

[Session 1]

Shelden: Keep talking a minute – still testing...

Emma: My children are not interested in history and passing down to their children and so forth in the future, and I tried to tell them that the black race has made more progress in the last 100 years than any other race on the face of the earth. I said and the early beginnings was at the end of slavery. I said we were cast out with nothing, no shelter, no food, no means of an education. We didn't have anything. We weren't ... we didn't even receive the 40 acres and the mule. You understand what I'm saying? I said –

Shelden: Let me stop you a minute, 'cause I want –

Emma: What area should I pursue? What do you want to know?

Shelden: I have some questions.

Emma: You have some questions, all right.

Shelden: So, let's start with the questions and then, then we can just open it up, and you can talk about whatever occurs to you. Is that all right?

Emma: That's fine.

Shelden: Okay good. So, my first question... first of all, this is Emma Griggs Carter.

Emma: Emma D. Carter – Emma Diggs.

Shelden: Diggs. Okay. I have it written down on the first page of my notes incorrectly, and I've been going back and forth.

Emma: And I would prefer for – any future use of this information that I be called Emma Diggs Carter.

Shelden: D-I-G-G-S?

Emma: That's correct.

Shelden: Okay, good, thanks. And this is August 21, 2010, and we are at the Northumberland Public Library, County Public Library. So, my first question is what is your association with the Holley School? Did you attend, a family member, other associations with the school?

Emma: When we moved here in the late 40s, I became a student of the Holley School. My father was a student at the Holley School, as were his mother and father. They walked from up in the woods or in the forest, as they called it, across the beaver

dam to the Holley School in all kinds of weather. And they could not attend in the summertime. They couldn't attend until after the crops were put in and harvested, and then they went to school in October to April, I'm thinking. And what they learned, they learned in the wintertime, and I'm told they walked barefooted most of the time.

Shelden: From where?

Emma: From up in the Coan Stage area. Well I'm just referring to my family now, but the families lived all over Lottsburg, down little hamlets and little coves and down on the waterfront and that type of thing. Some of them had to row their boat from Coan River across over here to Bundick's and then walked to Holley School. And this was in all kinds of weather. They had to bring their lunch in an old syrup can with the handle, and sometimes it would be a sweet potato or a biscuit with a piece of bacon or sausage if they had it. Or if they didn't, they did without until they got home. There were no stores or drug stores or just little family-run, mom-and-pop, you know I guess you'd call them all-occasion and all, you could buy everything there. Harnesses for the horses, food for the family, feed for the chickens, something for your rheumatism –

Shelden: General store.

Emma: Just a general store. You know, the material you made your little dresses out of came from there and also the shirts and the boots and whatever. And usually, with the amount of money they made, they had to run a store account, and as they couldn't write, they had to mark an "x," and they didn't know whether the amount put down was actually what they had purchased or what, and a lot of times, it was another form of slavery, and they never got free of or paid, ever paid their bill.

Shelden: Sharecropping – credit at the company –

Emma: Sharecropping, that type of thing. Yes, and if they had a little bit of land, they worked it, but still nobody had an education as far as how to count my money or how to purchase nutritious foods. Well, basically, their food was nutritious because everything came from the garden, everything; when they were able to buy pigs, when they were able to have a cow. It was a gradual, teachers' process of growing and learning, and the teachers that came here, Miss Putnam and Miss Holley, they taught the girls how to sew and how to cook and how to clean – those were the only avenues where any revenue was gained and, you know, my father said he used to get angry when his mother would come home and her pay would be a half a hog's head or a bag of cast-off clothes and they would be raggedy. His father[¹'s mother, Louisa Diggs] cooked here at the tavern here in Heathsville, and he used to walk from Coan Stage, up in the forest, as they used to call it, to down here and work 'til black dark and walk back in the dark, and that was a means of sustenance for them. The black woman had more leeway than the black man.

Shelden: More leeway how?

¹ Correction per October 2014 phone conversation with Emma Diggs Carter.

Emma: As far as earning some money, as far as earning some money, you know. Down through history, you know, whether it was their fault or not, and I don't think it was, they had a reputation for stealing. If you're hungry, you're going to steal. If you have children at home who need everything, you're going – if nobody gives it to you or you can't buy it, common sense is going to tell you, you're going to do something desperate. So, most people didn't want black folks around, and if they made any complaints whatsoever, they were fired. If they made a big complaint, you were lynched, so it was a struggle. It was a struggle. And it's still an uphill struggle. They think we have arrived, but we haven't. We haven't. Question?

Shelden: Sure. So, you attended the school in the 40s, and your father attended?

Emma: My father attended way back there. My father was born in 1876, and he was born 11 years out of slavery to land that was very, very, very impoverished.

Shelden: This letter is dated '76, so he would have been born right around the time of this first letter.

Emma: Right, right, 1876, and his mother had 14 children. And education was something to be prized. Something to be prized. And then when a young girl showed some promise, they would send her to Hampton or to Virginia Union, and her tuition would be a crate of chickens, a bushel of greens, six dozen eggs, a basket of turnips, whatever they could get together to help to pay that child's tuition, and a lot of times, they left home with the clothes on their back and maybe, just maybe, a change of clothes. A lot of times they didn't have a change of clothes. They would talk when you go home, you take these off and you wash them and hang them up and you get up early enough to press them and you wear them back to school. When that person graduated, it was a hallelujah time. Someone has come to teach us how to write our names. And that's as far as a lot of them ever got to write their names. And others took it and moved on. They learned how to count, how to read and follow directions, the proper English. They learned so many things. And in the process of learning, they lost a lot of their culture. Everything was based on what the white man did, and it still is. It still is, you know. But still, they learned, and when they found out that they could do something else besides drive the horses and work in the cornfield and in somebody's house, they took off. They took off. They learned to be nurses, and they went to school to be doctors and lawyers, and it was amazing. It was just amazing. And the pride that these things brought to the families – "my child is – she's going to such-and-such school, and she's going to be a doctor" – and a lot of these people worked on their knees and scrubbed and did without and prayed. Their religion was the only thing that they had. And frankly, it scared me to death, their religion. They had a habit of, when they went away to New York, they would come home the second week in August –

Shelden: Why then?

Emma: They would come home for the second week in August, which was revival time. And those who worked in the city would make preparations all year long, come home with something new, so they could show off, and when we first attended a revival

service, they used to stomp and shout, and we weren't used to anything like that. We thought they were crazy, oh – you know, and they'd shout and get happy, and I guess that was the only avenue they had for releasing their pent-up tensions, you know, because things still were very, very bad, and the only outlet they had was the church. And my father used to tell me how they used to walk to church barefooted and then take a brush and brush the dust off their feet and put their shoes on. Maybe they were two sizes too small to walk to church to worship. It must have been something to behold, and I know sometimes I don't worship as regularly as I should, go to worship as regularly as I should, but they never missed a Sunday unless the snow was up to their nose. And it's just amazing. It's amazing. Question?

Shelden: Okay, actually, I wanted to follow up, 'cause you said that the students who had been to high school at other black schools, they took off and did amazing things. The question I have for you is that you are here, still or again, and –

Emma: Still.

Shelden: – and did others who took off in this way return? move away?

Emma: They moved away, but this was always home to them. This was always home to them. They went away – my father was instrumental in helping the boys from home to find employment. He taught them the ropes, so to speak. He knew where to place them as far as employment, getting a job, and he helped so many, and he worked with the Astors up until just before Social Security came in place. And they encouraged him to leave their employment so that he could have some Social Security, and he got a job as an elevator person, and he had a job as a porter, and he worked for the *New York Times*. And he retired from the *New York Times* with a pension.

Shelden: What did he do for the *Times*?

Emma: He was a porter. I guess you'd call that a janitor, I'm not sure, but it said porter. So with his pension and his Social Security, he was able to retire and come back home. He and his brother bought 100 acres of land very early and gradually it was sold off and sold off and now, we still own 37, approximately 37-40 acres of it. And we were the largest land-owners, black land-owners on that highway, on Coan Stage Road, right on out back to 360 when you come out near Village, and when he came, when we moved back – we came down twice, and I was so afraid of the dark and afraid of everything here that the doctor told my father "you have to take this child back or else she's gonna have a nervous breakdown." I was used to the way people talked, the way they dressed, how they worshipped. I was just lost. So, we moved back, but when we came back, we were here to stay. I didn't like the school. It was different. It wasn't centrally heated. Those who sat in front of the stove roasted; those who sat in the back froze to death. Lunch was nonexistent. For a time, you brought your lunch, and then after a while they hired a cook and they came, you know, you got your lunch for a fee. And the boys were very rough, and the girls, well, they were different from anything I had seen.

Shelden: Where were you when you were not here, during that period?

Emma: We went back to New York. We went back to New York, yes.

Shelden: And where did you live in New York? I'm just curious.

Emma: In Manhattan. Manhattan.

Shelden: Okay.

Emma: I was born 160 West 119th Street, New York. Daddy said, "Now Sugarpea, you be patient now. When you graduate from Holley School, you're going to go to a big school," so I was anxiously awaiting going to the big school. So, I graduated from elementary school and one Sunday, he took us to see the big school. And we rode and we rode and we rode, and finally we got to Beverlyville, as it was called then.

Shelden: What is that now?

Emma: Beverlyville. And we rounded a corner, and Daddy said, "That's your big school." That was Julius Rosenwald.

Shelden: Oh, it was the Rosenwald School.

Emma: Julius Rosenwald High School. That has a history all of its own, too. And I boo-hooed and cried. I said, "That's nothing but a big old barn." He said, "just be patient, sugar, just be patient." Well, I had a lot of fun there. And going back to my early beginnings, we couldn't run and play with the other children, and he would regale us with the tales of Holley School, and I really didn't appreciate the history until I got much older, and then I started to dig into the history, and then I said, "How in the world do they do it?" Daddy talked about walking from up in the forest down to Wheatland for 10 cents a day, 50 cents or 60 cents a week. And you got up early enough to be there to start work at dawn, and I'm saying, "How did people, how did you live?" My aunt told me that when she and my uncle got married, they had 75 cents between them, and for their wedding breakfast, they had fried sweet potatoes. And I'm going, "What?!" You know, she said, "Emma, you just don't understand." She said, "We would wash for families until our backs were so tired, and then we'd walk back the next day and do the ironing." You know, and I said, "I bet you one thing. I wouldn't have done it." But different time, different place. You did what you had to do. And where education was a valuable instrument in those days, we've lost our quest for betterment. When I say "we," not only blacks – society. We think going to college is party time, you know, and we graduate from college and still can't read. You know, you've got all this book sense. You don't have no common sense. You understand what I'm saying?

Shelden: Mm hm.

Emma: Okay. Question?

Shelden: Yeah, sure. You can just tell me whenever you're ready for the next one. So, actually what I have here is how long did you attend Holley School and what years, from when to when. And so I guess I would ask that question for your father as well.

Emma: Now, I don't – my father went there. It was the only place for him to go. And I guess he was around seven or eight. I'm not sure how old he was when he started at the Holley School.

Shelden: Did you tell me your father's name already?

Emma: Robert J. Diggs.

Shelden: Okay thanks.

