

Shelden: I'm here with Darnelle Smith in her home. The date is November 11 – no no – sorry, November 19, 2010. And we're going to be doing an interview today. I'm going to find my questions.

Darnelle: Okay.

Shelden: Um ... I wonder if ... Hold on. Here we go. We're on the air now.

Darnelle: Okay.

Shelden: Okay, Darnelle, first question: what's your association with the Holley School? Did you attend? Did your family members other than you?

Darnelle: Yes, all of my family members attended. There were 13 of us, 5 boys and 8 girls. All of us finished through seventh grade except two, and it was a night school there on the corner and Melvin and James, they finished at night school. They didn't finish in the seventh grade. They finished in night school. And the rest of the girls all finished. There was eight of us.

Shelden: Did your parents go?

Darnelle: No, my dad was from Westmoreland. He did not go to school there at all. He had a limited education. But my mom went to a school called Tellis Run, which is still there today. It was made into a home.

Shelden: Where is Tellis Run?

Darnelle: It's right – do you know where the Lewisetta Road is? The road before you get to Glebe Road, before you get to my road. The road before there, prior to that, that's where Tellis Run is, and a guy lives in there that remodeled it. It's a home.

Shelden: Oh okay.

Darnelle: Several people have lived there.

Shelden: The same side of 360.

Darnelle: Uh huh. The road before you get to Glebe Road. It's a filling station over there. And then coming down, it's to your right. Mm hm.

Shelden: Okay. And when was that?

Darnelle: Oh, it was – my mom was born in 1889, so I guess she went there in the 90s. 1889.

Shelden: I didn't even know there was another school then.

Darnelle: Yes, it was another school.

Shelden: Hm. 'Cause I knew about the Howland School.

Darnelle: Yes, the Howland School. But this one wasn't quite as popular, because these two people came here from New York – two philampians and they came here – Miss Howland and Miss Sallie – and they made that popular, but they – that school wasn't as popular as Holley and Howland.

Shelden: Yeah, and Emily Howland was also a friend of Holley and Putnam.

Darnelle: That's right. She was a friend of those – of them.

Shelden: So, what do you remember about Tellis Run? How do you spell that, do you know?

Darnelle: Tellis? T-E – oh Lord. I wish there was this old lady name Mamie Leland, and she hadn't long died. She lived right on that road, and she was a teacher.

Shelden: Mamie Leland.

Darnelle: Uh huh, but she passed. She have a son living down on that road. The Lewisetta Road.

Shelden: Lewis Sadler, is that what you're saying?

Darnelle: Lewisetta.

Shelden: Okay.

Darnelle: And it was called Tellis Run. Uh huh. I had one of the people said, Arnita told me that her daddy went there, but her mother went to Holley, but her daddy went to Tellis Run, so she might could tell you more better than me. I don't know. That was back in the 1890s, I guess, when she went, and she was born in 1889. I guess she went there when she was seven or eight years old.

Shelden: Okay. This is interesting. Okay, and so how long did you attend at –

Darnelle: From, it was a primer, and the primer was what you called like a priming for the first grade. So back then when I started school, I couldn't go until I was seven years old, so I went from seven until I finished the seventh grade, and that was the year of 1937, and I finished in '44 and ended the seventh grade in '44.

Shelden: So, finished the seventh grade in 1944.

Darnelle: Mm hm.

Shelden: So, primer – you started in primer.

Darnelle: And the primer – and I named it, after I got older, I said wasn't nothing but a primer for the first grade.

Shelden: That's right. To get you ready for first grade. So, it's kind of a kindergarten.

Darnelle: That's right. And then you had to be seven years old.

Shelden: Okay. And you've given me your years. And you said there were 13 kids altogether?

Darnelle: Thirteen. Eight girls and five boys.

Shelden: And they all went to Holley School.

Darnelle: All went to Holley, and all finished the seventh grade, except the two older boys. And it was a night school, a tall building, which was the old Holley that stood off in front of Holley School, the present Holley School, and they finished up there what they called the night school. My mom had a lot of kids, and I guess they were the older two boys, and I guess they just came out and helped work to take care of the others, so they just didn't – at seventh grade, it was almost like finishing high school then.

Shelden: Yeah, so you said that your oldest brothers went to the original school building? Or no.

Darnelle: They started, I think, but see my older brothers and sisters, they're old enough to be my parents. And I can't remember them going to school, but I heard that from my mom, that's the way they finished, so I don't know whether they started at Holley and finished up there. They went to night school.

Shelden: They went to night school. And they finished night school in the current building.

Darnelle: No it was the old building.

Shelden: In the old building.

Darnelle: In the old building, uh huh.

Shelden: In the old Holley School. Okay, good.

Darnelle: A lot of 'em remember that school, but I can't remember it.

Shelden: Yeah. It was probably – I'm thinking that the new building was built before the old one was torn down. Do you think that's right?

Darnelle: I think it was. But it look like I have – maybe I have a faint remembrance of a tall, straight-up building that was there, but I don't remember too well.

Shelden: What color was it? Do you remember?

Darnelle: It wasn't white. What I can remember was old and dilapidated. And then it wasn't white, but I can imagine it was white at one time, I guess.

Shelden: Okay, all right. Do you remember the home building behind the school, the house?

Darnelle: Yes, faintly, yes. I remember that – and the girls that went to school with us, they used to live there. People lived there and had a basement in there, a nice foundation basement that were brick. And a family lived there until they tore it down. I can't remember the year they tore it down. It stayed there a long time. Children younger than me lived in that house, much younger lived in that house.

Shelden: That is the house that Sallie and Putnam built.

Darnelle: Yes, that's the house that – and it was well-built.

