One Ashland, Many Voices Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview with George E. Gray, Jr.

Interviewee: George E. Gray, Jr.
Interviewer: Kasie Taylor
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KT: if you could please state your name and birth date.

GG: My name is George E. Gray Junior. My birth date is December 14, 1947.

KT: Alright, I am Kasie Taylor and I will be interviewing Mr. Gray. Can you tell me when you came to Ashland?

GG: sixty years ago, I was born here.

KT: Ok. Were your parents originally from Ashland as well?

GG: My mother is originally from Ashland. My father is originally from Caroline County.

KT: Ok, um. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

GG: I am an only child.

KT: only child. What was something that you did as a child, here in Ashland?
GG: Well, I was always in the church. My mother was a musician (Miss August?) for a lot of the churches in here at Shiloh for thirty years and over thirty years and I've always played guitar and drums. And when she’d go round, as young as six and seven years old I would be playing drums.

KT: Do you still play the drums?

GG: No, I play um, well I went from the drums to lead guitar and from lead guitar and then from lead guitar to sax. And now since then, I have been playing base guitar, from about 64. 1964. So I play base now with the Gospel

KT: Ok, and what did your dad do?

GG: My dad, well, as I said he grew up in Caroline County. And the, he went into the military. He was in World War II

K : Ok

GG: And then he worked for Jacob and Lee’s Men’s clothing store for twenty-seven years. That’s where he retired in Richmond, Virginia.

KT: Ok. Do you have any stories from the war that your dad ever gave you?

GG: Oh, yeah quite a few. He was in a European theater. He was overseas and you know he only told me about. He was a corporeal and he used to do guard duty. And military police duty. Just how hard it was in World War II, didn’t have, you know, what they have now. The comforts, you know now, you’re almost at home in war. But back then, you know they lived in tents. They traveled. I think, on a boat going over.

KT: Ok

GG: To, Germany I believe, when he was over there. Yeah. And he has a few, but, but his stories would be more, less where you could go and where you couldn’t go. You know, certain places, that even in the United States you couldn’t go. But, you’re in the military, because of segregation.

KT: Ok

GG: You know. Even when he was in the military there were certain places, you know where they would have time off, you know you still couldn’t go into towns, you still couldn’t go into certain areas uh, you had to be very careful. But you still was, you know an American citizen and you still fought in the war. And, he would tell me things like that. But, he, he was quiet. He was very quiet. He’ll be ninety-three in August.

KT: Ok

GG: Mmhmm
KT: Does he go to this church as well?

GG: No, he belongs to Ebenezer Baptist Church in Caroline County. Yeah he was a trustee there for many years, but um you know as age creeps up on you, you can’t do what you could do. So he doesn’t, he goes out there, we get him out there every once in a while, but his health is such that he can’t get around a lot, yeah. My mother belonged to this church, Shiloh.

KT: Ok

GG: She was born and raised here.

KT: And were your grandparents [members as well]?

GG: Oh, yes. My grandfather was Johny Clinton Winston. My grandmother was Lilly Belle Winston. And my grandfather was a deacon here, Sunday school teacher and he (after doing that time) was considered a great singer. He sung base, the real base. You know, if you hear a person now, they are what someone calls a false base.

KT: uuh huh

GG: He sung real base. And he would travel around the county, singing. And his father Clinton Winston, I think he was involved in the church (at its beginning) but they lived, just past (Andelandy here) about a mile from this church, from Shiloh. Just past Shiloh Baptist church cemetery. And then they owned, my great great grandfather owned a blacksmith shop. Do you know where the (Municipal building) is right here? The Municipal building is one block over.

KT: Ok

5 MIN

GG: Town Hall, Well he owned a big blacksmith shop there. A big house and a little house. Clinton Winston my great grandfather lived in the big house and my grandfather lived in the little house. And they owned the blacksmith shop. He was first undertaker here, African American undertaker here. And then he rented rooms for a barber shop and a beauty salon. He was sort of an entrepreneur back then, and then when he died, Clinton, he gave the, he turned it over to his son Johny. Johny, did the same thing, until really the automobile came about. And Johny’s son Robert was in World War II stationed in California. He never drove, you know, he always used horse and buggy. So when automobiles came about, and when hearse came about, he closed the business because he couldn’t first afford to buy an automobile and have someone to drive it. So he closed it, the undertaker shop and funeral home. And then, he continued to be a blacksmith. You know, shoeing horses and stuff. And he had a heart attack one day down at the blacksmith shop and he died several days later. That’s how he became, you know. And then my mother and I think seven others died. Three died, three boys died of whooping cough. In the early stages, you know you didn’t have medical facilities or know how to handle those types of diseases. So, five of them lived, my mother was one, Idis Gray. Who , she still lives up there and my
aunt Mrs. Miller, Eleanor Miller still lives up there on the estate now. My aunt Mrs. Eleanor Miller was ninety-four on the first of May. My mother is eighty-nine.

KT: What is whooping cough, exactly?

GG: You got me! [laugh] I don’t know.

KT: [laugh]

GG: You know, like you have mumps and measles, and chicken pox.

KT: Yeah

GG: Well, they call it whooping cough. You know, some people [call it whooping cough]. I forget, there was another word that was used for it. But, back then it was deadly. You got it. And like I said, she lost three little brothers because of it. You know, it was just something that you had no cure of, at that time.

KT: Yeah

GG: And, you developed it, you were lucky if you survived it. Yeah, so it was a really bad disease during those years.

KT: So you were close with your grandparents when you were younger?

GG: I didn’t meet my great grandfather, nor did I meet my grandfather. They died before my time. But my grandmother, my mother’s mother Lily, she died when she was ninety-four. She raised me basically. My mother and father were working and we lived next door. She, she lived in her own place and my mother and father had their home. And she would come over in the morning and make sure, you know that I was ready for school. When I would come home in the evenings, she would make sure that, you know, I was give something to eat; a snack, something ’til supper time. And basically, basically she, she raised me. And, she basically almost did all of her children. There were nine of us. And you know, she was the matriarch. And, and Grandma spoke, you listened.

8 MIN 30 SECONDS

KT: [laugh]

GG: [laugh] Yeah, and she was confined to bed for about fifteen or sixteen years. Her heart and other arteries, she lost her sight, she could only see, you know just see images, she couldn’t make it out, she could just see light but even though she was confined to the bed, my mother and my aunt took care of her. In fact, my mother retired to take care of her. But the grandchildren, always assemble there. We always went by to see her. We always sat with her. We always talked with her because she had a lot of wisdom. And if she found out that any of the grandchildren had did any wrong at school, or got into trouble, all she’d do was speak and we got straight.
KT: [laugh]

GG: You know, I mean she could talk to you, you know. And she, she was never abrupt, never mean to us, but grandma had a strong constitution, a strong voice. And when she spoke, she was like “(yeah putton?...) you listen.”

KT: [laugh]

GG: You know that’s the way she was. And like I say, everybody, everybody was. You know grandma was the number one at that time. That’s how we learned, that’s how we grew up. And even my little, my daughter who is now thirty-one and married, when she was little three, two, three years old and my mother would go and spend the night with my grandmother, my daughter would go over and spend the night with grandma [her] great grandma. Yeah, I mean she loved it. That’s the way it came up. You know, just everybody rallied around grandma. Yeah, yep.

10 MIN 17 SECONDS

KT: Did she have any interesting stories she used to tell you?

GG: Yeah, she used to tell us stories. Um, I can’t remember, I tell ya. I can’t remember them, but I can remember her, I can remember her going out in the yard, you know, especially when it was cold, she would have a sport jacket on and a hat, pull down. And she would go out and she would chop her wood. Now she had a son that lived there with her, Uncle Robert, who was a son, who was in California, I mentioned. And he worked at night, but he, but he looked out for his mother. He was always there for his mother.

KT: ummhmm

GG: And he worked at night, but he, he looked out for his mother. He was always there for his mother. But he worked regular. But, he made sure that wood was on the porch, you know, made sure coal was there when she needed it. But there were times when she needed (Killen), or something, (Killen) that’s the strips of wood that you start a fire with

KT: Yeah

GG: She, she, man I remember her going out to the wooden pile and cuttin that kindling like it wasn’t nothin.

KT: [laugh]

GG: Yeah

KT: [laugh]GG: Yeah and I remember her even in those years, well she had chickens, you know. You know, running around, hens and stuff like that running around. And I can remember her going and getting the eggs. I can remember her going and catching a hen and putting him on a chopping block and got its head off.
KT: [laugh] yeah

GG: And then you dined sufficiently that evening. You know

KT: [laugh]

GG: I can remember those things, yeah. But she was just a strong person. You know, she was just a strong person. In fact, it was told that when she finally went down, she went down from a heart attack, but it was told to my mother and them by the doctor that she probably had had two or three heart attacks and didn’t know it.

KT: Oh

GG: And the last heart attack, she had the only thing stopped her was the fact that she got out of, out of breath. And we came over that evening and she was sitting on the back porch. Back then there always be (them) porches. She had a long back porch, a long front porch. And she was sitting on the back porch, just sitting there. And she said she was a little bit out of wind. And that was it. And they took her to the doctor, found that she had had a heart attack and she never [recovered], you know. From that point on, she went from you know heart attack, not, slowing down in her walk, not being able to walk good, not being able to see, but always had good mind. Always had a good mind. She could lay there listening to her tVs, tv shows, her stories, you know.

