

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CORNELIUS GAITHER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

WEST DEPTFORD, NEW JERSEY

JANUARY 31, 2014

TRANSCRIPT BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Cornelius Gaither in West Deptford, New Jersey, on January 31, 2014, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much, Dr. Gaither, for having me here.

Cornelius Gaither: You're quite welcome.

SI: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

CG: I was born February 28, 1928, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1326 North Camac Street, at home.

SI: What were your parents' names?

CG: My father was Cornelius (Hobson?) Gaither. He was also a dentist. He finished Temple Dental School in 1927. My mother was Edith Albertha Robinson Gaither.

SI: Beginning with your father's side of the family, do you know anything about his family, where the family came from?

CG: I don't know too much about my father's side of the history. His father was dead when I was born and his mother had remarried. I know about my step-grandfather and my grandmother on my father's side, but no more.

SI: Did they live in Philadelphia for most of their lives?

CG: Yes, they lived in Philadelphia, 1927 North 21st Street, and my father's half-brother became a medical doctor and it was just the two of them.

SI: Do you know if your grandmother always lived in Philadelphia or if she moved there at some point in her life?

CG: As far as I know, she always lived in Philadelphia, but let me say this, we are a part of the Gaither Clan. John Gaither--sometimes say G-A-T-E-R, not Gaither--came to this country in the 1500s and I am an active member of the John Gaither Descendants and a past president of the group. [Editor's Note: John Gater came to Jamestown in 1620 and later resettled in Maryland. The Society of John Gaither Descendants was incorporated in 1984.]

SI: Do you know anything about your mother's side of the family?

CG: My mother was raised in East Orange, New Jersey. Her father built a house there when she was a small child and both my father and she were sent to a Presbyterian boarding school in Augusta, Georgia, called Haines Institute, and this is where they met and they graduated from there, high school, in 1919. Mother came back, went back home to East Orange, and went to Upsala College, which is no longer in existence, and my father went to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. The boarding school was a black Presbyterian boarding school and this is where they met. ... The lady that had the boarding school was called Lucy Laney and she insisted that

all her males, [who] she called "her boys," go to Lincoln University, because it was a black, male Presbyterian school.

SI: Do you know why your mother chose to go to Upsala or what her experience was like there?

CG: Oh, it was just across the street from where the house my grandfather built [was]. I mean, she didn't have to take a bus or anything. She just walked right across the street to the college.

SI: Do you know what she studied there?

CG: No, I don't know what she studied there. No, I don't, but she didn't do anything but be a housewife after she and my father married in 1923.

SI: Did your father ever talk about what his days at Lincoln University were like?

CG: Oh, yes, I know all about his days at Lincoln, because I was raised in West Chester, Pennsylvania, which is not that far from Lincoln University, and, of course, he was there for every football game, every homecoming and every graduation, and I was right there with him and this is why I chose to go to Lincoln myself.

SI: Tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your neighborhood was like.

CG: Oh, God, that's a sad, sad story. It's a sad story because my father purchased a house in West Chester, 313 North Darlington Street, and right in back of our house was an elementary school, the Auditorium School, which I couldn't go to because I was black. I had to go all the way across town to Gay Street School, which was from K to ninth, ninth grade, and, in the ninth grade, I came back only a block from my house and it was integrated, as was the high school, which is right there also, ... but it was the kids who went to the school right behind my house, that I couldn't go to school with, that I played with after school, on weekends and during the summer, not the kids all the way across town at the Gay Street School, and so, I went through there. I skipped twelfth grade and went on to Lincoln University, but came back to march with my original class and get my high school diploma and I'm still considered a member of my original high school class. ... No one had done it before me and no one had done it after me, since I did it. So, that was that.

SI: Did your parents ever talk about how World War I affected them?

CG: Well, my father, ... of course, he was in college and/or high school, but there was a military group--it wasn't ROTC, I forget what it was called--and he was a part of that group. As we're talking, it'll probably come back to me, what that group was.

SI: I believe you wrote on your pre-interview survey that it was the Student Army Corps.

CG: Yes, yes, Student Army Corps, yes.

SI: Your parents never spoke about how rationing or any other policies affected them.

CG: No, no, but I could tell you, when I was growing up and got to be a teenager, seventeen or eighteen, we had to register for the draft and, if you were [hoping for] the Navy and Air Force, Army Air Corps, if you were drafted, you didn't get into those. The draft just put you in the Army, and I was deferred to get my education and to go to dental school, and then, intern, and so forth. ... I had passed my physical and the Army was hot on my tail, but my father had some pull and he got me into the Air Force.

SI: What year was that?

CG: Oh, it was after I had finished. See, I finished dental school in 1953. Then, I did an internship at Jersey City Medical Center for a year and got into the oral surgery residency and I didn't complete that, but I got most of it done. ... As a result, I went into the military as an oral surgeon and that was, like I said, I finished dental school in '53, then, '54, and so forth.

SI: Going back to your father's generation, he graduated from Temple Dental in 1927.

CG: Yes.

SI: Did he have a practice in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

CG: No. ... We were living in Philadelphia and he was commuting from West Chester to Philadelphia and his practice was in West Chester, which is where he finally moved us, to West Chester, Pennsylvania.

SI: Do you have any sense of how the Depression affected your family?

CG: No, not really, not really, no, not at all.

SI: Do you know, for example, if your father had to carry a lot of people on credit?

CG: Well, it was so different in those days. There are many people that gave my father gifts. We were near Kennett Square and all, which was the mushroom capital of the world, and he had a lot of patients that worked there and they would bring him baskets of mushrooms and, of course, he also had some patients that made liquor and, of course, they would give him the liquor. ... There was a train that went by. Those trainmen would often stop at this man's farm to get some of his homemade booze. [laughter]

SI: Do you recall, in your neighborhood, seeing people on the streets or transients coming through looking for food?

CG: No, no. We lived in an integrated neighborhood, on Darlington Street, and, no, I don't.

SI: What about other places you might go in Philadelphia? Did you see bread lines, soup kitchens, that kind of thing?

CG: No, no, not at all.

SI: You said your neighborhood was integrated. Was it dominated by any one group, for example, mostly Irish, mostly German, mostly African-American?

CG: Well, there were practically no African-Americans on the block where we lived, but they were mixed up. I don't think there were not that many Italians in that block, if [I recall]--I don't think there were any Italians. There was a Jewish family, ... but, then, an Italian family did have the liquor store on the corner, yes.

SI: Growing up, did the church play a big role in your life?

CG: A very big role in my life. ... After I was getting out of the service, I was with my father in the office, but everybody said, "We don't want you. You don't know enough. We want the old man." So, I said, "I'm going to Jersey, where there'll be only one Dr. Gaither." So, I set out to go to Penns Grove. They wouldn't sell me a house in Penns Grove, and a dentist in Swedesboro heard about my problem and called up and said he would sell me a house and help me get my practice started, which he did. ... That was in Swedesboro, New Jersey, but I having been a Presbyterian all my life, the Presbyterian church wouldn't let me in, but Paulsboro Presbyterian Church heard about it and they came and asked me. They said, "We'd like to have you worship with us. If you'd like to become a member, we'll be glad to accept you," and the minister said, "Don't do it on my behalf, because I'm leaving, going to Louisville," which he did, and I'm still with that church. We're no longer in Paulsboro. We've built a new church in Gibbstown and I'm still with the church that came and got me.

SI: Was the doctor who heard about your story in Swedesboro a Presbyterian or some other denomination?

CG: I don't know what Bill (Timmins?) was, because they even busted him about selling me a house on the main street in Swedesboro, Kings Highway, and he had enough pull, he just said the hell with them, you know, and he did what he wanted to do. ... That's where I stayed for many years, in Swedesboro, until I guess about '04, yes.

SI: What year did you move to Swedesboro?

CG: I guess I moved to Swedesboro--oh, it was '57. I came to Swedesboro and, because of my background, having been an oral surgeon in the military and the internship, I was the first black on Underwood-Memorial Hospital's staff. I was on the staff before it became Underwood Memorial, when it was just Underwood, and then, the merger came with Memorial Hospital. So, I was the first black on the staff and, also, the first black on the staff of Elmer Community Hospital, but I was not the first black on Salem Hospital [staff], ... and that's where I stayed for fifty years. ... I let go the other two hospitals, because I wasn't making enough money to pay staff dues, which are not cheap, and that was that, yes. ... I also became the first black in the Kiwanis International. They had invited me to join the Swedesboro Kiwanis Club, which I did, in which I became a life member, but I'm not active with any Kiwanis Club now, because our club folded, because we couldn't get any new members. They would start other clubs instead of

coming with us and those other clubs they started closed up, too, but I became the first black in Kiwanis International and a life member; yes?

SI: In that chapter or in the entire Kiwanis International?

CG: In the entire.

SI: Wow.

CG: In the entire thing, yes, and somewhere around here, there will be the plaque showing that I'm a life member, but I'm not active anymore, not because I don't want to be, but because I'd have to drive to get to a meeting and I can't do that.

SI: When you were growing up, which church did you worship at?

CG: Presbyterian, I've been a Presbyterian all my life.

SI: What was the name of the church?

