RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BETTY DAVIS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Betty Davis. The interview is taking place on September 27, 2016 in Toronto, Canada, and the interviewer is Molly Graham. We will start with when and where you were born.

Betty Davis: April 17, 1944 in Washington, D.C.

MG: Did you grow up in Washington?

BD: No, I was there until I was about six months old, and my parents then moved to Jersey City, New Jersey, which was where I spent about the first eight years of my life.

MG: Stepping back a little bit, what do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side?

BD: Not a lot. I know as far back genealogy-wise as my mother's great grandmother, but that's about as far as I was able to go.

MG: What did that research reveal?

BD: My mother's great grandmother was the daughter of a slave, that she spent all of her life in North Carolina in and around a place called Warsaw. Their family name, and I guess the name of the plantation owner ,was (Faison?). What else? Her family was a relatively small one, only a couple of kids in the first generation, two in the second generation. Then my mother's grandmother wound up having eight kids, and her oldest daughter was my mother's mother. She was born out of wedlock, as were a number of the children in the family.

MG: How did your mother end up in Washington, D.C.?

BD: Some of the family members wanted to get work, so they moved away from a farm in North Carolina up to Washington, D.C., because at that point in time my grandmother could get work as a maid. That's why they left.

MG: What about on your father's side?

BD: His side I know very little about. I've seen a picture of his father. I know his mother died giving birth to him. I know he had brothers and sisters. I only ever met one brother. I believe there were four or five others, but my father was very reticent, he didn't talk about family very much. I knew very, very little, other than what I learned from my uncle, his brother, and my cousins, his daughters, and that wasn't that much either.

MG: Where was he from?

BD: He was born in South Carolina and spent most of his life there. He had an older sister who left to go to Washington, D.C., again, to work, and she decided to bring him to Washington, D.C. When he was about sixteen or so, she came down to South Carolina, got him, and brought him back to D.C.

MG: Is that where he met your mother?

BD: Yes.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the neighborhood where they were living?

BD: I don't know that much about it. I know it was in Northwest. On my mother's side, her parents were, I would say, reasonably well off. My grandfather was a laborer, but during the Depression he continued to work, so they didn't really suffer very much when times were hard. Of course, when the war came along, they did reasonably well, were able to keep employed, and my mother was able to go to school.

MG: Where did she go to school?

BD: I don't know the name. It was Washington, D.C., but she managed to graduate from high school.

MG: When was it that your parents were both living in Washington, D.C.?

BD: Okay. Well, my mother was actually born there in Washington, D.C. I think she met my father when she was about seventeen. They got married when my mother turned nineteen, after she graduated from high school.

MG: Would that have been in the 1940s?

BD: In 1940.

MG: What do you know about their lives before they got married? What were they doing in D.C.?

BD: No, no, I don't.

MG: Did your parents or anybody in your family serve in World War II?

BD: My father did. He was in the Navy from sometime in I think 1941 until the end of the war.

MG: What do you know about his service?

BD: I know he worked as a laborer on a ship. I know he was stationed in Hawaii for a good part of the war. I know he lost a finger. [laughter] I can remember he had a trunk full of his Navy memorabilia, hats, uniforms, that kind of stuff. That's about all I know about his service.

MG: How did he lose his finger?

BD: He was cleaning a propeller or something on a plane. I don't know if somebody started the engine or whatever, but he wound up losing the tip of one finger. [laughter]

MG: You mentioned the memorabilia he had. Was the Navy a good experience for him?

BD: I think the fond memories he had was of a lot of the sailors that he was with. The kind of work that he had to do was demeaning, but I think all in all it was an okay experience for him.

MG: I was curious about what his Navy experience meant to him.

BD: I don't know.

MG: I sometimes wonder if it was hard to serve a country that was not treating black people very well at that time or since.

BD: I imagine it would be, but I don't know given that time and given the environment in which he was raised whether he actually looked at it that way or whether it was just part of life. That's the way things were.

MG: Do you know if it was tricky for your mother and father to be apart during those years?

BD: No, I don't know.

MG: How did she spend the war years?

BD: She spent the war years--well, she had me, later. I know when they moved to New Jersey, she wound up working for the government as a clerk until she got pregnant with me. After that, she didn't work.

MG: I think you said when they met, but did you tell me how they met each other?

BD: I don't know how they met.

MG: Okay. Were you the first born?

BD: Yes.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about what they were both doing in Washington, D.C., your mother's work and when your father returned from his service.

BD: Well, okay, they moved from D.C. to New Jersey. My father went into the Navy at that point in time. At first, I think he was stationed at Floyd Bennett Field [in Brooklyn, New York] and then went on a ship that went over to Hawaii. My mother was working for the government I think in Newark. After the war, when he came back, they continued to live in New Jersey. I think they were still living in Jersey City at that point in time, and my father wound up getting a job at a company called Hoffmann-La Roche. They make chemicals, and that's where he spent the rest of his working days.

MG: What was his role there?

BD: He was a chemical operator. He basically mixed batches of chemicals, making pills, ointments, those sorts of things.

MG: Was that a dangerous job?

BD: It could be, yes.

MG: Do you have other siblings?

BD: One sister. She is six years younger.

MG: Okay. Tell me about some of your earliest memories growing up in New Jersey.

BD: What do I remember? It was certainly a good life. I enjoyed myself. Until I was eight years old, we lived in Jersey City in an apartment. My sister was born during that time. I can remember standing by a window, obviously, before she was born, telling my mother that I wanted a sibling because I was an only child at that point. It seemed that it wasn't that much longer afterwards that I had a sibling. Then all of a sudden, I didn't really want one [laughter] because I wasn't the center of attention anymore.

MG: Six years is a pretty good gap.

BD: Yeah, yeah, I think that was the difficulty. Until she and I got much older, our relationship was, "Oh, no, do I have to take her everywhere with me?" that sort of thing. Generally, life was good. After Jersey City, we moved into a house in a city called Orange, where I lived until the start of my senior year in high school, and then we moved to the next town over called East Orange. We had a good, middle-class existence. It was a happy childhood.

MG: I hear that Jersey City has changed quite a bit in the last few decades. Do you know how it has changed? Have you been back in recent years?

BD: I haven't been back to New Jersey in about thirty years.

MG: Oh, wow.

BD: Yeah, so I imagine everything has changed. [laughter] I mean, I hear about Jersey City. Near the waterfront, there is lots of apartment buildings, and it's sort of come up in the world. Other than that, like I said, I haven't been there in thirty years.

MG: In Jersey City, you are so close to New York City. Would you get to go into the city quite a bit?

BD: When I was small, my parents would take us in at holiday time, and we'd go to Radio City Music Hall to see the Rockettes and whatever Disney movie was on for the holiday season. [We] had some relatives who lived in Brooklyn, so I would wind up being able to go into the city a couple times a year anyway. As far as spending time in New York City, no.

