

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Joselyn Naranjo

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Miami, Florida

Project: Virginia Key Beach Oral History Project

JOSELYN: It is March nineteenth, and this is Joselyn Naranjo interviewing Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields.

DOROTHY: Yes.

JOSELYN: So generally, we start most of these interviews for the Virginia Key Beach Oral History Project with very general questions, usually starting with the beginning of one's life. Were you brought up or raised in Miami?

DOROTHY: Yes, I was born in Miami Christian Hospital in Colored Town, Overtown. My maternal grandparents settled in Miami in 1903. They originally lived in Key West for two years, but they were both born and grew up in Harbour Island, Bahamas.

JOSELYN: Can you describe the surroundings of the area you grew up in?

DOROTHY: Well until age six I lived in Miami's Colored Town, Overtown. It was a self-contained community because of segregation so it had all the goods and services that were needed, all the professional services that were needed, doctors, and lawyers, and dentists. I was born New Year's Eve, December 31, 1942, and by that time Miami was—Miami's Colored Town was a bustling city.

JOSELYN: Do you remember the school that you went to?

DOROTHY: Of course, Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School and I graduated from Booker T. Washington Elementary—Booker T. Washington Senior High School.

At Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School my father's cousin, Grace Edwards Albert, was the principal. My mother was a Physical Education Teacher for girls. Her sister Roberta Johnson Thompson was a fifth-grade teacher. Her sister-in-law, Johnalie Johnson, was a third-grade teacher. Her cousin, Pauline Johnson-Higgs was a third-grade teacher. So it was really a family affair.

JOSELYN:

Can you describe what it felt like going to school with family or at least when you would get to school and encounter family members?

DOROTHY: Not good. (Laughter) And especially [my mom]—I was not physically—physically fit. I guess I took after my father's side, the Jenkin's side. My mother was petite and really was expecting a petite daughter who would do flips, and somersaults, and back bends, and I could do none of those things and did not desire to. And I remember her saying to all the children that at the end of the six weeks she was going to give a test and those who did not pass the test, didn't do the bend back and the split, and all of those aerobic things, would earn an F. And so I'm thinking to myself, 'She can't be talking to me.' My mother would not—I wouldn't get an F.

So long story short, we got to the end of the time and she gave the test and I didn't pass it. When the [report] cards came out the next week, I got home, and she said, "Did you get your card today?" And I remember thinking 'She's trying to be funny. She knows I got my card and she knows what's on it.' And I said, "Yes, I did," and she said, "What's your grades?" I said, "Everything was good, except one." And she said, "What happened?" I said, "I got an F in Physical Education." I guess it taught me a lesson. I'm not quite sure what the lesson was, but I learned that my mother was true to her word, and she learned that her daughter was never going to do that—those things that she wanted. But it's interesting because my granddaughter who was born in 2009, one hundred years from the year that my mother was born, does the back bend and the somersault, and all of a sudden, "Nana, look!" She is so athletic and I'm sure my mother is smiling.

JOSELYN: That's good to hear.

DOROTHY: Yes.

JOSELYN: Do you remember or have any idea of how the other students perceived your family at the school?

DOROTHY: At the time, I'm sure there were some thoughts of them being partial, but—and that's probably one reason my mother did what she did, so that they could see that she was not partial, and she wasn't. I mean I got a spanking like everybody else.

I was in my aunt Roberta's fifth-grade class, and she was very stern with everyone and especially me. It was a tradition. I understand from the Bahamas that the children in the family were to be taught by family members so my mother was taught by her brothers and it was just a part of the tradition—family tradition. I don't know that the children, well some of them, had relatives who were there too so they may have understood it.

I don't know. I see them now, though, and they say what they remember about my mother being a Physical Education teacher, having May Day Programs each year, getting costumes for the children, just being so engaged and that gives me a good feeling that she is so well remembered.

JOSELYN: That's good to know.

Did you attend the beach during your youth? The Virginia Key Beach?

DOROTHY: Very little. I'll start out by saying that my grandmother wanted to come from the Bahamas, even before she got married and had children because she had read that black children could get an education in Atlanta and Jacksonville and so she very much wanted to get them here. She wanted to have children and then wanted to get them to one of those places. She got to Key West after getting married, had two children, got to Overtown, had five children, so she didn't go anywhere. But the point is that the children—the seven children were always very studious, and it was important to them that you study all the time so going to the beach was not something that was of interest.

My uncle, the radiologist, the first child, Dr. S.H. Johnson—I think about age nine or ten—the story is that he and some friends were on Bayfront Park, what is now Bayfront Park, in that area, and the police saw him and they were going to arrest him because blacks were not allowed to go near the water—not even in the water, but near the water. That was something that always stayed with him, and as a result, none of us were interested in being near the water.

