One Ashland, Many Voices Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview with Toni Burruss

Interviewee: Toni Burruss
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AT: Alright if I could please get your full name?

TB: My full name is Toni Muranda Burruss

AT: If I could also get your birthday please?

TB: My birthday is September 25, 1963

AT: Alright, thank you. My name is Alexa Tellez-Mansy and I will be interviewing her. Well my first question would be how long have you lived in Ashland?

TB: I’ve lived in Ashland all my life.

AT: All your life, wow.

TB: Life long resident
AT: Life long resident. (pause) What was it like growing up in Ashland as a kid?

TB: It was a wonderful experience. Um. As a kid we had freedom to walk around as a child pretty much you know you had your rules you know how they say old school. My parents could trust us we were nine and ten years old we could walk to what you could call downtown which actually means you wanted to walk to the heart of the town. We used to go to Hughes Drug Store as kids and get ice cream and milkshakes and things like that. It was a wonderful experience everybody grew up in a community that I am in. Everybody grew up loving one another they could discipline you and it was just a total family atmosphere. And it was very very rural much more rural than what it is now.

AT: Compared to now to your childhood, do you think it has improved, has Ashland improved since then or did you like the rural like kinda smaller town aspect of it

TB: I miss the smaller town atmosphere I really do because that the way I grew up and I was happy that way but you know as time change so does growth just managing growth um we’re just busier now. But the only think that I don’t like about the town is the amount of cars. That’s the part I don’t like. Of course it was less cars back in the day but that’s the only thing I don’t like about it the traffic issue.

AT: Umhum. Um. So now that there’s more cars when you were growing up was it just you just walked everywhere and that’s how you got around?

TB: Yea, we definitely walked everywhere we had to go. Um. And you didn’t have any problems with strangers you know not like you do today. Um I have a eleven year old niece now and we don’t even trust her walking to my moms house which is just you know a block away where as when we were younger we would walk as a group of our friends and we could walk anywhere all over Ashland because everybody knew everybody and all you had to do was give your last name and they knew what family you were with. So you couldn’t get away with anything because everybody knew who you were or whose family you belonged to or what your family stood for. So someone always knew what was going on.

AT: So, um with the recognition of the name um were your grandparents, your parents, also long time residents of Ashland?

TB: Oh yea, yea. My grandfather yea. My mom is from Caroline County but my father’s people are from this area. The Burruss.

AT: So with that everyone knew who you were and they could report back to your family.

TB: Yea it was good. It had its good points and it has its bad points. (laughs). Yea it has its good and bad points. (continues laughing). You cant get away with anything because everyone knows who you are and even at my age now people know who you are especially the older people and uh you know you
couldn’t get away with a lot. You couldn’t get away with a lot.

AT: So with this growing atmosphere do you think Ashland has somewhat lost that like do you still get recognition with your name now?

TB: Yes, I do. Generally with older people um the older residents but because the town has grown so much and we’ve had what we and its interesting what um the thought process for a lot of people in Ashland. If you haven’t been born and raised here your considered an outsider no matter how many years you have moved her and you stayed here. You’ll hear ol’ Ashland say that and um your gonna have people who have been here thirty years but if you weren’t born and raised here your considered an outsider and that’s changed. I mean its changed but like I said a lot of old Ashland still thinks that way. Um. But as far as being recognized um its not like it used to be. Um its getting away from because we have so many new people coming in and they don’t remember when like we do and so its changed. Growth. It’s changing.

AT: Um a lot of these new people do they tend to just be from all over Virginia do you know or around the country?

TB: I think probably from around the country. I think a lot of people moved here thinking that you know they love the small town atmosphere so they want to come here and raise there children; however, everybody wants to move here so it doesn’t stay that small town atmosphere if everybody wants to move here and raise there children like that so yea its changed quite a bit

AT: Um. So as a child growing up um did you ever encounter the Ashland police force getting into any mischief or anything like that.

TB: Oh lord no. (laughs) Oh no, if I ever in trouble I would have gotten murdered you know. My brother got in trouble once for stealing some bubble gum out of 711 but um even then it was such a small atmosphere that the people that worked in the store knew you and they would call your parents um it had to be something serious in my opinion for the police to have gotten involved and we didn’t have the police force then like we do now although its still small but then you only had like one or two police that you knew and they lived in the community. So you respected the police then you respected their position so it’s not like it is now where a lot of people don’t respect law enforcement they just do whatever you know and we had our problems in the town then but it was something that everybody lets say for instance for instance everybody knew if you had an alcoholic what we would say town drunk and you knew who they were but its not like it is today. You know still respected them if they were adults. And so even they had a problem you still respected them and the police in that day did not just lock you up for anything, they would talk to you. They would take you home and or they’d talk to family members so it was sort of like the Mayberry affect with Andy Griffith. You know. Um. They carried guns they did more talking than they did enforcement, so yea huge different (laughs).
AT: Um. Speaking of colorful characters, were there any growing up like store owners or people in particular that stand out in your mind?

TB: Um. I used to go with my mother all the time to buy stockings and buy candy and toys. Mostly clothing items from flowers department store. Billy Flowers owned a department store on the railroad track and as kids we used to go there all the time to shop. We used to go to Barnes’ Drug, Barnes’ store, yea. And we used to go to Hughes’ and um I remember the Hanover Pharmacy, that’s where you went for all your medicines and prescriptions and they had old remedies that you just don’t see exist anymore and you know like if you get a bee sting or something everybody goes and gets a Benadril shot or something like that you know back in that day they said some kinda solution burrow solution that you could buy and um you could just soak it and put it on your arm and it would dry up the bee sting or dry up poison ivy, you don’t see stuff like that anymore, so yea. Hanover Pharmacy, Hughes’ Drugstore, Barnes’ Drugstore, and um Flowers Department Store we used to love that and we used to love to go to Crosses to by the donuts. I would go with my Grandmother’s as a little girl and you couldn’t leave out of Crosses to get you know unless you got a donut. So yea, I remember those days, yea. Umhmm.

