

Storer College Oral History Project
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (HAFE)
Interview with Jane Davis Reeves by Elaine Eff
April 9, 2014

Elaine Eff: Today is April 9, 2014, and this is Elaine Eff, and I am interviewing Jane Davis Reeves on behalf of the National Park Service for an oral history about Storer College. So, why don't we start—first of all, it's great to be here and thank you for being so willing to participate. Let's start just about you. Tell me when and where you were born, who you are, first of all. Tell me your name and when and where you were born and about your family, and then we'll move on to how you ended up at Storer.

[00:00:46.16] Jane Davis Reeves: My name is Jane Davis Reeves. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the middle child of five. My mother and my father were both born in Maryland: mother, Anne Arundel County, my father, Howard County. We moved out of the city—

EE: Let me ask you first, do you want to tell me what your birth date is?

[00:01:20.16] JDR: My birthday was January 2, 1930. My mother wanted me to be a New Year's child. She said she jumped up and down and did all kinds of things, but that's usually not in our hands. So, the five of us lived in Baltimore. It was during the Depression, and my father lost his job.

EE: Tell me what your father did. Also tell me where you lived in Baltimore.

[00:01:54.25] JDR: We lived on Mount Street in Baltimore, and so we moved to Virginia.

EE: Tell me, well, first tell me what your father did.

[00:02:08.06] JDR: He was just, I can remember he worked at a paste factory. It was during the Depression. So, he lost that job.

EE: First of all, what was your father's name and what is a paste factory?

[00:02:25.16] JDR: I don't. They made paste, I suppose.

EE: How do you spell paste?

[00:02:30.08] JDR: Paste [spells].

EE: A paste factory, how interesting. Tell me his name.

[00:02:37.24] JDR: My father's name was George Edward Davis. His father was a Methodist preacher. Well, it wasn't United Methodist then. It was Methodist Episcopal preacher. His only brother, whose name was Reverend Clarence Davis, was also a Methodist Episcopal preacher. I come from a long line of preachers and teachers.

At the time, when the Depression was in its full, I was born 1930, and we moved to Virginia because my mother's sister had no children. She and her husband worked in Washington, DC: she as a maid—that was Aunt Janie. I was named after her, and he was a chauffeur for a rich family, a rich white family, I'll say, because in those days, the blacks didn't have much. And that is the reason out of the four siblings that I have, my younger sister from—younger than me, Bernice was born in Virginia. All the rest of us were born in Baltimore because when the Depression got better and he got a job, we moved back to Baltimore. So, I started kindergarten in Baltimore. But I suppose he must have found that city living was very difficult for a growing family because my youngest brother, George, was born in Baltimore.

[00:04:35.14] We moved out to a little community called Patapsco Park, about three miles outside of Baltimore. [between North Linthicum and Brooklyn.]

EE: Where was that?

[00:04:49.03] JDR: I think that was still Anne Arundel County, but in those days, we went to—well, I'll just go through. I started school early because I had gone to kindergarten in Baltimore. They just put me in first grade because consequently when I finished high school, I was sixteen years old. So, I entered college at the age of sixteen and graduated at the age of twenty.

EE: Where did you go to high school?

[00:05:26.02] JDR: I went to high school in Annapolis, Maryland, Bates High School for three years. My father was at that time a local preacher.

EE: So, your father made a career jump at some point.

JDR: Yes.

EE: Why don't you tell me about that? That's interesting.

[00:05:46.08] JDR: Okay, when we moved to Patapsco Park, we were members of St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church. My father became a local preacher, then a supply pastor.

EE: What is that?

[00:06:04.28] JDR: At that time, his father died, who was a preacher, Reverend George A. Davis. My father was Reverend George E. Davis. Edward was his middle name. So, we had to move. They assigned my father to his previous father's pastorate because my grandfather died. So, my dad, as a supply pastor, went to his church to become pastor, and this was near Frederick, Maryland, but the place was called Ijamsville with a silent “j.” It was spelled Ijamsville [spells], and that's where we

stayed from my age five to fifteen, and that summer we moved from Baltimore County to Frederick. I had one year to finish high school there in Frederick County.

[00:07:18.24] Now, my father wanted to join the conference, but you had to have a college degree, and my father did not have that. So, he enrolled in Storer College, and we commuted twenty-six miles one way back and forth to Storer College.

EE: Now, you said “we.”

[00:07:44.15] JDR: When I graduated from high school, I went to Storer College, too, and then a couple of ladies in the community wanted to get a college degree, and so they went with us back and forth. We had a car full, just about.

EE: How interesting.

[00:08:05.25] JDR: For four years.

EE: Now, tell me this. How did you even know about Storer College?

[00:08:14.01] JDR: My father. I guess the conference told him there was a college nearby where he could get his degree because he had to have a degree in order to join the Methodist Church and become a pastor. So, he went to that—while I was still in my senior year of high school, then I joined and went down there with him. And my younger sister Bernice two years later, because she's two years behind me. It was unique because everybody knew a father and a daughter were going to school, college together, and there were other retired—well, not retired—other adults in the area of the West Virginia/Virginia/Maryland area that went to Storer, some on weekends just to classes, but my father and I went full time, and we graduated in 1950.

EE: So, tell me what years you attended Storer.

