

**Charlene Marshall**

Where: Charlene Marshall's home in Morgantown, WV

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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**Charlene (Jennings) Marshall**

Charlene (Jennings) Marshall (b. September 17, 1949) is a native of Osage, West Virginia in Scotts Run. She was the first African American woman mayor in Morgantown and all of West Virginia, serving from 1991-1998. She was a Democratic member of the West Virginia House of Delegates, representing the 44th District from 1998-2002 and 2004 until 2014. In this interview she speaks about growing up in Osage, her term as mayor, and experiences as an activist in the civil rights movement in Morgantown. She also showed pictures of an exhibit she has been working on, The African American Experience in Morgantown.

This interview is part of a collection of interviews conducted with Scotts Run natives/residents and/or members of the Scotts Run Museum.

EH: Emily Hilliard

CM: Charlene Marshall

00:00

EH: Okay, could you introduce yourself and tell me who you are and when you were born and where you're from?

CM: Okay, my name is Charlene Marshall. My maiden name is Jennings, and I was born and raised in Osage. I was born on September the 17th, 1933. My mother and father... my was... Charles Jennings and Christine Jennings. My mother's maiden name was Jenkins. My father was killed in the mines when I was about 6 years old and we had 5 children in the family. My mother was expecting. And then about 5 years later, my mother married again and then we had another sister and when she was 4 years old my step-father was killed in the mines. So my step-father was Ollie Cranford. So then my mother's name was— most people remember her mostly as Christine Cranford. And we lived... my older sisters had... my oldest sister went to Cleveland and finished high school and then my young... my second oldest sister, then when she finished she went to Cleveland and then worked for the telephone company. My older sister became the engineer for Ohio Bell and but we just grew up right there.

EH: So there were 7 of you?

CM: 5 girls and one boy. I mean 6 girls and one boy. (laughs)

EH: Wow. What are some of your memories of growing up in Osage?

CM: Just of I guess at a early, grade school was the different schools that we had scattered throughout the area for African-American students and then going to the new school when Floyd B. Cox was built. Just doing the shopping right there in the area, we didn't go too much to the company stores. My mother wasn't fond of shopping at the company store. So just doing that and going to the theatre at Osage and as we got a little bit older, learning our way around in Morgantown and coming to Morgantown to go to the movie and so forth. But my grandmother lived there in Osage and then up towards Pursglove and we always had a lot of family coming in to visit from other places— from Pennsylvania and Ohio so it was, from what I can remember, for me it was just a good childhood. And so many people will ask you about the things that you didn't have, and I thought, well, if you didn't have 'em you weren't accustomed to 'em, so you didn't think you were missing anything! (laughs)

EH: Right.

CM: So... but it was a good childhood.

EH: Mmhm. Were your parents' families from Pennsylvania and Ohio?

CM: My father's family was from South Carolina and he had a brother in Pennsylvania down at Brownsville and we would go there sometimes. And that uncle would always come to here to see us and he would always make sure he came for Memorial Day. Well we just thought that was just our time to go to the cemetery and I guess as a kid I didn't think anybody else went to the cemetery that day but us! (laughs) But he would come and we would go and he always drove a Buick and we would go to the cemetery with him. I never met his... my father's family... his mother and father. Probably I don't remember. I probably met his dad when my father was killed in the mines. Course I was so little I don't remember that. But I never met my paternal grandmother. But they were from... so he was from Pennsylvania but my... on my mother's side of the family, we had relatives also in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

And I think, yeah, then we had one aunt that lived in New York. So during the year, different ones of them would come and it was just always a big happy time and you know, my grandmother would do a lot of cooking and so forth. So it was just a happy time for us.

EH: Mmhm. And did your grandma live with you?

CM: No, she had her own home— and it was one place up past Osage—I'll have to show it to you sometime—and it was coal mining houses up there and they've all been torn down, but she lived there. And then when they were getting rid of those houses, she had to of course relocate and I think that was a pretty tough time, from what I... now that I think back of course, it was just a joyous time, like for us, when I stop and think about it now, that had to be a rough time for her to find a new location because the coal mines was getting rid of those houses. But and then she eventually, then she lived with my mother's youngest sister and she lived there until she passed away.

EH: Did your mother work outside of the home?

CM: Before my father was killed in the mines, she didn't. So, that had to be very rough for her to go to work after that, because my father was killed and then my youngest sister, of the Jennings family, was born in July, so I guess I don't really remember when my youngest sister went to live with my grandmother, but of course, she took care of her. My mother had to get a job. The funds for families was very little. And so, then everybody pitched in and we all had things to do with someone cleaning the house and someone did the cooking and I always say I did the...I guess me being the 3rd child I think they always thought they were gonna have a boy, so then I was, I did the wood, cutting the wood and carrying the coal and so forth.

EH: (laughs) And you were talking about the school—the new school that came in. Was that an integrated school?

CM: No.

EH: It was a middle school?

CM: No, it was a grade school from 1st to 6th and it was out in Osage. We have some pictures of that where it was located. But no, I never went to an integrated school.

EH: Okay. So people always talk about Scotts Run and how it wasn't segregated and you know, everyone lived together and I was just wondering—was that your experience?

06:53

CM: Uh... sometimes when I think about some of the places that I guess... we never thought about it being segregated, but when I think back to some of the houses and some of the probably, at that time, probably some of the nicer houses, I think to a certain extent, there was some segregation because there was—I can think of several places and I could make you know exactly where I'm talking about—that I never knew African-Americans to live in. But for the most part, in the coal camps, you, everybody just, you know, you maybe had black, white, whatever, living there. But there's two locations there that I always thought the houses seemed to be a little bit nicer but there was no African-Americans living there when I grew up.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah. So then where did you go to high school?

CM: Over Westover. The building is still there. It was called Monongalia High School. And it was constructed in the late 30s for any African-American student in Monongalia County. So wherever you lived in this county, African American, if you went to high school, that was your school. The building is still there.