MG: What family members were close by?

BD: My grandfather, my father's father, remarried, and the woman he married had a child. So I guess his stepsister, she and her husband lived in Brooklyn. We would go over, I don't know, three or four times a year, or they would come over to visit us.

MG: Would you go down South to visit your grandparents?

BD: No. South was someplace – [laughter] I think as far south as I ever got or ever went, I was probably about twelve, was Washington, D.C. My parents, because of segregation, didn't really want to take us there. They wanted us to grow up in a different kind of environment, so we never went south south. Like I said, as far south as I went when I was a kid was Washington, and that was bad enough.

MG: What impressions did you have about the South at that time?

BD: That it was a place that if you were black, you didn't want to be, that everything was segregated, that's what we learned. I guess when I did go to Washington, D.C., it was just really strange. I think my mother and I and my sister had taken a train down to visit some relatives. When we got off the train, we went outside to get a cab. I was sort of immediately running up to get the first cab, and my mother grabbed me back and said, "No, you can't do that. We have to get a cab over there." That's when I started noticing signs for "Colored" here, "White" there, that sort of thing. I found it really strange, to say the least.

MG: Did you encounter any of those attitudes in New Jersey?

BD: Attitudes. Not segregation per se, but certainly people's attitudes. Yeah, there were people that I would encounter who obviously didn't want me around. Certainly, when I was growing up, the neighborhood I grew up in, within a few blocks, there were white families, and I played with some of those white kids. I learned very quickly that I could play with them, but I couldn't go into their homes, especially if their parents weren't there. That was just the way it was, so, yeah, you learn early.

MG: I am curious what impact that has on a child growing up in that environment.

BD: Well, I think the impact is fairly obvious. If you hear enough of that kind of thing, although you get support from your family about who you are, you get a lot of other negative support. So, yeah, it makes growing up difficult at times I think, wondering who you really are and what you're really worth.

MG: What precipitated the move to Orange?

BD: I think my parents felt that the neighborhood in Jersey City wasn't conducive to raising kids, and they wanted to have a more suburban environment where we would be able to run and play and be relatively free. That's why we moved.

MG: Do you remember your house in Orange?

BD: Very well.

MG: Can you describe it?

BD: How do I start? Small front yard, white picket fence. Open the gate. Go up six steps, a porch that had one, two, three chairs. Open the front door, the hallway, to the right were stairs that led up. To the left was the living room. Behind that was a kitchen and a bedroom and a bathroom. Upstairs another bedroom, dining room, bedroom. The backyard was long and narrow, grass in the middle, and my mother planted lots of flowers along the edges, especially roses. She loved roses.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about your mother, the kind of woman she was.

BD: How do I describe my mother? [laughter]

MG: What was her name?

BD: Ruth Brawner was her maiden name. She didn't have the happiest childhood. I know she was always afraid of enclosed spaces, because for punishment her mother would lock her in a closet. If it was any place that was small and dark, she would get very perturbed. She wasn't a particularly trusting person. She didn't trust people outside of the family very much. It took her a long time to make friends. She was a good mother. She was a good cook. Yeah, her family was the most important thing to her.

MG: What kind of food would she make?

BD: Typical southern food, fried chicken, collard greens, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, not too heavy on the salads, but she did like broccoli, so we'd have lots of broccoli.

MG: What about your father, what was he like?

BD: Quiet, shy, didn't talk much about himself at all, hard worker, loved sports, played on the softball team where he worked and he was a good pitcher, a good family man.

MG: What was his name?

BD: Willie.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood you moved into.

BD: It was a neighborhood that was changing. By the time we moved in there, we bought from the last white people who lived in that neighborhood. By the time we moved in, the neighborhood then was all black. You could be free in that neighborhood. There were a number of women who didn't work, so whenever you went out to play, there was always somebody watching. If you did something wrong, there was always somebody [laughter] who was going to tell your mother. Houses were close together, or at least I think they were. Yeah, everybody on the street was friendly. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody seemed to look out for everybody.

MG: Had you started school in Jersey City?

BD: Yes, I did. Kindergarten, first grade, second grade were in Jersey City.

MG: What was transitioning to a new school like for you?

BD: Well, in Jersey City, the school I went to, most of the kids were black. When I moved to Orange, the school that I moved to, most of the kids were white, so that was different. I had to get used to a new kind of environment and different kinds of kids with a different kind of outlook, but it was okay.

MG: How old were you when you moved to East Orange?

BD: Oh, seventeen.

MG: Okay.

BD: My parents had to move, because at that point in time the city had decided that they were going to tear down about nine or ten blocks of that area to build some sort of highway. Otherwise, my parents would have still been there. Anyway, then we had to move, so we moved to a new house that was built in East Orange.

MG: The house in Orange, did you rent or own it?

BD: Own it.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the school district in Orange, what memories you have from going to school, the teachers.

BD: Memories. Lots of Italians and lots of Jewish kids. For the most part, the teachers were nice. I think the teacher I remember most is probably the first one I had in third grade, because the environment was so different and she took the time to try to make me feel comfortable. Other than that, teachers were teachers. They were okay. [laughter]

MG: How did this teacher make you feel comfortable?

BD: From what I can remember, she payed attention. When there were breaks and stuff, she would take me aside and she would ask me questions, trying to get me feeling comfortable. If I had any problems, for some reason I felt I could go to her.

MG: Was she doing this because you were a new student?

BD: I assume so, yeah.

MG: What subjects did you enjoy or do well in?

BD: History, geography, there wasn't anything that I didn't do well in. My grades were always good in high school and elementary school. I loved school. I can remember certainly when I'd get sick and had to stay home, I would cry because I couldn't go to school. Weird. [laughter]

MG: Were you involved in clubs or other activities?

BD: Not in elementary school, of course. In high school, Latin club, Spanish club. What other clubs? Stuff like that, yeah. I don't remember too many other kinds of clubs that I was in.

MG: I wanted to ask if you were recognized for being such a good student. Were you on an honor roll?

BD: Oh, sure.

MG: What was that feeling like?

BD: Well, it was expected. It was a good feeling, of course, because, like I said, I loved school, so I always wanted to do well and it pleased my parents.

MG: What else about school stands out to you?

BD: I have no idea.

MG: You were going to high school when the world was changing very rapidly, and then you have the war in Vietnam, which was after you graduated high school and graduated college.

BD: Yeah, Vietnam was just an issue after I left university.

MG: Growing up, were you aware of the Red Scare and fears of Communism?

