
P E T E R S B U R G
V O I C E S O F C I V I L R I G H T S :
T H E O R A L H I S T O R Y

INTERVIEW OF DR. FLORENCE FARLEY

conducted by

Hermanze Fauntleroy

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Petersburg, Virginia

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(Interview of Dr. Florence Farley
conducted by Hermanze Fauntleroy.)

BY MR. FAUNTLEROY:

Q I am Hermanze Fauntleroy. Today is December 6, 2007. I am interviewing Dr. Florence Saunders Farley. Dr. Farley is a retired psychology professor from Virginia State University, where she also served as the chairperson for that department. Dr. Farley was the very first female mayor for the City of Petersburg. Dr. Farley, we will be focusing on Petersburg, Virginia. However, I am aware that your early years were in Roanoke, Virginia; is that correct?

A Yes.

Q What is your earliest memory of anyone bringing up civil rights issues in your family and/or among your friends?

A My father was a follower of Marcus Garvey so my earliest memory is of a picture that he had of Marcus Garvey standing beside the ship -- a ship, and the ship had the black star on it. And that picture was in my daddy's possession in his room.

My father was a strong believer of family life, and rights of people and so forth. And

I would consider him to have been a black man who was torn by the segregated south. So periodically -- he was the baby in his family of about eight, and periodically he would leave us in Roanoke and go to New York -- I mean, go to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and work in the steel mills, because he felt that black men could make more money in the north, they were freer in the north and he basically wanted to rear us in the north.

My older sisters and brothers were born in the north, in Pittsburgh, but because of a fire that kind of wiped out the family in Pittsburgh, my grandmother, who was a strong, strong matriarch, my mother's mother brought the family back to Petersburg -- to Roanoke to get on their feet.

And so for years my father would work in the railroad in Roanoke, and we would see him get the trunk out, and he was on his way back to Pittsburgh, but we had a good, strong family unit during those years, but he periodically just -- segregation was just not for him. And so those were my earliest memories.

He often talked about going back to

Africa. And I had an uncle who was the direct opposite of my father in terms of sentiment and attitude, and as child I used to hear them on Sunday mornings arguing about political things and other kinds of conditions in terms of black people in America.

Well, as I said, my mother was a more conservative, traditional person than my father. My mother was highly religious. She was Baptist. My father was not. And for whatever reason, I am the ninth of ten children, and so for whatever reason I could hang with my father. And so on Sunday mornings if I didn't go to Sunday school I could go window shopping and window -- looking in windows and just kind of walking around town with him. And so I always had that choice.

And so I think he had a great influence on me. There's no doubt about that, because I can remember having human rights -- Roanoke was an interesting place to grow up, because there were not -- it was not a large numbers of blacks in Roanoke. We were not even 10 percent of the population and so we were not very threatening to the white power structure. So we had things I think that as I left Roanoke and came to Petersburg,

and realized we had things in Roanoke long before other black kids did in the south. Our schools, our teachers were highly educated and so forth.

And so we also had race-relation conferences, and I can remember being a part of those all the way through my elementary and middle years. And so I can vividly remember when the marches were going on in -- I mean, Martin Luther King, when they started the picketing, and the desegregation decision came down, and I can remember my father said he would never live to see it, he would never see -- live to see that come a reality. And sure enough, he died in 1955, which was a significant year for us, but I can remember that he says, I wish better for you, I wish better for all of you, but I don't think I will see it.

Q Did you attend public schools in Roanoke?

A Yeah. I went through public schools in Roanoke. As I said earlier, they were segregated, but they were -- to me they were -- they were different from the standpoint, as I said, we were a small population. We had our elementary schools in the different areas of Roanoke for black kids. We had a white -- I lived on the 500 block of Loudon Avenue as a child, and two blocks up was an

elementary school, but it was for white kids, and so I know about passing a school to go to another school, but we walked to school and that was okay.

So I went to public schools. The schools were extremely rich in terms of our teachers. We had teachers who had masters degrees. I knew about that as a young child because they were often families. There would be a number of sisters who would be teachers, and they would, in the summer, they would go to, quote, New York, and other places and they worked on masters degrees, because there were no jobs for them in the summer. And therefore they would go north.

And the State of Virginia paid them to go to school in the summer and so forth, so they did and they brought all that richness back to us. And at that time Virginia State had the top-flight school of education and most of my teachers had been at Virginia State, and that's part of why I ended up at Virginia State, because they would tell us like in high school, they would say now in English you are going to have this teacher if you go to Virginia State, and this is who is going to teach you math, and you better not go down there and disgrace us or show that we have not taught you and so forth, so

that we had a linkage, and so, yeah, the education was quite outstanding.