KT: Mmhmm

GG: She could tell you “this a good woman on.” She couldn’t see it, but she could, she could tell it. And when you walked in there and said a word, she knew everyone of her grandchildren who they were. Yeah, she could, she could tell you. Yeah, those are the stories I remember of her and of course taking care of me, you know. I ate too much peanut butter and apple butter, you know that’s why I’m large now. [laugh].

KT: [laugh]

GG: [laugh]. I can’t eat it now. But I mean, she took car of us

KT: Doe she have any recipes she used to cook for you or anything?

GG: Maybe for my mother, but I was too busy out in the yard playing. Playing sports, you know baseball, basketball, football, I didn’t. The only thing I know it was good and I ate it.

KT: Ok

GG: And whatever she would fix, you know. Yeah, but she was in my life for a long time. All the grandchildren remember her well, and even the great grandchildren remember her. And she’s been gone, gone a long time. But you still remember grandma, you know yeah, yep.
KT: Let’s see, Well to you think that today’s generation, is like yesterday’s, I guess? Like

GG: Nothing like it.

KT: Ok

GG: Today’s generation has missed out on a lot. Because there is a saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” And back then, even though there were ups and downs, even though there were some bad kids, if you want to call it, use that word, mischievous kids, kids who got in trouble. It was still the village. Because my grandmother could tell any of us right from wrong, scold us. She never, never put her hands on us. But she could tell us right from wrong, and we were, we better had listened to her. You understand?

KT: [laugh]

15 MIN

GG: I mean, that’s the way it was. And our parents expected us to listen to her. And our parents expected her to correct us when they weren’t around. Our parents expected our aunts and uncles to correct us if we were doing something wrong. That really was the good generation because you learn a lot of wisdom. Because there were times when you did sit under her and listen to those stories. You know, the stories of how they grew up. But today’s generation, they have lost, they lost that opportunity. Because, of course you know parents started having children earlier, at a early age. Younger parents grew away from the old heads. The (head, heroism?) that could help them. I don’t think it was done intentionally, but a gap developed. You know, and the gap just kept on getting larger and larger and larger until a connection was broken. Communication was broken. And now we have children raising children. And if the children that’s raising the children don’t have an understanding of how life is, how can the[their] children have an understanding of what life is. So, we struggle. And we get rebellious. And actually, we reaching out, but we don’t know where to reach to. We don’t know who to reach for. So that’s why sometimes we end up going into what we call the wrong direction. We get involved with the people that’s in the streets. You know they will stroke you, they will pacify you. You get turned into all different types of adjectives, out there on the streets. You know, I don’t need to call them that, but you know what I’m talking about. And then you have no one in the family strong enough to go out and pull that person back in. Because all the person is asking for, is help. They may go out driving around money in their pocket, driving a new car, but they are as just empty as they can be on the inside because they don’t have any direction in their life. So, so the older ones, we are fearful of them because people don’t, people, when I say people I mean especially young people, I guess it’s maybe bad to say they don’t value life like the old heads did. You lived, back in the day, you lived each day like it was the last day. You prepared for the future, but you, you always had in the back of your mind “ok I got to do this, I got to do that, I need to do this.” Trying to develop a future. But now there are so many of our young people, they don’t have a future. Because there is no one there telling them
“Well you can do this or you can do that.” And it’s not intentional, it’s just that we’re so busy in our life. I’m busy.

KT: Yeah, you are. [laugh]

GG: And, and that was one of the things that concerned me with my daughter. I only had... I was an only child and, and my mother (then and them?) treated me like that. And yeah, they spoiled me, until I became an adult. When, when I went into teen years, my father stepped up and said “ok, now it’s time to be a man, not a little spoiled brat, but a man.” So my mother and father made me a man. My daughter, because I was so busy, I spent a lot of time from her. But I reversed that thing, quick. And my daughter now, we are really super close. My daughter was married March 22nd. She lives up in, well almost like going to Beaverdam. A little place called (Noble?). She, she and her husband live down by his parents. And she was, like I said, she was married March 22nd. I drive from Hanover County. When I leave the house between 7 and 7:15 every morning, I will get a call from her, or, or I’m gonna call her. That’s every morning, you know and it makes me happy because I know that that connection is still there. You know, she picks my wife up, you know she is close to her mother, you know. She’ll walk in the house and be “come on mom!” And my wife don’t even ask questions and she jump up get in the car and off they go!

KT: [laugh]

GG: And, and she is close to my parents. Um, and my mother, my wife’s parents live in Culpepper and she is close to them. Before she got married, she and my mother and my wife would go up and they would spend time. They still do that. Now, her husband has gotten involved with the family. And now, they go out. You know, so we’re trying to keep that family connection there and, and she knows that doesn’t matter what happens, or how bad the situation is, I don’t care what goes on, you let Daddy know what’s going on. And if you’re wrong, I’ll tell you you’re wrong, but I will walk with you all the way. I mean, so she knows that. There is no fear there. She doesn’t have to say “oh, I can’t tell Dad this or I can’t tell Dad that.” She knows that if she picks the phone up, it doesn’t matter what the situation is, I’m going to be there. And that’s something that I just tried to do because I’m an only child. And I don’t want to disconnect, you know I want us to [connect]. I want us to be there cause she doesn’t have any kids and I’m looking forward to being a grandfather. You know, I just hope I won’t be too old and have dimensia by the time she has her children, cause I won’t know who they are, but I tease her like that all the time. And she tells me “You know, I’ll tell you what I do Dad, I’ll have them and you raise them.”

21 MIN 2 SECONDS

KT: [laugh]

GG: Oh, no, no, no. You take your time. When you’re ready, you let me know. And then I will play the grandpa role.

KT: [laugh]
GG: But, but that’s the way. It, it is a difference and we got so many young people out there that’s loosing their lives, loosing their souls because they don’t have someone to reach out and grab them. And look, it don’t have to be a relative, it can be a friend that will reach out and help them. And, and you know, because some people do get closer to friends rather than their family. But, then there has got to be a thing of trust. You know “I got to trust that you are going to help me, and not just use me.”

KT: Yeah

GG: Yeah, and our kids right now are, are hurting. And then, when they took, when the government separated church and state, that blew the whole thing out the water. When you, it [used to be] to the point that you could say prayers in church, in school. And they put restrictions on who, who God is, or who the higher being is, everything went right on down the drain. And I’m not saying that every person got to be holier than thou, but I’m saying that every person ought to know who they are and where they came from and that helps them to be stable, and they should know who they can go to when there is problems, when there is downtime. You know, when they’re struggling. And, I think that the government, really, really ruined that when they separated that. You know, cause all my life at school, we used to say a prayer and pledge allegiance to the flag, and you know, these types of things. But you can’t say a prayer in school no more, so kids. I mean, if the parents don’t take time with the kids and show the kids where they came from, and who they are, then who’s gonna do it? Two thirds of your life. Almost two thirds of your young life is spent in school.

KT: Yeah

GG: Right? But if you aren’t (read?) in school, and you become just a wall(ball), and there nothing up there, you’d be bored. You don’t have nothing to talk about. You don’t have nothing to hold on to. You know, we get so mechanical, so mechanical, methodical, that all it is, is just “go to school and study your lessons and go home.” I mean people, people. You’ve seen events that happen around here in the schools in the last several years. Tragic events.

KT: Yeah

**23 MIN 43 SECONDS**

GG: Somebody reached for somebody and somebody didn’t take the time to, to maybe. I am not saying that it could’ve been prevented, because we don’t know what the future holds, but somebody was reaching and there was nothing to reach and grab onto. So they said “ok, I will get a little attention and then while I’m doing that I will take myself out here along with it.”

KT: Do you think there is anyway that the connection can come back?

GG: Come back. It can only come back when the adults realize that they can’t be the best friends of their children but be parents, and when the children realize that the parents are there to helps them,
and not to hurt them and sometimes said “no.” And then when that happens, you can see unification in the family. That’s a long, hard road.

KT: Yeah

GG: It’s a long hard road. And then so many families separate you know, and then people use that as an excuse, you know because “I only have a mother, I only have a father.” You know “I can’t do this, or I can’t do that.” Well, I, I’ve been married thirty-seven years. You know, loved every minute of it. Wouldn’t have it no other way. Now, I, I, I, my wife and I we laugh. I laugh. I’m kind of a jokester. And I always tell my wife “we are the happiest poorest people I’ve ever seen in my life.”

KT: [laugh]

GG: You know, because times have been hard, and I was at Rich foods for twenty-one years. I was a superintendent there, making good money. I left there, started having a little problem with my heart. I left there, went into business for myself worked eight years contract with the government, handling sick patients. Then I became a courier, you know an independent courier driving all the way down through North Carolina. Drove four hundred miles a day. Now I am driving for Hanover County, (handling) their kids who’ve been taken out of the system. You know, I go to Charlottesville twice a day. I leave at seven in the morning get back at ten. Leave at quarter to two and get back at 5:30. I am taking kids up there to school in Charlottesville. A hundred and forty-four miles in the morning, 144 miles in the evening, you know.

KT: What’s that school?

GG: It’s Oakland Academy. Up in, up on Unionville Road, up in Charlottesville.

KT: Ummhmm

GG: And, uh I think the kids have dyslexia.