BD: Yes. Again, I think we were early TV watchers, so, yes, I can remember the McCarthy hearings. I can remember all the issues with Eisenhower and Communists and the Korean War and stuff like that. So, yes, I can remember that stuff. [Editor's Note: From 1950 to 1953, the Korean War involved American, South Korean and United Nations military forces fighting against the North Korean military, backed by Chinese military forces and Soviet weaponry, for control of the Korean Peninsula. Korea remains divided at the thirty-eighth parallel. In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy's claims that Communists had infiltrated the State Department sparked a Red Scare. The witch hunts of the McCarthy era relied on innuendo and unfounded accusations, tactics that earned the ire of President Dwight D. Eisenhower after McCarthy alleged that Communist spies were operating in the Army. When McCarthy launched an investigation of the Army in 1953, the Senate countered with an investigation of McCarthy. The televised Army-McCarthy hearings in the summer of 1954 exposed McCarthy's unscrupulous fear-mongering. Soon after, the Senate censured McCarthy, and he died from complications related to alcoholism in 1957.]

MG: Would you watch that on television? Did you have a TV?

BD: I guess probably from the time I was about seven, because even before we moved to Orange, I remember in Jersey City, we were one of the first people in the neighborhood to get a TV. Yeah, I was interested in the news. I think it's probably one of my favorite programs anyway, even now. Yes, I can recall those times quite well, and most of the things when I was younger dealt with Communism. It wasn't until high school that some of the issues about segregation started coming to the fore. Certainly, yeah, I can remember part of the high school time I had, that's when Malcolm X was alive. I can remember the discussions that my parents would have about Malcolm X. One of them was very much in favor of what he was saying and the other one not so much. [Editor's Note: Malcolm X was a civil rights leader and advocate of Black Nationalism. He was assassinated in New York on February 21, 1965.]

MG: Who was on what side?

BD: My father was the one who was very much on the side of Malcolm X, my mother not as much.

MG: How did you feel?

BD: I didn't really know how to feel. I think I felt more like my mother than my father, although as I got older that view changed.

MG: In school, did you have to do duck and cover?

BD: Yes, we certainly did, under the desk. [laughter]

MG: That must have been scary. [laughter]

BD: I don't think we thought of it as scary. It was just something that you had to do, and you just did it. You didn't really think of the concept of a bomb falling really; you just had to get under your desk when the certain bell rang. It was like fire drills when you had to go outside, and you didn't really think there'd ever be a fire.

MG: Did your family attend church when you were growing up?

BD: No. My mother sent me to church for a while, but after she left Washington, D.C., she wasn't a churchgoer. I don't think my father ever was. When I turned around seven or so, my mother decided that church was something that I should be exposed to, so she sent me to church with a friend of hers. That was my introduction.

MG: What was that experience like?

BD: I can't remember much about it when we lived in Jersey City. I can remember what the outside of the church looked like, and that's about all. When we moved to Orange, I wound up getting involved in Girl Scouts, and the meetings were held in a church. I made some friends in the Girl Scouts, and one of the friend's families went to that church. She invited me to come to that church, and I started going to it probably until I was about fourteen, fifteen.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your Girl Scouts experience. I never made it past Brownies.

BD: [laughter] Well, I went straight into Girl Scouts. I loved the uniform, loved the starchiness of it and the pins that I had, and there was like a gold tie that my mother would starch and iron all the time and a beret that you would wear. I don't know. I'm trying to remember the kinds of things we did, little crafts and all that kind of stuff. It was a good time. Like I said, it was probably the uniform that turned me on more than anything.

MG: Did you graduate from a different high school, or did you graduate from Orange High School?

BD: I graduated from Orange High School. Even though we moved to East Orange, for my last year, I talked to the school at Orange, and they let me finish my last year there rather than having to switch high schools.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about high school, things you were doing for fun. Did you start dating in high school?

BD: I was with a group of guys and girls. Nobody dated per se. Everybody just sort of went out together if you went out. Yeah, I can remember quite a few kids from high school. There were one, two, three, four, five kids that I hung out with in high school. One of them, by the time she was like sixteen, got a car, so we definitely had a better time then. When I was seventeen, that's when I learned how to smoke. [laughter] We were big kids then.

MG: Where would you go in this car when you would go out?

BD: We'd just drive around on the main street, or we'd go into another one of the Oranges, South Orange, and cruise up and down the main drag. [We would] go to a White Castle to eat

hamburgers, soda fountains, or there was a takeout place of Italian hot dogs. Oh, God, I loved those things. They were so good.

MG: What year did you graduate high school?

BD: '62.

MG: Tell me a little bit about getting ready to graduate and what that was like for you.

BD: I don't know if I can remember anything in particular about it. All that I can remember from that last year is the stress of trying to decide where I was going to go to school afterwards, because, in my mind of course and I guess in my parents' mind, I was going to go on to university because I had good grades and all that sort of stuff. Guidance counselors, though, weren't necessarily as enthusiastic about me going to school as I was. What I can remember about that time is despite them, I was still going to go to university, but I can't remember a particular reason why I felt that way.

MG: What was their suggestion for you?

BD: All-black colleges in the South was where they decided I should go to school, if I went to school at all. The other thing was to go to secretarial school. That was a thing that was pushed a lot, but I had decided, no, that wasn't for me.

MG: What did you hope to do instead?

BD: Well, I was going to go to university, and then I was going to study law. That's what I was going to do. [laughter]

MG: What other colleges were you looking at besides Douglass College?

BD: Howard, VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University]. I'm not sure if there were any others.

MG: What appealed to you about Douglass? Why did you want to go there?

BD: I thought I would be happy in a school that was all female. The campus was pretty. It was in New Jersey, so I would be able to get more scholarships because it was an in-state school. I think that was about it.

MG: Did you have an opportunity to visit before you went there?

BD: No, no, I never visited before I went there.

MG: How did you spend that first summer after high school graduation?

BD: Working. Starting in my sophomore year in high school, Bell Telephone was looking for kids to train as information operators, hoping I guess after high school that they had ready-made workers. I managed to get involved in that, so every summer I worked for Bell Telephone.

MG: What would you do?

BD: I was an information operator, so I sat [laughter] at a desk. Phone calls came in, and people wanted to know telephone numbers for people or businesses or whatever. I would flip through books and find the number and give it to them.

MG: Like a human White Pages?

BD: Yes, exactly.

MG: Did you enjoy that work?

BD: Yes, I did.

MG: What was your first impression of Douglass when you finally arrived on campus?

BD: It was very white. [laughter] That was my first [impression], but it was a beautiful campus. I thought it was really, really pretty. I had expected that I would be in a dorm in a building, but I wasn't. I was in a house, and I liked that.

MG: Who else was in the house with you?

BD: Who else?

MG: How many girls lived there?

BD: It was probably about sixteen altogether; I don't think it was more than that. I had a roommate.

MG: Were you hoping that it would be a little less white when you arrived?

