Isabella Stibbins

Oral History Memoir

Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Kizzy Gonzalez

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Miami, Florida

Project: Memories of Virginia Key Beach

GONZALEZ: Okay, so today is March twenty-seventh, and I'm interviewing Isabella Stybbins.

STIBBINS: Stibbins.

GONZALEZ: Stibbins, sorry. If you could– we will start with what was it like growing up in Miami.

STIBBINS: It was a neighborhood thing we were like village people. Everybody knew everybody, and the grown-ups knew each other. The part that I came from, that neighborhood was full of Bahamians and everybody took care of everybody. Everybody minded each other's children. My mother had a friend—my ma worked so hard until her friend told her, "You know Ms. Jessie, I keep your baby so much I'm wondering [if I] should I nurse her." So mama said, "Leave that alone. I'll come home in time. I don't need you nursing." They were just neighbors. It was like kin. Island people are like that, like kin, kinfolk.

GONZALEZ: Where exactly in Miami you were talking about?

STIBBINS: Eleventh Street and Fourth Avenue. It was mostly old wooden houses, upstairs and downstairs, wooden houses. I don't think anybody at that time had electricity. They had kerosene lamps and kerosene stoves. Ice boxes.

GONZALEZ: What time would that be?

STIBBINS: I went away from here for a while so that was when I was like maybe in primary school. Maybe I could have been about six around that time. And well the kids didn't know like they know now. It was whatever you knew they told you. They told you and then you didn't do too many asking questions because it was considered you trying to be grown.

GONZALEZ: Was this like in the forties or fifties?

STIBBINS: This was in maybe in '48 because I went to St. Francis Xavier for a while. That was because one of the ladies in my neighborhood was a member of St. Francis Catholic Church and that was another means of somebody minding you, going to school. Your mother works, so there was another means of people minding you.

GONZALEZ: Who did you live with during [your childhood in] Miami? Was it your mom? Siblings?

STIBBINS: Well I was living with my mother and mother's grandchildren. They were more like my sisters because her first set of children had married and were out. The second set of children

had started having children so my nieces and nephews were like my sisters and brothers because we were the same age. It's hard now for the nieces that I have left to understand that I'm not the oldest just because [their] aunt. I'm not the oldest because a couple of you are four or five months older than me. Had my sister Roxie Florrie not been home when my mother came home from work—she was a laundry worker—when she came home from work and went to the bathroom, I was born. My mother got sick and went to her bed, and good thing my sister Roxie went to the bathroom because I was on the floor. I was there. [That's where] I was born.

GONZALEZ: So you were born in your own home?

STIBBINS: In my mother's house. But her being an island woman—those coming from the island, they were all midwives. They didn't have licenses, but they were all midwives.

GONZALEZ: So your mom, you said she is from the Caribbean. Where exactly?

STIBBINS: She is from Eleuthera, an island out of the Bahamas.

GONZALEZ: When did she come to the United States? Do you know?

STIBBINS: She always had a fantastic story she told. She came here when she was four and her sister was six. She got here because her mother called from the Bahamas and told her first cousin, "I'm dying and I need somebody to come get my children." And her first cousin came and picked my mother and her sister up and they came to the States. Her cousin, having children

herself, helped raise my mother and her sister but they could only go to a certain extent because they had children too. So they could only do so much, so [when] my mother [turned] ten, eleven, [or maybe] twelve years old, her and her sister got jobs. They got jobs. See an old Bahamian used to do Bible so they said, “So you have no Joe, no job, (laughs) but you got a job.”

GONZALEZ: Do you remember any jobs she said she had?

STIBBINS: My mother had [a job doing] laundry. They all did laundry work because most of them now came at that age, they didn’t have an education. They read some, but not you know, not all that great.

GONZALEZ: When she came, do you know around what time? Like was it the twenties, the thirties—?

STIBBINS: Uh I really don’t, we didn’t talk about that, but it was probably—if I was born in 1940, that had to be the late twenties. That had to be right up in there.

GONZALEZ: As you were growing up, who [was] important in your life? Who influenced you?