Shelden: It was a well-built one.

Darnelle: Yes, it was.

Shelden: Okay, so your oldest two brothers finished night school at the old building.

Darnelle: Yes, as well as I can remember. 'Cause remember, if they had lived, one of them would be 98 and 97, so I guess – I don't want to tell you something that's not correct.

Shelden: No, sure, sure. But I just want your best memory. So, where were you – where was your family living at the time that you were attending Holley School?

Darnelle: Right here in Lottsburg. In walking distance. We walked to school every day.

Shelden: Okay.

Darnelle: We didn't have a bus.

Shelden: And where was your family home then. Where in Lottsburg?

Darnelle: Right here – right up on the hill, where you see that house. Right there, mm hm. The next house to me, that's where the family home. It was 13 rooms, and my daddy was a carpenter, and they said every time he had a child, he added on another room. So, we had a huge house there with 13 rooms in the house.

Shelden: Oh wow, yeah. And that house that stands there now...

Darnelle: That's my sister's house.

Shelden: So, the original house, does it still exist anywhere on the property?

Darnelle: No, it's – sorrowfully, the original house was there, it stayed, it was there until 11 years old ago. And when we had the fire to tear it down, because I had three siblings that were living away, and they tried to remodel the house, and the guy that came, and they had a tin roof, and the guy that came there to remodel the house, they – he took the – what's this called, the roofs you're putting on houses now? – and put it through the tin, and we had a cistern in the house, and it messed it up, so we had them to take the fire, destroy it and burned it down – and I have pictures here of the house. Huge house – 13 rooms. Had a porch on the front and a porch on the back.

Shelden: What can you – what do you remember about the curriculum or the subjects that were taught in school?

Darnelle: Well, back then they had reading and writing and arithmetic. And I can tell you with our reading, we had – I mean, I can't remember but one book that we read, and that book carried me through. It was a hardback, blue book with a girl and a boy on the back of it. And it said *Dick and Jane*. That was the name of the book, and the book said, and I can't remember. I know it said, "Run Dick Jane." I know we had that book. And the arithmetic book was just like – in my first grade, we just had to learn addition. Then – I mean that's the primer I read, the edition. And then in the first grade, we did addition and subtracting. And then in the third grade and during the fourth grade, we did multiplications. And writing was very – I really enjoyed learning writing as well as I do, because in the third grade, we had a teacher. She was a new teacher. She had just moved here. She had just moved from – came from Virginia State College. And at that time, we would have to write, and she would tell you how you slant, and we used to do this. That would throw your letters out. And, too – if I had a pencil, I could show you how we learned to write. To write, oh boy, this slants it out, and roll around, and roll around, and roll around, that'd be the lesson we had to do that. And it did teach us, 'cause I noticed children today can't write as well as we did back then.

Shelden: Mm hm. So, you focused a lot on penmanship.

Darnelle: Penmanship, if you want to say that, mm hm.

Shelden: So reading, writing, arithmetic. Did you do history at all?

Darnelle: History as we got in the higher grades. It was – very little black history was taught to us.

Shelden: So, not really black history, but history –

Darnelle: Yes, history in general. History – and we had higher, I guess we called higher grades, the fourth and fifth, sixth and seventh, we had geography. I remember it was a green-backed book.

Shelden: You remember your books better than I think I remember mine.

Darnelle: Yeah, it was green.

Shelden: Do you still have any of those books?

Darnelle: You know we, dad and my mom, we was living up there in the house, we called, we named the house the big house. Well, my sister came down, she destroyed all those books. In the corner, my mom had a bookshelf from the bottom of the floor to the top with all of our schoolbooks, and it hurt us so bad that she destroyed every one of them.

Shelden: Yeah, I'm sad I don't get to see them.

Darnelle: We don't get to see them.

Shelden: Do you know anybody who has any of those books?

Darnelle: Well, you might would interview her, and they still have the old homeplace there. It's Inez Armstrong.

Shelden: Oh, Inez, okay.

Darnelle: And she still have her old home. They won't let their home go down. They had it all painted up, and that's an old, old house. And I don't remember when it was built. But they still have that. But she's the one that probably still has some of those books. And Emma Carter.

Shelden: Yeah.

Darnelle: Emma got, I guess, a little bit of everything there.

Shelden: She did show me some of what she had. But I should ask Inez.

Darnelle: Inez, because she still has an old homeplace up there. Right up there on the Kingston Road. I don't guess you know where that is.

Shelden: Yeah, I think I do. She did not –

Darnelle: Was she there that day?

Shelden: She was. Well, I think Inez – I have an Inez...

Darnelle: Inez. Uh huh. Inez Armstrong.

Shelden: And then ... "would you be able to..." Oh, she said she would be willing to be interviewed.

Darnelle: Yes, I think she would. I called her today after I saw Liz and she's not there. She must be away with the kids, 'cause she hasn't been there for the whole week.

Shelden: Uh huh. Maybe you can give me her number later, so ...

Darnelle: Yes, I know her number.

Shelden: Okay good. So, and Emma and I have done up to here in this interview. That's as much as I've gotten done with her yet. We stopped half-way and then she had her heart attack, so I've got to get back to her. She's doing better now.

Darnelle: Oh, she's doing much better, but I don't know whether she's out of the woods or not. But someone says they do see her out now, but she's not driving. You know. And I have Barbara – did you have an interview with Barbara?

Shelden: I did. And my tape recorder wasn't working, so I didn't get it recorded. I have notes from it, but – I have to do it again so I can get it on audio.

Darnelle: Okay, 'cause she said she got hers on Saturday.

Shelden: Mm hm, yeah.