AT: oh, well I recognize that some of those places aren’t still standing anymore does that affect you know the atmosphere?

TB: Crosses is the only one still here. Umhmm.

AT: Its lost part of that.

TB: Oh yea, yea. I think that is one of the few original stores that is still here, yea.

AT: Um. Growing up, what school did you go to.

TB: I went to Henry Clay in 1969, that was the first year we intergraded schools here in Ashland and Hanover and um Melvin Hall was our principle, who was our neighbor, and um, I went to Liberty Middle School and then it was eighth and ninth graders. Um. Well I went to Henry Clay first then went to John M. Gandy. John M. Gandy was from fourth to seventh grade. Liberty Middle was eighth and ninth grade and then I went to Patrick Henry for tenth through twelfth grade then I came to Randolph Macon after that.

AT: So you entered Randolph - Macon as a freshman?

AT: And you graduated from Randolph – Macon . . . ?


AT: Did you enjoy your time here at Randolph – Macon?

TB: Yes I did. However, when I think back, I didn’t enjoy it as much as I should have. I did not participate on campus as much as I should have and a lot of it had to do with the fact that I lived at home. I walked to class everyday, so I didn’t, I felt like I really didn’t benefit from the atmosphere as if I had lived on campus and was away from my parents. Because most of the employees that were here were the people that were either my family members or they were neighbors. So again you couldn’t do but so much! Not that I was going to do anything, you know out of the way but you know. And in talking to my father when I graduated, my dad said yea I know pretty much knew everything you did on campus, its just that I had to treat as if you were living away. And I was like aww, that was horrified to hear. I mean, I did not really get into anything serious. I, I, um, others usually you know drink and you party you know and I did a lot of that my freshman year, but by my sophomore year I became a little bit more serious and so I was in Starr dorm and you know at the time is was all boys and you know your running out the guys you know, but um (laughs), I couldn’t do too much without relatives watching me or neighbors watching me and probably going back and telling my father what I was doing, but anything I don’t think it was anything that would alarm my father, yea. Yea, yea. My experience I think could have been better, I had fun, but it could have been better. I miss the comrady of classmates, um I know my classmates by name, I know some of them by face, but I don’t have a relationship with them because I lived at home. You know I was only close with a couple of them and then when I went to Randolph – Macon it was only ten blacks then out of nine hundred students so we were truly a minority here un trying to assimilate and fit in and trying to go to class and still dealing with some attitudes and behaviors in class, but for the most part I was okay because I was able to go back home where as some of my classmates um you know they had to stay on campus and live and deal with it. But you know I was well taken care of while I was here because of the employees and because they knew my family and um because I was the first to go to college in my family so um people took care of me. You know my family took care of me and the employees took very very good care of me here so I didn’t want for anything. I was probably more spoiled outside of campus than I was on, so yea, I was well taken care of . Yea. But the only thing I always encourage um kids sometimes is its best to move away from home and that was something I talked to my dad about it, it was best to move away from home because you grew up quicker. I didn’t grow up quick because if anything went wrong, I could always go back home and I would spend the night every now and then with a couple friends of mine on campus, just go I could get the experience and have fun you know of staying on campus. Well um yea it was different but um, I think if I had to do it all over again, uh I probably would have stayed on campus and I would have participated more. We didn’t have sororities then, so I was an AEPie little sister which you know it was just a handful of us little girls and you couldn’t do but so much in a fraternity. And uh at the time we were kind of like the nerds
(laughs) on campus so um, I just um, did not develop any strong relationships. So sometimes I feel a little disconnected from the college because I don’t have real ties where as a lot of people come back to homecoming. I came back a couple of times to homecoming and things like that and I enjoyed it but I couldn’t sit at homecoming like hey, yea you remember we used to do so and so. I don’t have those types of memories. I don’t have that and that’s what I miss. But I got a good education. And that’s something I’m not sorry about, Randolph- Macon gave me a very good education um I had choices to go to several other colleges and uh my father kind of talked me kind of strong armed me into coming here and I think that’s just so he could keep me close to home and I was the oldest. And so, and his daughter, so um, but I loved the small classroom atmosphere, I really learned a lot, and I think I flourished a lot because of the mentality and the level of intelligence here on campus, um, and it was a struggle because I had one set of friends at home and I had a set of friends here and its tough because they don’t understand the changing that you are going through when your amongst peers who think like you and act like you and they want you to still be home girl when you are there, you know, so I loved the intellectual atmosphere that I had I fit right in. When it came to that they really challenged me to think which I think has good reason why I am the way that I am and its not that you have when you come out of Randolph - Macon its not that you think you are better its just that your thought process is just so different and so um you always hear people say oh you must have been smart to go come to Randolph-Macon. Nah, I don’t think it was that, it was that they challenged you to want to know more and to do more so um the expectations of you when you graduated is fairly high. But I loved it the educational atmosphere of the school.

AT: And do you think that is why now you are also an educator?

TB: uh, I ran for being an educator for years. In fact, I went through uh. We had teacher preparation courses and I did it just to have something to fall back on, just to satisfy my father you know. I didn’t finish because my senior year I needed um student teaching and I didn’t want to come back one more semester, I wanted to graduate. But I just went on and took that anyway and um I didn’t start teaching until ten years ago. Um. I always tutored on the side, always had, but it took my old middle school principle to convince me to take advantage of you know doing what I was doing because you know I in Corporate America working you know that’s what I was doing and so um and I got tired of it, it just wasn’t me and I love working with kids. I just love teaching period whether is was an adult or a child and so um it um Randolph – Macon helped prepare me for that. They gave me the leadership skills that I needed to do what I am doing and to not be fearful of being who I am and thinking the way that I think. Sometime it is a struggle when people do not understand why you think the way you do, so they teach you to be confident about that an uh that’s why I said I love the atmosphere here, the educational atmosphere, um they teach you to be strong and who you are. So when I finally, I left Corporate America, gave three day notice, I was working in Virginia Power and decided it wasn’t for me and just started teaching a couple of days later just been doing it ever since. Yea, yea, so.

