

Trevor Chavis, Interview 3/25/08  
Pack Library

Karen VanEman: Do you mind answering some basic questions about your life history, like your birth date?

Trevor Chavis: I don't mind it a bit. My birthday is August 5, and I was born in 1936. I am 71 years old. And I thank God for every year.

KV: You're in great shape! You're beautiful! But I say that about every African American woman that I see who's ten years older than me and looks ten years younger.

TC: [laughs] Well, African Americans we have something something in their skin called melanin -- you know about that keeps our skin [moisturized]. I don't know if it's a type of oil or what. I've never studied it. And then I take care of my skin. I oil my skin when I wash my body. Things like that. I think it's the melanin. I'm going to research that someday. I've heard it all of my life, but I don't know.

KV: Birthplace?

TC: I was born in Hendersonville, NC, and my parents brought me to Asheville when I was two years old. And I've been here ever since, except for the times when I was away at school or away or working in other places, but this is really my home.

KV: Were you born in a hospital or at home?

TC: I was born at home. I was born on Oak St. in Hendersonville. And at that time, I don't know if they were admitting Blacks to the hospital in Hendersonville, but I know I was born at home. My mother says that my doctor was Dr. Staten (?) on Oak St. She even told me all of that. And one of my mother's friends, Mrs. Alberta Mooney, was a registered nurse at that time, and she assisted him w/ my birth.

KV: Do you know if the doctor was African American or white?

TC: He was white. And Mrs. Mooney was African American. When I got to be a bigger girl, my mother would take me over there and say, "This is my baby." I understand, my mother told me that when I was coming, there was a little problem; it seems that I was coming breach and they had to turn me, and they did that. But I got here. I don't know how difficult it was, because she said she had a little difficulty. Even at home at that time so . . . .

KV: Whoa! It would have been a little rough on your mom.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

KV: Did you have any other siblings?

T.C. I have one brother, and I was eleven when he was born. He lives in Columbia, SC. His name is Kenzill Summey. And I was eleven when he was born. It's almost like he was my child because I was so much older than he. And even now I still refer to him as my little brother. And he's sixty, and I'm seventy-one.

KV: I've got a little sister like that.

TC: My mother just had two kids; she just had two kids. That's it.

KV: And then moved to Asheville when you were two?

TC: Yeah, yes. She moved to Asheville--my mother and father moved to Asheville.

KV: Do you know why?

TC: Because my father got transferred; my father was a porter at the bus station. He always worked at the bus station, even the little bus station in Hendersonville, and they transferred him over to Asheville. And when he got transferred to Asheville, my mother moved w/ him to Asheville. That's how we got to Asheville. Because he was transferred from that little bus station--tiny little bus station Hendersonville at that time. In fact it looked like the bus station here in Asheville. I remember the time when I was growing up and my daddy was the porter, we had a nice [w/ emphasis] station at the time.

KV: We did?

TC: Yes, it was on Cox Ave. Very nice bus station. And when I came back [from working/living in New York] and saw what we have now, it really disappointed me. And he worked for the Trailway Bus Co. That's how we got to Asheville from Hendersonville.

KV: So the old bus station was on Cox. Do you remember . . . .

TC: I remember the first one on Wall St. When I was a little girl, about 4-5, before they built that one on Coxe, it was on Wall St. And the buses would come above up on Wall St., and the station was on Patton Ave. You'd have to go down stairs, then you'd take stairs to get up to where the buses would run. Now at that time my parents didn't have a car, so we'd get on the bus to go to Hendersonville. That's where we went most of the time. We would catch the bus, we would just walk . . . . I really don't remember where my mother would get the ticket from; I just remember getting on the bus on Wall St. It reminds you of the stations in New York and New Jersey where there was big stations and you would see buses coming in on tracks--that's the way it was but it was indoors, like because it was upstairs, enclosed. And I remember when they built the one on Coxe Ave. And my daddy went from Wall St. to Coxe Ave. bus station.

KV: Did he retire before they built the current one [now Greyhound, on Tunnel Rd.]?