KT: Ok.

GG: Major, you know reading problems, stuff like that, but I do that. Now I did have kids who had been out on probation for something like stabbing somebody, beating up a teacher, or hitting up a parent, or drugs or something like that. I have handled kids who are on house arrest. Had the bracelet on, you know you take them out at a certain time and you get them in at a certain time. My supervisor, for the county, you know she calls me the “gentle giant.” Because the other drivers have so many other problems. I have no problems. And it’s not because of my size, I am a little large, but it’s not because of my size, it’s because I try to take time with the kids. I try to talk to them and tell them “you don’t have to be like this.” And, I’ve been pretty successful and I am not bragging. But, you, you have to, I am saying this because when I drive, you can’t drive when your car is just out of control on the inside. The kids raising hell, you know. You know, acting out. And, and because some of these kids are violent. Some of these kids, like a said, they don’t respect life, they will do something to you. You know, they will try to hurt you if they can. So, I um, have a lot of success with the kids. And I don’t know what I am
doing, I don’t know what I’m doing to make it like that, but I usually start talking, having a conversation with the kid and the kid will calm right down. You know, and I haven’t had (any?) problem. I guess that’s why they allow me, well these kids that I’m transporting aren’t problem kids. They, they have special needs. But, they you know, I am driving a long ways for somebody else’s child in my car, it’s a big responsibility. You know, so I enjoy it. I’ll do it probably, probably till I retire. Don’t put that in your report.

KT: [laugh]

GG: Yeah, but um. It’s just that when we start valuing life, more so, I think that we will all learn how to get along with each other. Because, as you, as you read in the news, a life can be taken in the snap of a finger and no one thinks anything of it. You know, that’s kind of bad. It’s kind of bad, don’t you want to live to be 94, 95?

KT: Yeah, [laugh]

GG: Yeah, I mean we all realize, we going to need somebody to take care of us when we get that age, like I do with my parents. And I want to see them live as long as they can. You know, um I know that their level of life is going to decrease because of the health problems but I want to see them here, as long as they can stay here. Because I always joke, you going to lay there, in that hole in that grave a lot while longer than you ever walked this earth, so get the best out of it.

KT: [laugh]

GG: Get the best out of it, breathe this oxygen and enjoy yourself. [laugh]

KT: [laugh]

GG: [laugh], Yeah

KT: Oh, I like that little joke. [laugh]

GG: [laugh]

KT: Let’s see, I guess, um. So what was your education like?

GG: Well, I went to. Well you know, I went to a segregated school. I went to John M. Gandy.

KT: Ok

GG: Out in Berkleytown.

KT: ummhm

GG: You know, it is right out past (you guys, hugh). I went there. I graduated from John M. Gandy. And then I went to Smith Madden; which is no longer in existence. Smith Madden Business School in
Richmond for two years. And then I went to the University of Richmond, night school for two years. And um, and I went back to Smith Madden, being nosey. And that’s where I met my wife at.

KT:  Ok

GG: That’s where I met my wife at Smith Madden. I actually went back, looking for her friend, her girlfriend. [laugh]

KT:  [laugh]

GG: And her girlfriend wasn’t there. So I said, “well you will do.’ [laugh]

30 MIN 3 SECONDS

KT:  [laugh]

GG: And we started talking and we started dating. And you know, I thought I was something else back then. And um, [laugh]. And we started dating. We dated for six months and got married.

KT:  Oh

GG: ummhmm. And we’ve been married for thirty-seven years. And like I’ve said, we’ve had ups and we’ve had downs. But boy it’s been a good time. We have enjoyed ourselves. Yeah, God had blessed us tremendously. I met her family, she has two more sisters and two more brothers.

KT:  ummhmm

GG: and her parents were much younger than my parents. You see, I’m 60 and my father is going to be 93. My mother is 89. So you see that gap, almost a 30 year gap. Well, her mother was only 16 years older than she is. She is the oldest daughter. So, so they grew up close. You know, they grew up with their two baby brothers playing sports, you know playing with recreation. I got involved with that. You know, I was an only child, you I kind of connected with them and we almost became like brothers and sisters. We just that close. They call me now. I’m the oldest, so they call me now to ask questions, if there is something going on. We do for her mother and father, both of their health problems. We go up there and check on them. But, it’s just been a good trip. You know, like I’ve said, I’ve been blessed a lot. A lot of traveling. I’ve done an awful lot of traveling with her family, and then with my family. Her family traveled a lot. Her father was in the military. She was called an “army brat.”

KT:  uuh huuh [laugh]

GG: And she lived in Florida, she lived in Texas, Philadelphia. She was born in Philadelphia. But they grew up in Spotsylvania.

KT:  uuh huh
GG: You know, and they just, they just traveled. And, and I couldn’t get used to that. Because I had not done that. My mother and father weren’t into that traveling, that much traveleing. The most that my mother and father did when I was coming up was to go up to Caroline County.

KT: mmhmm

GG: (In August?) For the revival

KT: Ok

GG: And we would stay up there with his brother and sisters, you know for that week. And then come back. And in the summertime, my mother and I would go to New York on the train. Catch the train to New York and go stay with her, her aunt. Her two aunts. One week we would stay with one aunt, one week we’d stay with the other.

KT: mmhmm

GG: But, well my wife’s family, well they were travelers. They went everywhere. I mean, they just traveled. They went to Florida, they went to Canada. You know, we camped for 14 days in a Winnebago. Went on 3, 7 day cruises. Stuff, I had never been on before.

KT: Yeah

GG: So, that’s why I said I’ve been well- blessed because I have been able to see a lot, and enjoy a lot. And enjoy life as we have grown together. And we’ve just been happy-go lucky.

KT: Do you still travel?

GG: When I can. Now, it’s hard to do now with my mother and father. My wife does, more than I do. She goes up and spends weeks at a time with her parents in Culpepper. Probably four weeks out of each year. She’ll go the week of Christmas, the week of Easter, and she’ll go. She works over at the Henry Clay.

KT: Ok

GG: She’s a paraprofessional aid for kindergarten. She has been there 22 or 23 years. And, in the summertime, you know she’s off. So, she goes up usually in around end of June first of July for a week and then go again in August for a week. I used to go. But it is hard now, I can’t leave my parents. They are at that stage now that they are forgetful. Forgetful tot turn things off, cut stoves off you know, lock their doors. You know, stuff like that. And my wife understands that. You know we have no problems. But, I go up and spend what I can, but she knows that I have to give my time to my parents. So, and I don’t have a problem with that. I enjoy it. You know I still get around. I go up for a day. Go up in the morning, come back at night or something like that. But very seldom do I go and stay the night now. Yeah, Yeah. And also, but the last two or three months, I’m now on a C-pack machine. You see, my nose is bruised because I sleep on an oxygen at night.
KT: Ok

GG: Mmhmm I have to sleep on that. It’s called a C-pack machine. I have sleep apnea.

KT: Ok

GG: Yeah, so I have to sleep with that all night. And, my oxygen level went down to 67%. Now, it is up to 92%. So, I’m just feeling great. You know, I’m just doing great. But, I’m getting used of it. Of the machine, you know you have to put that elastic over your nose, real tight. And now, it’s… with my nose. I told my wife, “I’ve been so handsome over the years, now my nose it getting all scarred up.” [laugh]

KT: [laugh]

35 MIN 15 SECONDS

GG: And she said, “oh you think so?!” [laugh]

KT: [laugh]

GG: Yeah, yeah, but we. Like I said we still enjoy what I’m doing. I stay busy. I stay doing something. You know, with the traveling jubilee gospel singers. I’ve been with them 27 years. Before then, well I went, I started, I was playing R&B music.

KT: Mmh

GG: From the time, I was like in the tenth, eleventh grade until I got married. And, when I got married, I realized that the streets was not for me. So I came in, and then several years later, I started playing gospel. I started playing gospel ever since ’73 or ’74. And, I have been with this last group 27 years, I think we’ve been singing 29 years. We do a lot of traveling. We’ve been slowing down, but there are times when we just go, go, go. You know like not this coming weekend, but we got to do two programs Saturday and Sunday. You know, we don’t usually do that. We slow down a bit. But then, I was into photography. I had a studio, over here by the arts and activities center. Right on the railroad tracks up here. If you go past by the fire department.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: There is an old church, a big church there. That’s the Hanover arts an activities center. I had a studio there for five years.

KT: So you still do any of that?

GG: I, I do a little of that. Not much now. But, from 1970 to I guess ’92 to ’93, I did rather well. But, I had to give it up, it was getting on my eyes. I was having problems with my eyes. And, I even got what you call an automatic focus camera. But if I get to taking pictures, I’d see stars. And it, for the next 24 hours.
KT: Oh

GG: So I gave it up. And then, I was working too, see at that time I was working at Rich foods. Crazy hours. Crazy hours. And then I went and joined the international management council. That's a management organization, that all the big companies, they, they join. And they supervise us and stuff and go into it. You get training, you go to seminars, and I was an officer in there. I was treasurer for that organization. For several years, I got awarded distinguished service award for the job I had done. I didn't go after none of this, it just happened. I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. [laugh]. Yeah, but I've enjoyed. You know, but I don't have. I may not be a millionaire, but you know, that don't bother me. I'm rich in a whole lot of ways. Because the good Lord has blessed me immensely, you know. Yeah, I am chairman of the deacons here.