AT: And so you teach at Georgetown school in Mechansville?
TB: mhm. Yea um. It’s an alternative school and um people think it’s challenging to work in an alternative school, actually not. Um. They always think an alternative school is for bad kids because you always here about the negative things that go on. Hanover we are blessed, we have really good kids. I just always believe there is no such thing as bad kids. Its just how you have to be able to adapt to reach to that kid for that particular level or situation that they are in. Same way with adults because I teach GED so the adults that come back are generally the kids that dropped out years ago or were troubled years ago. You know they get about nineteen, twenty, twenty one years old and then they realize oh hey this is not how the real world works you know so now I got to come back and get what I need to get so that I can move forward um. Yea but we are blessed; it’s a brand new building you know we started out at the school board and we ended up in trailers up behind Patrick Henry and so I’ve been through that transition and now we are in our own building where the kids have to offer more opportunities for the kids and so um I enjoy but I always enjoyed talking to the kids. Find out where there head is, why they got to the point where they have, and then just to help them strategize and determine where I want to be five years from now. Where do I want to be next year? Where do I want to be the next month? Um. So that they can be successful and try to help them manage through the problems that there having. Yea, cuss a lot the problems are not due to them, sometimes its home life and its much different. You know when I was coming up we had responsibilities when we were young and so um now kids today don’t have a lot of responsibilities like we did. I went to work, I started working at the college when I was thirteen years old. That was my first job, cuss I wanted to go overseas and so I told my dad that I wanted to go to England and Scotland and this was a travel group that was offered at high school. He said well if you want to go you have to get a job. Well you know back in the day at thirteen years old, where you gonna work and get a paycheck? So Randolph – Macon hired me and my first job was putting salad in bowls. And Ill never forget it working in the cafeteria and I worked there until I was about seventeen. And um. But that year I saved six hundred dollars that summer. My dad paid for my trip over seas. So um, we just have that responsibility and so at and by me being the oldest even at a younger age I was responsible for my younger brothers and sisters. I had to clean the house, we had to cut grass, we had to do all that. Where as now, I look at my nieces you know, they don’t do half, if half of what we did when we were kids so that makes the difference. You know the responsibility, you grow up quicker and you become stronger quicker and like I said you know my father just taught us to become leaders not followers so um its, just trying to help these kids understand you can be a leader to, you missed out on some things but this is what you need to do to be successful, you know in the future. Hmhm.

AT: Um. So you said your first job was here at Randolph-Macon when you were thirteen um how do you think that I mean that helped you get the money you needed to go abroad, how after that like do you feel empowered you know you were thirteen and you had gone in and gotten a job and all that.

TB: Um, well. My father owned his own business and its real interesting um my father had a trash business when I was growing up and so um sorta like what you see waste management do and so um when I got my first job at thirteen and I worked. I worked after school from like three to seven working the dinner and I would work weekends from seven to seven. And so um. We were, I was always very faithful but I got the hard work ethic from my parents because that’s all I knew watching my father run
his business and watching my mother because they not only had a trash business but they had tractor trailers and so my mom drove, my dad drove, when we got old enough, I was the only one that didn’t drive, and my brother drove and so I grew up watching my father get up at three or four o’clock in the morning and going to work, you know coming home, taking care of paper work and then he taught us how to do it so it wasn’t anything unusual for me to work like I did as a teenager. I know that is I wanted things I had to work and though my dad could afford to give me those things but you know you had to earn it and so. And without me to having to always constantly going to my father for money, I wanted my own, and even then I still couldn’t spend it like I wanted to but still the fact that it was there so um yea I-I worked and I think as a teenager I worked hard and um I didn’t work here during the summers and I think the first time my freshman year my father wouldn’t let me work which was disheartening for me cuss I was used to working and so my father said no, I want to spend your first year getting acclimated to the college and to the college life and I was just used to always working and so, which I am glad he made that decision. I really am, he let me work my sophomore year up to my senior year. I would work on weekends but I couldn’t work during the week. And so um, yea it’s interesting that you know you grew up around the college you used to come and watch the games as a kid cuss my grandfather used to stand out in front of Starr and used to stand on their trucks and watch the games. Cuss at that time they weren’t aloud to come and watch the game in those days and so you know it’s just interesting um you know as a child seeing all of that and then one day having to attend here. You know he didn’t live long enough to see me graduate but my grandmother on my mother’s side lived long enough to see me graduate and so I just wanted him to be proud. I wanted to make sure that I was successful, that, you know that, they could see that everything they taught me wouldn’t be in vain and so um that’s pretty much how it was then. (laughs).

AT: Oh wow. Um. And so, um, sorry. (pause) Um may I ask growing up did you and your family attend church?

TB: Oh lord yea. Uhm. Yea, now um I will tell as a teenager we went but I can’t tell you how much we paid attention. (laughs), but we went and most of the time you went because you wanted to be with your friends you know um yea. As a kid it was it was expected for you to go to Sunday school and to go to church so yea and as most people, my father stepped away for a while. We did too for a while. We went but we just wasn’t serious. Where as its much different now. You know my father is a minister and so am I so um, we are all very, very active in the church now, so. Yea, umhm. Didn’t want to face Grandma if you didn’t want to go. (laughs) My grandfather was a decan so, my father, from him being the decan, my father’s father, he was expected to be at church, you know. Sunday school and revivals and things like that, umhm.

AT: Um, is that by chance the same church that you are still attending today?

TB: Uhm, yea I still attend Shiloh Baptist. Yea that is our family church. My father goes to Union Baptist now and um my siblings um they attend other churches to. Um, but I am the only one still at the
original church. Uhmm.

AT: Um, is the original church in Ashland or?

TB: Yea, its right on James Street. 106 South James, right where the 711 is, it's right across the street. Um hm, that's where we go.