We were members then of Mount Zion Baptist Church on Ninth Street and NW Second [or] Third Avenue. Ninth Street and Third Avenue. It was known that they had Summer Vacation Bible School, not only them, but all the churches had it. At the end of the two weeks—you had to go two weeks— at the end of the two weeks, the reward was to go to Virginia Key Beach. Oh boy. (Laughter)

JOSELYN: That was quite the prize.

DOROTHY: That was quite the prize, especially for us because our Pastor was Rev. Edward T. Graham from North Carolina and he could swim. See none of us could swim. So we finished, we didn't miss Vacation Bible School—and before Rickenbacker Causeway was built the only way to get to Virginia Key Beach was by ferry. I don't remember what bus picked us up. I guess it was a school bus that picked us up and took us to the ferry near Fifth Street, and we would go on the ferry to the shore of Virginia Key.

I was always afraid because I couldn't swim and I was fearful that I would—the boat—the ferry would roll over and I would drown or something, but of course that never happened. We would get about a mile or two to the shore and Rev. Graham, by this time would put on his swimming trunks and was ready to go. He would dive into the water and—oh, we cheered to see a black man swimming! That was really a big deal!

The first time we got there, we were disappointed because there was no running water. The story of how we got the beach and everything is well known, so I won't repeat that. But after that, we started bringing jugs of water until they actually put in a water system.

My other experience with Virginia Key would be when my uncle, Benjamin and Australia Jenkins, who were really from Miami but moved to Boston, would come for their winter vacation. Oh, they loved to be able to tell their friends that they had a winter

vacation in Miami, and they did. They stayed in the cottages on Virginia Key Beach, and I got to spend the night with them, and that was always lots of fun.

I was always afraid—again—to go into the water. Very, very few times [were] that I put on a bathing suit and go in the water. There were a number of children over time who drowned, and maybe some adults too. I don't know, but the current we were told, at Virginia Key was very swift. There were buoys, and you were not supposed to go past those buoys because of the swift current, and of course, the question was always whether not that the reason that we were given Virginia Key. Because it was known that the currents were dangerous. I would hope not, but that is something we thought of.

My mother was one of those teachers who was paid by the State of Florida, as did the other sixteen southern states, paid teachers who wanted to get a Master's degree. The southern states did not allow black teachers to go to state colleges, state universities. As long as you could show that the curriculum that you wanted was not offered at a state university, the state of Florida, Tennessee and all the others paid for your tuition [and] your transportation, first of all, from Tallahassee to wherever you wanted to go, and in fact, paid your tuition and room and board. My mother decided that she was going to get out of physical education because of the sun and everything. She was getting older and decided to go to special education. She went first to Springfield College because that's where basketball started, and she would love basketball when she was at Florida A&M. But they didn't really have a program that she wanted so she went to Syracuse and was getting a Master's in special education. One of the requirements, strangely enough, was swimming. She cut class a couple of times because she could not swim, because she was supposed to swim. And finally, she was going to flunk the course if she didn't go, so she went and got in the water and couldn't do anything and they asked her, "Aren't you from Miami?" She said, "Yes." "Well you should be able to swim?" and they laughed. And that was the first time that I saw my mother cry. She was so embarrassed, and the story is—the truth is that at Florida A&M where she graduated with a degree in Physical Education, there was no pool. A Florida school without a pool at the black University. I'm sure Florida State and University of Florida had that. Those are my stories about water. (Laughter)

Except going over the Seven Mile Bridge—my cousin Jewel and I laughed about that on the phone the other night. We had relatives who lived in Key West so in the summer part of the ritual, in addition to going to Vacation Bible School, was to go and visit relatives in Key West. And because none of us could swim, before we got to the Seven Mile Bridge, we would all put on inner tubes and sit in the car with inner tubes on, just in case the car flipped over, and we were lost in the water. That's how deep our fear of water was.

And to answer the question that you are going to ask, no, I still cannot swim, but my girls as soon as they were able to walk, I got them enrolled in a program at Barry University. My former husband, who was an attorney, would take them during his lunch time during the summer for swimming. And the younger one, who is now a professor of history at Carnegie Mellon did not want any part of it. She just screamed and hollered and carried

on. I understand, [it was] for the first two or three weeks. Finally, of course, she became acclimated to it and is a great swimmer, as is her sister who is an attorney in New York. So I never learned to swim, my mother never learned to swim, but our girls swim well and my grandchildren [say], “Nana aren't you coming in the water?” “Oh no, I'll wait right here. I'll wait for you.” My apartment in Pittsburgh has a swimming pool that I enjoy looking at and watching.

JOSELYN: I've heard a lot from what you have just been talking about within the community. It seems not being able to swim, cheering when you saw a black man's swimming, wanting future generations to learn how to swim—why was there anything restricting African-Americans at the time from learning to swim or just having access to water, or even lifeguards at the beach?

