

Storer College Oral History Project
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Interview with William Vollin by Elaine Eff
3324 Pope Street, Southeast, Washington, DC
April 2, 2014

Elaine Eff: Today is April 2, 2014. This is Elaine Eff, and I am speaking with William Vollin, a graduate of Storer College in 1952. We are recording his memories for the National Park Service Harpers Ferry archives. So, let me ask you to introduce yourself. Oh, we are in his home at 3324 Pope Street, Southeast, in Washington, DC, and I think it's finally spring. So, thank you for agreeing to talk with me, and why don't you tell me about where you were born and where you grew up?

[00:00:51.12] William Vollin: As it was indicated, my name is William Vollin. I was born in Arlington County, Virginia in the same general area where the Pentagon building is at this time. That area was commonly known as East Arlington and was close to what was designated as Queen City. I spent my early childhood days there up until about I was twelve years old, and when they built the Pentagon building, we had to move. We were very poor, and they put—it was my grandmother, grandfather who was an invalid, and my brother and mom, they put us in trailer camps, which is a little known story, up in the area around Columbia Pike in Arlington, and we stayed in the trailer camp for a few years. And then they moved us to another trailer camp in what is now known as Green Valley, which is near Shirlington, and later, we moved to a project, which is located on what is known as Johnsons Hill near Columbia Pike.

I had to walk roughly, when I was in the early elementary school, I had to walk roughly from what is, where the Pentagon is up to close to where the Navy Annex is, which is off Columbia Pike, every day. I started—there was no kindergarten, but I started first grade at five years old and walked every day to that school. I graduated from Hoffman-Boston in Arlington at the age of sixteen. I was in the graduating class of the first graduating class having twelve years at Hoffman-Boston. That was in 1947.

EE: Great. So, what did your parents do?

[00:03:21.18] WV: They were, more or less, did, they were maids. My grandmother worked in the kitchens up in Arlington, and my mother later worked in a laundry. She ironed in a laundry in the Arlington area. And my father abandoned my mother with my brother, who was about a year or two older than me, and I don't remember him at all. So, I saw him years later, but I was in a sort of a single parent situation with my brother and me. So, we were very poor, of course, no electricity, no running water. So, those were the memories of the early days. But I personally always kept strong self esteem and tried to make sure that I, you know, kept myself clean and kept my studies up in spite of.

EE: At what point in your life did you know that you would want to go to

college? Did you know that you wanted to be an educator?

[00:04:50.18] WV: I always—I don't know whether it was providential or not, but I always made good grades in school, but you must remember, that was back during really staunch segregation times, and it was very difficult to maintain. There was no buses. I mean, there were buses, but you could—you know, you'd get on the bus, and you had to go to the rear in Arlington at that time.

[00:05:20.10] I wrote a composition, I remember, in high school. I said I wanted to come back to Arlington to teach, but I've always worked with kids. I started working on the playgrounds, one of the first recreational workers in Arlington when most of the playgrounds were for whites, but they opened up three basic areas in Arlington, and I worked on as a recreational worker when I was sixteen and then later worked when I came home from Storer College.

EE: How did you even know about Storer? What made you decide to go there?

[00:06:02.19] WV: My minister, Reverend Aaron Mackley, was a graduate of Storer College, and he took a group of us up there a couple of years before we graduated to visit. I think it was a cold February day, and I said, "No way would I ever come back to this forsaken place." It was snowy, and that's how I found out about Storer.

[00:06:29.29] And I took a test when I graduated to go to Virginia State, but not having any money, and the church gave me money, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, to go to Storer. I mean, you know, to help us out, because the pastor graduated. So, I got money to at least start my education at Storer College in 1947. That's how I knew about it because we had traveled up to that area.

EE: So how old were you when you started and what do you remember about the beginning of school?

[00:07:09.16] WV: I started, I was sixteen years old when I went to Storer College, and we had to take a train to Storer College. Another young lady who graduated from my class named Ruby Brittan, we both traveled on the train to Harpers Ferry. I had no money to go up that hill to get to the campus, no clothes. I think I had some clothes in a paper sack. I had no suitcase or anything. So, I remember walking up the hill because that was a taxi—that was the black taxi driver who took the blacks up the hill. So, I couldn't afford it. I think it was about sixty cents or whatever. But I just remember walking up that hill to Storer, you know, during that time.

EE: Tell me, do you even remember your first days there? Where did you live?

[00:08:13.29] WV: When I was at Storer, I lived in Mosher Hall. That's where the men stayed, in Mosher Hall. I just had sort of a lonely feeling, you know, when I was at Storer. One of the things I wanted to do, I wanted to play football, but I never had

actually—I had played football like sandlot football, and I was very fast. I knew I was a good athlete. So, I did, I joined the football team in '47 and made, I think, first string in the first year I was there. So, I found some camaraderie there.

[00:09:01.11] I had no problem with the academics there at all. I wanted to be a physical ed major because I wanted to coach when I came back, but, of course, there was no physical ed major. And one of the things that made me not want to go into physical education was zoology. I studied the first chapter, and when you had to classify the histolytic gingavata [entamoeba histolytica] and I decided that—I think I made a C after digesting the entire chapter, and I said “uh,” one chapter.