AT: Oh ok. Um, do you remember the greatest joy or sadness in your childhood?

TB: Yea, my oh, my uh. The greatest joy I had in my childhood, um was my friends when we would go over to where the school board is now. Um, it was there then but it hadn't expanded where John M. Gandy is to. And we used to hang out everyday and we used to just sit and listen to the music latest songs that were coming out. Talk about the songs, talk about the artist, and we would just sit and hang all day long, um cus you didn't go home until it got dark because if you went home during the day mom found something for you to do. So um we uh we would go outside everyday and that's something I noticed to the kids don't do anymore. Um, we used to go outside and we used to just sit you know we used to just hang and just talk, we didn't get into anything but we would just hang and um my childhood friends, we are still good friends today, we still come to the aid of one another, and um the guys didn't take advantage of us like some like I tell my nieces now you know your friends aren't really your friends. When we were talking about friends we were there for one another, we got in trouble together, you know we had good times together and that's like one of my friends recently um two brothers they lost their father. I mean it was nothing for us to step up the plate, what you need us to do, how can we help you that kind of thing, you know they know we are going to come to each others aid, that's what I consider a good friend. We have been like I said since children so my greatest joy is when we used to just sit together and the guys would look after the girls, the made sure guys coming from other communities didn't take advantage of us, they were like big brothers and my sister married one of her friends. (laughs). Um. That's my greatest joy just sitting with my friends and now when we sit together and talk about ol times we just laugh about how much fun we had. Um, probably the saddest time. Um, gosh, that I can remember in my childhood um, eh that's interesting. Um, probably, my um, my sophomore year at Randolph – Macon, I sorta went through an emotional mental breakdown and I think because I worked so much and I had high expectations for myself and it wasn't anything that anybody put pressure on me but it is what I put on myself because I wanted to be successful and didn't want to disappoint my family and didn't want to disappoint friends, um I really went through something um around the beginning of my sophomore year I think I was just burned out. I think that is what was going on and um I had a really hard time and I called one of my professors one night on the phone and I just started crying and couldn't figure out why and um just realized I was just mentally broken at that time and eh after a while I was alright, you know she talked to me for a long time and I was alright and you know that studying, staying up late, and then juggling living at home and being at school and um you got to be one way at home and you got to be another way on campus it just takes a toll on you. You know I didn't recognize it, I recognize it now that's what was going on but eh and then you are going through changes. You know. I'm getting older and I think that was probably one of the lowest moments that I
can remember in my life was um in the beginning, in fact it was um, I got sick from ulcers because I was taking knowdos and fiberin and drinking coffee and that probably didn't help either. And I had a gastritis attack and ended up in the hospital the night before, its stress. It was stress and I was suppose to start class I think that first day of my sophomore year and I was just sick, I was just real sick, (laughs) and ended up having ulcers from yea, hmn.

AT: But you were able to recover and

TB: Yea, and graduated and graduated on time. I did um my senior year. Oh man I had one professor, lord I had a history professor, that man gave me a F on my term paper. I had him my first semester for American history and I came out with a C. So I went to take him my second semester and all the seniors were like are you crazy, nobody ever takes that particular professors class the second semester of his senior year, he is going to flunk you. Evidently he had a history of flunking the seniors and I said, I was like ah-nah he ain’t gonna do me like that. He’s not going to do me like that. I said I came out with a C in his class and they said oh no I am telling you they said I am telling you he has a history. I they know I don’t know cuss they were seniors like me and so um I took the class, did a term paper, and he gave me an F on it and that was horrifying cuss I had never gotten an F on a term paper and so I ended up going back to the writing center and then I got a student to help me and I forgot her name, Joyce, and um I think her name was Joyce I think was one of the best writers on campus and she helped me the paper and then I was babysitting part – time too so I had a professor that used to be here named Dr. Merrit, his wife was a English major and so she helped me with my term paper and he gave me a D- when I turned it back in. I went to him and I talked to him and he gave me a D- and I needed a C to graduate cuss history was my major. So you know Dr. Porter he was my advisor and I was I was torn up because I had bought my announcements you know and all of that for graduation. I had told my family you know everybody was going to be there and I was like oh God, I had to go cry to my dad and I said I’m not going to graduate. He said well do you need me to go down there and talk to him? I said daddy this is not high school that professor could care less about you so I ended up going to Dr. Porter, he knew what I needed and he taught this class and he and I still talk about it today, The Accent of Man and because I was such a history lover, I had seen it on PBS so I had already seen the tapes already seen the show. He just happened to teach from the show and I ended up getting a C in the class and that’s how I graduated. Then we didn’t have, when I was there we didn’t have January Colloquia like they do now. They changed it to May term and I still say they did that on purpose to us because after I graduated they went back to January Colloquia, but um, we had what they call May Term and so I never had a free May Term. I had to take a class. Everybody else could have a whole month off but I never had a month off so um I think I needed one more semester and I would have gotten a French concentration, but um probably could have gotten a minor but um yea, almost not graduating from here, yea that almost did it to me. (Laughs) I almost freaked out again because I did not want to come back an extra semester, not for one class. Yea, I was happy to get that C.

AT: What was the name of the professor who?
TB: Um. Godly. I can see him now, he might have retired. He wrote a book about Randolph-Macon (laughs). Oh my Lord. I had Reinhart, I had Porter, I had um, god I had a German Professor that starts with an H. This guy taught American history and he would, boy we had these difficult exams. He gave you, he put one question on the board, no two questions. Describe America up to 1850 or describe America from 1850 on. So you know what are you going to write about. He Lord I can’t think of the mans name but he was short, he used to walk a dog around campus everyday and he was from Caroline County I remember that cuss he knew my moms family. Oh Lord I can see his face. Probably if I had an old yearbook, I could point him straight out to you but I cant think of his name cant think of his name. I can see him right now.

AT: Where were you born?