KT: Ok, Do you have any other roles in the church?

GG: I sing in the choir and I used to play the base guitar with the choir. But we have some young people now that can just play circles around me.

KT: [laugh]

GG: So, I just sit back and enjoy them. You know, I was a trustee, I was chairman of the finance department here. And, for a number of years. And I learned the finances from business school, accounting was always my thing. I love to be with figures. And then, like I said I was treasurer for the international management council for a number of years. And then I came here, and I worked as a trustee ministry. And then I became chairman of the finance department and I was secretary of the finance department. And treasury. And I stepped up, and I became, I was ordained deacon here. And now, I am chairman of the (diocesan) here. And this is my last year. We only serve three years.

KT: Ok

GG: We rotate out. Give the next man an opportunity to step up. And, like I said I sing with the choir. I sing for the male chorus and the combined choir. You see, they do a lot of traveling. A lot of going to different churches and different programs. So, I guess they do. I get tired sometimes. But, when I get tired, I learn now to shut her down and regenerate you know, get my strength back you know. And then I'm off and going again.

KT: [laugh]

GG: Yep, yep. That's why I asked you to call me.

KT: Last night?

[laugh]

GG: Even though I keep a calendar, when I get back from Charlottesville in the morning around 10, when I first go in and check on my parents. I see if they need anything, see if everything is alright. And then, I usually just chill, sit back in the chair, lay down something like that, and then I relax until time to
go back out. And then usually when I am back on the way in, I call and ask my wife, “ok where am I going tonight? What am I doing tonight? What do I got to do?”

KT: [laugh]

40 MIN 27 SECONDS

GG: Yeah, cause. We rehearsal, with the traveling jubilee gospel singers on Monday night and that rehearsal is up in (Coatsville), up in Beaverdam. Saint James Baptist Church.

KT: Ok

GG: Tuesday night is my free night. Wednesday night I have bible study. The second, or the third, fourth Thursday night. This, this is a hobby. I belong to a pea knuckle club.

KT: What’s pea knuckle club?

GG: It’s cards.

KT: Ok [laugh]

GG: [laugh] Yeah, it’s cards. It’s like (big whistling?), and Spades and Bridge and all that kind of stuff. Poker.

KT: Ok

[laugh]

GG: But we play pea knuckle. And then on Friday nights, is open unless I am taking my wife up to her home for the weekend. And then, we, all of us are Patrick Henry High School football team. That’s another hobby. We, we last year we didn’t make any games. That was the first year we hadn’t made any games. We had been following them since 1982.

KT: And you went to all their games?

GG: I bet you we didn’t miss, since ’82, I bet you we hadn’t missed ten games. We went, we go, we travel to all the games. Away games, home games, playoffs whatever we travel to them. Didn’t make no difference where they were playing. I had that van. I’ve had several vans. I have several people who are seniors, who like to go. Load them in the van, we go.

KT: Did your daughter go to Patrick Henry?

GG: Yes, she graduated from Patrick Henry in ’95.

KT: Ok

GG: That’s the year they won the state football championship. And that’s, she’s the one who actually started us going, you know because she was young and we were, we would go to the games and stuff.
But then, when she graduated, of course, you know, she is on her own, you know. She lived at home with us, but she had her own life. But, we still continued to go. So, we just kept on going. We’ve been going every year. It didn’t make no difference. Snow, rain, if the game is going to be played, we goin be there.

KT: True fans. [laugh]

GG: We got all that equipment, rain gear and everything. You know, but we didn’t go last year. We had some health problems. And some things were going on with my wife’s mother. We said, “well we got to eliminate something.” So we eliminated football. This year, we’re going back to football. Yeah, yeah. It’s just something. My wife loves football. You know, and we just, we just enjoy going. And, it’s just something that helps us to kind of calm down. Because our weekends are always hectic. We’re always busy. You know

KT: Yeah

GG: Always busy. I mean it’s just that way. We have meetings here. Either I’m with the traveling jubilees, either we up [at] her home or we making sure my mother and them taken care of, you know the house and everything is taken care of. And then on Sunday, We have church Sunday morning and a lot of times, we have something to do on Sunday evenings. So a lot of people say they get rest on the weekends, I be tired when I wake up on Monday morning.

KT: [laugh] Yeah.

GG: Yep

KT: Um, this is a little backwards, but you mentioned segregation. How did that affect your family?

GG: Uh, technically? Not at all. I mean, shoot I’m not going to lie to you. When we first started traveling. We went when we first got married. We got married in ‘71. Of course, if you really wantd to travel and enjoy yourself, you could go to Florida. Because there is so much water to see. You know, Daytona beach. You know, we drove one day just down to Miami, just to drive through Miami, see what was in Miami.

KT: [laugh]

GG: You know.

Door opens and a woman asks Mr. Grey a question. He explains to us that she was asking about a program put in place to help the financially distressed get meals.

GG: We got a lot of that. People coming in, asking for assistance. Now, what we do, we belong to an organization called Ashland Christian Emergency Association.

KT: Mmmhmm
GG: It’s ACES.

KT: Ok

GG: And, we do. We send people to the police department and then what they do, is they give you a voucher. And if you, like need gas, or you need somewhere to stay they will send you to ACES. And, ACES will put you up for a night, give you breakfast, give you lunch, you know and give you assistance. ACES will also help people who are having trouble with their prescriptions. You know, if you don’t have insurance on something that you need medication. You get a voucher from ACES, you take it to the drugstore, the drugstore will tell you how much your medicine costs, you take it back to ACES, and ACES will give you x number of dollars to help you with your medicine. But we used to try to help people, but now, it’s so, so. You are just being bombarded. You know, people want you to pay their rent. You know, mostly it’s rent. Telephone bill, electric bill, and we just don’t have the funds. You know and what happens is you start one, and you just get bombarded. And then the other thing is, you have to have a system set up, so you can weed out the ones who really need it and the ones who are just taking advantage of the situation.

KT: Mmmhmm

46 MIN

GG: So, what I said to her was “no we didn’t.” And sometimes people think “well, that’s really abrupt, that’s hard.” But that’s the only way we can do it. Because first of all, we don’t have anybody to help full time. So, we don’t have a system set up where we can sit down with you and get you to sit down and fill out papers so we can investigate you. You know, to see if we can help you. So we have to say no. And if she has just stood there for a couple of minutes. And when I said “no” what did she do?

KT: Walked away

GG: She just leaved and turned and walked away. She, I could have told her to walk down to the police department. Now 9 times out of 10, they know where ACES is already. You know, and they know you can only go to the police department, to ACES one time. And occasionally, ACES will help you out a second time. But they going to determine what you need is, and whether you’re really taking advantage of the situation. And believe me, we have had people to take advantage of the situation. We’ve had people to come back, just to continually come back. And we’ve had people even get upset after they’ve been 2, 3 times and we finally said “no”. They get upset with you. Storm out the building, mad, you know. So we had just put out there, “no, we don’t do that.” You know, we send you to the social services can help you a whole lot. People don’t know that. But social services will do something for you. But they are going to investigate the situation first.

KT: Yeah

GG: You know, yeah. But now, you asked me a question before we got kind of off track.
KT: Oh, yeah I was asking you about

GG: Segregation?

KT: Yes

GG: Uh, no. When I was coming up in school, it didn’t bother me one bit. Because that’s what I grew up in. And, I went to the first grade, we didn’t have kindergarten, but I went to first grade and first grade to tenth grade, you know it was an all black school with all black teachers.

48 MIN 6 SECONDS

GG: You know, we didn’t sit at home and talk about segregation. It was just a common knowledge, that you knew it. And I know I used to, when I first started driving. My coach used to let me drive his car down to Barnes’ drug store. You know, by Suzanne’s, where Homemades by Suzeanne’s is?

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: Well, that used to be Barnes’ drug store.

KT: Ok

GG: During those years. And they used to have a lunch counter. And, I was fifteen years old, and see you could get your license when you were fifteen, but you couldn’t drive by yourself, until you were sixteen. You had to have an adult who had a license. But several of the teachers, over at Gandy, my coach especially. Because I played, I started playing football in seventh grade.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: I wasn’t supposed to start to play, until the eighth grade. But, football, and basketball, they claimed I was good. But anyhow. And he would send me.

49 MIN 9 SECONDS

GG: Him and some of the other teachers would send me over to Barnes’. They would get tired of the school lunch. You know, so they would send me to Barnes’ you know because Barnes’ used to have, I mean some great food, you know. And they would tell me, they would give me their orders. He had a Corvelle. You ever heard of a little Corvelle? It’s a little small car. I don’t know, I couldn’t get in it now.

KT: [laugh]

GG: Outside.. this table. A little four speed and he would tell me, “go down to Barnes’.” I didn’t even know how to drive a floor shift. I didn’t know how to drive it. He said “well this is your opportunity.”