STIBBINS: Well, some Bahamian people and coming in like that, [my mom] did because mind you now, she wasn’t a natural citizen then. Bahamian people didn’t want outside people talking to their children. They didn’t want you to get any grand ideas so [you interacted] within the family you know. I was kept real close because in my mother's mind, she didn't want me to make

the same mistakes she did and the other children did. We talked to each other, we played with each other, we did things with each other, and we went to the movies. But we didn't have too much outside people there because that was the way it was. I mean outside of your church, people you went to school with, or she went to work with. You went through the neighborhood because most of those people were island people too. It was a village. We called [ourselves] village people. Yeah that's what it was.

GONZALEZ: In your own community, who was the most important person? Or the important people in your community?

STIBBINS: The most important?

GONZALEZ: Or who was important in the community?

STIBBINS: We had a carpenter and he did buildings and his name was Strong. The Strong People. Since he worked with his hands, they pretty much—I believe were the first people on Eleventh Street that had electricity. I believe it. Then we had people across the street that were more educated, the Foxes. See even with education and having more, we were all still village people. Nobody above you and nobody beneath you either. We were all people.

GONZALEZ: I'm going to transition to Virginia Key. Could you tell me anything you know about the history of Virginia Key?

STIBBINS: Well, history I can't tell you because I'm going to tell you as much as I know.

GONZALEZ: Yes, exactly. Whatever you know.

STIBBINS: My sister Claudia which was the baby at that time, and [since she was] a baby when I was born [I will guess] she was twelve years old [at the time]. My sister Ollie and Claudy were together and we were walking down—we were walking down Fifth Street. Up in that time, Fifth Avenue was mostly whites and Jewish people up in there. Mixed Jewish people. Jews were there because they were working. But we were walking down Fifth Street until we got by the Fifth Street bridge and [when] we got to the Fifth Street bridge, the bridge was going up and my sister and I both we were talking. We were talking so much until we heard somebody hollering at us, "Hey, hey, hey, hey!" and we talking so much that we looked back and saw the bridge was going up and we were walking on the bridge. I got so scared. I broke company with them and they followed me so we went back, but there was a place by that bridge, up under that bridge, where there was a fish market, Captain Tom's Fish Market. We knew where we were because, at that time, it was right on the Fifth Street where the bridge at. It was ocean there. It's there right now because you can leave here right now and walk right down Fifth Street where the Casablanca and all the hotels [are], and right up in there you'll see on the wall, Captain Tom's. It's still there right now. The writing is still there.

The blacks went up in there because when Captain Tom took his boats out fishing he would filet fish and what he would do that, when he fileted fish, he left the backs of the fish on the back of his fishery and a lot of blacks used to go to there and take the fish backs and cook them—boiled

fish and grits was the menu. One time—I don't know. He was talking. Now this is just ‘talk’, ‘gossip’, said Captain Tom, [but he] asked one of the black women, “The fish backs, what do you do with that?” and they said, “We make fish and grits. That’s what we make with it. That’s a meal, fish and grits.” So every time he went fishing and came back, [he] put those fish backs and heads there. He would go back and [they would] be gone. [Then] he hired some blacks, Bahamians working for him, [and] he had them cook it for him. When they cooked it, he called it fish soup. We called it boiled fish and grits, you know if you make grits with it. One of his workers made some for him after work. And blacks kept going back there, back there looking for them backs, and Captain Tom started selling [it to] them. He started selling it. So that stopped the fish and grits, and you going back there and getting all that. Everybody is in business for profit so he made a profit. That stopped it.

One Saturday, I think it was a Saturday, [my sisters and I] were going [in that direction again] to go to the beach. And when we went, there was a whole line of blacks waiting for the boat to come in. That’s how they went to Virginia Key Beach, on a boat. They did not have the causeway or none of that. The first trip they ever took to Virginia Key Beach was on a boat. I went one time, but I was scared of water. If you couldn’t bathe in it or drink it, I didn’t bother with it. I went a couple of times as I got to be a teenager. At Booker Washington’s graduation we would—you know like you have now that when you are graduating [they give you] that time out when you go to Disney—well we went to Virginia Key Beach. As I got older with my sisters, we used to ride over there in a car. That’s after they did the bridge. We used to go there in a car. And when I didn't want to be found by my mother or brothers, I would have my dates over there. If

the regular people don't go all the time to the beach, you could hide out there. And I wasn't taking company anyways so that was a hideout.