EE: What was that you had to dissect?

[00:09:42.11] WV: The histolytia gingavata, which was a one-cell animal [laughs], and the different phylums and orders and that kind of thing. And I see that it was just Chapter 1, and I think being in physical ed, you have to take a lot of courses almost like premed. I had a basic mind for history and business, but science just was not my thing. So, I changed over eventually to English.

EE: Were you preparing from the very start to be a teacher? What did you think your career would be?

[00:10:20.22] WV: I wrote—I wanted to come back and teach in Arlington, but not, I was not interested necessarily in English, but I just wanted to teach eventually because I had a love for children.

EE: So, tell me what degree you did get.

[00:10:40.04] WV: I got a—in 1952, as I mentioned. I went down in '47 '48, and I ran out of money. And I worked during the summer and I worked the first semester of the next year and went back to Storer. In 1952, I got a bachelor of art in English in 1952.

EE: How did you afford to complete all four years?

[00:11:13.08] WV: A little bit of money from the church, from Grandma, and I also worked on campus. I cleaned a couple of rooms in Anthony Hall to supplement my—and with the grace of God, with some of the—Mr. Hazelwood was a business manager at that time. You would have to get a pass to take your test, and I would go and sometimes plead to him to let me get my pass so I could, phew, so I could take my test, and he always helped me.

EE: Do you remember what the tuition was?

[00:12:07.06] WV: I don't remember, no.

EE: So, it wasn't really scholarships. It was—

[00:12:12.22] WV: No, it was like a grant. It was like a supplementary grant. You'd get so much per month, which went towards your tuition and your expenses there.

EE: So, once you graduated, how were you prepared for the work world after that?

[00:12:35.05] WV: It was during the Korean conflict. I had to constantly get the waivers to stay there, and I graduated in June and went into the army in August of 1952, and I went to Fort Eustis, Virginia, which is an interesting story. When I went to Fort Eustis, Virginia, I did my basic training, and I noticed that all the Negro troops were being put into truck driving, where they'd have to drive the ammunition trucks or the supply trucks in Korea. And as soon as I finished basic training, I was really very aggressive and alert. I went to CNA which is classification analysis and indicated to the major general, saluted him courteously, that I had training. I could type. I had a college degree, and it concerned me that all the Negro troops were being put in truck driving school, and all the whites were being sent to T school to get technical training. I had a concern about this. Interesting enough, he cut orders on me to go into a supply room as a supply clerk, 3835. I wore a Class-A uniform most of my two years there. I stayed in a [inaudible] [00:14:25.26] room. I didn't have to pull KP or guard duty and worked there for most of my two years when things were real hot in Korea. So, that was, so I've always been a very aggressive, call it militant believer in the rights of people, no matter what their race, creed, or color is, and I've always believed that. I've never felt that I was inferior to anybody, and I've tried to promote that among people I meet and among my kids. I think that's what I've tried to practice as a teacher, as a counselor, as a principal.

EE: So, tell me, when you left the military, what did you do?

[00:15:14.03] WV: When I left the military—I married in 1953 to my wife. We got married while I was in the service. And when I left the military in 1954, it was very difficult getting employment. I remember starting as a, what I called the Injustice Department because the only thing they had there was a GS-1 messenger or elevator operators, and I was a messenger at the Justice Department, and I think I was—and the idea of messenger was to deliver mail, but most of the messengers there was not only delivering mail, but they were going and getting lunches and doing a lot of those kind of things. So, I rebelled against that kind of thing and told them, “My job description calls for me to just deliver mail.” So, I started converting the messengers into doing what they're supposed to do as messengers and not to be more or less flunkies.

[00:16:35.22] So, I stayed there for a while. In the meantime, I went back to school. I started at Howard for a while under the GI and worked under Dr. John Hope Franklin. I don't know whether you're aware of him. He was my advisor because I wanted to

get a master's in something, and he was my advisor, a fantastic man. I used to go over to his house on Saturday, sip his tea, and just talk history. I was beginning doing a history of the Negro in Arlington, and then he left, and I never completed it. I just took notes on it and stopped—I tried to apply for teaching, but they did not recognize Storer College in secondary.

[00:17:37.05] So, I left Howard, and I eventually went to the University of the District of Columbia and received a bachelor's of science degree in elementary education. I have the degree somewhere around upstairs. And then I applied to do some substitute work in Arlington and eventually landed a job in 1961 in Arlington as an elementary school teacher in Langston School. A couple of years later, I went to, I felt I needed some, if you pardon the expression, I felt I needed some white credentials. So, I received a master's from George Washington. I started to do it in counseling. So, I received a dual major in counseling and in administration from George Washington and spent thirty years in Arlington as a teacher, a counselor. I was one of the first elementary counselors in Arlington, Virginia, and got on the track with administration. I guess I thought I could be an interesting token because I was a good teacher.