DOROTHY: Custom. I don't know. I have not found, located a policy or legislation that said that blacks could not go in the water. My understanding and feeling is that it was just custom and because white people were in charge of Miami. They thought they were. They made themselves—they put themselves in charge. It was custom. And as my uncle was going to be arrested—and he wasn't arrested because someone recognized him, or recognized the name. They said “[We] know your parents' name.” [When he] gave his name, somebody said, “Oh, his father works for uh, Budge, Frank Budge, who had a hardware store downtown.” As a result of that, they let my uncle go. Frank T. Budge. But otherwise, he would have gone to jail.

JOSELYN: The few times that you went to Virginia Key Beach as a child, and possibly as an adolescent—can you describe what it looked like?

DOROTHY: It was a beautiful beach with foliage and white sand. It wasn't pink, but white sand. The carousel, the cottages that were there like duplexes, maybe six or eight of them, the corndogs (laughter), the cabanas. That was always a big deal to be sure that you registered to get a cabana, and we had a great time. We had a great time

Dan Johnson, who was the Superintendent for Virginia Key, the black Superintendent—I got to interview him before he died and it was interesting, his take on it all. He said he was—I'm not sure where he was working before. He said he was listening to the radio, car radio, going to work wherever it was, and he heard that blacks—that there was going to be a beach for blacks. This is after Haulover, the incident at Haulover with Judge L.E. Thomas, and so he said he applied for [the job]. He went down and applied and, and got it. Well, one of the reasons was that he was a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church so I'm sure that Rev. Graham, who was very active, not only as a swimmer, but he was active in civil rights must have given him a good reference.

But we really had a good time. The music we would—of course we brought our own music and it was a great time—those few times that I went. But there were a number of things at that time. I was, from birth, groomed to be a debutante. Let the truth be known. Debutantes wouldn't hang out at Virginia Key, and then after high school I didn't even think about it.

When I left Miami for college, August of 1960, of course everything was still segregated, and when we got to Atlanta on the train, it was strange seeing these Confederate flags hanging and blowing in the wind. I called my mother and I said, "I don't think I want to stay here." (Laughter). This is not going to work, but of course I did stay. And I took the freshman test and failed. I'm good at failure (laughter)—failed reading. I wasn't paying attention I guess. I was assigned, along with others who failed reading at Spelman College in 1960—I was assigned to Christine King Farris's class. First day she came in very haute, very prim and proper, and let us know right away that we would be reading before we left her class. That was one of her strong points. You may come in not reading, but you will read when you leave. And she was right.

But beyond that, about two weeks into the class, she said—she had quite a nice heavy voice like mine--she said that her brother and his wife and family would be coming to Atlanta in a week or two—this was now maybe October—and that they were going to start marches around Richard's Department Store. At the time, it was the largest department store in the southeast and there, like in the other stores, especially the Woolworths' and the Five and Dime, black people could not sit down and eat. Now, one of the graduation gifts I got was a charge card to Richard's Department Store so, I was looking forward to using it. We were told in class that, that her brother was coming and that this was an opportunity for us to earn extra credit. We would be able to get out of the front gate without our mothers' written permission, which was required at Spelman every two weeks. In order to get out of the front gate, you had to have a note, a written note from your mother. And the third thing which really, really just topped it off, we were going to be able to wear dungarees, known now as, well, just jeans. They went from dungarees to blue jeans to jeans. So with that trifecta, who cared about her brother? To get out of the gate—oh, and at Spelman at the time, you had to wear a hat anytime you got out of the gate—front gate, you had to wear a hat, gloves, high heels, stockings, and a purse. That's the way you went shopping and that's the only reason you would walk out the gate. It would be with three or four other friends shopping. To be able to walk out the gate on a Saturday, [or] anytime, with Dungarees to go to the next block to Rush Memorial Church. We didn't know who her brother was, what he was doing, but whatever it was, it helped us do what we needed—we wanted to do. And so of course, I was one of those.

The whole class signed up to begin with, and then, as time moved on, people dropped out. I never dropped out. I stayed there. And this—her brother, who was not just about my height even, and I'm 5' 4"—even with his hat on, he was a gentleman. He was always there developing strategy for the walk. Even though we didn't pass the reading test, we could read well enough to write some press releases and make the coffee and do whatever few things needed to be done. And so I did that for Martin Luther King, for I guess, about a semester until we actually got into the marches, and we actually left the campuses, once he got organized, students from Atlanta University, Spelman, Morehouse, Morris Brown, ITC, the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, and eventually students from Agnes Scott, which was a white all-girls school, Emory University, and other surrounding higher institutions of higher learning started joining us. We simply marched from the campuses downtown without speaking to Richards Department Store. [We] formed a

chain, a human chain, around that store and that store was a good city block, the entire city block. The Ku Klux Klan did a counter march in full regalia. Some of them carried bags. What do you call it? Shopping bags with bowling balls in them, and they would take this shopping bag and swing it at the girls to try to get you in the stomach and they would say when they would hit you, "I'm killing the next generation."