Emma: And evidently he told me but I've just forgotten how old he was, but he went there until he was a young man. And Miss Putnam and Miss Holley sent him to New York. That's how he got there, and he became a sophisticated intellectual.

Shelden: Did he graduate with a high school diploma from Holley School.

Emma: I don't know how they did it then, when you've learned all you can learn, you just went off to work or whatever. They didn't have graduations then, I don't think. I never heard him speak of a graduation. I know when they had taught them all that they knew, they sent them on.

Shelden: And then you attended –

Emma: I attended –

Shelden: – from what year to what year?

Emma: I really don't remember. I know we came down and I – I was about eight years old, I think, and I went for a year or two, and I just couldn't take it. I just couldn't take it. I guess I could get that information from the School Board. I guess I could.

Shelden: I wonder 'cause Harold said they burned a lot of records when they closed the schools.

Emma: Yeah, they did. And then I came back, and I was in the seventh grade. And then I graduated from the seventh grade and went to high school in 1947.

Shelden: So you attended one year, the seventh grade, and – I'm sorry, what was the year?

Emma: What?

Shelden: What year was that?

Emma: '47-'48 – I think that's when, yeah and then it was still '47-'48 when I went to Rosenwald. '49, '50, '51, yeah '47, '48, '49, '50, '51, yeah.

Shelden: So it would have been fall of '48 that you started at Rosenwald.

Emma: '48, right. Because I graduated in '51, and they just had 11 grades for graduation. After that, they had 12. Okay, that was a learning experience, and at that time, teachers didn't have to have a college degree. They could graduate from high school and teach out of high school, or if they got one or two years at a college or something later on, they were allowed to teach. But after integration came, all the teachers had to go back to school and get a degree.

Shelden: Their credentials.

Emma: Right, get their credentials. So, that's the way it was. That's the way it was. We came here, there was no bus transportation. Kids had to walk from Coan Stage to 360. My father said, "My children are not going to walk a mile. They're too young, and they're not going to be on the highway like that. And I'm not going to take them down every morning and go and get 'em every evening." He went down to the School Board and talked to whoever was the Superintendent. He told them that he wanted the bus to come around and pick up his children, so that created a furor. So, one night, we were in bed, and Dad got Mom up and said, "You all are going to have to go to the basement." And he was shooing us along, shooing us along. Well, I was the last one to go down. My brother had the lantern, and I was the last one to go down when he lifted the trap door up and when he got ready to put it down, I just jumped out. "I'm not going down in the dark. I'm not going down in the dark." So, he let the door down and he held me tightly by the hand, and he said, "don't you say a word." We went out, and there were some horses and people with some white things on, white sheets, I guess they were. And somebody said, "Boy, what you trying to do." And they said, "You come here and you're trying to change things." And he said, "We going to teach you a lesson." Well, I was my Daddy's baby. I wasn't the baby, but I was the only girl. I was my Daddy's baby. And I said, "You better not bother my Daddy. You just better not hurt my Daddy." Everybody got quiet. I could feel my Daddy trembling. He said, "You watch what you do now." And they swirled around and went on home or wherever they went.

Shelden: Phew. That was a near thing.

Emma: And my Daddy stood there a minute. "Uh, Daddy. What were those people, what were they, why'd they come here to bother us?" And Daddy said, "they was the Ku Klux Klan." And he said, "Sugarpea, I think you saved my life tonight. You saved my life." See, I was short then, and they couldn't see me in the dark, but when I spoke up, you see, I would be a witness, so that's why they got quiet and didn't say anything. But we didn't have any more problem with them. "I'm not going to live here, where I'm scared to death; blah blah blah." Now, that was why we went back to New York.

Shelden: Yeah, I bet it was.

Emma: Old Dr. Robert Booker, he said, "Robert this child is a nervous wreck." He said, "if you don't take her back to New York, you're going to lose her." Daddy said, "My Lord!" He said, "Now I've got to get straightened out and move back." We had to move – and we had to send for a moving van from New York City.

Shelden: They wouldn't –

Emma: There were none here. There were none here. When we moved here, we were the talk of the town. I thought everybody lived like we did. But my father having worked for the Astors, the things that they would give away were more valuable than anything we could buy. You know? Brocades and wall hangings and pictures, china. And you know, products of a different type of life and living. And I was always asking questions: "Daddy, why do they have the silver sitting on the table in a can?" Well, that's what they did then. We had tablecloths; they had oil cloth on the table. You know, and I was constantly questioning. Daddy said, "Emma, this is the way country folk live. This is the way I lived when I lived here." People had dirt floors. People had to draw water out of the well. And the outhouses, oh my Lord. We moved here the second time. Daddy had a – what do you call it – an outhouse built. And the Mayfair brought – Mayfair van, not van, long truck, trailer, whatever you call it – they had packed everything in tissue paper and dada, dada, dada, and Daddy took the tissue paper and put it in the outhouse. And I wanted to know, "What you gonna do with the tissue paper in the outhouse." He said, "You rub it together, and you use it." And that didn't sit too well with me. So, this particular day, I went to the bathroom, to the outhouse, and you know when a new little girl comes in town, the little boys from all around come around. Okay. I was in this outhouse, so I thought maybe I was through with my abolitions, and I reached my hand over and decided I wasn't through, well, I heard the paper rattle, but I didn't pay that any mind. Well, when I did decide to get a piece of tissue paper, a snake had stood up and said, "cshheeee." Well, Daddy had built this outhouse out of oak and had – I don't know how, what kind of apparatus or hinges they had, but everything was new. You go in and you turn the knob and you were locked in. Nobody could open the door on you. I stood up and went right through the door, knocked the door down, ran off – underwear all around my feet, and the boys sitting on the back porch just hee hee hee and laughing and ha ha ha, and I'm screaming and hollering for bloody murder. Daddy came running, "Sugarpea, what's the matter? what's the matter?" And pulling my clothes up. "What's the matter?" And my eyes – "Snake! Snake!" And he killed him, and he held him up and he – my father was over six foot, and that snake, when he held him up, was still some of him left on the ground. Well, that was the last time I used an outhouse. The very last time that I used an outhouse. Oh! I can't explain to you how – there's no way I could explain to you the pain of transition, the culture shock, the lack of any place to go. We were used to going to Radio City Music Hall, the Metropolitan Opera and seeing the Rocketts. And going to movies that were like palaces, you know, I mean, carpeting and velvet seats, that type of thing, you know, and going to the libraries and museums and – I haven't gotten over it yet. You know you move to an area where people think a different way – not that I fault them, not that I fault them or think I'm better than they are, it's just when you've been raised and taught differently, you think differently, you know. And I've done what I could to help. I've always been a civil rights advocate. I still am. You know, and just like the clothing used to come down on the boat from the North. When people give me things, I share them with other people, you know. And even today, you'd be surprised at the pockets of poverty at the – how they live on the income that they receive. How they ever built a house, I don't know.

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: It's been a long journey. It's been a long journey.

Shelden: So, you're saying Coan River, and I don't know exactly where that is. So, can you ...

Emma: The Coan River, well, you can go down the Bundick Road in Lottsburg and you can reach the Coan River. Incidentally, that's where baptism took place for Zion Baptist Church for a long time. And you can go down all the way, you can turn there by Claraville and go on down, on down, on down, and you can reach the Coan River. And both of these areas from the Bundick side, you can look on this side, across to the Bundick side. And that's the Coan River. And I'm trying to –

Shelden: Is there a bridge or people just rowed or –

Emma: No, there used to be – the steamboats used to come in there. The steamboats used to come in. There's an area – will you be coming back?

Shelden: Oh yeah.

Emma: Okay. Then we can do some prowling.

Shelden: Excellent!

Emma: Yeah, we can do some prowling. They used to roll – when you leave here and you go down the hill and you come up the hill, Coan Stage is that way, and I don't know what they call that, I don't remember. But if you go down there, you can go all the way down to the Coan River, and that's where they used to roll the tobacco casks and the old road is still there. You can see where centuries of – rolling the tobacco casks sort of ate the road out, where they used to roll the casks down the hill to the wharf, where they could be loaded onto the steamboat.

Shelden: So the wheel tracks are still there?

Emma: Not the wheel tracks. The indentation. The indentation in the land is still there. And you know, Northumberland County has tremendous history, tremendous history. My father said, you know, we're at the library. And just over there, behind, there's a house across the street, but all of that area, all the way back, used to be the racetrack. Racing, horse racing used to be the thing, used to be the thing, was a great big racetrack back there. And the gentry used to go to the track, you know. If we went, we went to hold the horses or to muck the manure, you know, so – there's so much that we've lost, so much that we –

Shelden: And yet, as you say, sometimes it's still in the land. Sometimes you can see it.

Emma: Yes.

Shelden: Sometimes it leaves a mark.

Emma: It leaves its mark. Just like history has left its mark on Northumberland County. You know.

Shelden: Yeah. And so your family lived on Coan River?

Emma: No, we lived on Coan – what they call Coan Stage.

Shelden: Okay.

Emma: The place used to be called Coan Stage. The stagecoach used to come stop there. Then there was a little store right there on that corner that's gone now. There used to be a little tomato factory there. That's gone.

Shelden: The tomato factory – or was –

Emma: The tomato factory where they pack tomatoes. Uh huh.

Shelden: Yeah, Harold and Stafford talked about the tomato factory.

Emma: That was just one of them. There was also another tomato factory over in Lottsburg.

Shelden: Okay.

Emma: Okay. At one time Coan Stage was considered Lottsburg, but now is considered Heathsville. All the people who live on that stretch of road say they live in Heathsville now.

Shelden: You mentioned another place name, too, that I want to come back to – Beverlyville. Is it called something else now?

Emma: Yes, it's Reedville. Reedville.

Shelden: All right.

Emma: And I guess you've heard about Reedville, where the – that's supposed to have been the richest town.

Shelden: I don't know much about Reedville at all.

Emma: Oh, that's where the fishing industry started, in Reedville, and the little town of Reedville has become a historic entity. And the fish factory's down there; in the summertime everything stinks because they process the oil and so forth and so on. And the man came from the north – I'll say I'm not exactly sure – Maine, I think – in a little schooner and he set up his pots and things and the menhaden was plentiful then. And

that's where employment came from. And I heard my father-in-law say that he used to fish on the fish boat for \$18 a month, and that was money. That was money.

Shelden: That was good money.

Emma: That was good money. And he had ten children. I don't know how he whacked it up to save my soul. I get they ate a lot of soup. I don't know. You know? But that's where the main industry used to be – is farming and the commercial fishing were the means of income. And then, we got a drug store, and then we got a grocery store and then we had some doctors to come in, you know. I went with my sister-in-law to go to the doctor to see if she was pregnant, and I don't know why everybody down here didn't die. So I went in with her, and old Dr. Hudnall, he said, "What you want?" She said, "Dr. Hudnall, I don't know. I think I'm pregnant." And he said, "Come here and let me see." And I said to myself, "I wonder if she's going to have an exam right here." "Pull your blouse up." She pulled her blouse up. And he took a string that had some knots on it, put it around her waist and told her she was about three months pregnant.

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: I was there. I came home and ...

Shelden: What does that tell him about anything?

