

History United: Memory Initiative

Interview with Doris Wilson (DW)

Interviewers: Amelia Grabowski (AG), Evelyn Riley (ER), and Kathryn Bennett (KB)

Wednesday June 26, 2013 at 6:00 pm at Loyal Baptist Church, Danville, VA

AG: Would you like us to ask questions first or would you like to preface it any?

DW: Whichever you would prefer.

AG: Just before we get started, we want to make sure we spell your name right. It's Doris, D. O. R. I. S.?

DW: Yes

AG: Then, would you spell your last name?

DW: W. I. L. S. O. N.

AG: OK, that's how we've got it written [Illegible 0:31]. What would make you more comfortable? Would you like us to ask questions, or tell...?

DW: Whichever is better for you, I made [Illegible 0:41] questions, why don't you ask me...

ER: I think we'll just ask you questions first, and if we don't cover, or we don't touch on something you think is important, we can go back to it.

DW: OK, sounds great.

AG: Interrupt us if something comes to mind.

DW: OK

AG: Our first question is, how long have you lived in this area?

DW: All my life...long time.

AG: Were you born at Danville Regional?

DW: Danville...no, Danville Regional was not integrated when I was born. Winslow Hospital was the hospital for black Americans. Danville Regional was Dan Memorial Hospital, for white Americans. So, I was born at the *black* hospital.

AG: I'm not from Danville, as you can tell from my voice, where was that located?

DW: It's on Betts Street and Elm Road...Right up from the boys and girls club.

AG: I know exactly where that is. Where did you grow up, in Danville, which part?

DW: I grew up in the Southern part of Danville.

AG: What do you remember from your neighborhood growing up?

DW: Remember that people were, we knew the community, knew the people in the community which is so different from communities today. We knew all of the people in the community and we were absolutely friendly with them, if we were out of line, they could correct us. My mother and father would appreciate that and they would correct us on top of that. So it was different.

AG: Do you have a favorite memory of growing up?

DW: I have a number of favorite memories growing up. I am from a family of seven children and I remember my family just having wonderful times together, at the dinner table, and otherwise. Just enjoying my family.

ER: Where did you fall in the seven children.

DW: Ah, number six.

AG: So your older siblings will correct you too then.

DW: Well, I'm going to show my family in a minute.

AG: Oh that would be great. Now, do you still live in Southern Danville?

DW: No, I have moved on the Northern part of Danville now.

AG: How have you seen, either between Southern or Northern Danville, or just Danville over time, how has it changed?

DW: Well, it's changed a great deal, in that for one thing I recently learned that the majority of people in Danville are African Americans. That's a big change. When I was working at the schools initially, Langston was the school for black Americans and Robert E. Lee, then GW, was the school for white Americans. Now the majority of children at GW are African Americans, that's really quite different. When I worked there, there were about 2400 children there, and I guess the population of black Americans must have been probably maybe five or six hundred.

AG: When did you start working in the schools?

DW: 1956.

AG: And did you start at GW?

DW: Started at Langston High School.

AG: And then, so you were there for the 1970...

DW: I moved to GW in 1970.

AG: That's what... Wendi Everson told us you had stories for us about that, but what was Langston like in 1956?

DW: I had been, well Langston was a high school and it was absolutely wonderful, it was absolutely wonderful. First of all, I love teaching, so what I'm going to say about teaching, no matter where I am, I loved it. We had, for the Langston students we had high expectations for ourselves and high expectations for them. We were fortunate in that a number of our students did exceptionally well. We had presidential scholars, we had kids who went to Ivy League schools, and who did well.

AG: What did you teach at Langston?

DW: History.

AG: Ahh, those are our majors - all laugh-

DW: My favorite too!

ER: Where did you go to school?

DW: I went to Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland and that was my undergraduate program. Graduate work I went to the University of Connecticut, and further study at University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, VPI, Virginia State...so I went everywhere. I loved learning and I loved to get prepared.

ER: Did you ever think about moving somewhere besides Danville, or did you always know you were going to come back here?

DW: I always knew that I was going to come back here. When you graduate from Morgan in Baltimore, Maryland, they have a placement office that tries to find employment for you, and they called me long distance and asked me if I would like to come for an interview and I said no because I wanted to remain in Danville. Nobody ever would believe I absolutely like this city. There's not a lot to do, but I like it. It's...what I like. I was fortunate in that the summer I graduated from college, I went to apply for a position at Langston, that's the school that I graduated from, I was fortunate to get a job in summer school that very summer. And after teaching summer school, the person that was teaching history decided to move to Washington, DC, and I got the job. So, I started work immediately.