KT: [laugh]
GG: I got in there and learned how to drive the car. By myself, switch gears. Go in first, go in reverse, you know. But, I used to go down there everyday. My senior year. And, buy their lunches, whatever change was left, and they would tell me to get something. Because, when I would go, I would miss my lunch by going there. And when we would go in, the counter into Barnes’ there would be people sitting at the counter, you know eating. Well, we knew, we understood, we couldn’t sit down. So, I would go where you put your order in, you stand up. And then I would stand there. And wait for the order to be filled. And then I would, when I found out how much money was there, it came a routine, I knew everyday exactly how much money would be there, exactly how much I could order. And the lady, real nice lady, used to tell me “you want the same thing today?” I said “yes, mam, I do.” Well I know I couldn’t sit down and eat, so I would wait until I got back in the car. And then, on the way back to school, I would drink my soda, eat my sandwich and drive the car.

KT: [laugh]

GG: And that went on, I started that my junior year. And that went on, I went through the whole senior year, doing this. And, I used to go in there. And finally, one day, the lady told me, she said “George.” She knew what my name was. She said, “While you’re waiting for your order, I’m going to give you your lunch now. And you sit on that bench and eat your lunch.” I said “What?”

KT: [laugh]

GG: “You sure?” You know, because there were people there eating you know. But, no one ever bothered you. And I sat down on that little bench and then everyday, she would fix me what I wanted, I sit on the bench and eat. And the when she got through with the order, she’d give me the order and I would take it on. And, and I never had a problem. But there was a sign there that said “We have the right to refuse service to any customer.” Well everybody knew that sign meant blacks, African Americans. I mean that’s not hiding that, that’s the way it was. When you leave out here, across the railroad tracks, that first building on your left is Drew Reality, I think it is.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: Well that first building there used to be a house, an old house, an ice cream store. Yep, Heinz, old ice cream company. You don’t remember Heinz ice cream store. Well, Heinz ice cream store used to be the best ice cream place in the community. I mean Heiz was the, the place. And, we used to ride our bicycles down there. And we used to go buy the cones of ice cream. And, they had the same, same sign, you know, “we have the right to refuse service to anybody.” And we used to go in there, it was nine of us boys. It was nine grandsons and four granddaughters. Well the one granddaughter was the second oldest. And the three girls, was much years behind us. So we, all the boys had bicycles. That’s what we did, you know rode bicycles all through the county. You know, we would ride down to get ice cream. You know, we knew when we rode down, our parents had already told us, “when you go in there, order your stuff and come on out of there.” We were never the people to start a problem. I mean, that’s three boys, that’s older than I am, there still living. But, you know, we were always, we were called the “hill boys.” When you go up to my house, you go on an incline.
KT: Mmmhmm

GG: When you pass the school here, you start up an incline. So the people in Berkleytown call us the “hill folks.”

KT: [laugh]

GG: You know that was the nickname they gave us. You lived up on the hill.

KT: uuhhuh [laugh]

GG: [laugh] And um, we would never start something. We were never people who would agitate anything. We’d go in that store and we’d buy ice cream. And we’d get our cones of ice cream, get on our bikes and go on because we knew we couldn’t sit down in there. You know, that basically the way it was. What you did, you respected what you had to do. And you did it. And it never caused you no problem. I used to stand there and talk to the owner of the store.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: Had no problem. The lady at Barnes’, never had a problem. You know, but that’s the way we were brought up. I couldn’t speak for nobody else. But that’s the way we were brought up. We were brought up to respect our elders regardless. So it never bothered, I never. It was there, we knew it was there. We knew that if we made the wrong move, we would pay the consequences. But we didn’t look to do that, so we just lived our life and enjoyed our life. It wasn’t until I got married, that I began to really see. Now in ‘69 they integrated the school.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: But in ‘71, my wife and I got married. And it was the early 70s, ‘73,’74, that we were able to do a little traveling. And that’s when I began to really see it in its better form. We were traveling down 95 to Florida. And when we left here, we set a game plan. The plan was, don’t let the car go below a quarter tank of gas. When that car got to a quarter tank of gas, you got off the interstate and you get gas. And now, if it was more than a quarter tank and you looked at the sign, and you come to a service station, the sign said next service station 50 miles, 60 miles you go in there and get gas. We didn’t stop for gas at night. We made sure we had a full tank if we was going to be driving that night. And the way we started driving at night, rule was we never started in the early evening because we knew in the middle of the night you got to stop and get gas. We started later in the night. So when we started looking for gas, we would becoming into the a.m. of the morning. You know, you did things like that to make sure that. And then you made sure that we tried to make sure that the service stations we stopped at were the big service stations; Shell, Exxon, Texaco. Those big stations where everybody was stopping. And I never forget. And we looked up, and we were just about out of gas. And I think the next service station was like 25, 30 miles down the road. So we came to the exit, and it said gas, just a sign that said “gas.”
Didn’t say nothing about food or gas. So we came off the sign and the sign pointed down this road. Now, we done gone 2, 3 miles off the interstate, down country roads in Florida.

57 MIN

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: We finally came up to this little Ma and Pa gas station. They had two little islands. And, when we pulled in, it was six of us. It was three couples. And we pulled in, there was a gentleman sitting out on the street, you know a country street. Like an example, my wife’s family lives up in Culpepper.

KT: Mmmhmm

GG: It’s up near a little place called Brandy. When you go through Brandy, it is like old town country. You know, got the little ma and pa store. Got the little bench where people sit outside. You know, the only difference is now, anybody sit outside. You know, but this particular, there was some men sitting there. So we pulled in and we got out, well we didn’t get out. The driver got out and we said “look fill this thing up so we can get back on the road.” And he went inside to pay the man for gas. And back then, you didn’t pump the gas, you paid for it and then you pumped it. See, that changed over the years, see.

KT: Yeah

GG: Well the gentleman told him “we don’t have any gas.” So we took a phase back, guy came on back. Said “man, we got a problem here. We ain’t got no more gas, and this gentlemen here says they don’t got no gas.” We are getting ready to leave and then a cop pulls in. And it was a white person. Got up, went out there, paid for gas, went back out and proceeded to pump his gas. What you say, you don’t have gas? So the guy driving, he was kind of a quick tempered guy, he worked for the post office. He wanted to know what was going on.

KT: [laugh]

GG: I said “man, you didn’t come down here, to Florida to get me in trouble.” He went back there to question the guy. The guy, the owner selling the gas “I only sell gas to my regular customers.” That’s what he told him. So we got back in the car and we left. We didn’t say anything, we didn’t fuss. You know, we just said “ok, let’s go, we got to get some gas.” We were lucky enough to get back on the interstate and we were lucky enough to get back to the next station on Fumes. And we remembered then, “don’t do that no more.” Get that gas, while you need it. You know, those kinds of things happen and that was the first of us actually, actually being involved in. You know what you would call, I would say segregation or things that weren’t done right, you know. And it happened to me and my wife in culpepper. Where my wife’s parents live at.

KT: Mmmhmm

1 HOUR
GG: It was having a gas war…I don’t know well you…. I know that you don’t remember no gas war.

KT: MMhmm[No]

GG: Where you…on our days you could get gas if you had odd…if you had an even license number. If you had an e… if the last number on your license was like an even number 2, 4, 6, 8, you could get gas on Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday. If you had an odd number, 3, 5, 7, you could get gas Monday, Wednesday, or Friday.

KT: Okay

GG: So you had to remember to get your gas the day that you could get it or you would be out of gas.

KT: When was this?

GG: Ah this was in uh…what I said…let me see now I was driving…I would say the seventies maybe…the eighties…when um…when when that time gas was in high demand. They were claiming that there was no gas.

KT: Okay

GG: I mean the government.

KT: Yeah.

GG: So they put everybody that on uh an um I think it was on Sundays. You could get…I think on Sundays. I believe if I remember correctly on Sundays everybody…anybody could get gas. But on those other days you had to do it according to the last number on your license plate. So you better keep your eye on your license plate. And we…same thing happened in Culpepper um I was in Culpepper and I had enough gas to get back to Ashland. But you know how sometimes you…you don’t…feel you want to make sure you have enough. And gas was dirt cheap then

KT: Yes.

GG: So I pulled up in the service station because this was a day I could get gas. It was a Saturday. And uh that was the day that I could get gas. I pulled up in the service station to get gas and I pulled up and uh the gentleman…back then see people used to come out and pump the gas.

KT: Uh huh.