Emma: I said – she was pregnant.

Shelden: She was pregnant?

Emma: She was pregnant. I went home and told my Daddy. I said, "Daddy, if I get married and have a baby, I'm not, I can't stay here. I have to find a doctor somewhere. That man came right up to me – his desk was piled up with everything." Oh Lord, I was upset. I was upset. "Oh, and my mamma used him" and – "Daddy," I said, "Well, he will never be my doctor." And when I got married, I had my baby at St. – it used to be called St. Luke's. St. – no, not St. Luke's, what was – St. Philip's. St. Philip's in Richmond is where I had my baby, and everybody thought I was stuck up because I didn't use the midwives and all that kind of foolishness. No, no, no, no. Like I said, we thought differently. And I don't know whether it was for the good or whether it was for worse, and I promised God I wouldn't raise my children the way my father raised us, because it made you so different. It made you so different, you know. My father and I and the children, other boys – we talked about everything – philosophy, Socrates, mathematicians – we talked about everything – sex, marriage, education, and how to form and keep a household and I mean, you name it, we discussed it, and there was no shame in anything we discussed. Well, that was our entertainment. There wasn't any place to go. The closest movie was in Tappahannock, and that was segregated – you sat upstairs in the gallery. So we got an education at his knee. "Daddy tell us about..." "Daddy, what happened when?" "Well, Daddy, if such and such happened, how come you all didn't do thus and so?" "Sugarpea, it was a different time. It was a different time." And the area really didn't make any progress and start to grow until after the war.

Shelden: After World War ...

Emma: World War II. We moved into a post-slavery situation. Men wore overalls that were patched on top of patches, and they used horses to farm, walked, and you put corn in the ground, one of three ears in the corn so it could grow, and you threw the clover out there and just broadcast it all over the place. You cut hay, and those old, big, funny-looking threshing machines would come in June and all the women would come and congregate at whatever house the wheat was being threshed. Everybody would come in the kitchen, and everybody would cook and be ready for the men at 12 o'clock. I never saw food consumed so fast and so much of it. Then, if you weren't through by evening, you had to have another meal. I'd be so glad when they were gone. Nobody paid me any attention. Daddy was out there in the field, and I couldn't go out there with him. I was Daddy's girl. I followed him all – I learned a lot. I followed him in the barn. I followed him in the woods, and I know I was a pain in the neck. I know it, and you know, I wanted to go with Daddy to see what he was doing. And he said, "You can't go because it's cold down there. The boys and I are going down to cut wood." "Well Daddy, I'll be all right." Down in the woods we'd go, and I guess I'd be there about ten minutes, and I was freezing to death. Daddy said, "Well, go home then." "I can't find my way." Daddy said, "Sugarpea, I'm not going to be worried with you," and Daddy would take off his coat, and I'm still cold. So he'd make a little fire, and there I'd sit beside the fire, while they cut, chopped wood, chopped wood. So, I didn't have anything to do, so they used a crosscut saw then, you know, with the two pieces of board that made the cross – the whatever – and I'd watch the boys using the cross-cut saw just saw wood, cut wood, and I wanted to do it, too. So, my other brother, my older brother would let me. And we got good at that thing, girl. We got good. Man, I could sling that saw, and we could cut more wood. So one day I'm laying upstairs in my bed minding my own business getting a cozy snooze, and Daddy said, "Emma! Come on downstairs." I said, "Come downstairs?" I said, "Daddy, it's early!" He said, "Come on down. I want you to help me cut some wood." I jumped out the bed and went to the bathroom and looked down at him. I said, "Cut wood?! I'm a girl!" [laughing] "I'm a girl. I'm not gonna cut wood." But I did it as a form of recreation. He said, "You come on down and help father cut wood," he said, "and then I won't ask you to do it anymore." I was an indignant soul that day. Oh my goodness gracious. But you get in trouble when you ... I learned real quick what was girl's work and what was boy's work. Lord have mercy – those days, those days.

Shelden: So, let's see. Do you remember anything about the school curriculum during the time that you were at the school?

Emma: I remember the books. They were hand-me-downs from the high school and other elementary schools. Some of them had no backs. Some of them had fronts and the middle was torn out, and so we got a sketchy education from the curriculum that we had. We were supposed to have the reading and writing and arithmetic, but we had it with what we were given, what they were given. And Daddy went down to the School Board again. "These kids need new books." We got new books, you know. And he fought a lonely fight because everybody here was afraid of Mr. White Man. They still are, you know. You had to go and ask for and demand and tell them that you pay taxes, too, and

you want thus and so for your children. And he was always a spokesman, and when he moved back here, he encouraged the workers here, the men especially, to have your employer take out some money for your Social Security, and that was another furor. And my father said, it is the law, and if you don't do it, you're going to be held responsible. So, they went to work and hired somebody to come down here and tell them the law, and they started taking money out of people's paychecks for Social Security. And you know that didn't sit too well with the status quo. You know. This was his home. I know he was born here, and he went away as a young man. He didn't come back until he was, I guess, around '74. I'm a product of his third marriage, and he was 60 years old when I was born. When my brother was born, he was 62. I had another brother born, 64, and my baby brother – and he was 66. He got his first driver's license – I don't know whether it was 76 or something, and there ought to be a law against that! He scared us to death. You know then you didn't have automatic transmissions, and his coordination was getting bad and he had to use the clutch and the gear at the floor at the same time, and a lot of times, it would cut out and we'd be halfway across the road and a big truck would be coming down the road, and the man would stop in the truck and cuss my Daddy out. And one time, the truck got that close to us. We jumped out the window. And when it got straightened out – finally got it straightened out – James and I held hands and we said, "We're not going home with you, Daddy. We're going to walk home." And he fussed at us, "Now you get in this car." We wouldn't, just wouldn't get in there. Our little hearts were going – [thump thump thump] – you could hear it! That was the longest walk home that you ever saw. Oooh – girl you don't know. Oh and he came – he used to come to Holley School sometimes to pick us up. This particular day, he came around the corner of the school. Like I said, his coordination was bad. He came around the school, and he took the corner of Holley School off on the back and ran over the well, broke the well all up. Oh, we used to stay so embarrassed. "Oh, Mr. Diggs!" Oh, they'd talk about Mr. Diggs. Oh, they would talk about Mr. Diggs. I'd be waiting and then the kids gonna tease you. Oh Lord. He used to cook there at the school, and one day the boys were playing baseball out back, and they – he had cooked everything for lunch, and the boys bat a ball through the window, and it landed in the pot of beans. And Daddy took the ball out and served the beans and nobody would eat it. And he dipped it out, dipped the ball out. They called him Dippin' Diggs from the North.

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: Lord have mercy. We can look now and talk about it now and it's amusing and it's funny, but it was very painful then. Very painful. Very, very painful. I didn't make friends easily, and I had one girlfriend – we just bonded. And we could sit down together and not say anything, and I'd know what she was thinking; she'd know what I was thinking. She told me one day, she said, "You know Emma, I'm going to leave you." I said, "Well, where are you going?" She said, "I have to go. I'm going to leave you." And I didn't pay that too much mind, and then she started to get sick and sicker, and she went to the hospital, and her mother told Daddy that Berenice wants to see Emma and put me on the bus and went with her mother to the hospital to see her. I really don't know what she had. If I did, I forgot it. But she said, "I wanted you to come so I could say goodbye." And I just looked at her, you know. And I went and kissed her, and we had to

go, you know, the bus schedule. We just went for a little while, and then the bus had to turn around and come back down, you know. And she said, "I just wanted you to come so I could say goodbye." And I kissed her, and I said, "I wonder where in the world she's going." And a few days later, she was dead. And that was my best friend.

Shelden: I'm so sorry. How old were you then?

Emma: That was seventh grade.

Shelden: Then, you went to Rosenwald after that. It made that transition probably both more difficult and more necessary.

Emma: Right.

Shelden: Yeah. Yeah. You take a minute, that's fine.

Emma: I have acquaintances now. I don't have friends. When you bond with someone, and you lose them, you don't get that feeling back. It was a trusting, loving relationship, and her mother had a lot of children. And during that time, you know, mothers didn't get the nourishment and the vitamins and whatever they needed, you know, and having children close together affected a lot of children's health. And when the doctor moved here, a black doctor, he said, "It's a shame." He said, "Men here take better care of their hunting dogs than they do of their wives." They didn't think anything about having two babies in a year. But they didn't breed their dogs but at certain times. You understand what I'm saying?

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: And I don't know how they did it. I really don't know how they did it. I really don't know how they did it. But we survived. We survived.

Shelden: So, could you describe for me a typical day at Holley School?

Emma: A typical day at Holley School. You got off the bus, and you went in, and you hung your coat up, and you went to your room and to your assigned seats. And then you had the Pledge of Allegiance. And then somebody would sing a song. And they were still singing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again for devotionals". It's an old war song. And "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" – what's that ...

Together: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else but Me."

Emma: And "The White Cliffs of Dover." When I went home and told my Daddy that, we had a League meeting, what they called a League meeting, and Daddy told them, you need to teach these children the National Anthem, "God Bless America," and "America the Beautiful," and different things, like different songs like that, if you're gonna have devotions, have a devotional song. And that's how we grew. That's how we grew.

Shelden: Tell me about a League meeting. I don't know anything about a League meeting.

Emma: The League. The League was formed by the parents of the children who attended the school, and they would meet and put their little money together, and a lot of times, they took up a whole lot of money, something like \$6 or something – I don't know what it went for, really, but it was to help to support the school, in what way, I don't know – maybe to help pay the lighting –

Shelden: Maybe buy a new songbook or –

Emma: Or whatever, right, right, right. And then we had, we had our lessons. And one teacher had all these children here, maybe seventh grade or sixth grade or whatever, and if the class was small enough, there were two classes in one room. Now the original Holley School – that's not the original Holley School. The original Holley School originally sat right in the middle of 360, in front of it.

Shelden: So the road went around it or ...

Emma: Went through it!

Shelden: Through the campus, you mean, so there were buildings on either side? I can't picture it.

Emma: Well, now the highways that we have now weren't highways then. They were paths. I remember when Daddy had a horse and a wagon and you met another horse and a wagon and somebody had to pull over so that one could pass. Same thing with the automobiles. So they widened the road a little bit and they widened it some more, and then there got to be a standard of how wide the road had to be and so forth and so on. So, I imagine the old Holley School was in the path when the road had to be widened. And there was a cistern behind the school where the water was, and then up on the hill behind that was Miss Putnam's house.

Shelden: Yeah, Harold's shown me where it was.

Emma: Where it used to be.

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: And you know, I get upset when I think about it, the books that they had – "See Spot run, Dick and Jane, see Jane run," and when the house burned, they excavated it, the bottom and they dug a hole and put all that old stuff from Holley School in there, you know, but we didn't appreciate history then.

Shelden: Wait, tell me that again. Tell me that again.

Emma: When that building burned –

Shelden: And how did it burn?