EH: So Miss Sarah went there as well I think?

CM: I'm sure she did. Yeah, that was the only high school in the area. Mmmhm.

EH: And then you went to college—did you go to WVU?

CM: Oh no.

EH: Oh, okay.

CM: That was segregated also.

EH: Ohhh, okay.

CM: The only African-Americans that went to WVU, if you went to WVU, had to be a graduate student. And just recently I saw where they were honoring a young man who as far as I know and it's kinda sad, because probably there was some written laws that some people didn't know about, especially if you were someone that, or if no one in your family had ever been to college before, but evidently it was unwritten. There was a written law that very few people are familiar with, that if you desired a occupation or your choice of classes in college that no other school in West Virginia offered you, that was, we had Bluefield State, West Virginia State, Storer College, if none of... those were for African-Americans... if they didn't offer those closes, WVU would have to accept you. But sometimes I know that... I know of one lady who went away from here to go to nursing school and some of the nurses in this area, Caucasian, helped with her education. But there was one young man and I didn't realize until years later, that came to school here as a freshman. He was—he wanted to go to the school of journalism. And he... when I was in high school and he was in the university, I just thought he was a graduate student. I guess everybody a couple years older than me just looked like they were old.

EH: (laughs)

CM: But it was years later when some of the other people were telling me, they said no he came here as a freshman. But when we were working on the Center for Black Culture, and trying to get some of those individuals to come back, he did send us a copy of the letter he always kept when he was accepted to WVU and he said he even kept the envelope. So he came here and that had to be early 50s. In the 50s. But he could not stay on campus so he had to stay with a private family. But he was a freshman. He graduated and he... and it's something because some of the things he couldn't do... Of course, he probably couldn't go to the Dining Room or anything. And later, I guess he was such an outstanding student, later he became the president of the School of Journalism Alumni. (laughs) So he was evidently outstanding.

EH: Yeah, right? So where did you go to college?

CM: I went, I didn't finish, I didn't finish. I went to Bluefield State. And the only reason I was able to go down there, a family had offered me, because we didn't have the money... A family there offered me to live with them and help with the you know, the house and so forth. So I was only there for a short time and then my step-father was killed in the mines when I was there, so I knew that that was the end.

EH: Wow, wow. So that brought you back and you were helping your mother?

CM: Well, not... I was home and of course I would always, I always found a little job some place.

11:37

Because back then about the only place you could find a job or any kind of work you wanted to do was working for... doing domestic work.

EH: Yeah.

CM: Mmhm. So then soon after that I got married.

EH: Ah, okay.

CM: Mmhm.

EH: Then what did you do in your working life?

CM: Well for the most part, up until the 60s, it was domestic. And then with the Civil Rights Movement coming on and so forth, and then they were beginning to accept applications, of course it was all kinda plants around here, glass factory, shirt factory and all of those things, and Sterling Faucet. And people started talking about the fact that... why don't we put some applications in. So another lady encouraged me to go with her. We put our application in at Sterling Faucet, and I always felt a little bit bad about this. The talked me into going and they hired me. (laughs) So... but and I stayed there, I remained there for 15 years. But then later she was able to get on but if she had not encouraged me to go I probably wouldn't have gone.

EH: Mmhm. Wow. Were you involved at all in the local Civil Rights Movement?

CM: Yes, yes.

EH: Will you talk about that?

CM: Yeah. And then I'll have to show you some things on a project that I did. From, because it was you know, no restaurants, special seating in the theatre and those places did not want to serve African-Americans. So (sighs) there were several individuals at the university and one lady is still... she's retired— Sophie Peterson, and Sophie was active with me on this. She and her husband. And not just the two of us, it was many others. But when I first met Sophie it was because she and her husband came here as—they were both doctor, Virgil Peterson, Dr. Sophie Peterson. And they would treat their students to a, I guess a dinner or an outing or something, maybe a dessert, excuse me, for a special project they had accomplished. And I guess so many times they were told that you couldn't bring any African-American students and she just could not, she just could not believe that. So we, some of us worked together trying to break that down. There was one restaurant that, one in particular that we worked together on. Two individuals had invited my husband and I— we knew what we were getting into—to go to dinner. And these ladies had a membership and a reservation. And we made sure we were there right on time and dressed up and so forth and they, when we got to the door, they didn't want to admit us. And they explained, well we have a reservation, we have a membership, and so forth. But the other plan that we had was the Petersons were going to an event at the University that night. Then when they finished, they were gonna go to the restaurant. Well, eventually after a while, they let us in, put us upstairs. It was a cold winter night, there was hardly anybody else in the place, but we were put upstairs. When we finished I let them know that, you know, we enjoyed the meal and that my husband and I would like to have a membership also and the guy told us, well we don't have any right then. Again, we knew what they were

gonna say. So I thanked him, he said, but he'll let us know if they have any. Now, he didn't know me from no one and didn't have my phone number or anything. We left, we went home— I went home with the other people and we started filling out our complaint for the Human Rights Commission. The other couple come by later. They went to the same place. No membership, no reservation and they were seated immediately and were given an application for a membership as they left. So those are some of the things that we had to do.

15:54

At different times, different places around town that did not accept everybody, different groups would go, maybe a Caucasian couple and take an African-American with them and let them know, this is what we intend to do. So that was one of the ways that we went about breaking down things and so forth, but it was an interesting time doing that.

EH: And about what year was that?

CM: Oh, late 60s.

EH: And then when did Morgantown desegregate their schools? Well I guess they did with...

CM: Yeah, yeah. Morgantown—it was not, well... it was probably one of the first places... I don't know if they were the first place in the state or what, but for the most part except for the southern part of West Virginia, you didn't have large communities of African Americans and it just blended you know, right in. Now I'm sure some of the students, if you would talk to some of those individuals who went to school at that time, like I can remember, I can think of a number of people who maybe went there in 10th, 11th, 12th grade, I think it was pretty hard for them fitting in with this group, because here you only had maybe a small number.

EH: Right.