CG: Second Presbyterian Church in West Chester, which was a black Presbyterian church, but all the Presbyterian churches come under one heading, as the Episcopal Church does. Now, that's another thing about it. The Episcopal minister, who lived right next-door to us, in the parish house in the church across the street from us, they would see my kids sitting there looking at the Episcopal kids in Sunday school, came and got all five of my kids, and so, they came up in the Episcopal Church. ... I had two sons who were the altar boys when the King of Sweden came to visit the church, yes, and, while I was overseas, in Germany is where I spent my time, ... I was married on the 23rd of December, 1952, and my wife was told that she shouldn't have any more children, because she bled so much. So, since I was on my way overseas, we said we would adopt one of the brown babies from overseas, and so, I went overseas. She could follow me after the baby was six months old and I was looking for a boy. I found one and, when she came over, I showed him to her and we adopted that boy, who was older than our girl, but still within the time of years that we were married. ... One time, I took him back to the orphanage and they brought out this little girl and said, "This is his first cousin. Their mothers are sisters," and I said, "I want her, no ands, buts or ifs," and so, I took her. So, we had two adopted and one of our own the whole time we were in Germany. It was when we came home that she had two other boys, but the boy that we adopted died in '91.

SI: I am sorry to hear that.

CG: But, the girl that we adopted, she has a--you can't tell her that she's not a Gaither. I said they were a year-and-a-half old when the two of them came into our home. Their birthdays are only two weeks apart, and so, she is a vice principal today, up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and she has one son, who ... has just completed his first semester at school in Loretto, Pennsylvania. It's a Catholic university. I can't think of the name of it right now [St. Francis University], but he's there on a football and an academic scholarship. I'm very proud of him, yes, but his name is Brandon Gaither Taylor, yes.

SI: How long did you live in Philadelphia before your family moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania?

CG: Oh, I wasn't there six months before [we moved], because my father had to commute from West Chester to Philadelphia and closed his office. ... I said he finished Temple in '27 and went there and I was born in '28 and it was shortly after I was born that we moved to West Chester.

SI: The Gay Street School was in West Chester.

CG: Yes.

SI: Okay, I misunderstood before. Was the neighborhood in West Chester also an integrated neighborhood?

CG: What, which neighborhood?

SI: The neighborhood your family moved to in West Chester.

CG: Well, that's where we moved to. It was the integrated neighborhood.

SI: Okay, that was the one you were talking about before.

CG: Yes, yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about the Gay Street School and what that was like for you.

CG: Well, I have nothing but good things to say about the teachers we had at Gay Street School. Gay Street School sat on a whole block, with nothing else in the block, surrounded by the grass. Today, ... the school has been torn down, of course. Today, that block houses the police station in West Chester and the borough hall of West Chester, occupy a small part of that block. Nothing else is in that block but that, those things, today, and there were about two grades of each, like, two first, two second, and so forth, and Joseph R. (Fugate?) was the principal of [the] Gay Street School and that was about it.

SI: What interested you the most in school when you were going through the Gay Street School?

CG: What interested me? [laughter] Well, I played the trumpet and I was in the band. They had a band, under Mr. Andrews. ... We didn't have a gym at the Gay Street School, because the ceiling wasn't high enough, but we could do anything else where we could have a little ceiling in there and, of course, we had lunch there and that was about it, I guess.

SI: Did you get the sense that the facilities were not equal to what the white children had at the school that was right next to your home?

CG: No, I couldn't say that. I know, in other instances, that was very true, but I cannot say that was true in West Chester. Dr. (Stetson?) was the superintendent of schools at that time and his son, George, we grew up and we played together, because, in the neighborhood where I lived, he was one of the ones that I played with. ... I guess George is dead now, his son, who was also George, but we remained friends practically all through our lives.

SI: Did you face any prejudice in that neighborhood?

CG: No, not at all. Just a half a block from the block where I lived was where a bunch of the rich whites lived and ... their children were the ones I played with and grew up with. There were a couple lawyers, they had their sons [there]. We played together. We were all in the same age group and I said George (Stetson?) came from across town, the president of the college, his son was up there playing with us. ... The president of the college, his son became president of one of the banks in West Chester, and whenever he saw me, he recognized me. He would always come up and say something to me, because most of my life, I was still in and out of West Chester.

SI: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked? [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

CG: I remember the day was a cloudy day and, of course, all we had was radios and I got on my bicycle. My father sent me up to the newsstand to get a newspaper. They had put out a special edition about the bombing at Pearl Harbor and I'll never forget that day. It was a cloudy day and I rode my bicycle up to the corner to get the paper to bring home, so [that] we could read about it.

SI: Had you heard about it earlier in the day on the radio?

CG: We'd heard earlier in the day on the radio. This is why all of our attention was to that and that's why he wanted this special edition of the paper.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor had been attacked, were you aware of what was going on in the world, the War in Europe, for example?

CG: Oh, I was aware of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe, yes, I was, definitely, and I couldn't understand why Hitler did the things that he did, ... particularly against the Jewish people, because I just lost a Jewish friend, Bill Chertok, and Bill Chertok ... inherited a furniture store from his father in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. Bill and I used to double date and he would leave Coatesville to pick me up in West Chester, pick up his date in Wilmington and pick up my date ... in Chester. Then, we would go to--he went to ... University of Pennsylvania and his cousin went to Penn State. At that time, the two schools played one another. We'd go to their football game or we'd go out to eat. ... Bill, a couple years ago, ended up in a nursing home in Media, which must've been a Jewish nursing home, and I visited him there a couple times and I would not be surprised ... if he had not had something to do with the building of that place, because when I went there to visit him ... the first time, he had all the administration people come down



and meet me and said we had been friends for seventy-nine years, which was true. ... Neither one of us married the dates that we were dating at that time, but, after we did get married, we still went out to eat together, yes. ... When I learned that Bill had died, I understand, in the West Chester paper, the daily local news, the first page was all about Bill Chertok. He was active in Coatesville. So, I called it, called the store, and asked to speak to his son and his son knew all about me. I was surprised. He knew all about me and I told him. He said, "Yes, I know," and so-and-so, and so-and-so, yes.

SI: After Pearl Harbor was attacked, did life change much in West Chester for somebody who was in his early teens?

CG: Oh, yes. We had someone on top of the tallest building in West Chester looking for airplanes and, of course, they were out to get people to enlist, ... men to enlist, in the service, yes.

SI: I know that they particularly wanted to recruit doctors and dentists. Did your father have to do anything in regard to registering?

CG: No, no, not after the Student Army Corps. That was it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: There were some changes in town as a result of the war.

CG: Oh, yes, like I said, we had these people who had the [watch stations] on top of the tallest building in West Chester, which was not tall according to other buildings, but it was tall for us, and we had people who had to stand there and look out for airplanes. ... I sit back now and think about, "They were in Europe fighting. We didn't have anything over here," [laughter] you know, but that's what they were doing, yes.

SI: Did rationing affect your life?

CG: Oh, yes, we had rationing then. That affected everyone, the rationing. I forget now what was being rationed, but we were affected by rationing, yes, definitely. We had coupons. You could take your coupons, and rationing, yes, definitely.

SI: You were a bit younger, but did you know a lot of young men or young women who went off to the service?

CG: Yes, and one of them that went off to the service, you might've heard of him, was Horace Pippin. You ever heard of Horace Pippin? [Editor's Note: Pippin served in the US Army during World War I and was wounded in combat in Europe.]

SI: The name sounds familiar.

CG: He was an artist, a very primitive artist, and he was from West Chester and he was one of the first blacks that went away to the Army, which was not integrated at the time, and I knew Horace Pippin and nobody wanted to buy his pictures. His pictures just stood stacked up in the barbershop, and a movie star used to come and court a lady in West Chester. She had a dress shop. I forget his name right now, but he saw one of his paintings and went back to Hollywood and told them about it and, all of a sudden, boom, Pippin's pictures went up like that and they still are up there today, very primitive though, very primitive.

SI: In the 1930s and 1940s, would you say that there was a sizable African-American community in West Chester?

CG: There was not a sizable community in West Chester. ... Basically, blacks lived in one area, over near the Gay Street School, ... and I just realized, about a month or two ago, that up the street from where I lived, there were a bunch of Catholics. There were twelve kids and they didn't go to the Gay Street School, but they were Catholic and they didn't have to ... go to the segregated school. All these years of my life, I never realized that, until recently, and there was another fellow there, Charles Thomas, who became a pharmacist, he didn't go to the Gay Street School, either. ... It never occurred to me that they didn't go to the Gay Street School because they were Catholic.

SI: They went to the Catholic school.

CG: They went to the Catholic school, right straight through, and they were the only two families that were black Catholics in West Chester.

SI: What year did you enter high school? You said you skipped eighth grade.

CG: I skipped twelve grade.

SI: Okay, I am sorry.

CG: And, you see, I would have graduated in '46, but I left in '45, so, yes, '46 would be what, '42? That's the year I probably entered high school.

SI: Could you see any impact that the war was having on the school? Were any programs or classes being cut or were there any wartime classes being added to the curriculum?

CG: No, I didn't notice any of that. I didn't notice that until I got to college, and then, I noticed it in college and, at that time, the fellows were beginning to come back ... from the service.