Emma: It caught fire. Somebody rented it. After Miss Holley and Miss Putnam left and died, that whole area back there – there used to be little cabins all back there on the side. It used to be like a little village back there. It used be like a little village. All of the things that you see now on 360 weren't there when we moved to the country. This library wasn't there. The courthouse was there, that old church was there, but all the rest of that stuff on the other side of the road wasn't there. The tavern was there, but there weren't any houses. Used to be a big plantation over there where that little house is, in the back where you see two great big trees. Springfield was over there. There were a few houses like you're going out of Heathsville. One or two big houses. The president of the bank had one and it cost him a whole lot of money to build, like \$2,000. And the others on the other side of the highway are Johnny-come-lateless. And – oh, let me tell you –

Shelden: Yeah, tell me what you remember, if you would, about especially that campus – what I mean by campus is the school – and their houses and whatever was there – and also just generally about Lottsburg at that moment, when you came first.

Emma: There wasn't anything there but the canning factory and really the church and the Holley School are the only things of historical significance in Lottsburg.

Shelden: Is anything of the canning factory still up?

Emma: Just the rumble [*sic*]. It's falling in on itself. Just before you get to the intersection for Bundick's, if you look across the field, you can see a large something with the buildings like falling down and crumbling down. We're going to have to take a tour when you come back again.

Shelden: Yes, please, because you know a lot more about this farther back than Harold or Stafford.

Emma: Mm hm. That's what people – the ladies – would go to the canning factory, and that's where they made their money for the August meeting. People used to buy their clothes for the August meeting, you know, and young girls. And I asked, told Daddy, I wanted to go to the canning factory so I could make some money to buy myself something for the August meeting. He said, "You'll do no such thing. No daughter of mine is going to the canning factory. And I'd boo-hoo and cry and raise such a – I didn't go to the canning factory.

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: My brother – I remember one year – "You don't need anything new for the revival. You have clothes." And I stewed, and I fussed, and I snotted, and I told my brother, "I'm going to order me something." The only way you got anything, you had to order it through the catalog – Montgomery Ward, Sears Roebuck, Walter Field. There were some more catalogs, but the main ones were Sears Roebuck, JC – not JC – Montgomery Ward, Walter Field. And how Walter Field was a smaller company, and I –

that's the only little catalog that I could get my hands on, and I ordered myself, what do you call it, a Gibson Girl outfit with the skirts. It was fuchsia or pink or something. And I ordered the blouse – white Gibson Girl blouse with the black bow and I ordered a pair of shoes. I didn't tell Daddy I ordered it. And I told James, and I said, "James, I ordered some clothes for the August meeting." "You know Daddy's not going to get that stuff for you. Why you order that stuff?" The closer the meeting got, I was scared to tell Daddy anything about it, so James had went to work. He had made some money. He said, "I'm going to get that package for you. And don't you order another doggone thing." And I got the package. Daddy went to the store and said, "The man, he's put a notice in my box there's a package here for Emma." And so this time James went to the post office, and he brought my package home. Daddy hit the ceiling. But luckily, I knew the style he would have chosen for me, and I stayed within those guidelines. If I hadn't, I couldn't have worn it. You know? "And don't you ever do anything like that again." And then he, after I got dressed and pressed it up, he said, "You do look very nice."

Shelden: [laughing] He was fond of you.

Emma: Oh, he loved me to death, and I didn't realize how much he loved me until I think I was about 13 or 14 years old, and I found out I could wind the man around my little finger. And then it was "Kitty, bar the door." Yeah, he – you know – I'd go and comb his hair. He had very fine hair. And we'd be talking. And then he'd got, he had an inkling of "What do you want? What, what do you want?" I said, "Well, Daddy, you know one thing? We're getting ready to have a dance at the school, and it's a sock hop, and you have to have black and white shoes and dungarees." "No daughter of mine is going to wear dungarees." "But Daddy, everybody else is going to have them on, dungarees." "You're not going to have dungarees." I cried and I boo-hooed, and my eyes swolled up, and my nose swolled up, and the Saturday before we were going to have, Daddy went to the store and put on his account the black and white shoes and the socks and the dungarees. "You're going to wear them one time." I wore them one time, and they disappeared. I don't know where they went. There were certain things we could do and certain things we couldn't. I couldn't wear red, because that was supposed to be a Jezebel color. First thing I did after I got married was to buy some red clothes. The next thing I did after I got married was to cut my hair. And that reverberated all through the family. The family in New York came home to see me with my hair cut, and I shouldn't have done it, and dada dada dada dada da. I said, "I wish they'd go on back and let me alone." But –

Shelden: Tell me about cutting your hair. What was that for you?

Emma: Well, ladies – it was my assertion of independence.

Shelden: Clearly.

Emma: I could do what I wanted to do with my hair. One of those times when those people came to thresh the wheat, well, I was sort of at odds. James was out helping and doing what they told him to do, and Raymond was in their way, and I was in the house like rambling. We had a big ten-room house, you know, and I could just rambling

all over. And I happened to stop in front of the mirror that was in the hall, and it happened to have a pair of scissors there. I had these old big plaits that you put behind the ear. My mamma put 'em behind my ears, and my ears sat out like that. And this plait, she plaited it, and it was hanging down there. I picked up the scissors and grabbed the plait and cut it off just like that and the rest of it sprang open. My mamma had a fit, and my daddy had a thousand fits. What am I gonna do with her hair now? I can't braid this stuff, dada dada dada da. And I walked around for a long time with that stuff sitting up. She could do something with the back of it, because I cut it right here and the back of it was a little bit longer, but the front of it made me look like a unicorn for years. It finally got all together and grew back. Well, I didn't try that anymore. And my mamma didn't have any mercy on me. You see, we didn't have running water and in order to wash my hair, she had to put my head down over a tub. And I just knew she intended to drown me every time she washed my hair. I wasn't used to that stuff. See, in the city, Daddy sent me to the hairdresser. Oh, Lord have mercy. And taking a bath was another horrible thing. I wasn't going to take a bath downstairs in the kitchen. "Well, if you want to take your bath, you're going to take your tub upstairs." So, I had to bribe my brother to help me take the tub upstairs. And you know, hot water and cold water, by the time we got upstairs, the dern thing was cold. Lord have mercy, girl, you don't know. You just don't know.

Shelden: Well, you're telling me now, so now I know a little more.

Emma: Now you know. Now you know.

Shelden: So, do you remember a typical lesson for you and/or for your dad at the school?

Emma: I remember –

Shelden: Did you like the teachers there? You talked about the other students. Did you have a good relationship with the teachers there?

Emma: Well, you know, the teachers of that day weren't very well-educated, and a lot of times, when we'd be reading, they'd stumble over a word, and I would say it's such and such a thing, and I got to be known as the uppity Diggs kid. You know, "I don't know who she thinks she is correcting me," dada dada. So, nobody liked me. We read, and we did arithmetic. She had the reading and writing and history of geography, they called it then, and I was smart. And I got an award when we graduated from the elementary school going to high school, and I didn't know it until the night of the graduation. They called my name, and I wondered what in the world are they calling my name for. And then I got up there, and she made mention of the fact, this, that and the other thing. I said, "That was easy." I mean, it wasn't hard because they didn't, couldn't, wouldn't go out of their comfort zone. Understand what I'm saying? They didn't have the ability. A lot of times the teachers would get sick and send a substitute, and they knew less than the teacher. And a lot of times, she'd sit at her desk and we'd do what we wanted to do – sleep, you know – so I can look back now with amazement and wonder how, how we got as far as we did. I really can, you know. Boys weren't taught to be

gentlemen. Girls weren't taught to be ladies. And they wanted the children to say yes, ma'am and no, ma'am, and Daddy said, "You don't have to do it. You say, 'yes, Miss So-and-so,' or 'no, Miss So-and-so,' or 'no, Mr. So-and-so,'" Well, that created a furor. That's a southern thing. Yes, ma'am, no ma'am, yassuh and nossuh. No, Daddy said, "You don't have to do it. You're still being respectful." Therefore, when we didn't say it, we weren't being respectful. We learned arithmetic. I had bad teachers for arithmetic, had bad teachers for arithmetic and math all through school, and I hated it. I hated it with a passion. When I'd change classes and get to the math class, I'd get sick. I'd get sleepy, whatever you had to do, I got it. I had to go to the bathroom. Whatever it was, I had to do it. I just didn't like it. And every job that I've ever had had to do with math. And I learned more after school, after I came out of school than I ever learned in school about math. And my grandson is at Longwood, and he's graduating in December, and he hates Spanish with a very particular hatred. It just doesn't make sense to him. He was supposed to graduate in 2010. I said, "you have to somehow master some of it, son, or else you're gonna be there until you get 50." Everything else fine: two As, two Bs, one C – and a D. Finally he said, "I passed Spanish!" "What'd you get?" "A D." "A D?" He said, "I passed it. Don't worry about it." I said, "You know one thing?" He's studying theatre – he wants to be an actor – and mass communications. I said, "Do you know one thing? I guarantee every picture that you perform in is going to do something with Spanish, and you're going to have to learn it." I said, "I promise you. That's the way it works." Oh he hates it. I know a little bit, not much, but when I would say something to him, he'd look at me "What?!" I said, "You mean you don't know that simple term?" "No. It just don't sink in." He said, "I listen to what they're saying and what they tell us to do and use my book and write something down and dada dada da, and it's just like I never saw it before when I walk back in the classroom, never heard it before." I said, "Son, if you can memorize lines to Othello and things like that, you can memorize some Spanish, son." "No I can't. It just won't go in." "Okay baby. Okay." You know, so, that's where it is. It was –

Shelden: It was different for you than it was for your dad, do you think, being at Holley School?

Emma: Yes.

Shelden: You think he had a very different experience.

Emma: My first educational experience was with a preparatory school, and the only way you can get there is by the recommendation of a government official, and my father's friend was Lloyd – L.J. Warner, and he was in the House of Representatives in New York City, and when I got to be school-aged, he said, "Robert, why don't you send her to Mrs. Blunt's Preparatory School." Daddy said, "I don't have any money to send that girl there." Anyhow, arrangements were made. I think I got a scholarship. I don't know. And I went there; my brother went there.

Shelden: What was the name of the school?

Emma: Mrs. Blunt's Preparatory School. And we learned about good manners. Of course, we learned that at home. And we learned how to sip tea. And James learned how

to stand when a lady came into the room and the proper way to conduct himself. At that time, men used to walk on the streetside, and ladies were on the inside to keep the water from splashing on them and dada dada da They learned all that and how to tie his tie properly and little girls – I'm sitting here with my pants, legs gapped open, we didn't dare do that. You sat properly with your back straight up against the chair. And you didn't speak unless you were spoken to. And if you were asked to have something, if you wanted it, you said, "Yes, please." And if you didn't, you said, "No, thank you." And that type of thing. And I learned to write and read at home, so I didn't have to really go through that. It was just more or less learning how to sit at the table and the different forks on one side and dada dada dada, you learned what to do with shrimp cocktail and dada dada dada dada da. And you start from the outside with all your cutlery, and you put your napkin in your lap when you sat down. That type of thing. And one Christmas Eve, we were going home from school – no, that was before we were going home from school – Mrs. Blunt had some kittens, and she took us all down to see the baby kittens and the mother. We wanted to know what the kittens were doing, and she said, "They are nursing their mother." Well, nursing their mother. "Well, what's nursing?" "They're getting the milk from the mother, from her breast." Okay. Nothing for my little bad brother to do but pick up a kitten and throw it on my back. And you know, kittens they grab with their claws, and I screamed and I screamed and I screamed. And Mrs. Blunt was upset, and James was laughing. Now James threw the cat on me, but I was the one that got the beating. I didn't have any business being unladylike. Mamma said – the street was pretty, all decorated, you know how New York City is, and I didn't have any excitement at all, 'cause I knew I was gonna get a spanking. "Come on here, you little dickens. I'm gonna give you a good whipping." And I got a good whipping. And I didn't do anything but scream. Would you scream if a cat was unsuspectedly thrown on your back?