BD: I guess I hadn't really thought about it. It would have been nicer if it were. [laughter] In high school, I was exposed to lots of white people, so it surprised me that there were so few blacks on campus. It wasn't so bad, because, again, I was used to it. I wasn't used to living with white people, but you get used to that, too.

MG: What is it like living with white people for the first time?

BD: Different, very different. [laughter] Most of the people that I lived with, well, in fact, I think all of them in that house had never been that close to a black person before. A lot of them were from the far reaches of New Jersey, like South Jersey and Northwest Jersey and stuff, so they hadn't been exposed to black people.

MG: How many black females were at Douglass when you arrived?

BD: In my class, I think it was the largest class of black women for quite a while. I think there were eight of us or nine of us, I can't remember what. I found out afterwards there were fewer. It didn't sort of increase every year when I was there; it became less. I didn't realize until I was on campus for a while that the year I arrived was the first year that black students were actually paired with white students, that it wasn't automatically black students together in a dorm. I can remember being stopped a couple of times [and someone] asking me was that working out okay, and that's

when I [said], "Yeah." Then someone explaining to me, "Well, this is the first year that this has ever been done. This is an experiment, and we're trying to see if it's going to work."

MG: How do you feel about that? Was it successful? Did it make sense?

BD: Yeah, I think it was successful. My roommate, again, I found this out much later, her family was told that she would be rooming with a black student and was that okay. My parents weren't asked [laughter] if it was okay if I was paired with a white student, which I found really interesting. They said, "Okay." In a sense, to be fair, at least they were attempting to do something that hadn't been done before, and this was their way of trying to do it. I guess figuring, well, there's a likelihood that some black parents wouldn't want that, so they would have to ask the parents of the white student whether that was okay.

MG: Can you describe the dorm? It was shared with one other person.

BD: Yeah. Again, like I said, it was a house. It had a living room, hallway, communal bathrooms, one on each floor, and then either one-bed-room or two-bed-room bedrooms. It was a nice house. It was a house. In one sense, that was good because in one way it was like being at home. To me, I was glad I was in that kind of environment rather than a dorm. I think that would have made the adjustment more difficult. I was just used to being able to walk in the front door and walk into my bedroom and sit at my desk or do whatever, just like I would have done at home.

MG: Were there ways that you made that space yours?

BD: Oh, yeah. You'd put up pictures and posters and things like that. I can remember, the funniest thing that I wind up telling people about the experience there and just how little my roommate knew at least about my world, I was in love with Johnny Mathis, the singer. I had a poster, and I had put it in a picture frame. I had put it on my desk. When my roommate came in, I guess in part to make conversation, she was asking if that was my boyfriend, and I kind of looked at her like, "Don't you know who that is?" No, she had no clue. By then, Johnny Mathis had had lots of hit records, but whatever. [laughter]

MG: Were there ways that you taught her about your world and what it was like?

BD: Not in a deliberate way. I think just in talking, and of course she would ask me about my hair and, "What do you do with it?" Then, she would see what I would do with it. In a sense, I didn't need to learn much about her, yet it was a learning experience for her. That's for sure.

MG: Do you think by the end of the year she had changed her mindset at all?

BD: I don't know if she changed her mindset, but we were comfortable together. We were roommates.

MG: How was that first semester? I remember being very homesick when I went to college for the first time.

BD: I wasn't homesick. I remember being surprised at how homesick a lot of the kids were, because I was ready to go. My parents had always sort of stressed, you know, "We're teaching you to be an adult, and when you get to a certain age, you'll move out and you'll do this," and so I was ready for that kind of independence of being away from my parents.

MG: Did you feel like you were doing as well in college as you were in high school?

BD: Oh, no, no, it was much more difficult, especially in the first year. I guess the expectations, I think, of the professors was different than the expectations in high school. So, yeah, I had a much more difficult time, and my grades were not nearly as good. I don't even know if they did it in those days. I didn't feel that I could go to the professors to talk to them about what was happening, and I didn't really feel that I had anyone I could talk to about the difficultly I was having and trying to understand why I wasn't doing as well. Yeah, that first year was hard.

MG: What happened in subsequent years?

BD: I developed better study habits, that's for sure, so my grades improved some. Then, of course, you wound up having more choices as to what you wanted to study, so I took courses that were more interesting to me and basically tried to stay away from the ones [laughter] that I didn't do so well in.

MG: Good plan. What were those courses that you found interesting?

BD: History, political science, languages.

MG: Were you still pre-law at this point?

BD: Well, there wasn't any [pre-law course of study]. In my mind, I wanted to go to law school afterwards, but there wasn't pre-law per se. Yeah, the degree I graduated with was in political science, which is close enough to a pre-law course.

MG: Tell me about some of the professors you had at Douglass.

BD: I can't remember names too well. I remember one of my political science teachers, yeah, she was quite interesting. I can remember what she looks like, I can't remember her name, I remember she was from Russia, specifically Georgia, although at that point in time Georgia didn't really mean anything to me. I found her classes really, really interesting. She had a lot of knowledge about world affairs and had an interesting way of imparting her knowledge.

MG: What interested you about political science?

BD: I think just worldview, learning about governments, political machinations, those kinds of things were of interest to me.

MG: Did it make you study the politics at the time more closely?

BD: Yeah, it did. That was one of the things once I had declared as a poli-sci major that you were encouraged to get involved in, at least the state and federal political scene. Every time there were elections, of course, we focused on those and what the issues were, that sort of thing.

MG: Were there particular candidates that you were supporting?

BD: Well, at the time I was there, of course, Kennedy was there, so I was a big supporter of his.

MG: You were a sophomore when he was assassinated. [Editor's Note: On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was shot and killed while traveling by motorcade through Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas.]

BD: Yes.

MG: What do you remember about that day?

BD: Practically everything. I was in French class. It was in the afternoon. It was like one-thirty, two o'clock when we got the news. Somebody ran screaming into the classroom saying Kennedy had been killed. Of course, then everything broke out, and people were all over the campus crying. We went and were listening to a radio. Back at our campus, in the center of the campus, was a large rec room that had a TV in it. Of course, everyone glommed onto the TV, and that's where we spent the rest of the day. After that, I remember that night calling my parents, and they were really upset and just sort of wandering around. For the next couple of days, all you did was sort of wander around in a fog or watch TV.

MG: I was curious about the atmosphere in the country over the next week or so after he was killed.

BD: Certainly where I was, everybody was somber and very upset. I remember not so much things that I did but how I was feeling and how sad I was feeling. At first, I wanted to go home, but my parents said, "No, you have to stay at school." Yeah, it was just really sad, very sad.

MG: Kennedy had visited New Brunswick on his campaign trail a couple years prior to that. Did you have the opportunity to go down there at all?

BD: No.

MG: Tell me a little bit about some of the friendships you were making at Douglass.