Rain and the few days that there was a little snow, Dr. King would say, "Keep marching." It would rain, sometimes we were drenched, and he said, "You got to keep marching." We get to a corner and the guys from Morehouse and Morris Brown would be on the other side, would run across the street to try to stop us, from—the Ku Klux Klan from pushing us into a busy street. Cars were going back and forth. It was the most frightening thing ever, and we would march for about two or three hours and then Dr. King would say, "All right, it's time to go back to campus," and we would all go follow him back to campus. Right now you're talking about two or three hundred students. [We would] get to campus and sometimes there would be a cross burning. When we had our fiftieth anniversary, my classes' fiftieth anniversary several years ago, we had to laugh about it because we remembered that our instructors expected us on Monday no matter what happened on Saturday when we had the marches, to have our homework. (Laughter) And we did. We all graduated on time. (Laughter)

I didn't know any much about civil rights here in Miami. It was a self-contained black community. You knew your place. In high school, we did have the Intergroup Youth Council sponsored by the National Council of Christians and Jews with Dr. Davis, the dentist, and Dr. Rev. Graham, and others who met with the Jewish community. Several of us from high school were selected to participate because of our family background, [based on the assumption] that we would come back to Miami to live and we would be the ones to connect with white people. So we were trained to be a part of that community, and we met at Koubek Center sometime, which the University of Miami now owns right off Flagler and Twenty-seventh Avenue because at that time, it was against the law for Blacks and whites to be in the same room. You could be arrested. The sponsors would have to call to be sure that the police knew that we would all be in the same room for a meeting, and if they forgot to call, the police came by. That could be a problem. But beyond that, I guess I didn't think very much about being separate.

My family lived quite well, in my eyes. When I was born, my mother, her two sisters, and four brothers were all college graduates. One was already a medical doctor and had started his own clinic because as a young resident from Meharry when he came home and became board certified, he took one of his patients to Jackson, then [called] City Hospital to have a fracture X-rayed, and they would not let my uncle, even though he was board-certified, X-ray the fracture. At that time blacks had to—there were shanties, little shacks for black people outside of the Alamo. You couldn't even go in the Alamo and so once the person—and my uncle sat there with the person for about twelve hours. Once they did bring the patient in, he, my uncle, couldn't go. He kept saying, "I'm board certified", they said, "You're a negro." They X-rayed the person and my uncle wanted to read the film. They said, "No, you can't come in here—we will mail it to you." They mailed it from City Hospital where Jackson is now to 171 NW Eleventh Street, behind the Lyric and he

said it took about six or seven days. And of course, you know he couldn't treat the person until that was known, and so that person was in agony all that time simply because of a custom. There was no law, simply because there was custom, even in medicine. All of that happened before I was born. My uncle started his—and so he said he decided to build a clinic. His office originally was in my grandmother's home, 159 NW Tenth Street. He saved his money because of that incident and went to Chicago and to Cook County Hospital, and became a fellow in radiology, and then he went Homer G. Phillips for a fellowship also in radiology, came back and built his own clinic, which still stands, just barely. We're trying to get it restored. It is designated, but it needs to be restored and needs to find an adaptive reuse for it. So again, he was already in practice.

One of his brothers became a family physician and finished his work in 1943, and finished his Boards. The same year, another brother became a lawyer and passed the bar in '43. Forty-three was a banner year for us. The other, the three sisters and the other brother were all teachers. So that really—we really knew a lot of people and were a part of a lot of families as a result of that.

I thought about living in Atlanta and wanted to stay there, but as I looked around after I finished, I didn't know anyone there. I didn't have any family there, and I thought about it, 'Well, my family really is in Miami,' and so I came back, and became a school librarian.

It was during the bicentennial, preparing for the bicentennial in '74, I had a two-year-old and four-year-old, and I was at—I was a librarian at an all-white school, Myrtle Grove in Opa-Locka, and because I didn't want to have to be bothered with the children, I decided to call the library downtown to see if they had any books on local black history.¹ I was going to put the book jackets up on my bulletin board, and I did it a year before the bicentennial, two years before just trying to get a head start. That's why I made the call, and the answer that I got when I asked if they had books—because I was accustomed to going to the library getting fifteen or twenty books for my teachers in whatever they were doing in science or social studies. The person who answered put me on hold and then came back. She said, "We only have a folder with obituaries about black people." I said, "Why?" The answer she gave me changed my life and the life of the entire community as it relates to black history. She said, "I guess those people haven't thought enough of themselves to write their history." I was taken back, and I tried to answer her, I said, "Well, Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*." I couldn't name five and even in '74, there were books written by blacks. There were not that many, and I didn't know of any in Miami and I thought, 'That can't be.' I continued to talk with her. In fact, I badgered her and I could hear her annoyance, and finally she said, "Why don't you call history—why don't you call the Historical Museum?" I said, "What's a Historical Museum?" So, she said, "Here's the number," and she gave it to me, and I thanked her, and I know she was glad to get rid of me.