A lot things happened on Virginia Key Beach. We had some good times there. Even when you were allowed to go there, and we said it was our beach, there were some good times there. They would have Caribbean music—a lot of my friends got pregnant on the beach. So there were some good times there. There were really some good times there, but when I came back.

My mother did something [because] she didn't want me to fall through the cracks. Sometimes parents they see things in the family and my mother's thing was, "All of these are your sisters and brothers, these are your nieces and nephews, but there [has] got to be a change somewhere." One of my sisters married a serviceman, and in marrying a serviceman, my mother asked her [if she] would be responsible for me, and she said, "Yeah, that's my baby sister. We don't want her working in the laundries. We don't want her to be the maid." She did take me with her, and I spent some time in upstate New York. I stayed in town. I'm going back there soon, to a town called Saratoga Springs, New York. I loved it there. Now this were some experiences oh god that I'll never forget. Everybody was one. You didn't have to worry about what color you were. And when I went to school there, I had a lot of friends there because I believe I was the joke of the friendship. It was like the way you talk, 'Southern', 'Southern talk'. I know I was in a group one time I said "Y'all come on! Y'all come on!" and they said, "You know she is from the South." Out there, there was no talking about 'y'all' and 'what you talking about y'all?' I said "But you all there." They just like being around you. I know in my first P.S. school—it was like in the seventh grade because I would go back and forward [from New York to Miami]. I would come

and go. This we leave here, when I came back I'd be in public P.S. school there. I went one year and I polished my tennis shoes. And that was the oddest thing. My friends just laughed. "Oh you know they from the South. They from the South, they clean up everything." I learned that even the tennis shoes didn't want to be white. They were really good, kind of dingy and dirty. I had a good time.

Commented [DP1]: Is this her requesting to keep the subsequent anecdote off the record? There is nothing really personal said immediately after, but she does make a comment about tennis shoes not wanting to be white, which may be euphemistic. Let me know if you want us to edit the video.

I would go back and forth, back and forth. We're having our sixtieth reunion now coming in June, and we are having a lot of activities leading up to it. A lot of [people] say, "Isabella I remember you, but in some places I don't. I remember you at Douglas, I remember you a little at Phillis Wheatley." Most of my classmates that finished school were from Dunbar or Phillis Wheatley or little schools around. They say, "Sometimes I don't remember you at different places," I say, "Because I was in and out." I would spend maybe four months in school here and four months over there, but I did come back when I was in tenth grade. I came back. I mean, I stayed and I didn't keep going back and forth. [By then] when I did go back upstate New York, I went during like summertime when school was out. I had a beautiful time there because I got to see the seasons changing, the autumn leaves turn to red and gold. I saw that. I was in the Pocono Mountains where, if we're down here you look down there and people are walking around. It was just nice. Oh I enjoyed it, even now I enjoy it. Even more now looking at trees and shrubbery. Oh god, it's exciting.

GONZALEZ: So just to go back to Virginia Key. Can you actually describe it? Like how it looked, and describe the place itself as you remember it?

STIBBINS: Okay. As I remember Virginia Key Beach—part of that beach we didn't go to. To me now, because I'm telling you [after] visiting the North and [given that] back here I'm a Southerner, it wasn't so much poor (in terms of land) because we were black. It was just that part of that beach hadn't been surveyed yet. It was wooded. Little things were walking around like crabs. A lot of people use to go crabbing on the beach. There were a lot of things hanging around at the beach. Then you had wild birds, a lot of things. You had jellyfish in the water, a lot of things going on there, but we had good times. On weekends and on holidays, they had a Caribbean band. You could really shake that thing over there. You could shake it up now. You could make some good lemonade shaking it up over there. I had some good times on that beach. I think a couple of reunions we went to [were] on that beach.

GONZALEZ: High school?

STIBBINS: Yeah, we went. I was in a work group experience when I got to eleventh grade. I don't know if they even have it now, but it was called DCT, diversified cooperative training. I was in that in eleventh grade and they gave you different jobs or careers because not everybody went to college. My first job was at the Ritz Theatre. That was on Second Avenue, Second Avenue and Tenth Street. My next job was at Jackson Memorial hospital as a nurse's aide.