BD: Interestingly enough, some of the friendships I made were people who lived in the house that I lived in. One person in particular was a year ahead of me, and I guess through some strange way I wound up being friends with people who were ahead of me in school, as opposed to those in my same year. The black students at school, of course I knew all of them. I was friends with them. There were some good friendships there. Because you get to live with people, see them all day every day, eat with them, shower with them, all kinds of things, and I guess given the age, you just develop really intense feelings for your friends that you make at university.

MG: Talk about some of the things you would all do together.

BD: Play cards. After my first year, go to the pub and drink.

MG: Where was the pub?

BD: Halfway into town. I see a main street; I don't know what street that is, Brunswick Avenue?

MG: Maybe George Street.

BD: George, okay, that street. About halfway between the two campuses of Douglass and Rutgers, on a street going to the left if you were heading towards Rutgers was a pub. I can't remember the name or anything. I can remember what it looks like inside, and I can remember drinking a lot of Rolling Rock.

MG: [laughter] Well, that sounds like fun.

BD: It was. [laughter]

MG: Would you ever then go all the way to Rutgers? Were there parties there?

BD: Oh, yeah. On the weekends, well, there was at least one black fraternity, we would go there for parties, and sometimes at, I guess, it was like a campus center [the Ledge], they would also wind up having parties. It seemed that they'd sort of switch off between black students having parties and white students having parties, because certainly the music when black students were having the party [was] very different than when white students were having a party. So, yeah, I went over to Rutgers usually on weekends to party.

MG: I have heard a little bit about, and this might not have been the case while you were there, some of the rules about wearing gloves in the dining hall.

BD: No, no. [laughter]

MG: Okay. I think that was the case before you attended. I did not know what was maybe still leftover in terms of decorum.

BD: I can't remember any rules in particular. I can remember a friend of mine who got kicked out of school because she and her boyfriend were caught in the library at Rutgers making out, and that was an offense that required that she got kicked out of school. He didn't, but she did.

MG: Yikes.

BD: She had to leave school for a year.

MG: Was there a curfew?

BD: Yes. I can't remember what it was, but I can remember sneaking in a couple times.

MG: Can you kind of describe the Douglass campus and what buildings were around then?

BD: All I know are the buildings that were around then. Again, I haven't seen that campus since I graduated. What can I remember? I remember the campus I lived on was sort of at a far end, close to the highway. It was called Gibbons. I can remember you had to cross a street, you crossed a field and went over a bridge and then off to the right was a chapel. Off to the left was the library, and that was relatively new. If you kept on going past the library and crossed another street, there was a student center, and then across from that was Neilson Dining Hall. Going back across the street--behind Neilson Dining Hall, there was another campus called Jameson. There was brick buildings. What else do I remember? Across from the library, directly across, were some old houses that were used for administration, and I think there were some classrooms as well. That's the part that I can remember. I hear it doesn't look much like that now. [laughter]

MG: How come you never visited after graduating?

BD: It was a bit too far to come. There wasn't anybody there at that time that I knew. After I left university, I went in the Peace Corps, and I was in Nigeria for a couple of years. When I came back, I stayed at home for nine months and then moved to Canada. There really wasn't anything to go back for, because there wasn't anybody there.

MG: What else about your four years at Douglass stands out to you?

BD: It got less so, but it was always emotionally difficult, dealing with the change in the environment that I was living in, issues that were going on in the world at that time, the separation in a sense that existed between black students and white students. In some ways, I wouldn't change it, because all of the emotions and things that I was going through helped me to grow and helped me get more of a sense of who I was and what I might want to do with my life. I look back on it and I remember some of the negative emotions, but in a sense I wouldn't change it. I still look back on it very fondly.

MG: Were students at Douglass becoming politically active while you were there? It was the beginning of the civil rights movement.

BD: Not so much. I was part of the NAACP group that was there at the time, starting in my sophomore year. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a civil rights organization that works to ensure political, social, economic and educational equality.] There was a bit of activism then, but it was starting to change after I left. I think up through 1966 and that class, while we were aware of things that were going on, there wasn't the kind of activism that started [in] '67-'68.

MG: You mentioned getting involved in the NAACP. Were there other clubs or activities or chapters that you were involved in?

BD: Not so much. I don't remember being involved--I know I played softball for a while. What other clubs? I don't think I was involved in any other clubs.

MG: As you were getting closer to graduation, were you starting to solidify your post-graduation plans?

BD: Yeah, I had decided by the time I was a junior that I was going to go into the Peace Corps when I graduated. That was something I just decided I wanted to do, see a bit of the world. That was as far as my thinking went at that time.

MG: Did you know someone who had been in the Peace Corps, or how did that idea come to you?

BD: I knew a person in a class ahead of me who was going to go into the Peace Corps as well. I think I had been reading a lot about the Peace Corps and Sargent Shriver and Kennedy, and looked at it as, "Okay, this is a way that I can sort of contribute to the world and at the same time benefit myself by seeing another part of the world." [Editor's Note: On March 1, 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order creating the Peace Corps and chose his brother-in-law R. Sargent Shriver to head the new agency. From 1961 to 1965, Shriver oversaw 14,500 Peace Corps volunteers working on projects in fifty-five countries.]

MG: This might sound like a silly question, but how do you sign up for the Peace Corps? How do you join?

BD: You get an application from the government--if I remember rightly--and you fill it in. Then, they do background checks on you and all kinds of wonderful stuff, and then you're either accepted or not. You get asked things like, "Where would you like to go?" It was just an application process.

MG: Did you have a preference for where you would go?

BD: I wanted to go to Africa.

MG: How come you wanted to go to Africa?

BD: Because that's where my ancestors came from. I wanted to see at least part of where my history was.

MG: Was that always a drive you had?

BD: Yes.

MG: Were your ancestors from Nigeria?

BD: They were from West Africa somewhere. I don't know if it was Nigeria in particular.

MG: How do you get ready to go to Africa for the first time?

BD: How do you get ready? Fortunately for us, they had a training program, so I spent about three months in California, which was neat. That was the first time I had ever been on a plane was actually flying to California. It was basically like going to school for three months. You got to meet volunteers who had been there who would talk to you about what life was like. We were involved with a particular program. Basically, what we were sent there to do as a group was to teach [and] give better skills to primary school teachers, because one of the things that Nigeria lacked were good primary school teachers. Typically, a primary school teacher was somebody who had gotten out of primary school but wasn't bright enough or wasn't wealthy enough to go on to higher education. The government in Nigeria saw that as a detriment, so in essence, hired the American government to send in people to bolster their skills in math and English, history, geography, again, so that they could be better teachers to the primary school kids there.

MG: Where in California were you getting this training?

BD: Outside of UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], because I know we could go there. I can't remember the name of the town we were in though.