SI: In high school, what interested you the most?

CG: Oh, I played the piano. ... My piano teacher was head of the music department in West Chester State University, Lloyd C. Mitchell, and I was the assistant accompanist for the mixed chorus, but *the* accompanist for the all-male chorus in high school. I played trumpet in the band

and the orchestra and I was very interested in Latin and French ... and I followed through all into the college.

SI: Did you play music anywhere else, such as in church or privately?

CG: Yes, I did. There was a black organization called the Elks. They had an Elks band and I did play in their band and we had uniforms and all and they played for different occasions and different parades and I was a part of that, because I almost had forgotten that, yes.

SI: As the war continued, there were several advances for African-Americans in the service and changes in hiring practices elsewhere. Did you keep up with that in the news? Did you follow stories, for example, of the Tuskegee Airmen or the tanker battalions in Europe?

CG: Well, I got to Europe as the Tuskegee Airmen were breaking up and, as a result of that, I was at the tail-end of them before they broke up and I'm considered a Tuskegee Airman because of that. ... [Editor's Note: Pressure by Civil Rights activists and the passage of Public Law 18 in April 1939, which created pilot training programs at African-American colleges, led to the creation of the US Army Air Corps' segregated 99th Pursuit Squadron (later Fighter Squadron) in January 1941 at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The first class of African-American aviation cadets began training at Tuskegee Army Air Field in July 1941 and graduated in March 1942. From 1942 to 1946, Tuskegee produced 992 single and multi-engine pilots and African-Americans trained in other flight and ground crew positions at facilities across the nation. African-American pilots served overseas in the 99th and the 332nd Fighter Groups in North Africa and Italy.]

SI: That was in the 1950s.

CG: Yes, and in Germany, and [General] B. O. Davis, [Jr., commander of the 99th and the 332nd Fighter Groups in World War II] went on to become the deputy commander of the Twelfth Air Force, which we were all a part of at the time, and I was there as the group was beginning to break up and I became a part of them. They informed me that I was a part of them, you know, yes. [laughter]

SI: Had you followed what they were doing during the war when you were younger?

CG: Oh, yes, yes, ... I followed them straight through. ... Well, a lot of people don't realize that Delaware State College in Dover--it's a black school--they had a little landing field there and some of the Tuskegee Airmen were trained there. Also, I had a cousin who became a Tuskegee Airman, but he was trained up in Michigan in air traffic command ... and he spent the rest of his life as an air [traffic] controller in St. Louis, but everybody didn't train at Tuskegee. Some of them trained other places, but they were still a part of the Tuskegee Airmen's group. Now, when they came to Morocco, which is the first, one of the first, places they were, ... they were flying over to into Europe, and Italy, primarily, and then, they went on, were stationed in Italy. That's when they became Red Tails and because they did not lose any of the bombers that they were escorting, but they did lose some of their pilots and their fighters, and everybody, ... when you say you're a Tuskegee Airman, we had some women in there, too, and they're considered

Tuskegee Airmen. We didn't have any such thing as a male nurse at that time. All the nurses we had were females. They're considered Tuskegee Airmen. Also, we had some WACs. They were considered Tuskegee Airmen and most people, when you say that you're a Tuskegee Airman, they think you flew. Everybody didn't fly. They had to have so many [support troops]-- who prepared the food for them? They're Tuskegee Airmen, too. Who took care of the jeeps and whatnot? Mechanics, they're Tuskegee [Airmen, too]. Everybody didn't fly, but it took the men to keep those planes in the air and they're all Tuskegee Airmen.

SI: As you were going through high school, did you know that you wanted to be a dentist? Was that something that was impressed upon you by your father or others in your family or did you decide that yourself?

CG: No, no, I came from a family where we had eleven physicians and four dentists. That's all my family did. So, I just followed along with them and went on the lesser side, where there were fewer, which was the dental side, and, like I said, ... my father's half-brother was on the medical side. He was younger, of course, than my father and he had no children, just he and his wife.

SI: Before you went away to Lincoln, did you ever have the opportunity to travel beyond the Philadelphia-West Chester area?

CG: Well, just a little bit. My father had black classmates from Temple and they were in different places and we would visit them, ... but, other than that, no.

SI: So ...

CG: Well, let me say this.

SI: Go ahead.

CG: My children, which I said I have four living, ... most people are amazed that they are the fourth generation to go to college, and, on my former wife's side, they're the fifth generation, because her grandfather was the first chaplain at Tuskegee and her father was registrar at two schools at the same time, Atlanta University and Morehouse College, ... but people are surprised and they said, "You're fourth and fifth generation?" "Yes, we were." They can't picture blacks going back that far, and so many whites can't, either, if you think about going back that far, but we can.

SI: From all of the interviews that I have conducted, with people of all different backgrounds, it was rather rare for anyone to go to college back in the 1920s. Even into the 1940s, it was more common, but still not commonplace.

CG: Well, my wife's grandfather, who I said was the first chaplain at Tuskegee, he's mentioned in Booker T. Washington's autobiography, which I had the book until I moved and I came across the book. I gave it to one of my daughters, so that [she] can put a bookmark in there, the page where he's mentioned in there, which would be her great-grandfather.

SI: When you were in the eleventh grade, did you decide that you wanted to go straight to college or was that decided for you, that you would skip the twelfth grade?

CG: No, no, I did that myself. No, like I said, no one had done it before me and no one had done it after me, but I decided on it myself that I would get out of there and get on my way.

SI: Was there any particular reason?

CG: Yes, there was, and you're going to laugh at this. [laughter] I was dating a girl who had come from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to West Chester University. I was a junior in high school and she was a freshman and I would've been a senior and she would've been a sophomore. I said, "I've got to get out of here," and that would put me just one year behind her, which is what I did, and that's why I did it.

SI: You entered Lincoln University in 1945.

CG: Entered Lincoln in 1945 and graduated from there in '49, yes.

SI: First, do you have any memories about the end of the war?

CG: No, I never thought much about the end of the war. I've thought about things in many years after the end of the war, and, of course, in Swedesboro, I was responsible for the Memorial Day parade and the Christmas parade, so, I got veterans from my black American Legion post, over in West Chester, to come and be the first group in our Memorial Day parade for years. ... So, this is what the postwar was for me.

SI: Before you went away to Lincoln, had you had any jobs, either part-time, afterschool jobs or summer jobs?

CG: You name it, I had a summertime job. I worked at Lukens Steel in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, which made the largest steel plates in the world. That was a summer job. I worked at Sun Shipyard in Chester, #4 Yard, which was the black yard, which was headed by--he was an All-American football player from Cornell, I'll think of him, he went on to become a college president--and I worked on farms and I worked at the post office. There were two of us and, after we had both worked at the post office one time, they kept calling us back, because the people were not so late getting their mail, because we had to sort it, and then, wrap it up, so that the trucks could take it out. ... We got to know so many of the addresses and whatnot, we had a job in the summertime, when the men would go on vacation, and at Christmastime. [laughter] We had to serve mail on Christmas and get it all out the post office, and on Sundays, yes, and I worked on the farm. I did everything on the farm that you could do, really. The lady that had the farm, Jean Kane Foulk, her daughter married one of the DuPonts, and I remember pitching hay up on the hay wagon, ... and then, when they came out with the things for bundling the hay, you know, but, then, when you were pitching it up, you had to get it up there right, the person up in the top had to pack it right. Otherwise, it would all fall off. So, I did everything. That's where I learned to milk cows and everything else.

SI: Was the farm in West Chester?

CG: Just outside of West Chester. I could ride my bicycle out. In fact, I started there just cutting her grass, because she was very active in the black community, from her house up to the main road. That's when I started doing it. Then, one thing led to the other and, weekends, I would be out there working on her farm.

SI: What did you do at the steel factory?

CG: I was in the labor pool and, I'll tell you, we had to unload those sandstones that they made the forms, I mean, the steel plates, the largest steel plates in the world.

SI: Molds?

CG: Molds out of, yes, and they were heavy and we'd have a freight car would come in there. We'd have to unload it and, if they had to break down the furnace, where they were heating the steel, we wore wooden soles, about this thick, under our shoes.

SI: Two to three inches.

CG: And they looked like charcoal when we got through, because they were not red-hot, they were white-hot, and one thing I still would like to know, as they were rolling these steel plates out, they would throw burlap bags saturated with syrup, molasses, on top of these things and, of course, they would just sizzle-sizzle, disappear, and I don't know, to this day, what that did for the steel. It had to have done something, but Lukens Steel is not there anymore as Lukens Steel and, of course, Sun Shipyard is not there anymore as Sun Shipyard in Chester, yes. ... Also, I worked up in Lake George one summer, in the Hotel Willard on Lake George, and this was, the people that ran it, the blacks that ran the cooking and whatnot for the hotel, came up from South Carolina and did this every summer. ... Somehow, I'd heard about it and applied and they told me to come, ... and, from then on, they kept in touch with me. I never went back but that one summer, but even when I got married, they sent wedding gifts and everything.

SI: These were the cooks that you formed this friendship with.

CG: Yes, yes, the cooks I formed the friendship with, and the thing about it was, you know, you could row across the lake to get the mail to bring over to the hotel when the weather was good, but, otherwise, you had to drive up and around to get to the post office to get the mail, yes.