GG: You didn’t pump your own gas a lot. Sometimes you pumped and other times, people would come out the store and pump your gas…they had an attendant. And the guy came up and said, “Can I help you?” I said, “Well, I want to fill this thing up.” He said, “Well I’m sorry uh we um.” He said the same thing. We don’t have any gas. But I said okay. I didn’t do nothing because I knew I could get back to Ashland. I’m getting ready start to pull away and another lady, a white lady, pulled up to the tank and she was a resident uh because he knew her. He went right for her tank I’m pulling out… looking out…he
wrote popped the cap off and started pouring gas. I backed up, “Hey, you don’t have any gas!” Well, she’s a regular customer. And we only selling gas to our regular customers.” I said a word, pulled on out and came on home. Didn’t think anything of it...yeah of course we thought something of it but it wasn’t nothing to get my blood pressure up. You know to worry about. You know but those were some of the things that um I remember going to uh Stanley’s drugstore in Richmond um on Broad Street. Used to be a Stanley’s drugstore. And um my mother...my mother worked in Richmond. My mother retired...she was a histology supervisor for the chief medical examiner’s office of the state of Virginia

KT: Mmhmm

GG: Worked over thirty years and um she um I used to go down there summertime sometimes and when I got older, I worked down there part-time. But uh I used to go with her and we used to come up on [indistinguishable] Broad Street in Richmond. I mean if you didn’t go on Broad Street in Richmond it meant there was something wrong with you. I mean because that was the...everything was there...Tall Hammers, Millen Roads, Stanley Drugstore, J.C. Penney I think. I mean that was the store where you...everybody shopped on Broad Street. And we went to Stanley’s and um we during those years early years we had to go to the counter and we could order...they had the best hotdogs. And we used to order hotdogs, French fries, and we would be standing here eating the hot dogs and French fries and other people would be sitting right there eating and enjoying themselves. We be standing up there eating. And then they had...one time I think they had uh a serving um thing in the basement I think it was. You know where we had to go to eat at. Um that changed dramatically because they boycotted it. You know they had the boycott. They decided that okay we’re going to come here everyday. Now that type of boycott...usually the boycott is when you don’t...but what they did was students got together and they said we’re coming here everyday and we’re going to bombard you until finally they just said go ahead and sit down. You know enjoy yourself. Basically how that happened. But they used to have the best hotdogs. I remember that hotdog right now. You are making me hungry I can remember it because they made it. It was good food you know. But uh those are some of the things...but uh I didn’t...I was lucky I was not in the situations where some people were um who really went through severe segregation. You know some lost their lives...got beat up. I...We never had that around here. I think one evening um years ago somebody said I don’t know how we found the hill...we ended up on the hill because we didn’t get much of that measure. Somebody said the KKK had come into Ashland...used to be a Shell station right on the number 1 highway...right there by the Rite-Aid...used to be a Shell station there...the KKK had come in there and um all the older black men that was in their teens and their twenties preceded to go down there...we never heard no more of it...just dissipated...went on away. Just like that...just disappeared. We don’t know what happened. And there was no riot...there was no fight. But we never heard of it no more. You know. That was the only time I ever heard there. Um I worked at Royal School Laboratories up there where Best Products used to be. Um you go up Route 1 and there it’s uh I can’t think of the place. It’s a big building up there.

KT: Supply Room?

GG: Supply Room. Well next to the Supply Room used to be a place called Royal School Laboratories. They made the desks for schools...the cement...they’re hard marble desks...
KT: Uh huh

GG: And I worked there. And uh summer job. And uh we had a problem with uh the bathrooms...somebody locked the bathrooms trying to scare us off uh a couple of nights we would be right out in the middle of the warehouse and the lights would go out...cut right off. We learned that when the lights went off you dropped to the floor and rolled down your machine. Don’t move because no one could see you. As long as no one could see you nothing could happen to you, you know, but that went out that was in the place of business where we worked at. Yea, I mean that happened several times. We would be working, I worked on, uh, what-cha-you called the blue reel. You glued the sections together and then it would spin. Big wheel would spend and and um you would press the button and stop and you know it would put the gluey things together and we’d be working and we learned to take flashlights, we bought flashlights, little flashlights, keep in our pocket. And then we realized when you turn the flashlight on your giving yourself away. So uh the lights would go out in the building and and when as soon as the lights go out we would just hit the floor on our stomachs and slide under your equipment and just stay right there. You would not move and then a few minutes later you hear the supervisor coming through cutting the lights back on telling us okay. And we don’t know who did it. We don’t know whether it was a gag or they were just trying to scare us, but um that that would happen on occasions but it wasn’t something that would happen all the time. It would happen on occasions. It never made anybody quit the job; we still continued to work.

KT: Were you scared to go to work?

1 HOUR 8 MIN 11 SECONDS

GG: You know, truthfully speaking, we weren’t. We kinda though that somebody was pulling a gag on us, but we never heard of anybody fired, um, we didn’t think the supervisor would be stupid enough to do it because that would slow your prod your production.

KT: Yea

GG: Your productivity. But we would it would happen and we would go to the bathroom and there would be flyers all over the walls telling us where to go and to get out you know. We would look at them, use the bathroom, and come on out. You know, we just didn’t pay any attention to them. And never had a problem. No one every harassed no one ever came at us, it was just those little things that happened. But um, I don’t know, you just you learn from instinct to um to go where you knew it was save to go and where you didn’t think it was save you use your first instinct. If you didn’t think it was save you would go you would just move on and um I never really had a direct problem you know I have seen it I have seen it even at Rich food. I think I saw it um what-cha-call it what do you call it when it is low key um under the table like? You know you may feel like your up for a promotion, you’ve worked hard for it, and then all of a sudden boom someone else gets it. And then that person got to come to you so that you can help them through the job. That is the kind of stuff we went through. And then down the road maybe a year or so down the road that person will finally fall flat on his face or move on and then you’ll be offered the job, but you won’t be offered it at the money that they were being made.
But it still never did cause me to have um be angry or have animosity or any of that. You know if it come directly at me then I would have to protect myself but other than that it just went on that is the way we grew up. That is why I don’t, you know, I I I don’t hold grudges, I can’t live like that. You know I know what the history is I know because my mother and father told me. I know because I experienced some of it. But I live for today I don’t have time to fool with that stuff, you know, I really don’t. I tell people, I tell my daughter, I never drill nothing in her head. I just always told her to look out for herself and to take care of yourself and you will slowly learn through your own experiences. You know, what is and what is not. And that is the way she grew up, you know. That is all I can stay.

KT: Ok, um. Did ya’ll ever take the train?

GG: Oh yea. I used to take the train every year with my mother to New York. I was ten or eleven years old. I used to go to New York and um we would go up and visit my aunt, my great aunt, my 2 great aunts, and my two great uncles um in New York City. My aunt, one of my great aunts, owned a little store you know the little Mullen paw Store, um, up in New York. Uh, let me see, if you ever looked at um any of the Tv’s shows from way back and you see people sit on the steps. And you have people play in the streets because you don’t have much traffic and then across the street was a little store...that was just the way it was when I used to go up there in actual life in New York.

KT: In New York or New York City?

GG: New York City

KT: Oh!

GG: Yea, I mean, yea, every year my mother and I would go up there and we would stay two weeks and um my aunt added on a store and um it has just little novelty items in it: candy, cigarettes, sodas, um, toys, and um, and, and you could go in there and get what you wanted to get. Of course when I went up there I was the great nephew visiting and I had to run into the store because it didn’t cost me nothing. Candy man whatchu talking about. And we just and it was right across the street from her home, her house. Her house you go up like seven steps into her and there were rooms that would join together and then right across the street the sidewalk was real wide. Just the like the city sidewalks real wide. And um this was in Harlem by the way, this was in Harlem, NY. Um and you go across the street to the store and she would open the store in the mornings and she stand in the door and talk to the people when they come by and you people would come in there and buy a few things and go in. I would go in there and she would let me go in there I can remember now just like yesterday we would go in there and eat and have a good time and um I met some kids that lived up there and the would come down and we would hang out on the streets together. Wasn’t much traffic then so you could play in the streets. You know, if you saw a car coming you would just get out of the way, you can’t do that now but that’s the way it was. And I we used to get on the train and here right here in Ashland that is when the station was open we used to go um to New York and the train ride used to be a lot of fun. And basically you now during those years you stayed on you know you, blacks stayed at Coach and whites stayed at coach and you stayed on your coach but we never thought about anything like that.
You know what was a seat to sit in, it was a comfortable ride, we looked out of the same window. You know it was just fun to see to see when you were going up there and um um I hadn’t ridden a train for many many years till um 90 – 99 I think it was for a seven day cruise. My wife and I and a group of us and we rode the train from Richmond down to Miami, um, I think we road the Silver Star going down and the Silver Street coming back. I swear ld never ride a train no more in life. That was the worse ride I’ve ever had in my life. Well it was just um um well the train was late getting down there first of all and um they were nice enough to hold the ship. Because you know you don’t usually hold those ships up.

KT: Yea

1 HOUR 14 MIN 34 SECONDS

GG: But there were so many people on that train that were scheduled to go out so they held the ship up and then the same thing when we went back to to the train station coming back the train was four hours late coming into Miami and they had to hold that ship up to. And um and then on the return, see when you get to Miami you are basically at the end of the line. Now it does go on down to Florida Keys, but actually the main spur ends in Miami. So you, the train, goes into this big this big garage and it’s washed clean and re-stocked you know and then it’s headed back north. And when we got on the train the corridor came through and he announced that we were running about three and half hours behind schedule and and they had to make up most of the time up between Miami and Richmond. See because the tracks are wide open you know once you hit Richmond, you in the city, you can’t run that speed and I tell you what that night when we got to Richmond we weren’t a half an hour behind schedule. They announced we were a half an hour behind schedule. This train was heading from Boston and um I thought the train was going to take wings coming back that night I that engineer either he was drunk or he just was out of it, he didn’t know the train was going that fast, but we had to pull the curtain down because we was passing objects so fast you know and my mother-in-law, I’ll never forget she pulled the curtain rod down because she couldn’t stand looking out of the window no more and of course, once it got dark you couldn’t see, you could only hear. And that train that train was rolling an I remember when we I got back to Richmond I said no more. No, but it was a nice ride, we played cards in the club car and you know we tried to get them to walk down the isle and the train be throwing you all around, you know. Cuss your going so fast you know. Um and that had been years between I had did it and a boy to an adult. So um yea I’ve been on trains. We’ve been we rode one day up to grand is it Grand Union Station in Washington. A bunch of us went up there from here caught the train here and went up there and just spent the day in the station all day. Cuss they got stores in the station, they got restaurants in the station, a few of them went out and did some sight seeing, but we just hung around in the station and caught the train back in. Just to say we did it, you know.