[00:19:22.10] In 19—when was it? '70? I think '71, I don't know. I became principal of Glebe Elementary School. I don't recall the exact year—I'm going to have calculate back—and stayed there for seventeen years, which was another interesting story. Glebe was a consolidation of Page and another, Langston school. I think I mentioned I taught at Langston School. Okay, I taught at Langston. When they integrated, it went on to become—then Langston to Reed. Then I became a counselor, and then eventually I think in '71, I have to get that sequence right, I became principal of Glebe Elementary and stayed there for seventeen years.

[00:20:25.01] And I mentioned, Glebe was the combination of two, a black and a white school. I was the second principal there. They had another black principal who didn't stay. When I went there, there was like a white flight out of that school. And I just turned it around. We did some good things there. I stayed there for my school career.

EE: And what year did you retire?

[00:20:57.01] WV: '91.

EE: You had a good long career. So, you said that the schools did not recognize the Storer degree.

[00:21:12.03] WV: In secondary education. I think they did in elementary education.

EE: So, then you went and got another degree in—your BA was in education.

[00:21:23.24] WV: In elementary. So, I changed over to the elementary education, but I got

quite a hassle from the state. Prior to getting that degree, I would take a course and then I would hear back, "You've got to take another course," and I was just frustrated. And then I decided I would just go to—it was actually DC Teachers at the time. It's now the University of District of Columbia. And I went there and got a degree in elementary education.

EE: So, you had really two degrees in elementary education.

[00:22:03.01] WV: No, my first degree was in English.

EE: And that was not recognized?

[00:22:08.18] WV: The secondary was not recognized by the state of Virginia at that time. It wasn't accredited.

EE: So, let's talk about getting—applying to Storer. We found this wonderful application that you have here, which I love looking at, and you might want to sort of tell us a little about it, what you remember about applying to Storer.

[00:22:29.11] WV: I don't remember applying at all. My minister was—I don't remember actually ever filling out an application for Storer at all. Maybe I did, but I don't recall filling out an application or how much it cost or anything at all. The first year I was at Storer, when you said you wanted me to say something about football, the first year we played Elizabeth City, and I did a fairly good job as a halfback, a running back, and they offered me a full-time scholarship to go to Elizabeth City to play football. And really, I had no inkling of ways—how is it? What is it? So, I didn't accept that, and I mentioned to my wife, she's lucky because if I had gone to Elizabeth City, she would never have had the privilege of meeting me at the time.

EE: Now, we're talking about Elizabeth City, North Carolina?

[00:23:41.04] WV: Uh huh. Yeah.

EE: So, when you went to Storer as a freshman, how many students do you think were at the whole college?

[00:23:48.05] WV: We had, I would say, four or five hundred at that time when I went. A minimum of five or six hundred or so went to Storer at that time.

EE: And how many were there when you graduated?

[00:24:05.22] WV: I would say a total, roughly no more than two, three hundred.

EE: What happened?

[00:24:12.20] WV: There were always rumors about the school would close, you know, and that didn't help any. There was never actually—I think had I known, I would have really started some kind of student movement or going to the historically black ACBC [?] or whatever it is to try to see what we could do to preserve it, but the deans, they never enlightened us, the students, as to actually what's going to happen in '52. Of course, it closed in '55. I graduated in '52. But it gradually decreased. I just felt that there should have been more aggressiveness on the part of the administration to at least let the students know and seek out some possibilities. That has really bothered me all these years. That school in such a beautiful area, a breathtaking area, couldn't at least be a junior college. So, I guess I'll go to my grave with that. That has bothered me a lot, that the leaders didn't do more to... I know the State removed their funds, but I'm sure that something could have been done.

EE: Was there any activism on the campus at all that you were aware of?

[00:25:51.24] WV: I don't even think the students were apprised of, as far as I know of, anything at all. You'd just hear rumors about it closing.

EE: What was the male/female ratio at the school when you went? You were going right after the one war.

[00:26:12.13] WV: I think it was maybe like two-thirds/one-third. I don't know. There weren't that many—

EE: Two-thirds—

[00:26:17.29] WV: Female. But I don't think there were—there were more females than males there... At Mosher Hall, I don't know how many it held—they had most of the males there, three floors.

EE: And what was the black/white ratio?

[00:26:37.28] WV: I don't remember having any white students there at all. We had white faculty members.

EE: Do you remember having to pay for books?

[00:26:51.15] WV: I had a buddy named Clarence Earl Jowls. My first day there I walked into my room, I think it was on the third floor, and this little guy was there, and he looked at me, and I looked at him. And he was a veteran. I guess probably it must have been World War II, I suppose. We became buddies. He used his GI rights to buy books. I could not afford any books at all [laughs], you know?

EE: So, what did you do?

[00:27:31.21] WV: He bought my books for me under his bill, yeah. I think maybe later on I had a few dimes to buy books. Of course, books weren't a hundred dollars apiece like they are now. And I was like pretty studious. I mean, I'd get somebody else's books and study the day before the test, you know, [laughs] and pass the test. You know, growing up black and you didn't ask this question, you really have this sense of, an unconscious sense of inferiority, that's sort of embedded in you because—and you don't really—it took me later to think of myself as intellectual and smart, you know, because you don't think of yourself as that because it's embedded in you, but I knew years later that I must have been. I rarely studied anything. I mean, I just, you know, English, history. I wasn't that great in math but whatever. You know, I could have become a doctor, a lawyer. I could have done anything I wanted to do, you know, at all, if I pursued it. But it took me a while to realize, and it really was very prevalent to me when I went to George Washington, and it was a breeze. [laughs] Everybody was taking, we had to do this comprehensive or something, and we had three or four questions or five to develop out of the ten, and I had this book you write in, you know, those little books to write in. I was out of there in maybe a half an hour.