SI: What did you do at the hotel?

CG: I was second cook. ... I would help people bring their bags in--I'd take my apron off--and I learned a lot about cooking around there and some things that they did, I never realized, but I follow them through today.

SI: Going back to the steel plant, was there a racial division of labor? Did they, for example, have certain jobs that only African-Americans did and certain jobs that only whites did?

CG: I don't think so, no. I don't think there was at Lukens Steel, no.

SI: I have interviewed some African-Americans who worked in the chemical plants here in New Jersey and they said that they got the worse jobs. For example, they could not even drive a truck.

CG: No, no, I don't recall anything like that at Lukens Steel, and you ever heard of Dr. Percy Julian? [Editor's Note: Dr. Percy Lavon Julian (1899-1975) pioneered the chemical synthesis of medicines from plants.]

SI: No.

CG: Well, he was an outstanding black chemist and he developed something, I don't know what it was, but, in West Chester, they built this plant to produce whatever it was he had discovered. ... In fact, it was one of the largest plants in West Chester when I was growing up, but, when he would come to inspect the plant, he couldn't come and inspect the plant, because they had no place for him to stay. He couldn't stay at the hotel in West Chester. None of the executives at the company invited him to stay. So, they called up my father and mother and asked, "Could he stay there?" with us, and they said yes. So, whenever he came to inspect the plant, he stayed with us and, every Christmas, his hobby was making penny peanut brittle and we'd get a package of peanut brittle from him, up until the time he died, but you can check his name. He's very, very well-known. He's dead now, of course, but Dr. Percy Julian, from out in the Midwest somewhere, in Chicago, somewhere out that way.

SI: In West Chester, there was segregation in public accommodations. Does anything else along those lines stand out in your memory?

CG: Oh, I couldn't go to the YMCA, and so, the groups that the YMCA had, you know, ... connected with the high school, I couldn't be a part of it because I couldn't go to the YMCA, which is only a couple blocks [away] from where I lived. The swimming pool was there and everything else. They eventually built, across town, not too far from the Gay Street School, a community center, and, of course, there, they had a basketball court and everything else, and many, many, many years later, they had an outdoor swimming pool, but nothing indoor, like the Y had.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit more about your job at the shipyard?

CG: There, again, it was in the labor pool, one of the lowest jobs you could get, but, there, I was also in the band. When the ship was being taken from the dry-dock, dropped into the water, they always had the ceremony and, of course, the band would come out and play for that ceremony and I'll never forget when that ship was ready to go out on a trial run. Boy, they brought some food on that boat. The boat would be going down the Delaware for about two weeks and the food they put on there to feed the people that were checking out that boat was something, I'm telling you. [laughter]

SI: What type of ships were you working on?

CG: They were tankers. They just built tankers at Sun Ship. My job was sweeping down inside the tanks where the oil would go. We used a little wisps broom.

SI: When you say you were a laborer, does that mean that you were moving materials around? Were you doing anything like riveting?

CG: No, no, they had [others]. There were black welders, particularly in #4 Yard, because they had one, two, three, four yards and the #4 Yard was practically all black and, of course, there were welders in there and everything else in there, but, no, I never got up that far and, tell you, I just can't remember what I did at Sun Ship.

SI: At the time you worked there, were there many women working in the shipyard?

CG: Not that I recall, no, not at all. In fact, I don't think I recall any women that worked at Sun Ship.

SI: To go into your time in college, can you tell me a little bit about entering Lincoln University, your first few days and weeks on the campus?

CG: Well, my father had--Horace Mann Bond, you ever heard of him?

SI: No.

CG: His son, [Civil Rights leader] Julian Bond?

SI: Yes, his name is familiar.

CG: Well, Horace Mann Bond was a classmate of my father's, in the Class of '23, and he came back to be the first black president of Lincoln University [in 1945] while I was a student there, and so, ... what else did you want to ask me about my time at Lincoln?

SI: What was it like when you first arrived on campus? You entered in the Fall of 1945. There were a lot of GIs coming back at that time. Did they have a big impact on Lincoln University?

CG: It had an impact, not a big impact. It had an impact on the campus, because they had gotten some old Army buildings and placed them [on campus]. We called that Vets Village and that's where a lot of the veterans stayed and, ... of course, we didn't have any more than about three or four hundred students at Lincoln at that time. ... It wasn't like it is today. ... Nobody that I knew had a car. Here, you go past these high schools and whatnot today, parking lots are filled up with kids with cars in high school, but we didn't have any of that at Lincoln and, like I said, I was there when Frank Wilson came back as the first black on the faculty at Lincoln and he was a very close friend of my father's from when they were students there, and then, he went on to become the first dean at Lincoln University, and then, later on, Bond came in as the first black president, and Bond had a lot to do with this man's art in Philadelphia here, that they just built a new place up on Broad Street. He had a house out in Philadelphia, outside of Philadelphia,



where he had all this art collection. I can't think of what it [was], but they had Bond come out there and a lot of people couldn't understand why they wanted Bond out there as part of the committee to decide what to do with all this man's artwork, but they just built a new place. What is his name? I can't think of his name. Maybe it'll come to me later, but, if I could recall his name, you would definitely know who I'm talking about. He had all this art collection in his home in, now, (Lower Marion?), or somewhere, and, if you went there, there was no parking lot. You had to park along the street. It was hard trying to find a parking spot, yes. [Editor's Note: Dr. Bond's friendship with Albert C. Barnes, a wealthy businessman and art collector, led to Lincoln University's control of Barnes' Impressionist and Modern art collection, valued at over two billion today. A deal between the state and Lincoln University in the 2000s led to the relocation of the collection to Center City Philadelphia.]

SI: Did you live on campus?

CG: Oh, yes, I stayed on campus, yes, and, on the weekends, Lincoln University was right on Route 1 at that time and you could go down there to the main gate and stick your thumb in the air and I would thumb it to West Chester for the weekend, but I would catch the bus back, because the last bus left at nine o'clock. Otherwise, I couldn't thumb at night, you know, but, during the day, and a lot of the students there were from Philadelphia and Baltimore, they would be thumbing home, too. ... The bus would stop there at the gate and, of course, they don't use that gate anymore. They have a new entrance to the campus, but, oh, yes, you could thumb and go, get out of there.

SI: Did you work at all while you were on campus?

CG: I had a job on campus, delivering; most of our faculty who lived on campus. They had buildings, houses, for them on campus and I had a job, out of the office, to deliver mail to these faculty homes and I would do that every day.

SI: When you were at Lincoln, you mentioned that there were people coming back on the GI Bill and living in this Vets Village. Do you recall sitting in class with veterans? Did they clearly stand out?

CG: They were just students there. ... We were all integrated together.

SI: Were you involved in any student activities at Lincoln?

CG: No.

SI: Was the course that you entered called a pre-dental or pre-med course or something else?

CG: Well, pre-med and pre-dental are about the same and, of course, this is why I told you, just like ... [the] first two years at medical and dental school are practically the same. We dissect a body, too, and I'll never forget that. ... The body that I had to dissect was a heavyset woman and that turned me against heavyset women, period, because ... they had little, itty-bitty muscles. You had to scrape all the yellow fat out the way to get to the muscles, to see where they were

fastened, you know, but the courses were the same and, practically, you had two medical and dental schools [accessible to African-Americans] at that time, Howard University and Meharry Medical College. ... Lincoln had more students in each one of those schools than anybody. We might've only had two or three, but the other schools might have one here and one there and one there, but Lincoln, both at Meharry and Howard, had more students per class. Like I said, it wasn't half the class, but it was three or four, but the other schools didn't have that much, that many.

SI: Not being an expert in medical science, I understand that there were a lot of innovations introduced after the war. Do you recall anything that you learned in your courses that was new, that was just being introduced?

CG: Oh, there were things constantly coming in. Well, I had a toy, growing up, which was a pedal drill. That's what my father started with at Temple and, of course, things went on to become electrolyzed, motorized, and they had the machine to drive the drill. ... Of course, when I was coming along, we got air to give us high-speed, and so, that made the difference. You had these high-speed things come along when I was in dental school.

SI: During your time at Lincoln, since it was a Presbyterian school, did that play a role in campus life? Did you have to go to services?

CG: Oh, we had a course we all had to take our freshman year, had to take a course and it had something to do with the Bible. We also had a Presbyterian seminary on campus. ... We had instructors who taught at the seminary ... that lived on the campus, too. So, we were surrounded by religion. ...

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about going to Meharry?

CG: Going to where, Meharry?

SI: Meharry, yes.

CG: Oh, no, I said his brother had gone there ... for medicine, and so, I went for dentistry and I had sent a letter to Temple, in my father's name, and they answered the letter, saying, "We would be glad to have your son apply to Temple," but I didn't. I went on to Meharry. Now, when I would go to school, I would catch the train at Paoli and go to Cincinnati. At Cincinnati, I had to get into a segregated train from Chicago, going to Nashville, the L&N Railroad, and, of course, there was no air-conditioning in trains at the time and no diesels. It was all steam and, of course, we had to sit in the car behind the steam engine and that's how I would get to Nashville. From Cincinnati on down, it was segregated and, one year, I decided to go the other way, go through DC, and that's how I met my wife, going that way, but there, in DC, I would have to get into the segregated car and I went from there to Atlanta and, from Atlanta, catch the train to Nashville, but I had to ride. It wasn't too bad from Cincinnati to Nashville, because, with Fisk University being there and Tennessee State University, there were a lot of young students on the car. You weren't there sitting by yourself, you follow me? and so, that helped to break up the problem that we were facing.