TB: What hospital? Saint Phillips, um, that was MCV and at that time MCV was split between you know African Americans babies could be born and where you know anyone else could be born. St. Phillips was the hospital my mother went to when I was born in 1963.

AT: And you said you had a brother, did you have more siblings?

TB: Yea, six of us total. And uh, I had one brother and was five girls. So I’m the oldest.

AT: Did you enjoy growing up with a large family?

TB: Yea, Cuss we are extremely close um we talk to each other all the time and some people look at it not strangely but there fascinated by the fact that we all are extremely close and we talk to each other we lay each other out you know and because we are so close and I have one brother-in-law and he fits in like a brother so its difficult sometimes. I was jus talking to someone about how sometimes it is difficult because we are so close that somebody from the outside could come in because you got to be used to our family style. You know if your not used to it, you could easily be offended, easily be offended because you um we just stay with one another you know my mother raised us like that so that’s how we are.

AT: And did your siblings also like growing up in Ashland?

TB: uhhm. I think of the professors name Skanling. Dr. Skanling that’s who it was. I was sitting there thinking that when you asked me that question. Uh yea, they loved growing up in Ashland. In fact my sister moved back to Ashland for the simple fact that she has girls and so her girls can walk down to my mom and them house. And she likes the fact that we are in community where everyone still knows us and so she knows that there is someone watching over her girls to so yea, umhm.

AT: Um, uh, during your childhood um who was in charge of decisions such as house keeping and
budgeting and things like that?

TB: My mother and father, they were in charge of all of that.

AT: Um, uh, do you have any children?

TB: No, I’m not married either. I don’t have, my sister is the only one that’s married (laughs). Its two of the girls that have kids, my one of my younger sisters has two boys and the one that’s right underneath me has three girls and eh she is the only one right now that is married, the one that is right underneath me and the rest of us aren’t married at all other than the one and don’t have children.

AT: Um, sounds like an odd question. Where did you get milk and ice, things like that?

TB: Aoh, that’s interesting, you know, that’s not odd.

AT: (Laughs)

TB: Now, we didn’t have a ice truck I would think that’s probably my fathers generation you know to come and drop of ice because we did have refrigerators and all of that, um, but milk. My father used to work at Kurl’s Neck Dairy and I mean we could go in the store and buy milk. I ’m not that old but um we did used to have milk and juice delivered to us. We used to have a milk man that did used to come out and leave milk on the front porch when I was growing up. I do remember that and um you know how you have those gallon things of water that you could pull the little spout out, we used to have our milk like that. When we would get cereal we used to go and open up the refrigerator door and pull the spout and get our milk and push it back in and we used to get juice um also. Like I said my dad worked at Kurl’s Neck Dairy so he used to bring it home and this is what we used to have and like I said we used to have a milk man that used to come and leave our milk on the porch to glass bottles of milk. Yea, I remember that. I was real young but I remember.

AT: Do you wish like it was still like that or?

TB: Yea, you know its its some things I wish were still the same, you know, I think that as far as that I like the convience of going to the store and getting what I need. You know (laughs) Well for the most part there are some things you wish were still the same. You know, I still wish we had the type community that we do you know where everybody you know your neighbors and everybody get together you know and just enjoy one another. Now we’re at a point where you know your neighbors but you really don’t. You know, you don’t know the history or whatever so um you’re still kinda cautious you know about where you live.

AT: Um, how do you feel about some of the new businesses such as Homemade by Suzanne’s and Ashland Coffee and Tea, how do you feel about them um now that they are in Ashland?
TB: Um, I don't have any problem with them, um, now, um I go to Suzanne’s I really don’t go into Ashland Coffee and Tea um or like Iron Horse or whatever they are a little expensive but um there not you know that’s just not my cup of tea per say going in there. I go in Suzanne’s because they have good food; I don’t go in there often but I I don’t have any problem with them you know being here. Um, I always say you know for business comes that a service already residents of the town of Ashland to be able to patronize them that’s the only thing I am concerned about but I don’t have any problem with them being here

AT: Um, how did you feel about the Wal-Mart coming in?

TB: Oh, I was in the planning commission when Wal-Mart came in. I was definitely 100% behind Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart, when they first um, when I first heard Wal-Mart was coming, at first I was against it because I liked the town small town atmosphere but I grew up here all of my life and I’ve had, I even had a resident that voted for Wal-Mart. I had a resident come up to me and say you just really don’t care about Ashland? And I said if I really didn’t care about Ashland, I wouldn’t have wanted you to move here cuss I know you are not from here. You know and I uh (laughs) and um sometimes people don’t think about what they say but I remember Ashland when it was dirt road. I just remember when England Street was just two lanes, you know, I remember when route one didn’t look anything like it looked and half and all of it was wooded. Even where the post office was that how it was when I grew up. But I like I said you can’t stop change; it’s how you manage change. Um, the Wal-Mart I have no problems with it what-so-ever, it is outside of the town anyways. It’s not within the town limits, the traffic I mean, the traffic going into Wal-Mart doesn’t affect the heart of the town. Although traffic is awful in the heart of the town, its because of the added small businesses that we have in here. I mean so um I found I found it interesting some of the people that were against Wal-Mart and I was like my God you weren’t against Ukrop’s when they came to Ashland. You weren’t against Food Lion when they came to Ashland so why all of a sudden Wal-Mart? There not going to take your business, there going to add to the town and I mean we could use the tax money to you know offset some of the things that we need here in the town because it’s the businesses on Route 54 that really keeps this town going in my opinion and so otherwise we would be paying taxes out of ying-yang. You know so um we are already paying double tax. We are paying town and county tax and I still say we get the best of services you know than anywhere here in Hanover County you know um. I mean how many towns how many places do you know in Hanover County where you know your officers personal, you can see them shopping in the store with you. You know that kind of thing so um so you see your town planner. You know you are in Ukrop’s, you stop and talk, how are the kids going, you know that kind of thing but um as far as Wal-Mart, yea, I was against it at first when I first heard they were coming and then as I listened to the position. My thing was when I voted for the Wal-Mart, I listened to what the public wanted not my personal opinion. I listened to what the public wanted and when I heard a lot of the elderly in the town talk about they offer some things that they can’t get at these other stores and I had to think about my grandmother and how somebody has to drive her to Richmond to get what she need and I can have a store right here and you have what you need and then one of the store owners I’ll never forgot got up in a meeting and said well I can get
that in the store, but why should we have to tell you so that you can go get it in your store when this store is going to carry it anyhow and you know cheaper prescriptions and plus they brought employment to the town. And so I looked at that. Um, but as in anything um politics is always involved you know. Wal-Mart didn’t choose to come to Ashland on there own, anybody who is smart enough in government knows that a store doesn’t just ride around the country looking for a place to come; they were brought here. I was smart enough to know that and it was old Ashland that brought them here for I was smart enough to know that they brought them here for an investment for somebody so (laughs). I I was for the Wal-Mart. I was for the Wal-Mart. Yea, a lot of people just aren’t educated about politics or what actually goes on but big businesses like that, yea, its going to happen, um we went to Chesterfield and looked at how that Wal-Mart was built out on Iron Bridge Road. You can tell a business how you want it to look for it to fit into your structure of your locality. But you know we told them what we wanted. We told them what they couldn’t have, like this particular Wal-Mart is a Super Wal-Mart but it doesn’t have the auto mechanics side of it like some of them you see and cuss we told them we didn’t want that, you know, and so they honored that, you know. And that’s a give and take on the table and that is what you have to do. That is why I said you have to manage it, you don’t let it control you, but you manage it.

