, was in it.

[01:47:24.22] And the instructor evidently was partial to that, and he said I finished second high in the class on the comprehensive, and I wasn't working with the language. The other people were working with the language. Most of them were working with the language. There was a couple in there that was in the same boat that I was. But they were surprised that, you know, I did as well as I did, but I can blame that because I had had physics and was told what a neutron was and just—and that was—that professor was Wolfe. He might have been an American Caucasian. I know he was Caucasian, and he served in the navy in World War II. So I guess he was.

SW: And is there anything you'd like to say about Storer College that we might not have covered so far?

[01:48:23.17] WP: Oh, I really can't think of anything off the top of my head. I still like to go up and see what's happening and find the Park staff very easy to work with And the students that I met, I still see a lot of, and I'm able now with the computers to put out a lot about them. In fact, I think I have something on the computer now about, that one about—

SW: This one is about the film.

[01:49:24.18] WP: Oh, the film. Okay, that was—was her name Gwen? I have it right here if I can find it. And this guy is a grandson of the guy who the—Brackett. This guy, his name, I think he lives in Harvard Square. Let's see what it says here, Newcombe of Harvard Square. John Newcombe said he spent his early childhood years at the college. His mother, Jean C. Newcombe taught until they closed. I don't remember that name.

[01:50:46.22] 1955. And I attended this girl's funeral just the first of April. The one in the middle with the orange outfit on, and the other one went to Storer College, the one standing. The picture that you see there, there's a man. That's John Newcombe, and that's Brackett's grandson at the end. The one standing next to him is— oh, what the heck is her name? The two of them live across the street from one another. I guess the premiere, was it in Charles Town or Winchester? I'm not sure.

SW: Yeah, I can't recall where it premiered. I know they're showing it at a few different places.

WP: I beg your pardon?

SW: They've shown it at a few different places, but I can't remember—this one they showed at the Wright Denny Intermediate School.

[01:52:01.21] WP: Oh, in Charles Town. That's in Charles Town, yeah.

SW: Well, what I'd like to do is thank you for your time today. Thanks for sharing all your memories with us.

WP: I appreciate your driving up because in driving back from Harpers Ferry, Sunday, I think we saw you Saturday, that Sunday, I got back to one of these little towns, just back in Montgomery County—no, I hadn't made it to Montgomery County yet, I had cramps in my hands driving. My wife drove the rest of the way.

[01:52:46.25] But she'd had cramps in her legs from just driving a little bit on Saturday. Now, since I've been treated for cancer, I don't know, you know, what is coming—I'm always lacking something. I'm wondering if it was just potassium that I had not taken that weekend.

SW: It's been my pleasure coming out here, and again, thanks so much for helping us out.

WP: I wish I could remember more, but I'm just not as good as I used to be.

SW: Well, there's a lot on here. We have a lot of good information after today.

[01:53:29.19] [End of File]