TC: Oh, yes. He retired from Coxe Ave. and at the time that he retired, integration had come to Asheville, and they wanted him--well, while he was there, sometimes my daddy would be in charge of baggage. He did a lot of work that white employees would ordinarily do, b/c he knew the system just from A to Z. He was excellent b/c he had done it all of his life. He would know things--he didn't even need a map. He would know, when I got my first teaching job, they called me and said it was going to be in Eddington. I didn't know where Eddington, NC, was; I thought it was in Maryland. He [her daddy] said, "You wait; you're going to be way across NC. You're way across NC!" Sure enough, that's where I was. From Asheville, Eddington is near Elizabeth City. In fact, I was closer to Norfolk than I was to some parts of NC. And to me, at that time, I didn't drive and had to go on the bus--Trailways Bus. I said, "I'm getting me a car." So I learned how to drive. But the thing with that, he knew about baggage, how to ship, he

just knew everything about the bus [system]. And when he got ready, when he was almost to retiring age, they offered him one of the jobs that had been held by whites. And he said, "No; I don't need it now. When I needed it I couldn't get it." He said, "My daughter's getting ready to finish school now, and I don't need it." So he retired as a bus porter; but he was a dispatcher, too. He would call the buses. So when he retired he was a dispatcher; he had worked up from being a porter. That was how he started off. And the people at the bus station were always very nice to our family. One of his managers was Mr. Livingston. I'll never forget that name as long as I live. Now that's when I was a little girl. The name I can't remember--I was grown about 20 years old when this other manager came, but I can't remember his name. But I do remember Mr. Livingston who was my father's manager--he was manager of the bus station at that time. And it was just an experience. Everyone in Asheville knew my father because at that time everyone and in surrounding areas, like Marshall, Barnardsville--they rode the bus. Canton, they would come in--they knew him; some people from TN would come--they knew him b/c he would check their baggage and take care of that.

At that time, my mother, she didn't work at that time. When she decided to go to work, she wouldn't work before my brother was born. She had just stayed at home for years with me; she just wanted to be with me. We didn't have anything, but baggage handlers made a lot in tips at that time at the bus station. That's why when I go places now, I don't mind tipping, because I say that what my father made his living from--tips, really.

KV: And that's what I've heard from folks whose dads were Pullman Porters.

TC: Yes, yes. I never did like the bus, though. I always wanted to go on the train when I went away to school (in Maryland). But Mama said, "Your daddy can get you a bus pass. And I said, "I don't want a bus pass (laughs). I want to go on the train w/ the other kids." Because they were going on the train [children of the Pullman Porters who lived in Asheville]. I could've ridden the bus free, but I didn't want to go on the bus. At that time, the bus--the train had more status to it. You know how it was at that time in the 50's.

KV: Yes, indeed.

TC: My other friends from here would go on the train, so I wanted to be w/ them.

KV: And this was when you went to college?

TC: Yes. I went to Morgan State in Baltimore. And we were far away. I had been accepted by one of the schools in NC but I changed my mind. So I applied to Morgan State and I was accepted to Morgan, so I went to Morgan. And in a way I'm glad that I did b/c I was exposed to--I would have been exposed to these things going to any college, but going to Morgan, it exposed me to going to NYC, Philadelphia, and places like that. I was a music major, and the choir would go places to sing, so I was exposed to the North, so to speak. In Baltimore, we thought we were in the North, but we weren't b/c we had to picket and walk to get into some of the movies, too.

KV: Oh, did you?

TC: Oh yeah. Baltimore was just a kind of a big country town.

KV: Tell me about that, if you don't mind.

TC: Well, during my era in Morgan, the school was out in the Northwards section and one of the movies we couldn't go in. And I remember Rev. Abernathy, who was Dr. King's top man came, and he spoke to us during that time. He let us know you're in Baltimore, but you're not that cool, either, because you have problems here, and he let us know that we had to picket to get into the neighborhood movie. We sure did. And I don't remember if we broke that barrier down before I graduated or what. I wasn't as much into picketing as my brother was here in Asheville b/c he did things and broke things down [in a] more organized [way].

We would march a little while, but you know how college kids are . . . . We would march a little while and then come back to the campus and have a party, you know, at that time. And we had so much going on on campus, we didn't [deeply] care whether we got in or not. But the stores were didn't seem to be segregated; we could shop and everything. But I remember that Northwood movie theater; they didn't want us in there.