SI: You had obviously grown up knowing what segregation was like in West Chester. However, had you ever been exposed to the Southern style of segregation before that?

CG: No.

SI: Do any differences stand out in your memory?

CG: Oh, yes, well, there were places we couldn't go, like up in ... [Greensboro], North Carolina, the three fellows that sat at the five-and-ten, and one of those became one of my students ... when I was in the Reserves at McGuire. ... I was at a Tuskegee thing in DC, several years ago, and he saw me and came over and, there, ... he was a general and I don't know whether or not the segregated thing that he had down there, sitting in the five-and-ten, helped him get that or not, but I was surprised. He came right over to me, yes, yes. [Editor's Note: On February 1, 1960, four students staged a sit-in to protest the whites-only lunch counter of the Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Over the next six months, students across the South embraced the sit-in tactic of nonviolent resistance to protest Jim Crow segregation policies and try to force integration. One of the students, Joseph McNeil, later became a major general in the US Air Force.]

SI: Could you see any difference in how you were treated when you were there in the 1950s?

CG: Oh, yes, definitely. Nashville was segregated and, when I went to Meharry, they had no dormitory, no dining room. People in the town rented out rooms to the students. Meharry had a nursing school, but they had dormitories for the females in nursing school. ... My parents happened to know somebody in Nashville and, when I went back my second year, they had me stay with them and they didn't charge me for room or board for three years. My father would constantly say, "Will you please ask Dr. and Mrs. Walker how much I owe them?" and they said, "Nothing," for three years I was there for.

SI: Wow.

CG: Just had the tuition for school. So, I'll never forget them, but, of course, now, they have dormitories for males and females, the whole bit, but they didn't then.

SI: How large was the student body at that time?

CG: Well, we had sixty-five med students and thirty-five dental students. This past June, it was sixty years out of Meharry for me and they wanted me to contact some of the students. Between the two classes, there are only thirty-two, out of the hundred, and what shape they were in, I don't know, but I know one or two have died since then, but that's what's happened.

SI: Do any of your professors from Meharry stand out in your memory?

CG: Stand out?

SI: Yes.

CG: They'd stand out to me, because of what they were teaching, yes. Other than that, they were just regular professors.

SI: What about their subject grabbed your attention?

CG: Well, there was Dr. (Singleton?). He was the oral surgeon at the college and taught us and, of course, I followed through with that, and so, that's why he was one of the main interest to me, yes. Then, I did an internship at Jersey City Medical Center and it just comes back to me now-- where they're playing the Super Bowl is where they used to send us to take care of the patients in the nursing home down there, where that football game is going to be held. [Editor's Note: Super Bowl XLVIII was played on February 2, 2014, at MetLife Stadium at the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey.] We had to rotate ourselves back to that nursing home and just none of the stuff that's there now was there then, but I do remember the area, yes.

SI: Did you have the opportunity to specialize while you were in dental school or was that more when you got your internship?

CG: Oh, in dental school, [when] you graduated from dental school, ... you could go on out and take the state board and practice. I didn't want to do that. I took my state board in Pennsylvania, but I wanted to get further into dentistry. That's when I took the internship, and then, I was interested in the oral surgery. In fact, for fifty years, I did all their broken jaws and facial fractures, just like I had [in the month prior to the interview], at Salem Hospital, New Jersey, yes, and that was all because of what I had done after I finished dental school and what I had done in the military, because I was in the military as an oral surgeon, [Military Occupational Specialty number] 9836, yes.

SI: Was there anything in particular that attracted you to oral surgery?

CG: No, just the fact that it just seemed to draw me to it more so than drilling teeth to put fillings in. [laughter]

SI: Please tell me a little bit about the internship at Jersey City Medical Center.

CG: Well, we stayed [there]. We all had a room in the hospital where we stayed, but I was married, so, I also had an apartment. The only time I stayed in the room was when I was on call and you would be on call for anything that happened in the area that you were concerned with, but I could look right out of my window to the Statue of Liberty. ... I could just see it just as plain as day from the window. That was my room in the hospital and we were busy there. We had a lot of work to do there, kept us busy, yes.

SI: At that time, was oral surgery a pretty established field?

CG: Oh, yes, yes, very much so, very much so, yes, oh, definitely.

SI: Were there any new innovations coming in at that time?

CG: No, I don't recall any new innovations at that time. If somebody had a prominent jaw, we could shorten it, and I said we took care of upper broken jaws and lower broken jaws and facial fractures, just like I had. ...

SI: The residency was after you finished your internship at Jersey City.

CG: I started the residency, in oral surgery, which is just strictly oral surgery, and then, I didn't complete that, because I went on into the Air Force, but I had enough credits that I went into the Air Force as an oral surgeon, which 9826 was general dentistry, I was 9836, which was oral surgery, and I stayed in the four years active duty, and then, thirty-two Reserves. ... While I was in the Reserves, a lot of times, the oral surgeons at different bases were going on leave. I would have to go fill in for them, and so, I had quite an experience, yes.

SI: Was the residency also at Jersey City Medical Center?

CG: Yes, yes. It was all at Jersey City, yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about entering the Air Force? Did you have to go for any officers' training or did they just bring you in as an officer due to your degree?

CG: Well, they took me in, they took us in, as an officer and, of course, at that particular time, when I went, you went in as a first lieutenant, but it wasn't long after I had got in that they changed it, so [that] you went in as a captain, as the physicians did. ... As a result, because of the time I had finished [after] dental school, it put me above some of the ones that had been there before me, you know, and I outranked them because of the time ... I had worked, that I had been doing, yes, but that was about it.

SI: Where was your first duty station?

CG: ... We had orientation, somewhere down in Alabama. I can't think of the name of the base there. That's where all the dentists went in and they had to go through this particular base down there.

SI: Was it Maxwell Field?

CG: It was near Maxwell Field, but it wasn't Maxwell and it was another name, and this is where all the physicians and dentists went to learn, because we didn't do all that marching and all that other stuff they had to do, you know. ... It wasn't that far from Tuskegee, where we were, and then, I got shipped overseas, to Ramstein Air Force Base, and that's where I stayed for four years and we did not have an airfield, but right adjacent to us was Landstuhl Air Force Base. They had a landing strip. We took care of the dependents and those who worked in the commissary and whatnot. We took care of all them, as well as the pilots and all that. They had medical men to take care of them, but, if it was beyond them, then, we would get them in Ramstein, and the Army had a big hospital in the town of Landstuhl, called Landstuhl General

Hospital. They had taken over this German hospital and it's still in use today, Landstuhl General Hospital, yes.

SI: Were you the only oral surgeon there or were there others?

CG: No, no, I was the only one. They didn't need that many of us, you know. They had a lot of general dentists, but oral surgeon, I was the only one, and I don't know of any base where I was ever sent where there was more than one, because, if there were, they wouldn't have sent me to it when these men went on leave.

SI: When you were at your base in Germany, what was a typical day like for you?

CG: Well, I had people in the dental clinic that would [need to be treated]. ... Also, you would do the severe extractions, the impacted wisdom teeth, and so on, and so forth. So, they would line those up for you and, of course, if anybody was with a broken jaw, you would have to go to the hospital and take care of them, yes, but you did the impacted wisdom teeth, and so forth, also.

SI: Was your wife able to come with you to Germany?

CG: Oh, yes. She could come to Germany after the child was nine months old. Then, she came to Germany, yes.

SI: When you were not on duty, what would you do for entertainment?

CG: Well, with the three kids, we had the two adopted, our own daughter, we toured Europe. We had our car, our own car, and we toured Italy, we toured Germany, we toured France and, also, we had a lot of pilots that had desk jobs during the week, but they flew on the weekend to get in their flying time. ... They would often come and say, "Hey, you want to go this weekend?" I said, "Yes." So, I would go with them and they would go to Morocco, to Egypt or to Sweden, someplace, and we would come back with the plane loaded with junk. [laughter] Our friends would say, "Bring me this back, bring me that back," you know, and we did. We didn't have to pay customs, because we landed on the Air Force base, you know, but we would all chip in for our landing fee. So, it didn't cost us that much, you know, and, as a result of that, I had the pilot for the President's helicopter when I was in the Reserves--no, no, yes, I was in the Reserves at Andrews Air Force Base, yes--and he took me and my assistant, and who has never forgotten it. Now, the helicopter goes out every day, whether the President's on it or not, and they would go down to North Carolina, touch base, and then, take off, touch and go, and so, we did that. ... Like I said, the Italian fellow that was my assistant, he has never forgotten that and, every year, Christmastime, he tells me about it and sends me pictures of his family, but he's never forgotten when I would take him along with me.

SI: Would you describe your four years in Germany as fairly routine? Were there any times of crisis that stand out in your memory?