CM: Because the classes... if there was 20 students in a graduating class at Monongalia High School, that would be a big class, so when you start splitting people up, you know, but they went and when I think of some of those— I forget what age maybe, some people probably are like in their late 60s now, they went in first grade, so that's all they knew. But some of the others when they were like 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade, I think it was kinda hard for them but they went right in. But down in the southern part of the state where they had large numbers, it was a while before they were able to get everybody you know, integrated into the schools.

EH: And so you've been working on a project about... is it about the history of black schools in West Virginia?

CM: In Monongalia County. Now, there is a lady I did meet a young lady... I went to a class at WVU about a month or so ago and I showed them what my project that I did— it's only for my memory from what I went through and I'll share that with you. Also so then later on that week another young lady was coming who had been a student here that I knew when she was in undergrad school that I almost had forgotten, but anyway... and she is doing her... she's getting her doctorate and this is her dissertation on this, and she's doing it about the whole school— about the whole state, rather. And it was, it's so interesting. She talks about the government at that time and how... it's really some positive things. So I really enjoyed seeing her presentation.

EH: So how did you get involved in local politics?

CM: Well, (laughs) I... first of all, it's something I said I'd never do.

EH: (laughs)

CM: I thought I would... when people would try to encourage me, I thought, oh, I would NEVER do that. I... working at Sterling Faucet, I became active in the union, and it's probably something—that was probably something I always thought I would love to do, if I could have a voice to help make things better for other people. I knew what we went through as children and the, and I knew that... of course my dad was a United Mine Worker, and I just believed that some of the benefits and some of the things, although not everything is going real good right now for some of the retirees, but all of the benefits that they've been able to expand on is because of the union. So I always thought, well, I would... but then when I first got the job at Sterling Faucet... and I guess I was only mostly about the United Mine Workers and I thought, I don't know what the union's gonna do for me! But you know, but the job that they were hiring for, it was a union job. So I became involved in that and as a result, so many times they wanted us, they would encourage you, rather, to know who your delegates were, who represented you, because these are the people who are making laws for you. So as a result of that, I started, years ago... I wouldn't go... I wouldn't go all the time, but I wanted to know who my delegates, who my representatives were.

20:39

City Council, whatever. So, then as it come on down many years later, there were some things going on in the area that I lived where some of the houses needed some repairs and when older people would pass away, the younger people weren't there to—they didn't want to, you know, they moved away so they didn't come back to take care of those houses. So some of the people in the neighborhood where I was living—and we talked about this—we needed to have some repairs on some of the places. So we formed an organization and then I told them that we needed to have a president or secretary, and everyone kept saying, well you're the one that's doing the talking, why don't you be the president? Well, you know they always say if you talk, you're it. So then we had a young lady was our secretary—she typed up letters that we all put input in that, and we took those to City Council to let them know about our area, which they already knew. So then I guess somethings about that was in the paper, and then people from other areas would call me and say, well could you help us start an association. So there I was going from community to community helping to start an organization. And then there was a group in Morgantown called Clean Up, and that was probably late—I'll say late 80 or maybe in 90s really, because the election that I first was in for City Council was '91, so they were trying to find people from each ward—there's several wards in Morgantown—to run for City Council. So I was notified that they wanted to know if I would... they'd like to interview me to be one of their candidates and I thought, I'm not interested in that. And a lot of the individuals in that group was from the university—some from the law school and so forth—so they wanted to make appointments to try to come and talk to us—I just thought I would not do that.

EH: Right.

CM: Well, long story short, then one lady kept asking me to come and go for the interview and I... I said no, no, no and it was on a Saturday and I was busy, so finally after she called me about the third or fourth time about that, I thought okay. She said I'll pick you up, you won't even have to drive. And so I went out for the interview and we interviewed together. And I don't know if the other lady was chosen or maybe didn't want...whatever. But later on I got a call that they wanted me to be their candidate for the 6th ward. And for a long time after that, I continued to say no. As a matter of fact, delegate Barbara Fleischauer met with me a number of times and I thought, no I can't do this. But I got, one evening I come in from work, and a gentleman called me—I guess I use that word loosely—and he said he wanted to talk to me. And when he started telling me what he wanted, I said sir, let me tell you, I just come in from work, I'm fixing dinner, I don't have time to talk to you and I don't think I hung up on him, but the conversation just ended and I hung up. Well he lived in Suncrest, and he drove across town to talk to me.



EH: That night?

CM: In about 15 or 20 minutes he came right over, rang the doorbell. And I said I thought I told you I didn't want to talk to you. So he told me that he had a slate for my ward. No, he had a slate for each ward and I wasn't on it. And he did not want me to... and I thought, that's kinda ridiculous for one person to think they could control who's gonna run for office. And then after that I received 4 phone calls from Caucasian men telling me that I should not be a candidate because a black woman couldn't win in this town.

EH: Wow.

24:28

CM: So my thought began, if they think I can't win, why are they worried about it?

EH: Right!

CM: And but the gentleman that came across town to talk to me, he told me that he had all men on his slate. And that they had all picked themselves up by their bootstraps and their fathers had been killed in the mines and he did not want me. So what had happened is the word had gotten out on the street that I might be a candidate. I hadn't even decided yet, so that got me to thinking. But after those guys called me and I thought, that's it. I am gonna... I'm doing this!

EH: (laughs) That was a challenge.

CM: Yeah! I thought don't tell me what I can't do!

EH: Right.

CM: So they really pushed me over. But I've always thought, later, years after listening to Dr. Phil, Dr. Phil always says that his dad told him that never pass up a good time to keep your mouth shut. And I thought, those guys passed up a good time to be quiet, you know.

EH: Right.

CM: So I, so after all the other things that happened, and then with that, and then I thought, I'm getting in there. So of course clean-up was well organized and did a great job and we worked very hard, but I've always thought that, although I was active in the union at Sterling Faucet, I had been active in the bowling association, so I knew a lot of people from different places, and I guess I was always getting involved in something whether it was taking this class or that class and so forth, but it was really probably one of the biggest city elections that I can remember because I think they had like 28 or 29% turnout for that city election, and today those numbers are much lower than that.