KT: Yea

GG: Yea

KT: Um, I don’t really know how to ask this but uh the college how does that?
GG: How is the college?

KT: I mean do you think it affects the community or is it a good thing or a bad thing?

GG: Well I am sure it has brought finances to the town. You know, Im sure it has been a financial accent to the town. Um, not only because of the taxes but because the kids shop, they buy there beer here. (Laughs)

KT: (Laughs)

GG: And I mean they shop and they buy in Ukrop’s they go to stores Wal-Mart, you know. They they um, it has to be a financial accent to the town. Um we don’t have many kids here and if they all, we even have some of them that come in here. They come in here. We had six young men in here last Sunday, um, Dean Keitt, uh, Anthony Keitt, do you know him?

KT: Oh, yea.

GG: Yea, he is Deacon here. He is Vice Chairman of Deacns here. Yea, yea, he works with the organization um uh I think these gentlemen go out into the community work or something like that?

A: Brothers for Change?

GG: Yea, brothers for change. Yea, six of them was here not last Sunday but the Sunday before last and um they were just at the service. Throughout the years, we’ve always had students, white and black, come here. Um, some Sunday’s we feed them, you know because we understand that I think the cafeteria closes at a certain time on Sunday or something like that?

KT: Um, I think it’s the same

GG: It’s the same, okay?

GG: Well anyhow.

KT: Its supposed to.

GG: We’ve fed them here or something like that on you know after church jus the kids um um it started this started back there in I want to say in the late 70s or 80s. My cousins, the girls I was telling you about, that would be the youngest of the grandchildren they had friends they had friends who lived here who had friends at Randolph-Macon and they started to come in here regular on Sunday’s. Um, tell you one for instance, um uh Jerome Ross, Reverend Dr. Ross, he teaches over at the college.

KT: What does he teach?
GG: He teach, I think religion, some type of religion. He came from the communion from Samuel Proctor School of Theology on the campus of Virginia Union.

KT: Oh ok.

GG: He taught that for years, He’s about 6’7 or 6’8, African American, got a little bush, ya’ll have seen him probably over there.

KT: I think so

GG: He teaches um religion, some type of religion over there now. He graduated from Randolph-Macon.

KT: Okay.

GG: he was with Randolph-Macon. He played basketball at Randolph-Macon. He and um a fellow by the name of professor Johnson who coaches now I think um Fletcher had a little stent with the pros for a while but this gentle men um um and another guy named mike love they played basket ball for Randolph - Macon and we used to go up and see Randolph - Macon play and um the year I think Paul Webb was the coach then the year the first time and the only time they ever played Georgetown university they beat them. They beat them by two points. One or two points and Georgetown University had guys 6’8” and 6’9” and they played right when they played and Randolph - Macon upset them. ‘cause they were naturally ranked when they came in here and they had just somehow coach Webb I think had just gotten in on the schedule ya know and they came in here of course thinking that we could just blow these guys off the court. And Randolph macon upset them that year. They did. Yeah. Yeah uh. And that it started then. So ever since then our kids have been coming over here um for Sunday morning services um and then every time we want to have a program we usually have it in Blackwell auditorium. I’ve been there many times with many groups many organizations performing there participating there um it has not I’ve heard I’ve heard you know young people are young people like I said y’all are young people. Um I’ve heard that there’ve been some problems with the private homes that young people live in in the neighborhood which you know you know music up loud, drinking’, and stuff like that. But um it hasn’t has has not bothered me I mean I don’t it doesn’t bother me. I go through there and my aunt lives in Berkley town and I have two cousins, several cousins, that live over there. And um it doesn’t bother me. You know I’ve never had that much involvement personally I other then hear what other people have said. You know the most I’ve ever heard is that um sometimes where the kids live off campus in the homes, in the community, you there is some disturbance there you know and um which there shouldn’t be because I think you should respect my home and I respect your home but when the music get up too loud and the drinking’ is going on too much or the carousing too much then I think there should be a stop to that. There shouldn’t be no questions that automatically should be thought issue ought to stop it um because of the respect issue you know if you got two old people or seniors living on each side of you and you got a bunch of young people the young people should be able to have themselves a good time and enjoy themselves but not when it over flows on these people who become scared who are seniors may be who are retired who
don’t want to hear that so I figure the college should really look at what they’re doing when they buy these homes and put these young people in them and that’s not speaking against the young people either govern what’s going on and have someone in that home that will speak up and say we can’t do this but we can still enjoy ourselves. You know as far as me you know I don’t want to hear them. I live by two cemeteries everything quiet up there. (laughs).

KT: that hole that’s six feet under...

GG: that’s right yeah. I live right next to Shiloh Baptist cemetery and the Moulin cemetery so I don’t have a problem with noise. Yup.

KT: Alright well um do you have any other stories that you know about?

GG: I think I’ve talked out um I don’t really have I’ve been I mean I’ve been living in Ashland all my life this has been my home church all my life I don’t believe in running from one place to another. I believe if there’s a situation then make it correct and go on and live. That’s just the way I am. Um I don’t believe in um trying to be like the Jones’s me, myself, and I. I don’t like to imitate try to imitate anybody here I am this is me. Uh when I’m told by my my family or my wife that there should be some corrections I make the corrections and keep on going. That’s the way I am. Um I try to enjoy my life, I try to get the best out of it, um but at the same time I know how I got here and I know who’s keeping me here and that is the good Lord. That’s where my blessing’s. and when you don’t know that you got a problem you got a problem. Now I’m not saying that everybody got to be holier then I am I’m not saying that everybody got to believe in God but I’m saying that if you don’t know who you are and where you’re coming from and where you’re going then then you have a problem. Now you’re not always going to make it the way you want it go but at least give it a shot give it a shot. And when you find you don’t make it, you don’t have to feel bad you know you did your best. Yeah that means a lot take you into your senior years you know take you into um to them old years where you can sit back with your children and your grand children and tell them those stories you know when I leave here imma tell my daughter that I had an interview today you know I don’t know why y’all want to interview me. I’m here. I’ve been here in Ashland all my life. I don’t plan to go any where I mean one day I will but I don’t plan to to go any where as in right now um I’ve been involved with a lot with a lot of Ashland community projects. The Variety Show that we have every year I think I’ve only missed one I believe. I’ve been in it every year you know there have been some years I’ve been tired and I just just didn’t put my energy in it so I didn’t get into many acts. I really pulled back on that I only now get into one or two different projects you know when they have it that’s to save me. Save my stress level but um but um again um God bless me with a little bit of a talent and there’s a saying if you don’t use your talent you’ll loose your talent. So use whatcha got to the best of your ability. And then go ahead and keep on going. I mean that’s the way I live so everybody tell you that. I try to be forthright I’m not going to tell you to lie if I can help it. I’m not going to tell you know I’m going to tell you the right way tell ya and I’m not perfect by any means um I have ups and I’ve had my downs but if you come to me and ask me questions I’m going to try and give you the best answer that I know and If I don’t know the answer I’m going to try and go get it and come back and give it to you and and and if uh I feel that uh the best thing to be able to say to a person is if you don’t know say it. I’m not going to try to impress you by giving something you can
not use or get you in trouble. If I don’t know it I’m not going I’m going to say I don’t know you know and that’s that’s that’s my philosophy um I didn’t sit down and say okay “now George whatcha gonna do with your life?” Everything that’s happened to me and everything that everybody cause a lot of people come to me to talk and I just let it flow I just talk you know I just talk and when I’m finished the conversation I don’t’ look back I go on. Yeah, and I say you can come back anytime. I still don’t understand why you want to interview me but

KT: we’ve learned lots of stuff!

GG: yeah but uh it’s it’s fun you know life is enjoyable if you control it. That don’t mean you’re going to be rich or that you’re going to be a success at all at all times but always try to be in control of what you do be man enough be woman enough to be in control and if you know that somebody is leading you down the wrong road, if you know what you’re doing is not exactly right, have the guts enough to let your first instinct be your best instinct and say I’m not going to do it. Don’t try to impress anybody, that’s right. People will respect you down the road far more when they say I don’t’ have to worry about so and so because he gonna tell me just the way he thinks it is. It may not fit me at the moment but he gonna tell me he’s not going to pass by me he’s going to say well uh you can go ahead and try that. I’m going to say no I don’t think you should do it and if people would do that more and stop playing games if people would do that more and stop sticking pacifiers in adults’ mouths. If adults would start acting like adults instead of being adults with child like mentalities this world would be so much better. Because sometimes we got adults who that try to act younger than the children and if the education with the children, nothing, there lost, you know, that’s just the way I feel. But people say I’m so mentally ill so.

KT: (Laughs). Do people really say that?