Shelden: So, I'm sorry – who gave you the whipping? Mrs. Blunt?

Emma: My mama.

Shelden: Oh, your mom.

Emma: No, no, no, no. Daddy never spanked me a day in his life. But if my mother slapped you, you had to stay that way until it's thunder and lightning. And she would spank me. I mean, she would spank me with a belt, while Daddy said, "Maude [sp?], don't you give Emma another spanking, and I mean it." I said, "Mamma, well, why..." I think I was about 35 or 40 years old when I asked Mamma. I said, "Mamma, why did you treat me so differently from the boys?" And she said – she had to think about it a little while. She said, "You know one thing. I don't think your father loved me anymore after you were born." I said, "What?" She said, "When you were born, you were his life." I said – she said, "You knew you were." I said, "No" – but see, I wasn't spoiled. I wasn't a spoiled child. I just hung around with Daddy for safety, I guess, you know. We'd talk – he'd set me up on a bale of hay, and we'd talk. That's the first thing I wanted to do after we ate breakfast was go find my Daddy. You know. And the boys could do anything they wanted to do. Now, when we got out in public – "That's my daughter. She plays the piano." I'd try to feed off that when I got home, but it just wasn't happening, you know, but I survived. And she was a concert pianist.

Shelden: Your mother?

Emma: My mother was a concert pianist. She studied with Hazel Scott. And she and Hazel Scott were –

Shelden: What was your mother's name?

Emma: Elizabeth Maude Jackson, and she was born in Ansonia, Connecticut.

Shelden: Maude is M-A-U-D-E?

Emma: M-A-U-D-E, mm hm. And –

Shelden: Where in Connecticut?

Emma: Ansonia. My mother was born in Ansonia, Connecticut. And when – she didn't want to move here, and I understand. She had more responsibility and more to work against than I did. I was just a child following, you know, directions, you know. I got clothed. I got food, regardless of who cooked it or whatever. You know, and I didn't have the responsibility of running the home under those circumstances. And she never learned how to really make a –

Voice: Hi.

Emma: Hi.

Voice: I was just looking at the paintings.

Emma: She never really learned how to make a fire or how to cope with drawing water and that type of thing, washing and not being, having to go out, you know, to the movie or go shopping or whatever they did back there, you know, and no friends here at all. And I understand. She was a frustrated woman. When the man at Mayflower people took the piano out and put it in the living room, my brother went, just went and pushed the top up, and she come along a few minutes after that and slammed it down, and she never touched that piano again.

Shelden: Wow.

Emma: She never touched it again. And she wouldn't help me. She never touched it again.

Shelden: Why do you think that was?

Emma: Well, who here could appreciate the type of music that she was used to and could play? Who here could appreciate – Daddy said something about her coming to the church and playing for the church. She said, "What? What can I teach those people?" And she was right. What could she teach them? She didn't understand – they wouldn't have understood what she was trying to get through to them, you know. She never

touched it again. She never touched it again. She never dusted it. She never touched it again. And I really felt sorry for her, and when my father died in 1960 –

Shelden: She was considerably younger than he, yes.

Emma: 30 years younger. And I said – and I knew how I felt at 60 years old. I said, "Why in the world would anybody want a baby at 60 years old? But he lived to see me 24, 26, something like that. He lived to see my other brother – I think I was 26 when he died. And he lived – my brother was 24, and my other brother, my baby brother was 18. So, he lived to see us grown. I used to wake up at night and hear him praying and asking God to please let him live to see his children grown. You know you had to pray at that age. And I'm wondering, "Why in the world" – after I got grown – "Why in the world would anybody want children at 60 years old?"

Shelden: I don't know, but he seemed to love you a lot.

Emma: He loved us. He loved us dearly. He loved us dearly.

Shelden: We are only halfway through my – not even – halfway through my questions, so I think we have to meet again, 'cause we're at –

Emma: 12 o'clock.

Shelden: Yeah. They're apparently wanting to let people ...

Emma: What's convenient for you?

Shelden: Let me get my book. I'm going to stop rolling. I'm going to call it rolling tape, even though ...

[stop interview #1]

[Session 2]

Shelden: So we're getting some feedback. That's a sign of life.

Emma: Some more lights have come on.

Shelden: Yes, that's good. Um – sorry I don't think I have a stand. Oh there – I'll have to kind of improvise. But that looks good. Talk into the mic there, Emma.

Emma: My name is Emma Diggs Carter.

Shelden: Okay, so yeah, we're rolling and the numbers are going. So, this is April the 9th. Mary Shelden here on April 9, 2011, seated here with Emma Diggs Carter, and we are undertaking to complete her interview. I'm going to need – [walking across the

room] I'll be right back. My students and I answered these questions all the way here. Okay, it looks like they're still in my car, Emma. I'm so sorry – I'll be right back.

Emma: Five and ten miles to school, and then when they got there, they had to make a fire on the stove, and they brought their lunch in an old molasses can with a handle or they brought a sweet potato to put on the back of the stove that would be done by the time the lunch was. The scheduling wasn't like the schedules we have today for the school system. You know, when you got there, classes were started, and that could have been 8 o'clock, 7 o'clock, 9 o'clock, when the majority – everybody tried to be there by 9 o'clock. So, that meant a lot of them had to leave at 6 o'clock in the morning to get here. Some came five miles; some came ten miles. And through the woods and across the beaver dam.

Shelden: The beaver dam?

Emma: The beaver dam.

Shelden: So they walked across the –

Emma: beaver dam. There was an old tree – very, very old – that had fallen across the dam and made a dam, like. And they walked from up in the forest and went across throughout property and went through the woods and walked across the beaver dam, and they came out just below the mill down there at Heathsville, and they walked up here, just to Holley. And then they came from Howland – not Howland – Lively Hope this way, walking, and some of those who had horses or wagons or whatever would use those.

Shelden: Did they pick folks up along the way then?

Emma: Sometimes they did, you know. But you had a wagon that was just able to hold four or five. You picked up those or your brothers or your sisters, and that was it. That was it. And the day started with the devotionals.

Shelden: What do you think is the longest distance people walked? What do you remember people saying? Like the farthest away town that –

Emma: I'm saying, I'm thinking 10-15 miles. 10-15 miles, you know, give or take. But you know, back then – and I used to do it. You could walk a mile in 15 minutes. When I was going to high school, the bus didn't come around. They didn't have a bus schedule, and I could do my mile in 15 minutes. You get used to it. You know, you had to hurry up or else the bus was going to leave you. It wasn't going to wait. So, I mean, fifteen minutes, you know, they could maybe get there in half an hour. Or whatever, and if it was cold, you ran to keep warm.

Shelden: Yeah, I bet you did.

Emma: You ran to keep warm. That's right.

Shelden: So, did you walk 15 minutes to Holley School? Was it a mile for you?

Emma: No, I walked to catch the bus to high school, but when we came, my father went down to the School Board, and he said, "My children are not going to walk to catch the bus." So, they put a raggedy, dilapidated bus on the route, and that picked us up, and sometimes the bus would show up and sometimes it wouldn't. It would break down, and we'd be waiting and waiting and waiting. And but that came at the end of our land, but still they didn't have transportation for the high school students. So, when I started high school, I had to walk from our house down to 360, and that was a mile and that took me 15 minutes.

Shelden: So it was 15 minutes to walk to the bus and then you took it to – were you going to be the Rosenwald School?

Emma: Going to Rosenwald School.

Shelden: And where is the Rosenwald that everybody went to? What's the town it's in?

Emma: The address then used to be Beverlyville, but it's all come together now, and it's called Reedville.

Shelden: Reedville. So Beverlyville got annexed by Reedville.

Emma: By Reedville, that's right. There used to be a post office there, but that went by the wayside. It was closed up so Reedville takes care of everything now.

Shelden: Good. And so you were saying that in a typical day at the school, students would have walked from a far distance. They would have brought their lunch in a pale or they'd bring a sweet potato for the fire. A lot of people talk about that: putting their potato on the fire at the school. Can you describe or have you heard a family member describe to you, remember, particular methods used at the school, teaching activities, kinds of ways that kids got taught?

Emma: They used slates to write with.

Shelden: You used a slate?

Emma: No, no. I'm talking about the early days – my father.

Shelden: Okay.

Emma: They used slates to write with, with chalk. There weren't no notebooks or pencils. And you came in and you had a devotional period and salute to the flag. And then your class day started. And the teacher had exercises on the board or for young children, it was storytime and you had to remember your poems and everything that was taught as far as oral lessons were concerned. And some of those old people, by the time they were 60-70 years old, they remembered those poems. They used to stand up in church, and I'd say, "Oh my goodness gracious," and they were long. They were long, you know, and that shows the quality of the education they received. And anybody who

lived in the area came to Holley School. There was no way to get around it. You went to Holley School. Or you went to the Howland School down there in Heathsville. There was no avenue for education, except for Holley School. And there used to be a post office here, and they did a lot of things here – that people in the area would come and work her garden for the things that they would get from the North – the barrels of clothes and things that they would get from the North. And she would give them advice as to how to live and how to be clean. You know, that time was a time when the land had been raped by war. There was deprivation, poverty, and people were let go and turned out like animals with no homes, no food, no transportation, no sanitary privileges, no medicine, no nothing, and I don't know how they survived, but they did. I really don't know. And they made do with whatever they could get their hands on. And the boats used to come down from the North, steamboats, and Miss Holley and Miss Putnam would send northward to bring barrels of clothes down here for the people, and they would wear them and some of the most ridiculous things you ever saw in your life, but they kept you warm. They kept you warm. And my Dad used to say they used to walk barefooted to get to church, and they got in sight of the church, then they'd put their shoes back on. And you got one pair of shoes a year, and if they got too small, that's just too bad. You got one pair of shoes a year, you know. And times were hard. They cooked over fireplaces. And they made bread on hoes. That's where your hoecake bread came in. They didn't have pots and pans. And I used to get upset when my Dad used to say they would catch raccoons and possums and eat them. You had to live off of what was there. And they raised gardens and somebody came along and taught them how to dry their food for the winter, and then a little bit later, they learned how to can. And it was just a – to me, it was a horrible time. And they learned so much and most of them went away to work and most of them found gainful employment, and everybody wanted to know where they went to school. That's how thorough their education was. I could talk with my Daddy on any subject in the world, and he knew something about it. He went to work for the Astors in New York, and he became a very polished gentleman. And I thought everybody lived like that. You know, what they gave away, my goodness gracious, was more than we could afford. You know, we had damask walls and curtains and everything, you know, crystal, and dada dada, and what they didn't want, they gave to my Dad. And then when we came here and we saw oil cloth on the table and your forks and knives in a syrup can, I'm going, "What's the matter with those folk? Why do they do that?" But he told me, you know, he explained, "Everybody's not as lucky as we were."