Darnelle: 'Cause I thought she was supposed to come today. She said, no I've got mine that Saturday.

Shelden: I'll call her again to schedule a make-up. I thought I should get a success under my belt before I tried her again. Okay, so you told me a little bit about the school curriculum. Can you describe a typical day at the school?

Darnelle: Yes, my most typical day was the Maypole Day – we had a May – we were every – in May, school closing time, we would have the Maypole. And I remember I used to like to go around and wrap that Maypole with all different colors. That was real good. That was real good – I enjoyed that. That was one of the particular days, and when I was in the fifth grade, I had this teacher, and she would like to teach us dances. And I remember one dance that we learned, and we had to do it to the rhythm. And it was called "School Days." And it went like this, "school days, school days / dear old Golden Rule days / Reading and a-writing and arithmetic/ taught to the tune of a hickory stick / You were my barefoot, bashful beau / I was your girl in calico / When you wrote on my slate / I love you Joe / When we was a couple 'o kids." And up until it was two or three years, I could do that little dance, but I can't do it now. And that was the cutest little dance, and I remember, and then they would take us. This teacher, she would carry us to different schools, and we had to do stunts and little dances and things, and that was in the seventh grade. And I really did enjoy that because when you got to go to another school that was three or four miles away from you, that was great, and sometimes, you would go almost as far as Kilmarnock to Auntie Jeanne's school. I enjoyed that. That was another thing that I really did enjoy. The maypole – I guess they called it the May Day.

Shelden: Uh huh. May Day. And then you said in seventh grade, your teacher – who was your teacher who taught you about School Days, do you remember?

Darnelle: Miss Mildred Tucker. That was in the fifth grade.

Shelden: Imelda?

Darnelle: Mildred.

Shelden: And who is you teacher who took you around -

Darnelle: That same teacher. She was the one [ringing] Is that your phone or mine?

Shelden: I think it's yours.

Darnelle: Okay.

Shelden: All right, here we go. We're rolling again. So, Miss Mildra Tucker. Did you say M-I-L-D-R-A?

Darnelle: Mildred. MildRED is R-E-D, I think.

Shelden: Uh huh, yeah.

Darnelle: Tucker is T-U-C-K-E-R.

Shelden: Okay, thanks. What was a regular day like at school.

Darnelle: Well, the first thing – we had devotional every day. And everybody had to repeat a Bible verse. Friday we called assembly day, where everybody got together, all the classes come together, and we had those four rooms, and like I say, was two classes taught in each room, sometimes three. I guess – like I say, less advanced children would be – maybe they would split one class and one who was a little advanced would be ahead of the other one that was a little slower. So, sometime, it got three in a class, and sometime – would split, you know.

Shelden: Okay. And then in a regular day after devotion, what would happen next?

Darnelle: We would go to our classes, and the first thing we would have, like I said the devotionals. You definitely had to say a saying and then from there, we would – I guess our first class. I guess way back then, I can remember high school, but elementary school, I think the first thing we had was our arithmetic class. We would do that. And from there, you had called it recess. No, we had couple classes. I guess recess – no, arithmetic was the first, and then from the arithmetic class, we had – oh, we had something called the spelling class. We had to spell, learn how to spell. And then we would had two recesses, so we probably go to recess. After prior recess, we came back and had another – it was lunchtime. After recess, we had lunch. I guess I'm getting this right, because it's been so long. Sixty-some years ago. And we had lunch. And after lunch, we would come back and do the others like, oh, we probably had writing class. That's way down in the grades, but then as we got older, you know, the older classes, we had history and geography. We had – and we went home at 3 o'clock every day, so 2 o'clock or quarter to 2, we would have another recess. And then 3 o'clock, we'd walk home.

Shelden: Okay.

Darnelle: And what was so unfortunate, the white kids always had a bus. And we didn't. And we had to walk. And my goodness, children walked eight and ten miles. But I was blessed. We had a field right across – we'd go across the field and right by the church and go right to the school. So, it was very short for us. The only time we got a ride was the days that our daddy

carried us in that old truck called – children would laugh and call it the kitchen cabinet. He would throw all of us in there, and we would go. And like I said, my parents raised seven grandchildren. And some of them was the same age as us, ‘cause like I told you some of my older brothers and sisters were old enough to be my parents. And so, he would throw all the grandchildren in there with us, too. All the children – all go to school. Only on rainy or snowy days, otherwise, we walked. ‘Cause he worked.

Shelden: Yeah. So you could see the white kids getting a ride in their school bus.

Darnelle: Uh huh. I hate to tell you this, but that was actually true. They would ride and come all down this road, Glebe Road, and all – ever since I remember, white kids had a bus, and they would put their windows down and spit at us and call us names. But do you want me to tell you the real truth? Every damn day – one day, a girl was named Gladys Gaskins. And she said, "we're gonna get those white kids." We said, "What are you going to do, Gladys?" She said, "I'm a get us a limb with prongs on it." And when they put the window down the next time to spit on us, we'd go right – I could see all of 'em had the windows down, we'd go right across that bus, and the driver would let them slow down to do the kids like that. And she took that prong – it went all the way across their face, do you know from that day to this they never did put the window down any more? That was the actual truth, Mary.

Shelden: Wow.

Darnelle: That is the truth. And you can tell – ask any of my sisters or anybody – you know, all of those children is dead that was on my road that had to walk, except one, and she's 89 years old. Do you have Margaret Jackson on your list.

Shelden: No, I don't. I should.

Darnelle: She was older than me. But, anyhow. I don't know whether she was up there that day or not.

Shelden: Is she still alive?

Darnelle: Yes, she's still alive. She's 89.

Shelden: Let me add her, here.