EH: Right, yeah.

CM: So I had I think 4 guys and my top opponent was the sitting mayor at that time. He had been mayor 5 times, so in that election, that was a big election, big election. And of course I knew nothing about—could get out and talk to people and so forth and there was one lady that made our signs, of course she made everybody's sign that was in Clean Up and so forth. The disclaimer on the signs—I knew nothing

about that. (laughs) But it was pretty exciting. And to me... there's several people who said sometimes, one former Councilman at that time, one of these days, she's gonna write a book because that was historic what happened there. So Clean Up had... I think maybe 5 candidates, I think. But they, 5 or 6 maybe. But they won all but one seat. We had 5—we had 5 or 6 new people go in at that time. I forget the exact number. But that's how it happened. So then I was... several people had said, of the newly elected people said, if we're gonna make a change at this time, and to show people we're gonna make a change, you should be the mayor. And I thought, I can't do that! I cannot be the mayor! And they kept saying, yeah, yeah. But Helene Freeberg was a Council member who was elected at that time and Helene was the one who nominated me and I kept thinking, oh, I'll be too scared, I can't do this! And the election's in April, the City Council is seated the first Tuesday in July. City Hall was packed, packed. People were sitting on the floor. But everybody had... before the election had been so determined they were gonna make some changes in there. So it took about 6 or so ballots, and of course, you need 4 votes to elect. And this time my heart was just jumping, about to jump out of my...so finally on that last ballot and I got the 4 votes that I needed and the place just erupted, went crazy. Just went crazy!

EH: Wow.

CM: But and then I thought, I'm so nervous, and at the time I was thinking, now why don't we just adjourn and go home and come back next week. (laughs) But by that time the City Clerk and somebody else was moving my things up to the Mayor's seat, and I was thinking, I don't know if I (laughs) but you know, if it had not been... and I think it's so important some times.... of course, different things that you learn is very important, but I had been the president of the Morgantown Women's Bowling Association, Vice President for the State Bowling Association and then active in the unions. Because of those things, I had learned a little about parliamentary procedure. If it hadn't been for that, I don't know what I would have done that night going up there. You know? But someone told me later that some people in the back of the room who were not my—I was not their favorite— said, now what's she gonna do, she probably doesn't know anything about parliamentary procedure! But I really, you know, fooled them, because I did know how to process the meeting and so forth. But that was my first... and I (sighs) got the meeting going and after a while I thought oh, we've got to take a break! So took a break, and of course the TV, this was a big—a lot of people had their eyes on Morgantown! I remember a channel, a TV station out of Clarksburg, they had a satellite set up in the parking lot and everybody was waiting to see what happened in Morgantown. And so they said, I called for a break and... or a recess. And they said, we got to, we got to, we need to go on air right now. So I went out in the parking lot and they were just ready to you know, to interview. And I always remember that one of the guys, the guy that was interviewing me on the TV, he said, well I wanna know, how are you gonna do this? He said that because I guess a lot of people had always thought that you would never elect anybody on City Council that was connected with the university and that had been something had been... he'd heard for years. He said how are you gonna do this? He said, you're gonna, you're elected to Mayor and here you are a university person. I said whop, stop right there. At that time I probably had been at the university maybe, 6 years I think.

EH: Oh, so you were working at the university?

CM: Yeah, I was working at the university. I said let me tell you one thing. I lived in this area all my life, I've been at the university for 6 years, and I don't like that title you're a university person. I said I'm a Morgantown person right now and my job will be to connect the community and the university and we should be working as one.

31:35

But at the same time there was Ron Justice who is still at the university, Frank Scafella was... Dr. Frank Scafella was in the English department, Helene Freeberg, her husband was a law professor, so there was 4

of us with some connection and I believe that we did a terrific job and we really turned Morgantown around and it started growing from then on. But and then I let him know right away, I said I've lived in Morgantown most of my life, but I was born and raised in Osage. And because I didn't want anyone to think, she's not gonna say she's from Osage, but that's the first thing I said! But, so that's how it all go. So I... at the time, some of the things that was happening that was making history, I had no knowledge of it, never thought about it, but later on there was a young lady that went to the same church that I did. At that time I was going to St. Paul AME, and a young lady, Dr. Caroline Bailey, sometime later, she said Charlene, she said you know, I think you're the first black woman to ever be a mayor in West Virginia. And I thought, oh, I don't know! Well, she sorta checked it out and sure enough I was. Course I was the first African American to be on Morgantown City Council. So I thought, okay, I'm gonna be the mayor for one year. One year, that's it. Well, you go in in July and about when you get up to May, and I'm thinking, I've got 2 more meetings and then that's it. And there was so many things going and I thought, no, no, no. I'm gonna try this another year. Well then it turned into 7. So at the end of that time, then the City Clerk told me, she says, do you realize that you've just set a new record? What do you mean? No one had ever served as Mayor more than 5 years in the 200 history of this city.

EH: Wow.

CM: So I had set a new record. So it was a pretty exciting time for me. And by that time, oh, and then by that time, though, I had tossed my hat into the ring for the state legislature and I had won the primary and then different people kept saying, well why don't you just go ahead and resign. I thought, if I don't make it to the legislature, I'm gonna stay on City Council and for me just to jump up and resign like I know I'm gonna go, I thought, I'm not gonna do that, and I thought, no one's gonna tell me when to leave anyway. So primary was in May for the legislature, then July time for a new mayor. I nominated Frank Scafella, and he became the new mayor, and then after the election in November, then I resigned. And then I went to the legislature for 14 years. So I've always said that I gave 21 years to something I said I'd never do.

EH: (laughs) Right. Because of those 4 men.

CM: Oh!

EH: (laugh)

CM: Poor thing learned to keep their mouth shut!

EH: (laughs) You showed them for sure.