ER: Things just work out sometimes.

DW: They really do, they really do. –all laugh–

AG: Was it hard to go from Danville to Baltimore and then, was that a difficult adjustment to make?

DW: No, it was not. My family...I have an older sister, I'm going to show you a picture even though this is being recorded. I'm going to show you a picture of my family that went to Morgan prior to me. This is my family that went to Morgan.

AG: Wow...

DW: Ok, this is my Mom and Dad, my brother, my sister, my sister, me, my sister, my niece, my niece, my nephew, nephew, nephew, nephew, nephew, nephew, nephew, nephew, these are the children of my nephew, and all of this...my college did a picture of us because so many of us went to Morgan. So prior to me going, you asked if I were apprehensive about going, prior to me going I had three siblings that had gone to Morgan and all they did when they got home was talk about Morgan. So I really knew a lot about Morgan before I went.

ER: So is that your college's newspaper?

DW: Yes, this is my colleges' newspaper they did a sports events, at the end of the sportsman's page they put the picture of my family.

AG: Wow...Did you play any sports at Morgan?

DW: I did not, I had a sister who did, but I did not. I'm not a sports person, I love watching sports, I'm a sports spectator.

AG: That's a good sport...good to be a supportive sibling, I'm the same way, I fall down, I take three steps, but I can cheer with the best of them.

DW: Absolutely.

AG: You said you graduated from Langston before going to Morgan?

DW: Yes.

AG: Was it similar when you came back or were there differences you saw in those four years?

DW: I think it was similar when I came back, I'd been gone just four years and in that four year period it was very much similar. I worked with some of my teachers, a lot of my teachers, and of course there were some new teachers that had come on board...but it was very similar.

AG: What was...high school had to be much different then and much the same then as it is today, what was it like to be there in the early years when you were going through...

DW: I, well, I didn't find it a lot different when I was going through at when I came to teach. I think in my years of teaching I sent one student to the office. I respected them, and I was prepared to teach them, and they respected me I think. You know, I have some students who tell me they would run to my class and, you know, that really made me feel really good.

AG: Is that what you would say is the most rewarding thing about teaching?

DW: I think the most rewarding thing...yes, the fact that students really liked history. And they could buy into history. And absolutely love it enough to run to class. That really is quite good. When I went to GW in 1970, in 1971 the Future Teachers of America chose me as Teacher of the Year.

AG: Wow!

DW: Yeah, that was great...

AG: What was the change like, going from Langston to GW?

DW: Well, the first year when we went to GW in 1970 there was terrific unrest. I don't know whether the students who were there thought we were encroaching on their territory, but the students themselves had...you know the police had to come and retain order. And of course, that didn't last very long. For me, a student is a student, and I enjoyed working with the students I enjoyed working with the teachers. After two years of teaching history, I became a guidance counselor. After two years of being a guidance counselor, I became the assistant principal. After six years of being the assistant principal there, I became principal at Langston Junior High School. So you ask me what's the difference between high school and junior high school and I can tell you: energy! –all laugh-

ER: So which one has more energy?

DW: The junior high school students, quite energetic. They vacillate between being teenagers, wanting sometimes to be babied, and sometimes to be grown up. They vacillate from one stage to the other.

AG: Did you prefer one to the other?

DW: I thought that I preferred high school until I worked a year in junior high school and learned that I love that too. I was in a different role now being principal is quite different from being a teacher. I went from being a guidance counselor to being assistant principal. A situation where you are on the side of the student and you are working with them to achieve their goals and now I am correcting them for doing things they should not do, but I think they understood that.

AG: Did you have a favorite position between guidance counselor, assistant principal...

DW: I loved teaching, I really love teaching, but I liked every position I had, I really did. If you were to ask me which position I would one I would take if I was given the opportunity to go back, I guess I would choose whatever's available because I enjoy all of them.

AG: That's wonderful...and we usually ask this question at the end, but because you are a guidance counselor I want to ask it now, if you had to give one piece of advice to the youth of Danville today, what would you tell them?