[00:09:25.11] JDR: I enrolled in 1946 and graduated 1950 with a bachelor of science degree. I was the only female in the science department. I wanted to be a doctor. I took premed, but my father talked me out of the way. In those days, you did what your parents told you to do. He said, “You'd better take some education courses just in case you have to fall back on teaching.” So, that's what I did, and I did fall back on teaching, just like he said.

EE: Did you always want to go to college? What made you—

[00:10:12.04] JDR: The reason I went to college is because in my family, my father's side, that was the next step after high school. My father has a sister that was principal of an elementary school in Baltimore.

EE: Which one?

[00:10:29.10] JDR: Aunt Mabel. That was my father's sister.

EE: And what school was she principal of, vice principal?

[00:10:34.28] JDR: I don't know the name of the school, but she was the principal. My father's only brother, when he joined the conference, I thought he went—I remember my dad saying, he gave him the last ten dollars in his pocketbook. He went off to get his BD at—I forgot. I'm having a senior moment—Northwestern, I think. Northwestern University.

EE: Who was this?

[00:11:05.11] JDR: My father's brother, Uncle Clarence. The Davis family believed in education. So, in my family, my children are all college graduates. My husband, we'll get to him, was a teacher in Middletown, here in Harrisburg, a little town ten miles from Harrisburg. He was a teacher. So, my heritage is teachers and preachers.

EE: Did you know of any other or did you ever consider any other school, any other college?

[00:11:42.11] JDR: There was no choice. We were poor as church mice [laughs], and we didn't have the money. In the summer, we would get a job, and that would pay for the tuition. When I went for the first time in 1946, from the high school that I finished in Frederick, the local Elks, I think it's a social club, granted a \$250 scholarship to whomever had the highest, among the graduating class, had the highest average. That was me. So, I got it. So, that paid for my tuition. And in the summer—tuition was \$250—can you believe it now, at what colleges cost, but in the summer, we worked enough to get it, and we got that. We commuted every day.

EE: What other expenses did you have?

[00:12:49.15] JDR: That was it.

EE: Besides tuition. Books, meals.

[00:12:52.24] JDR: Books, yes. No meals. We went back home because it was only about an hour, a little over an hour ride back in Maryland. We went back to Frederick. We lived outside of Frederick in a little place called Centerville. So, that's how we were able to get a college degree.

EE: And tell me about your commute. You were telling me about how you went through three states.

[00:13:18.15] JDR: Oh, yes. That was something. We went through three states every day leaving Maryland, and when we got down to—oh, we went through—oh, I forgot some of the names of the little towns we went through. But when we got down to the bridge, in the beginning, in 1946, we had to go through a mountain when we got to Harpers Ferry because there's train tracks still there, but they built this bridge, and that went into Virginia when we got across from the bridge that says, "Welcome to Virginia." You go around that road, and then you cross the river up at the same river, the Potomac, I think it was. We cross that river and went back to the right, and that took you into West Virginia. So, every day for four years, we went through three states, and that was unique, too. I enjoyed that.

EE: Tell me about your first sighting of Storer, when you first saw it, and how it appeared to you.

[00:14:28.08] JDR: We parked outside the gate. There was a big gate up there with a nice entrance and the words, "Storer College," was it 1856?

EE: '67.

[00:14:43.04] JDR: 1867, but that was there, and it always seemed like hallowed ground. It was dignified. Some colleges, you go into a town, and it's buildings, but there was the campus, and you didn't see it until you went through—you saw it, but you had to go through those gates every day, and I thought that was the way all colleges looked, but they don't look like that now. Oh, I also had the privilege of whenever they needed a substitute teacher at the high school in Leesburg, Virginia, Dean Johnson would send me. I became the teacher's pet. All the way through school, I was the teacher's pet. I didn't make waves. I followed the rules. [00:15:44.24] I'm still a rules follower because if you don't have rules, you'll have chaos. But, anyway, at the end, I don't know where that cup is, but the college had a big silver cup, and every year, they would engrave the name of a student that best represent the ideals of the school, and in 1950, it was my name, Jane Celeste Davis, which I haven't ever seen it. I saw the cup, but it's like an urn, and it was silver, and I think for that year, I was that student because I was a teacher's pet type. [laughs]

EE: Tell me how many students were at Storer when you got there and when you left.

[00:16:43.03] JDR: My graduating class was the largest graduating class up until that time, 1950.

EE: How many came in and how many left with you? And why don't you tell me a little about this photograph that we'll copy?

[00:16:59.18] JDR: I don't know what the enrollment was, and some were not in that picture. But at that time—now that was in 1950, and, of course, in '55, the school closed. Whether the enrollment improved or not, I do not know.

EE: Do you ever remember there being white students on campus?

[00:17:25.16] JDR: No. We had white teachers, but up until that time, all of my education was all black. Everything was separate. When we lived right outside of Baltimore and had to go to high school in Annapolis to Bates High School, we passed through two white communities, but, of course, we were not allowed to attend them. We had to go through them. It's so funny because when integration came, so many people didn't like the idea of busing. Well, we were bused because of education, because of segregation, and now because of desegregation, they [the whites] didn't like that. They thought it was, but that's what we had gone through all those years, segregation and had to commute to another black school. There were no high schools around except—because my father was instrumental in getting a bus to take us to Annapolis so we could have high school.