KV: Period? It wasn't just a matter of going to the balcony [as in Asheville]?

TC: No, I don't think it even had a balcony. It was in like one of these little malls, and I think it had just one floor. But I don't remember [for sure] b/c we never got in. It did look like it had a balcony.

KV: And this would have been in '55 - '56?

TC: I went to Morgan Sept. of '54 and this was about '57-'58 when we tried to integrate that movie theater. It didn't happen in '54 when I first got there.

KV: Closer to your senior year?

TC: This was when the Movement -- they had begun already by this time b/c I remember meeting Dr. King b/c I had met Dr. King. No, that was after I had left Morgan. But he [Rev. King] had started b/c Rev. Abernathy was telling me about "the Movement" and was telling all of us about that as he spoke. So that was my experience in Baltimore, but it was a beautiful one.

We had a professor there who, Dr. Benjamin Quarles--you know it's amazing how I remember all of these--even during his time, he was a professor of history. And he had courses in -- we called it "Black History" or "Negro History" at that time. We called it "Negro History" at that time. That Black name wasn't given to it until later. He (Dr. Quarles) had begun an African American Studies program way before it was popular. Dr. Benjamin Quarles--yes, he did. Because we think about this sometimes; they were not offering majors in African American studies but that was part of the History program. So he started it while we were there. He's a graduate of Morehouse College. He's written many books.

KV: That's why I've heard of him.

TC: Dr. Benjamin Quarles. It was an unusual name--Q- u -a -r- l- e- s.

KV: So you were a music major?

TC: Yes, I was a music major, music education. And after graduating from Morgan, I got my first teaching job in Eddington, NC.

KV: And you graduated in . . .

TC: in '59. I went an extra year b/c my freshman year, I was--you know how you do when you get away from home sometimes? I didn't really knuckle down. So I went and

had to go an extra year. Sometimes I think that had I studied more, you know, I was a good average student, but I'd say I could have been tops had I really applied myself. I did, but you know how we do. . . .

KV: And you had other interesting things to do.

TC: Yes, yes. So I graduated in 1959, and I started my teaching job in Edenton, NC, on the east coast. And I did not know that was a little historical town, but now I'm learning about it, b/c every time I pick up a NC magazine--Our State--Edenton is in there.

KV: Oh, really.

TC: That's where I'm supposed to be this week--in Edenton, but I said I better not take a chance on Asheville weather when I realized Easter is coming in March. I usually go away every Easter, because Easter usually comes in April. But I'm glad that I didn't b/c of the weather. You can't predict the weather here in Asheville. I found out on Easter Monday, and I'm glad that I didn't go there, although the weather there is balmy and warmer than here. A beautiful little town. And I found out that they had a tea party in Edenton just like they did in Boston. I didn't know that until I was teaching there. Surrounded by water, you the Schwann (?) River on this side, you have Abermarle Sound here, you have the Quinlins (?) River going to Elizabeth City. There's only one way out of Edenton that you do not have to go over water, and that's a route that we would have to go to Norfolk to shop. But it's surrounded by water. But even after we would leave the city of Edenton--the little town--we wouldn't have to go over any bridges or touch water right then, but going towards Suffolk, Norfolk, that's when we would see the other bodies of water, including part of the Chesapeake Bay and the James River and all of that. It's like sitting here. Edenton's right in here (gestures on table w/ hands) on the Abermarle Sound.

It was very interesting. I worked there four years, and then after. . .

KV: Would you mind describing the job a little bit?

TC: Well at that time it was an all-Black high school. The high school, primary dept., elementary dept., all were on that one little campus at that time in that little town. So I would go from building to building to teach. It was very rewarding. At that time, the

principal--I worked for an African American principal. He was very strict. He did not play at all. I said, if I can work for him, I can work for anybody!

KV: No kidding.

TC: Oh, he was something! But he was a good principal, but you know, at that time, things were different than they are now. He just--that was his school, and whatever he said, that was it! They had a superintendent; they had a white school over on that street--Oak Street or whatever it was, and we were over here. The superintendent, Mr. Holmes, sweet little man, but he did tell Mr. Walker what to do; it was like Mr. Walker would tell him what to do.

KV: No kidding?