DW: I would tell them to value education. The most important thing they will ever achieve in life is a quality education. And I will tell them while they have the opportunity to get an education get the best one for them that they can get. Abilities vary, but whatever is your best education...get that.

ER: How best do you think that we should instill that value?

DW: I think, we have to work not only with students but with parents because when parents value education, when they get involved, when they come home and they ask, "How was school today? What do you have for homework?" And providing a place for the child to study and having materials there for the child to use. When parents do that and they come in and meet the teachers, and sometimes volunteer at the school...makes a world of difference to the child. When children see their parents value education, and that the parents expectation for them is high, their achievement rises with that expectation.

AG: It's obvious in your life that you've embraced education.

DW: Oh, yes.

AG (Timestamp 17:00): Was that something that was instilled in you as a child, or something you instilled in yourself?

DW: Well my family, my entire family, you know my parents, wanted us to get an education. I think they were thinking about our future, and what our future would be like if we ended up at Dan River Mills. So, my parents were not wealthy, but they sent all six children - my brother, my oldest brother became a bricklayer, of course he was making good money so he decided to remain in that position - but the other six of us went to college.

-Pause in transcription, visitor for Mrs. Wilson came to the interview room.-

AG: In the picture, you said your parents went to Morgan?

DW: No, my parents did not, they were just showing the picture of my parents they did not, but all of the other people did.

AG: It's like those bumper stickers, my children and my money go to...

DW: Yes – laughs-

AG: What did they do?

DW: My mother was a housekeeper, my dad worked for Southern Railways.

AG: Were they born in Danville as well?

DW: They were born in Danville as well, yes.

AG: How many of your siblings stayed in the region?

DW: Initially, my oldest sister went to nursing school so she came back and became director of nurses at Winslow High School. The one under her went to Morgan and came back to teach. The next one under her came back to teach. I came back to teach. My sister under me came back to teach. My brother went to Cleveland, Ohio, he was a music teacher so he went to Cleveland, Ohio, to teach music. But all of them came back, but left. I am the only one who has remained here.

AG: You won the contest! –all laugh-

ER: You mentioned how your parents didn't want you, or your family, to go work in the mills. Could you elaborate a little bit more about that, the perspective of going and working at the mills in terms of people's future and for Danville?

DW: Well, I think, I'm not belittling working at the mills, I really am not, but I think my parents decided that there were other avenues that we could pursue if we got an education. I'm not saying that working in the mill is something a person shouldn't do. For some people it was fine. It was a living they could make, and it was good for them, but my parents decided that there were other careers we could pursue if we had an education and so they sacrificed a lot to save. At one point my parents had four children in college. Of course college did not cost what it costs today.

ER: Still, relatively, that's a lot.

DW: It was a lot, it was a lot...and that's why I can appreciate so much my parents. I really appreciate the sacrifices they made. Now I'm not sure that I've covered what you wanted me to cover.

AG: Any story is a good story, we are just enjoying hearing about it...when you came back, what did you do after school? What was your normal night like?

DW (Timestamp 21:00): Well my normal night was correcting papers and making lesson plans, but then there were groups. I became a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority so meeting with sorority sisters; there were social clubs that we had that I was a member of. There were social activities that we went to. Sometimes going out of town to Greensboro or Chapel Hill...

-Pause in transcription, opened door to cool interview room down-

DW: My sister, who had moved back to Baltimore, we would go some weekends to visit her so we were back in Maryland...

AG: It's a long drive

DW: We did though, for weekends, we would go Friday evening, and get there late Friday night. Get up early Saturday morning, spend the day and then come back Sunday.

AG: Make a weekend of it.

DW: Yeah, we did that several times.

AG: How long have you been a member of this church?

DW: I have been a member of this church for at least fifty-two years.

AG: That's great.

ER: Have you held any positions here?

DW: I was director of Christian Education at one time, I was president of the general missioner's, I currently teach in the adult Sunday school class, formerly I taught in the teenage boy's class, I served, when I was really young I served as secretary of the Sunday school...that's all I can think of.

AG: That's a lot of jobs.

DW: *-unintelligible-*...I thoroughly enjoyed it.

AG: That's wonderful, to find your passion. Did you choose to get married, or...?