[00:18:39.19] When my father was in high school age, they went in Baltimore to Morgan Academy. It was an academy. That's where he got his high school education. My mother only finished elementary because there was no high school. So, that's the way my father got his education, but his family was very education conscious, and all of my family are college educated.

EE: Tell me about life in Harpers Ferry. Were you aware of a black-white divide? Were there places—

[00:19:22.13] JDR: Yes, yes. West Virginia still is, in my opinion, not as progressive as some of the other parts of the South. Maryland was Southern and completely segregated, but they were still considered the Union, part of the Union. They never seceded. Virginia did, but I remember we used to go to get ice cream at this drugstore in Harpers Ferry. They served us, but we had to leave. We couldn't sit down and eat there. We had to get our cone at the counter and leave, knowing we were college and everything. And in those days, they were more dignified than they are now because you had professors that lectured, and that, of course, enhanced your vocabulary. [00:20:22.28] I don't know if they lecture any more or not. Dr. Schumaker taught us all about, he taught geography. We had about four or five white teachers. That was my first time of being around whites, other than cleaning their kitchen or something because weekends sometimes I would go and do family work. The year I graduated from college, that summer, I did private family work. I would work anywhere, you know, for income.

EE: At what point did you get employment in your field—well, tell us first what your major was.

[00:21:09.09] JDR: My major was biological sciences, and when I finished college, I was twenty years old, and I sent out applications, Maryland and Virginia and West Virginia. We did our practice teaching in Charles Town, which was four miles from Harpers Ferry, and I went back. I had to stay on campus for some of those

activities overnight, but we went back and forth to Charles Town to practice teaching. So, I sent out to Maryland and West Virginia because I think my certification was with West Virginia and Maryland. I'm not sure about Virginia. I'm not sure. I don't remember. But I didn't get a job that September.

[00:22:09.00] So, I went to Washington, DC to try to get a job with the government. That was in 1950. But then it was the Korean War. Which was the first? Korea or Vietnam? Korea. The teacher that got that job went off to the service. So I was called to teach in Baltimore, Towson, Maryland, in December of 1950. I turned twenty-one while I was there, and that was in Towson, Maryland. I had a female teacher. Some of my students was only two years younger than I because I taught senior high school. Maybe my principal realized that I was not mature enough. I'm not sure, but I guess I went in as a substitute. That June, I was dropped. So, I came to Harrisburg.

EE: So, in other words, did you continue your teaching career elsewhere?

[00:23:27.01] JDR: I came from Baltimore, from Towson to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in June of 1951. I applied here, and I was certified here in Pennsylvania, but I did not get a job. So, I went into the government. I worked at Middletown, which is the Department of the Air Force, and I worked there for fifteen years.

EE: So, why did you come to Harrisburg?

[00:24:04.12] JDR: Well, I came to Harrisburg because my father was sent here to pastor a church here. So, that's how we got to Pennsylvania. He came in June. I was still teaching. After school was over, I came here because I did not get reassigned. And it was kind of segregated here. My husband was from Middletown, and he finished college. He was trained—well, we'll get to my wedding. I was here a good six years before I got married. Let me see.

EE: Well, we want to keep up with teaching and Storer first.

[00:24:52.04] JDR: Okay. I worked at Middletown, the Department of the Navy, for fifteen years, and things began to change socially here. Middletown, from downsizing, closed. That was the Department of the Air Force. That year, I got a job teaching at a junior high school, Edison Junior High, seventh grade science. My salary was \$2,400 a year. So, when a military facility closed, your name goes on a list. The Department of the Navy called me, and I only got one year in teaching. I loved teaching, but the salary difference, I could not refuse, about \$3,600 a year more. So, I went back to the government. That ended my teaching career.

EE: Okay. Let's go back to Storer for what prepared you for your career and just tell me, you were a day student.

JDR: Yes.

EE: So, tell me where you spent your time when you were on campus.

JDR: In class.

EE: Yeah, say that in a sentence, what a day was like.

[00:26:34.08] JDR: Okay. A day at Storer was most class—mostly classes. We had a room in Brackett Hall, which was the female dormitory, and all the day students, some girls from, my best friend from Charles Town, and we would eat lunch there. And at the end of classes, my father's and mine, we would get home. We would get back in the car, go outside the gate where he parked, and go home and back the next day.

[00:27:10.25] Tuesdays and Thursdays was science and lab. That's all I had, but Monday, Wednesday, and Friday was a full day of school. There was no—we lived in the country. There was no other activities available, and those days, blacks could not go to restaurants, and when we went to the movies in Frederick, we had to sit upstairs. This was the 1940s.

EE: What about in Harpers Ferry? What social activities—

[00:27:48.00] JDR: None. We went back home to Maryland. You know, at the end of the school day, we left Harpers Ferry.

EE: Tell me about your best friend in college. Who was your best friend?

[00:27:59.22] JDR: My best friend was Ruby Brown. She was a day student from Charles Town, and Ruby married another one of our classmates, Roper. His name was Russell Roper. He built a house there, and I would always go see Ruby. When we begin to have the reunions, she and I were very close. And when I got married here in Philadelphia, Ruby Brown and Delores Berry came to my wedding in 1956 in Harrisburg. Ruby was my matron of honor, I think. We continued to be friends until she died 2000, in the year of 2000. She was a teacher in Bolivar, which is part of the Harpers Ferry—Bolivar becomes Harpers Ferry. It's a small section there. But, yeah, she lived there. Her husband built their home, and that's where she was buried. But I remember the year 2000 she passed. Delores Barry is still alive, but I haven't gone back to—I haven't been to the reunion in two years.

[00:29:39.20] Another lady in my class was—oh, I know her name. She's on the list. It's going to come to me in a minute. I'm having a senior moment. Well, Mildred Vollin was a year behind me. My sister Bernice is two years younger than I. She was a home ec major, and most of her classes was in Cook Hall, where the home ec students were. I said Delores Berry. I'm trying to think of somebody's name. Who was it?

EE: Well, tell me what classes you took, and how you picked your major.

[00:30:20.27] JDR: All right. I wanted to be a doctor. So, I took all sciences, chemistry. I did very well, only one semester I made all As. I took German. I took Latin. A music class, I did very well in that because my whole family is musical. I played the piano at the end, the last two or three years of college whenever we would have—at noon, we would have—now, what's the word I want? We had a worship service because it was a Baptist school. We had worship service, and when we had the assembly, I would play sometimes.

EE: What would you play? When did you play?

[00:31:07.27] JDR: Hymns, hymns.

EE: On the piano or the organ?

[00:31:10.17] JDR: Piano. They didn't have an organ there. I took organ lessons when I came to Harrisburg. There was no organs in the churches. It was all pianos in Maryland when I was a child.

EE: Were you able to participate in any extracurricular activities, any clubs or sports or choirs?

[00:31:30.10] JDR: I participated the last two years, the choir director needed altos, and I guess he heard me sing in the music class. So, he would have me and my sister stay and be a part of a choir my senior year. He would take us home to Maryland when it was all over. So, he came back and forth just to get us to sing because my whole family can sing or play some kind of instrument. We're very musical.

EE: Was there ever a Glee Club?

[00:32:03.17] JDR: Huh?

EE: Was there a Glee Club?

[00:32:05.19] JDR: Yes. I've got a picture somewhere. It's in that book. I'll show it to you.

EE: Did you participate in the Glee Club?

JDR: Yes.

EE: So, what did the Glee Club do? And did you travel?

[00:32:16.04] JDR: They traveled, but that was before I joined. I didn't join until my last year because they needed altos. And so I got to sing mostly at school, but the choir did travel.

EE: So, when you say “choir,” that's the same thing?

[00:32:33.00] JDR: That's the Glee Club.

EE: Got it. Now, what was your favorite subject and tell me why.

[00:32:38.21] JDR: Biology because I did well, very well. I made an A. Chemistry, I made an A. And all the biological sciences, the students didn't like it because they—in algebra, college algebra, they graded on the curve, and they would take the highest score and then make it A, B, and C as it came down. They didn't like me because my score was 100 all the time. [laughs] I liked science and math, exact courses. I was not good with—you know, I would rather answer a question, “What is the name of the first one-cell animal?” I'd say, “Amoeba.” But if it's a “describe something,” people, that's more aesthetic, I was a scientist. I'm a bottom-line person, and there's one answer, right or wrong, and I'm still that way. So, my favorite subject was the sciences.

EE: Who was your favorite instructor?

[00:33:51.25] JDR: I guess—who was my teacher for college algebra? It wasn't Miss Jemison, but we got along.

EE: Tell me about Miss Jemison.

[00:34:02.19] JDR: She was very strict, and in the beginning, our very first class, we were running around trying to find the right room, and, of course, you get a demerit for coming late. We finally found the right, two or three of us, but we got—she was very strict about that. But it's understandable, the first year, trying to find, you know, where everything was, since we didn't live on campus. But I guess my favorite teacher, I don't remember her name. She taught chemistry. I forgot what her name was. Or Dr. Johnson. He was the dean, and I had a class with him.

EE: And what did he teach?

[00:34:56.29] JDR: I know trigonometry was one. That's the only class I made a C in because I missed it in high school by moving my senior year to Frederick from Annapolis, which was pre-med, college prep. Frederick was only general education. So, I missed trig. Half of the subjects they had in high school I had already had because I left a better school, Bates in Annapolis, to come to Frederick. I wanted to go back there and live with my aunt because all of my family, aunts, cousins, everybody, was from Maryland, and I wanted to live with my aunt in Annapolis and finish my senior year. My mother didn't want to break up the family, she said.

EE: Were your courses that all students were required to take?

[00:35:56.00] JDR: In college? The first year, yes.

EE: And what were those classes?

[00:36:00.24] JDR: Biology, English, geography, religion, you had to take religion. I did well in that, too. I think it was like overall refresher to see how much you did not or did get from high school, and my education in Maryland undergrad [high school] was not up to par. They were supposed to give us separate but equal. It was not equal. I think in elementary school, those teachers were high school graduates. I don't think they finished college. Maybe the principal did, but it was very inferior education, and I didn't know what it was to study because I didn't have to, because I was always the smartest in the class, in a marginally rural people. And when I went to Storer College and students from the north who went to integrated schools was competition, and that's when I hit the books and had to learn how to study just to keep up. But my education, elementary and high school, was very, was not up to par. It just was not.

EE: How would you describe the quality of education at Storer?

[00:37:40.11] JDR: Well, to me, it was wonderful because I hadn't had to study and work. I don't know how it would have stood up against white schools. I don't know. But you get out of college what you put into it, and if you go there to learn, you will learn. I guess that's all I can say.

EE: Can you tell me about any of the teachers that you remember?

[00:38:07.28] JDR: I remember Miss Hyslop. She taught Latin.

EE: Was she white or black?

[00:38:13.04] JDR: She was white. And she would give you—we laughed so much with her. She would give you a question, and she wanted you to get the answer so bad, she would act it out. She would do all kinds of stuff. My father was in that class with me. I made an A, and he made an F. She said to me, “Why don't you help your father?” [laughs] He had four country churches and raising five children and trying to go to college. He barely made it, and I came out with honors. But, in those days, your parents was here up on a pedestal. Now, I don't know. Nowadays they want to be your buddy, but parents should be parents. But I do remember her because she just would do all kinds of—“interfricio”[phonetic] was the word, and she would go say, “What does “interfricio” mean?” and that was “fright.” It meant “fright.” And she went into, she just went all over, fell on the floor and all. “Now what was that?” she said. You almost had to get it. But I remember her. She was so funny. She looked like Olive Oyl, you know, in the cartoons. She was an old-fashioned—we had her, and Dr. Schumaker was white. Miss Hyslop was white. Who else? Dr. Gunther. He was a German teacher. I made A in German, too, the first year, anyway, and B the second, I think. But, one year, I got all As because I had all my favorite subjects. German was one. I made an A in German my third year, and that's when, in the Methodist Church, they have [offered to send me to]

Meharry Medical School. That's the only black school around that I wanted to go to.

EE: And where was that?

[00:40:24.12] JDR: Tennessee? I'm not quite sure now. I wonder if it's still—I don't know. It's Meharry Medical College, and that's where I wanted to go. And the Methodist Church was going to send me there because that summer, the bishop—and we were in an all-black Methodist Church. The Methodist Church North and Methodist Church South couldn't come together to let blacks in. So, they put all the black churches in the central jurisdiction, and we had our own bishops and everything. And the bishop that summer saw my grades and he was going to send me to Meharry Medical School. I think it's Tennessee. It's a southern state, but it wasn't the Carolinas. It wasn't Georgia. [00:41:26.04] It must have been, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But my father again said, “I don't have the money to send you,” and, in those days, blacks didn't get scholarships. Blacks couldn't get loans. Nowadays, it's a good thing because nowadays kids have such debt when they come out of college. It just really ruins their early years. But there was no money for it. So, I had to give up my dream. So, I taught science just the year at Towson and here in Harrisburg, but most of my career has been with the government.

EE: Do you remember any kind of honor code or rules that you had to follow when you were at Storer?

[00:42:24.07] JDR: They had curfew. We had a women's dorm. Men couldn't come in there unless the house mother—downstairs, they had a living room sort of a set-up for that. But now I think it's coed everywhere, even in the dorms, but at that time, no.

EE: You said sometimes you had to spend the night overnight in Harpers Ferry.

[00:42:50.05] JDR: Yes, my last year, to practice teach. We didn't get back in time, you know? My father started in 1949, no, no, no, the year before, 1945. But that last year, he waited and graduated with me because he had to bring me back and forth to school. So, he would take just a course or two, go to the library or sit out, you know, until I got my classes done.

EE: Where did you stay when you spent the night?

[00:43:26.16] JDR: In Brackett Hall with the girls. It was the girls' dorm, and at that time, there were empty rooms. So, I stayed—I remember staying overnight, and I could hear the water at night down, the Potomac River coming. The Potomac and the Shenandoah met right back of the campus, and I always loved the sound of the river. You could hear it. It was at the edge of—John Brown's Fort was right next to Brackett Hall. They later moved it down to the historical area, but at that time, John Brown's Fort was on the campus.

EE: What did its presence, you know—

[00:44:14.02] JDR: History. A part of history. We didn't think about that then. We didn't think about that then, but we always knew it was there, and the story behind John Brown and coming through, hanged in Charles Town, four miles away. Now, my children are fascinated. When we go back there, I had them go down with me two years ago, and they went through all their—there's a plaque now, but Storer College members in the Storer College building down in the historical part, and the last name on the list because we had to send the money in for that, that was my father and I. We were the last ones on the list engraved in brass or whatever that is, the plaques.

EE: Now, tell me about the library. I know we have a great picture of you there. When did you spend time there?

[00:45:16.03] JDR: On Tuesdays and Thursdays because I didn't have classes all day. [telephone rings] I went to the library mostly Tuesdays and Thursdays because we had shop—we had lab day on that morning and some at night, in the afternoon. So, I didn't go all day, like we had to be there at eight o'clock or something and go from class to class because those were lab days, Tuesdays and Thursdays mostly. So, I would spend that time in the library, you know, waiting. We traded books because you had to have, you know, books for everything, but they did have a library, and that's when I would spend my time there in between classes, but it was usually Tuesday and Thursday because I didn't have a full schedule of classes. I just had lab work.

EE: Do you remember which of your teachers had doctorate degrees or what kind of degrees your teachers had at Storer?

[00:46:33.07] JDR: Dr. Schumaker had, was a doctorate. Our dean of instruction, Dean Johnson. Of course, McKinney, who was the president, we called him Dr. (Oh, there's a package in my mail.) Okay. Dr. McKinney was the president. Dr. Schumaker, he had a philosophy, a doctor of philosophy. I think Dr. Gunther, the German doctor, he was white. I don't know whether Miss Hyslop had that or a master's, but I know of at least three. I don't know about Miss Jemison, whether she had. I know she had a master's. I'm not sure about that, but I know at least three had PhDs.

EE: Was Storer College the first time you were educated by white teachers?

[00:47:43.08] JDR: Yes.

EE: Tell me what that meant to you.

[00:47:46.21] JDR: I don't know. They were the authority. They had the information that I wanted to get. So, it was in the summer of my junior and senior year. The Methodist Church, that's how I got my \$250 for tuition the following semester,

the Methodist Church sent me to New York to work in a work camp in the black churches in the Bronx, and my senior year, it was in Yonkers. And in Frederick, there was two white girls. I forget where—Joanne, her name was, I forgot the name of the young girl. She was a Methodist, and she was sent there for the same purpose, and both of them were white, and we were roommates in New York. That's the first, yes, that's the first time I was ever around whites, but they were lovely people, and we got along fine.

EE: Do you remember any special events that took place on campus? Any special lectures or music or programs that were brought on to the campus?

[00:49:10.22] JDR: Football games, but I didn't go to them because I lived in the country and that was on Saturday or weekends. They had a football team, and the choir, of course, which traveled, and the Glee Club.

EE: Did you travel with the Glee Club?

[00:49:27.14] JDR: No, I wasn't a part of the choir then. Only my last year, when the choir director came and got me in Maryland and brought us back because he needed, you know, just my last year.

EE: Tell me about your graduation.

[00:49:41.04] JDR: That was this. This was my graduation. We came down, and the minister, a friend of my father's, he had a country church, too, and a member of his church commuted with us. So, he was there. What was his name? He was from Mississippi. I forgot his name.[Reverend Blackmon] I taught his son how to play the piano. That's when I started teaching piano, my senior year of high school. But he was there, my mother and my father, and that's when they took pictures of me as the graduate. It was a beautiful day in June.

EE: Tell me where the graduation took place and what you remember. Was there a procession? Where did you walk? Where did you go?

[00:50:31.15] JDR: Oh, the procession. In Anthony Hall was the building where most of the classes were, and we marched in, yes. That was a nice day. But, of course, after the service, there was no place socially you could go in the 1950s. Those were—looking back now, on how things have progressed, I realize that segregation was a terrible thing, and many people are still fighting the Civil War. They still are. It's hard to change men's hearts. But we had a social life of our own, and that was sufficient until you knew and saw some other way, like when we came to Harrisburg, of course. You see white people all the time, but down there, it was, you stayed in your community, and children adapt. That's the way it was, you know. You do what you have to do, as Maya Angelou says, and Oprah quotes her often. When you know better, you do better, but if everything, if that's all you've known, you make your peace with it until you can do better, and that's the way

life should always be.

EE: What lessons, what do you think were the great lessons that you learned, you know, maybe both good and bad, from Storer specifically?

[00:52:20.21] JDR: I feel, and I've got to speak about that, as an African American, that it's going to take a long time, but the answer to all of this is education. And I come from a family on my father's side of people that believe in education. I feel like this year, you should be a little better off than you were last year. I believe in progress, and I realize now how things were then and how you've got to prepare yourself for life because life has got to be lived. You have no choice, and you need to do as much as you can to keep moving upward, to better yourself, and then to pull somebody else along that don't know. I find that so much in my church now.

EE: But what about at Storer? Were there any great life lessons that you think began there?

[00:53:43.04] JDR: Only how important education is. When you're young and you live in an all black society—I lost my train of thought. You get satisfied. I realized that I would rather be a little fish in a big pond than a big fish in a little pond, and I feel what I got in my early years, all young people need to know and do and be around people that can lift you up. I don't know if I realized that then because I was very young, even sixteen, starting college at sixteen, and finishing at the age of twenty. I didn't know anything about life and how it is. I lived in a cocoon, and my husband now tells me—he's gone. He said, “Janie, you don't think like black people.” I said, “What do you mean? I grew up in an all black situation. My father was black. My mother was black.” My mother was of mixed race because her father was biracial. My mother's picture's there. I'll show you, a good-looking woman, a very good-looking woman. But I feel like you should pull yourself up from your bootstraps, but my husband explained to me, some people ain't got no boots. I didn't have empathy. I do now. Age and sickness brings that on. And I didn't know how inferior and cloistered a life I lived because I volunteered at the soup kitchen. I was there today. I was almost afraid of street people. I would never—the only people I knew were in our church and in the school. I never saw street people. I didn't—

EE: I have to get you back on track. I want to try to stay historically here.

[00:56:28.07] JDR: But those were the things I've learned, that the answer to life is education and being aware of all that is around you, and the different kinds of people there are in this world.

EE: Describe what the people were like at Storer. Did you walk into a situation where everyone was just like you? Were there a lot of different—

[00:56:52.14] JDR: I didn't notice any difference because we were all dirt poor. I didn't notice any difference. The people that came to college came from a family that cherished and loved education and becoming more aware. So, those were the kind of people I was around all the time, except for church people. They were like me. We came from poor circumstances, but we came from families that boost education. So, I figured they were all like me, and pretty much they were. But here, like in the city, you see everything.

EE: Were you aware of the Niagara movement or the NAACP?

JDR: No, no.

EE: Tell me about that in a sentence, how that whole movement played out on campus.

[00:57:56.07] JDR: I was like a little butterfly [larva] in a cocoon to be a butterfly. I was not aware. I was not aware of the outside society, only my family, which was large. My mother was one of twelve children. My family, the church people, and my college people. I was unaware. I never even thought nationally, statewide. I didn't think about that.

EE: How about, were there activists on campus?

[00:58:31.17] JDR: No, not then. I don't think the protests started until the late fifties and the sixties. Was there an NAACP? My father was active in the community and trying to better black people. He did. When we came to Harrisburg, which was shortly after my graduation from college, they started the OIC, trying to get people—we had no black—in Harrisburg, no black bus drivers, firefighters. They had to fight to get jobs in there. I didn't realize. Back then, all you could do was be a preacher, a teacher, a lawyer. There was just not many—no typists. Nobody was hired to work in an office, none. I just didn't realize socially that that's not okay, but I didn't realize it. I was in a cloistered, safe world.

EE: What places did you value most at Storer?

[00:59:48.14] JDR: Well, I just went to school and back.

EE: Was there places—I mean, close your eyes and sort of take yourself back to being an eighteen year old on the campus. Were there places that you really liked to go and that you liked to spend time, or where you felt very—

[01:00:05.08] JDR: Not for me, being a day student. Now maybe kids that lived on campus the whole time might have participated in stuff earlier than I. Maybe traveling with the football team or something. But I didn't have any access to any social programs because I was a day student, and I went back to my home.

EE: Did you ever go to Jefferson Rock?

[01:00:33.09] JDR: After I graduated.

EE: Use that in a sentence.

[01:00:37.01] JDR: I didn't get to see Jefferson Rock until we started going back for the reunions, and that's when I got down there, downtown also. But it wasn't historical then because John Brown's Fort was on the campus. Now, everything is down there, and they run buses, but, at that time, it wasn't.

EE: Can you describe to me the interior of Anthony Hall? Was that the building that you spent the most time in?

[01:01:06.09] JDR: Yes. It was wooden. It wasn't a brick building. And right on the other side was Mosher Hall, which was the men's dorm. Brackett Hall on the other end of the administration building, one was on the left, and the other was on the right, the administration building in between. Wooden floors, there was no tile, I don't think, not swanky at all.

EE: What were the classrooms like?

[01:01:47.19] JDR: If our graduating class was the largest, there were rooms with desks and stuff, but they were just plain. There was no, the only beauty was outside: the trees, the grass, and all. We had a little gym down at the bottom. There was grass from the entranceway. I thought that was pretty. I loved the entranceway that said "Storer College." And when you walk in, on the left was all grass, and down below, it looked like an old barn is where the gym classes were. And then—it was small. We didn't have many buildings. Cook Hall, Brackett Hall, the library, the science dorm—not a dorm, the science room. That was it. And then Curtis Hall. Curtis was the chapel. They went to chapel on Sundays, but, of course, I never did. Okay, you're looking for something. [pause] ... the campus life, those that lived on campus had.

EE: Say that again.

[01:03:07.03] JDR: We as day students did not have access to any social life, which was minimal because of segregation because we had to leave at the end of the day at the close of the classes. We went back into our own little communities. So, I missed a lot. I missed a lot by not living—and I also feel that I lacked a lot of social skills because I was only exposed to family and church and school, nothing else.

EE: Tell me what you think about the National Park Service—first tell me where you were when you learned that Storer College was closing.

[01:04:05.11] JDR: I was here in Harrisburg.

EE: Can you use my question in your answer?

[01:04:11.04] JDR: When, in 1955, when I learned that Storer was closing and it was because of the Brown v. Board of Education. We knew in a way that pretty soon Storer would be affected because nearby was Shepherd College, that they recommended that the Storer students went to. And so by 1955, I don't know what the time schedule was, how it was planned, they little by little got less students in and stayed long enough to graduate. I think some of the students, and then the others were transferred to Shepherd College.

EE: Did you have inklings that it was happening?

[01:05:13.10] JDR: I just heard the news. We were sort of isolated. Almost all the students at Storer College came from Virginia, Washington, DC, not many from Maryland as I know of, and when we came to Harrisburg, another state, there was nobody around, graduates of Storer, that I lived. There was a couple of kids from Philadelphia. One lived in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. So, we were removed from the scene, and I was not affected so much in the fact that I just heard it was closing, and that it finally did until we began to meet. The twenty-fifth anniversary, we went to Washington, DC, and my father was still alive. I went with him and my mom. That's the first time we had gotten together. That was twenty-five years after I graduated because it was the twenty-fifth of my graduating class, I think. Yeah, I don't know whether it was my graduating class or all of Storer, but most of them, I knew. So, it must have been. That's the first get together twenty-five years after it closed. And I had no contact with the DC people and the Baltimore people because there was no alumni club, a club for graduates, not in this area. I think there was a chapter in Philadelphia, but that's two hours away. [01:07:12.09] So, when I graduated, that was the end of my going until we started the annual reunions that I had.

EE: So, tell me what you think of these reunions. How do you feel about them now?

[01:07:30.29] JDR: In a way, as you get older, I'm eighty-four now, and the classes are getting smaller. Everybody on that top row, which for a long time of the school picture, they're gone. Every one of them. And one of the first ones before our twenty-fifth anniversary, Freddie Johnson, she's on the second row down, she's the brown-skinned girl on the right, she died young. But it's sort of bittersweet because you wonder who's left, and I came very tied to some of my classmates and tried to keep in touch, but only just two or three.

EE: You know, you had a lot of men in your class.

JDR: Yes.

EE: What was that about?

[01:08:27.19] JDR: That was wonderful, wasn't it? They couldn't get jobs. The only thing in the South, and there's so many black colleges in the South because there was nothing out in the corporate world available to blacks.

EE: Was Stanley Spurlock in your class?

[01:08:47.25] JDR: Yes.

EE: Do you remember him being president of the class?

[01:08:53.19] JDR: No. I don't remember that. No, I didn't remember that. Maybe I did then.

EE: Were you aware that so many of the guys who did come, that were in your class came because of the GI Bill?

[01:09:07.28] JDR: Oh, yes.

EE: What effect did that have?

[01:09:12.28] JDR: I suppose that's the reason they came because, let me see, my brother went out and joined the army when I was a senior in high school in Frederick. Yeah, it was in the forties, and I'm sure a lot of them. My sister, Bernice, my younger sister, married a young man from, at Storer, not at that time. She married him later.

EE: Who did she marry?

[01:09:39.15] JDR: Henry Stevens, and he went on the GI Bill. So, many did use the GI Bill to go to college.

EE: So tell me what you think about the National Park Service now taking the place of Storer College?

[01:10:05.16] JDR: I'm glad that it did because it did a lot of—well, Brackett Hall is gone. There's a new building there. And it brings back memories, and it's a place to go to remember your childhood, how interesting and innocent we were, and it's still there. So, I'm glad that they do, that the Park Service took over and made it that because that means there'll be a vestige of some kind of Storer always because there's a Storer building down in the historical place. So, I'm very pleased about that.

EE: And I'm pleased that your story will be part of it, as part of the Storer archive. Is there anything that we didn't talk about? I know we didn't talk about your

husband. I know he's not a Storer boy, but—

[01:11:01.25] JDR: No, when I came here, my husband was in the service, as he got out. I was twenty-one when I came here. I met my husband when I was twenty-four. He was a graduate of Lincoln University near Philly, and his father's a Baptist preacher, and we were introduced. Now, he majored in high school curriculum, secondary ed, but he could not, because of racism, he had—they gave him a job in the elementary school, and he had to go back to school to get elementary education courses.

[01:11:57.04] So, he went—shortly after we were married, he went back to Philly and lived at the Y, went to Temple University, and got his equivalency to become an elementary school teacher, and he got his master's, I think. Yeah, he went to Temple.

[01:12:20.01] My daughter went to Temple. My younger son, Justin, got a football scholarship here in Harrisburg. He went to Villanova. So, all of my children are college graduates. For a long time, we didn't have children, and we adopted Chrissy. . . . When she graduated, she was a good student, very good, except for math, but she was in the accelerated class. She just took math, and math was—I was good in that, but she went to the University. She was in track, and she, her husband, she met her husband at a track meet. He lived right outside of Norristown, Pennsylvania, and she met him at the track. She went to Arizona State and dropped out. She had to do it her way. It took her six years, but she got her degree from the University of Reno.

EE: Would you have wanted any of your children to go to Storer College?

[01:13:39.07] JDR: I became a Pennsylvanian, and I know, if it's totally segregated, no, because it was not—it was separate but not equal. You get a better education except my niece finished Lehigh. Her children—and Justin was going to go to Morehouse. That's a good school, and my niece went to—it's the best female college.

EE: Spellman.

[01:14:17.11] JDR: Spellman, Spellman. And those two, now Justin, if he hadn't gotten the scholarship to Villanova, he was going to go two years to HAC.

EE: What's HAC?

[01:14:31.00] JDR: Harrisburg, it's a junior college, a two-year certificate program, but it was rated very high here, and you could transfer almost anywhere. I was going to transfer him to—down in Georgia. We just called the name of it.

EE: Morehouse.

[01:14:55.13] JDR: Morehouse, thank you. Another senior moment. [laughs] But he got that scholarship. So, he went. So, my three children—my husband was a graduate of Lincoln University, and then he got his equivalency of a master's in Temple.

EE: Have I forgotten to ask you anything? We'll wrap it up now. Is there something about Storer that we should have talked about that I've left out?

[01:15:28.04] JDR: I only have pleasant memories of a very innocent time for me in a very cloistered, safe environment. There was something strengthening and comfortable being with all of your own and having the same goal, education to improvement your way of life, and I think I accomplished that. I accomplished that, and it's wonderful to know that you can meet people from other parts of the country and widen your base, widen your base. It was safe. It was beautiful down there. It is pretty. I think it's a beautiful place, and I have nothing but fond memories of my time there.

EE: Super. Well, I thank you for sharing them with us.

[01:16:30.23] JDR: All right. Good to relive it when you're eighty-four years old, just turned eighty-four in January.

EE: I'd like your secret. Thank you so much.

JDR: You're welcome.

[End of File] [1:16:42]