AT: Um, you said that you were on the Committee. Um, being on the Committee, were there any other decisions about the town that you participated in?

TB: Um, On the Planning Commission, um you dealt with some zonings, things like that, um, you had um, how can I explain it? Anybody that wanted to build something or expand sort of as an example, they would have to come before the town, apply for a permit, and get permission to do whatever they need to do, and that’s what I served on. If I am correct there were seven of us. I believe it was seven of us that were on the planning commission and then in turn we would say “yay” or “nay” and then it gets forwarded to the town council and the town council would look at what our recommendations. Our job was to do all of the leg work so that when council got it they would have all the stuff in front of them, you know, what we have done, you know the studies or the questions we’ve asked, um to save them time in making their decision, they would look at what we’ve done and they would say well okay, they have taken care of this, they’ve asked this, things that I wanted to know, okay, well we approve or disapprove, you know what’s going on, so that’s what was our job. Basically we did the leg work.

AT: Um, What do you know about the original Henry Clay Inn?

TB: Very little. I didn’t even know that it existed, um, until they built this one and I still haven’t read much on it. I have read a very little about it other than I heard back in the day about in the 1800s or so it burned down, but I know very little history about the Henry Clay Inn.

AT: Um, do you know some of the other local industry businesses such as the RaceTrak on Ashcake Road?
TB: RaceTrack? On Ashcake? I know of some of the local business. I’ve never seen a RaceTrack on Ashcake Road cuss I pretty much know pretty much how much I know where everything is (laughs) and then some of those businesses when like I said on the Planning Commission had to get permission to build other than I know Sheetz is on Ashcake. Um, is a RaceTrak about to be build on Ashcake Road? On, on, Ashcake Road?

AT: I don’t think so

K: I thin it deals with horses

TB: Oh, oh, that, oh yea. Yea, I thought you were talking about the actual auto store called RaceTrak. There is an. Yea, I know about that, um, I, you know, I don’t know if it is God knows, I don’t know if it is active or not, I know that there is like a little farm out there, yea, I know about that, yea. I remember that as a child coming up. But them being out there, right across from eh, Toddler Town, a little day care center, yea. I know exactly where you are talking about!

AT: Um, the Shirt Factory?

TB: Uh-huh. I don’t know much about the Shirt Factory and stuff other than I know people that have worked there and I used to hear them talk about it. I knew where it was. Um, which is right across the street its not Henry, is it Henry Clay Road? I think its right off of Henry Clay Road, right where, um, the Wemps Building is located if I am correct is where the Shirt Factory used to be. And eh I just used to hear my aunts and from what I understand everybody worked there back in the day just like me working at Randolph-Macon all teenagers worked at Randolph-Macon in the cafeteria. So, yea, I used to hear them talk about it all the time.

AT: Um, like some of the other local ones like Duke’s Market, Cross Brothers,...?

TB: Duke’s used to sell that old – fashioned what my mom used to call what my mom called hard rock candy and we would go there every Christmas season and she said that is the only place you could go and buy the old-fashioned hard rock candy. Its not um its no more than candy you see in a tin box but effindently is was homemade candy probably,. you know, she used to go there and get it at Christmas time. She loved having it as a child so yea you could go to Duke’s and you could get certain meats you couldn’t get anywhere else say thing with Crosses, yea. You could meats there they were fresh meats you know and it was good, yea.

AT: Um, and Hughes you mentioned early, Hughes drug store, um, Mayberry store, uh Lownsberry, um Lawnsberry Bakery.

TB: Um, the only bakery I knew is Litefoot Bakery. The Litefoot Bakery is right across the street from
where my sister currently lives. They you know of course he is long gone, him and his wife. Litefoot Bakery was on Henry Street everybody used to go there, he was a baker and he was a decan out of our church and oh my God that man made the best Dunkin Donuts and Krispy Kreme doesn’t even touch how this man made his donuts. And for years I didn’t eat any other donut even after he stopped making them I wouldn’t eat any other donut because I grew up eating his and he just had a different. Oh, they were good. They would melt in your mouth even when they were cold and hard they were good and you used to just go all the time after school and you had a nickel or so and buy a couple of donuts you could get like four for a quarter or something like that and there was a little um lil teeny bakery in an old building and he would make cakes and all kinds of stuff. He was well known, very well known for it and um, there was he had one of his apprentices that we found in Richmond on 25th street and was making donuts the way he used to make it and people when people found out he was out there. My father would go and buy boxes of donuts. He’s retired now so he left I think his children or grandchildren they didn’t want to run the business but I haven’t found anybody else anybody else everyone whose ever been to Litefoot Bakery would tell you they never found anybody that makes donuts like this man did. Like I said Dunkin Donuts and Krispy Kreme doesn’t even touch. Cuss his donuts being homemade and the sugar and everything on it, the sugar would be like almost like flakes on his donuts. You know how Dunkin Donuts they just dip there’s in there. He didn’t do I don’t how he did his but nobody’s every made it like him, nobody. I never tasted anybodies donuts that tastes like his.