Darnelle: Oh, I think she said she didn't want to be interviewed. I remember she was sitting at the table, and she told you, No – and then this other lady that's 97 got her hand over her mouth, said she didn't go to Holley School, which she didn't. She said no, her mind is not well enough to be interviewed. I remember she told me that.

Shelden: Okay. Well, okay then. So, you'd see the kids on the bus and they'd call you names. They'd spit at you.

Darnelle: Put their windows down and spit at us. And what stopped them when she got this branch with all these prongs on it, and when they put the windows down, they were too

surprised. She took that and brought it across all their faces, and never did they put the window down any more. And the bus driver was cruel. Now we had it sort of hard then.

Shelden: So, the bus driver would slow down –

Darnelle: for them to do that.

Shelden: But he or she didn't get out of the bus when she –

Darnelle: No, no – she thought it was funny.

Shelden: Interesting.

Darnelle: She thought it was funny.

Shelden: Um, can you – do you remember anything about the teaching methods, about how the teacher taught, what he or she did, like were there blackboard lessons – or ...

Darnelle: Yeah, start on the blackboard. The blackboard was on the wall, and there were kids that would go to the board. First was arithmetic. That was the main thing that they drilled in us. Arithmetic and reading – and writing. And she would put on the board, say for instance, she would put multiply 45 times 10. And we had to – and she would put it, it would be on the board. And we had to go up there and work out the answer. Then, after we got older, the numbers was real large, like adding and multiplication. And most of it was taught on the board. And then I guess they were called a test, most of the arithmetic was taught on board. And we had some – I don't know what you call it now – it was like purple that they would stand it on there and that was what passed around there when we had a test.

Shelden: Like a mimeograph?

Darnelle: Yeah, but it was – it's not like – it's hard to describe it. Looked like to me, it was on some kind of – it was, I guess, a mimeograph and looked like when the letters come out, it wasn't very clear, and we had to. That was we – that was called out when we did our tests. We received – I'm trying to remember how often we'd see report cards. It was like every six weeks, we would get a report card, and that's how they are. [ringing] Will you cut it off again?

Shelden: Sure, no problem. Okay, we're recording again. Um, let's see. So, blackboard – anything else that you remember about what methods they used?

Darnelle: And then they would have oral spelling. And we would have to stand up – my mom and them had that back in their day. We had to stand up and see who the child who last was spelling – go down the row. And like you would stand the first, and the child who stands up the last was sort of rewarded with nothing much. But they were – that how we do. And then a lot of times, we would have – like I say, oral spelling. And a lot of times, we'd have to write the spelling down. And then they'd grade our page, our paper. And I think in elementary school, we had A, Bs and Cs, and then after we got to high school, you know, you got grades.

Shelden: Can you describe. Okay, well, you just kinda were describing a spelling lesson. Do you remember anything else about – what – about handwriting, you kind of described penmanship. Um, what about reading? What was that like? Do you remember a reading lesson?

Darnelle: Well, it was sort of hard for us to call the words. We weren't taught like my kids were the pho- what you call them, pho-

Shelden: Phonetics.

Darnelle: Phonetics. We would have to point to the word. Like for instance, this word here, we would have had to point, like questions, and it made you a bad reader and right today, I'm not a real good reader, because you know, you had to look, and they say, you know your ABCs. Oh that was taught – the ABCs. And you – it was hard for you to see the questions. And you didn't know the phonetics. We had to kind of learn. Reading was hard for us. And I noticed most of the girls, you know, the kids in our class wasn't very good readers like the kids is today. They can – you know, my kids can go right on through, but I can't do that like that. So reading was kinda hard for me. Right today, I think I – I did as well as everybody else in my class, but my best grade was arithmetic. And you know how they used to do. The child who finished their work the first, they could go outside to recess. And by me being very good at arithmetic, you know what I would do – they could tell you, children could tell you – I would, my first paper, and then you weren't supposed to let the teacher see you, and when I go out, and my sister and I had to sit together. If you had a sibling, you had to sit with that one. And when I'd pretend I'd go back to get something, I would put it in her lap, and she'd be the next one to come up like that. And then she had a real good girlfriend named Aura. She would give her, if she had a way – give it to Aura. Teacher never did catch up with us. We were slick. Never did catch up with us, 'cause I was better at arithmetic than I was at anything else. And my sister that sit in the seat with me, she was better in spelling.

Shelden: So, you'd use her paper to get out to recess.

Darnelle: She was a mean teacher. Her name was Ms. Ida Washington. You could sit right beside your sister, and she – you'd better not look on her paper. When we had to do written work, you'd better not look on, Ms. Washington – she would come – she had these great long switches. It ain't like it was when we were coming along. Teacher would beat you, and then you go home, and the parents would beat you if they told – you were scared to tell your parents, because you'd get another beating. And I was supposed to have been a mischievous child. I was the only child that my mother had the teacher had to send home for being bad. And one time, I really wasn't bad, but I was sent home, and I got angry and I hit the teacher. You know my reason for hitting her? We had a teacher who had a habit of going outside and leaving one child in the classroom to take names – as to who kept noise or being bad while the teacher was out. So this girl, particular girl, was name Gladys. And so the teacher went out, and I remember it just as well as I was there now – third grade, and I can remember it just as well. She – was some boy that she liked herself. And his name was Robert Payne. And she said, "Robert, Darnelle said she really love you." I didn't say it. And I told her she was telling a lie. She said, "I'm a tell the teacher on you that you was acting bad." And she said, "the rest of y'all act up, and I'll put it on Darnelle," so when Ms. Maith came back in, she asked, "who was keeping all that noise?" She said, "Darnelle." She said, "How could she keep that much noise by herself?" I said, "Ms. Maith,

I wasn't keeping all that noise." I said, "was other children." But Gladys outcried, "I don't want to hear it. You got out and get yourself a switch." I had to go out there and get a switch for to beat my own self with. And I – when I come in – I mean, I went right down by Miss Putnam's house, where the little switches were back there. I came back with a switch. And I was so angry, Mary, when the teacher hit me, I hit her back. I remember hitting her back. And that was bad. And she sent me home. But I – I went to school several years, and I didn't miss one day. So she sent me home and said I didn't have to stay all day but to go home. And I'm a tell Ms.