¹ The narrator is referencing the US Bicentennial, the two-hundred year anniversary of US independence and the events preceding it

I called, and it was my good fortune that Dr. Thelma Peters answered, identified herself, and she said she had just recently retired after teaching social studies thirty years at Edison Senior High School, and then she went back to the University of Florida to earn a PhD in history so I told her about a family of seven, who had all finished college and were professionals living in in Overtown, Colored Town. And she said, “Oh, I’d love to meet them.” I don’t think she believed me. (Laughter) So I said I would make arrangements for that and she told me that she was working on a book on Lemon City, and she said, “Quite frankly, I’ve had some people, black people, I’ve talked with who’ve given me information about Lemon City,” which is now of course Little Haiti, and she said, “But beyond that, they didn’t seem interested.” She said, “My colleague Arva Moore Parks is working on a book on Coconut Grove and she has had the same experience.” She said, “Arva Moore Parks is the new president of the Historical Museum,” now History of Miami, “And she’s out of town. She’s in Tallahassee hiring the new director, but when she comes in—comes back, I will surely introduce you to her,” and of course she did. And the rest is history.

Yes. In fact, because it was the beginning of the bicentennial and after having the conversation with Dr. Peters, I went to my uncle and talked to him. I told him what the librarian had said, or [rather] what the library clerk had said. He was very philosophical. This is Dr. S.H. Johnson. He lived across the street, and he said, “Well, Mrs. Fields I guess you don’t understand our history any more than the library clerk did.” He said, “We had been too busy trying to survive. History is written by the rich, kings and queens who have histories written. Poor people don’t. But if you’re interested in doing anything about this, I will do whatever I can to help.” And I thought, ‘Well what can I do? I’m a school librarian. I have two babies. I have a husband in law school.’ He said, “Well give it some thought and anything that you need that I can provide, that money can provide, I will get it for you.” And so I thought, ‘Well that’s a generous offer,’ and I wrestled with it and then I decided to do a photographic archive. I told him about several conferences that I had heard about and he said there was one in Tallahassee, the State Department had it, and it was about a black archives, developing black archives for the bicentennial. So I told him about it and he wrote the check, and I went and got information. I came back and decided that I would establish a black photographic archive.

I was working with the American Association of University Women and through them—Edna Duvois was our family friend and she invited me to participate with the Miami branch of the American Association of University Women, and she said they were going to write a book. They were threatening to write a book about women. It was a threat because it wouldn’t—[there] had never been a book written about women. She said, “Maybe I can get you connected with them.” As it turned out, the person who was chairing the committee for AAUW was a wife of the chairman of the School Board, Holmes Braddock. Ruth Braddock was with AAUW, Holmes Braddock, her husband, then husband, was Chairman of the School Board. So, Edna Duvois mentioned it to Ruth and Ruth talked to Holmes about it.

[Then,] I had a call from the social studies department, from Paul Hansen, who asked me if I had social studies on my certificate. I told him “No.” He said, “Would you be

interested in getting social studies on your certificate, and leaving the library and coming down to being on the social studies staff and writing a book about black people? And then at the end of— they'll give you two years, and at the end of the two years, they'll put you back in the library?" So, I said, "Sure, why not?" They said, "One day a week you will do oral history on blacks, one day a week you will do oral history on women, black women in particular, two days a week you will write curriculum, and one day you will go to schools from Ojus to Homestead, any school that calls, you will go." "I'll take it." I stayed in that position for over thirty years because as I started, once I accepted it, they said, "Oh and by the way, we don't have any place for you to sit. We don't have any place for you." And the Historical Museum had been trying to get a teacher on special assignment at the Museum of Science—the Historical Museum at the time was in the same building across from Vizcaya, so they said, "We'll assign you to the history—to the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. You will be the Education Coordinator there. You will develop the tours." So I developed the tours at the History Miami. "And you will train the tour guides, who happened to be the Junior League." Yes. So that was my position as of August 1974, and—"Oh and by the way, you will write a book." (Laughter)

JOSELYN: That's a tall order.

DOROTHY: Yes. Yes. So, I said yes to all of it—I didn't know any better. And so, I did, and I was assigned there and when I got there, I was fascinated. I had never heard of a history society before, and I was just overcome, and any time they had meetings that were unrelated to what I was doing, I would ask to sit in. I had never written a grant before, so when they started writing grants, I went in. I never went out for lunch. I brought my lunch, and I sat next to the library so I could read the journals, and it was in the journals that I found out about archive administration becoming a new position, that there were—and they didn't quite say it like this—but there were white men with PhD's in history who could not find jobs, and so they helped create archives administration, and later on public history so that jobs could be available in the field of history. And so, I found out that at Emory University there was a program, Georgia State Archives. And Emory University had a joint program.