Shelden: Do you think that's why he wanted to move back here?

Emma: No, my Dad was 60 years old when I was born. It was time for him to retire, and he was getting old. He was 60 when I was born, I told you, all right. Sixty, and he died at 84. And I was 24 when he passed. My brother was 22, and the other one was 18. And he had property here. He and his brother had bought 100 acres of land here, and he had his property. He had his home. So, I guess slowing down in age and everything, he decided to come home, you know. And you talk about a culture shock.

Shelden: So did you – then you knew folks, Emma, who had been slaves, who had come out of slavery?

Emma: Yes.

Shelden: Folks in the church who recited their poems.

Emma: Right. Right. Those were the old folks.

Shelden: What about your dad. How many generations was he from –

Emma: He was 11 years old out of slavery, so that meant his parents were slaves. And his parents had children that were born in slavery.

Shelden: Was he born in slavery?

Emma: No, 11 years out.

Shelden: Okay, 11 years old. Okay.

Emma: And it was just a horrible time. He tells stories about walking from up in the forest, from up in the Coan area all the way down to Wheatland, all the way down near Lewisetta for ten cents a week. I said, "Ten cents a week? What could you do with it?" Well, you could get a pound of sugar for a penny. That was the medium of exchange then. And if you went somewhere and worked for 25 cents, then you were making good money. I used to talk with my Aunt Florence and Uncle Harvey and she told me when they got married, they had 75 cents between them, and they had fried sweet potatoes for their honeymoon breakfast. I said, "What?!" Didn't sound very romantic to me, but she said, "We thought we were living, we thought –" you know? And whatever they raised and people had apple trees, pear trees, peach trees, plum trees and walnut trees, and they dyed their clothes with the walnuts. You know, you put them in the water and make it hot and you get a certain color brown. I never saw so much brown in my life. All kinds of brown – white, tan, dark brown, you know – but that was the way they lived. That was the way they lived. And there were no drugstores. There were no Food Lions. There were no movies. There wasn't anything.

Shelden: They had to put up their own food and –

Emma: Right, and the only avenue they had for expression was the church. The church. And they had their little chicken dinners or whatever you have – or rallies or whatever the had – it was at the church. It was at the church, and they had what they called a revival, but back there, they called it track meeting. And people would – the ones that had left home would come back and make it their business to come back home for a track meeting. And those folks would get in there, Mary, and shout and raise Cain. They're supposed to be getting happy. The first time I attended one of those services, it scared me nearly about to death. I didn't know what was wrong with those folks. And then they had a way of doing their foot like this in time with the music. You know. And I'm looking all around, "What in the world is going on here?" But I can understand that was an avenue for expression, a release of tension, maybe they would gather some hope for tomorrow.

Shelden: Have you read *Beloved*?

Emma: Yes, I read *Beloved*.

Shelden: I'm thinking about Baby Suggs.

Emma: Yeah, yeah. You know, it was – and people would work for a dollar a day. That was when we came here, and then they gradually grew to two dollars a day, and then five dollars a day, and I'm going –

Shelden: You came here in the '40s, right?

Emma: In the '40s. Yeah. And they would go – what did they call – live-in service. And they would stay on-site all week long and come home with maybe when the \$5 was – maybe \$25 or \$20 for the week.

Shelden: Wow.

Emma: And that's how families kept going. They – the money that was brought home, they would share it with the folks at home, to help buy shoes, to help buy this, that, or the other, and it was just a terrible raping of the land, poverty, and that's what we walked into – post-war poverty, you know, and there were no tractors. Just a very few people had tractors. You had to do it with your horse and your plow. So, it was hard.

Shelden: Right. And your dad owned land.

Emma: My daddy owned land.

Shelden: How common was that for blacks to own land at that time?

Emma: Not very, very common. Not very common, and not for him to buy the amount of land that he did. He and his brother bought 100 acres of land together. And gradually it was sold off and sold off – and one brother died and that was sold off, and then my father kept 43 acres, but we were the largest land-owners from Coan Stage all the way out to Village, black land-owners.

Shelden: Coan Stage. I was trying to remember the name of the place where –

Emma: They called it Coan Stage. A mile from 360. Every –

Shelden: And it's between here and Heathsville, is that right?

Emma: Coan Stage – you go on out and go past, go across the mill here at the water. And then after you cross the water and the mill, you take the first right to your right and you go back about a mile and then I'm on – our old house is on Dungan Road. Dungan Road or Dungan Lane. And it was – is this Harold?

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: And that's where – that's where it was. And acquiring land was a new idea for black folk. It was new. And they would buy a piece of land, and they didn't have money to build a house, they would put a shack on it, and eventually they would build something, build something, and it was something. You'd have 19-20 children and you'd put 'em in two rooms, you know, and gradually you would add on, you know. And we as a people, we've come a long way. And we're the fastest growing, most prosperous people in the history, in the history. No one has made as much progress as the black man in America. You know, I don't know whether people realize it or not but no one has made as much history and progress as the black man in America.

Shelden: And the black woman in America.

Emma: And the black woman, too. Well, I include myself –

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: And it's remarkable but I'm concerned that our young people don't appreciate the fact of where we've come from. They're living in the present and they're not concerned about the future. Education was something that was valued. "Oh I have to go to school. I want to learn how to write. I want to learn how to read." Communities would send one person up to Union so that person could come back and teach. And they'd pay for the tuition with baskets of greens, baskets of sweet potatoes, a thing of chicken – I forget what they call it – anyhow, it was a container that held chickens. A packet full of chickens and –

Shelden: It'll come to you as we talk.

Emma: Right and Irish potatoes. And anything that they could get – string beans from the garden. They would send a whole bunch of stuff up there and how long it took to get to Union, I don't know, but it was quite a distance. Horse and buggy – horse and something from here to there, you know, and it was tedious and arduous. But the person would come back and they would teach. They would teach. And that's how important the education was, how bad they wanted it. [to Harold] You gonna leave us? Oh. [to Shelden] That's how important the education was, and we've gotten away from that.

Shelden: Yeah. We all have.

Emma: Yes, we have. Ask me something.

Shelden: Okay. Let's see – I kind of want to know both what you know about your own and your father's experience in terms of like a typical lesson at the school or textbooks or other materials. Do you remember any of that, for yourself, or did your dad talk about it for him?

Emma: My dad – the teachers had the See Spot Run –

Shelden: The Dick and Jane books?

Emma: The Dick and Jane books

Shelden: That's what I read, too. Isn't that interesting?

Emma: The Dick and Jane books. I forget what it's called – the First Grade Primer or something like that. And we had cast-offs from the white schools. We had cast-off books from the white schools. You'd get a book. Might not have a back on it. Or you'd get a book, and the middle part of the contents was gone, but they did the best they could with what they had. And you had the cooperation of your parents. Today you don't have the cooperation of your parents. If you misbehaved, the teacher would give you a flogging with the ruler and send a note home with you and you got another one. And you knew to behave at school. You knew to behave at school.

Shelden: I read that Putnam and Holley did not administer corporal punishment at school.

Emma: No, they'd [smack] on your hand or across the knuckles. Daddy said he got it across the knuckles with a yardstick. And as sensitive as they were, I guess that was the end of the world.

Shelden: Yes, they did. Kind of, yeah.

Emma: End of the world. Because they loved those teachers. They absolutely loved those teachers and they were so kind and understanding and helpful in any and every way. They went through the neighborhood trying to teach sanitary practices and how to take care of your little babies and give them baths and – 'cause sometimes when they were born, they didn't get a bath 'til they were about a year old. And you wondered why they died. You know, "Well, it's just the Lord's Will." Well, no – it was just being dirty, you know.

Shelden: Were all of your teachers black?

Emma: Not – after I came here, yes. All of my teachers were black.

Shelden: Were all of your dad's teachers black?

Emma: All of my dad's teachers were black. I had white teachers in New York.

Shelden: Well, there were white teachers early on at the Holley School. When Putnam and Holley first started coming here they had white teachers regularly.

Emma: Yes, the last teacher was Carrie Benton Allen. And there are some letters from her on the wall that was written to my Daddy. They're copies.

Shelden: Tell me your dad's name again.

Emma: Robert J. Diggs.

Shelden: Of course Diggs, sorry.

Emma: Of course Diggs. Robert J. Diggs. And from her – she was the last white teacher to teach at Holley School. And I think she's on the wall out there. One of those pictures, I think.

Shelden: And that was before he took over as trustee? Right? 'Caus, okay – this is my understanding – in 1917 when Putnam died, it had been up 'til then a private school and so it could be integrated. But then in 1917, the trustees felt like they had to let the Board operate the school – the County Board – and so then it became a public school and then it could not be integrated. It was at that point I guess against the law to have white teachers with black students or white students with black students. And it wasn't, it wasn't – during Holley and Putnam's time it wasn't common for white students to attend, but it did regularly happen. From time to time, white students –

Emma: From time to time, yes it did. But I wasn't a part of that scene. I was not a part of that scene. And there was a stigma, too, coming to a black school. If whites did come, they didn't come and stay long, because the community would chastise them.

Shelden: The white community?

Emma: "You're going up there with them niggers."

Shelden: How did the blacks feel about it? Did your dad ever talk about this?

Emma: Um, I don't think it made any difference. He was concerned about civil rights. He was concerned about civil rights but during that time, you were supposed to keep your mouth shut. You weren't supposed to make any waves. And when we moved here, my father started talking about my children are not going to walk to school and this is what we need to be doing. We got visited by the Night Riders.

Shelden: Did you get a cross burned in your yard?

Emma: We didn't get a cross burning, but one night, my Daddy got up and said, "Come on, you all, we're going down to the cellar. Come on Maude with the baby and we're going down to the cellar." He had a little lantern and downstairs we went. "Why are we going down ... " "Don't talk so much, come on, let's go down in the cellar." Well, the cellar was down in the kitchen. And he lifted up the trapdoor. Mamma went down with the baby. And then the other little boy went with his lantern, and I was the last one

to go. And I said, "I'm not going down in there. I going to be with you." So he put the thing down, and I said, "Daddy, where are we going." And he said, "We're going outside, and I want you to be quiet." We went outside and these horses and these people with these things on their head. And somebody said, "Boy, what you think you're doing around here?" And "We're going to teach you a lesson." And I just reared up. "You'd better leave my Daddy alone. You'd better not bother my Daddy." And everybody got quiet. They didn't see me, see. It was dark. And everybody got quiet. "Now you better mind." And they turned around and went on wherever they were going. I could see my Daddy trembling. And after they were gone, he said, "You know, Sugarpea? You saved my life tonight." I said, "What did they want? Why'd they talk to you like that?" Daddy said, "I'm trying to make a change. I'm trying to make a change for my people," you know. We had people who – the man who rules your stomach, rules your life. You know? They had to go to work, and they can borrow money against the next payday. And he tells you, "Don't you vote for this man." So you don't vote for that man. If you need a car, he'll go and stand for you to get a car. "Don't you go to vote today." You don't go to vote. They'd take the fishermen out – they used to – keep 'em out all day long on boating days. They don't do it anymore. But times were hard. And they didn't address you as Mrs. Carter. You were Aunt Sally or Aunt Emma or Boy or Uncle John. And I tell people. I've got six children; I'm married. I am Mrs. Carter. We don't have any problem with it now. But it used to be when I first came here, it used to be.