1 HOUR 30 MIN 23 SECONDS

GG: Awww, they tease me all the time. They say my elderly is going to go over the top, you every heard that? When your elderly is going to go to the top that means you aint’ straight! Yea, but I don’t let that bother me, see, you know, people say you crazy, I say yea, but I’m a good crazy! Yep, yep. And I just enjoy myself and my I really believe God has blessed me to have decent health. You know uh, I I stay under a lot of pressure. I mean I stay under a lot of pressure and sometimes I just go in the room and sit down and just take ten minutes to just sleep and just get in line but, um, I don’t, I try not to let the pressures get to the point where they start affecting me physically and hurt my health because I am at risk. I have arrhythmia, I take medications for my heart, um, and basically, I had a catheterization done the year before last and they found no blockages. I weigh 349 and that is very unusual, so I know got has blessed me. I mean I could have angina, I could have cardiac, I mean I could have what-cha- call it, congested heart failure. I don’t have any of that and knock on wood I’m not bragging. I know that I’ve got to learn as I get older to take care of myself better, but I believe God has blessed me a whole lot. He has blessed me a whole lot and um cuss I see people who a very much smaller than I my age and they’re not here, there gone. There having all kinds of health issues. You know and I’m not having those health
issues, but I’m not saying that down the road it’s not going to happen, but I believe that um, that that God has done real well. So, I give and I give and I give and when I get tired of giving I sleep.

KT: (Laughs)

GG: (Laughs). I get rest.

KT: Then you wake up and give some more.

GG: And I give some more!

KT: Usually, I cant sleep half the time I want because usually somebody calling me or my wife reminding me, you got to do this and you got to do that. Cuss she keeps my calendar too. We have a calendar on our door in our bedroom. She can tell she says you got to go here today you got to go there today you got to do this and she supports me. She fusses sometimes and tells me I do too much, my mother also, they tell me you got to slow down. You know and I do that. I take that I don’t just let it so past my head. I take it because they can tell when I am getting kind of out of sync, you know, um, so then I I regenerate. I sit down, I relax, and I get up, and I am ready to go again. Yep and then sometimes um I have had some years that I totally pulled away. Three or four months at a time; I don’t let anybody get in my way, I do exactly what I want to do and I got myself, everything, and my health back in order. Got my mind back together and got my strength back and then I started back. I still did what I had to do but I did it in a low key manner. You know and sometimes you have to do that. Sometimes you have to save yourself. When you ain’t got enough sense to do that that’s when you get in trouble. Yep, so, I I enjoy it. I enjoy it. I still don’t know why ya’ll are interviewing me. Who gave you my name anyway for the interview, may I ask?

KT: Oh, ok, um. I thought I told you this in the message but maybe I should have said it more clearly. Um, our class, we are taking an FYE, which is first year course, and we’re going to do the 150th anniversary of Ashland.

GG: Oh, okay, yea.

KT: So, we’re or our teachers, professors, found people throughout the community and we got your name.

GG: Oh, okay. Well I appreciate that. I I thank you for thinking that much of me, to want to interview me, um, um, when my mother is 89, she’s not up to that now, has been interviewed an awful lot.

KT: Oh.

GG: She is in the um if you were to go to the Cross Brothers Ashland Book, they have a guestbook at the counter where you checkout and its called the Ashland Book. Um, if you got that book and looked
through it you would see a whole lot of my families history in that book. My mother put it in it. They interviewed my mother. My mother has been interviewed by like several different people who have been putting together books. Roseanne Shaft she interviewed for that book, the Ashland, Ashland book.

KT: Yea, we had to read a section from there.

GG: Yea, my mother Iris Gray she out a lot of information and then this in the Ashland book that is in um um Cross Brothers that is being sold there is a lot of pictures and writings she put in that book and um let me see she’s been interviewed by several other people. She has given an interview at the library, she gave a talk at the library.

KT: At our library?

GG: At our library or at the Pamunkey Library?

KT: At the Pamunkey.

GG: Yea, the Pamunkey. She gave um um, I watching her right now, she forgets a lot. Its not that she forgets a lot she can’t remember names real good. So it’s um I can see the stress when she’s trying to do it. You know, so she is kind of pulled away from doing that, but, um, and then I took the ball up because I love history and I we been doing a lot of research with my family history and I have done a lot of research with the young lady, driving that Corvelle. Man, her name is Jody Allen, that’s Anthony Keitt’s wife.

KT: Oh okay.

GG: And she is Dr. Allen she uh she has a doctors degree. She teaches down at William and Mary.

KT: Oh okay

GG: She is the secretary here at the church and she teaches three days she’s not teaching now they finished, but she’s teaching three days a week down at William and Mary. They live here in Ashland am um, she is our archivist here for Shiloh and I am the historian for Shiloh.

KT: Oh okay

GG: So we’ve done a whole lot of research uh the yearbook that that the town of Ashland is putting together that’s a big yearbook. Well this is is what you are working on right? The yearbook?

GG: Well they are working a big yearbook um for the town of Ashland um uh my grandfathers small history is in there my great grandfather, my grandfather, my mothers family, and uh I am in there and we did the write up for the church and the cemetery for Shiloh and the cemetery that’s up there. If you go out here and turn up right you’ll see the Shiloh Baptist Church cemetery um we put that we write up all that is going to be put in that book.

KT: Oh okay.

GG: Yea, we did the write up for that. So that’s why I think people have kinda grabbed me because they know I’ve been doing a lot of research and trying to get a lot of history on you know. Like I said I love history I mean it’s nothing like learning your roots. Who are you? I mean you are nothing but your roots, you know? And people say well I don’t want to learn my roots because there are some bad things in my family or there are some bad people in my family. Well I got news for you there is bad in every family.

KT: Um-hmm.

GG: If we were perfect we would be out of here. We wouldn’t be here. There would be no need to live. We will never reach perfection so every family got some highs and got some lows. You take it for a grain of salt and you go ahead. You don’t condemn because if you condemn you’d be condemning yourself that’s your family. I mean so so I got an alcoholic cousin big deal. You know. I got a cousin that was strung out on drugs lets try to help him. You know we may not be successful but at least give it a shot. You know like I said I got some crazy people that’s alright, I’m not crazy, you know I got their seed. I mean if we would think like that we would come together you know um my family several years ago started having uh whatcha call it, a little family reunions but my mothers family is a small family. My wife’s family they got people all over the untied states and they have taken the home place in Culpeper and they have refurbished it, beautiful, and then my wife’s parents live one house from their and they have the family reunions and then they have 300 people there. Those people come from all over the united states in the summer on the weekend. They get hotel rooms you know at the holiday inn, all man they have the best time umm they just they respect each other, there’s not a lot of alcohol all that stuff there, but they have all this food, they meet each other, they learn who the young people are, the young people get a chance to meet the seniors, you know, they really know how to put together a family reunion. And, and like I said they start on a Friday night and they end up on a Sunday evening. They have a what-cha-call get acquainted on Friday night, they have the big reunion on Saturday, Sunday morning they have the brunch, and then most of the people are spreading out getting out there leaving going back to there different homes and um they invited everybody. They don’t exclude nobody and everybody come and have a great time. I tell you I love that family to death and they are what you call a real family. They have their ups and they have their downs but they are family and uh sometimes they can ring each others necks but they uh when people get the chance and learn how to do that there can be ten people in the family and you can have a good time. It could be 200 people in the family and you could have a good time, it’s what you bring to the table if you don’t bring nothing you’re not going to bring anything from the table when you leave. Right? If you if you get together just like the organizations or at the school if y’all are on an organization and ten of y’all are sitting down and three of
y’all are doing work, why are the other seven there? So you got to speak up and say hey y’all got to get on the ball here, do something, you know, or just go home. When we learned to do that we become better and it’s not being hard, it’s not being mean, it’s calling it like you see it. Like my mother said “let the cookie crumble or crumble where it falls.” Fall ain’t crumble or whatever you say.

(laughs) but what I’m saying is be real. Just learn to be real, be yourself. Yeah you don’t have to impress no body. I told my daughter when she met her friend, they dated for ten years and they got married, they were engaged for five years, and then got married. And I told her “you don’t have to impress anybody. Be yourself.” And that way there’s no surprises, teach him to be himself and that way there are no surprises and for god’s sake if you find that you can’t make it, separate. Go on about your business but respect each other, don’t ever try to hurt each other and don’t don’t try to show him a picture of you that’s not the true you. You know just be yourself um and you’ll go a long ways and she is definitely is. But that’s the way I I live and um and I’m not perfect but I do the best I can. But I don’t know what else.

KT: oh well, you’re good I was just trying, just listening.

GG: well I just enjoy talking I have a gift to gab. Yup. But it is I I am who I am. Can’t be no body else. Yup. That’s why I still don’t know why y’all want to interview me. But I hope it helped you I hope it gives you what you want um what do y’all plan on doing with this, can I ask?

KT: um well the tapes going to go to the archives upstairs in the library and you can go there and listen to them.

GG: I need to go there and listen to myself

KT: and um we’re going to actually have a presentation on it next Friday and

GG: I should have spoke professional, why didn’t you tell me that? I could have started using different verbs and vocabulary.

KT: they won’t hear all of this I will just take like a little section out of it.

GG: oh okay, alright

KT: (laughs) I’ll get the most professional one out. And um I don’t know what else we’re doing with it.

GG: well I hope I helped you, I I don’t know whether I did but I hope that you got what you needed and um when I become a great great grandfather I’m going to take my great great grand child over to Randolph- Macon and say listen to your great great grandfather I’ll do that.

KT: Okay

GG: when I’m 90 years old and I won’t be able to remember to take my little great great grandchild to Randolph- Macon and let him listen to my interview how’s that, that’ll work? We’ll do that.