So, in 1977 I told my uncle about it. He said, "Well go." And so, I was accepted. At first, he really wanted me to go to Duke for a PhD in history, but, again, [with] two young children [and my] husband in Law School, I did not want to and would not go away even though my mother lived next door. I wouldn't leave my girls. And so, even though my uncle made arrangements for me to go to Duke—and he was very, very disappointed that I didn't because he had a friend there and made living arrangements and everything—I did not even apply. I did apply to Columbia and NYU because I was really thinking about library school as opposed to history. I was accepted at library school at the University of Illinois Urbana, and at the last minute turned it down. Again, it meant going away for two years. It's not like it is now that all of the universities have online programs and this and that so I decided instead to go to Emory.

Because I am a Spelman graduate, I wrote to Dr. Donald Stewart, who was President of Spelman at the time to let him know that I had been accepted at Emory and to see if I

could get two rooms in the dormitory. My mother said she would go with me and take the girls. Whenever she went to graduate school, she always took me with her and there's something about a child being on a college campus that seems to inspire them, just seems to give them—maybe because the buildings are tall, I don't know, but there is just something about it. I would not go without the girls and so my mother went with me. And when I got to the campus, they said, “Oh Dr. Stewart decided that because of the work that you're doing, there aren't that many black women archivists in the country.” There was one Brenda Banks, a Spelman graduate, who was working at the Georgia State Archives. I didn't know it at the time, and I'm sure that she was instrumental in getting me there, but they said, “Dr. Stewart has made the home for visiting professors available to you.” So I was in that with maid service, and so that was great. So that's how I got into archives administration.

Came back and by this time had moved from the history museum. I had a grandmother come while I was at the history museum and she had heard what I was doing. She read it in the paper, and she had a picture of her husband, who was in World War I that she wanted preserved. This is before you had Walmart, and where you could go and get, you know your picture copied on a copy machine, and all of that. We're talking about 1975 and she had this one picture of her husband, who was a doughboy in World War I, and she wanted me to have it for the archives. I have since let Arva use it for her book, *Miami The Magic City*. And so this grandmother—now I'm a grandmother so I can appreciate it—took two buses from Liberty city to get to me, to the historical museum across from the Vizcaya.

When they built the Caleb Center, I was invited by Mrs. Eunice Liberty, who was then President of the Miami Chapter of the National Council of Negro Women. She wanted to have a Bethune Archives, named for Mrs. Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune in Daytona Beach. She wanted a Bethune Archives so she thought we could work together on that, but I knew that the archives that I was developing wouldn't be for my family, wouldn't be for Mrs. Bethune. It was going to be for Miami Dade's Black Community. I was able to get the Caleb Center through Mrs. Liberty, and eventually after two years, move from the Historical Museum and start a collection there. I was still working for Dade County Public Schools so at some time that became a problem, but I wasn't going to let it be a problem. (Laughter) I stayed as, I think, the longest teacher on a special assignment, because I was there for thirty years. When I retired—I retired [after] forty years. Yes.

It's been quite a journey. I had just finished my master's in '60. In '74, when I started the archives in curriculum and instruction, I was able to develop curriculum that worked quite well. At age fifty, I decided that I always wanted to earn a PhD, and I really needed a theoretical context for the preservation, the archives, all the things that I was doing, the curriculum. [I] decided that I would earn a PhD. And again, a program through Dade County Public Schools became available at the Union Institute in Cincinnati, and they opened a branch in North Miami, but we had to go to Cincinnati at least once a year for colloquium and for our work. The other work was done right here in North Miami Beach. So that was my gift to myself, but by the time I was 50, my former husband had his law degree, my girls had both finished college, and it was my time. (Laughter) That was my

gift to myself, and paying off the student loan was not an easy task, but I finally did it. So that's my story and I'm sticking to it. (Laughter)

JOSELYN: I have a question. I want to back track a little because you mentioned earlier that at Spelman—or at least [after] what had transpired—they were preparing for you to come back and be ready for desegregation.

DOROTHY: Well no, not at Spellman. At Booker T. Washington. I was actually a student at Booker T. in tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade, and it was called the Intergroup Youth Council. It had started in the 30s to prepare students to work, black students to work with white students. We met once a month at the YWCA and it was interesting because our principal, Mr. Charles Williams, had the home economics teacher at Booker T. Washington, Mrs. Elaine Adderley, my mother's oldest sister, bake a chicken for—because at the Y, at the meeting, they always served chicken and a vegetable and salad. And the Principal at Booker T, Charles Williams told us that white people, in polite company, all cut the chicken off the bone. Don't go to that meeting at the YWCA picking up the chicken and eating it because white people don't do that. White people cut their chicken off the bone. So always once a month, on maybe a Wednesday, the day before we went to the Thursday evening meeting, he would have Mrs. Elaine Adderley bake a chicken, and he would come in and personally instruct us on cutting the chicken off the bone so that we could be like the white people at the Y, at the meeting. And they did cut it off the bone.