CM: (laughs)

EH: So what was your tie to Scotts Run later on in your life? Did this museum kind of start a new reason to go back?

CM: Well, so for a number of years my mother was still there for a while until the interstate went through and then after she moved, I guess probably for a while I would just go out occasionally when they had their street fairs and so forth. And then after of course the museum was pretty popular, then I started to going back. And I guess there was never a time that I didn't go. And of course, I had an aunt that lived up that way. She was at Cassville even after my mother moved. And she would shop at I think Solomon's Market up there and so sometimes I would go up through and take her to the store. So I was always, you know, around some place.

EH: So did you know the people who go to the Coffee Shop, before the Museum started in 2011?

CM: Oh yeah. Course like I guess most everybody out there, but one of the fascinating things was even before the coffee shop, I think oh... Probst, John Probst, I had... I would tell him all the time, I used to see him driving around sometimes and I thought, I know that guy, I'm gonna... one of these days I'm gonna have to have a little talk with him and tell him who I am. So there was an article in the paper once about me and it said that I was from Osage, and I saw him, I used to visit the senior centers a lot and of course at that time I was campaigning and he let me know... he said, I know a lot of people from out there, but I saw that you said you're from Osage. He said, I wanted to talk...and I said, yeah and I want to talk to you too, I said, cause I know who you are, but you don't know me. And I told him that, I told him a story about his sister and my sister and it's something both families always laughed about and I said and the other thing is, my grandmother and your mother were good friends. And when I told him what the family name was, he said, I know them very well!

37:01

And he would say that his, sometimes my grandmother would come to visit his mother and bring my, the youngest daughter, he said she was so pretty I couldn't even stay in the same room with her! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Aw.

CM: So then I let him know the connection you know, so we always get a kick out of that. And then, and then it's like people that you, maybe I remembered when I was little and maybe they didn't make the connection, but most of the people I've known— Al [Anderson] was good friends with my brother, my brother was killed some years ago in an automobile accident and of course I knew Sarah's youngest sister, but all of them have had some past, most of them have some past connections.

EH: Wow. What's the story with your sister and John's sister?

CM: Oh. There's a photo, and he keeps asking me have I been able to find it, but I think my sister in Cleveland probably has a copy of it. But years ago you would have photographers going through the mining camps to take pictures, like there's a picture of me and I think my kids have it someplace. I must have been about 5 years old. And a guy would come through with a pony and he'd put you on there and put a cowboy hat on you and some, those... (motions) I don't...

EH: Chaps?

CM: Chaps!

EH: Uh-huh.

CM: And I had a kerchief around my head, and they would take pictures and they would come back if your family wanted to purchase them. So somebody was going through and there was one of my sisters and John's sister. Now, I don't know why my sister had a coat on because it was evidently hot weather. John's sister had on an apron, one of those kind that you, like a pinafore, you just put your arms through it and it fastens in the back. And they're standing there with their arms around each other and they're probably about I don't know, 5, 6 years old, something like that. And that just shows how everybody was friends.

EH: Right.

CM: So evidently the story goes, when the photo came back, and John's mother I think her name was Mary Lou, and said, Mary Lou, now which one are you? And then she said, Mother, don't you recognize me with my apron on?

EH: (laughs) That's very cute.

CM: So, and evidently, his mother and my family—I got a big kick out of that, how she described that. And that reminds me of that one article we saw not too long ago. Well, probably last year sometime, these two little kids, one African American, one Caucasian that wanted to get their hair cut the same to try to fool the teacher so she wouldn't, you know. (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

CM: Think that she wouldn't know which was which. But John's always asking, he says Charlene, he said, I lost my picture! And I said I know I've got one someplace, but there's so many photos around. But I think my sister must have a copy, but John wants a copy of that. (laughs)

EH: That's very sweet.

CM: But there's just a lot of people out there, and of course, there's none out there compared to what used to be, because to go out there not to see anyone on the street, unheard of. Unheard of. There were just so many people there. And then of course people would, some people who didn't live there would act like, oh, that's the scariest place to go or something like that. And I would babysit for people in town and I guess if they would take me back home and let me out of the car it'd be 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, I would just scoot up on that hill. I was never afraid.

EH: Wow.

CM: Of course there wasn't any street lights or anything, I just knew where I was going! (laughs)

EH: Wow. Do you recognize people from those WPA photos when the WPA photographers came through?

CM: I have a couple of photos, yeah, that I have recognized. And as I said, I wanna show you the thing that I have. And a couple of those are from... they... A fella (?) I forget which fella it is now, but it's in a lot of them, some of the ones I took myself. It can go back, it's just really something to go back through and recognize those people.

EH: Yeah, I bet. Yeah.

CM: And then there's a book here, *Our Monongalia* that was put together—you've probably seen that.

EH: Oh yeah, that had that out at the Museum today.

CM: Yeah. Uh-huh and when we go, and Connie Park Rice did that book and we had a committee when I was the mayor to do some things because of some of the complaints that we had throughout the area. The City Manager at that time was Dan Boroff—put the group together. Dr. Barb Howell (?) in the history department and she was the one I think that got Connie, and then they would just go through and talk to people and everybody would tell you, somebody else that you need to talk to, so when we go through that book and see some of those pictures, it's just amazing.

EH: Yeah, yeah I bet. So what has the museum done, and the Saturday coffee shops, what has that done for the community in your opinion?

CM: I think it has brought a lot of people together and then just to set there and reminisce and always, there's always something there that maybe someone will mention. You'll think, oh wait a minute! And they'll refresh your memory about something, and then as you discuss it and everybody tells their side of it, and brings something to the conversation, it brings back a lot of memories or reminds you of something that maybe you had forgotten about, so it's just great to go. Now, of course I didn't go today, but when I get a chance, especially when it's warm, I like to go out and, and then when they have the street fair, that's always a good time too.

EH: Yeah, I gotta come for that. Before that was there any kind of, aside from the street fair, was there any kind of community gathering spot?