Thompson on you. So, I went home and I was crying. I told mamma. "The teacher's not going to tell no story." I said, "Actually mamma, I didn't do it." And I almost got a beating when I got home. And so she said, "I'm going to see Miss Maith," and Miss Maith said, "yes, Darnelle hit me and she kicked me and she tore my stockings." I guess I had on a pair of regular shoes. So, I said, mamma said, "Most of the time if your children are lying, you can tell, but she didn't look like she was lying." And I said, "Miss Maith, you didn't hear me out. I was telling you, and you just told me to go get the switch, go get the switch." So, you know, she regretted that. And my daddy was working over on a house, over at a house, at her mother's house, and so she told my dad, "Mr. Thompson, when you come over, you bring Darnelle over." And her mother got angry and said, "Is that the one that hit you." She said, "Mamma, you ain't got nothing to do with it." You know what she did? She went to the store and bought me ice cream. And that was a treat. Back then you could get something like that, and she realized I was one of her favorite children after that. Yeah. That girl – I can remember that just as well as it was today. She told all the kids to keep noise. She said, "Darnelle couldn't keep all that noise by herself." Said, "Yes, she did." "Go over there and get that switch. Go get that switch." Oh, teachers beat you then. That was hard though. Something if you know you didn't do it. But if I had been bad and did something bad, then I knew I was supposed to be punished, but the girl told her that –

Shelden: It was too much when you hadn't done it. Yeah.

Darnelle: Yeah. I was ready for her, though. [laughing] Every time she <gesture>, I <gesture>. That was bad. Don't put all that on my record, though. [laughing] Don't put all that on there, but it's the truth. Everything I'm telling you, Mary, is the truth.

Shelden: I believe it.

Darnelle: As far as I can remember, I'm telling the truth.

Shelden: I believe it. Can you describe – okay, we've talked about textbooks a little bit. Do you remember any other materials used at this school?

Darnelle: Well, at Christmastime, we had something called art material paper that we used to decorate the tree with. And you'd cut it down in strips – all colors, green, red, blue, any color – we would take all those strips. We'd put it together. We'd glue it together and decorate our Christmas tree with. And then like – any holiday, we'd try to do art – we called it, at that time we called it art material paper.

Shelden: Is it construction paper?

Darnelle: Yeah, construction paper. It was thick and it was all different colors. And back then, we called that art paper.

Shelden: Mm hm.

Darnelle: I'm a tell you another thing I did. I could draw pretty well, and when I was in the sixth grade, I drew a set of lungs and I won first place for it, prize for it. I remember how I done so – they asked each child to do something in health. That's right. We had a book called a health book, and I had to draw. They asked you to draw whatever you want, and I drew the lungs. And I won – I don't know what I won. I know I got a ribbon. I don't know whether I got a – first place. My sister told me I got first place. I told her I didn't know whether I got first – blue ribbon or the red ribbon – I did not know I got a ribbon for that. I was in the sixth grade then. I remember that.

Shelden: Anything else about materials that you used. You talked about the blackboard and the mimeograph sheets and –

Darnelle: I can tell you what kind of heat we had.

Shelden: Uh huh.

Darnelle: Well, we had wood heat, and boys had to bring the wood in. We had a tin stove, and I forgot the girls had to wash the blackboard – that's what they were supposed to do. And the boys were supposed to bring the heat in, the wood in. And every evening, a certain girl had to clean the blackboard down, dust the – we had erasures – we had to go outside and dust the erasers on the outside, and the type of water we had, it was in a pump, and we had to pump the water like that to get the water.

Shelden: And you had a privy outside? A privy, a latrine outside?

Darnelle: Oh yes. We call that a toilet. Yes, a latrine. And we had to go outside, and everybody had to use that. That was so unsanitary, but that's all we had. That's all we had, and every body had to use that – the boys, we called it the boys bathroom, the boys toilet – that was called then – and the girls toilet. We had two of those. It wasn't – I look back over my life, and I tell my kids, I say, "Well, you know, we thought it was hard, but I appreciate what I did back then, those days than what the kids have nowadays." They couldn't walk from my lane to the house, my youngest girl, and neither one of them – the bus would come right to the lane and pick 'em up. And I said look what we had to do – so cold, and we would go out there, and when we got there, people lived down at the bottom of the road, their dad had to row them in a boat to get to it. And we would put the basin of water on the stove and warm, for us to warm our hands. You could have on gloves, and you'd be freezing, some of those kids. We didn't have to walk that far, but we was good and cold when we got there. And then the children who had walked ten or fifteen miles, you know how they felt when they got there. And that's why a lot of them had a limited education. Because they had to walk so far. It was so far, in that cold winter, and their parents didn't have no automobiles or nothing to bring 'em. It was rough back there then, but I told 'em, I wouldn't like to go back where I come from, but I appreciate the little bit that I did get, and I regret that I didn't go on to college because my mom used to say when my nieces and nephews and children finished – "are they college material?" But I think I was college material

back in that day, but what happened – my sister and I finished at the same time. My sister married the teacher. My mamma had two children in college, and at that time, I didn't want to go. I just wanted to go to Baltimore to a city, so I went to Baltimore to work until I got married, which I didn't stay there but two and a half years. I came back to Virginia, got married, married a guy from Lancaster County, and I had two children when I was in Lancaster County. Fourteen years later, I was back in Northumberland, I had my youngest girl. There are my kids up there. That's my son, he's the oldest. The baby on this side and the oldest daughter on that side.