MG: I skipped over graduation. Was there anything you wanted to say about that day or that moment in your life?

BD: Graduation, I got drunk. [laughter]

MG: On Rolling Rock?

BD: [laughter] No, no, stronger stuff then. I can't drink gin to this day because [laughter] I had much too much of it. That's about all I can remember about graduation. I mean, I can remember going up and getting a diploma. I can remember my parents being there, and I can remember going out partying and no longer liking gin. [laughter]

MG: When was this training? Was it right after graduation?

BD: No, it didn't start until August, so I went back home, worked for the phone company until my time to go.

MG: What else did this training entail? Did you feel you were well prepared for your time in Africa?

BD: Probably as well prepared as you could be. It was helpful for me that one of returning volunteers, I didn't know it until the very end, happened to have been stationed in the town that I wound up going to. I wasn't paying that much attention to what he said [laughter] until of course after I found out I was actually going to that town. They spent a lot of the time trying to get you aware of the fact that it was going to be a very different environment and the expectations of you as a representative of the American government to go there and do your job, enjoy yourself too, but [do your job].

MG: When did you leave for Africa?

BD: It was sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas, because I think we were there from August until almost Thanksgiving. Then, we were home for a couple of weeks, and then sometime in December before Christmas, we actually flew out to Nigeria.

MG: What was that trip like?

BD: A lot of us excited, we were on the plane, on a plane going all the way to Nigeria. It was a long flight. When we landed, I can remember, it was really funny, we must have landed during the daytime because we wound up being put up at a university in northern Nigeria. They served us breakfast, and for all of us, it was our first exposure to an English breakfast. There were baked beans, toast, tomato, mushrooms, that sort of thing. It was like, "What is this food?" [laughter]

MG: What were your other impressions?

BD: Of Nigeria?

MG: Yes.

BD: Well, I was stationed in not quite the north. Where I was stationed is now the administrative capital of Nigeria, Abuja, but Abuja was just a tiny town with just dirt roads back in the '60s. I liked the north in part because half of the year it was dry. It was my first exposure to Muslims, and I liked that culture. I felt very comfortable there. I was attached to a secondary school, lived in a house on the campus of the secondary school, so part of my day was spent teaching classes at the secondary school. I remember when I first got there, the principal said, "Welcome. We don't have a teacher for 'West African History,' so that's what you're going to teach." I knew squat about

West African history, so I had to read these books to try to stay ahead of the students. It was crazy. Then, my afternoons were spent going out to various villages to meet with the primary school teachers, because by then they were finished. We would all meet at a school, and then I would give them lessons in English or history or geography or something.

MG: It sounds like a long day.

BD: It was, but I was young then. I had a motorcycle to ride. It was great.

MG: What kind of motorcycle? Do you remember?

BD: The first motorcycle I had was one of those small ones that has skirts on the front, I think it was a 50cc, but then I graduated to a 125cc. I could bomb up and down little tiny roads and stuff. It was great.

MG: What were your living conditions? Where were you staying?

BD: It was a house on the campus. It was quite nice. Any of the teachers who taught at that secondary school had housing on the campus. It was nice. You know, it was utilitarian, but there was a dining area, living room, bedroom, bathroom, two bedrooms, in fact. Of course, you were expected to hire someone from the town to do your cooking and your cleaning, so it was great. [laughter]

MG: What age groups were you working with?

BD: At the secondary school, of course, they were kids who were, I don't know, in their teens. With the primary school teachers, of course, they could be almost any age. There were some who were in their forties, thirties, twenties.

MG: What were the demographics of the teachers? Were they mostly women?

BD: No, mostly men.

MG: Okay.

BD: Yeah.

MG: All men?

BD: No, not all men, but mostly men.

MG: What else about the culture there surprised you or did you learn about?

BD: What surprised me most was that the little bit I knew about Muslim society was that women's place was very much lower than a man's. What I found when I was there, in reality, that was true to a certain extent, but women exerted a lot of influence in a Muslim household. At night, when they had the night markets, that's when all the women came out and they would have their conversations. They weren't as downtrodden, in a sense, as I had been led to believe they were.

MG: How many other members of the Peace Corps were there working on this project?

BD: In my town, it was just me. In total all over Nigeria, there must have been about forty of us.

MG: Who were you living with in the house?

BD: Me. [laughter] My house.

MG: What was that like transitioning from a very white college to living in Nigeria?

BD: It was lovely. It was lovely. It was very nice being in the majority. For the most part, when I looked around, the faces that I saw were every shade of beige, brown to the blackest black. That part was very comforting. There were white teachers at the school. Some of them were white, but they were the minority.

MG: Was there sort of an emotional or psychological impact of this trip? You had talked about tracing your roots. When you arrived, was that a factor?

BD: A factor in?

MG: Like a feeling of coming home or connecting.

BD: Yes, certainly. Yeah, it was interesting. The culture was totally different. Most of the students, if they referred to me, they would say, they used a term (*batrudia?),* which means European, a European women, and I kept saying, "Well, I'm not European." "Yes, you are." [laughter] It was a reminder in a sense. We were the same skin color, but we were really culturally very different. There were things that were the same in a way, but, yeah, I was still very much of the western world, not of their world. I was very happy there.

MG: Was there sort of a trust that needed to be built because of that?

BD: Not on my part. I don't think on their part.

MG: What was there to do in this town where you lived?

BD: What was there to do? It sounds like I spent all my time drinking. You got together with the other teachers at people's houses to sit and talk. There was an old British club that was up on a hill outside of town. Sometimes you would go there, again, to just sit around and talk. That's basically what you did. You either listened to the radio or got together with people to just talk or read newspapers, if you could get a hold of newspapers.

MG: What was the landscape like there?

BD: Well, given that it's almost in the center of Nigeria, it certainly wasn't tropical. It was closer to desert. It was sort of half and half, like half the year it rained every day and the other half of the year it rained not at all. [It was] mostly flat. If you saw the area I lived, you'd say, "Yeah, this is desert-like. This is sort of like being out in Arizona or something."

MG: Did you have the opportunity to travel around Africa or around Nigeria?

BD: I didn't have the chance to travel around that much. When secondary school was out, we then had to go to another town, a group of us, and then we would have more intensive training sessions with the primary school teachers. They would all wind up coming to a larger school where we were, and we'd have classes with them all day. Most of the time, except the odd week, we were working all the time. No, I didn't get a chance to travel that much. I got a chance to travel a bit in Nigeria, but I never went outside of Nigeria while I was there.

MG: How long were you in Africa for?

BD: Two years. That was the stint usually in the Peace Corps was two years.

MG: What changed in you in those two years? How were you different when you left?

BD: How was I different? I guess just the fact that I had lived in an entirely different culture for a couple of years. Coming back, I remember I was surprised at how strange it seemed in a sense, because I got more comfortable there emotionally than I had been living in the States.