CM: No, occasionally, and I don't even know when they're having their... and I think they have their meetings at the museum now, but occasionally I used to go out for some of their meetings a long time ago, but I think those meetings are being held at the Settlement House at that time. But there wasn't that much more.

EH: Yeah. So what else are you involved in these days. You're mostly retired?

CM: Well, mostly retired. I went on the... I was asked to join the community for a statewide CASA and so I'm on that board now. I've been trying to eliminate some of the other boards and so forth that I was on. And I guess I'm not... so many people laugh and say what are you doing, because I know you're not sitting still. And sometimes I still feel like, well I'm doing some things. During the election time I you know, was very supportive of some of those individuals who were running for certain offices or campaigning for certain offices and so forth and I get a lot of calls about. And sometimes, I guess it's that people aren't paying attention and maybe they'll call you about something that maybe you don't have anything to do with anymore. So...

44:49

And in the past I guess since I've been retired I thought I should get you know, not be involved with a visiting community at the university, so I'm no longer on that. So like I said, last summer I took up knitting, so I do that once a week.

EH: Right, yeah! (laughs)

CM: (laughs) So, yeah.

EH: Is there a knitting shop that you go to?

CM: No, there is some ladies. Well I was telling one of my neighbors—she was talking about doing crochet, and I said I've always wanted to knit. She says, why don't you come and go with me. So she belongs to a group and they meet at a church on Monday and one of the ladies in there will help you to learn. So I...that's what I've been doing! So that's my Monday. And I actually, most evenings I sit and that's what I'm doing.

EH: Yeah, yeah. I find it nice to do while you're watching TV.

CM: Yeah, mmhm.

EH: Makes you feel like you're at least accomplishing something.

CM: Yeah. So sometimes I may not be able to watch, but at least I have the TV on and it's not dead silence.

EH: Yeah, right.

CM: And then I'll be... I like to travel and I'll be doing a little bit of traveling, so I usually find something. Between the reading and the knitting and of course all... the telephone is always busy, it keeps me pretty well. Yeah.

EH: Well is there anything else you'd like to add?

CM: Well I'm gonna share with you some of the photos I have on that project that I did. And show you, tell you how you've on your own time, on your laptop or something, because it's on the Morgantown Museum have put it on there. And there's one professor at the university and I'm gonna try to get with him because there's no voice to it. So I usually show it but I explain everything. But he told me he would help me with a student and that we'll just go ahead and put the voice to it, so I'm looking forward to doing that, and I, and I should have been in touch with him, but I'll probably see him this week and talk to him. We're getting together with that. And then there's one student, no well he's not a student maybe, but there's one employee at the Center for Black Culture and we've talked about going down through Osage and to show him where different things used to be, and he wants to make some films of that.

EH: Oh nice.

CM: But there's always something to get involved in.

EH: Yeah. And the Center for Black Culture, is that a WVU program?

CM: Yes. Uh-huh.

EH: And is it mostly focused on local or is it global?

CM: I guess I don't really know the answer to that, but I would say global because it's students... the director for their is Margie Fuller, and they do a lot of good work. And a lot of students, you know, work in and out of there and they do different projects. I know they take different trips. And I know that she's been able to preserve different history from around the area. And not just this area. So they do a lot of interesting work.

EH: Well I might like to be in touch with her, because I was recently talking with—there's a Black in Appalachia project that's through I think Tennessee Public Broadcasting, and they have been doing, basically they come to a community and they set up a scanner and they ask communities, black communities, to bring their photos and their records of the history of the local area, and so then they digitize those so every person who owns it gets a digital copy, so it's preserved and then they also put that in their archive, and they didn't have any West Virginia yet.

CM: Really?

EH: Yeah. So I was telling, I was trying to help him be in touch with people maybe in McDowell County, but that might be a good contact for him, someone at the Center for Black Culture, cause they could do...

CM: That would be a good contact. Also other parts of the county— I mean other parts of the state. Like I have a good friend down at White Sulfur Spring, and she's active in so many different things and there's a lot of history all down through there. I know a person from McDowell County—there is so much history too there. Course there's a lot of history right here. I know last year and I think— I'm sure Margie would like to speak with you. The one building on White Ave. that used to be the high school years ago, probably back in the 30s, and the lady who purchased the building and was renovating it found some things up in the attic that was up there from the early 30s when the school was there. And she wanted to know if I... I thought, I don't know what to do with them and I thought Margie would be a good one—they could preserve some of that.

EH: Yeah.

50:11

CM: And she even told me later that going through those things, she even found a letter up there that was written by Dorothy Vaughn, one of the ladies in the *Hidden Figures*?

EH: Oh, wow, yeah!

CM: You know, she graduated school here.

EH: Uh-huh, right.

CM: And that, and I haven't seen it yet, but I'm sure they've been able to preserve it and have it framed.

EH: Cool! Yeah.

CM: So...

EH: Well I should get in touch with her.

CM: Oh, she'd be a great person for you to get in touch with. Yeah. So they I, and I've probably promised someone, I have the obituary of Dorothy Vaughn that someone had sent me and I think the grandson of the man that used to own, that owned that house when it was a school, I was so surprised when he called me—I forget what state he's in. He didn't even know that it had ever been a school. I said I couldn't believe that your mother never told you that. And then when some people saw this about Dorothy Vaughn, they sent him this so I guess he was wondering why, so he called me and then he emailed me her obituary and some other things. But there's a lot of history right there and Margie would be a good person for you to get in touch with.

EH: Yeah, great. Well I leave this on if you want to show me the...

CM: Okay, I'll go—let me get my laptop.

EH: I'll pause it.

CM: I hope I have it plugged up somewhere.

51:40

END OF TAPE



MarshallCharlene2.3.23.2019  
00:00

CM: Put this on here so that I will get to it quicker but I'm gonna tell you, I just have on here Charlene Presentation. But it's the Morgantown History Museum and when you get there, I forget... there's some other things that you go down, I might go back and find it again without going through this easy way.