I think I really got -- I became shocked, though, because UVA was offering scholarships to youngsters, and I applied to UVA. Virginia State was offering them. I didn't know -- did not really understand the significance of them, but UVA, of course, said my academic record was okay, but they of course did not let black children and certainly girls, black girls, no girls went to UVA. But I came to Virginia State.

And at the time the State of Virginia had a program that the top two students, the top graduates in every high school in Virginia would get a scholarship to a state school, and so I was the salutatorian of my high school class, and I received the state -- the scholarship, and it was a four-year scholarship that paid for much of your tuition, and it was as long as you stayed, you know, like kind of like an honor student and kept your grades up. So that was an interesting thing because that was the way they tried to have things separate and equal, you see, rather than separate and unequal, but that was something that the state did at that time for high school students to come to their state

universities.

Q You mentioned in your discussion that teachers went to New York and the state paid for that. Do you think that was as a result of the segregation that was in place at that time?

A Oh, it was. It was direct. Yeah, it was direct. In fact, they had a person -- when I finally came to Virginia State, they had an office that did nothing but that, took care of making sure that people made applications to a school outside of the state. You could not go to any of the schools -- other schools. Virginia State at that time did not have a graduate program. So in order for them to get graduate school education, they had to go out of state, and the State of Virginia paid them to go, and they paid their transportation, and they paid their tuition, and they -- you know, the transportation up to wherever they'd go and back, and also they paid their tuition.

And that was part of the whole tag of segregation that we dealt with in education in the state. When we look at some of the things, you know, that we had to deal with, I think it's a lot of people that don't really understand just how much it infiltrated everything.

Q When did you leave Roanoke to come to Petersburg?

A I left Roanoke in 1946. I finished high school that May, applied to Virginia State, and was admitted, got the scholarship that I pointed out that I got to come. Had to have \$69.00, if you like, to make the first payment. We paid that four times a year, and because I had the scholarship and I got the AKA and the Delta scholarship, the sorority -- both sororities, I got another scholarship from alumni association and so forth so my first big payment was \$69.00 and that was the payment that I had to have for room, board and tuition.

And of course I got a job. They hired me, and I was a student worker and they -- and I made -- we were paid 25 cents an hour. And my job was in the -- Virginia State didn't have a hospital at that time, but they had an infirmary, and that was in the basement of Byrd Hall. And so my job was that each student would be, you know, patients, in the infirmary, and my job was to go to the dining hall, get the food, whatever the meal was, breakfast, dinner and lunch -- lunch and dinner, and bring it back, and put it on a plate,

and fix it up kind of like pretty, made the children some tea, and made them toast for the bread and all that, just made nice, little meal for them. And then I would carry it out, you know, to the students, and then I'd wash up the dishes, and lunch I'd go to class and at lunch I'd do the same thing, and at dinner do the same thing. So that was my first job at Virginia State. I made 25 cents an hour half.

After that job I met up with a friend and her father was the head of the laundry on campus. You remember the boys on campus used to get their clothes washed. The girls didn't. But anyway, we used to have to work on the steam table -- I mean steam things where you press the sheets and the pillow cases and all, but they made 35 cents an hour. And so Janet Saunders was my buddy, and she got her daddy to hire me, so I went up to 35 cents an hour.

And by the time I got to be a junior I worked as -- in the department and I became a student worker in the Psych Department.

When I was admitted to Virginia State that summer, I was admitted to Virginia State College for Negroes at Ettrick, Virginia. Okay.

And my -- that summer mail came, and my father brought call, and he said, Florence, I don't know what's going on with that school where you are going.

And I said, well, what is it?

He said, look at this letter. It is from Virginia State College, and it says Petersburg, Virginia, so it's not the same school, and it's not in Petersburg. And we didn't know anything about down here, you know, didn't know anything about Ettrick and Petersburg. And anyhow, he says, I don't know what's going on.

I guess maybe -- he was an avid newspaper reader, and in a couple of days -- this was after July 1, in a couple of days, he says, oh, now, I know what went on, and he went on, because, you know how the paper, they tell what the general assembly has done, and this, that and the other, and he read that Virginia State, that the general assembly had dropped the name of "for Negroes," so it was just Virginia State College. And that they also -- the geographical -- the post office address would be Petersburg, Virginia rather than Ettrick.

Now, I didn't know why the Petersburg -- the address was changed, the post

office was. But later, I was told by one of my teachers, the history teacher, in fact, Dr. Danni Townes, you will remember her, she told us that what happened was that Ettrick Post Office where our mail would come, and then they would bring it over to the post office on campus, the local post office, that they had been elevated to be a first class post office, and it was because of the volume of mail that Virginia State got, and that's what made it.

