

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

PROFESSOR: *JOE PRATT, PhD.*

THEME: MIGRATING TO HOUSTON

INTERVIEWEE: DORIS FOREMAN

INTERVIEWER: GERTRUDISCABRERA

DATE: 11/18/2004

Interviewee: Doris, Foreman

Interview Date: November 18, 2004

Cabrera This is Trudy Cabrera. Today is November 8th, 2004, Monday. I am interviewing Doris Foreman for my class at U. of H. on Oral History with Professor Pratt. My theme is "Migrating to Houston." Thank you Doris for helping me with my project.

Cabrera Can you start by telling me about your background? Where do you, and your family, come from?

Foreman I am the youngest daughter of a single Mom with six children. I am from Bryan, Texas. It is about a hundred miles from Houston. We were a poor little family, of course, with a single Mom, back in 1948, which is when I was born. We lived in a two room house, not two bedrooms, but a two room house. I attended school; elementary, junior high and high school in Bryan. I came to Houston the year before I graduated, during the summer, to live with my sister. She talked me into going back home for another year until I graduated.

Cabrera Why did you leave your home town and move to Houston before you graduated from high school?

Foreman I was not the world's best child. I was, now I know, that I was a problem child. My mother had six children, and my older sister already left home. Things were not the best for us, there were certain things that we lacked.

The things that the other children had. Of course I wanted those things and my mother could not provide those things, and I did not understand. I felt like if I could leave home, I could do it on my own. So I wanted to come to Houston and get a job and make a life for myself, but I did not realize, you could not do that if you did not have a good education. So I struck out in the summer and came to Houston and tried to find a job. I did get a job, it was a baby sitting job and it only paid ten or fifteen dollars a week. Which was not anything to live off of But, I was living with my sister and it was enough to help out with the groceries, but it did not pay any of the bills.

Cabrera How did you managed to get to Houston from your town? You said things were tight.

Foreman My sister came home one weekend, my mother and I were having problems and I just decided I was not going to stay anymore. Of course like more hard headed kids - I said: I am going to leave, I am not coming back, I am going to make a living for myself My sister said well she can go with me you know it is summer time anyway. Just let her see what life is really like being on her own. And of course, I thought I could go to Houston and become a secretary over night without any kind of skills or anything like that. Once I got out there, I realized the little typing that I had in high school was not enough or the shorthand was not enough to get

a suitable job. Nobody was going to hire a seventeen year old to go on a job that really paid anything during that time, especially a black girl.

Cabrera Can you tell me a little bit more about your experiences in Houston? How did you find your first job?

Foreman My first job was with one of the neighbors. One of the neighbors got a job and she needed somebody to keep her children. There were the worse kids that I had ever seen in my life. I was from the country and I was so used to kids behaving. I really thought that I was tough stuff and I could handle anybody's children. I baby sat in my home town before, and was known to be a good baby sitter. But I never come across Houston kids that were street wise, and they were much tougher than I ever thought a little kid could be. They knew things that I never hear of in my whole life. It, maybe, worked out for a month or two and I asked for a raise because the kids were so bad, and the lady told me no. I decided ok I just can not keep these kids because I did not want to lay hands on them, of course. So I decided to quit and find me another job. So my next job was, I looked in the paper, and it shows you how much education I had and how smart I was at that time. The next job, it said, "experience nursery worker". Well I felt like, a nursery. I thought nursery school, but that was not the kind of nursery they refer to, it was a plant nursery, where you grow plants. I went and applied for the job and the lady really laughed

about it. She was really nice, and she said; well if I do not hired anybody in the next couple of weeks I'll call you back. It was at a nursery that grows plants and did flowers and stuff So sure enough she called me back, of course. I stayed there a couple of weeks cleaning up and picking up the dead flowers and stuff and putting them in the trash, things like that. Of course I did not like that, so I quit. I really wanted to be a secretary, I thought. I had taken all these classes in school; shorthand, I typed sixty words a minute.

On my first job, (interview) it was in a building that was downtown, and it had to do with the airlines, and I went down there and the little man laughed at me. I was very well dressed, very well spoken but he laughed and he said; you are not old enough for this job. Almost all the job interviews that I went on, they kept saying; you are not old enough, you are not old enough. Sometimes you could look at peoples' faces, and see the expression that they had. Here I am, maybe 98 pounds, this tiny little girl, going into these big buildings, trying to find a job. A little black girl not knowing. I had no idea, people during that time hired you because of color for certain jobs. I would go in just boldly and ask for a job, you know. They would tell me, they would not give me an interview or any thing. They would just come in and say, you are not the person for this job. You need to go back, you are not old enough, and sent me back on my way. So I had a lot of those and I really got upset, and told my sister that maybe I needed to go back home because I was not helping her with

the bills and stuff. She said, well why don't you do this; why don't you go ahead and go back home, finish up next year, your senior year. You can put up with anything for a year, because I was really like I said before, having problems with my mother. I decided to go back home and stay for the year. I was going to come back and stay with her again, go to school and get some more clerical skills, so I could get a job and be a secretary. I do not know why I had that on my mind, but it always looks good on television, the secretary sitting behind the desk all dressed up, starch in a little suit. That was going to be me.

Cabrera So you went back home, and finished high school, and then you came back to Houston?

Foreman Yes, I did.

Cabrera Can you tell me about that time?

Foreman Well, I went back home and I graduated. During that time, there was a college here in Houston that was called Massey Business College. About eight of us decided to go to secretarial school, and our major was a two years' program, major on Secretarial Science. We were going to school I guess maybe for about, it was September, October, and do not think we went through November. I am not sure about, but one day we went to

class, and they told us that the school was closed. We paid maybe eight hundred dollars for the course at that time, and you had to pay all of the money. **It** was such a struggle for me to get that kind of money. Of course they wanted to give you a loan, financial assistance, but my mother was not sure about that, because she did not know how she was going to pay it back or if **I** would be able to pay the money back. It is amazing that when we got ready to go, the girls that went with me, nobody told us that the school was in financial trouble or anything like that, but it did. **It** did close in the middle of the semester. I never got a chance to finish. So, I went back home, no I stayed with my sister until the end of the school year, and went back home to live with my grandparents.

One day I was at church, an aunt had come to visit, and we were having Sunday dinner. We were talking about what I was going to do with my life. You know, how I needed to get myself together. You know how older people talk to you. You need to change your ways and all that kind of stuff I did not really know what I wanted to do, but I was always one of those kids that when you were in church on a Sunday, after Sunday School, you got up in church and talk about what you had learned in Sunday School. For whatever reason it was always me who got up and started talking. My aunt said; I really enjoyed your message this morning in church. You know there is a school that takes all of the good Baptist ministers and trains them. You would be very good as a missionary. So I went to that school. **It** was a Baptist Seminary. **It** used to be a school for all

girls, it was called Mary Allen Baptist Seminary and it is a historical monument. It is in Crocket, Texas. It is in the mist of being restored by engineering students from Prairie View right now. It was an old building that looked like Dracula's castle. There were about a hundred and twenty five of us there. Everybody was majoring on Elementary Education, Theology or something to do with religion. It was during the sixties and everybody was talking about going out and being missionaries, going to Jamaica and Africa, and saving the people who really did not have much. As I did all my training, most of my training was in basic studies, but you had a lot of religious stuff, Old Testament, New Testament, anything religious you named we had it. We were in the chapel, praying, learning at least four days a week, and of course we had to go to church all day Sunday. My life personally changed of course.

I met a young man who is my husband now, who was very strong in The Word and anything I did not understand; he was always there to have my back. I never had a boyfriend or a friend that would do that. He never never let me, even in our regular studies, miss a question. I do not know if he was embarrassed because he likes me and he did not want me to be wrong about anything, but he always told me answers and if I m s/quoted something, he would always have my back about it. We started dating, and one of the other couples who was at the school; they talked about going to South America and doing missionary work. Another couple who we knew had already gone. They would write back and tells us; you know this

people Southern Baptist, they are not sending us any money. We are over here broke and bla, bla, bla. We started thinking about it.

My husband graduated before I did and he went on to a school called Paul Kuinn College, a religious Methodist school,. he was there, and he changed, all that religion changed. He changed, all of a sudden, he was playing basketball. I was still at the school and still had the missionary on my mind; I really wanted to do that. After I graduated, I went to Paul Kuinn with the same intention to be a missionary. I was going to teach, so

I changed over to Elementary Education, got my social degree from Mary Allen. My husband got his degree on Biochemistry, (with a minor) in Zoology. We really worked hard at Paul Kuinn together, because we were still going to be missionaries. The Vietnam War was going on and we were losing a lot of friends. I think we started to change. We were growing up and stuff. Our ideals and values started changing. So we decided not to do that, but we were so eager to get married, more than anything else.

He left the school a year before. He left and came to Houston and got a job that summer at an oil company. He started working; it was a really good job. We decided to get married the next year, when I got ready to do my student teaching, which we did. Came to Houston and I did my student teaching, and I find out that I was going to have a baby, after we got married, of course, this is after the marriage, ha, ha. We moved in a little apartment and had the first baby. I found out later when I was trying to get a job, that I have not received my teacher's certificate. I got my degree,

but I did not get my teacher's certificate, I could not figure out why. So I went to the school and they told me that I had missed one class. So, with a new baby I had to go back to school and take that one hour. It was Literature in the Elementary School. It was only worth one hour, so I had to leave my husband, go back to the school and take that one hour or stayed in Houston and take; I think you had to have thirty hours before you could graduate from another college. Something like that, it was all messed up. Anyway, I ended up going back for a semester and taking that class. I tried to take my baby with me but that did not work because I had to work, my mother in law kept the baby for me for the semester. My husband and I went back and forth, he was either in Waco or I was in Houston, visiting the baby. I finally got the class over with and we settled down into married life. The first three years I wanted to stay at home and of course he wanted me to stay at home and raised the babies, until they got to be school age, I did. Soon as the girls were ready for school, I think, I started subbing. No, I started working for a detective agency. It was fun, I loved it, I loved it, and I wanted to be a policeman after that, and it got to be dangerous. People do not believe being a private detective is dangerous, you are following people, and you are getting into people's life and stuff I had a good time doing it, but it was a little bit stressful and I ended up getting an ulcer and my husband made me quit.

Cabrera How did you find that job?

Foreman I went to an agency that finds jobs for you and they gave me that. Believe it or not of all the secretarial jobs, I had never had a job as a secretary, never.

Cabrera What kind of things did you used to do at the detective's agency?

Foreman My first job was, I am thinking it was Walgreens, it was Walgreens or Ec: They were having problems with somebody stealing drugs out of the Pharmacy. I went into the store as an employee and started working. I was supposed to keep my eyes open as to who was doing the stealing. The person who was doing the stealing, believe it or not, was the most handsome black man you ever seen, tall, dark, salt and pepper hair, just super fine. Come to find out, he was getting ready to start his own pharmacy, and he was stealing the drugs for his pharmacy and trying to blame it on the young boys that were working in the pharmacy with him. He finally got caught, I turned him in, but once when he found out that I knew about him, his first thing was, I am going to woo her, and try to talk to her sweet talking, just so happen he probably made me to, ha, ha. No, no, I am not going to say that. They brought in another person, to come in with me, I had to turn in my report to her and let her know exactly what was going on, we turned him in, and of course he got fired. My next job. I started subbing as a teacher. My husband said; you are

going to have to do something other than these dangerous jobs.

Cabrera This was after you had your certification?

Foreman Yes, I finally got my certification. My husband said how that you got it, you are going to start teaching if you are going to work. I went as a substitute. I think that I maybe work six weeks and the lady at one of the schools ask me if I had my degree, if I was certified and I told her yes. She said; I do not have any thing available as a teacher but I like your work, I like your style, would you come in and be a teacher's aid for me? And at the first opening in the district that I know of, I will give it to you, just come in and help me. So I did, that was at River Oaks, in the River Oaks area. I maybe stayed at River Oaks until October, school just started, and the first opening was Franklin. The principal at the school had been the counselor at Franklin and she sent me to Franklin. I interviewed with the principle and he hired me the very same day. I started working and I stayed at Franklin three years as a Math. Specialist. I had a lot of Math classes because when I was at Paul Kuinn, I worked in the Math Department and all the elective classes I took were Math classes, basically because my husband was good at Math and he could always help me with my classes. I started teaching Math, and I started a Math lab there. Then the program, it was a Chapter One program, a Title One program, one of those kinds of programs, and they had to leave. Everybody that was in the

Title One program, for whatever reason. I do not think the principle wanted it or you know how they can get rid of different programs. So I left and became an instructional coordinator.

Cabrera At the same school?

Foreman No, Port of Houston, Eighth Avenue, in the Heights. Believe or not, I loved what I was doing, but as soon as I found something that I really loved, I got pregnant again, ha, ha. I got pregnant again with my son, and of course I finished out the year. My husband did not want me to go back to work anymore because I was having his son. He wanted his son's mother at home raising him. You know, the old fashion kind of way. But it did not last long because I was sort of a hyperactive person. I stayed home maybe six weeks and then I was back at work.

Cabrera After you had the boy?

Foreman Yes.

Cabrera Who took care of the boy?

Foreman I had neighbors, and then my sister did, and then he was able to go to Day Care.

Cabrera What year was this?

Foreman 79, at first I was not going to go back but then Mr. Pryor called me, and he said, "I heard you had a baby, congratulations. I need a Math specialist and I need somebody to start a Math Lab here, are you interested? And of course I jumped at the chance, because I loved being at Franklin. So I went back. If it had been anybody else who called, I do not think I would have gone, I would have stayed home like my husband wanted me, but Mr. Pryor was a super person to work for, so I went back to work for him, and stayed there for the next seventeen years. Seventeen, eighteen years."

Cabrera Tell me about life in Houston, with your husband and your family. Was it easy to socialize, to make new friends, easy to get around?

Foreman My really first enjoyable time here was when we really settled. We got an apartment over Bracewood and Stella Lane. My husband, like I said before, had a really good job and I could have stayed at home and been comfortable. Once the girls got ready to go to school I did not have anything to do, and I was bored and of course then I had the other baby. Subbing I was making some extra money. We were doing really good, in fact, the first pay check that I got, was maybe four hundred dollars. I was so excited, never in my whole life had I ever got a check for four hundred

dollars. The most I ever got for working was eighty three dollars, and that was for two weeks period of time. This was like I was in heaven.

I had always gone to the laundry mat. I had this little pattern. I would go to the laundry mat on Saturday morning, by ten o'clock. By twelve o'clock I would be finished with all of my work on Saturday, and the girls and I would go to the beauty shop, do little girly things that girls do. You know, get your hair done and stuff like that. One of the girls at Franklin said to me; why are you still going to the laundry mat? Why don't you buy you a washing machine? Me buy a washing machine? I had never made a major decision about buying an appliances or furniture or anything like that. It always been something that my husband had done. I would say it now, because I removed myself from that period of my life, but back then, I used to feel like, whatever my husband said was ok. If he did not bring it up, that we were going to get something new, I did not bring it up, because I always felt like it was the man's decision. I know that is old fashion, and some people would say what planet she came off But I was raised that way, with my grandparents, because my grandmother never made decisions. My grandfather always made the decisions, and of course when I lived with my mother there was no man there, so my mother made the decisions, but we were too poor to even think about a washing machine.

So anyway, I went to Sears. Sears was not far from Franklin. Just on a whim I went in there and one of the ladies asked me, you know, can I help you. I went in and I said, I really need a washing machine. She said, do

you have a job? No, how are you going to pay for it? We found the washer that I liked. I really did not know what was I looking for , but it was cute. I picked that one. Got in there and fill out the papers for credits, and did not know, had never had any credit on my name or anything before. The lady asked me if I had a job, how much money I made. If my husband had a job, and I said yes. So she filled up the application for me. I left there that day expecting to get a washing machine and a dryer on Saturday, so I would never had to go to the laundry mat again. I could do my laundry any day of the week instead of only on Saturday. That was the first feeling that I had of sort of being an independent person, been able to do stuff on my own, because basically I always relied in somebody else to make major decisions for me in my life. When I got home, I was so proud and I told my husband. He said, his words were: You did what? Because he knew I was not one of those persons. I could not make decisions like that on my own, even as simple as buying a washing machine and a dryer. So, that was the beginning of me being a totally different person.

CHILDREN BECOMING HISTORIANS

Trudy Cabrera

This article by Alistair Ross, explored alternative ways of teaching elementary students the basic skills to conduct oral history at the same time that they learn new concepts and develop their communication and social skills. The setting for the project is a London inner city school. The topic is the evacuation of the students before the beginning of World War II, from London to Wiltshire. Two classes of different ages were chosen; one of 7 to 8 year old students, and one of 9 to 10 year olds.

Throughout the article the author compares and contrasts age groups, their findings, successes and difficulties. The students conducted interviews with former students and staff from the school, who were involved in the evacuation in 1939. By approaching history this way, instead of relying only on texts and documents, students had the opportunity of developing a wide range of skills that are not generally approached in a traditional classroom, such as some communications skills. In the classroom students are encourage to develop their reading and writing skills, but other skills such as questioning, discussing and talking, are generally overlook.

The students were exposed to new concepts like social change, tradition and conflict, in a more interactive way than just reading from a book. By interacting with other adults outside their social circle, students improve their skills at understanding, listening and been compassionate to other age groups. They also had the opportunity to discern and use their own judgment on what they considered to be contradictory evidences. Students were able to compare and contrast their educational and cultural setting within the school today, compared to fifty years ago. Finally students compared,

analyzed and summarized their findings and wrote about the topics they found more interesting.

In general, the author's project is a holistic way of training students to become historian_ in their own rights, at the same time that they widen their knowledge and expertise in a variety of concepts that will help them be more successful students and individuals. Using such an interactive approach to teaching would make a lasting impression on the students, an experience they will remember for the rest of their lives.



ORAL HISTORY: METHODS AND USES

Project proposal

Trudy Cabrera

My project will be based on interviews with two African American ladies who migrated to Houston.

Doris Foreman migrated to Houston in 1965. She was born in Bryan, Texas. At the age of 16 Doris decided to leave home and moved to Houston. Her sister was working as a nurse in 'The Big City.' Doris had no working skills and did not finish high school. I want to learn about her reasons for migrating to Houston. How was life for an African American teenager in a small town, and how her life changed in her new setting? Were her experiences with segregation in a small town different from the big city? What kind of jobs and other opportunities were open to her in Houston in 1965.

Thelma Dickey was born in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1948. She migrated to Houston after finishing high school. She graduated third of her class. Thelma's mother died two weeks before the end of the school year. Thelma moved to Houston to live with her half-sister and her husband. She attended college in Grambling, Louisiana, a college for African Americans. Sometimes during the summer and school holidays she will come to Houston, but she preferred to stay in Louisiana. After graduating from college in 1970, she came back to live in Houston permanently.

Thelma remembers seating on the back of the bus, and going to demonstrations during the Civil Rights Movement. I want her to share her personal experiences of the Civil Right Movement and her feelings and insights about moving from an African American community in Louisiana to a racially mixed community in Houston.

The purpose of my project is to compare and contrast these two ladies life experiences before and after moving to Houston. How their working and social experiences in Houston differ from each other in a time lapse of five years. And the changes, if there were any, in working opportunities for African American women between 1965 and 1970. How the social changes that were taking place at that time in Houston impacted their lives.



*MIGRATING TO HOUSTON
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