EH: Uh-huh.

CM: This was a top part of it... the African American Experience in Morgantown. And then that was one of the pictures I used for my campaign, and as you see I just drop the population of Monongalia County, and some of the other things there. Earlier African-American Schools, but on your laptop if you just go up there and you get it and then I show some of the maps and talk about some of the things that used to be.

EH: Is that Jenkins related to you?

CM: No, no, uh-uh. You know something, a million times I've seen that name and I never connected it to my mother's name, but I'm sure not.

EH: (laughs)

CM: And then this professor, Alexander Wade who, it's something, when I look at this now, course... it's just really something. But there were some things that he did for African-American schools and a project that I don't know all about all the things that he did, but anyway, when I think about this as a high school student, some of the families would call the black school to see if any young ladies wanted after-school jobs. I was always looking for a job and before I even knew about him, connected with the schools, one of my after-evening jobs was working for his daughters and they lived across the High Street Bridge. There's a big house to the left when you go, you know where Fred L. Jenkins is?

EH: Uh-huh.

CM: And up there that great big house.

EH: Yeah.

CM: That's always called the Wade House, and I worked there for them after school and they were just great with me. And so... I thought boy, that's something. This was a school house that had been down beside the field house years ago. And (sighs) this was... years and years ago. I don't know... I was talking to a lady not too long ago that's in her 90s and I asked her, did she go to school there and she said no, so I don't know how long ago they went to school there. And that was a picture of some of the black kids there. Little Red Schoolhouse. Course I got then on files. And I just go on down and talk about you know, the schools and what happened there. And 501 White Avenue, that's where— there was a building, it'll come to me, down on University Avenue, Beechhurst Avenue? And that was the 1st black school. When they outgrew that, they went to White Ave. and this house. And a huge house and it's still there. And then because when that building was getting overcrowded, there was someone who was campaigning, writing to President Roosevelt and so forth, to build a better school here in Monongalia County, and that's part of some of the things that's in the book. These were just some of the schools in the area that were for black students. This one is still up in Jerome Park and this is two pictures of it. And when the Board of Education sold that property, a private family or private person would purchase it and maybe turn it into a house, so this is now a residence there.

EH: I see.

03:56

CM: And it was kinda, it was kinda humorous to me when I was saying, I was so busy and I was trying to put all this together and get the pictures and this one lady said I'll help you. And I said I gotta go up there to Jerome Park and take a picture of that school. She said, oh let me do that for you. And I said I bet you don't know where that school is. She said, yeah! I said it's just a little place. She said I know where it is. She said, no it's bigger than you think. I said trust me. You do not know what I'm talking about. (coughs) Could I get you some iced tea?

EH: Sure! yeah.

CM: It just dawned on me...sometimes I get to talking and forget to offer something to drink.

EH: Oh, that's okay!

CM: She said my, we go up that way a lot. I said yeah, you don't know where it's at. So when I told her where it was and she shared with her mother, and her mother is older than I am, her mother said I never knew that even existed. But do you know what I'm talking about in Sabraton up on...

EH: I don't think I know where that is.

CM: So (ice machine sounds) I knew where mostly all the buildings were.

EH: Uh-huh.

CM: I didn't make the tea, I always buy it.

EH: That's okay. Thank you.

CM: You're welcome. But they had... a number of schools throughout the area for African American students. And then one of the things I found out, and it seemed like it always happens, you'll read something in history and you never know if it's really true or not. When I was going through some history looking for some things about this school, it said that the Board of Education voted to close it in '29. I thought that's not true, I thought I wasn't around in '29, but I know it's not true because I knew some people who went to school there until, until the 50s!

EH: Oh wow.

CM: So I called this one lady, and I asked her, I said, when did they close that school? She said well they didn't close it until this year. I said see, the record says— I said I knew that. This gives you an idea— you know where Dominion-Post is right?

EM: Mmhm.

CM: If you're going out that way there's a street that goes up over the hill. That's called Darr street. At the top of Darr Street there's a street called Central Avenue and Jerome Street and that's where that's located.

EH: Okay.

CM: This was the building that was down on Beechurst Ave. that was the first high school. This gentleman here had an ice cream place here, see it's called Hunts and he let them have the top part of that for the school because there wasn't very many. But when they outgrew that that's when they went to the high school. He was a millionaire I guess several times. West Virginia Regional History Center some of these pictures came from. And there's a street there from okay... this is the old president's house. You know where Stuart Hall is?

EH: Mmhm.

CM: And right across the street that used to be the president's house.

EH: Okay.

CM: And there's a street right here. No right here and they named that after him. And this is where his home was, but in later years when they put a university building across that street, that street only goes halfway. It used to go all the way there.

EH: Ah.

CM: So then that just tells you about another guy that used to be the principal, this guy was the principal. That was the football team. Excuse me.

8:09

END OF TAPE

MarshallCharlene3.3.23.2019

Below is a log rather than transcript

00:00

CM is talking through her digital exhibit project about African American schools in Monongalia County.

CM: "Last surviving member of championship team."

Points out the coach. Father [Hunts] owned house high school used to be in.

Talks about photo of the school.

Refers to map of African American schools in Morgantown

Asks EH if she's familiar with The Shack in Morgantown

CM points to photo of school at Cassville, now remodeled into home. Points to school in Everettville. Point to school in White Ave. where her husband went to school. Says woman made 7 studio apartments out of one of the schools, on Natl. Register of Historic Places.

Point of photo to her and her first grade classmates. Says she didn't recognize herself.

03:42

Says she's the only one in the photo still living. Points out Sarah Boyd Little's brother.

Speaks of Floyd B. Cox school. Explains old layout of Scotts Run before interstate.

Shows photo of Osage in late 50s, taken by one of her sisters.

05:25

Said house sat right where the interstate exchange is.

Shows photo of kids she went to school with.

Says you can tell how poor everyone was.

07:22

Says on Thursday they had Bible study with Presbyterian Church and students from university.