And the president at Virginia State at that time or the administrators asked them to say, well, would you put a black person into the post office in Ettrick?

And of course the post master said, no. And therefore, they asked Petersburg -- Petersburg already had some carriers, and they said that they would, you know, take care of the mail and therefore they changed the address to Petersburg.

Q Did you have the need or the opportunity to visit any of the surrounding localities while you were a student at Virginia State?

A Yeah. Dr. Harry Roberts was a sociology teacher, and Dr. Roberts would bring us to Petersburg. He was very concerned. You know, he was, what, a Yale graduate, Ph.D. from Yale, he had

studied in England and all. He was very concerned about the social conditions of blacks. And so he brought us to Petersburg once, and I'll never forget that, because it played a part in my life years and years later, I guess, when I met you and all the other, quote, grown folks in Petersburg. And that was the Gillfield area.

And I had never -- again, as I told you, Roanoke was very different from here, you know. I didn't know anything about plantations until I came down here. And I did not know a whole lot about free blacks, and free Negroes and all that kind of stuff. But of course by the time I got here, I started learning a little bit about it at Virginia State, and of course I learned much more about it from my husband's family.

But Gillfield, I'll never forget that. I'd never seen outdoor toilets, toilets with -- houses with toilets outside. I had never seen -- there was a place that we went, and they had like -- it looked like to me a horse -- somewhere where horses could go and drink water and all, and it was a pump, and they said that all of the people in that area got their water from this pump, and this was where the running water was. I couldn't

believe it, as I said before, because things had been so different from, you know, where I'd come from and that. But he showed us all of that, and we went through that.

I also -- we also visited a courtroom, and of course there was segregation in Roanoke as far as the courts were concerned, but on this particular day, and I still can't remember the case, but I think it had something to do with the Martinsville Seven. Do you remember -- I know you remember that whole incident where this white woman was raped and all of that. Either he had told us about it, or he wanted to show us something about it, but some people had come through Petersburg, some black men had come through Petersburg and had been picked up, or suspected of something connected with that case. And anyway, he took us there. So I got a little bit of a flavor of the life in Petersburg.

And at that time I didn't think very much of it. And I can remember we would go at -- some of our teachers would tell us not to go down High Street. We would walk downtown, of course, and they would tell us that we couldn't -- they didn't want us on High Street, and they didn't want us on

Grove Avenue because there were people there that they didn't think we should know about or what have you, but of course we did. We walked right on down High Street and saw a lot of things maybe we should not have seen or they didn't want us to see but, yes, so we kind of roamed around Petersburg.

Q What were the conditions in Petersburg in terms of the racial situation?

A Oh, it was tight. It was tighter than tight. As I said before, the contrast was great for me because Roanoke, again, just was not quite like Petersburg, you know, with the black and white thing. There was segregation. But because I guess there were more blacks in Petersburg, and also more blacks surrounding Petersburg because, see, the counties even surrounding Roanoke even today are predominantly white, and so you had Dinwiddie, and Prince George and the southern part of Chesterfield. I can remember being amazed that the students from -- children from Chesterfield came to Petersburg to go to school. I couldn't understand that but -- the black kids, you know, would come there to go to school.

I didn't understand you all didn't have an eighth grade, and I didn't understand why

you didn't have an eighth grade in your school system because we had the eighth grade, you know, because we were older than the kids from Petersburg because we had gone to school more years, okay.

We would come -- as I got older, and senior and would kind of come over to Petersburg for social life, and as I met students who were day students, and came, and started visiting in their homes and everything, it was amazing to me that still people that we would consider to be middle class people today, they had -- their plumbing facilities -- their toilets were on the back porch, were still on the back porch. And you -- you know, and it was just a common occurrence. I had not seen that. And that was amazing to me, and it was not that they were the poor of the poor.

And I do remember the -- some of the housing patterns that we did see where they would say that, that's a rental house, that's Mr. So and So's house, and it seemed like there were these slum lords who had all these houses, and they would paint the houses the same color so you knew who the slum lord was, and just ugly brown colors and all that kind of stuff. It was amazing to me. It was amazing to me.

Q Public facilities as far as Petersburg was concerned, anything cross your mind?

A Well, first thing I remember when I came to Petersburg, that 1946 as a freshman, Virginia State, we -- of course, the Norfolk and Western Railroad was big time in Roanoke, because most of our parents, fathers worked with the railroad and all, so when I came down to the train station, and ours was -- our train station in Roanoke was segregated, you know, black/white side, but not quite like Petersburg was, and Petersburg station, of course, was much older and larger and all.

And I remember very vividly getting on the telephone, and I called home and told my momma I didn't like -- I didn't like Virginia State.