But the beach—now the beach was exciting. It was very exciting. I remember one time, on the beach, I was learning how to swim. I just knew I was swimming. I'm just swimming, just moving my hands and everyone done stopped and looked at me. So I said, "I must be swimming good. I must be swimming good." I happened to look down and my breasts were out. (Laughs)

They weren't looking at me swimming they were looking at breasts. At that time, Bahamians called them titties. [They] weren't just looking at me. They didn't see me. They just saw breasts. That's what they saw.

GONZALEZ: Wow. That's a memory!

STIBBINS: I had some funny times happen there.

GONZALEZ: So you did go in the water eventually.

STIBBINS: Yes, yes, yes. [I'm] calling it swimming, and the sand was there, but I thought I was swimming. I'm just making waves, and I always thought I was something else. I thought they were looking saying, "There goes Isabella. I already thought that she was hot." And I'm just swimming and everybody is looking and I just say, "Might get a boyfriend or something." And I happen to (laughs)—oh lord my titties.

GONZALEZ: Oh my goodness.

STIBBINS: I had some good memories of Virginia Key Beach. Then as a grown person, we went there. That was a place to go for the Fourth of July. Those of us that had cars and had friends at the time that would go to the beach, and would let you know through the week, "Girl we're going on Virginia Key Beach! Girl, that's us beach, we're going to us beach, come on." But it was fun.

GONZALEZ: I didn't ask. When did you graduate? What year?

STIBBINS: I graduated—we are having our sixtieth reunion. I graduated '58, the class of '58. Booker T. Washington High School. Maud was in our class. She was a class member.

GONZALEZ: Maud Newbold?

STIBBINS: Yeah, she is a member of that class. Now she comes from a Bahamian family too, but their family stressed education. And after I was born, that was my momma's greatest wish. [It] was for [my] education. She was determined that nobody fall in the cracks again. Nobody.

GONZALEZ: So you described the beach. But where did you set up? [I am asking] because you said there was some wooded area.

STIBBINS: There were some wooded areas. And way later on, they built a concession place there where you could go to the bathroom there. On the weekends, they would have somebody sell sandwiches, sell hot dogs, sausage sandwiches. That's when people started really going then. Up until the last ten to twelve years I didn't know they considered it anything else. They said a colored beach. Black folks go to that beach. But I was in and out of Miami so I thought everybody went to it. I swear I thought—if I hadn't left Miami, had a different education, and [gone] everywhere I went up North—[I thought] it was everybody's beach.

GONZALEZ: But when you went to Virginia Key did you notice other people going?

STIBBINS: Other blacks.

GONZALEZ: Okay.

STIBBINS: The toll keepers were white. But the folks that kept the beach clean, they were black people. And then again you didn't need much cleaning because if [something is] considered yours, at that time you're going to keep it clean anyway. You're going to keep it clean anyway. It's different from now. I drop some paper here and drop some there, whoever [will] clean it up. It's alright. But at that time, we had a little bit more pride in what we were doing. Especially what you're doing. You had a lot of pride. Now those people were really full of—they were proud people. They really were, because they were like my mother. They didn't have much, but you couldn't tell her nothing. She would say, "Nobody above you, and you not beneath anybody." You're not up under anybody. It's an equal opportunity thing. That's what she would say.

GONZALEZ: You mentioned that they sold hot dogs?

STIBBINS: Hot dogs, sausage sandwiches, French fries, sodas, snow cones.

GONZALEZ: No Caribbean food?

STIBBINS: Later on.

GONZALEZ: You would bring it yourself?

STIBBINS: Yeah, you brought it yourself. Some of those people carried their basket. They weren't able to buy even though it wasn't expensive like it is now. They carried their own food. Sometime they made the conch salad, some of them made the conch fritters, sometimes they made their own sauce and put it in something, a thermos. Fried their own chicken.

GONZALEZ: At the beach, or they brought it?

STIBBINS: No, they fried their own chicken and brought it to the beach. Then, way later on, they had pits there so they barbequed. Seasoned and trimmed down, they had their own little pig. If you got there earlier enough you got a pit. Then later on, you could buy a stall. Things [were] getting better.

GONZALEZ: What did people talk about at Virginia Key? Anything that kind of stuck out?