Shelden: I was just sitting here thinking, "When I call you Emma, is that all right?"

Emma: It's okay. It's okay. People are more informal now. People are more informal, but if I don't know you, you have to call me Mrs. Carter. And I said – went into the back one day and somebody said – that was a long time ago – "How you doing, Emma?" I said, "I beg your pardon. I'm not your friend, and I'm not your relative. You don't call me by my first name. I am Mrs. Carter. You call me that, or don't call me anything." Didn't have any more problem with that. Didn't have no problem with that, and the things that these Holley School students have done has been a tremendous asset. My father helped people who came to New York to get employment. He put them in taxicabs. He put them in elevators. He put them all over New York City when they came. And when he came, he was – the reason why he stopped working for the Astors, 1935, Social Security came into being, and they advised him, if he wanted to get on Social Security, to get a public job. And if he didn't, he wouldn't get any Social Security. So he did. And that's how he was able to sustain himself when he moved here with the Social Security for my mother, me, and my two brothers. And so when he came, he started to talk to the people – had a town meeting at the church. You make your employer take out Social Security. They weren't doing it. They weren't doing it. Oh, that raised the biggest furor. I'm surprised he lived as long as he lived, seriously, because they didn't know how to do it. They had to get an education as to how to do it. You understand what I'm saying? So, it was just a new thing. It was just a new thing. You know.

Shelden: So, you're kind of going in this direction, so I want to ask the question: how would you describe the importance of the school – and I'm asking this question in three parts: to the African-American community, to the larger community in Lottsburg or

Northumberland County, and to you and your family. So, let's start with the African-American community. How would you describe the importance of Holley School?

Emma: I would describe it as tremendous. It had a tremendous influence on this community. Without it, there wouldn't be a community. Without the influence of Holley Graded School, there would not be an active, black American community. Our students have gone all over the world. The grandchildren have branched out and they are all over the world – judges, doctors, nurses, mothers and fathers, fishermen, maintenance managers, White House – they're everywhere. For, from the influence of Holley School.

Shelden: So to the larger community in Lottsburg or Northumberland County, what do you think of as the importance, the importances, the influences of Holley School in this area?

Emma: Very important. Very important. The people who are here, and the people who were here and went away and came back have brought a new insight to the community because of their start at Holley School, and it's been a – it's a tremendous influence that this school has had.

Shelden: Can you think of an example? I know I'm putting you on the spot, but can you think of an example of a time where you could see that somebody who had gotten their start at Holley School had brought new insight to the community here to race relations or to anything else in Northumberland County.

Emma: Well, Robert J. Diggs was one.

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: Robert J. Diggs was one.

Shelden: And the fact that he was working for Social Security for – helping folks get Social Security – and the fact that he was trying to set up a bus system for the schools.

Emma: There are so many.

Shelden: Do you think the fact that he had an education that he knew not all blacks were going to get had an impact on how he saw his role in the community? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Emma: Yes. He realized because of his educational background that he wasn't necessarily superior, but he was able to have a complicated thought process, and he knew how to go about solving a lot of the problems that were going on at that particular time, and he was willing to work with and reach down and help to bring up our people. There was a Eugene Nelson – he got to be an insurance agent. Eugene Nelson. And there were other teachers – Lorraine Brooks, she used to go, she used to be a principal here. She was a student here. Lorraine Brooks. Mary Maith, she was a principal here. All of these people made contributions to the community, and the community looked up to them,

because why? They had an education. They had an education – they were able to influence – our people didn't know how to fill out forms, how to apply for anything, Social Security or whatever. They didn't know how to help their children with their homework. So they had to look up to someone. And they looked up to the ones that had an education.

Shelden: And what – how is the school important to you and your family? Can you gauge that?

Emma: It's very important to me, because I see and I have reaped the benefits that the school has provided. It was like an oasis in a dry ground, a dry area. It provided a social and educational outlet for the community. People rallied around and helped to have chicken dinners and pigfoot dinners and all kinds of dinners to have the League meeting. And the League – there was a group of little League's parents and they thought they had a good meeting when they collected six dollars, you know, to help pay the electrical bill or to help to buy lamps or what – it wasn't always electrified, and they had to buy wood and the parents had to buy wood. So, they had the little dinners and the this and the that and the other thing. It was – and everybody said, "Well, we're going up to the school tonight." If anything was going on, they went to the school. And the school came out of the church. Everybody who was a member of the church, you know, came to the school.

Shelden: They were kind of mutually reinforcing.

Emma: Mutually reinforced. Right. Mutually reinforced. And I don't understand now why the community doesn't rally together to preserve this old landmark. I really don't understand. I think newfangled things have gotten in the way. It's an icon. The church and this building are the only historical things in Lottsburg. The only historical things in Lottsburg – buildings, icons. And I don't know – we were a diverse group when we first started, talking about preserving and maintaining historic – but we died out. A lot of us have died. And –

Shelden: I think Porter would still be engaged if he felt –

Emma: I'm going to get back with Porter. I'm going to get back with Porter, because say that you want to – any effort of the magnitude that we're attempting – has to be a community effort.

Shelden: Well, and it is actually a community history.

Emma: Community history, but I'm talking about it has to be a diverse group.

Shelden: Yes, I quite agree. I quite agree.

Emma: It has to be a diverse group. Now when I was president, we had a diverse group, and there were a lot of things that I may not have gotten done if it hadn't been for that diverse group.

Shelden: Well, and I think this is important, too, in a way, that the school was founded by women who believed in integrated society, believed it so much that they left their society, their home, behind. And so it seems to me to be true to that, we should be working together.

Emma: I agree. I agree. And this is 2011. But there are still carryovers of the old system.

Shelden: Yes, always.

Emma: You know? There are still carryovers. I mean –

Shelden: There's still lots to be learned here.

Emma: Yes, and – there are factions that pull apart. There are factions that don't want to help this group, help that group. And I say we need to work together. All of the problems that I have, you have. If I get sick, I go to the same doctor you do. We have babies the same way. You know, I had to have blood at the hospital. "Who's blood is that?" Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. "Are you sure?"

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: I'll tell you – but you know, we're all one and we need to get to that point. Integration has happened, and I see a lot of things happened that I don't want to have happen, but there's nothing I can do about it. You know, our black boys, they're marrying white girls. Our white girls are marrying black boys, you know. I guess everybody has their choice, but I would prefer that our races stayed – what's the word – pure? Pure. But they, they're not ever going to be pure anymore, because a lot of things happened in slavery. You know, my grandmother was half-white. Okay, and I have first cousins who have blond hair, blue eyes, green eyes – they look like white. Nothing I can do about it. And if they married somebody who was white, then the line goes on, you know. And I said after a while – all of my grandboys, all of my grandboys have married white girls. I said, now 25-30 years from now, they'll say, "That's my black grandma."

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: Well, that's the truth. That's the truth. There's no stigma to it. You know Queen Elizabeth has black in her family.

Shelden: I did not know that.

Emma: You did not know that. Oh yes, she does. Yes, she does. I found out – I said, "Okay." But she didn't want to dwell on it when it was brought to her attention. But the fact is the fact. You know, the fact is the fact. And a lot of us, you know, you can tell – you can tell folks. They may be just as white as snow, but you look at the hair – "What happened to you?" You know. Understand where I'm coming from. Yes, I do. Some of them here acknowledge their progeny, you know. "That's my cousin. Even though I'm

white, he's black. That's my cousin." Or "That's my half-brother" or whatever. They acknowledge. Yeah, they acknowledge.

Shelden: Yeah, we just recently got a black cousin integrated into our family, actually, so this is in my – I have half-brothers and half-sisters, and my half-sister and her other family just recently went to her reunion where a black cousin came, and so yeah – it's interesting to see that happening –

Emma: It is. It is. Where you see a lot of that is Bermuda. I was there a while back, and we were touring, and it got time for people to get off work. And all these beautiful many-hued women were coming up the street, and they had gray eyes and blue eyes and green eyes, and I was going to say – I said, "Oh my goodness, but she's brown. What's she doing with blue eyes?" You know, the sailors were marooned there and from wherever – it's a melting pot. It's a melting pot. I was just astounded. There was no special group – not one special color. It's all mingled, all mingled up. I said, "They're beautiful. They're just beautiful!" You know?

Shelden: Yeah. What were we so scared of?

Emma: Huh?

Shelden: What were we so scared of?

Emma: I don't know. I don't know. Well, one thing they were afraid of during the slavery. There were more people who were slaves here than there were whites. You know? So, they had a reason to be nervous.

Shelden: Yeah.

Emma: The only thing that kept them tame and in place was they didn't know where to go. You'd brought them across the water – new country – they didn't know where to go if they got free. You know? And then, there was some mis – what do you call it – miscegenation going on.

Shelden: I'm sure there was.

Emma: There was some going on, you know. Yeah, there was something going on, you know. Plantations wives that had black babies, and they killed 'em. You know, so – it was just something. It was just something. I remember way back a long time ago, where there was a black woman down in Edwardsville. She lived in New York, and she married a white guy. That's a long time ago. That was before it got to be a thing. He couldn't come here unless he came in the nighttime. And if he came in the nighttime, he couldn't go outdoors. He had to stay inside the whole time he visited his wife. But she could go where he was, and there wasn't anything said.

Shelden: And so she was white and he was black?

Emma: She was black and he was white. She was black and he was white. And I said, "What's the matter with people?" But he picked who he wanted; she picked who she wanted. But it just wasn't done. It just wasn't done. It just wasn't done.

Shelden: Again you're heading in the direction of my question, so I want to get my question asked. How would you describe relationships between the school and its white neighbors.

Emma: Then or now?

Shelden: I would say both.

Emma: In the beginning, it was a suspicious entity. It wasn't done. "Who do you think you are, coming here and stirring up trouble?" It wasn't done. And a lot of flack was carried on. They had a post office here, and one day the – my father said somebody got chicken pox or whooping cough or something. And they didn't come in because they were scared to death that the mail was contaminated. I mean, they just didn't know. They just didn't know. The whites had little one-room schools all around, but the blacks didn't have anything. They didn't have, they didn't have anything. And this was the only school that they had. The only school. Now, there used to be a little one-room school over in there in the Avalon area, and there used to be a little one-room school – I'm thinking it was over in, over in Lively Hope or Callao, but that was just a one-room school. I think it was for the little children, and the bigger children had to walk here.

Shelden: Oh, you're saying in Callao and over in –

Emma: in that area –

Shelden: was a one-room school for the black children –

Emma: one-room school for the blacks. It was like a – I can't say a nursery school. But it was something like a primer. The little ones couldn't walk but so far, maybe, you know.

Shelden: Right.

Emma: No, it wasn't first through fourth. It may have been one to two.