So she said, where are you?

I said, I'm in the train station, and I said it's-- I don't like it.

She said, I didn't send you to the train station to school. I sent you -- I sent you to the college. Now you go up to the college and see what it's like. So that was my first impression of Petersburg was that train station, but everything was tight. Everything was segregated.

We -- I could remember coming to

Petersburg and we would get -- if somebody had a car, and we would go out 460, and I can see the little place now, and they had a sign on the door that said, "No dogs and no niggers," and we would go, get out the car, run into that place, and say that we wanted a hot dog. And they said -- because we no dogs and we no niggers and then we would run out. I mean, we did a lot of things but -- to, you know, deal with the segregation and the ugliness of it that we could have gotten in trouble, but we were teenagers and didn't quite know the import of it, but it had an impact. Let's put it that way. It had an impact.

Q In your opinion, and from your knowledge maybe while being at Virginia State and knowing something about the Petersburg school system, how do you think segregation affected the Petersburg public school system?

A As I said earlier, our schools looked better than your schools, than Petersburg schools, and I, subsequent, as an adult, have heard of some strong teachers that the black kids were able to experience in the Petersburg school system. And I know about the expectations that the people, the black people in Petersburg had with their schools

and the accomplishment of the people, but when looking through the eyes of a student at Virginia State, and listening to many of my friends did their student teaching in Petersburg, so -- and looking at what they would say, and many of them were able to do their student teaching at Blandford and Virginia Avenue, and Blandford and Virginia Avenue were laboratory schools for Virginia State. So I saw, really, a richness and, you know, everything up to date because the School of Education at Virginia State placed their -- the teachers there, they had Saturday morning classes for those teachers who came over there and so forth, so I -- those two schools just kind of stood out for me in terms of schools because of the influence that Virginia State had on those two schools.

As I have stayed here and seen us lose that kind of connection and all, of course I see a different picture, but that was one of the things that was paramount in my thinking. Many of the people who taught in Petersburg -- some of the young teachers in Petersburg would still come to the campus if they had homes up there, and we got to meet some of the younger teachers.

But the impression was that, you

know, everybody was working hard, and trying to do a good job as far as the schools were concerned under the conditions that they had.

Q Do you have any way to make any comparison between the two schools that you mentioned and the other schools in the City of Petersburg?

A No, didn't have any opportunity, and those were the only two schools that I was aware of that were -- they were the ones that I was aware of. The Peabody -- no, it was not Peabody. It was Henry Williams when I did my -- I took a course in my senior year in testing, okay, and we had to give -- we would test children, would have to come over to the city to test children under supervision, and I do remember, recall going into that school, and I guess I'm not sure that it was called Henry Williams, I don't know what it was, it was an elementary school right on that old site where Peabody is now, okay, and I remember that I had to go down to the basement, and those special -- they were special education children, the kids who were enrolled in special education program, and they were in the basement of their building, and the pipes, the water pipes and the pipes from the furnace and the, you know, steam pipes and all that, they were

clanking, and making noise, and dripping water, and so forth, and that's where they had the program for special education.

And I will never forget how shocked I was with that, because although special ed at that time was not integrated well into the school system, I just thought it was horrible how they were treating those children, and I guess I have become very sensitive and still kind of watch what goes on with special education in the City of Petersburg because I know what those days were like and how they treated those children.

Q In your opinion, what caused the segregated conditions in Petersburg to begin to change and how?

A You know, Hermanze, I have to say it is hard -- my involvement in Petersburg I think is kind of interesting because it was like on the periphery, okay. We talked about Virginia State, okay. Well, you know, I left Virginia State and went back to Roanoke for one year. And this is at the height of -- finished Virginia State, what, in '50 and this is -- things had started kind of getting antsy, if you like, between blacks and whites throughout the south, if you like.

And I needed money to go to graduate school because my family was shocked when I came home and they were -- they became aware of the fact that I couldn't teach school, because I had been a psychology major, and I don't know how they didn't know I was a psychology major or what, but they didn't understand that.

And so when I tried to find a job again as a young, black woman, coming out of school, psychology degree, didn't know how to do anything at all, and they were shocked that I couldn't find a job. My peers were finding jobs teaching school.

And so I finally got a job in Roanoke teaching special needs children in a private school for white children where the lady hired me as a teacher but told me I couldn't tell the parents of the children that I was a teacher because it was against the law for a black person to teach white children in the State of Virginia so I had to kind of be their companion. That was all right. I had five little boys, but I did my job there, but I still knew I had to do something in order to get myself ready for my adult life. And I joined the Army. Okay.