Shelden: You're saying Leicester County?

Darnelle: Lancaster. LAN-Caster. L-A-N-C-A-S-T-E-R.

Shelden: Thank you. Thank you for spelling it out for the Northerner.

Darnelle: Yeah, so. But I did do substitute work. I substituted in Lancaster when my kids were young. And I moved back here. Really, the reason for me moving back here, my parents got old, and nobody was here with them, so I moved back over with my two kids. One was seven; the other one, nine. And I stayed with mom, and like I said, I stayed in the big house until I built out here. In 1975, I built here. And later in '72, I had another baby, 14 years different in ages. So, 14 years difference in my girls' ages. But I was thankful to the Lord that all three of them finished Virginia State University. All three of the kids had finished. My baby girl is in Northern Virginia, and my oldest girl, she's a physical therapist, and she's on a conference now. My son came back home, which he said he won't. And he's right here with me today, and he's – he's working as a – he didn't get anything in his field. The two girls were blessed. He's a distributor at Potomac Supply over in – what county is that? – Westmoreland County. That's where he is. So all of them.

Shelden: So, you went to Holley School through seventh grade. Did you go anywhere following that?

Darnelle: Yes, I finished high school at Julius Rosenwald.

Shelden: So you went to Rosenwald. All right

Darnelle: Yes, finished high school. And back then, if you finished high school, you were ready for college. I finished Julius Rosenwald.

Shelden: Yeah, and –

Darnelle: In 1948.

Shelden: So, you went eighth through twelfth at Rosenwald?

Darnelle: No, Rosenwald didn't go in for eleventh grade – at that time, you'd finished high school – you went eight through eleven, then you would graduate. They didn't put on the twelfth grade until 1955, I think, let me see – it was in the 50s. I don't know, '54 or '55.

Shelden: Okay, was that true for white kids, too? Everybody had a twelfth grade, or –

Darnelle: No, everybody had the eleventh grade. They had the same commencement, they'd come as far as the eleventh when they'd finish.

Shelden: So white kids only went through eleventh, too.

Darnelle: Yeah, yeah. They went through eleventh, too, and then – then, it was in the 50s. I'm not sure, like '54, '55, that they added on, adds on the twelfth grade, so that was later.

Shelden: So, you – we talked about your – you graduated seventh grade in '44, so that was long before integration.

Darnelle: Oh yeah, I never, we never went to school with integration. Believe it or not, my oldest two children was in the – first we had the school of choice, and I can't remember exactly what year, and then after one year of school of choice, which my kids – it was black and white went together, then the next year after that was totally integration. From that, it went on, but the youngest girl –

Shelden: When – what year was that? Do you remember?

Darnelle: Oh, let me see, it was in the – my daughter had started school in '6-. It you're born in '5-. One was born in '56, and one were born in '58, and I think – Oh, I'm so afraid, Mary, I can't tell you the exact, so –

Shelden: Some time in the 60s, though, maybe?

Darnelle: No – yeah. Well, like if she was born in '58, and she started in the 5th grade with integration, so – what year would that be. I used to be good at arithmetic.

Shelden: Okay, so it's hard to figure, 'cause she'd have been, what, five when she started school. Six?

Darnelle: Yeah, she were five. No – the oldest girl was six. My baby girl was five.

Shelden: So –

Darnelle: Fourteen years made a lot of difference, because when Tammy started school, she went with total integration. And when Susan and Phillip started school, it was school of choice one year, and she was in the fifth grade when school of choice. Then sixth grade was totally integration. So, she might have started school in '54, if she was –

Shelden: No, she was born in '56. You mean '64.

Darnelle: I mean '64.

Shelden: Yeah, and actually –

Darnelle: Yeah, and it went up to the fifth grade, 'cause – ever like I guess it would be around '69 before we had total integration.

Shelden: Okay, '69.

Darnelle: 'Cause she was – around '69. Maybe my son come in, I don't know whether he's coming in or not – I will ask him, 'cause he could tell you right off the bat when it was.

Shelden: Okay, all right. So '69 would have been maybe total integration. And then '68 would have been school of choice.

Darnelle: Uh huh. He might be coming in. If he does, he can tell you the exact date, 'cause his memory's better than mine.

Shelden: All right. Good, I hope I get to meet him.

Darnelle: He might come in. I don't know.

Shelden: So, my next question is: how would you describe the importance of the school to the African-American community or to the larger Lottsburg community or to you and your family.