AT: (Laughs). And then the Ashland Feed Store has been here for a while.

TB: Oh yea, they’ve been coming along for as long as I can remember. Yea, yea they are still here. Yea.

AT: And, um, things like livestock and all because of the farms around here. Was that still the case?

TB: Not now, you don’t see the farms like you used to, um you had the Luck Farm, like on your way up to Patrick Henry High School, they got the pond on the left and he used to have cattle and all of that out there. He used to have barns out there, you know, you don’t have farms unless you know, we don’t take that stuff over anymore. (Laughs). Um, a lot of the farms are gone, they are not around like they used to and my grandfather had animals. You had animals down here in the neighborhood that people had there own cows and things like chickens and stuff you don’t see all that is gone now. Yea, all of that is gone.

AT: Um, and then Painter’s Department Store?

TB: Yea, I remember Painters. I didn’t shop in there as much as I did flowers, um, Painters was a little bit more on the upscale if I can remember as a child that’s how I viewed it. But yea, painters existed, yea, surely I forgot all about them.

AT: Um, do you know of some of the historical landmarks that have been around here 50 years or older? Like the oldest house? Um,
TB: Um, not I couldn't tell you who has the oldest house I remember a lot of old houses but I couldn't tell you who had the oldest house. Not at all. My parents currently live in the in Ms. Bundy’s house. We bought that when I was probably about twelve or thirteen years old. She was the principal of John M. Gandy which is the African-American school for this community in Hanover. They live right across the street from the school, I know that’s a landmark and um, not off hand unless you can name then I can tell you if I remember them or not.

AT: Um and then as far as the transportation and the railroad, um, what do you think about the railroad in Ashland? Do you think it gives the town more personality or?

TB: Oh, yea it does. I grew up, we grew up living on the railroad track. So, um, the trains coming by at night that’s not unusual for I grew up with that, um, definitely. That is what we were known for, you know, railroad town, and um, we used to we had cab service here. I remember back in the day uh Foster Cab service there used to be several cab services. Um, right where, um, Home Town Reality is, um, Mr. Flowers mother used to have a shop there called Flowers too and um right as a matter of fact the cab drivers used to park where the library is. Um, Ashland Library, that was a parking lot when I was a kid and um, they used to park right there on the side of the street and there used to be a telephone on the pole and the telephone would ring real loud. And when the telephone would ring you know whoever was first would go answer the phone, go pick up whoever was next. Cuss my grandmother used to ride the cab and so you used to have about three or four cab services that used to be parked along the side right there in front of where the library is currently located and used to have the telephone on the telephone pole.

AT: Oh, okay.

TB: And who answered it you know someone would be called to be wanted to be picked up. That’s what I remember.

AT: Um, as for the town politics such as the involvement of um you know bringing in Wal-Mart and everything, um, what was the governing body for the town?

TB: The governing body. We had a town council. That I remember. We have a mayor, you know, but we have a town council and they were in charge.

AT: Um, and for recreation uh I know you said you were outside a lot and um

TB: Yea, we had Ashland Little League then. Little League started getting big as we got older cuss we used to just entertain ourselves but um we had little league. I was a cheerleader. My brother played football and cuss we had more girls so we were all cheerleaders. So that was the biggest thing we had
basketball, little league basketball, um, I wasn’t into it, um, into sports persay, but all of that was going on.

AT: Did you have like any carnivals or?

TB: Oh gosh yea, we used to have the fair come to Ashland and I want to say every summer oh man I missed that. We used the fair used to be used to where the baseball field is now across from Henry Clay Elementary School we used to set up there and um like I said we were old enough we could go on our own. You know in those days and you would get so much money from mama and then you and your friends and all would go all around. They had rides you know little simple rides and fairruss wheel and all that. Candy apple is all I wanted. (laughs). All I wanted was that candy apple. And uh, yea, the fair used to come to Ashland every year when I was a child, every year. And the last time I can really remember the fair is when my grandmother, my fathers mother, died. And at that time I was probably um twelve or thirteen years old. That’s the last thing I remember, now they may have kept coming in but I don’t think so. That’s the last time I remember.

AT: Um, cuss I know today I think they have uh, the Talent Show or something?

TB: Ah, that’s knew. That’s nothing like the fair we had that came into Ashland was like going to the state fair.

AT: oh, okay.

TB: Yea, it was it was just like that that setup was just like that. Clowns and blackjack tables, and you know balloons and cotton I mean just like the state fair it was just a mini version of it on that big field. Yea everybody saw it, everybody, it was like a massive either family reunion you know it was out I mean everybody saw everybody. We used to have fun. We used to have a lot of fun. Yea, what they have now, even the Strawberry Fair is nothing compared to what the fair used to be when we were coming up.

AT: And that stopped around.?

TB: Uh, let’s see my grandma died in what seventy like in seventy six cuss in seventy three I think I was nine. And so yea in about seventy six probably, yea, that I can last remember. Yea, I used to like to go because my father used to have trash business we used to clean up after the fair would leave and I loved doing it because we could find money, people would drop money. You used to make a lot of money cleaning up behind the fair. You just had to look in the grass real good and of course people trampled through the grass, but you could find coins and dollar bills. (laughs). Yea, I loved doing that job. (Laughs). And what you found you kept.