STIBBINS: Well most things they talked about at that time were really [related to] education, trying to do better, trying to get better neighborhoods, school, family, [whether] this family couldn't do things, or didn't have enough means of doing things, "Let's go over there," "Let's see what we could do over there." Neighborhoods were really neighborhoods then. If one family didn't have—then the children would get together. You know when children talk, they say, "You

know mama didn't have it," and "Mama couldn't go because mama didn't do this in before it was all over with." [Our] mama was doing what everybody else's mama was doing you know when it came to food and clothing and just having fun. Sometimes we had fun when it stormed. I tell people that and they look at me like it was hard. "How do you mean you had fun?" Yes, with the rain. We had the radio, everybody gathered on the floor and listen to the radio and what was going on. It was hard times, but we had good times there too.

But Virginia Key Beach now that was the beach for us. We didn't go to Crandon, we didn't go to all them other beaches. We were going to bathe. We were going to go Virginia Key Beach. We were going there, maybe because the name was Virginia. I don't know, but we had fun there. The old and young had fun. I loved going to the beach because even though I didn't know how to swim—because after that little thing happen I didn't know how to swim—I sure loved going in the water and standing in that water as tall as I was, and mind you I was 4"11. I was going go in the water until it got up until my neck. I still do that right now. Virginia Key Beach, boy it was the beach to go to. That really was the beach to go. Some people came from out of town, from funerals and brought what was left from the funerals. 'Let's go bathe and let's sit up under the sun, go up on the rocks somewhere and sit down.' That's what they did. Simple life. Simple. It wasn't all of this what we have now. Sometimes we wonder. Hey I wouldn't want it to be like that, but sometimes wonder. You just wonder.

GONZALEZ: What's your favorite memory of Virginia Key?

STIBBINS: My favorite memory of Virginia Key Beach is from one evening—that's when my mother was allowing us to go off for an hour or two. I must have, I could have been in the tenth grade. One of the boys from the next street over—we were on Eleventh Street so they had to be on Tenth Street—was old enough to buy a car, a bartered car, or whatever it was. My niece Vernal had a boyfriend and the guy whose car it was, he caught himself liking me so we sneaked off and went on Virginia Key Beach. We stayed out there a long time just talking to each other, and we had some silly things going. He said, "Girl, you think if we stay out here any longer the creature from black lagoon would come up?" We started imagining things. We stayed out there so long until we said "Let's go before we wake up somebody out here." It was just little silly things little girls do. And, "Hurry up and get back home before mama miss you."

GONZALEZ: After you graduated from high school, you told me you went back as a young adult. When was the last time you went to Virginia Key?

STIBBINS: Last time I went Virginia Key was two months ago.

GONZALEZ: Okay.

STIBBINS. Two months ago. Arcola Lakes Park took us out to Virginia Key, and it was nice. It was January, black history. That's why we went back out there. The park carried us out there, showed us different things. Historians, they come up talking about the same thing we're talking about now, only they had different experiences. It was nice. It was really nice. It's something

else now. It really is. It's something else now. It's beautiful now. You got a lot of shrubbery there, and it's nice. A month ago, yeah, for Black History month, we went out.

GONZALEZ: So there's a difference from what you remembered. Is there like a big difference?

STIBBINS: Oh a big difference, a big difference.

GONZALEZ: Anything that stuck out for you?

STIBBINS: Yea, big difference there because now they study the wildlife there. They didn't have that. The only wildlife we studied was each other. We were wild too, but it was different. It was a pleasure really to go and sit around and go in areas. That stuff wasn't there when you first went there. That stuff wasn't there. I remember one time my daughter told me, "Ma, don't go over, don't get—don't go over stuff like that, they might not understand." I remember one time I told a friend of mine, it was two boys and three us girls, so they said, "Let's go in the back of the beach, let's see if we can't find some crab." I should leave this alone, but I'm going to say it anyways. So one of the boys say, "Well you rather far. You don't have to go too far to find some crabs because I got some over here." (Laughs)

GONZALEZ: Oh! (Laughter)

STIBBINS: I leave that alone. My daughter told me, she said, "Ma leave, come on, leave some of it alone." One of them said, "You don't have to go crabbing. If you're looking for crab, just

search me." (Laughter) So I had fun. A lot of people right now say, "Isabella far. Little bit better because she trying to make god dang sense." And [the man from the story] is still living too. He's their leader. He says, "Isabella you don't forget nothing, do you?" I said, "Naw, naw. Because we were really were going to go crabbing," but you said, "Naw, naw, naw. Just stand right here with me." I remember him.