EE: What were the students, what was the intellectual atmosphere like at Storer College?

[00:29:23.26] WV: They had some bright students there. They really had some very bright students there. It was a family atmosphere at Storer, I thought.

EE: Tell me, what did you get involved in other than the classes. Were there any clubs? Were there social activities?

[00:29:54.25] WV: Not too many. They didn't have any fraternities there at all. I suppose other than the sports, I didn't get involved in too many other activities at all. I was almost a loner in the sense that I never smoked. I never drank. You know, I wanted to take care of my body and keep clean. I never, I just kept my eye on the prize, I suppose. There was some drinking there and some smoking, a lot of card playing at night, but I never—not that I was antisocial. I never got involved in those kinds of things at all. I just...

EE: Do you remember there being rules? Like rules of conduct or honor code?

[00:30:56.18] WV: Well, with the girls now. [laughs] When we went to see the girls, you had to go over there and ask them to come down the steps, you know, that kind of thing. When you danced, you had to stay about ten feet from them. [laughs] They watched you. There was some rules there. I mean, they had some. And we had to go to vespers on Sundays over at the chapel over there on Sundays. That was required to go there. There was a rule you had to go to vespers. And they had rules, you know, about visiting and getting in the dormitory, but, you know, at that time, it wasn't like now. You just did what you had to do. I don't remember anybody getting suspended or getting in trouble or that kind of thing.

EE: So, tell me how it is, how you met your wife, and tell me about her, when she appeared on the scene, and how you met her.

[00:32:01.20] WV: Ah, you take me back. My buddy, I had a buddy named George McClaren [?], who was walking a girl. My wife lived in town. She had to take a bus to go in town. And he told me he was walking with another girl, and she had a buddy with her. I said, "Okay, George, I'll go with you." So, we had to walk down. There was a drugstore down there where they had the bus stop, down at campus. So, I walked with this girl. I'd seen her around.

EE: What year was this?

[00:32:33.12] WV: '48, '49. She came in the '48-49 year, but I wasn't there until the second half of that year. So, it must have been close to '49. So, my buddy George kissed the other girl. So, I was going to smooch on Mildred, but she didn't go for that. [laughs] So, anyway, then we were in music class together. Mildred was very studious. I mean, she was an A student, and I was in music because I had to take music appreciation, and I didn't know a whole note from a whatever. I was a big time sports guy. Test time come, I look on her paper, you know, during test time. And I sat beside her, this cute little thing, and when test time came, [laughs] I glanced over to try to see what the whole note filled in. She covered her paper up. So, at that point on, I played a couple of practical jokes on her like some guy in the dormitory said that he was in love with you, and I sent the guy down. So, we finally, you know, became buddies later on when she wrote me some note over there, "When you come back in after Christmas, we can start." So, we became good friends after that. She was a real nice person and has been a fantastic wife, sixty years at least, you know, a good mother, grandmother.

EE: So, she did not live on campus. Where did she live?

[00:34:46.19] WV: In town. She lived in town on like a farm area. People had adopted her. Her dad—her mom died when she was ten. She was from Little Washington, Virginia. Her dad brought her and her four sisters up here. He was with the races and abandoned them, and those girls had to make it on their own. So, when my wife was about ten years old, the people, Mr. and Mrs. Cromwell Hall in Charles Town got her when she was ten and raised her like on a little farm outside of Charlestown, and that's where she stayed with them, was raised by them. And she had to take her bicycle, she said, about a mile or two up to the road where she'd get a bus to go in to high school. She graduated, I think, cum laude, and she worked in the summertime with some white people where she made some money during the summer. She'd ride her bicycle. That's where she got her summer money from, for her to go to school, for her own tuition. They had to drive eight miles so she could get down to go to college. So, that's—

EE: What was dating or courtship like? Where did you go? Was there a

black/white divide? Where could you go? Did you stay on campus? Did you go into town?

[00:36:32.10] WV: Pretty much, pretty much on campus, but I'd go visit her on Sundays. I'd walk that two miles around that country road to catch a bus up there and walk around that road and have, you know, would eat with them and then walk back. Sometimes, the man that adopted her would take us back to church or somewhere in the evening so I could get my bus back into, go back to Harpers Ferry. So, there was not much—I guess I was sort of a square when it came to dating and courting, really. I was like, those guys were way ahead of me. So, we could go over there—when they came over, we could go over there and visit. We'd go over there and visit the girls over there, and I'd go and visit her on Sundays.

EE: Was there any social life on campus? Was there activities to bring students together?

[00:37:30.09] WV: I suppose there were, but I just can't recall too many. I think they would have a dance or so down there at like the dining hall down under Brackett Hall. There was like a dining room down there, and they would have some social activities down there. And then, of course, football was a big time or basketball time. They would have games. We'd have our bonfires. Before every football game, we'd light a fire.