So there was a special program that

took in college graduates to -- in as officers in the United States Army, so I decided I'm going to join the Army, and I'm going to get my education, and I'm going to go back to school, and I'm going to be a psychologist. So sure enough, I joined the Women's Army Corps, and was stationed at Fort Lee.

So here I was at another institution, if you like, surrounding Petersburg, and I had another opportunity to be involved with Petersburg because by that time I had started dating my eventual husband, who was a Petersburger, and so he's a Petersburger as you are from birth, if you like, and his mother from birth and all of that.

So I was able then to start seeing another side of Petersburg and -- because I was stationed at Fort Lee. So I had to deal with all those -- Truman had caused the military to be integrated, okay. These were the early months, if you like, in years of integration. We still had to deal with left-over segregation and negative feelings of people toward each other and so forth.

And Petersburg was having its problems. And people were restless, as I said, because during that time I got involved with the political stuff that was going on in Petersburg

because my husband was active in the social, political things that went on here, and so I got involved in that. I got involved in them trying to get people to vote.

And so when I had an opportunity to leave post, I came into Petersburg and I was on the Avenue, and learned how to work with them in the Trojan Club. They had this club that they called the Trojan Club, and it was a civic organization club, but it was a place where they could go as young men, professional men, to socialize. But at the same time, they were -- they wanted to do something for the community.

And so they started a voter registration campaign, and that was in the days of poll taxes, and where they worked with trying to get black people on the registration rolls. They would run people for city council, you know, and have them -- they didn't have but a handful of votes. And I learned how to work at the polls during that time, was able to do that.

My husband -- well, he was my fiance at the time, but anyway, he was involved with the Wilcox Lake closing. He was one of the men who went out there to swim. He was a swimmer, by the way.

Some of them weren't, but he was one of the ones that could swim. And I know all about that case, so I started hearing about it, and knowing something else about Petersburg as an adult, but stationed at Fort Lee.

As I said, we're fighting down at Fort Lee with everything that went on down there in terms of I was a training officer, and the young, basic trainees had -- every eight weeks I had to start all over again, and work with them, and they had problems acclimating to that segregated -- I mean to the remnants of segregation, you know, such as places to get their hair done, and places to even socialize and so forth. So it was a lot going on there that we had to, as officers, we had to deal with. And also as I said, I was kind of caught up into the Petersburg thing because I became basically -- accepted by my husband's family, and kind of became a member of that family, you know, and all.

And so I saw that, and then I left -- got out of the Army and went back -- and went back to Virginia State. Still at that time I could not get into any other graduate program in Virginia, but by that time they had started a program in

educational psych at Virginia State. And so I got out of the Army on a Friday, and I was in the master's degree program on Monday at Virginia State. I was the first -- only full-time graduate student they had in psychology, so you know I just got all kinds of education out of it. I mean, everybody was pulling out for me, and I was pulling after all the knowledge they had and everything. So I was just the darling of the department and -- but at the same time they were pushing me.

And I realized later that they were so glad to have an opportunity to teach the high-level courses in the discipline, and therefore, they piled it on me. But I was able to get it. And so I stayed there a year, finished my master's in a year, and left there and went on an internship in Maryland.

Well, when I got to Maryland, that was -- I did my internship at a psychiatric hospital that was segregated. Okay. So Crownsville State Hospital was for black psychiatric patients all over the State of Maryland. And we started right -- they were having problems with segregation in the mental hospital system there, and of course they -- the conditions there were not good, but they started

pouring money in it and that's the way we got that internship program, so I benefited from being able to get an intern as a psychologist with a master's degree, because usually you do that with a Ph.D.

It is interesting how segregation played a kind of role and in how I got educated, okay, because I ended up, I think, getting credentials that I would not have gotten at the level that I was if I had not been in the segregated thing, just like Dr. Whitehurst, our program was educational psychology, Dr. Whitehurst was a Harvard graduate in clinical psychology. She decided to teach me all she wanted to about clinical, and at that time, you know, teachers didn't talk back to students, so I just learned what she taught me. And I ended up knowing as much about clinical psychology from her as I would have if I had been in a regular Ph.D. program.

So, anyway, my credentials piled up. You know, I got in a way kind of indirect, but very, very beneficial and made me a, I think, a very seasoned kind of psychologist that maybe I would not have been if I had gone straight through a program without that kind of individualized instruction that I received.

So anyway, I left the internship, and came to Petersburg one Easter, and saw in the paper where they were -- they needed a psychologist at Central State Hospital. So I just kind of decided I'd go out and apply. And at that time Central State was so segregated it wasn't funny. They didn't have any black professionals out there at all, according to them. They had nurses, but they didn't even -- black nurses, but they didn't consider them a professional. And so that whole hospital had no professionals, no doctors, no psychologists, no social workers or anything who were black.