So fast forward to 1974, when I started at the Historical Museum and Arva Parks was now a good friend of mine, and she invited me to a banquet in Coconut Grove. Well I got lost because I didn't know white people lived in Coconut Grove. We always went to visit our cousin Maxine in the black Grove. I never saw any white people. So I learned something there. We got there. I was the only black person at the banquet and they served chicken, so I didn't—I felt comfortable. I cut the chicken off the bone and ate it, and after the banquet, Arva could hardly wait to meet me outside, and we got to the parking lot. She said, "Darling I got to ask you this question." So, I said, "What is it?" She said, "Cutting the chicken off the—I saw—everybody saw you cutting the chicken off the bone. Is that what they do in Africa?" I said, "No that's what I was taught as an accommodation to white people." (Laughter)

JOSELYN: What did desegregation look like in Miami in the 70's?

DOROTHY: It's interesting you should say desegregation, and not integration.

JOSELYN: This is true.

DOROTHY: Because it was that. It wasn't the mixing of the races as Faubus in Arkansas thought. He said many times, "As soon the races are mixed, black children and white—black girls and white boys are going to sit next to each other, and there are going to be brown babies." I mean, he just knew it was going to be an instant mix. You know. It didn't mean anything for a long time. I mean we still lived where we lived, we still did

what we did, and even now sometimes, I think it doesn't mean much. I go places and I'm the only black—not that it's not available to us, but it's not of interest to us. Even when we go to meetings and conferences, the children and the adults who know each other sit together. That's just natural. Except for meetings, and of course, the schools were integrated and so it was kind of a forced situation where you had to—it meant little or nothing to me.

JOSELYN: Have you seen Virginia Key Beach after your childhood?

DOROTHY: Oh yes, yeah. I've been. I've never been on the Virginia Key Trust. I was invited to, but my hands are full. I certainly am an advocate, and I've gone to a number of events, and in fact Mrs. Range had asked me to develop the schematic for the museum at Virginia Key, but I don't know that that has happened.

JOSELYN: Can you describe what the beach looks like today?

DOROTHY: The carousel is back. (Laughter) Except for some erosion, it seems to be pretty much the way we left it. (Laughter). The buoys are still there. Don't cross the buoys. I mean we really—really, children and adults lost their lives because of that. Has anyone else mentioned that?

JOSELYN: They have mentioned the fear of the water.

DOROTHY: Yes, yeah.

JOSELYN: Not the loss of lives.

DOROTHY: Yeah. I don't know, and now I have to back-up and say, was it the fear of the loss of lives? But I do, I think, remember several, hearing of several children who may have gotten swept up, but it's as Uncle Sammy would say, 'It's a matter of record.' We can check it. So again, I'm not a beach person (Laughter), and I try to stay out of the sun so I'm not one to ask about, but, you know, just being out in the air was great and having a picnic, and the corndogs. Don't forget corndogs. That's a good thing, sure.

JOSELYN: Since you've been in the more recent past at the beach, what kinds of people have you seen there?

DOROTHY: Oh, it is open now to everyone which is really lots of fun and Gene Tinney and his group, along with Guy, are just doing a great job of bringing life to the beach again. I applaud them for what they're doing and encourage them to continue. Hopefully it will—the city will not overtake it and put development there. It should not. We need to have that as open space, as an area for all people to be able to enjoy.

JOSELYN: Is there anything in particular that you would like others to know about Virginia Key Beach, or some sort of take away from that?

DOROTHY: That it has served us well. Lots of good memories have been made [there] and [there are] still memories to be made [there]. And it's important that it is a landmark, and it should be treated, must be treated as such. It's a part of our heritage.

JOSELYN: That's true. Do you have any final reflections on the beach, your life, segregation, desegregation, integration, post-segregation?

DOROTHY: (Laughter) It's been a wonderful—it's not been, it still is, it's a wonderful journey, and I am going to write that book. Of course, I am writing for The Herald, so I get to do that, but it's not the same as having the book that tells the story not only of the community—because my family group grew up parallel to the development of Miami. Having come here in 'nineteen-aught-three', as my uncle would say, it was fascinating to be a part of such an inspirational family. I was maybe third grade when I realized that the other children in the class didn't have a family like mine. At the time, my uncle, Dr. S.H. Johnson, the radiologist, was living in Liberty City. In fact, I have a picture of—his painting of his home that I want to show you, and he had a rooftop. Well, some of the homes you still see—you can entertain on the roof. That's the first fib that I remember telling. Once I saw that house and realized that you could have a party up on his roof, put a story together and was able to get my teacher, who was my cousin, Pauline Johnson-Higgs—I guess it wasn't too much of a story for her—and my uncle and aunt, for us to have the class have a picnic on his rooftop. Yes, and so that was exciting. It has been very interesting. I mean to grow up in a family of professionals, and not boastful people, but really quiet people who, more than anything wanted to see the community progress and did all that they could to help me with the development of the archives from a photographic archive, to going to school, to helping to write the book *Julia's Daughters*. Have you seen that book? All right, I'll show you a copy of that. It's named for Julia Tuttle. That's the book that I helped to write with Ruth Braddock.