TC: I don't know if that was just small town stuff or not, but I tell you, he did just what he wanted to do. It was a good school, and the students were very polite--no discipline problems. I tell you he walked around like he was a king! Teachers were well-dressed; you know there was no such thing as coming to school in dungarees. At that time, I don't think we even wore [dress] pants. We did not.

KV: I bet not (remembering the 50's and 50's in OH).

TC: We had to have on dresses , skirts, and I really don't think that he liked women coming w/out stockings or pantyhose on. He did not like bare legs. At the time things were very strict. But the more I think about it, I think that if teachers dressed better now, it would be a better image w/ the students now. When I did teach in New York [City], things were very relaxed. But I still had that need where I'd always come dressed and I required that of my students. That time, when they [students] first started wearing pants you know, falling down--that style--when it first started, none of my students--they would not come into my class w/ their pants falling down. I guess that's from I had learned when I was teaching in Edenton under Mr. Walton.

So I taught there [at Edenton] for four years. As I said I taught public school music b/c I had all the grades. And after i got married, I came to Asheville,

KV: You got married over in Edenton?

TC: No, got married here. The guy that I married, he lived here in Asheville. Some of my friends were teaching here, so we would get together, have parties and things. That's how I met him.

KV: What's his name?

TC: His name is Samuel Chavis. Samuel A. Chavis.

KV: Was he originally from Asheville?

TC: He was born in W. Asheville.

KV: Did you know him at Stephens-Lee?



TC: I didn't know him; I knew his sister. I knew the family. He was older than I; he was eight years older than I.

KV: He definitely was older than you.

TC: Yes, he was older than I (laughs). You do things when you're young, so that was that.

KV: So you went to Stephens-Lee H.S.?

TC: Oh yes, I haven't gotten to that yet; I've skipped things. We'll go back to the Stephens-Lee part. I go to the Morgan State stuff and I started thinking about . . . .

KV: Yes, b/c we were talking about your education and your wanting to ride the train instead of the bus, and that led to your job. So when you were a music education major, were you a vocal major or instrumental or did you have to do everything?

TC: We did what we had a concentration in, either voice or piano. Mine was education, so I sang and what-have you. But I would have the chorus; And this was even in Edenton. I would have the chorus; then I would teach music appreciation; little children would play little instruments--toneettes, song song flutes, even in kindergarten, first grade. I had to teach them in Edenton. Music history-- I had to do everything.

Now in New York, that was another story. In New York, when I went to the school I retired from, I was what we called--it was like public school, I was in one school, but I would go around to different classes, teach songs, music appreciation, little instruments, music history. Something like in Edenton. But New York is more vast, so I would get most of the materials that I needed where I didn't have the materials in Edenton; in New York, I would get the materials that I needed.

KV: And were you in Queens the whole time?

TC: Yes, I was lucky enough to be in Queens.

KV: How did you end up in Queens?

TC: That's where my husband's family was staying, and we stayed w/ them a while until we got our [own] home. Then I went to Brooklyn to get my teacher's license, and that's how I started teaching there b/c I knew I had to work. You know at that time, you had to work, and that's how I ended up in Queens b/c my husband's family lived in Queens.

KV: Did you go to Queens soon after getting married?

TC: We got married in --I've forgotten what year it was now--we got married in June, and I think the next June, I went to NY 'cause we had been married only two months and I got pregnant w/ my son--two months. And I stayed here, had my child here; my

husband had gone on b/c his brother wanted him to do some kind of work up there in a service station--operate a service station for him. So he had gone because/c he had to take courses. So he had gone; I stayed w/ my mother and father until my baby came, and then I went up there that following June. The year after our wedding. That's how I got to NY. I didn't want to leave here, but I'm glad that I did b/c New York has so many opportunities, like graduate school.

KV: Oh, really.

TC: Queens College. Got my master's in Music Education from Queens College, branch of the City University of NY. It was an experience.

I always knew I wanted to be a teacher b/c -- I'll hit on that when we get to Stephens-Lee. I'll tell you about that.

KV: Then tell me about Stephens-Lee.

TC: O.K. I've about covered everything in my life. Not everything, but I guess enough.

KV: We haven't begun to cover everything--I'm sure.

TC: I attended Stephens-Lee: Our class had to go to Stephens Lee in the 8th grade, b/c the jr. high school [for African Americans] was torn down--it was the Asheland Ave. School.

I suppose others have told you about that. My cousin was the principal of that school. Rita Lee. Have you ever heard of her?

KV: No, not that I can remember.

TC: Rita Lee, she was the principal. And then when she died, she was the principal of Hill St. School [elementary school for African Americans]. That was before--that was like in the 60's, late '60's. But anyway, she was the principal of Asheland Ave. Jr. High. And we would go there in the 7th and 8th grades, from elementary. school. The year that we were supposed to have gone to the 8th grade, the school was condemned, so they shuffled us on to Stephens-Lee. Some of my friends that were one year ahead of me said that they resented that wholeheartedly b/c it took attention away from the real freshmen, b/c we weren't supposed to be there. So that year we were up on the third floor, and the rest of the school were ---you know. Now we were little fish in big pond, so we grew up very quickly.

And I knew then that I wanted to be something in music, b/c I was impressed by the band which I'd been before I'd gone to Stephens-Lee b/c could see them march and I would hear the choir before going to Stephens-Lee. So I knew I wanted to be a part of that. Mr. Leonard was the band director and Mrs. Alimore Cool Reynolds was the choir director, vocal music teacher. And she's the one that influenced me; she's the one that composed our Alma Mater--for Stephens-Lee.

KV: Oh, that's why I've seen her name.

TC: When I was in elementary. school, teachers that could play the piano and knew music, I just gravitated to them; I just loved it. Anybody can play the piano. When we'd play school, I wanted to be the teacher that could play the piano.

Before going to Stephens-Lee, I'd like to say--we didn't bring this out: Our elementary. teachers were very strong, so we had a good background in elementary. schools here in Asheville

KV: You must have had, in order to deal w/ the demands of Stephens-Lee.

TC: We always give Stephens-Lee the credit b/c it's our high school and we love it. But the more I thought about it after I got home [from the afternoon program at Pack Library--"Twilight of a Neighborhood"], I thought, "You know, we should have mentioned some of our elementary. school teachers, b/c they're the ones that started us w/ our music, our speaking and I could call many of their names.

KV: Go ahead, call them.

TC: Cassie Evans--excellent in speech, choirs and speech. Lucy Herring, our principal. Mr. Reynolds was also one of our principals.

KV: Was he related to the Mrs. Reynolds?

TC: Then we had one teacher--her name is Gladys Cowan Kennedy. I think she's about the only one still living (deceased, 2009). She started us singing and dancing over at Livingston St. Ele. And at Mountain St. [School], you had teachers like Ethel Bailey, Mary Hall, Miss Glover-- Desiree Glover--these were teachers that knew dance, knew music--they just knew everything. Jonnie White--beautiful in art: she could take crepe paper to make little dolls. She made a whole Mexican village once. People would come to see it from all over Asheville. Very talented, b/c most of the time when they were working on advanced degrees at NYU, Columbia, Ohio State, they would bring what they had learned back to school, dancing and art and everything. So that's why we had such a good foundation for Stevens-Lee b/c our elementary teachers were very strong. And our jr high teachers just as well. So we got to Stevens-Lee just carrying over what we had learned, and I always wanted to be Mrs. Reynolds.

Everything she did, I wanted to do.

KV: Were you at Mountain St. for your elementary. school?

TC: I was at Livingston St., the first two years; when I spoke to the group privately-- before we did it for everyone, I was telling them the reason I moved to East End was b/c our bridge was washed away during a flood on South Side. And my mother said I had to go for this (chuckles)"higher ground"; she had to get where that flat land where that Branch overflowed--the Branch I was talking about. . .

KV: Nasty Creek?

TC: I found it's real name was Cripple Creek. That day [the day of the Library's "Twilight of a Neighborhood"] Mr. Harrison came up to me and said the real name is Cripple Creek. But anyway, our bridge washed away and the Depot (train depot on Depot St.) was flooded--whole South Side was flooded. Water just went everywhere. Scared my mother to death. So we moved to the hilly section of town, which was East End. That's how I got to Mountain St. School. And one day two of the teachers who were sisters were arguing, and one said, "Trevor went to Livingston" and the other said, "No, she didn't; she went to Mountain." They were bickering, and I said, "Both of you are right--I went to both." [laughs] These were two sisters, Ms. Reynolds and her sister. Both of them were teachers, one a music teacher and the other an elementary teacher. She knew that I had gone on to Mountain St. But Ms. Reynolds had seen me at her husband's school so she knew that I had gone to Livingston, you see? So that's how I got to Mountain St. That's how I know about the teachers on both sides of town. There's another elementary school, Hill St., but I don't know too much about that. And after going to Stevens-Lee, I gravitated towards music. And that's where I had to get all my work in speech, drama. But I didn't like math too much, but we had some terrific math teachers. One of the best math teachers was my homeroom teacher. And we were just exposed to many things that were so educational and cultural for us--even at that time. We knew that we were in a segregated society, but we didn't--I'm not saying that we didn't care but it didn't bother us b/c we were having, we were doing and we were having what we wanted and as other children growing up then, So it didn't upset us.

KV: And you had instructors who were really able to pull it out of you.

TC: We knew that we were important. And as I said, when we would march down the street, we knew that we HAD it; we knew that we were just the best! And we looked good, you know, and we just had that self-esteem that I tried to pass on to my children [students] when I taught. Let them know, you don't let anybody--you carry yourself a certain way . . . . And most of them--not all, but most--have done very well. I get letters, now some haven't, naturally. And they write me letters; in fact one of my students has her doctorate--well more of them have it--but she writes me and lets me know everything that she's doing. She says, "Mrs. Chavis, you influenced me; that's why I'm a good teacher--because of you." And it makes you feel so . . . . So I said, "Well thank you, my dear; I guess I did something right." And another of my students, she's going to be--well, she's in, well, she's doing her residency now. Oh, where is she now? Some place up in New York City--I just got a letter from her the other day. And

uh, she is going to be eye-ear-nose and throat; she told me the big name for that, but that's what she's specializing in. So I feel good that some are doing so well. Now there are some that didn't do well.

KV: Well, odds are that some won't.

TC: I'll just tell you the truth. My nephew that's a big administrator in a prison in Hopewell, VA, and he said, "Aunt Trevor, (chuckles) I have one of your students." (we both laugh)

I know what I'm gonna hear about. But you know you just can't win 'em all, but just do the best that you can. So that's one of my strengths.

And at Stevens-Lee, I'm trying to think of some of the other things that we were exposed to. We had a Crown and Scepter Club which was the Honor Society; we had one of our instructors, she got her Masters at Columbia and she was our physical education teacher and she had danced w/ Catherine Dunn.

KV: No kidding! Wow.

TC: And her name was Catherine Chappell. She would choreograph dances--the most beautiful productions I've ever seen. She would learn all of that up in New York and she would bring it back to us, which most of the teachers, as I'd said, did. Our band director, he would go away working on his doctorate at Ohio State or one of those marching schools, he would come back and do formations that he learned. That's one of the reasons that we were exposed to so much in school. And most of the teachers here did that. The elementary teachers did, too. They studied away, out of town and they would come back and give us lessons and experiences that they had learned; they'd pass it on to us. That's what teachers are supposed to do.

KV: Yes.

TC: I think I've told you about Stephens-Lee; I think I've told you.

KV: So you must have been active in the band and the choir?

TC: Band, choir, Crown and Scepter Club, I didn't dance, b/c I didn't take physical education until my sr year; I didn't want to put that old gym suit on.

KV: (laughing) Yes, I remember those things.

TC: French Club, Glee Club, Band. . . . These were my main clubs. Should have brought my year book with me. I remember Willie Mae Brown--she was in the French Club w/ me. She was in my class; we graduated together. And we were just active, but we had to get all our work -- homework-- done. And I think that's about it.

KV: What did you play in the band?

TC: The Glockenspiel. We called it the bell lyre. That's what I played. Had a harness that you slipped it down into; you'd hear me coming before they were sitting (?). I marched right behind the majorettes.

KV: No kidding?

TC: Right behind them. That's where he placed me. Right in the front behind the majorettes; that's where I would be. I would be here, the ones that played the flutes would be across here. As they went back, the heavier, the louder instruments would be further back w/ the percussion in the back. But that's what I played.

KV: So had formations to learn, too.

