

Interviewee: Granger, Shirley L.

Interview Date: April 30, 2011

Oral History Transcript
Ms. Shirley Hicks Granger
30 April 2011

Sandra Davidson (SD): Good morning.

Shirley Granger (SG): Good Morning.

SD: My name is Sandra Davidson. Today is Saturday, April 30 and I'm here with Ms. Shirley Granger. We are at 3715 Florinda Street in Houston, Texas. If you would, please, tell me what your full name is.

SG: My full name is Shirley Lenora Granger.

SD: Okay. And what is your maiden name?

SG: My maiden name is Shirley Lenora Hicks.

SD: Where and when were you born?

SG: I was born in Wharton County, Hungerford, Texas on April 6.

SD: Okay. And did you have any brothers and sisters?

SG: Yes, I have one sister, Marva Smith. And I have one brother, Howard Hicks.

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SD: Are you the oldest, youngest, or the middle?

SG: I am the oldest.

SD: Okay. So what was it like growing up in Wharton County?

SG: It was a lot of fun. We lived on a farm, a very small farm but it was a lot of fun growing up. We walked to school sometimes and sometimes we rode the bus. And we farmed. My dad farmed corn and cotton and things like that—vegetables. And he also had cows and hogs and dogs and cats and things like that. Chickens. And we had a lot of fun learning the ways of the farm. And we enjoyed going to school during the time that—going to school. I went several places.

SD: Where did you go?

SG: I went to Hungerford to a little neighborhood school. And from there I went to Los Angeles to live with my aunt, my sister and I. And this was in about, the upper primary grades, say fourth, fifth grade, something like that. And then I went into what was called something like middle school or junior high in Los Angeles. And we lived there two years and then we came back to Texas. And when I came back to Texas, I was in seventh grade and entered the school in Hungerford, Texas. And from there into the junior high school in Hungerford and then transferred to Kendleton, Texas which was just a few miles from Hungerford, and finished the eleventh and twelfth grade there. I graduated in 1955 and I entered

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junior college, Wharton Junior College in Wharton, Texas for one year majoring in Art Education.

Prior to entering college, I had enrolled in a commercial art course by mail. And I had almost completed it when I got ready to go to college and became kind of busy and I didn't complete every book, the last book. But it was the beginning of my art—sort of the art career. The gift, the talent, for art was there way back. And I transferred from Wharton Junior College to Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas and I stayed there and graduated in January of 1960. And I received my Bachelor of Art Education degree there. Do you want me to go further?

SD: Let me back up a little bit. What did you mean by “commercial” art?

SG: It was an advertisement in the paper or a magazine about a commercial art contest. And I saw a picture there that says, “Draw me,” and I attempted to do that. I did that, sent the entry in and they wrote me back and told me that I had talent. I didn't win a prize as such but I had talent and they offered me the chance to take the course and I did. My parents were poor financially but they were able to pay the fee monthly so that I could take the course. And I did. So there was a series of twelve books and I completed Book 1 through Book 11. And that was the beginning to going into college and choosing the art career.

SD: Did you always know you wanted to go to college?

SG: I didn't know. Right now—I didn't really know about college at that point, at a young age. It was just going to school, enjoying school [laughs]. And our parents were always encouraging. They did

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their best to help us. In fact, when we started school, Marva and I, we knew how to write our names and basic information. So when we started to school, we were not starting empty. And we just continued like that so we developed a love for school, our teachers and our friends and just continued on. Plus it was inborn from above. My father was older than my mother about fifteen or twenty years. And my mother finished high school through about the eleventh grade. She was very smart with her education and she taught us. She taught A-B-Cs and 1-2-3, and she had a little switch and she would . . . [laughs].

And my father, he did not finish elementary school but he was well-learned. He had learning God had taught him. He could read. He could write. He could read the Bible and understand the Bible. He became a minister when I was a little girl, we were little girls. And he taught us about the Lord, to love the Lord, to get to know Him, to just love Him, to serve Him, coupled with our learning in school because in school we had spiritual learning, singing songs about God, Christianity, being a Christian. And we sang songs; we did prayers. All of this was in school at that time. And my father was a very strong person in the Bible and in divine inspiration from God. It inspired me a lot on through, even now. And I speak some of the words that he spoke, the teachings, and I carried it over into my life and teaching.