CM: "This is the guy that argued to get the black school built. And he was just a tiny little guy, he was shorter than 5 feet. He lived to be like 104 years old. And he was just dynamite. I told everybody when I do this, he would be my hero, because after reading some of his history I found out that he, he had to go through so much to help to get that school built. But he had to fight, it was like discrimination within our own race. Some people thought they didn't want others to go to school with the kids from Osage. He fought against them, he had to fight the Ku Klux Klan, and then when they got the property over at Westover, people over there back then put out a petition that they didn't want the black kids to be over there and it was just one thing after another, but he fought it. And I said and then after the Ku Klux Klan burnt crosses in his yard, then his wife left him."

08:43

EH: So other African-Americans didn't want kids from Osage to go to school with their kids because they were poor?

CM: Yeah. Well, that was always an ongoing thing. A lot of people thought that if you came from Osage, you were just trash.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

CM: And I guess it'll take a new generation to undo it. But he thought... let me see. Number one he thought the school was too dangerous, it was becoming overcrowded, and of course the guy that owned the building didn't want to lose that money, whatever it was back then.

09:30

Refers to picture of guy who worked WPA.

Talks about when she was in legislature, getting a plaque put up to mark a former African American school in Morgantown.

11:18

Refers to program of dedication of Monongalia High School  
Speaks of Monongalia High Reunion, which used to happen every 2 years. No longer happens because there are so few people remaining.

14:19

CM: "And then when the story came out about *Hidden Figures* and they realized that Katharine Coleman taught here one year.

EH: Yeah. Sarah said she remembered her.

CM: I don't think she does.

EH: (laughs) Yeah, maybe she doesn't.

CM: And reason I said that, 'cause I was asking her one time, I said Sarah, see, and it wasn't until... of course her maiden name was Coleman and then she was married, and in this thing it was Katherine Johnson.

EH: Right, right.

CM: So when the... something that she had said—I met her down at the Greenbrier. And I thought, I wonder why they didn't put her name in there. And I'm looking for it and then one day it dawned on me—she wasn't married then. And then I was asking—she said, wait, now was she that real light colored lady? I thought, everybody knows what complexion she is, you know?

EH: Right.

CM: I thought come on. And then when she was here, she also said that she lived with her principal and that kinda threw me. And I was doing a lot of studying and looking up about it and then it dawned on me... Mr. Barnett was her principal and he... and then she said I think when she went to summer school here maybe 6 weeks or something, her mother stayed with her and she said they lived at the principal's house, and then it dawned on me— he and his wife would always go away for the summer and the house was on Richwood Avenue and I think... I'll have to go back to his picture maybe.

EH: So I didn't know she taught music too. I didn't even know she played music.

CM: I didn't know what she did. Oh math and music. Okay. I just overlooked that. But yeah. You know they passed a bill in the legislature this year.

EH: About her?

16:15

CM: They want to call... for the equal pay? And I gotta find out if the governor signed it or not. Barbara Fleischauer had called me and asked if I could find out how to get in touch with her family because she has 2 daughters. One's deceased. And they wanted to know if... I got the answer right there. I need to call that daughter. They wanted to know if her family would be okay if they named... if the bill get passed, could they call it the Katherine Johnson Equal Pay Bill. So I... like I said I met her and I would not be anybody that they would remember—there was so many people at that party at the Greenbrier. But I thought, well I'll try so I called... I was asking some people who live in Norfolk, or Newport News and then I have a friend here and he said that you know what, I have a friend down there and he's acquainted with a writer that's going to, works for the newspaper and he's doing an article on her or a story on her. He said and so he's in touch with the family so maybe he could help you. So I called the newspaper and left him a message, the next day he got back with me and I told him what I wanted and I said now I'll tell you a little bit about myself and, but they won't remember me... I guess Barbara just thought since I was

African American, I'd be the most likely to get their attention, so he— I said anything you want to know about me, and I said I used to be the mayor and I live in Morgantown, and then in a couple minutes he said, oh and you served for quite a while didn't you? And I said, so you Googled me while I'm talking to ya, huh? So he laughed. I said yeah, so everything you need to know about me is right there online. He got in touch with them, he called me back, and they were, they will let their attorney handle it and they said they'd be pleased, so they gave permission and then Barbara I think got in touch with the lawyer or something and I think the bill passed, but I just don't know if the governor signed it. But it would be named the Katherine Coleman.

This lady was quite active all over town and quite the just... math was her thing. Just a wiz. And this is that team and the guy that just died is right there."

18:56

CM says she likes to talk about the teams they had and the things they did, and the difference with the white school—how they had to support themselves and look out for themselves.

Shows photo of Monongalia choir that went to White House, including Ida Boyd (in WPA photo of women selling ice cream in Scotts Run/Osage), and Sarah Boyd Little.

20:02

She says it was separate but not equal. School janitor but the band together. Said they had dances to raise money for athletic department.

Says only 9 African American teachers were hired in Monongalia Co. after integration.

Says one of her classmates became first African American female to graduate WVU after integration. First two years she had to go to West Virginia State. Her grandfather was a Hunt and had the ice cream place.

27:01

Shows photos of first Monongalia High reunion.

Says next part of presentation is about her, but her friend presents it because she doesn't like to talk about herself.

Shows photo of her signing a document as Mayor in Metropolitan Theatre downtown. Was Mayor when the city got money to purchase the building.

CM: "...No one knew but me... I just had cold chills sitting there. I said here I sit today. I said here's this poor little black girl from Osage when I was a kid I had to sit up there [in the balcony] and now here I sit today with a check to buy the place."

29:22

Shows other documents and awards of her career.

Says that Annette Chandler's grandfather evidently recruited Dorothy Vaughn's family to come to Monongalia High School from Kansas when Vaughn was 7 years old. CM says she was reading

something from the church and found a letter of recommendation for Dorothy Vaughn, written in 1923, signed by Bartlett. He was still the principal in the 1950s when she was there. He also knew Katherine Coleman.

32:53

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW