

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Documentation Project

BEVERLY WATTS DYSON

July 21, 2007

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor

Videotaped by Aaron Brusset

at her home in Callaway Maryland

Logged by unknown

A verbatim transcript is available

Original format is digital video download

39 minutes, 18 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

0:00 Getting settled in preparation.

0:45 She started at Great Mills High School in September of 1964. She graduated June 1968.

2:10 Give some background on you parents. Who made the decision for you to attend Great Mills High School? Her parents were Reverend and Mrs. Garnett Watts. At that time, schools were beginning to integrate and her father made the decision to send her to Great Mills High School. He felt she could get a better education at Great Mills.

2:52 She did not want to leave George Washington Carver School. She said she would miss her friends and was use to the school. She had attended George Washington Carver since 1st grade. "When your parents decide what you're going to do, you have to listen to your parents."

Track 02

3:36 She was initially very nervous because she was going to an all white school. At the time the kids still went to schools in segregated buses. Her father drove the school bus, so she was still able to ride on the black bus with her friend, but got off at Great Mills. It wasn't that bad. She was the only student that got off that bus.

5:44 The first couple of months were kind of hard, but some of the kids just got use to seeing use. Military kids and local kids that grew up with blacks started to

become their friends. It started to become easier. But some kids just wouldn't accept the change. "She had her buddy Lorraine in school."

6:46 A lot of the kids came to them and told them not to pay attention to the other kids. They told them that the other kids were ignorant, and to stick with them that if anything went down, they were there for them. They stuck up for use.

Track 03

7:20 The attitudes of the white kids? Some of the kids would open the windows when they came into the classrooms, because they said there was an odor when they came in. The white kids would walk close to the walls or against the lockers because they said the black kids had diseases. They would call us the N-word when they walked down the hall.

8:42 Teachers: They had some wonderful teachers. The principals were remarkable. "When I started Mr. Marvin Joy was the Principal, Mr. Duke, and Mr. Moses. They were remarkable. Some of the teachers were still a little negative about it. The majority were helpful and understanding. Some of them gave them their little attitude. One teacher told them that they should return to their own schools, they didn't belong there. One teacher would go along with the students when they put the windows up in class in the winter. There were only a few with nasty attitudes. When they were told the principal or vice principal about the incidents, they never occurred again.

Track 04

10:16 How were the white teacher different from the black teachers you had at Carver? "The black teachers made sure that we were taught very well. They were very good about giving us an education. They took time with us. The white teachers at Great Mills didn't show as much concern towards our education as the black teachers had at Carver. By the time Lorraine, Thomas Saxon and I had left Carver we were more advance then some of the kids at Great Mills. A lot more advanced.

11:16 Some of the teachers didn't pay any attention to the students and others really taught class. She learned how to live off the land and trap a bear from her classes at Great Mills. She learned to survive (live off the land) from her industry class. "If I ever got in a predicament and got stuck out in the woods, I would know how to survive"

12:36 Teacher using the N-word. When she walked into a classroom a teacher at Great Mills said, "Well we have several 'N's' in the classroom today, let's welcome them in". He also directed a question to her by stating, "I'm going to ask this 'N-person' over here..." A lot of the students laugh about it. Her parents taught her that there are some things you have to ignore. "I am there to get my education. ...

not to cause problems with that teacher, some things you just have to ignore". The principal told us that if we had problems, then come and see him. After class she reported the incident to the teacher. The principal had a conference with Ms. Dyson, her parents and the teacher. "I never did have anymore problems out of that teacher again."

Track 05

14:41 Relationships with African American students at Great Mills: The students stuck together because they were more comfortable. They had different classes but they would meet in the halls and eat lunch together. If they had classes together, they would seat together. When they came back from Christmas break during the first year, the students welcomed them back. "I guess they accepted the fact that they were not bad and they could be friends with us." The ones that acted more prejudice were becoming friendlier. They weren't hearing the N-word anymore unless someone new came into the school. They found out that we were just like them. There were only four people in the school who were still negative towards them.