DW: I chose, I wanted to get married, I never got married because I did not find Mr. Right and I was not willing to settle just to get married. It had to be someone I fell in love with and it's not

difficult for me to fall in love, but there were not a number of people in Danville...now I dated, I dated, but...I chose not to marry those that I dated. One person I would have married, but he got married before...

AG: Before you had the chance?

DW: Right...

AG: What would you do for dates, or fun? Would you go to the movies, or bowling...?

DW: We went to the movies, there was bowling, on occasion I would go bowling, but going to the movies were...there were dances or social activities. Going out to dinner.

ER: Did you ever go to the drive-in that used to be here?

DW: I sure did.

KB: Love drive-ins, wish we still had one

DW: Yeah, well the drive-in we had was out near the county, but it was fun. It was fun to sit out in the area and watch a movie. Get the speaker off your stand and put it on your car and watch the movie, it was great.

AG: Would you like to, while we're talking about 1960 and 1970, would you like to talk about Bloody Monday now, or go through the questions, or not talk about it...

DW: Ok, well I...Bloody Monday was a time when I was teaching, and as a teacher we had signed a contract and we were not to break laws. You know, I don't say that they were breaking laws, but according to the policeman they were breaking laws. They told them to do something, they charged them with breaking laws. We were not to get involved in that. So, we, the teachers, would contribute wherever we could, but we did not get involved in the demonstrations. The sit-ins, the marches, we did not get involved.

AG: Did you have a lot of students leaving class, or were students ditching...

DW: Well students didn't leave class necessarily, I don't recall a student ever walking out of my class. A student who went either went between classes or went before classes, or didn't come to school at all. But we did have a number of students who got involved in the demonstrations. Before the demonstrations, times were very difficult for black Americans. There were laws

passed that absolutely separated Americans. I don't know whether you've heard the case of Plessy v. Ferguson have you?

-Interviewers nod-

DW: That case ended up by the Supreme Court saying that separate but equal was what was necessary, but things never got to be equal. When I was in school and my brothers and sisters were in school we never got new textbooks. The books that we used came from GW...came from the students at GW. They, my brother, my oldest brother played sports. The uniform he used, even though the colors at Langston were maroon and gold, they had uniforms from GW. So, you know, I think when you look at the situation, laws had been passed to segregate people in transportation, accommodations, education, and they were not equal at all. They were not equal. And I think for a government, the best investment you can make as a government is to educate your citizens. And so, the library that they had on Main Street was equipped with a number of books. The library for blacks was on Holbrook Street. Do you all know where the AKA house is? You may not know where it is, but the library was a building sitting there that's since that time torn down. I think there were a number of...there have always been people that have tried to get better civil rights. That happened from ages past. But I think it came to a culmination in the 1960s when the boycott in Montgomery, Alabama with Rosa Parks, and the sit-ins at A&T State University. The idea sort of took hold in many communities, and the idea was to get civil rights, to get voting rights. Blacks, when I first came back to Danville, we had to pay a poll tax in order to vote. There was a literacy test, of course that was not a problem for me, but you can imagine it being a problem for a person who, you know, is not educated. And there were, as you've heard, the Supreme Court has not agreed to monitor states that discriminate against black voters. That was legal at time. So you know, Bloody Monday was a time when people had gone to demonstrate, asking for civil rights and it was rejected. And you know about the hose pipes that were used, and the beatings that were given, and...I was in the classroom teaching on Bloody Monday.

ER: So, I know that you, with your position you couldn't actually support it, but how did you feel about it?

DW: Well I felt that we absolutely needed civil rights. And I was in favor of Martin Luther King's non-violent approach. I felt that that was a good approach. You don't go in, blocking and beating heads. You go in because your goal isn't to create a problem, it's to solve a problem. So I agreed with the non-violent approach that was used.

AG: You mentioned Rosa Parks and the sit-ins at Greensboro, what was your first memory of the Civil Rights Movement, was it Emmett Till or...?

DW: My first...well, the Civil Rights Movement really started in the 1960s, and so my first...well no, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King were my first because that's where the momentum started. There had been others, the NACP was organized in 1909 and the NAACP [note – interviewer is discussing the NAACP] was organized by both blacks and whites in New York City, they got together and realized that they needed to form an action plan in order to get civil rights. They have a number of court cases that they took to court, Brown v. ...

ER: Board of Education?