TC: Oh, yes. See at that time, you just didn't---they don't have marching bands much now; they just sit and play. Concert-style.

KV: What a shame.

TC: Because they don't have - - - the Black colleges do; when you watch a Black college game, they used to show them perform, like Grambling and A and T and Florida A and M. Now, the white colleges do the formations, but we made formations, too, but we had a little bit more w/ ours, dancing and stuff to go w/ it. And we practiced every day, after we would eat our lunch. They let the band eat first and then we'd go-- 'cause we'd have to march from Stephens-Lee down to McCormick Field. Not McCormick Field--that's the baseball stadium, the one behind. Memorial Stadium--that's the football stadium. That's where we would march--there, practice, esp. for Homecoming and for every game, we'd have to do this. And we would do some formations that --I'll never forget this as long as I live, it was so beautiful. We had flashlights on our hats and we would make a formation of different things. We made the moon one time, and we played "Moon Over Miami" I think that's what he'd have us play. We made a star, too, and we played "Stardust" and all the lights would be turned out, just us. And you couldn't see anything but our lights on the field. It was the most beautiful thing that you'd ever seen. And the majorettes, they would put their flashlights on their hats; but they would also put flashlights on their batons and they'd be twirling them. The most beautiful thing ever. They just don't do things like that now.

KV: Wow! Did whites come to watch?

TC: Oh yes, if they wanted to. Oh yes, they wanted to. Sometimes people from Lee-Edwards [H.S. for whites] would come over.

KV: Yes, I bet so.

TC: Sometimes the friends of the teachers would come over sometimes; I didn't know them personally. Sometimes we'd have city officials come to our games and when we'd

have our graduations, that's when we'd have a lot of white city officials there. In fact, the first rabbi that I ever knew . . . (tape side A ends)

Side 2

TC: . . . on Charlotte St. And when we had our senior vespers, he was always there to give a prayer or do something for us. That's right--that was his name--Rabbi Unger. U - N - G - E - R . And our superintendent would come to give us our diplomas-- J.W.Byers. I'll never forget him--he was a little short, stocky little man. He was our superintendent. Something to remember. And our mayor. He would come at different times. And we would go to get ads for different activities [programs], like for a play or whatever we were having. We would get ads from a lot of the white businesses; they gave us a lot of ads--white businesses did. Bon Marche, Ivie, see this whole strip [ Haywood Ave.] down this whole street. Woolworth's on the corner. Those were our major stores. And we would get a lot of our ads from the white businesses. Man's store was on Patton Ave. where a lot of men got their clothes.

KV: I noticed that in a yearbook that I got to see.

TC: And Mr. Perry Sims was the tailor there. He was an African-American guy, but he had taken tailoring at Hampton Institute. I will never forget this: his wife was my second mother. And he was a tailor at the Mann store. And he was an ordinary--at that time we didn't have clerks at the stores. So when men needed to get something tailored to fit them, Mr. Perry was the one who would do that. That was a long time ago.

KV: So when you were living on the South Side, what street were you living on?

TC: South Side Ave., 248 South Side Ave. You had to take the little bridge to get to our house because we had to cross that Branch.

KV: And then you moved over to the East End?

TC: To East End; we moved to 138, no, 136 Pine St. And then a lady bought our little home, so then I had to move onto Huntington St. And my mother and father's home was built the year that I graduated from high school. My uncles came from Spindale; my uncles were bricklayers, and they built my mother's and father's home, on Mountain St.--74 Mountain St. If you're ever in that area, there's public housing called Mountain Springs , sits here [demonstrates w/ hands]. There's a little brick house above Mountain Springs; there was a time when there was nothing there--no Mountain Springs. My mother and father's house was the first little brick house that you would see when you would go up Mountain St. You know where the Board of Education, L.S. Herring Bd of Education Bldg is? Well, my mom and dad's first little brick house is on the left, and they built that house--my uncles from Spindale. My granddaddy laid the

flooring; one brother did the plastering; the other two brothers did the brick work, because her baby brother had told her that when he graduated from A and T (??? check) that he would build her house. And I would be very angry, I think I was angry for about an hour, because I wanted a very pretty house like my friends had. And the house we were living in on Huntington was not a cute house like the one on Pine, which that lady had bought. And I was ashamed because that house was not pretty and I did not want to bring my friends there. It was a shack to me.