AT: Um, does your family have any stories about Ashland like during the Civil War?
TB: We never talked about it if we did. My father’s people died when I was young so we never really talked about it, persay about the Civil War, other than during just background family background and you know investigation of who our relatives were, but you know, other than that I really never heard much about the war.

AT: Um, I know that you had mentioned growing up in schools school wise they were segregated until a certain point, what was that like? I mean growing up...

TB: I never attended a segregated school. I remember the days I probably was about five years old when I can remember little bits of it but I didn’t know that’s what it was. You know I didn’t know any better. I remember going over to John M. Gandy when they had May Day and that’s when you used to march around the pole and wrap the ribbon around the pole, I remember that. Um, I remember some of my older cousins because at that time Lee Davis didn’t allow them to come, they would come here and I remember seeing them do the little bamboo sticks and you had to jump in-between them. I remember I have little memories of that and we used to have field day we used to go over their on field day and that was like a huge picnic. You know you used to watch the different classes um compete I remember some of those things, but when I started in sixty nine that was the year they integrated. The only memory I have is when I went to catch the bus and I was five um cuss I didn’t turn six until later September but I was five and I just remember all of the mothers standing around at the bus stop at John M. Gandy waiting for us to get on the bus you know to make sure we were okay. Yea, I didn’t know any different. I didn’t know there was a year that we integrated until I was old enough for someone to explain it you know, God I was probably an adult and I didn’t realize the impact then and some of the memories I’ve had living in the community where Gandy is that some of the things I went to was an integrated a segregated type of atmosphere but I never attended segregated schools. Now I um I never went to Kindergarten and I never went to Head start cuss they weren’t available when I started school now my younger my sister underneath me went to Head start here at Dunkel Memorial and my brother did too, uh, my baby sister I think went to kindergarten at Dr. Unger a professor here, his wife, was a kindergarten first grade teacher and she’s had my nieces so she been around I talked to her the other day she’s been around forever, but um I my mother had to teach me how to read and write when I went to the first grade she taught me how to do that so I didn’t have any of that like the others did

AT: Um, and you said like when you came here to Randolph-Macon you were of very small minority.

TB: Yea, it was very few of us here. I know I want to say that when I graduated in 85’ it was more Blacks here then but seven of us graduated together. I think all at once but um yea from what I understand it was only like ten or so of us here maybe out of nine hundred students. Yea, it was very few of us here

AT: And you said that some of the students had attitudes?

TB: (Laughs). Yea, you got to remember now back in the day and I and its probably not too much different now as cuss its pretty much across the board now. When I came to school here in the type of
family I had we were down-to-earth family, we were a working family, um I didn’t like I said I didn’t want for anything. I was spoiled but I worked where a lot of the kids I went to school here a lot of the white students I went to school here their parents were already wealthy, you know, and some of their parents were lawyers and doctors. See I didn’t come up in that type of atmosphere. My parents were not lawyers or doctors but they were business owners and so um some of them probably have never been to school with a black student, some of them probably hadn’t, and some of them you could tell because of some of the questions they would ask you. (Laughs). How do you get your hair like that? You know, you know, you can just tell they have never really been around Blacks and so. And some of them had an attitude that they thought they were better, you know, when I started it was like in April 1981 just coming fresh out of the 70’s you know and so like I said my generation didn’t really have a whole lot of understanding other than what you hear your family always tell you, you know, about segregation. So my generation was just coming in to integration, so as where the class mates that were before me, the Blacks that were here before me they looked after you. I can remember Michael McClendon and John Anderson um they were some of the older classmates. Alva Hughes they were older classmates and so they looked out after you because they knew what they experienced when they were on campus and they got more I think they received more um probably had more problems than what we did you know because we were just a different generation and although some stuff still existed I wasn’t the type of person that I would recognize right away it had to be blatant for me to as the older classmates were used to somebody telling them something very blatant and some of them would tell me well you know you want to avoid certain professors because they were very very verbal in class. I still that same history professor I never forgot um my first semester of my senior year and he looked me in my face and told me Christen Addox was not the first to die in the American Revolution. So why are you looking at me and telling me that? You know history is history you can only go by what somebody tell you, you don’t know, you weren’t there but you know just Ill forget that, you know, and you had some students who were Blacks and they were only going to repeat what their parents say. So you know you’ve been called the “N” word you know or something like that but you know you know that didn’t stop me from getting my education. You know I’m not here for you, I’m here for myself and I’m here to better myself so that’s how I looked at it, you know.

AT: Um, well I think that’s it. I think we are coming around to the end here, um. Is there anything else you would like to add or anything you.

TB: No, not really. You’ve brought back some old memories. Some really old memories you know. You know about Randolph-Macon and about the town of Ashland, yea.

AT: Well, thank you.

TB: It’s been an enjoyable interview, yea.

AT: Good! Thank you so much. I appreciate your time and
TB: I thank you guys cuss I was just surprised to get a phone call. I was real surprised! I was like what is it that I can tell them because I’m around here so much so a lot of people a lot of some of the same people still work here and some of them still teach here so I see them all of the time. I was like what is there new and different that they don’t remember, you know back them, because probably because I am one of the few graduates that are still around here. I never really left but I moved away the day I graduated because I never you know been away from my parents and I didn’t stay long. I ended up coming back, but I just always believed in giving back to my community and so you know I just try to encourage other kids to go to college and try to encourage kids to come back to school here. You know and just value the education that is here to and so um yea I am probably one of the very few graduates that you know is still in my own community and still around Randolph-Macon. (Laughs). Yea, yea, it’s funny, you know, you’d be surprised when they hear that you went to Randolph-Macon but you still live here in Ashland. Yea, I’m still living in Ashland so there’s work to be done. There is work to be done, you know, its about giving back and that’s what I like doing. I like giving back and they just prepared me on how to give back and to who.

AT: Thank you so much!!! (laughs)

TB: You’re welcome! You’re welcome (laughs).