DW: Yeah, Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas, that was one the NACP had...Oliver Brown had a daughter Linda who had to ride a long distance in order to get to school and they thought she should go to the nearest school. Those were my earliest memories.

AG: Were they discussed in your household growing up, how do you remember hearing about them, on the radio or the newspaper?

DW: I had heard them on the radio and the newspaper, and of course we did discuss what was going on in my household, we did discuss what was going on. My parents discussed it with us, always in a very positive way. So, as a family we talked.

AG: That's wonderful, that's not true for many families.

DW: Yes.

AG: Then in Danville there was...we've just come into Danville, Evelyn and I this summer, so we've heard a lot about Bloody Monday and we talked to Emma Edmunds and we know there's a lot more to the story. What else do you remember going on in the sixties?

DW: You mean other than Bloody Monday?

AG: Other than Bloody Monday, or in general.

DW: Well, I remember in the sixties when the children tried to go and integrate the library, the public library, and immediately the library was closed and they took the seats out of the library so that nobody could sit down, and that was one incident I remember going on in Danville. I remember Martin Luther King, when he heard about what was going on in Danville and how the people were beaten and hosed down he came to Danville and he described Danville as a very harsh place.

AG: Were you able to see him when he came to Danville?

DW: I certainly was. I went to High Street Baptist Church when I heard he was coming, and I wanted to hear him speak. I had heard so much about him, I had read portions of his speeches, and I wanted to hear him speak.

AG: How was that experience?

DW: It was tremendous, it was tremendous...He was not, you know, he was not looking for just civil rights for black Americans, he wanted civil rights for all Americans. And he did not want this to be a violent kind of approach, he wanted it to be non-violent and his speeches were very, very inspiring.

AG: I can imagine, just hearing his voice today gives me goosebumps.

DW: It's amazing, I...when his day comes, when they observe Martin Luther King's birthday and they play recordings, every one of them, I still...it's like hearing it for the first time.

AG: This is an awful question to ask, but I have to ask it, do you have a favorite of his speeches or writings?

DW: The one from Birmingham jail I like, and of course I like the "I Have a Dream," speech. I did not go to that march, my sisters did, I did not. I made a choice, because I wanted to see everything and looking at it on television was my best bet.

AG: What do you remember from watching it that day?

DW: His speech...his speech...and the number of people that were there. Just the overwhelming number of people that had gathered there, and watching them so attentive to his speech and him inspiring them, and I think inspiring the nation. I think his "I Have a Dream," speech not only touched black Americans but it touched America because when these demonstrations were going on in the south not only blacks were involved, whites were involved as well. Some of them were killed because they came with the Freedom Riders. So, you know, it was something that...many Americans felt that it was time to end segregation.

AG: I can only imagine what it would have been like watching it. Did your sisters bring back stories?

DW: Well, I saw more than they did. They were back in the crowd. Of course they had a different feeling being there, and on site. My aunt from New York had gone down and they saw

my aunt. So they had a number of stories to tell, but really I saw more than they did watching it on television.

AG: So jealous of you seeing that...do you guys have any other questions?

ER: How would you in particular like the history of the Dan River region, or your history, to be portrayed? How do you think it would be best presented?

DW: You mean what forum would be best, what means?

ER: Right...that's a tough question...

DW: It is a tough question, there are so many ways now...you know, the media is just open so there are so many ways to portray the history of Danville. It could be done through...many different avenues.

AG: We could let you think on that.

DW: Please do, I'd like to...another question?

ER: Yeah, if you had to pick three words to describe...

AG: You took my question!

ER: Oh did I? I'm sorry! -all laugh- ...If you had to pick three words to describe your experience growing up in Danville, what words would you choose? [*unintelligible*]

DW: When you say growing up in Danville, I have three words. I would say it was a very trying experience. When I say a trying experience, there were things, for example when we had to go someplace and my parents didn't take us and we had to get on the bus and we had to get on the back of the bus, you couldn't sit anywhere. If you got on the bus first you couldn't take the first seat, you had to go to the back of the bus, and that and just living a segregated life. We lived not far from other white people, but not having, you know I spoke with everyone on my street but when I went on the other streets you know, I would not be able to have that kind of reaction and that was different. So it was...it was a challenging experience. I said the word trying, I want to use the word challenging experience...yes.

AG: Before we get to our wrap up questions, we talked a lot about the history of Danville from 1956 to the mid-1970s, but what should we know about the history of Danville after 1971 and 1972.