CG: No, I don't recall any crisis that stood out while we were in Germany, none whatsoever, but we did visit some of the camps that Hitler had set up and we visited those, two or three of those, and I'll never forget those visits, but, as I said, we ... drove all over and, a lot of times, we got a lot of stares. People would look at us and stare at us. I guess they had not seen that many blacks or whatever, but I can remember that in Munich, how we were there and there was one woman that sat there and she just kept looking at us. I'll never forget that, yes.

SI: You were serving during the first decade after Truman desegregated the Armed Forces. I know that not every aspect of the military desegregated as quickly as they could. Some places dragged their heels. Do you think that the Air Force, at least that you could see, was doing a good job of integrating its forces?

CG: No problem. The only one that was the last one to integrate was the Navy, and you wouldn't believe it, but, [in] this day and age, there are a bunch of men who served on destroyers and they meet twice a month, not as a regular meeting, no president, no [agenda], although I understand there are groups of destroyer men all over the country. They have come and gotten me and they have me have lunch with them and their wives on the first and third Thursdays of every month and, the first Thursdays, they're at the Woodstown Golf Club and, the third Thursdays, they're here at RiverWinds, and so, they look forward to [that]. I'm the only officer in the bunch, former officer, and the only black with them, but there are about thirty of us that meet and just for lunch. We have no business discussion or whatever and it's become a very close group, but the men all served on destroyers in World War II. ...

SI: You said you were working with the Tuskegee Airmen unit. Was that unit still all African-American or was it integrated as well?

CG: It was still all Afro-American when they came along. It was breaking up and becoming integrated into the regular Air Force, yes, and I still function with them.

SI: Does anything else about your tour in Europe stand out in your memory?

CG: Only thing I can say is that I enjoyed it, because I enjoyed, with my wife and our three kids, touring all over Europe. Like I said, we saw so many places, in Paris and you name it, we were there, and I'll never forget, in Italy, in the northern part of Italy, there was a little country that was completely surrounded by Italy. ... Of course, we had to drive up the hill of this road to get there and there were roses planted all along the road to get there and I cannot remember the country. ...

SI: Was it San Marino?

CG: I don't know, but it was completely surrounded by Italy and a policeman stood in the street, on a box, and directed traffic and I understand that the main industry for that town was their postage stamps.

SI: Did you face any difficulty in adopting your children there, any red tape or anything like that?

CG: ... I would have experienced red tape if I had not been black. They probably wanted to get rid of these black kids and, otherwise, we would not have been able to get them, because we weren't Catholic, but, because they were black, I guess they were glad to get rid of them, although the boy that we adopted, he had been the pet at this orphanage and this is why we'd take him back periodically, so [that] the nuns could see him. ... That's when they brought out the girl and told me about her and I just grabbed her right then and there, but, if I had not been black and non-Catholic, I don't think we would've gotten them, but I have no regrets getting them. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it.

SI: Going back to when you were in dental school, you said you met your wife there while you were traveling through Washington, DC.

CG: I met my wife my second year at Meharry. I wanted to stop off in South Carolina to see this gal that I had met and, when I left her place, I had to get to Atlanta. ... When I got to Atlanta, my father's brother had some relatives, sisters-in-law and whatnot, in Atlanta and they knew I was coming. So, I'd stayed with them and ... they had another nephew there and my wife was coming down the steps of Booker T. Washington High School, where she was teaching for the year. ... I met her and I never got back to South Carolina. I just stayed going to Atlanta and, eventually, I had her come up to different affairs up in Nashville, and then, we got married in December, on the 23rd, because we knew that I would be busy interning and whatnot and I couldn't get away ... to get married. So, that's why we got married when we did.

SI: After you got married, did your wife continue to teach?

CG: My wife didn't teach when she first--well, when we first came to Jersey, she worked for DuPont's in Gibbstown, New Jersey. ... They sent about five or six young black men up there, where she was teaching--where she was working, she wasn't teaching--and one had his PhD. The others just had their bachelor's degree, and all of them left, except the one with the PhD, because they said DuPont was just "window facing" them, you know, and they all ended up in medicine, dentistry or law, and many of them, I'm still in contact with today, even the one that had his PhD. We're together at a group in Delaware together and, of course, he's in a wheelchair, I'm almost there, and she did that, and then, after we were settled in Swedesboro, she had a job teaching in Burlington, mathematics in Burlington High School, Burlington City High School, and that's where she taught until she retired. She's still living. She lives in Voorhees, New Jersey.

SI: Okay.

CG: And I'll tell you this, one of the physicians that was on the staff with me at Underwood, when it began, knew my wife, because he was a physician at this Gibbstown [plant]. He said, "We've got to get your wife back, because her blood test came back with sickle cell trait," and he said, "Only blacks have that," and I said, "Well, my wife is black." He didn't realize that and that's why she had the sickle cell trait.

SI: You came back to the States in 1958. Is that correct?



CG: '57.

SI: Okay. When you came back, that was when you were with your father briefly. Where was the first town that you said you tried to buy a house?

CG: Penns Grove.

SI: Penns Grove, New Jersey.

CG: 169 North Broad Street.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about that experience, how they did that?

CG: Well, the woman that had the house, she just wouldn't sell it to me, because the house was for sale, but, because I was black, she wouldn't sell it to me. ... Five or six years later, you know, she called me up and wanted to know, "Did I know anybody that would buy the house?" I said, "Hell no. You didn't want to sell it to me," and I'm glad she didn't, because the house I ended up with in Swedesboro, ... I enjoyed it and my whole family enjoyed it and we did a lot of work in the house, let's face that. We did a lot of things in that house, rewired it, put in a new heating system, and so forth, and added extra baths, two baths, because it only had one old bathroom. We added a backstairs. We did a lot of work in that house, and so, I'm glad that I didn't stay in Penns Grove and ended up in Swedesboro, and I'm still active in a lot of things in Swedesboro. I'm still a member of the Greater Swedesboro Business Association, because I was one of the founders. There are only three of us living that were founders of the group, and so, I meet with them when they meet the first Wednesday of the month, every month. An Italian fellow comes down from Mount Laurel, picks me up and takes me to the meetings.

SI: When did you help found that? What year did you help found that?

CG: Oh, I don't remember what year it was, many, many years ago, many, must've been shortly after I went to Swedesboro. ... The group has grown so much since then, because, if you've ever been to Swedesboro, it's a nice, little town. It wasn't like that when I first went there, so many small businesses there now, which were not there. Of course, the area, with Beckett and all, has grown so much.

SI: When you first arrived in Swedesboro, there were few businesses.

CG: There were a few businesses that had been there for years. It was mostly a farming area. It was more farming than anything else at Swedesboro, and Woolwich, Swedesboro Police covered the area of Woolwich. Now, Woolwich covers Swedesboro, because Swedesboro doesn't have a police department anymore. It's reversed and I think that the Woolwich-Beckett area is one of the fastest growing areas in New Jersey.

SI: You touched on this before, but can you tell me a little bit more about getting yourself established in Swedesboro and how your career took off from there?

CG: Well, I'd said I had the house in Swedesboro and I started my practice in Swedesboro. I was on the staff at Underwood and Salem and Elmer Community Hospital, which I let go after eight years, but I stayed at Salem and I had several nursing homes--yes, nursing homes, Salem County Nursing Home and there's another one in Penns Grove--that I took care of the patients in there for them and this is what I survived on for quite a few years. I had an integrated practice.

SI: Going back to your father's practice, was his practice in West Chester also integrated?

CG: A minority, very few, very, very few, and they were people that had known him for years that came there, yes.

SI: Were the hospitals integrated, that you had privileges at?

CG: Oh, no, no--were they integrated?

SI: Yes, were they integrated?

CG: Oh, yes, yes, they were integrated, and I ran the Chester County Hospital dental clinic for a year when I first came back from overseas and I was trying to get established in West Chester, and that's another place that I almost forgot that I had been with.

SI: Were the hospitals that you were at in New Jersey also integrated?

CG: Yes, all integrated, and I go back to Salem Hospital frequently, because most of the physicians I see are down that way, and I always stop in the doctors' lounge to get a free lunch [laughter] and I did that yesterday with my son, who took me down. We stopped there and there's only one physician living who was there when I joined. All the other physicians that are getting old now, people think of them as being the old generation, I greeted them when they came there, and a lot of people are [asking me], "Did you know this [doctor]?" I said, "Yes, I greeted him or her when they came." Even my cardiologist that I go to, I greeted him when he came there with his brother-in-law.

SI: Tell me a little bit about how the area grew, since you were there for so long.

CG: Well, the biggest thing in the way it has grown has been the loss of farming. You can drive through that area now, you'll see, I guess you call them condominium after condominium, or whatever, housing area after housing area, all covering the area where I used to remember asparagus being grown here, tomatoes over there, you know, and those areas are all gone now, practically all gone. Just a few are left, yes.

SI: When you moved to Swedesboro, was there any kind of African-American community there or were you one of the few African-American families in town?

CG: They had a small Afro-American community, yes, and a black Baptist church there, which is still there, and I understand they have three ministers in that church now, when I remember

there was only one, ... but Swedesboro now has grown so much and it's so [different], like, I couldn't tell you that much about it now.