GONZALEZ: What did you know about the Civil Rights [Movement] going on elsewhere and how?

STIBBINS: Well the Civil Rights. You are asking about Civil Rights now, not Virginia Key?

GONZALEZ: Yeah, how and what did you know about the Civil Rights movement as you were growing up?

STIBBINS: Oh I knew a lot.

GONZALEZ: And how did you find out?

STIBBINS: Well sometime when we were getting back, going back up north, we would drive and in driving back going through Georgia and the Carolinas—and I don't know what made me do it, I was just a little girl then. But sometime you have these [impulses] and you read about all this stuff about killing, and folks don't like you on account of your color and all kinds of crazy stuff. One time, we stopped in Georgia to get some gas and I don't know what made me, but I

got up, just a little girl, I had to be about twelve. I got up and while they were getting the gas, I stood in the back of the car. I must have stood where the tag was and my brother-in-law had gone in and paid for the gas and my sister got back in the car she said, “Come on Tilly get back in the car.” This man looked at the tag and he said, “Little girl, you’re still. Why are you still?” I didn’t know what he was talking about, but I heard him, he said, “Oh they going back up North. They some uppity niggers.” There was a lot of hatred there, a lot of hatred there. You tried to turn a blind eye to it, and I believe this is why my mother kept sending me out of Florida.

She made sure that I would see other parts because my sister’s husband was in the service, because we’re not just going to stay in New York, we’re not just going to stay in Schenectady, New York or Albany, New York. I like it. One time we were a couple hours from going to Hawaii. Sometimes when families do things, sometimes it’s for the better of that person. I’m glad I got the chance to see more than Miami. I’m glad of that. My daughter is the same way. My granddaughter just finished school, I mean college. She has her own place. My daughter told me, “Ma, don’t start trying to help her and get her stuff. She’s not going to hang around if she doesn’t get the job she went to school for. She’s not going to hang around here in Miami. She’s just not going to do it.” And I told her the other day when she came to pick me up to take me somewhere, “You know I started to buy you a little set, a little dining room set, just the table and the two chairs and your mama told me don’t it.” She said, “Ma, know me. If I don’t get what I need here, what I went for four years, I’m not going to stay here.” I told her, “You sound like me.” And guess what? She was born on my birthday. December fourth. She’s got a good head on her [shoulders]. Now, I thought she would leave here before because when she came here, she had to go to Atlanta to get the job that she was coming here for. Now, I don’t know, but this is just me,

she just didn't want to tell me this but the job she came for was a circulation job, a communications job, but she didn't get it, here. She got another job here but she says, "Grandmother, that's not the job I went to school for." I said, "You know what? You're only twenty-six years old." She just turned twenty-six years old this December. I said, "Nothing here is going to anchor you down [to the point] where you need to stay here. If I had not met your granddaddy, I wouldn't have stayed here either. When I met him, I was just getting ready to go back. There's nothing written in stone that you should stay here, that is what that is."

GONZALEZ: How did the story of the Civil Rights Movement in other places compare to what was going on in Miami?

STIBBINS: There was a lot of things going on in Miami. The McDuffie thing. So much going on here and it was like right in your face. I had a cousin, my mother's first cousin, the family that brought her and her sister here. He was a policeman. He retired from the police force. He talked to us and said there was a lot going on even with the policemen. He said at that time you couldn't arrest a Caucasian. He couldn't do it. He had to stand there with them and call somebody, a backup to arrest them and for a long time. Maybe now they are in the last fifteen years, [now] that they have blacks in the police benevolent association. I know this. It's coming about now. I imagine it is. When we were in Booker T, one thing we did have was that Black Police Precinct over there. It is just a museum now. It's on Eleventh Street and Fifth Avenue, the first police precinct. We use to go from Booker T. Washington go there for law. We called it history and government class, and every time we had something coming up with law, we would go there and we would watch the courts. It was educational. A lot going on in Miami.