Yes, so that fulfilled part of my obligation to the School Board, but I really want—and instead of writing a book—before writing the book, you have to get primary sources. I didn't want to just go and interview a few people and write something. I really wanted primary sources to be included, and when I was working at the Historical Museum, my uncle said to me that growing up, because he was born in 1900 in Key West, he and Elaine Adderley, my aunt—he said that he remembered, by age thirteen, he remembered the Lyric Theater being built. He saw it being built. As a boy, he said he went to talk to the men who were retired men—and now I realize that some of them may have been former slaves—old men sitting around playing checkers where the Lyric is now. My uncle said, that he knew that the person who built the Lyric, a black man, Geder Walker, had on occasion with his wife gone to Paris. Mrs. Walker, I understand was a very fashionable woman, wore wigs before they were fashionable. She was paying \$1,000 for a wig, one wig and hats, and long dresses, and oh, she was fashionable. So, she wanted to go to Paris before World War I. We're talking about 1910, 1911. He took her to Paris, and it was in Paris that they saw this theater, and he was a businessman and she was a fashionable lady and liked the arts, so they came back and decided to build a theater.

So, at Emory, fast-forward to '77 at Emory, as a part of the archives administration

program curriculum, they had pre-historic preservation. I had never even heard the term and so I learned about the principles of historic preservation. And when I got back to Miami, I went on a tour and we stopped at the Lyric and there was a sign that said that it was to be demolished. It didn't have a roof. The pigeons were flying in it. And there were no homeless shelters around then. The whole notion of homelessness had not developed, so people were actually sleeping, eating, and defecating in there. We stopped and looked out, this group that I was with, stopped and looked out, looked at it and of course, the people who were with me, all local people said, "Oh, tear it down, tear it down." So, I came back, and I mentioned it to my uncle, he said, "Don't you dare," he said, "Oh no, you aren't going to tear that down." He said, "I watched Mr. Geder Walker build that, and he built it for black people, so you save it." I said, "Not me." (Laughter)

JOSELYN: Someone's got to do it.

DOROTHY: Not me. I work for the School Board. He said, "Figure it out." (Laughter) And now we own it. I was able to buy it through a state grant and get one million from the city first to restore it, and then the lobby, of course, was too small. Whenever we had—we could not have intermission because there is only one bathroom for males and one for females. People in my board would have to stand in the door, directing traffic. So we stopped having intermission. The one or two times we had intermission, we had to put card tables on Second Avenue in the street, with baked goods and everything, and on the sidewalk and the street and hope that no one would hit you, cars coming by. So clearly we had to have a lobby. I was able to go to the state and get five million for the lobby. I'm still working for the School Board [at the time] and sometimes they would say, "Where are you?" I'd say, "I'm at the archives." And finally my supervisor says a couple times, he says, "You know that doesn't have anything to do with School Board." I said, "Oh, okay." But I always developed curriculum as I was going along.

And so when, I guess it was 2008, when the county was doing a bond issue, I went to Mrs. Range, who was on my board—and in fact, she called me, and she would always say, "Darling"—she'd say, "Darling, get your pocketbook and come pick me up." (Laughter). [I would go to the funeral home and pick her up and I said, "Where we going now?" She said, "We're going," she said, "I just spoke with Dr. Barbara Gary Shula and the time is now for us to go and ask for money for Virginia Key." She got fifteen million for Virginia Key, ten million for the Black Archives, five million for the Hampton House, and five for the Dorsey Library. With that, I was able to add more dressing rooms to the Lyric Theater, improve the lighting, and add a three-story office building containing a repository for the archives collection and for an office until now the CRA rents out the third floor. Yes, I really wanted the third floor to be housing so that we would always have money coming in, but they said housing was too complicated and we would never get it done. So, I settled for an office building with offices on the top. I've done my best. (Laughter) And as my aunt would say, sometimes it was a good best and sometimes it was a not-so good, but always a good best, always my best. And the purpose was to, and still is, to document the black experience in Miami-Dade County from 1896 to the present.

JOSELYN: Thank you so much Dr. Jenkins Fields. This has been a pleasure.

DOROTHY: It's more than you bargained for. I applaud you for your work. And I say, if not now, when? And if not us, who?