Track 06

17:59 The next September more black kids came into the school. In some cases this caused some tension because some black kids came in with an attitude that the whites were not going to mess with them. So it was like starting over again, but after a while, it smoothed out.

18:51 There were fights but she can't recall any really violated incidents.

19:20 Males versus females: The males were treated worse the females. She doesn't know why.

20:00 Extra curricular activities - She didn't do much with Great Mills. She still did most of her activities at Carver. Carver was a basketball school and Great Mills did more football. Carver had more activities then Great Mills. She did play soccer and hockey in the 10th grade.

Track 07

22:51 What else did you do for recreation? They participated with basketball and did a lot of bike riding. Her family had a beach, so she went swimming. Her uncle owned Smith's Beach. It was an all black beach. Her uncle had a juke box. Bus loads of people would come down from Washington, D.C. "There was a whole lot of loving and a whole lot of fun." They would hang around the little country stores and eat ice cream. They would play baseball. Some people had TV's and some didn't.

25:28 That way of life is gone now. People don't do these things anymore. It was all about love and caring. Everybody's in a big hurry now. TV and video games are so popular now. They had a TV that wasn't crystal clear. You had to turn the antenna to get better reception. They would listen to Hopi Adams on the radio. He would play the music that they always wanted to hear. He would play Otis Reeding and Junior Walker. Next to Old Carver there was a recreation center they would go to for dances.

Track 08

27:07 Every Sunday, they had to go to church. They use to have "good ole gospel music back then." The churches us to have homecoming in the summertime. All the little churches would go to each others homecoming. She was Methodist and there were six Methodist churches in the area. They were in Valley Lee, St. Indigos, Lexington Park, Ridge, and Oakville. Everybody got together and had a lot of good food. You stayed in church all day. Families were strong then and they stuck together.

28:30 Education was different. In school you got a beating if you were unruly. There was no talking back to teachers. You had to respect the teachers because they were taking the time to teach you. There was no foul language and you always respected your parents. She called her switch "Miss Minnie."

29:09 We loved our parents and enjoyed going to school. We knew we were getting something out of school and were bettering ourselves. "A lot of our parents didn't finish school or couldn't read or write. That' way they pushed us to better ourselves to obtain an education."

29:42 Discipline at Carvers versus Great Mills: It was all together different. At Carver if they did something wrong, they would be called to principal's office. If they did something "real wrong," her principal, Mr. E. Jerry Williams had a black belt and a long ruler that had a name. He would hit you "dead in your hand." If you moved your hand, you would get ten more hits. One teacher would hit you in the knuckles. When you got home, you would get it again. "Those kids were good in school." The bomb threats they have today would not have happened in those days.

Track 09

31:07 At Great Mills you got called in the principal's office and you got suspended. She and Lorraine skipped school and went to the Great Mills market. "Mr. Moses came by and got a few of the kids out of the store." She and a few other kids hide behind the cars and snuck back across the street to school. Mr. Moses was hiding behind the bushes and caught them. He called their parents and suspended them. He did not get in touch with Lorraine's mother so she pretended to be sick on the day she was suspended. Beverly used a pay phone at the school and pretended to

be Lorraine's mother to get her back in school. She said her behavior was caused by influences she was learning from Great Mills.

34:00 How did your relationship with your parents change after you went to Great Mills? It did not change her relationship. Those two people wanted the best for her. Some things she didn't see as a child but can see as an adult. She loves them very much.

Track 10

34:59 It made an impact in her life. It allowed her to see another side of life. No matter if she was green, black or purple, she could be accepted anywhere. You may have your little down falls but the door always opens for you.

36:00 Her parents knew Mr. & Mrs. Groves and she remembers Joan and Conrad. She remembers them talking about the experiences they had when they went to Great Mills. She was in the 6th grade at the time. During the time that Joan and Conrad attended Great Mills High School, they had it rough. During that time integration was not accepted. They were opening the door for other black kids. They were treated very badly, but they stuck it out.

38:00 The interviews in the book brought back a lot of good memories about the way things use to be. They did not have to go through the same things that the kids in Salem Alabama went through. "It wasn't as hard for us." "We have to say thanks for Joan and Conrad for opening the door for us."