Shelden: Oh okay.

Emma: Uh huh. First and second. It was a thorn in their sides. Holley School was a thorn in their sides, but they gradually saw as time went on the benefits of having a school in the area. They gradually learned. And that made them want to learn, because you know – you grow up, you didn't need an education, so they said, all you needed to know how to do is farm. And we were a county of rednecks, chew tobacco, wear overalls. I never saw overalls that had patches on top of the patches before in my life. But that's the way they lived. Chew tobacco, spit over here and spit over there, and smoke old nasty

pipe, and take a bath on Saturday night, maybe. But Miss Putnam taught her students to bathe. You know, we learned things.

Shelden: Did your dad talk about that.

Emma: Yeah. We learned things. We learned a lot of things, the right things to eat and not to fry everything. Boil things – you understand what I'm saying? And to eat your vegetables. And have your vegetables with maybe some meat. People used to get sick when they had hog-killing time, 'cause that's what they ate. Had ham for breakfast – chitlins for breakfast, pork chops for supper 'til he was gone. And then, what did you have? You had high blood pressure. You know, you had high blood pressure. And then they learned how to smoke the meat and preserve it, and they learned how to raise some chickens and get eggs. Everybody learned how to buy a cow and have some milk, and you traded this for that or this for some flour or this for some meal. And you walked in the field and picked up corn behind the corn picker so you could feed your chickens. And it was just a hard life, very hard, very hard life. Nobody had any running water, and sometimes you had to walk from here to the church or further to the spring to get some water. I don't know how people did it.

Shelden: Did your dad talk about when he was walking to and from school or whatever – or when you were walking to and from the bus, did you encounter white folks?

Emma: No.

Shelden: No?

Emma: No. They had – when I was walking to high school to catch the bus, they had busses. They had busses.

Shelden: Oh, so you didn't – there wasn't any –

Emma: Any intermingling.

Shelden: Was there talk back and forth – like, one of the folks that I interviewed talked about sometimes the kids on the bus would yell out their window.

Emma: Oh yes, that's when the – it never happened to me. But it did happen. It did happen. They were jealous when they built the new Central High School, the one that's been torn down. And the blacks got that. That was the new high school after they came from Rosenwald. Rosenwald closed in 1958, and they went to school in '59 in the new school. And then when the busses would go by, the whites would hurl epithets, you know, and say bad things and dada dada dada da. And we had the new elementary school over here at Lottsburg. That was built. And they would come by sometimes and say bad things. You know, but they already had a school. But they didn't want us to have one. They already had one. You know? But that was a way, I guess, of keeping us down because we never were an ignorant people. We never were – even in Africa, we weren't

an ignorant people. And I said, to come here and everything we've done, we've become Americanized. We want our hair straight. We want a house like you have. We want a car like you have.

Shelden: Well, maybe not me.

Emma: Want to dress like you dress. We want to have tea parties like you have. I see that. It bothers me, but there's nothing I can do about it. You know? We're integrated into that society. And I have gone to Lenten services and to worship services with others, and I am struck by how cold the other side's worship services are. It was just like "can you help us raise – donut sales order form, Christ died, stayed in the grave three days. And we're hoping that you will take this into consideration," and –

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: But we – I'm serious – there's feeling there. There's feeling there. Even today, we have people who are struggling, who have no hope. There's no place to go, except to the Lord. And I understand when people come and a song strikes a nerve or the minister says something that refers to them, and they just let it go and scream. I understand. But if it happened in your church, I'd run because they wouldn't know what it was –

Shelden: [laughing]

Emma: I would run. I mean, every one I've been in, sit there just cold.

Shelden: I've heard it referred to once as the frozen chosen.

Emma: The frozen chosen. That's the Good Word for the frozen chosen. I mean, and I look around. Nobody says – hums or – they let the choir sing – they don't sing. If you happen to come in late, all the whites do like this [gestures]. And you can hear it. And the blacks are so busy clapping their hands that they don't – they might see you and they might not. But if it wasn't for the religion, we couldn't have made it. We could not have made it, 'cause it was hope when there was no hope. It was water when there was no water. It gave us strength to move on and really, Mary, I don't know how we made it. I really, I honestly don't. I had a teacher who said, you know, she came to school one morning, and she had to walk from down in Reedville up to the – I think it was – Hygeia. She said, "You know, Emma?" She was an older teacher. "The closer I got to that corner, it just looked so funny. There was something wrong." And she said, "When I got up there," she said, "My land. Somebody had lynched a man." I said, "What?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, what did you do?" She said, "There wasn't anything I could do." She said, "I kept on to school." She said, "I knew – when I came back, he was gone."

Shelden: When was this?

Emma: This was way back in the early 30s, early 30s. And she would tell that often, how she was on her way to school, and she saw this man that had been lynched, hung up from a tree. You know?

Shelden: What kind of a message is that? I guess it was the one they intended.

Emma: Mm hm. That was the message – intimidation. Intimidation. You know, and they still have, they still have a form of slavery here. I look at the oyster houses. They don't make any money. If they get paid say \$100 for this week, they do whatever they can with the \$100 and they go back Monday morning to borrow \$50 more – if anything comes up, they go back and get \$25. So, at the end of their paycheck, they don't have much, maybe \$60 or maybe \$35. Can't live on that, so they go Monday and get some more money. Now, if that isn't slavery, what is slavery? But you talk about a union? You're a bad girl. Understand what I'm saying? We still have a form of slavery. I tell my children, "don't go out and buy things you can't afford." Nothing I can do to help you with these big mortgages. You got a mortgage \$2,500 a month, you got two car payments to pay \$400 a month, you got food, utilities, children, babysitter. Where's all this money coming from? If you can't afford to stay home one day, you're a slave. You're a slave. Why can't you live in a house that costs \$98,000, rather than five, half-million? Why can't you drive a small car? Because somebody else got a big one? "Mamma, you don't understand." "Yes, I do. Yes, I do." I said, "Every time you get paid, take a little bit for saving." "Mamma, that's old." "Okay, it's old. What you looking all down in the mouth for?" "Mamma, I don't have no money." I said, "I'm sorry, I told you. Mamma don't have any either." You know? Okay. There's still a lot of things we need to grow on – not only as blacks, whites, too. All – whole societies, you know. We learn and we're told – but we want to jump in that mudhole anyhow. Anyway. Any more questions?

Shelden: Yes, I have three more. One is – this one is actually about life before integration, which you've talked a lot about. But what do you remember about when integration happened?

Emma: Oh it was horrible. Oh there was such a furor. My son was one of the ones who integrated Northumberland High School. It was a furor. They weren't gonna teach them black children, and "I'm not gonna do thus and so." And the blacks when the teachers, they could come out of high school and teach. But when integration came, they had to go back to school. And they started off ignoring our children. That's where I come in. "And you don't ignore my child. You do what you're supposed to do. And if you can't handle it, call me. You don't treat my children mean in any kind of way, and by the same token, my children are going to be respectful to you. You've got a problem, you call." Okay. They wouldn't do this. They wouldn't do that. They wouldn't call on 'em, dada dada dada. "I have to go to school and raise holy Harry to get you to treat my child the way he's supposed to be treated." You know, and I didn't stop with the principal. I would go to the school board, school board to the superintendent. You know, I know what – you know, you have to inform yourself as to what's available for you. And then you go after it. You don't talk behind somebody. Okay. "Give me the State Board of Education. Give me this department. Tell me what you're supposed to be doing and who's supposed to be doing what in this particular program. Okay – can you send me some information. I got

you. I got you. You know what I mean. I got you." And I've had to do that with my children and everybody else's child. It was horrible.

Shelden: So when the school – when they decided they were going to integrate, it didn't happen right away, right? The school closed for a while?

Emma: They gave you freedom of choice.

Shelden: Okay.

Emma: They gave you freedom of choice.

Shelden: That's what happened in Lottsburg first.

Emma: That's what happened in Northumberland first. That's what happened in Northumberland – the gave you freedom of choice. That went on for two or three years, and then they decided that they were going to – three of them – my son, Deborah, and two or three others integrated Northumberland High School. Child, it was a mess. People were crowded on sidewalks looking. And I was there, too. "You're not gonna bother my child." You know what I mean? And, of course, nothing happened. The sheriff was there, and it happened every day that week and they got used to it. And if you leave the kids alone, they can make it. You leave the kids alone, and they get along. And then that's the way it went on, you know, but for programming, if you didn't inform yourself about what was available, what was going on, what was available for your child and children, they could tell you anything. But see, I always went to the top. I don't say, "I heard –" or "she said –" I don't do that. But it was a learning experience, and it was long past due. And some things have gotten better, Mary, and some things have gotten worse. You know? We still have families who have no running water. We still have families – two and three families in one trailer because they can't afford this, that or the other thing, and we've been working, trying to get some help for them. And it's coming slowly, and you have to go to the Board of Supervisors and fight like a dog. You can get a block grant for this group over here. They're all white. Block grant for these over here, and "We can't." "Don't tell me you can't." Understand what I'm saying? Yeah, but we still have to work together. And if it weren't for Holley School, a lot of us would have been lost.

Shelden: Two more. What one thing do you know about the school that you would most like others to know?

Emma: I'd like for people to know that Holley School is an icon, a historic icon, that has been a blessing to the black people of Lottsburg. We need to remember the landmark and the effort that was put in to make it grow. Someone planted a seed and now we have trees.

Shelden: Good. And what would you most like to know about the school that you don't know?

Emma: If there were a blueprint around, I would like to know the composition of the little town they had back there at the Eastgate. That used to be called the Eastgate, and there were little cottages on one side and littlecottages on the other, and if there were anything, any blueprints available, pictures available, I would like to see that.

Shelden: Like how the lots were laid out ...

Emma: How the lots were laid out. I would like to see, I would like to see that the school restored and maintained again to be a community center. What's the question?

Shelden: The question is what would you most like to know about the school that you don't know.

Emma: That I don't know. I would like to know some more about Sallie Holley and Miss Putnam. What caused them to be abolitionists? Why was there such a concern for the Negro? What did they go through when they established the school? How did they handle it? Was it hard? Did they regret it? They gave up a life for Holley School. Neither of them married. You know. Did they ever look back and say, "I wish I had done something different?" You know, how was it built? How was that first school built? Just a one-room concern – how was it built? Was it warm? Where did they get water from? What did they sit on – Daddy said they sat on planks, no backs, wood floors, air coming up through the planks. And they put stuffed newspapers in the cracks and covered it with, laid it with braid rugs and put them on the floor. You make do. You make do. But those are some of the things I would like to know. Where did they live? What kind of families did they have? What did their families say when they decided to come to Virginia to start a school for blacks? Were they disgraced? Put out of the family? How – what happened? How did their families feel about it? I wish I could talk to somebody who was around when Holley School was first built. The old one. It wasn't a good thing. It wasn't a good thing. No, it just wasn't a good thing. Whites threw eggs, rotten eggs, you know. They did all kinds of things, you know. But it's still a shining icon. It's still a shining icon. We owe our lives to Holley School. We do.

Shelden: Thanks. Thanks, Emma. I'm done.

Emma: Are you? I've enjoyed talking.

[end recording]

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