DW: Well I think after that time the laws were passed by Congress, the Voting Rights Act was passed by Johnson I think in 1964 so you're doing away with the poll tax and the literacy tax and the other kinds of things they had to go through. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1965 to give civil rights so public accommodations and schools were integrated, but Danville schools were not integrated. When they said all the *[unintelligible]* schools...there were about seven states that did not, and they were southern states that had been a part of the Confederacy. Danville did not integrate until 1970. But gradually, things begin to happen and courts begin to pass laws and gave civil rights so you could go to a hotel, you know, and you didn't have to try and find a black one you just go to a motel. Schools were integrated, blacks were serving on city council. Now during the period of Reconstruction, if you all love your history you know that blacks during Reconstruction did have positions of authority in many of the states, but after the 1970s things begin to get...better. It's better to have a good relationship with all citizens; we should not be separated because of our color. That should not be.

ER: Why do you think the churches are still so segregated?

DW: I have no idea. I have no idea. I remember having the idea...that is a good question. You know if you're a Christian, and you're worshipping the same God, then why is it that we couldn't worship together? That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that. Maybe eventually that will happen. I think intermarriage is happening more and more, and when that happens they gotta choose one church or the other so...-all laugh- It will just happen eventually.

ER: That kind of leads into my next question, which is where do you see the future of the Dan River region going, what do you see for it?

DW: I am told by several persons that Danville region is in for a very, very demonstrable improvement in many facets. I'm told that job-wise and otherwise, as far as the Danville region is concerned we are going to see a marked improvement, a marked improvement. So I'm listening to that and I believe there is potential to do that, but I have a concern though that when we get jobs coming to Danville, generally speaking the people in Danville are not qualified to take those jobs. Many of them require skills that people in Danville don't have, so we end up importing people to take the jobs. So I'm hoping that, I really believe that, the schools need to get some of the skills back in their curriculum. They used to have bricklaying, and many of the things that would enable a student to leave school and go on a job.

ER: Like a trade.

DW: Yes, yes, they taught trades. Like carpentry, bricklaying, they do have some. I know that they have cosmetology I believe still in school, they have dentistry I think. But there are other

areas, auto mechanics I think they still have. But there are other areas that I think that they can train students right in school, college is not for every student. Interest-wise it's not even for every student. So I think the more you can provide skills for them would be helpful.

AG: We talked a lot about, sort of the prejudices of Danville then and now, did you find it hard to be a woman in Danville? Did you have to deal with a lot of sexism or misogyny?

DW: No I didn't. I didn't because I never thought of myself as being less than a man. When I was at GW, I was the only woman who was in administration. I worked with three men, they were three gentlemen...and it was just a pleasure to work with them. But I never considered myself less than, less capable than. So, I never looked at it as...of course I know that when men were given the right to vote, women were not. Women didn't...the struggles that women went to, to get the right to vote, I mean black men could vote before women and black women. So...I'm concerned now with the plight of women, with laws that are passed to restrict women. Now I don't mean about abortion, I'm not talking about that, that's something that's between God and that person. I'm not going to pass my judgment on that, but as far as positions, I don't think women are...you can look at congress and see the number of women there compared to the number of men. Local governments, the same is true.

[Interviewee requested portion of the interview to remain off record] [48:40-49:09]

AG: I have another question about three words, if you had to pick three words for life in the Dan River region today, what would they be?

DW: I think life in the Dan River region, for me, is very good. I enjoy a small town. I enjoy...I love my church, and I love the people whom I have come in contact with. I love the fact that the people I've come in contact with are trying to make Danville a better place. I recently met with a group from the Boys and Girls Club and we are coming up with ideas about fundraising for the Boys and Girls Club. We sat this morning in a group to exchange ideas on what we thought would be a good approach to fundraising and that was good. These were not board members, we met with some board members, but these were people from the community who wanted to make their community a better place to live and I can appreciate the fact that when I meet with people who really give it their all to make their hometown a better place to live and they take the time and the effort to show up for meetings and to give you know, what they have as advice.

AG: Do you think that's something that's always been present in Danville, people giving their all to the community or do you think it's something more recent?