SI: When your family was there, say, for the first ten years, would you say that the town was pretty integrated or were there places where African-Americans could not go or places you knew that you would be turned away?

CG: I was not allowed in the Presbyterian Church because I was black. The Presbyterian Church in Paulsboro came and got me. I'm still there today. Not in Swedesboro itself, and the funny thing about it, I was in ManorCare, the last place I was before I was discharged, and, next to me, there were two of us in the room, there was a white man. ... His wife and daughter used to come and visit him every day and, one day, my two sons were there with me and this, their daughter, heard the name Gaither, and so, she came over to my son and said, "Have you ever heard of Carol Gaither?" and my son said, "Yes, that's my sister," and he said, "That's her father in the bed there, next to your father," and so, she said, well, she was at Friends School with Carol and that she had been to sleepovers at our house. She knew more about my house than I did, [laughter] and then, after that, it made a different relationship between her parents and myself, and then, she and my daughter ... have gotten together again, but she said, "You had a full-time maid, Dawn," and so on. She knew more about my house; I don't even remember my daughters having sleepovers, [laughter] but this is a white family. ... See, I was on the board of directors--you name a board of directors in Gloucester County, I've been on it. I was on Friends School in Woodbury, before they moved to Mullica Hill. Then, I was on it in Mullica Hill. I was on the Visiting Nurses Association, Visiting Homemakers, the United Way, you know. I helped to set up the county college. Gene McCaffrey was head of the Board of Freeholders [from 1967 to 1972] and he got four of us, one who became the first president of Gloucester County College [William L. Apetz], myself and him and another fellow, who was a State Senator, I can't think of his name anymore, but we had to go all over the state to see what kind of college we wanted and whether we wanted it all in one spot or different pods, as they called them, all over the county. So, we decided on one pod and I think it has worked out very well. Now, the first president of the college, he didn't have his PhD then. His son is a physician in the area now, but the one that was with me is dead. He retired years ago from the college and he has since then died, but I was there for all those things. You name it in Gloucester County, I have, just about, been a part of it.

SI: How did you first get involved in these boards? What was the first one that you became very active in?

CG: I became active on the boards because I was an active Republican. Oh, I don't know which one it was. I was active in things in Swedesboro and the mayor had appointed me as on the--I forget what board it was--but, you see, the thing about it was, I was a registered Republican and everything in that time was Republican. ... This is why I was appointed to so many of these things, because I was a Republican, which they didn't expect, to see a black come up as a Republican, but, from where I grew up, if you weren't a Republican in West Chester, you could forget it. So, I came over to Jersey with that same thing and that's how I got to be involved with so many things, because of my political affiliation, and this is why I can't understand how I got the letter from Andrews to go on the ship that day. [laughter] ... Oh, I said, all my life, that's all I knew, was Republicans. [Editor's Note: Dr. Gaither is referring to a Pearl Harbor

commemoration ceremony held aboard the USS *New Jersey* in Camden, New Jersey, on December 6, 2013, hosted by then Congressman Rob Andrews, a Democrat.]

SI: In the early 1960s, when you were getting involved in these boards, were you also following the developments in the Civil Rights Movement, such as the March on Washington in 1963 and the sit-ins in the South?

CG: I was very much involved, because, you see, my ex-wife and Martin Luther King went to school together, elementary school, and, of course, he went to Morehouse and she went to Spelman, which was all girls and Morehouse was all males, and her father was registrar at Morehouse. ... When her mother died, about three years ago, Martin Luther King's sister was there for the funeral, and King's wife, Coretta, has a sister and brother-in-law that taught at Cheyney [University of Pennsylvania] at that time and they used to come over to my parents' home. ... A couple of times, they brought Coretta over to my parents' home and, of course, she has signed the guestbook, as did Percy Julian, I was telling you about, has signed the guestbook, which my nieces and nephews have now, but, oh, yes, she knew all the King Family, because they were all right there together in Atlanta.

SI: Did you or you and your family get involved in terms of going to marches or doing anything like that?

CG: No, I didn't get involved with marches, because I was so busy trying to make a living and educate my kids, but what was his name, the black guy who set up the March on Washington?

SI: [A. Philip] Randolph?

CG: No, it wasn't Randolph. He was from West Chester. Bayard Rustin, of course, he was older than I was. He had relatives that were in school with me at the Gay Street School, but, oh, jeez, he was a graduate of West Chester High School, too, but he was very active in it. I knew all about him, and so, I was able to follow these things that were going on, but I was not in any of them at all.

SI: As the 1960s progressed, were there any issues that came up in the town, either in Swedesboro or the larger area, that you were aware of or involved in?

CG: Not that I can recall, no, not that I can recall. ... There's a Methodist church, a black Methodist church, outside of Swedesboro, in Woolwich, right in back of the Kingsway Regional High School, where there's a black cemetery, where naval veterans from the Civil War are buried, and I used to, as part of my thing, I would be putting flowers out there on these fellows' graves, yes. They were from the Civil War veterans, black Civil War veterans. They were Navy, yes, and it's still there, even though they put a road [in] and it's like an island sitting there now, the cemetery, but the church is still there and it was also a church where it was an underground railway, yes.

SI: Going back to your career in dentistry and oral surgery, what were the biggest changes that you noted in your field over the course of your career?

CG: Oh, I'd say it would be the application of air-driven equipment, which gave you the high-speed RPMs, versus the belt-drive things, yes.

SI: You are also very involved in the Salvation Army.

CG: I have received--you ever heard of the Others Award, by the Salvation Army? In 1991, I receive the Others Award from the national body of the Salvation Army. It's the highest award they give to volunteers. So, I was involved with the Salvation Army and all I have to do is call up the state Salvation Army office and I said, "Do you know anything about me?" ... Right like that, they can call up that I received the Others Award. ... That was 1991. I had to go to Washington to receive it and I am recognized by older members of the Salvation Army as being the recipient of the Others Award.

SI: What kind of activities would you get involved in with the Salvation Army in Swedesboro and the area?

CG: Oh, I would supply people with food and meals and help them with housing. I did all that. ... We did all that sort of thing, and I'm still doing a little bit of that by mail, because that box over there, on the other end, that's my Salvation Army kit. I have the slips in there, which I can give to a person to take to a particular drugstore and get food if they need it, and so, I'm still active with them, but not like I used to be, but the highest award they give to volunteers is the Others Award, which I have the plaque around here somewhere. I know it was hanging on the wall in the other apartment.

SI: You served in the Reserves for thirty-two years. You said you were primarily sent to bases where the oral surgeon was going on leave.

CG: Not basically, no. ... Basically, I spent time at McGuire, and, also, when we would go away for our two weeks, we would go down to Andrews Air Force Base. It was just occasionally that I would have to go to one of these bases when the oral surgeon would [go on leave], and it was not always in the summer. It might be in the middle of winter, whenever, you know, yes.

SI: You would go to McGuire for your two weeks.

CG: No, no, I would go to McGuire one weekend a month.

SI: One weekend a month, okay.

CG: And then, I would go to Andrews for our two weeks.

SI: What did your duties there usually consist of?

CG: Same thing, oral surgery, yes.

SI: What were some of the biggest changes that you saw in medicine and dentistry in the Air Force over your long career?

CG: Oh, I don't know. I can't say, really. I guess things happened and you accepted them. I just don't recall any specific thing.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement in your professional associations over your career?

CG: Oh, yes, yes. I am involved, and it's on one of those papers over there, I think, the many things that I'm involved in, and I was involved Chi Delta Mu, which was a medical-dental-pharmaceutical fraternity. I was involved with that and ... we have a black group in New Jersey, called South Jersey Medical, which is physicians, dentists, we have one chiropractor in it, and I'm involved with that even today, and, oh, I don't know what all I'm involved in. I'm not involved with the American Dental Association or the National Dental Association anymore, even though I get the literature from them about their conventions coming up, but I am not involved with them anymore.

SI: You were the staff dentist for the Wilmington Board of Education.

CG: I was a dentist with the Wilmington School System from 1960 to '77 and, in our term, there were three of us, and, of course, I only got to the black schools in Delaware and our contract was canceled when the city schools merged with the county schools. The county schools didn't have a dental program and we took care of the kids in the elementary and middle schools and I did that from 1960 to '77, that's what it was, '60 to '77.

SI: How long of a drive was that for you?

CG: Twenty, thirty minutes, that was all. It was no problem from Swedesboro, and let me say this, getting a license in Delaware, if you weren't from Delaware, was hell, you know. My father pulled some strings for me to take [the test to] get my board in Delaware, and it's still that way today in medicine, dentistry or law. You're going to catch hell getting a license if you're not from Delaware, and Delaware also has so many seats at Jefferson Medical College every year and I've learned this when I was a liaison to Jefferson for the Air Force, for the Air Force students who were students there.

SI: In those seventeen years, was segregation still pretty prevalent in the schools down there?

CG: I only saw black kids, in the black schools. I didn't see anybody else. I said the other two fellows were white. I was the only black and I just saw the black schools. I didn't see anything else.

SI: Could you characterize the quality of the schools?

CG: Well, I grew up knowing about the segregated schools in Delaware, so, it was nothing new to me. Howard High School was the high school blacks went to in Wilmington and a lot of them

were bused in from other areas, so [that] they could go to Howard High School, and the elementary schools were the same way, and Howard High School, today, is still in existence, but it's predominately black.