Darnelle: To me, Mary, it was very important. The reason why I say that to think of those philampians would come here and educate the blacks, which would have no education at all, and I read in the book, like I said, I misplaced or someone got my book, that they would also open up to the poor whites. They were allowed to come, too. And I thought it was very important for the blacks and then for the underprivileged people. I wouldn't call them poor whites. But for everybody. It was opened up to everybody. And to me, it was something great, and it gave my older sisters and brothers a chance to get an education. And then back then, they couldn't go to coll – even to go to high school, some of the older ones, because you had to pay to go. And you had to have a bus, and only the people who had one or two children could afford to send their children to high school back then. And so, like I said, the Taylor woman, she's 90, but she went to high school. But my mom had 13 children, and it made – and dad had 13 children, it made it hard. So, it was like – not many finished out high school. One of my sisters went to school in Philadelphia after she got to the seventh grade. And she went to a nice school, the one that's named Garnet Pearl. So, the one from – Liz and Virginia and Doris, Darnelle, Oliver and Lawrence. There's seven of us finished high school. Two of us went to college. My sister, Virginia, which died in a tragic accident. She was a – she taught here. And my brother Lawrence, he went and he was officer. He went to Virginia State and graduated as an officer. He didn't want to teach, but he finished, and he went on to do great things. He's passed about five years ago. He was the baby. And I had one brother, he was – which his son now is a lawyer, a judge – he was so smart, he could teach the children in high school, in the high school, and he was working as a mechanic. He could build a car. And the children from high school would come and ask him to come and do the math for them, which he'd be – when we was in elementary school, we only had arithmetic, but as we got in high school, it was algebra and math. And they would come there and ask him to work it for 'em.

Shelden: And he could do it.

Darnelle: He could do it. He was a smart – and when he died, he died very suddenly. And the principal of the elementary school said it grieved him to his heart that he couldn't send that boy to college, 'cause he was one of the smartest students he ever taught.

Shelden: What was his name?

Darnelle: Oliver Wesley Thompson. We called him Joe. And that was – he had three children, and his baby girl died when she was 27. And his oldest daughter is a French teacher. And the youngest girl, she was teaching, but she died at 27. And the boy is in New Jersey – he's a lawyer – no! He's a judge.

Shelden: Judge, yeah.

Darnelle: And they said, "No wonder, 'cause he had such a smart daddy." His daddy was a real smart guy, but he didn't have the privilege to go on to school, so what he did, he left and went to Baltimore, and he had his business as a mechanic there. And he could help his kids with his work and all. He had a brain on him. But he didn't have the opportunity to go to college, you know.

Shelden: So Holley School was important as a starting point for a lot of people.

Darnelle: A lot of people, it certainly was. And that's why I'm so interested in it, and I try to get my kids involved. I said, "No, ya'll didn't go, but I would love to see ya'll just try to help us upkeep the school." And it's so hard – people my age, and just a few of us, maybe 12 of us, would come to the meetings. So, we now have got a vote, like – I call him Peter – Harold and Stafford and Don – we've got a few that are coming to, you know, push us on. But we don't have enough people to keep it, you know, to upkeep it. But one time, it was great, because we had friends of Holley. And they would help us, and they brought in so much money and all, but now we just almost stay in the red.

Shelden: Yeah.

Darnelle: Yeah.

Shelden: Well, I'm hoping that some of our project may get to reach some new folks, maybe even some folks that didn't go to Holley School.

Darnelle: That's what we're trying to get now. So, we did have a group of men that called it – what is it, Holley Community or something – and they got involved and they was at not this meeting, but the meeting before last, and they – and there's one guy in there who seems to be real interested, and his name Wayne Hooper, and he got a group of men, I guess it's about ten of them, to come together, and their project is, they said they wanted to – by May, they wanted to have a project that they're going to have different things, and they named the different things they would have, hoping that they could bring at least in, maybe five to ten thousand dollars to help. I don't know how well that's going to go, but they're having separate meetings and everything, so hopefully, it will. It will work out. Hopefully.

Shelden: I hope that happens.

Darnelle: Yeah, it really needs to happen.

Shelden: Yeah. How would you describe relationships between the school and its white neighbors?

Darnelle: Now it's different than when I went, because we had nothing to do with the white neighbors. But now it has some very nice, friendly, white neighbors. And like the people on my road, you know, we don't visit each other, which I don't visit the blacks either, but we're friendly. You know, we say hi and bye. And we have a neighborhood watch on my road, and once a year – it was like back summer – one time, once a year, we will meet and everybody brought their favorite dish, and we would sit and socialize and most of the people that's on our road now are new people come from Northern Virginia and different places, and they're building new homes down on that road. And they're very friendly. We have no problem, you know – each one of us bring their favorite dish and – like the old time ones, if anybody pass and I know them, I will bake for them and carry it, and take it to them, so – I guess, I don't know, we get along fine now, but not when I was coming up, not when I was coming along, no.

Shelden: So, you talked about the kids on the bus. What about the grown-ups? Did you interact with white adults at all?

Darnelle: Same way. No, they didn't have anything to do with you. We had one girl who lived next door to us that – that house has long been torn down – and her mom would want her to get off the bus at our lane, and she wouldn't do it. And we told, 'cause she – she originally came from Northern Virginia. And she was real friendly, and her daughter wouldn't get off. She would get off with a white girl, and she lived down the road. And someone told her mother, and her mother beat her for not getting off at our lane. And I felt for her, because you know, they would tell her, "you're a nigger lover" or something like that. And her name was Ruth, and Ruth said, "I love y'all, but I don't want to get off because they call me a nigger-lover." And she would get off of the bus, and we didn't tell her mother. But some of the whites told her mother, and she said her mother beat her. And I felt for Ruth, because I wouldn't want to get off if my parent told me to get off at her mother's lane and the black kids would see me, you know. And they would say I was a white-lover or something.

Shelden: Would they have said that, do you think?

Darnelle: Uh huh. Yeah.

Shelden: They'd have made fun.

Darnelle: Yeah. And they'd probably wanted to beat me for doing that. "Why you going with them white kids? They don't love you. You're black." They would say that. They didn't use the word black. They would say nigger.

Shelden: Yeah, so do you remember interactions with white adults yourself? Or did you just not ever run into white adults?