I went out for the interview. Well, fate would have it that they were in the midst of a suit. There was a guy who was in the Coast Guard, and they had put him at Central State, black guy, put him in Central State, and his care was paid for by the federal government. And he -- the conditions were deplorable there. It was a snake pit. And his relatives visited him and discovered it, and there was this federal money being put into this place, and this man was treated this way. That opened the door.

And school desegregation was going

on. The schools, they had been closed. Prince Edward and all that -- all this stuff -- not Prince Edward, but the beginning of the desegregation of schools because the Supreme Court had said things have to happen. All of that kind of came together.

And so Central State decided that they were going to have to at least placate, they were going to have to clean up a little bit, and they got -- they decided that they would have to make things better. So they hired me. And I got this job.

Okay, I had come from Crownsville State Hospital where although it was segregated as far as patients were concerned, it was integrated as far as staff was concerned. And so the first day I was there the clinical directors said, let's go to lunch. And so we went to lunch.

They had this beautiful, little dining room upstairs in the administration building, and I went in with him, and we sat there and, you know, I ate and so forth. And I did that for three or four days. And the order came down from the governor that the State of Virginia was promoting this interposition law, and that they could not have any state agency practicing desegregation and,

therefore, I no longer could eat in that dining room.

So I -- so they said, but they would make provisions for me. Now, as I said, they had all these other black people who worked out there. This dining room that I ate in these three or four days was just beautiful. They had -- the people -- it looked like it was on a plantation. The people had their caps on, you know, little caps, and the cooks and all. They had fresh bread was made three times a day. You have never seen such pastries in all of your life. It was the best food I have ever eaten, okay, until I recently went to South Africa, but it was some real food, okay.

And it was just pennies. You paid nothing much for it, okay. And anybody if you were white, and you worked on the grounds you could go up there and eat. So the doctors, lawyers, everybody ate there who was white. And of course the governor put me out of that.

But they built a little -- took a room upstairs, and they made this cute, little dining room for me, and it had little, yellow curtains, and white tables and everything. And I was to eat there, and they told me I could, you

know, at no cost, and they told me that I would be able to bring my friends there, you know, because they -- the other people did. They used to bring family and everything there if they wanted special food and all.

But anyway, I never put my foot in there. It was a beautiful little room, but it was made exclusively for me.

And I told them, nope, I didn't need to eat in that room if I couldn't eat where the rest of the professional people ate, I wouldn't eat. And that's when I started going to Virginia State every day to eat my lunch, and a group of us would get in the car and go over there to eat. But it was -- it was tragic, that situation out there.

I was able -- there was a number of things going on there in terms of civil rights. Patients were -- people would drive up to the hospital, and the patients would go out, come to Petersburg, do all kinds of services like slave labor, and then bring -- they'd bring them back at the end of the day, and they'd come back into the hospital. And they had one -- they had two bathrooms in the administration building, and -- well, they had four. They had one for white women,

patients; one for white men, patients; one for non-patient white, non-patient male, you know, and female white. And then one for all blacks whether you were a patient, staff worker, visitor or what have you.

It was a whole lot of deplorable things. But anyway, we would go to the staff meeting, first thing I would say, when are we going to get a toilet for ourselves, a bathroom for ourselves? I would have to bring up these issues.

And finally I got the NAACP, Mr. Gunther -- do you remember him? Gunther was the President of the NAACP. So while you all are doing some fighting in Petersburg, I was out there working and fighting. And Dr. Gunther and Reverend Bernard Johns -- you know, I was fortunate enough to live with Reverend Johns when I was a graduate student. So Reverend Johns was my buddy.

And when I talked -- told him to come out and visit me one day, and he saw the patients being picked up and dropped off and so forth, and he saw it was slave labor that the State of Virginia was letting -- permitting the people to do. And the two of them worked with me, and we were able to at least put a real cloud on some of the things that

were going on.

Finally got a bathroom for -- separate facilities, bath -- restrooms facilities for people. But -- so I went there. And again, I spent a lot of what I was doing trying to be a professional there in that atmosphere and then by that time I had married and I was in Petersburg, and the civil rights movement is starting here and was able to become a part of that.

Q Do you remember whether or not the churches in Petersburg became involved in the civil rights struggle?

A Yeah, I do. In fact, going back to the voter registration, okay, the Trojan Club, they had a project whereby they put the names -- they -- you know, the guys that were in the Trojan Club, they were brick masons, and carpenters and all. They were tradesmen. They had all gotten all this good training at Virginia State. I think about vocational education now, and we had that trade school at Virginia State, Simms Hall, and so many of them had gone there. They were electricians, they were plasterers and you name it, you could find a skilled worker who could just do tremendous things.

And they built a -- kind of like a

bulletin board, and it had slots in it where you could put people's names. And as the people in the -- in some of the churches, they let them put that bulletin board up in the vestibule of the church. And it contained the names of the registered voters.

And so as you were registered -- they also -- they played cards and did things, but they had what they call a pot, so if they played cards for money and all, some of the money that they won went into this pot, and that money -- or if you broke a rule, they had a lot of rules, and if you broke a rule, you know, maybe you brought somebody that you weren't supposed to be up in the club -- for example, basically, one of the other things they did was that you had to be registered voter in order to come in the club. Okay, so if you brought a non-registered voter in, you had to pay a fine. And all of this money they used to pay poll taxes for people.

So they had a kitty, you know, and they had the money in there, and they would go out and they would pay the poll taxes for the elderly, especially senior citizens and things like that were -- who were home owners but could not pay their

poll tax, and then once they got them registered they'd take them down to register and all, then they would put their names up if they were a member of Gillfield, or Zion or what have you, they had that bulletin board, and they put their names -- put those names up.

So even then, you know, the churches were involved, and they let them put them up. There were a couple of churches that said, no, you can't bring that in them, but for the most part the churches did let them do that, and that was a way of trying to get people registered to vote. So that was one of my first memories of the church.

And of course during the civil rights movement, I could remember the first time Martin Luther King came to Petersburg, and I had -- I was working at Central State, and that snowy night my husband went to it, but I was sick, so I missed that first mass meeting that they had, but they went through that snow. You know all about that.

And I can remember how he came home just -- just so enthusiastic, and so happy and so pleased and talked about everything. And so I have that very vivid memory.

And then the other kind of work,

because as I came to Petersburg to start working with the demonstrators, you know, the children -- getting the kids ready and everything, more and more of the churches did work and support and all, I guess until we had one incident where things got a little out of hand in one of the churches and they asked us not to come back. You know, we had meetings in the basement and things like that, but basically they were very, extremely helpful in terms of everything we did.

I can remember in -- at Bethany Church, in the basement, we would -- you remember when they had the blank card for registration, and you had to teach the people how to fill out this -- answer these questions that were not there, that they had to memorize and fill out that card. I even remember working there with some of the people from Blandford to teach them how to register to vote. So yeah, the work was all over. The church -- everybody was involved in it.

Q Do you recall any involvement from Virginia State as a college in the community during the civil rights era?

A Yeah, I do. In fact, I taught graduate and undergraduate school, you know, courses at

Virginia State. And many of our students were involved in protesting, if you like, and demonstrating in Petersburg. And in my -- in our department, one of the things we said was that all of you may not go to jail, but you have some role to play. And so in my -- I never will forget. I had a graduate course, and these two young men were so -- they were tight buddies. And one of them stayed in Petersburg every time you look, or he was picked up, he was in jail and all.

But the other one said, I'm not going to jail.

And this one said, well, I'm going to be demonstrating at Woolworth's. I'm going to sit at the counter.

And the other one said, well, I'm not going down there and sit at the counter, because if anybody spit on me, I'm going to punch them out.

And so what we did with that group, I mean, to give an example of how we worked even at the individual level, I insisted that the one who could not protest, you know, openly, would take notes and make -- and have the notes ready for the class for the ones who was out protesting. And so that we had some of those arrangements. There were

other teachers who did similar kinds of things because the students were out of class, if they were in jail, or if they were in the streets or wherever they were or going to a meeting or what have you.

And so we said, okay, you still have to finish college, but you could help each other, and you -- both of you can make a contribution in your own way. And so many of the kids were here and many of them were arrested and many of them played a part in it.

Q Additional comments on the growth and understanding of Petersburg.

A Well, I guess Hermanze, I tell you, reminiscing about it and thinking about it and all, in a way, I guess my heart is heavy. I'm still very, very concerned about where we are. And as I was telling you earlier, I just got back from South Africa, and I saw and witnessed and kind of experienced some things over there that said that there are -- there's something -- I'm glad you are doing this, okay, but the people in -- the kind of spirit in South Africa is that apartheid, they are not going to let it die by sweeping it under the rug, or by denying it happened, or what have you.

And I sometimes think as I see some

of the struggles and some of the things that we're doing now that we let the spirit, the commitment, the passion, the understanding, the challenge of what we were about during that period die. And we did not promote it with our young people. We didn't keep -- we didn't keep the story going, so that it would be integrated into their souls. And so I see us now as being separated from our people.

I think we -- those -- and I'm saying the "we," those of us were who were part of the civil rights movement and all, I see us separated from our people, and I don't think the way that they are hoping, you know, things will turn out in South Africa that they will be separated in the same way. But I just -- I'm just most uncomfortable.