MG: I think the culture had changed quite a bit between 1966 and 1968. I think hair got longer, pants got wider.

BD: That's true. [laughter]

MG: Did you feel like you were making a difference where you were?

BD: Yes, I did. I did.

MG: Talk to me a little bit more about that.

BD: I especially enjoyed the work, working with the primary school teachers. When you first talked to them and got a sense of what kind of knowledge they had, it was sort of depressing to say, "Okay, there's such limits there, and they're limiting the kids that they're trying to teach," but they recognized that and they really, really wanted to do the best they could for their students. With these teachers, they had taught all day, and then they wound up coming to another primary school to have lessons with me for an hour and a half or two hours. Then, they had to go back home. You either had a bicycle or you walked, so it was a sacrifice for them to do what they were doing. I really admired them for that, and because of that, of course, I wanted to do the best job I could giving them additional knowledge that they could pass on to their students.

MG: You mentioned that there was a little bit of a sexual hierarchy there. Did any of the male teachers you were teaching have an issue being taught by a female?

BD: If they did, they didn't let me know. I was so young and American that if some of that kind of stuff was happening, I really didn't see it. I'm sure there was some of that, but I would suspect those teachers knew ahead of time that it was going to be a woman. Again, it wasn't like I was a Nigerian woman. I was a European woman, so that's kind of different. [laughter]

MG: Was it hard to leave after two years?

BD: Yes, it was. It was hard to leave. Yeah, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life, and by then I had met someone and was going to get married maybe. I was torn between going home and dealing with that relationship or staying, but I knew it was time for me to leave.

MG: How did you meet that person?

BD: He was one of those British people who taught at the school, the secondary school that I was at.

MG: Did you end up getting married to him?

BD: Yes, we did.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about how you met and what he was like?

BD: Well, we met at the secondary school, because we both taught there. [We] just developed a friendship, and that developed into more. He was from Britain. We started talking about what we were going to do. He was a volunteer as well with the British equivalent of the Peace Corps, so he was there after university for a couple of years. [He] wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life [and] was pretty sure he didn't want to stay in Great Britain. When we would talk about maybe getting together, he didn't want to come to the States. I didn't want to go to Britain, so that's where Canada came in. We figured that was the happy medium between the two. There was enough American in Canada and enough British in Canada so that we could both, we thought, feel comfortable.

MG: Yeah, I was curious how you ended up in Toronto.

BD: Yeah, that's how we decided on Toronto and both applied to become landed immigrants here. This was about nine months after I left. I worked for a while in New York, waiting to get papers to come here. When they came through, we got married, and I moved up here.

MG: What year did you get married?

BD: 1969.

MG: Where did you get married?

BD: In New York City. I had friends in New York, so we decided to do it there. Then, I came up here.

MG: What was your plan for Toronto? Did you go back to school or find a job?

BD: Found a job. When I got back from the Peace Corps, I couldn't decide what I wanted to do, whether I wanted to go back to school and study law. [I] decided I would try to find a job [and] happened to luck into this place where a guy said, "They're looking for people to learn how to become computer programmers. Why don't you take this test?" I said, "What the hell." I took the test. I passed the test, and I wound up getting a job learning how to program at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York City. I did that for ten months and then left to come up here. When I came up here, of course, I started looking for a job as a computer programmer, because by

then I had the courses and stuff. Computers were relatively new at that time, so it wasn't too difficult to find a job.

MG: Can you talk about the state of computer programming in the 1970s?

BD: [laughter] Computers were very large. [laughter] Programming was done by hand in a language, well, the one that I learned was called COBOL [Common Business-Oriented Language]. The state of it, it's not there anymore, that's for sure. Everything was so slow, so old.

MG: Did it seem slow then?

BD: No, of course not. It was interesting. Of course, I was doing it for an insurance company, so it was like actuarial stuff. It was pretty boring, the things you were programming, but it was an up-and-coming field. I seemed to have a talent for working in it, so that's what I did.

MG: Had you had a chance to visit Toronto before you moved here?

BD: Twice, yeah. I'd been up here twice. [laughter] Toronto back then was, oh, my God, nothing like it is now.

MG: Tell me about that. I do not really know what it is like now.

BD: Oh, okay. Well, Toronto now is a very cosmopolitan city, a very modern city. You can find anything you want. Back then, it was still Toronto the Good. It was still very much a British influence. Stores were closed on Sunday. You had to go to a government store to buy liquor. I remember the first time I wanted to make lasagna. I went to the supermarket, because you go in a supermarket, you get lasagna noodles, you get tomato paste, you get Italian sausage, whatever. No, no. I went into the supermarket [and] couldn't find any of that stuff. I stopped somebody [and] asked them, "Oh, no. You have to go to the Italian section of town." [laughter] So, [I said], "Where's the Italian section?" First moving here, [it was] like I'd been here, I'd met some of my future husband's friends, because he worked for IBM, so it was a fairly cosmopolitan group of people, but the rest of Toronto, outside of those little pockets, it was like whoa, so provincial.

MG: When did things start to change?

BD: Starting in the next four or five years, all of a sudden, there was much more immigration. People from everywhere were coming here, so, of course, Toronto especially changed. All kinds of different stores opened. To me, that was perfectly normal, that's the way it should have always been, because that's what I was aware of in the States. Being near New York, you're used to a cosmopolitan environment. It took about five or six years, and things changed slowly. Within about ten, fifteen years, it was a very different place.

MG: Where were people immigrating from?

BD: At that point in time, let's see, where were people from? Italy, lots of Italians, it was mainly European countries, Poles, Hungarians, Eastern European types, Germans. [There was] very little Asian immigration at that point in time. That was another wave that came over. I guess the second wave that came in were West Indians, and, yeah, the third wave would be Asians.

MG: Were you encountering any American men who had fled to avoid the draft?

BD: No, I didn't run into any. Yeah, I know they were here, but I wasn't in those circles, I guess.

MG: Was there a particular neighborhood you first settled in when you came to Toronto?

BD: It was called Flemingdon Park, lots of high rises. The reason we were there was that it was close to IBM, where my husband was working. He could walk to work from there. That's a neighborhood that's changed a lot since we were first there. I guess we lived there about four years, and then we bought a house out in Scarborough.

MG: Is that a suburb of here?

BD: Yes, yes, it is.

MG: Nigeria and Toronto seem like two very different places.

BD: Yes, [laughter] certainly.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about that transition, coming to a place so cold and so cosmopolitan?