Darnelle: I never run into any of them, other than what they want my mom to do some work for them and they kill a pig or something, and my mom would go over there and help 'em clean the pig, you know, scrub the pig or whatever had to be done. But I was a kid then, and after I got grown, I really didn't have much interaction. But once I went to work at Levi's, you know, back in the 70s. And like I said, I guess total integration was back in '69 or something. Oh, I got along fine, and one of the ladies was my age, she said, "Darnelle, I'm not gonna call y'all black." I said, "Well, that's what I want – that's what we are." She said, "No, that used to be a fighting word." And she was a white lady saying that, and "I can't gonna call y'all black. Can I still call you colored?" I said, "well, I don't guess you colored me, but you can call me anything you want." And so, you know, and I – like in the 70s, I got along fine. She would come to my house or – also, lot of things I had that I didn't want, she was glad to take them. She – I remember my sister living in D.C., and I had a lot of extra sheets and things. And she would come and she would appreciate it. And like, when we had – we had meals. We'd all sit together. We didn't discriminate ourselves. But I tell you, we had a Levi's club. We'd meet once a month. Lot of times, we'd discriminate ourselves, Mary, 'cause most of us would come and sit at one table. And they'll come over and trying to be friendly with us. And I'd tell the girls, "don't act like this, you know, we all gotta get along." But you know it was hard, you know, at my age, co-mingling with them. You know, it made a difference. But now, I get along with them fine. You come to my house, and I go to their house. No problem. Mm mm. I don't have no problems now. But back then, in the 40s and the 50s, it was a big problem. Yeah, made a lot of difference.

Shelden: Um, okay. We've covered that already. What was it like for your kids during integration – do you remember any of that? What did they tell you about it?

Darnelle: Problem at first, school of choice. My oldest daughter – the baby girl hadn't started school. She had a problem and like I said, the white driver, she was very prejudiced. And they were – I think they were frightened to death because it was school of choice. And it was full of children on her bus that were black. A lot of kids didn't want to go to the white school. And she got on the bus one day, and when she got off, they took chewing gum and put it on the seat, and they'd say, "you sit there," and want them to sit, you know, and she was young and she was afraid, and she'd not notice no chewing gum was there. And when she got up, it was the first, that was a little new outfit I had gotten her. She got up, and she said, "Mama, I was stuck to the seat." They all sat and laughed, you know. So, it was one girl that lived the third house down. She was older. And she would look out for the younger children on the bus. And so she said, "What's happened to you, Sue." She said – oh, she went in there, and the teacher was name Ms. Gardy. And she went in there crying, and she got Sue, and said, "What is wrong." And she said, "Look at my clothes." And she was all stuck up in chewing gum. And I went up to see Ms. Gardy, and I told 'em, you know – she said, "It will never happen again." She called the children that was on the bus and found out who was the child that did it and what – they didn't tell, 'cause it was a whole group of them, and she said, "If ever I hear a student...." The teachers were very nice when it went to total integration, and they loved my kids. They really did. My daughter Susan was always so petite. They said they always – I have pictures and things, and area she would sit with them and – she was very petite. But my baby girl is stout. You know. And so from that day to this, they didn't bother any more. But they had that same tendency of calling them little nigger children. Was it the older girl, parents came up there, and this woman – the other woman did like the old time. She would slow the bus down, and their parents said, "I had a hoe

and hit right on the bus, and she didn't slow it down no more." And the children never had, they never picked on 'em or nothing anymore. So they – oh, they got the best of friends. Some of their best friends are white kids. They could get along better sometimes with the white kids than they could with the black, 'cause if you had something a little different, some of the blacks would be jealous, you know. And even the Keysers that had money here, when Susan was in the sixth grade. I forgot the – his name was Kenny Keyser. He went – his parents took his some – they had money and his parents took him somewhere. He came back with this beautiful bracelet that he gave to Susan. And I said, "where did you get the bracelet?" She said, "Kenny give it to me." I said, "you take that bracelet right back to Kenny." And "Mama, I want a bracelet." "No, you take it back to Kenny." And then I thought about it. I thought that was ugly of me, but she carried it back. And Kenny said, "Susan, why'd you bring it back?" She said, "My mama told me I couldn't have it." He said, "Why you couldn't have the bracelet." She said, "My mama said I couldn't have it." So, she carried it back, and like I said, some of their best friends are white kids now. They get along fine, especially my son, he knows everybody. And everybody calls him at Summit Hill. They get along fine. But like I said, it was much different when I come along. Yeah, they're fine. They're getting along fine. She's at a conference now with only two blacks and about ten whites. So, they have no problem.

Shelden: What do you know – I have two questions left to ask you. What do you about the school that you would most like others to know?

Darnelle: I always tell them it was a learning experience for my 13 siblings, sisters and brothers. And it was – I call it a research like I guess I'll go back and repeat myself that we had a place where we could be educated at, and what I don't know about it is that – I don't know what I would like to, one thing I would like to see it kept up and keep going after I go off – to see it– I would love for to see Holley School just to continue grow. I would really love to see that. I–

Shelden: What do you not know about the school that you wish you did know, that you'd like to know.

Darnelle: What I don't know about the school that I wish I did know? Maybe – I know that was impossible. I wish I had known those two people who came here. I know that's impossible.

Shelden: You'd like to know Holley and Putnam.

Darnelle: I'd love to know Holley and Putnam. And you know, they're buried right in our cemetery.

Shelden: Yeah, I know that Putnam is there.

Darnelle: And what God placed on their minds to come all the way here just that some of us could be educated. I would say that was a blessing.

Shelden: Yeah.

Darnelle: I believe my son – you're gonna see my son.

Shelden: Oh great, I get to meet him. Thank you very much for your time today.

Darnelle: I hope I helped you some, but some of the things I couldn't recall, so –

Shelden: You did great.

[END RECORDING]

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