EE: Where did you do that?

[00:38:05.09] WV: On the campus somewhere. We had a big bonfire. And this story, you can probably take out of the record, but there was a beautiful thing from Robbinsville, North Carolina, who was a freshman. And my wife was like, she was a junior or a senior. Her name was Carrie Purvis. So, we went to—it was the night before the football game, and I went to the bonfire with Carrie. My wife had to sew up my jersey that night. I mean, Mildred, and she took it home, of course. A big game the next day, and she found out from one of her friends that I went to the bonfire with Carrie. I didn't know she had found out. So, when I went over to Brackett Hall, she came down the steps with my jersey teary-eyed. [laughs] She said, "Well, I'm very disappointed in you," and I took my jersey. I tucked my little head down. [laughs] And guess what? At the football game, I had to walk her off the field and give her chrysanthemums on the car. [laughs] So, my buddy and I, Willis, the co-captain, we go walking across the field. I said, "Oh, my goodness. Would you give her the flowers?" He said, "No, you give them yourself," you know? So, what you see is she was angry with me. I had to hand her the flowers [laughs] that day.

EE: Now, explain to me why you had to hand her the flowers and what she was doing in the car.

[00:39:55.18] WV: She was Miss Homecoming, and I was the captain of the football team, and

so that was the, you had to present them flowers during that time. So, that's why I was taking her the corsage. So, I mean, the chrysanthemums or whatever they were at that time. So, she took them and marched on back off the field, and I think, during that game, I think I made an outstanding run to win the game or set it up or something during the game. [laughs] But that night at the homecoming dance, I told my buddy, another one of my buddies, to make sure she gets some dances in, you know, because she was angry with me. So, that night at the dance, I'm not much of a dancer, but when Nat King Cole came on, "For all we know, we will never meet again," I eased over there. [laughs] The rest is history.

EE: Oh.

WV: [laughs]

EE: So, what were you doing hanging out with Carrie Purvis?

[00:41:03.21] WV: Well, she was there on campus, and my wife was off campus. [laughs] So, that's the story.

EE: That's a nice story. That's a very nice story. I'm glad it worked out. So, who was your date for homecoming?

[00:41:21.05] WV: For the homecoming dance?

EE: Yeah.

WV: Carrie was there with another guy. [laughs] We made up during the homecoming dance. That was an interesting sideline there.

EE: So, did you get engaged? How did you decide to get married?

[00:41:38.10] WV: Not until by the time I was going to the Army. She came down here because it was hard finding a job. She came down here, too, and stayed with an aunt over in Northeast, and that's where we started seeing each other. And we became engaged, I think, as soon as I went into the Army, I think. I guess it must have been in '53. I went into the Army.

EE: And you came out.

WV: I came out.

EE: That's all good. So, let's go back to school a little. Tell me who you remember, the faculty. What was your favorite subject? Did you have any favorite instructors?

[00:42:38.04] WV: Okay. [pause] It's difficult to remember names, and I do have a book

upstairs with all of the faculty members in it for your information, but I—I had an English person there. I cannot remember his name right now. Most of the instructors were very good. I can't remember too many of their names at all. I don't remember names.

EE: That's all right. Were there any classes that you particularly liked?

[00:43:29.15] WV: I had a course in journalism, and I can't remember the instructor's name. And we had to do a paper, my buddy George and I. We had to produce a paper. The class had to produce a paper, like at least four pages, and have it, you know, by a certain time. So, we had weeks to do the paper. George and I hadn't done our paper. We stayed up all night. At that time, you didn't have all of the computers and things. George was typing on these long sheets, and I was dictating, you know, the sports, the editorials, this, the different things, putting this paper together. We stayed up until four or five o'clock in the morning for our journalism class, and the paper was due like, doing it in classtime.

[00:44:30.24] So, I called the paper *The Storer Arrow* and had a little arrow straight to the mark. [laughs] Our paper won first place, the best paper there. It had all the different sections in the paper. So, that was—I enjoyed the journalism. I think the lady's name was Ms. Bannerman who had that class. I'm not sure of her name.

EE: Is there anybody who everybody stayed away from? Were there teachers who were the terrors?

[00:45:10.22] WV: I think Mr. Goutwall was—I don't know what he taught. I don't know whether he taught math or whatever. He was kind of like—people kind of stayed away from him. But Dr. Schumaker, he was a good teacher. He was a nice man, too nice. And the thing that was on my mind, you know, people used to cheat in his class, and he would go to sleep or he would walk out.

EE: What did he teach?

[00:45:45.23] WV: History, social studies. And even during that time, as a student, I thought he was doing the students a disservice, and I remember that. Why would he do that? Why would he just allow? You know, he would walk back in and books would drop all over the place. And even during that time, I said, "He thinks he's being maybe liberal, but I think he's doing a disservice to the students by allowing them to cheat in class." Dr. Schumaker was like, I guess he was a nice liberal guy, but he didn't, I didn't think much of him.

EE: What was the black/white ratio of teachers? Do you remember?

[00:46:32.27] WV: I remember Mrs.—what was that lady's name? Hyslop, Mrs. Hyslop was a French and Spanish teacher. Dr. Schumaker, I don't remember, and then Prof. Wolfe was the librarian, and he didn't teach when I was there. He was the

librarian. I don't remember but three white teachers during the time I was there. I imagine before there may have been more. It was predominantly black teachers at that time in music and social studies. And then there was the biology teacher. I cannot remember her name. She was an excellent biology teacher.

EE: Was it Miss Jemison?

WV: Oh, my goodness. A fabulous lady.

EE: Was that her name?

WV: Uh huh.

EE: Tell me about her. A lot of people have talked about her.

[00:47:22.29] WV: Oh, my goodness. She was a jewel. Any time she'd give me a B in biology, she must have been a jewel because I didn't do too much of anything.

EE: Now, was she white?

WV: No, she was a black lady, a fabulous lady. Yeah, I loved her, a beautiful lady. I think her husband was a business manager, Mr. Jemison. I had a professor—I took Shakespeare. Dr., I have those names upstairs in a book, but he was really—he would get so excited, he would jump on top of the desk, and then he'd say, "I'll jump on this one." He was doing the Shakespeare stuff. He was quite a professor. I think he came from Virginia State. His name has escaped me, but he was quite a teacher. If you leave a blank there, I'll get his name for you.

EE: Now, is he white or black?

[00:48:24.00] WV: He was black. A little old guy. He came from Virginia State.

EE: Now, didn't Storer become Virginia State?

[00:48:33.06] WV: No, Virginia Union. All of our records went to Virginia Union. They have a Storer building down there now, which I visited. There was a dormitory named Storer down there. All of our records. So, if I needed any records, I'd have to get them from Virginia Union.

EE: And where is that?

WV: In Richmond.

EE: Now, have you gone there to visit actually?

[00:48:55.07] WV: Yes, yes.

EE: What is the presence of Storer there?

[00:48:58.18] WV: Other than—they've got a little plaque there for Storer College and a building in recognition of Storer College. Other than that, I don't know.

EE: Why do you think Storer College is so forgotten, or do you? I mean, am I right?

[00:49:18.07] WV: Yeah, people—when you say “Storer College,” they don't—they don't even know where, how, who. [aside] Sorry about that.

EE: You're fine. How do you feel about the Park Service taking over the facilities?

[00:49:41.01] WV: They've been very cooperative to the alumni.

EE: Can you use the Park Service in your answer?

[00:49:47.10] WV: The Park Service has been very, very cooperative to the Storer alumni. Whenever we have meetings up there, they've been—we have our picnics. We have our meetings, and they have been just very, very gracious to us, and certainly in no way fault the Park Service for that.

EE: Do you remember anything about dorm life? You lived in Mosher. Tell me about Mosher. How was it decorated? I mean, did you have a roommate?

[00:50:32.20] WV: Yes. I had four roommates the first year. There were four of us during my first year at Storer. It was—Storer College was just a very barren dormitory. I mean, you had cold water in the winter [laughs], probably hot water in the summer. I mean, it was just a basic, it was a basic dormitory. It was not anything. We had a shower at the end of each hallway, you know, and small rooms. Nothing, just a barren dormitory.

EE: Tell me what your room looked like.

[00:51:19.13] WV: I mean, the first room I was in, they had bunk beds, the first room with four people in the room. I think the second year, there were two of us, and, finally, my senior year, I got the big room on the front there. My buddy George and I shared that room. That was a good room. But the rest of it, they were just small dormitory rooms with not any—I don't remember any equipment in it at all, like today. It was just a basic room. As I said, when I went in, I don't remember the water hardly ever being hot at all. And, of course, I played football, and I'd come back and—and that's why I say when I went in the Army, I breezed through the Army. We had hot water and cold. It was just a dream, two years in the Army. After you survived Storer College, you could make it in the Army.

EE: So, did you play football the whole four years you were there?

[00:52:27.17] WV: See, I didn't come back one year. So, I played the first year, and then I played—the first year was in '47. I wasn't there in '48. I played in '49. I played three years there.

EE: And what kind of teams did you play? Who were the arch rivals?

[00:52:50.14] WV: We had, it was called Eastern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, EIAC. Okay, in that time, you had Norfolk State, which was smaller then. You had Elizabeth City. You had Miners Teachers College, which is now UDC. Cheyney, Pennsylvania.

EE: How about Bowie?

[00:53:38.16] WV: We played Bowie in basketball, not in football. Another school in North Carolina—two more schools in North Carolina, I can't remember, but one where there's a fort way down in North Carolina, I can't remember. Two other schools in North Carolina we played. I can't remember them now.

EE: Who was the big rival? Was there one big team that you really liked to beat?

[00:54:13.22] WV: No. We didn't beat hardly anybody at all. I mean, we were just—we might win homecoming. One year, in '49, we had veterans there. I mean, a lot of veterans in '49, and we won most of the games in '49. But after then, we might win the homecoming, but that was about it.

EE: Were there any other really big events besides homecoming?

[00:54:44.11] WV: You know, they had some musical events. They would bring different people up there for musicals, different artists up there. I forgot that project periodically we would have. I can't recall too much else going on there.

EE: Do you remember the president when you were there?

[00:55:15.24] WV: Dr. McKinney was there when I was there the first year, a fantastic man. After then, we had Dean Johnson acting and that kind of thing. But Dr. McKinney was just an outstanding person.

EE: How did you get to know him as a student?

[00:55:37.17] WV: They invited us over to the house when you first come in. You'd go over to the, they had a reception for all the students. And then Dr. McKinney, he was a fan of mine because I was a good football player. I remember scoring a touchdown, and he ran ON the field to shake my hand. [laughs] He was just a

personable, just a great person. After then, the administration kind of diminished, I think, in terms of a true vision administration after Dr McKinney.

EE: What was happening in the town racially? Were you aware of civil rights issues in your own community?

[00:56:32.25] WV: I don't remember having any incidents at all. I remember there was a—down in Harpers Ferry, they had a movie, a big house, and they expected the blacks to go upstairs. I think that building may be still there that they had. They had a Rathbone Drugstore there, and I don't remember any incidents. They were very nice people, Mr. and Mrs. Rathbone. And when we went to the movies in town, in Ranson, I believe, there was a certain section that blacks were supposed to sit on. But when we went up there, we did not obey that at all. I don't know whether we integrated it or not, but we just didn't, as students, we just sit pretty much anywhere we wanted to sit. But I never remember any hostile incidents in Harpers Ferry at all during the time I was there.

EE: Was there any kind of residuals from the Niagara movement?

[00:57:58.17] WV: You mean, as far as the—

EE: Awareness of kind of the roots of NAACP.

WV: During that time?

EE: Yeah.

WV: Not that I, I don't recall any racial incidents during the time that I was there at all or any problem with anybody calling derogatory names around at all. I used to go downtown to get the guys. They used to pay me to get their beverages downtown at the store. That's where I would make my money. I don't remember any time—what's the name of that store? I'm sure that [Stanley] Spurlock could tell you 'cause he... but I don't remember any incidents at all. People, I guess West Virginia people are kind of different. That's why they broke away from Virginia, I suppose.

EE: Do you remember where the auditorium was, where special events took place?

[00:59:07.18] WV: We used to have some cultural activities in the auditorium. I just can't recall. Maybe [Elbert] Norton can tell you. Other than commencement or baccalaureate or—I don't remember. I think we used to have to go over to Chapel or over to the other place in vespers. I don't remember any—

EE: Where'd you graduate from? Where was the graduation?

[00:59:36.27] WV: Right in that auditorium. We had to line up down by Brackett Hall. It was a beautiful day. The trees were in bloom. We walked up...My wife and I walked up hand in hand to that graduation in Anthony Hall. That was quite a day. That's where we had everything. You had classes there. The business office was there, and all the activities were pretty much in Anthony Hall. Except Cook Hall had the home economics people over there.

EE: What other buildings do you remember?

[01:00:21.10] WV: Well, you know, you had the library there. You had—

EE: What did you do in the library? Did you use it much?

[01:00:31.00] WV: Yeah. Prof. Wolfe had a good library program there. It was a nice library there. Of course, you had the library, and then over there, you had Miss Bird, you had a house over there where Miss Bird stayed. She was the lady matron over there, Miss Byrd. That was right near Brackett Hall. And then, of course, you had Cook Hall. And, of course, the barn down there, the gym, and then Mosher Hall, which is torn down now. Have you been on campus recently? Mosher Hall is on this side. As you come in, you see those stones there. That's where, I guess you know that's where Mosher Hall was at that time, which was, I was sorry to see that building get destroyed. I had a lot of memories. We used to say, "Give a yell. Give a cheer for the boys who drink the beer in the basement of old Mosher Hall" and then we'd go around and around.

EE: I thought you didn't drink.

[01:01:42.13] WV: I said, "For the boys who drink," not me.

EE: So, what was that, just a drinking song?

[01:01:48.02] WV: Yeah, for those that drink. But—

EE: Do you remember any other of the songs, any of the things that were popular at the time?

[01:02:01.27] WV: Not really. But I guess one of the most memorable times was Homecoming Week, homecoming time, and the homecoming dance, and dances after the games.

EE: Do you remember John Brown Days?

[01:02:22.28] WV: When they had the fort on campus? They had it on campus, you know, before they put it down, and they used to have—Storer people used to—they used to hire Storer students to monitor John Brown's fort, if I recall. I never did, but I remember it on campus.

EE: Where was that located?

[01:02:44.22] WV: That was right in the area—I think it was sitting right on the right in a section of Cook Hall, back down there, where they have this big building now, but it was in that area over there somewhere on campus beyond Anthony. It was sitting right in there when I got to school.

EE: Do you remember anything like May Day, any other holidays, anything that you celebrated there?

[01:03:18.18] WV: I don't remember us doing much celebrating of any holidays at all.

EE: What were your favorite places on campus or places in Harpers Ferry that you liked to go?

[01:03:31.14] WV: I don't remember any places now. I was pretty much a campus person.

EE: Did you ever go to Jefferson Rock?

[01:03:37.22] WV: Well, that's a whole new show. [laughs]

EE: Oh, yeah? Tell me about that.

[01:03:44.07] WV: Well, all the guys used to take, go down and look at the pretty flowers with their girlfriends. [laughs] Oh, boy, yeah. And we used to stroll down there to Jefferson Rock. It's very pretty and look at nature. It's very beautiful.

EE: You were in an incredibly gorgeous location. What was your kind of sense of participation or awareness of like the water? Tell me about it. Describe it.

[01:04:16.07] WV: It was just magnificent, the Shenandoah running down there. I don't think you have much appreciation then as you do now, when you think about it, but if you stroll down the field, down there to Jeffersons Rock, around that area, and just—it was just, you know, I don't think I had as much appreciation then as I do now for that area. You're talking about somebody who's like sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. I got to appreciate it years later. But I always enjoyed the campus during the springtime and summertime. I mean, spring, when it was—there used to be beautiful trees right on the walkways in the campus area.

[01:05:15.22] WV: But we also, we never had a football field there, as you probably know. And right in front of Anthony Hall, that little hill there? That's where we had to practice football. And we played our games up at, I guess, Harpers Ferry High School up there. So, we had to practice our football right on that hilly place over there.

EE: It was really a place where you made do with what you had. What did you

call the church where you went for vespers? Did you call it Free Will Baptist?

[01:05:57.01] WV: I don't know. What was that place?

EE: Curtis Memorial?

[01:06:01.12] WV: It was Curtis Memorial.

EE: You never called it anything. [laughs]

WV: I never called it anything at all.

EE: What did you do at vespers?

[01:06:08.21] WV: Well, I really can't recall, but I think they must have had some kind of a religious service there that you were required to go to on—I think on Sundays, I believe. It was just a requirement to have to go to vespers. I don't recall the activities at all. Maybe Norton may recall them or someone.

EE: Do you remember anything about the Hayward Shepherd monument?

[01:06:40.23] WV: Where is that located? No.

EE: And just tell me what you remember most about Storer. What would you say is your fondest memory?

[01:07:05.24] WV: Well, I guess, if you look at the sports, I enjoyed, you know, playing football there. And when they had the basketball games, I was like, I helped to keep score with the basketball. I didn't play it. I was like a, I worked with the little girls. I used to be like manager of the girls' basketball team also.

EE: What was that like?

[01:07:40.24] WV: That was very difficult. You know, sometimes I had to tape their ankles and things like that.

EE: Why was that difficult?

[01:07:48.01] WV: It was kind of a chore, you know, because I used to feel sorry for their little ankles being hurt, sprained, that kind of a thing. But the sports I guess is one of the things I enjoyed a lot about Storer.

EE: Where did they play basketball?

[01:08:03.17] WV: The basketball games were mainly played down in the barn.

EE: Can you describe the barn?

[01:08:09.17] WV: It had rafters. It's a long barn, and you had rafters up there, and our guys just had to shoot through the rafters, and that's how we'd beat the visiting team, you know, in playing. Norton will be able to tell you more about that because he was a basketball player. I didn't play basketball.

EE: Who's Norton?

[01:08:30.11] WV: Elbert Norton will give you some more information there. We had a good little girls' team. At that time, the girls had to stay on one side, the guards and the forwards. You never crossed over the line. My wife didn't play, but she played in high school. She played basketball in high school. But, I remember that. But, other than that, the friends that we made, I remember a lot of those folks. Other than that, they gave me a foundation for the future.

EE: What would you say is the biggest lesson that you brought home, brought into your professional life and your family life from Storer College?

[01:09:24.20] WV: Well, I suppose Storer College let me know that I could achieve. Although I was always ambitious, but it let me know that I could achieve. I could excel, and I could go forward and be successful. I mean, it created more ambition in me to do well.

EE: What have I forgotten to ask you? Is there something that you want to tell me about the Storer experience? We've probably covered a lot of territory, but I don't know that I've gotten everything that you would like to share with me about, you know, both the physical landscape and the academics and your professors, your friends.

[01:10:18.18] WV: I think you've covered most of the things that I would have talked about. I guess the last thought is I just feel very, very sorry that it's closed, and, you know, that feeling will be with me like forever. And I think what the Park Service is doing to try to preserve things, I think it's magnificent because nobody will know about Storer if we don't preserve it. There were a lot of memories there, and there were a lot of excellent students there and excellent professors that gave the least of us an opportunity to go forward and achieve.

EE: What do you remember about learning in 1955 that the school was closed? Do you remember when you heard that, how you heard it?

[01:11:28.05] WV: Well, it was pending all the time that it would be closed. It was, it seemed like it was almost inevitable that it would close, and it was just a sickening feeling that it was closing.

EE: Yeah.

[01:11:52.20] WV: A sad time.

EE: Well, but the good news is that you've got your stories, and maybe we can get your wife to share hers some time. That would be nice. Well, all I can say is thank you. This has been wonderful. Thank you for bringing Storer back to life and sharing this. It's been a pleasure.

[01:12:09.29] WV: So, anything that I can do to support the project, you know, feel free to call on me.

EE: Thank you so much.

WV: You're welcome.

EE: It was an honor.

WV: Thank you.

[01:12:22.08] End of File