DW: I think that people have always been in a position to make differences in their community. Now they do have more of an option to get involved, but there were times when that was not an

option. But I think now that it is an option, people are coming forward and doing that, and I think more people get involved if they were asked. Sometime people are not involved because they don't know that there's a need for them to get involved.

AG: Same question about three words, but for teaching, how would you describe that in three words?

DW: I would say that teaching was the most rewarding thing for me, and I hope for my students. I absolutely loved it. It was interesting. Right now, GW has some reunions, class reunions and they do occasionally you know, let us know that they're having a class reunion, but for Langston the whole school, every three years has a class reunion. All of the graduates from 1936 to 1970. In fact, to 1973 because the students who attended Langston said we couldn't help it if the schools were integrated, you know we came to Langston so you ought to add us. So, from 1936 to 1973 every three years they come back to Danville and have a reunion.

AG: What is that like?

DW: It's fantastic. It's absolutely fantastic. And then when students from GW, they have not gotten to the point now of mass reunions, but they do have class reunions and I see...I keep in contact with some of the teachers that I worked with at GW. That the principals that I worked with at GW, we can see each other occasionally, so it's good. And it gave me, you know, I absolutely love the idea that I had the opportunity to work at GW because it gave me an idea of realizing that people are people. I didn't sit in my classroom and look at black and white – I know colors when I see them. They were students. I absolutely had no problem with students from the very beginning, it was no problem for me.

AG: I can see why they ran to your class. –all laugh- At Langston with the reunions, did everyone go to the same elementary school and the same middle school, and then go to Langston or did multiple schools come in?

DW: Multiple schools. There were schools on the north side and schools on the south side. So there were elementary schools on the south side, elementary on the north side. They all converged at Langston.

AG: Where did you go to elementary school?

DW: Westmoreland. *[unintelligible]* Westmoreland was, it's now being used for something different, but it was an elementary school and so I went just across the yard really to Langston.

AG: What do you remember about elementary school?

DW: I remember, well I remember learning to read. Learning to read, and absolutely the teacher reading to us stories that...there was a story called Big Road Walker that captivated me and I still remember the title of it because it was so interesting.

ER: What was it about?

DW: It was about a person, a huge person who got into difficulty doing things and how the person was able to come out of it with some help, some training. But it was interesting. And the teacher read it with such fervor. You almost felt that you were right there with the person.

AG: That's wonderful.

DW: Yes.

AG: When did you learn to read, do you remember the first book you read?

DW: Oh, I don't remember. It was Dick and Jane or whatever the book was that we had. I had learned some at home because my older sisters, you know, had gone ahead of me. I was number six in the family so I had learned some. But learning rapid reading, I learned that in first grade. I was not a rapid reader when I entered school. I could identify words, but as far as rapid reading, I couldn't do that.

AG: I was the same way. I could identify people to read to me!

DW: Right, right.

AG: I think one of the last questions is if you could choose one artifact or one object to represent you, what you choose?

DW: I think I would choose a book. I think I choose a book.

AG: Why would you choose a book?

DW: Because I love, love learning. I love learning. I just love learning. My house is full of books. They have Ollie's, it's a store here, I don't know if you whether you all know where it is, but every time I go in there they have all of these books and somehow I'm going to have to resist buying them. –all laugh- You know you can go on the internet and they have just about everything you need.

ER: Raid the Goodwill.

DW: Well, that's a good thing because they have some good books too, I have seen them.

AG: So, which book would you pick to represent you? I know that's a hard question.

ER: Or would you write one?

DW: No, I haven't thought about writing one. I don't know...which book would I choose? I'm not sure if I can remember which book I would choose...what I enjoy now, and you're gonna be surprised by my answer, is the Bible. There's a program in Danville called Bible Study Fellowship, BSF, have you heard of that?

[interviewers shake heads in the negative]

DW: I went there for eight years and I'm going to go back because, next year, not this coming year but the year after they are going to study Revelations and I'm going to go back. So, I think right now I choose the Bible as my favorite book, because I do more reading in that than anything else.

AG: I think we're about to ask the same question...

ER: No, I'm not asking a question, so you go.

AG: I was going to say what else would you like to share, what question did we forget to ask that you're dying to answer?

DW: I can't think of anything that I'm dying to answer that you didn't ask...I think we covered just about everything I can think of unless you can think of anything else.

ER: I just wanted to thank you again for taking time out of your day...

[END TRANSCRIPTION]