

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

THERESA CASSAGNOL

Interviewed by Carol Locke Endy
June 1, 2002
at SMCM Exhibit Kickoff Event
Logged by Tania Jordon on September 11, 2005
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is one cassette tape
31 minutes, 24 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

- 0:00 Introduction by Carol
- 0:26 Born in Pierson (where Naval Base is now) in 1933- most of the Blacks lived closer to the light than to the water
- 1:30 Schools: 2nd Jarboesville School (Three Notch Rd.), long wooden building looked like a large barn with dark shingles and outside toilets, housed grades 1 to 12. Walked less than 2 miles to school.
- 2:36 Ms. Gatton (played piano) taught grades 1-3, Beulah Bennett (very serious, spanked her for not doing her best) taught grades 4 & 5.

Track 02

- 4:20 Bus transportation for Catholic kids issue resolved/ Transferred to St. Peter Claver School (Ridge) in 6th grade, big difference. Nuns, one grade to a classroom, prayed before class, attended mass on Friday morning. Attended Cardinal Gibbons.
- 5:50 Impressed by Father Horace McKenna. Helped people in community to pay utility bills, etc; wanted the best for the children
- 7:10 Family lived in shack across from Jarboesville because of Base disruption. Father McKenna instrumental in family getting current property in Ridge

Track 03

- 8:02 Schools: St. Peter Claver had 1st through 8th grades; Cardinal Gibbons (4 students in graduation class), some lay teachers, religion classes twice a week, sewing,

cooking, civics, etc. classes. Encouraged to be a teacher (home economics).
Wished for classes in Human Development.

10:30 Followed sisters' example attended Hampton Institute (University) for 2 years,
came home because mother was ill

11:30 Married and moved to New Jersey

11:41 Moved back home and transferred credits to St. Mary's College ('70 to '72), major
was History/Social Studies, graduated 1973: Had 10 children by this time.

Track 04

12:09 Student-taught at Carver; spoke about unjust banking practice surrounding her
father being refused a loan to open a funeral business. Censured by principle
Renford Jackson, who was not popular with the black students.

16:11 Segregation not taught when she was in school; students had second-hand books;
staff was completely black

Track 05

16:53 Mother taught at 1st Jarboesville School; black & white teachers met separately –
Black Order (nuns) taught at St. Peter Claver

17:45 Teachers at Jarboesville were dedicated, spent time with students/ teachers today
have so much paperwork.

18:40 Doesn't remember Home Visits, family did not have telephone or TV, mother
played piano (family's source of recreation),

19:43 Plays at school; Principles were not very visible in the classrooms when she was
in school/ not like Dr. Janice Walthour is now

Track 06

20:52 War years/ Base disruption and relocation: Remembers; planes going over during
the war, 3 men in suits talking with her father and him having tears in his eyes.

22:30 Special memories from schools (St. Peter Claver and Cardinal Gibbons). Plays at
both schools, used platform in basement of St. Peter's for performances (CCD
classed are in that spot while upstairs is being renovated)

23:10 While waiting for bus (one bus took the Ridge children home first, then came
back for the up-county children), looked out of 2nd story window (boarding
student area)) and saw father making a road (with a scythe) into new property
Father McKenna helped him purchase

24:42 Cannot remember exactly why sister (Dorothy/Dot) boarded

Track 07

- 25:38 Limited resources at Jarboesville: had chalkboards, but no maps, no pictures of Blacks; better now but still not enough resources
- 27:27 Her children's experiences at St. Michael's School/ mistreatment by both students and nuns
- 29:02 With integration parent and students lost the caring of black teachers; white teachers either didn't have the interest or were overwhelmed. Parents were not necessarily kept informed of their child's progress.