Backing up a little bit—I'll move ahead because it could be a long story. Scriptures that my dad taught us, number one: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." That was the basic philosophy and he did it in practice. On Sunday mornings we would go to the table and eat breakfast. First we would sing, read a scripture, and pray. And my dad would be the one as a model. And one Sunday after he had done this for so many times—it was like learning in school, he would say, "Okay, Shirley, you pray." And he would let me pray. And then maybe the next

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Sunday, he would pray or Mom would pray. The next Sunday would be Marva's turn to do the same.

This continued. Then when we—kind of jumping ahead—when we became grown—well, every

Sunday it was, “Train up a child in the way he should go” and then “Honor your mother and father.”

Those are the basic things. And then as we got to be young ladies, girls and ladies and on up, when we had children, there was the same thing, “Train up a child in the way he should go,” and our children.

And I had one child. Marva had one. And it was the same thing like that. So that spiritual learning

background, it formed the lives of Marva and myself and it was good. We had a good time. Now, I

was always afraid of whippings whenever I did. But those little spankings that I got, it paid off. My

dad, I can only remember one spanking he gave me. It was with his hand and then he walked off and

that was it. No fussing. But Mom was a little bit rough, you know, but it all paid off. And that was

about our training. Of course, a long story on through our adulthood, marriage and so on. That was

about it on that learning.

SD: Let me back up a little bit. What was the main difference, or was there any difference from when you were in school in Texas and when you went to school in Los Angeles?

SG: Well there was a difference in that there were more opportunities for learning, exposed to a lot.

My aunt, she lived alone and she loved us. She gave us food, clothes, and shelter, basic necessities of

life and she exposed us to things in school. For instance we learned how to skate. We learned how to

do music. When I entered the upper grades, I learned to play the violin and it was real good. I made

friends. I learned to do craft work, working with yarn. In the class there was a girl that could draw

very well. I was just really awesome in watching her and I think that had an influence in my life. And

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she could just sit up and start drawing. She would tell us stories. The children, her classmates, would gather around her like we're gathered and just watch her and watch her. And we wanted to say, "Take my hand and make my hand do what you're doing." And of course, from that time on, step by step, I just started doing drawing and so on. And then when I came back to Texas a little bit, I had this ability to look at a picture and draw it and make it look like the picture. It wouldn't be perfect, but it would look like that. And then my classmates and teachers noticed this and they would help me to do things like that making posters and so on. And it just carried on. But backing up, I didn't play in the band or anything, but I enjoyed that. Also, I learned to sew and I had an interest in that, a very strong [interest] in that and my first project was to make an apron and a pot holder. And I can remember the color, the design and everything right now. Sewing, creating crafts, was my thing and teachers noticed things about me. Before I left Los Angeles, a teacher had some granny-squares that she had done. You know, we always have something that we start and don't finish [laughs] like I have now. And she gave them to me and I brought them to Texas and I just kept them and kept them.

Also, related to the crafts, my aunt entered me into the Girl Scouts. Now, Marva was three years younger and I can't remember all of what she was exposed to. But she let me get into the Girl Scouts and the Girl Scout leader helped us to make a Girl Scout sweater. The color was green and white, I think. And I think I might've been the only one or one of the only ones who finished the sweater and I was able to bring it back to Texas. However, I don't know where it is now [laughs]. But I really appreciated that because I learned how to do the basic knitting stitch, knitting and purling. And I can do it even now. That's something that stays with you just like the drawing and other things.

Toni Tipton-Martin (TTM): It does.

SG: And I enjoyed those things. And my aunt, she would just feed us and feed us and feed us. And if we didn't eat it, she would be ready to kind of put a little punishment there and I was always sort of like they say, the "skinny one", the "puny one" who didn't want to eat much and all like that. So I would hide my food in my pocket and say, "Marva, you eat this." It was fun like that.

So anyway, when we came back to Texas after two years—okay, we also learned how to do the cartwheel and things like that in gymnastics. When we came back to Texas, the skates didn't do any good because we didn't have the concrete to roll on and so on but I don't know what happened with them. But we were able to carry the exercises and so on back to Texas. But when we came back our language had kind of changed [laughs] and the children would say, "Why are they talking like that?" [Laughs]. But we had taken on that. It kind of wore off after we came back, you know, depending upon where your location is. But we came back and did well in school on through high school and so on.

SD: Had you gone out there to help your aunt, or was it to get more opportunities?

SG: Well, I think it was more or less to help her. She needed someone to be with her, maybe to live in that area. And she asked my mother and father if she would let us go and stay with her for a while. They didn't want to but eventually she convinced them to let us go and stay with her. And we stayed two years. She started telling us, "You don't want to go back to Texas. Blah. Blah. Blah. Blah. Blah." She had a little bit of education, more, and she kind of looked down I think on being there and our ways of talking and living and all like that and all. But in spite of it all, God brought us through.

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He gave us all what we needed and that was it.

SD: Tell me about Texas Southern. How did you choose Texas Southern?

SG: Well, Texas Southern was the school at that time and for my field. And how I got into that, I made the application after leaving junior college. I was accepted and I didn't have a place to stay. I wasn't able to stay in the dormitory because of financing so I had a first cousin that lived here in Houston and he was married. His wife was a teacher; he was in the funeral business. I lived with them about two years I think. And I learned a lot from them. And she being a teacher, I was able to help her in the creative part by doing charts and different aids in teaching. And then I lived closer to the campus with a friend who was going to Texas Southern and continued. And on the last year, I lived with a cousin and then went to do my student teaching and I moved into a dormitory to do my student teaching and I graduated in January of that year and so I had the Spring semester to just. . . I did substitute work at home for it during that semester and then graduated in May.

And then I applied for a teaching job in several places and I had offers in two or three places but then Port Arthur came through. And that was the one that was in my field and I accepted that. I had never been to Port Arthur before and I accepted that and I went there I think in the Fall of 1960. And my position was a Classroom Teacher junior—it was at the high school. There was only one black high school at that time, Lincoln High School in Port Arthur, seventh grade art. And I worked at that school one year and they gave the school to—it was the crossover—to the blacks. And my assistant principal became the principal and he carried—I was one to go with him, still teaching art on seventh grade level. And that's where I met my sister-in-law who had finished Prairie View. And we started the same

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year [laughs]. And then the same year I met her brother through a friend. She didn't know about it. She didn't have anything to do with that. And that year we became engaged and then later we married. And then about nine years later, we had Crystal [laughs].

SD: So what's, what was your husband's name?

SG: His name is Wallace. And I had a lot of fun there. During my career there I taught sixth grade—seventh grade art for a few years. Then they gave me an assignment—sixth grade because they didn't need as many art teachers so I taught sixth grade about three years and then I had my child. And then I left. I stayed out one year. And then after I went back, I lived in Port Arthur three more years, which was a total of twelve years. And during that time before I moved, my husband and I separated and I moved to Houston so that I could be closer to my parents; they were older. Marva and I had a crippled sister from birth and we wanted to be closer to them. Marva was living in Houston at that time. We wanted to be closer so that we could work together and care for our parents and sister. So my daughter and myself moved to Houston.

We entered Crystal in pre-school, on up until where she is now [laughs]. She was very successful through her school years. And I worked with her, the things that I had learned, influences carried over. She inherited a lot plus on her father's side and my side. And that's where we are today, a long story and all in between, you know.

SD: You mentioned that you grew up on the farm.

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SG: Yes.

SD: Tell me a little bit about your experiences with gardening, or food, or that kind of thing.

SG: Okay. On the farm we grew corn, greens, potatoes, okra. Now, I don't remember us planting okra seeds but we had plenty of okra. It was called "volunteer" okra. It just grew up on its own in the corn and cotton fields. And every year we would get it without planting it. And it was the best-tasting okra, the ridged okra. We didn't have the smooth okra. And we could go and just pick okra, come home and cook it. There were different ways of fixing the okra we learned from our parents and others. And we would have other vegetables. I can't think of any in particular, but we loved mustard greens, tomatoes, corn. Of course, we had cows. And Dad milked. We had milk and we made butter, and buttermilk, and things like that.

And we had hogs where we would—Daddy would butcher the hogs and would have the meat and they would cook the meat and share with the neighbors because neighbors would come over and help with the killing of the hogs, processing. And then the butter we would make and we would have a chance to churn. We would have a chance to churn the butter.

Then the chickens, one of our favorites. We raised chickens. We had a chance to see—could get the eggs and gather them. We learned how to cook eggs. And we learned how to make potato salad and put eggs in there [laughs], boiled eggs. And we learned how to cook the other vegetables. Now, Mom did not say, "Come, gather around. I want to show you," as such. We just saw things going on and we would look. And then of course, over a period of time we would know how to put certain things together and what ingredients she would use. And there were some favorite ones that we learned

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how to do. And one of the baking things that I like to do—well, let me finish about the chickens. The chickens, we learned how to pluck the feathers off. I never did learn how to break the neck of the chicken. My mother could do it. But we could clean it by putting it in hot water, scalding them, and then plucking the feathers off and then learning how to cut the chicken up into parts and then learning how to fry the chicken. Fried chicken was a favorite food. We did the chicken. We had potatoes, Irish potatoes, made gravy. We loved gravy, onion gravy. So chicken, potatoes, gravy and the green vegetables, that was a meal. And pinto beans. That was a favorite food. We learned how to fix pinto beans and flavor them to our taste. And there was always some food to eat, you know. Beans and cornbread. We learned how to cook cornbread. And biscuits for breakfast.

And I remember my mother had to go and stay with her sister. She was ill in Los Angeles. And while she was gone, Marva and I were small girls so Dad had to take care of us, getting us ready to go to school. He knew how to comb our hair, how to cook, and feed us. And that was where I learned how to make biscuits. I loved it so much until every day I wanted to make biscuits and we had biscuits to throw away [laughs]. We just had fun like that.

So after—the other foods—we liked to make ice cream, too. That was a favorite food. The milk that we had, and the eggs. Mom would make the custard, put the flavor, and we would have the ice cream. Going along with the ice cream, the tea cakes. And we learned about tea cakes. So sometimes in the evening time, late, we would gather on the porch and I'd say, "Well, I think I want some ice cream. Ya'll want some ice cream?" We'd say, "Okay." And she'd say, "Well, I'll do so-and-so-and-so and you fix so-and-so-and-so." And so we would make the ice cream in the freezer, turn it with the crank. And Mama would make—"I'm gonna' make a batch of tea cakes if you bake them." So she would make them up and we would bake them. And we would make the ice cream, sit on the

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porch—it was hot—we didn't have air [conditioning]. We didn't even have fans, I don't think. We just had the windows we would open. And we'd just sit up and eat ice cream 'til we'd get full and tea cakes. And we would rest awhile and then we'd go back and eat some more ice cream and tea cakes [laughs].

And what is it about—concerning the meat in the kitchen, we learned to make cornbread dressing. That was a favorite dish. Cornbread dressing, of course, with the cornbread, the giblets from the chicken, the broth from the chicken and all the seasoning and we learned how to put it together. Of course, if you could not have highly seasoned spices, you know, you would not put that in. Even today I can't eat spices too much. But we learned how to do the cornbread. Nobody could make cornbread dressing like Mama. And have the turkey and sometimes just baking a chicken.

And concerning baking, this is kind of jumping ahead—when I married my husband, his people were from Lorraine, Louisiana and they knew how to make rice dressing. Dirty rice. It's called dirty rice. We, in Texas, didn't know. We didn't know about dirty rice. And my in-laws, they didn't know about cornbread dressing but they liked cornbread dressing [laughs] so they learned about cornbread dressing from me from Texas and we learned about the dirty rice, or rice dressing, from them. And I'm kind of jumping ahead now. My mother-in-law was the best maker of rice dressing or dirty rice. So that caught my attention. I wanted to learn how to do it, but I didn't have time to go sit and watch from the beginning to the end so I would ask her what to put in there and at different times I would look and see, you know. Boy, it would taste so good. I didn't want anybody else's but hers. So one day my mother came to visit me. I said, "Mama," I said, "Rice dressing is so good. You've got to get it in our family." I said, "I'm gonna' carry you over and I want you to watch her from step one through the final step and I want you to learn it so you can teach us." I carried her over. Mama sat there and enjoyed herself. So when she came back, I said, "Well, Mama, did you learn how to make the rice dressing?"

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Did you take notes?" She smiled and laughed and said, "Oh--." I said, "Mama, you didn't . . ." I started fussing. I was being the mama, talking like Mama. I said, "Mama, you didn't learn? Why do you think I carried you there?" [Laughs]. And so anyway, we laughed about that. So I said, "Well, okay." I decided I was going to write down the ingredients and the steps to make rice dressing. I did fairly well, but still there was nobody's like my mother-in-law. So I remember her for that. So much for the food. There were other foods too, but that was one of the favorites.

And backing up with my mother about cakes—her favorite cake, one that was well-known, was the jelly cake. I don't know if you've heard about that. The jelly cake. And that was about the only kind of frosting or icing whatever, you know, because they would make the jelly from grapes that would come up alongside the road, and berries. Grapes and berries. And they would take those fruits and make jelly. That was canning and jarring. And then when they got ready to make cakes at Christmastime, on special holidays and Christmastime, and maybe Thanksgiving, they would make those cakes and would put jelly on them. They would make it two or three or four layers of the cake and put the jelly in between and then on top. That was a favorite one. That was one that stood out in my eyesight. And then later as the years passed by, they learned other ways of putting the layers together. And then, of course, the pound cake, you know. I'm trying to think of other foods.

Okay, the potato pie was another favorite one, dessert. Sweet potato pie. We loved that. And of course, there were other ways of fixing sweet potatoes—the candied yams and sweet potato pie, and perhaps others but mainly I think the sweet potato pie. We learned how to do that, make the crust. And of course they fed the potato pone [?], pone [?] or whatever. I didn't ever try to make that but I did make the potato pies. And when I became an adult, I did make them even in Port Arthur, but then it kind of got ___ on me and I didn't make it anymore. And when I came here to Houston, Marva was the

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one that would make the potato pies. She's good at that. And I came into making cookies. And I started making cookies.

Well, with my crafts, my artistic ability and so on, I was just doing some of everything from sewing to crafts. And backing up about that sewing. Because I had learned how to sew in Los Angeles, I was able to come and make some clothes for myself and for Marva, school clothes, and also for my mother. I would make little two-pieces. And it was real good. I enjoyed that. And of course, the creative design. And even after Crystal was born, many years later, I was able to make some things for her, for special events. And I made one piece for Chimere [Crystal's daughter]. I didn't have much time because I was a single parent with Crystal most of the time from three years on. And then with Chimere, all being together, I was able to make one dress for Chimere.

Now, with Crystal, in the sewing, she wanted fabric. Whatever she saw me do, she wanted to do. She wanted this and sometimes she would go and get things without even asking, you know. If I would see something on TV and I would order it, like a craft, you know, she'd say, "I like that." I would get it and she would want it. So I started ordering two and I still have some of them right now, unfinished. And I said I don't want her bothering my stuff so I'm gonna' get her her own. So I would get it in for her and she would do it. But back to fabric and sewing—Crystal, I had not taught her anything, and like she's told you all how she watched her grandmother. I started thinking to myself, "Where was I during that time?" [Laughs]. All those beautiful stories that she told. Where was I? But anyway, it's good. And she learns fast. But anyway, "Mama, I see you have some fabric over there. Can I have it?" It would be a beautiful piece that I didn't want to—I'd say, "Well, Crystal, I was going to. . ." "Mama, I just want"—so I said, "Okay." I let her have a piece. She took it, cut it, no pattern. She cut it the way she wanted. She did it the way she wanted to do, made her a piece [laughs] and

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wore it. So I said, "Oh, my goodness." She didn't want to ask me anything. She was just self-taught and then it just kind of carried over like that and just a number of other things that she did like learning from me unawares. And then she took two face-cloths and some yarn and made a pillow and stuffed it for me for Mother's Day.

SD: That's nice.

SG: Anything else that you would like to know?

SD: Oh, there are so many things. It's just a question of what to pick [laughs]. [To Toni] Maybe I'll ask you if there's a certain question that you wanted to ask.

TTM: I think that if we were going to summarize what we heard, it sounds like you—there was a very artistic side to you that was trained in, but there was also some natural talent in there.

SG: Yes.

TTM: And Crystal—that carried on into Crystal. And you can see that in food and around the kitchen table. And your faith drove a lot of that. I'm curious about, though, how tea cakes fit into that whole picture of all the various foods you described and the experiences. We hear so many iconic or traditional foods that people think of that fit into African-American culture or experiences and I'm wondering how the tea cake fit into this whole picture you've already beautifully crafted for us.

SG: Well, like I said, my mother made tea cakes. It was her favorite thing.

TTM: Which was her favorite thing.

SG: Uh huh. One of her favorites and it just handed down to us and we carried it over. And when Marva and I left home, during our years I guess we started doing it. And even today, people like tea cakes. They've heard of them but they don't know about them, how to do. A lot of people don't and a lot do. They buy tea cakes, you know. And I have made them. I didn't do a lot of selling because it's just kind of like give away. I started making cookies. I started collecting recipes sort of when I was finding them in a newspaper or a book or maybe with somebody. I read recipes. And the tea cakes, I have several—*Southern Living* gave an issue that had about three or four different tea cake recipes and my friend called me and told me. So I bought that issue. And in that it had four and you could choose whichever one you wanted. And they used lemonade. That was just a nice treat. Tea cakes and lemonade. And I shared that with family and friends. And then with what we learned from growing up, we just kind of carried over. In Port Arthur, I didn't do a lot of that. It was more or less I think potato pie during that time and then coming here to Houston, we got into tea cakes. And tea cakes was just popular. It was tasty; it could fill you. It could be a meal or dessert or whatever. And then Crystal, with her learning about the tea cakes, they liked them. She—then her daughter. We came up with what we wanted, how we wanted to do it. It's always something that you can put in or take something out. And this is how it became. So now, I have my way of fixing tea cakes. It's all basically the same thing, using your flavor, your flour, your sugar, and things like that. And Crystal has hers. When she became

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old enough to be independent to do her own, she has her way. And then she's faster with it. I work slow and take my time. And then her daughter learned from her more or less and she has her way. So we have our own special little parts in there that we do.

TTM: It's so interesting that we don't stop to think about the lessons that are taught at the table and how we transfer skills, [and] messages. And something as subtle as your mother's passion for tea cakes turned into a passion for cookies.

SG: Yes.



TTM: For you.

SG: Yes.

TTM: And then that translated back through the grandmother experience that Crystal had.

SG: Yes.

TTM: She went right back to the tea cakes--

SG: Yes.

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TTM: Because she was close to the grandmother.

SG: Yes.

TTM: Which we'll talk about with her. And her passion for it continues the tea cake. And so if younger families realized the importance of that table experience and how you can impart--

SG: Right.

TTM: Important messages of faith, life skills--

SG: Right.

TTM: If you were going to say that there was one—if we had to force you to come up with one lesson, one thing that was communicated in your family at the table, what would you say that that was?

SG: Values. Values. Family values. Spiritual family values. Sharing. Relationships. Family relationships. Sharing and caring and giving.

TTM: How was that expressed?

SG: In different ways of our way of living. Our teaching. Values in teaching. In school. In home and

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at school because what our parents taught us at home, it was carried over into school. We had a chance to use it at school and it could be seen in other people observing our behaviors and how we lived with how we were taught at home developing life skills. Living skills. That is just life. Everyday life. And how to get along with people, live in society.

TTM: Very good. That's good.

SD: Do you have time for me to ask you one more question?

SG: Yes.

SD: Just personally, I wanted to know about Port Arthur. Did you say when you went there, that the schools were not integrated yet?

SG: No.

SD: Were you there during the time when they were integrated?

SG: Yes.

SD: And how was that experience?

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SG: Like I said, from the first year that I worked there in the high school, the second year we went to the school which was junior high given to blacks only. And we didn't have any whites at all. It was all black. And over the years after that is when they started and there were black teachers in the white schools. I don't recall whites being with the blacks. I just can't recall that now. But when I went back to work from maternity leave I was assigned to a white school [Travis Elementary School]. There were about four or five blacks working there. And I was assigned to sixth grade there. I no longer taught art as such. I did well. I worked there three years. However, we could tell there were differences and so on. I received compliments. The children liked me. I had a good rapport with the children and the teachers and the principal. However, there were some issues that you could see on the side. And I left there saying that I wanted to be nearer to help take care of my parents. But the crossover, I think, is a gradual thing. We knew that there were prejudices there from the superintendent on down. It trickled on down. But that's everywhere, even now. It's better. Every generation it gets better in some ways and we have to do with that. We make the change by what we do and how we live and how we treat people. And in spite of what happens or what is going on, what is, we do what we can to change with the help of God. And in all of this, God has to do it. He does the change in us.