BD: Well, Toronto, when I first came here, wasn't cosmopolitan at all. So in that sense, it was similar to Nigeria. It was cold though. I spent a lot of my time working, because I eventually found a job not too far from where we were living with the provincial government in programming, and it was close enough that I could walk there. My world was the people that either I was working with or my husband was working with and a few neighbors in our apartment building. It was kind of isolated. I didn't know Toronto really. [I] didn't really go that many places. [I] went to friends' houses; that was about it. There wasn't any downtown to speak of really. I was cocooned for the first while when I lived here.

MG: How were you feeling about the work you were doing? You had come from something you had felt was really fulfilling. Did you feel the same way about the work you were doing here?

BD: No, not in the same kind of social way. I was working for the Ministry of Health, so the kinds of things we were working on were useful things. That's when socialized medicine was, or the start of the computerized systems that worked with our OHIP [Ontario Health Insurance Plan]. Yeah, I wasn't as concerned about the work being meaningful in the same way that it was when I was in Nigeria.

MG: Can you also talk about how life in Canada is different than life in the United States?

BD: Well, the U.S., at least from my perspective, it's a country whose racial issues are always at the forefront. Here, it's not quite the same. Obviously, they don't have the same history. In that sense, people's reactions, the general culture is not as fraught with division as it is in the States.

MG: Does that exist anywhere, maybe socioeconomically?

BD: Yeah, I think so.

MG: Were you still following along with United States news and current events?

BD: Yeah, for the most part I was. I mean, you really couldn't help it back in those days, even with TV. Most of it was a Buffalo station, so, yeah, I learned a lot about Buffalo. That's for sure. I definitely kept up with it. I still got *The New York Times* and read that, and I still got *Time* magazine and read that. Yeah, I was keeping up on what was going on in the States.

MG: When you were in Africa, you talked about being drawn to the Muslim religion, and I was curious if you took any of that back with you.

BD: The only thing I brought back with me was not any particular prejudice against the Muslim religion, because I lived with people who were Muslims and as far as I was concerned their outlook on life and what their religion meant to them was something that was perfectly normal and ordinary and, yeah, that's the way religion should be. It should be something a lot more practical than what I remember of Christianity in the States.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about your early married life and what stands out to you about those years?

BD: Certainly, I got to a point, within a few years, of wondering whether I really should have gotten married at all. I don't know whether I should have, I must admit, but it was a reasonably happy time. Within the first couple of years, I went through some physical problems, so that put some stresses on the relationship. In general, it was good I think.

MG: You did not stay married.

BD: Well, in the end, I was married for fourteen years, so stayed married long enough. [laughter]

MG: What has your life been like since you divorced?

BD: Well, the first couple years were difficult, of course. After that, I picked up, focused more on my career, friendships that I had with other folks. Life is good. I think in the end, it was a good thing. Neither one of us should have been married to each other.

MG: Did you start a family?

BD: No, no, I wasn't able to have children, so we didn't start a family.

MG: With all the technology changes, did you have to keep up with computers and advances in programming? It is not something I know a whole lot about, obviously. [laughter]

BD: Yes, certainly while I was in it, it was still more physical, although the languages changed, the speed of the computers changed, the way you created programs changed, not as much as it has today. There were still old legacy systems, I guess you call them, ones that were originally built in the '70s and '80s that still needed to be maintained, so most of my programming life was spent on those kinds of programs, as opposed to the kinds that people [do] right now.

MG: Do you think you will live the rest of your life here in Toronto?

BD: I expect so, yeah.

MG: What about Toronto do you enjoy?

BD: Well, everything is here, other than the cold weather, which in all the years I've been here, the cold still gets to me. Toronto's got everything to me that you would want. Culturally, sports-wise, nature-wise, it's here.

MG: What has been your relationship with or contact with Douglass College? Are you keeping up with what is going on there?

BD: To some extent. I get emails. From the AADC [Associate Alumnae of Douglass College], I get bulletins. I hear what's happening in general at the school, new buildings that are going up. Of course, they hit you up for money. In that sense, I keep up peripherally with what's going on.

MG: Are you able to see how Douglass impacted your life? So many people that I have talked to pinpoint college as where the trajectory of their life changed. For you, it might be Nigeria or something else, but I am curious what role Douglass played in your life.

BD: It was an important role that it played. Next to Nigeria, that was the big influence on my life, just getting used to a different kind of environment, different kinds of relationships with different kinds of people. Being at an all-female school was also good too, because you didn't have the pressure, like in classes, of male dominance. Women could dominate in a classroom. The camaraderie, it was, like I said, I look back on it fondly. I really do.

MG: Are you in touch with women you went to school with?

BD: A couple. Interestingly enough, one of the people that I was closest to when I was there, for whatever reason, we kept up a correspondence for a few years, and then it just sort of drifted off. It was two years ago now, I just happened to be fooling around on the Internet, and I googled my name. Up came this email from this person that I had known who was looking for me and had been looking for me for years. I'd only gotten on Facebook a couple of years before, so I decided to look her up on Facebook, and sure enough, I found her. That's a friendship that I've renewed, that this was a person that I hadn't seen since about '72.

MG: Oh, wow.

BD: That was good. There are a couple of black students that I keep in touch with. That's about it though.

MG: Did you stay on working with the Ministry of Health?

BD: No. I stayed with the Ministry of Health probably for about fifteen years, and then I moved to the central government agency, which is called Management Board, and worked for them on human resources-related computer programs. Then, from there, [I] decided I was tired of programming, so I wound up getting into management of human resources.

MG: That is still for the government.

BD: That was still for the government. Yeah, I always worked for the Ontario government, which was good in the end, because when I retired, I got a very nice pension. Back in those days, and, well, I think still with the government, they have defined benefit pensions.

MG: How often do you make it back to New Jersey?

BD: I don't make it back to New Jersey now at all. My parents, once my father retired, they moved to Virginia. Like I said, the last time I was in New Jersey was just before they moved, so that was mid-'80s. Maybe '83-'84 was probably the last time I was in East Orange, New Jersey, and I haven't been back there since.

MG: Are your parents still alive?

BD: No, both of them are dead now.

MG: Where did your sister end up?

BD: She married and moved with her husband, who was in the Air Force, moved to Texas, moved to California. They got divorced. She moved up here with me and my then husband and stayed in Toronto until her daughter was about eight. [She] decided that she really wanted her to grow up as an American instead of a Canadian, so she moved down to Virginia with my parents. Then, after my father died in Virginia, she decided to take my mother and move to Georgia, because there were better job opportunities for her there. My mother died in Georgia, and my sister and my niece are still in Georgia.

MG: Is there anything I forgot to ask you about or anything I skipped over?

BD: [laughter] I don't think so.

MG: I really appreciate you getting in touch with me and meeting with me today.

BD: Oh, no problem.

MG: I really loved talking to you and hearing about Douglass and everything else. If there is nothing else, I will turn this off, but I want to thank you for your time.

BD: You're more than welcome.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Transcribed by Alex Sutton
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