SI: How often would you go to Wilmington for this?

CG: I don't remember whether it was--it might've been a couple times a week. I don't recall.

SI: As you mentioned before, you were involved in many of these Gloucester County-wide boards, like Visiting Nurses and the United Way. Do any of your activities there stand out, anything that you pushed for that was adopted or went into action?

CG: No, not really, not really, but some of the older members on these boards still remember me as a member of the board, and there are certain ones, like the county college, they've given me their cards, because they were youngsters when I was down there and they're connected with the college today.

SI: After the development phase for the college, did you remain on the board?

CG: No, no. They would just call on me periodically, for one thing or another, but no. Look, I didn't have time for that, because I was involved with so many other things, but the President, he knew me. He never forgot me.

SI: It is remarkable how you had your practice, your commitments to the hospitals, but, then, you had all of these other activities that you were involved in. You are also a member of the NAACP in Wilmington.

CG: Yes, I'm a life member of the NAACP through Wilmington and I'm through Wilmington because, in Gloucester County, the lady that was head of the Gloucester County NAACP, we didn't get along. ... Since I was in Wilmington so much and I had been to many luncheons that they had, I took out my membership in the Wilmington NAACP, a life membership.

SI: Through the NAACP there, were you trying to address the issues of inequality there?

CG: No, no, I just wanted to become a member of the NAACP and function in Jersey as I could, but be a member over there in Delaware.

SI: You mentioned before that you were the Air Force liaison to Jefferson Medical School. What did that job entail?

CG: Well, you see, there are so many students, a certain number, not a large number, who were students at Jefferson who were also Air Force people, and the Air Force was paying their way to go to school. This happens all over the country, not just at Jefferson, and so, they have to have somebody that these people can contact if they want to know anything about the Air Force and this is what my job was, but this is true all over the country. There are plenty of students in

medical schools who are Air Force personnel and the Air Force pays for them, even though the Air Force even has a medical [school]--the military has a medical school--in DC, yes.

SI: When did you retire from the Air Force?

CG: I don't know, been quite a few years ago, but I don't recall.

SI: You retired as a lieutenant colonel.

CG: Yes.

SI: When did you retire from your practice?

CG: '04.

SI: You have obviously become involved in veterans' groups. Were you always involved in veterans' groups or did that come later in your life?

CG: I guess both, to tell you the truth. I've been in veterans groups. I'm a life member of the black American Legion post in West Chester and I said I'm with this Navy group and the Tuskegee Airmen, yes.

SI: Regarding the Tuskegee Airmen Association, are there periodic meetings?

CG: We have meetings once a month at the VA in Philadelphia. It's usually on a Wednesday. We didn't meet this past month, because of the weather, and they couldn't arrange for a makeup meeting, because you've got to go through all this red tape with the VA. So, we will not meet until February, but we meet every month and, of course, there are these groups all over the country and they have a headquarters in DC for the Tuskegee Airmen.

SI: Are there other activities that you are involved in, aside from meetings? For example, you went to the ceremony at the Battleship *New Jersey* in December. Are there other activities that you have been involved in as a veteran?

CG: No, I can't say, other than the ones I've mentioned to you already, this naval group, Tuskegee Airmen, my American Legion group, which I'm also, I said, I'm a life member of, and I can't think of any other veterans groups. I know I go up to the high school in Swedesboro every Memorial Day. They have a thing for veterans and I've been going to that for quite a few years.

SI: I am curious, because I have heard of this from other Tuskegee Airmen, that when President Obama was inaugurated, I know that they tried to bring down as many members of the Association as they could for the inauguration. Were you part of the group that went down to Washington?

CG: I sure was.



SI: Please, tell me a little bit about that.

CG: I'll tell you, in the John Gaither Descendants, which is the white group, they asked me and I wrote them a whole big article, which they published in the newsletter that they send out to us. That was a couple months ago. I wish I had the article. I should've kept it, but the--what was your question again? ... Yes, I'm a past President of the white John Gaither Society.

SI: If you went down to Washington for the inaugural.

CG: Oh, I was [there] for the inauguration, yes. I was there. There were four of us that they took from Philadelphia down. One was the daughter of one of the Tuskegee Airmen, myself, and another Tuskegee Airman and they put us up in a hotel on the other side of DC and they put us all together on a bus, and there were two buses, because of the people they had to help us. They had nurses, they had plenty of food there for you, if you wanted a snack or something, and then, we were also invited to the inaugural ball. ... I don't know what building that was in, but the President came and danced with his wife, and then, he got somebody out in the audience, a female, to dance with her. His wife danced with somebody, one of the military, and the Vice President came later and did the same thing, and each one of them talked to a group of military men overseas, in the war area, and they were up on the stage. Of course, I was down here on the below stage, but, at the inauguration, we were sitting in the reserves. They had wheelchairs. They wheeled us around everywhere. We didn't have to walk anywhere and we were sitting on the bottom left side and up over here was the President and all of his people up over there and right next to us was the reserve section for wives of dignitaries, and it's something I'll never forget.

SI: How did you feel, being honored in that way and being there for that moment?

CG: Well, I'll tell you, I saw so many people that I have seen pictures of and heard about, I didn't have a chance to think about that, but there were so many of them coming in and greeting people in their group of dignitaries' wives over there, in our group, yes. ... I said, when they were wheeling us back to our bus, because we had to go back--we didn't have to go back, but they took us back to the hotel, and they paid for all this, we didn't have to pay a penny--it was, they would just say, "He's a Tuskegee Airman." Boy, the road would open up for us to get to the bus.

[TAPE PAUSED]

CG: That's the name I was thinking of about.

SI: We are back on. You just remembered the name.

CG: Bayard Rustin. He's the one that set up King's speech in DC and he was from West Chester and, now, the high school I went to burned and, in place of that, they built three high schools over there and one is named after Bayard Rustin. You never heard of the name?

SI: Yes, I have.

CG: Bayard Rustin, oh, yes. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Can I record this?

CG: Yes.

SI: You were just telling me a little bit about your work with some of the shelters in Delaware County.

CG: Yes, it was for the children out of Glen Mills, is what it was called, and I was involved taking care of the students. They were students out of the courts of Philadelphia and they lived there and whatnot, and I was involved in taking care of them. Glen Mills was boys and the girls, I'll think of the name later on, but-- Sleighton Farms was the girls--and I was involved with taking care of the kids. Glen Mills is still in existence, but I don't think Sleighton Farms is anymore, and these were in Delaware County, but they were for the kids from Philadelphia.

SI: In dealing with kids who were coming out of the court system, did you do anything beyond just helping them with their dental issues? Did you get involved in any other aspect of their life?

CG: No, not really, not really, no.

SI: Is there anything else that you would like to add to the record, anything that we skipped over that we should discuss?

CG: I don't know, let me think about it for a minute. You can shut that off and let me think about it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

CG: About my children.

SI: Okay.

SI: You are going to tell me a little bit about your children.

CG: Okay, I said we adopted a boy while we were in Germany, who died in '91, and we still have four children, two boys and two girls, one, the girl, that's adopted and, of course, the two kids that we adopted were the oldest of our total of five kids. The girl we adopted, I said she's a vice principal, up in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She lives in Montclair. Our own daughter, and we don't like to (talk around her?), ... but she is in Aberdeen, Maryland, and she's a special ed. teacher and I have a son that's an undertaker in Philadelphia. That's John Gaither, and there's

Reggie Gaither, that lives in Camden, and he's unemployed right now, but he is my main source of transportation. That's it.

SI: You mentioned, at the beginning of the interview, that you are involved in a descendants' group for John Gaither. What is the name of the group?

CG: John Gaither Descendants, and, like I said, I was president, way down the line, when it was first formed, and it's a white group, but you would never--and [gospel singers] Bill and Gloria Gaither, on television, they're a part of this and my church didn't believe that we were all related. So, I dropped Bill a line and he sent a picture of himself, signed, said, "To Cornelius and Christ Presbyterian Church," and, oh, yes, there is a black Gaither group, called the Gaither-James group, and it's called Gaither-James because so many of the Gaithers married James, but I'm a member of that, but I'm a past officer and recognized as that with the other group, and they meet once a year and, this year, I don't get to the meetings anymore, because I don't want to travel that far away from home with my medical problems, and so, I have to wait and see, but I do hear from them regularly and the thing about it is, when you get together, nobody is called Gaither. Everybody goes by their first name, because everybody's a Gaither. [laughter] You use first names.

SI: Thank you very much for all your time today.

CG: Oh, you're quite welcome.

SI: If there is anything that you think of that I should come back for, feel free to call. You can also add material to the transcript that we can insert, but thank you very much. It has been very interesting to learn about your life, and thank you very much for your service.

CG: Oh, you're quite welcome, you're quite welcome. ... I am a life member of Kiwanis international and the very first black in the National Organization. Locally, I was a member of the Swedesboro, New Jersey Club. I was also the first black on the staff of Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, and also at Elmer Hospital, New Jersey, leaving both in 1988.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/1/14

Reviewed by Cornelius Gaither 4/5/14

Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/14/14