SD: Is there--

SG: And I was a teacher for thirty-seven years and I'm proud of that. Do you want to know a little bit about that, just one statement about that?

SD: Sure.

SG: Okay. From Port Arthur, I moved from sixth grade to Houston and entered third grade at an elementary school [Fonwood Elementary School] in North Forest. And I worked there with a third grade, second grade, and my principal asked me to take a kindergarten class because I had some hours in kindergarten before I came to Houston. I did complete the requirements to get certified on the kindergarten level and that's why I was asked to take kindergarten because I had that certification and one was needed. And I just loved it. In fact, each grade level that I taught from seven on down to kindergarten, I loved all of them. I loved the children, I had fun with them and they had fun with me. They learned how to cook in the classroom, the third grade classroom. Yes, that's something to say, too!

Our principal and friend of mine, she and I took an extension workshop and we learned how to teach cooking in the school classroom and boy, that was something. Third graders! The principal let us do it. And so like on a Friday, we set up our class schedules where the children could participate each week. So many children had a chance to—preparation, that's another important thing, planning and preparation. And we taught those things. And teaching is about life. It's not just teaching book matter, it's teaching the whole child. That sums it up. And they learned how to be clean handling food. They learned the names of the food, how to prepare it. And we did foods like chili burgers and that was one of the main things. I would buy all the materials, the ground meat, the onions, the seasoning, the buns, the utensils and all like that. So the children had the chance to be exposed to that. I don't know how much they got at home but they had good memories of that year that they were in third grade. And we had fun, too. But after about two or three years we had to stop. We couldn't go any further because the school would not permit us to do that. But they had a lot of fun just having the food there.

SD: Why did the schools stop?

SG: Well, you know, they have schedules.

SD: I see.

SG: Curriculums and so on. And because of the time, scheduling the time, class matter and I don't know what other reasons. Those are mine [laughs].

SD: Yes.

SG: But we had a lot of fun. And we had the recipes. The class included recipe sheets just like you would get worksheets. And the children got the recipe sheets and they learned how to read the recipes that way they could carry this over into the home. And they just had fun.

SD: That's good. Did the children seem to really take to cooking?

SG: I can't really say that because they were third graders then.

SD: Right.

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SG: But one boy in particular, he must've been in high school, or gotten out of high school—I was on the porch during dismissal. He came up to pick up a relative. And I was there doing teacher duty watching the children go home. And he came up and he spoke to me. Some of the children would come up to me and say, “I was in your class.” “And so you were.” And I'd say, “What—did you learn anything?” He says, “Yes, I did.” I said, “What did you learn?” He said, “You taught me about life.” And I thought that was so touching. He says, “You taught me about life.” And then I had another—I said, “Oh, okay.” And I wanted to know some more after I thought about it because I was surprised. Another student, a girl, told somebody, “That was my teacher and she was the only one that I learned something from.” And I heard this through another person, from one of my relatives. Then, while I was in Port Arthur, I did Food and Hobby Week, a day for baking or cooking food and then a day for crafts or blah-blah-blah. But the main thing—this one was on cooking. Doing hobbies. We had Doing Hobbies and blah-blah-blah. And this boy came up. He was in seventh grade. And he said, “Ms. Granger” he said, “I want to do something, but what I want to do is bake a cake and I know the children will laugh at me if I do that. And I want to do a cake.” And he was just real close to me. I said, “Well, darlin' if you want to do a cake, you go right ahead and do a cake.” I said, “We're going to have cakes.” I said, “Don't worry about the kids laughing at you.” And he said, “Okay.” And he did his cake. And I thought that was so neat for him to come and tell me. It was so burning within him so much that he came and told me and I gave him my approval to go and do that. And boy, we had a good time because we had all kinds of cakes there. The teachers participated, the children. Everybody participated and then I had judges to come in and judge and tell about them. They had a chance to taste, and just a lot of fun.

SD: That's wonderful.

SG: So that's cooking.

SD: Yes.

SG: Baking.

SD: Yes.

TTM: That's great.

SD: Well, I appreciate your interview. Thank you.

SG: Thank you.