I just don't believe that we have a Petersburg of today that came through that Petersburg. I just don't -- it's as hard as anything for me to believe. I read some things, I hear some things and I say, how could you? How could we? What are you talking about?

And then I realize that there's this big gap. There is this big gap. So they don't even know what -- why I feel the way I do, or why, you know, why I would feel -- and I'm saying I,

representing the whole group and all, and I guess I have a lot of sorrow because we are old, sick, broken down, tired, and all, and I don't know how we're going to get our folks back together. I don't know how people are going to get back together.

And I'm talking about black and white, because we didn't have to get this separate and apart, because the whole reason was to have a oneness, and we just didn't get that piece right. And as I said before, what I saw, at least what I heard some of the young people in South Africa, it's a struggle over there, don't -- I'm not romanticizing it at all, please understand that, but at least their constitution and their purpose and all is for a oneness, and I think that we -- I don't think that that was what we expected to come out of this.

We talked about, you know, integration, desegregation. We used terms that still said that there was one piece maybe that you aspire to be, rather than both pieces coming together and blending and making something. And I think we kind of lost it. I don't know where we're going now. But I'm kind of glad you all -- you know, that you are doing this, and hope that having

a record and having some way -- we go through Black History Month, and you know, that's just become -- has become a farce. It's just become some entertainment piece.

And we have people like you and me and a whole lot of folks who could sit down and talk to the children and, you know, and I believe they would -- oh, their eyes, when I have talked to them, their eyes pop, but I don't think we use the resources. I don't think there's that connection that we should have. I don't think the wisdom that we have has been able to play a part in the life of the people in Petersburg today.

And there is some wisdom in this community that came out of that civil rights movement, but it is not a part of making this city what it could be and what it can be, so that's all I need to say right now.

Q What do you think you need to do at this point? Is there anything that you need to do that you haven't done in terms of really moving the city forward in the manner that you talked about?

A I have thought about different things. I think last year when I did my exhibit, well, the needlepoint, you know, exhibit and all, I got to

talk to a lot of people in Petersburg that I hadn't talked to for years. I recently went on a casino trip with the people from the Lafayette House, and some of the people on that bus were people who lived on the Heights when I lived on the Heights, and kind of grew up with my husband, you know, some people in that age group and all. And then I, as I said, met a lot of people here in this library and all.

Then I think Wyatt Tee Walker, and Shaw and Coles and I were on a panel where they asked us to kind of reminisce and do some of this. And I talked to several younger people, not the young, young, but some of the, I would say the forty, fifty year old people because I think they are going to be the ones in terms of maybe we needed to start -- try to get a group together, and see if we could -- See d if we can start handing to them and giving to them, because they all seem to have been so impressed, and so grasping for information and knowledge because they had not been brought along, either, although some of them up wee much -- were like teenagers or what have you or went off to college, and some of them are back here, and then of course there are other professional people here from -- and other people who lived in Petersburg who

were not part of us and all, that they would like to hear and talk about it and work with it.

I think that if, you know, before it is over for us that maybe we have an obligation to try to see if we can't get folks together and talk and share, and give some feedback in a kind of positive way. Try and see if we can come together and assess where we think things are and share that assessment with them, and you know, and share that. Something has to be done.

And I guess as an educator I always believe it starts with education, and so that's where I think that if we could just get a group of folks together. It started that way. You know, I go back to PVEC that we had, and how we worked with that in order to keep people informed. You look at how we have -- what we did with the whole educating, PVEC stood for the Petersburg Educational Council -- Voter Educational Council. We believed that a voter should be educated. We can't even get a good forum when people are running for office.

They don't ever -- you remember we used to have a report to the people, and if you were an elected official, you came to report to the people. Now we have our elected officials bringing

in speakers. I don't need any speaker. I need to talk to you. I voted for or against you. I need to hear -- you need to hear me talk to you.

And so I think we need to kind of see if we can do something. It's a big responsibility, but surely as you are talking to the people who were active in the civil rights movement you know who they are, you know. Maybe we could be first -- after the first of the year, after the holiday, to sit down and see if we can't have a little reuniting and see if we can't come and have a brain storm, see if we can't get -- because some of the things that we are permitting, and I call it permitting, to happen in the city should not be able to happen, because we know too much to know the perils of what's going on now.

Q Well, Dr. Florence Farley, we certainly appreciate your taking valuable time --

A Okay.

Q -- to come and share with us today, and this has been a tremendous opportunity to share with you and to have you to share with us, and over a period of time to share with people who will hear these interviews. So again, thank you.

A Thank you for doing it. Okay.