Even now, I met a guy on the bus stop there and he came and sat down by me and he said, “Miss I want to ask you something. Were you born in Miami?” I said, “Yes” and he said, “What happened? What happened in Miami?” I said, “Now you are doing it. I’m supposed to tell you what happened in Miami?” He said, “Yes, it looks like we aren’t going anywhere.” I didn’t want to, but he started to cry. I didn’t want cry too. I told him, “Well, where are you going?” By that time I didn’t have to explain myself because the bus was coming, but folks ask questions that need to be answered.

My oldest granddaughter, she’s fairer than you. Her picture is here somewhere. I’m standing in Marshall’s and a Hispanic lady was standing in the back of me and my granddaughter. I was getting her ready for she was in high school then, getting ready buying her a few things for school. She said, “Grandma what do you think about this?” and I said “That’s okay. Get what you need. I’m going to stay here in this line because this line is getting longer.” So I’m looking at the Hispanic lady saying to her— [My granddaughter] went back again and she said, “Could I get this?” and I said, “Go get it, I’m standing in line now because in a minute if you are not here I’m going to get out of line and you are going to have to pay for that stuff yourself.” She went and picked out something else and she came back and she got in front of me and the lady was there and I said, “Miss let me tell you this. I don’t care what complexion she is. She is still my granddaughter. I don’t care how she looks. She might look Hispanic, but she’s black.” She was embarrassed. I said, “I don’t care what texture her skin is. My daughter is her mother.”

And you know what my granddaughter kept telling me, “Oh grandma I know who I am, but it works for me. They look at me different.” I say, “You know your name is Sheranda. You know

what works for you, Isabella, that's a beautiful name." So she says," It works for me and I'm not mad." My children are happy children. They don't have any bone to pick with nobody. Now, if they want to pick with their mama—their mama is in ministry and you don't come to her with just anything. The girls and my grandson, as they finished school, they got their own department. They didn't say apartment, department. I said, "Why you done did that?" and [one of them] said, "You and ma don't take company and I want some company. When people come in, y'all sit and look like you sizing people up." That's the way it goes. I imagine your mother and grandmother do the same thing. Anybody is not going to come in here and entertain you. That's the way it goes.

GONZALEZ: How did you become involved with the Virginia Key Beach Trust? Or are you involved actually?

STIBBINS: Well you can't be a friend to Maud and not get affiliated. She is like a hammer.

GONZALEZ: Okay

STIBBINS: Her and another little short lady. I can't think of her name is—she is another old lady. Miss Newbold, Miss Enid. What her name. Miss, Miss—

GONZALEZ: Pinkney?

STIBBINS: Pinkney! Miss Pinkney! You can't know them people, now and not. It's like a charge. God, it's like charge. It's like a guilt thing.

GONZALEZ: They're determined.

STIBBINS: Yeah.

GONZALEZ: What does it feel like—oh I already asked how it feels like going to Virginia Key now. What do you envision for Virginia Key in the future, actually? That's a better question.

STIBBINS: I envision that they bring some modern stuff up in there. Bring something in there for the kids. Something in there, besides sand and sea. There's got to be something else. I know you go to the beach to swim and have fun and entertain each other, but there's got to be something else there. There's got to be swings for the children. Something. I've been to beaches—oh god, they even had Ferris wheels on the beaches, the northern ones. I've been to one called Katie Ross in Saratoga Springs, New York. You'd think you were at a museum park.

GONZALEZ: And my last question. What do you want people to know about Virginia Key and its history?

STIBBINS: I would like people to know some of the great things that happened there, some of the things that happened there that should not have happened there, and for it to be [remembered as] a place of fun and joy and games. And if you have time go swimming that's what the beach is

for—to enjoy. And if you are not dark get a tan there. Enjoy the water. I enjoy bathing and I can't swim a lick, but I love water. As a matter of fact, my daughter was telling me the other day, she said, " Ma, we bought beach chairs and we said we were going to get up early one morning and just sit by the beach," but I said, " Yeah, but look we got to check that thing out because folks waiting on the beach now." People are waiting on you on the beach now. You have to be careful. But I intend to live until I leave here.

GONZALEZ: That's a good way to think, yeah.

STIBBINS: And I don't know nobody who left here alive so I'm going to enjoy my life while I have it right now. I'm going to die a very young old lady.

GONZALEZ: Alright. Well thank you very much for your time.