KV: Oh, really.

TC: But it was clean. And my mother, I said, "Mama, why don't we move?" And my mother would say "I'm not moving any place until Silas gets out of college, to build our house." His name Mark, but they called him Silas because he had a brother named Paul, and Paul and Silas--you know how they do in the Bible. They would play together, little brothers; they nicknamed him Silas. So that what we called him--Silas. She didn't budge until my uncle graduated from college. They started in on our house that Feb., because my other uncle had been working in Washington. He said, "I'll help because work is slow in the wintertime--" Washington, D.C. And he came to Spindale to help my other uncle build that house. They laid it brick by brick. And that time we had our trade teacher--we called it Trade at that time--at Stephens-Lee was Mr. Lacey Haith. He was dynamite when it came to making things. They built houses and everything with his guys from Stephens-Lee. He brought a class over there to see my uncles. And when I came home that day my uncles said, "Trevor, one of your instructors came and brought his whole class over to see the house being built." I said, "That was Mr. Haith." (chuckles)

My father passed first, and my mother lived until 96, and after she passed, my brother and I sold it because he's in Columbia, and I didn't want to be responsible for collecting rent. I just couldn't do that.

KV: You were still in Queen's at the time?

TC: No, I had moved back here. I moved back in '93. I retired in '91. I stayed in New York for 3 years after I retired.

KV: Oh, really. And when did you say your husband passed?

TC: He passed a year before my mother. He passed 2003; my mother passed 2004. She passed the year we had our 50th class reunion. It was our 50th anniversary. She passed that year. And my husband had died a year before that. So that's, that's something. But when you do the best that you can, you know, . . . (indiscernible). But I had it for a while--just one after the other.

KV: Oh yeah, yeah, it seems to go like that, doesn't it?



When you were living in Asheville, did you more or less keep your circulation in the East End community?

TC: When I moved to East End, I did not get back with my friends from the Southside community until I went to Asheland. I went to Asheland that one year, so I got to see some of my friends that I had not seen or been with for a long time from the Southside because we all had to come together in jr. high. For that one year. And then we went to Stephens-Lee, that 's when we were altogether. But I was telling someone, my friends on Southside seemed to be more cordial than the ones in East End.

KV: Oh, really?

TC: Maybe--I don't know if it's because I had come from Southside; I don't know--I had friends, but sometimes, I don't know, how can I say this? They'd be your friends for one minute and the next minute they wouldn't be your friends. You know, childish things; I guess children do things like that. But being an only child at that time, it would hurt me because I didn't have any sisters or brothers to cling to. But everything worked out well; after I got old I realized. So, it's just one of those things.

KV: Once you got into high school, did it even out?

TC: Then I had so many friends that it didn't matter. Some of the ones that hadn't been so nice, they were on the back burner (chuckles). See, once you get to a certain age, things like that don't worry you as much. When you're little, things illike that hurt you. Once you get like 15 or 16, you get with your other friends, that's over. All this happened when I was like little. And I was telling someone the other day when they came to my house, it might have been because we were all taking piano lessons and my aunt would sit at the table and would play and sing, and I would put my little music up there and I would pretend. She said, "If you don't get this child a piano, I don't know what I'll do." And my mother went down to the old Tomlinson (???) music store and bought me a piano. I don't think that piano cost \$50. It was an old piano, but it had a good keyboard. She said she didn't want to pay a lot for it b/c she didn't know if I would want to stick to it or not.

KV: Right.

TC: You know how parents are. And my mother was very frugal. And she'd pinch a penny 'til it'd holler. My mother was so frugal! But I'm glad she was like that: she knew what she was doing. I think my mother was saving for our education. 'Cause my daddy wasn't as stable as she was at that time.

But anyway we were taking piano lessons; a group of us from our neighborhood in East End on the Hill--we called Baptist Hill East End--and I could just play . . . it just came to me. Now that I think about it, I think there was a little jealousy there. I didn't realize it

then, 'cause I was young. But as I got older I said, "That's what sometimes is behind their treatment of me." Because I could play that piano, and they couldn't play as well as I. Even one of my friends that had taken piano way before I could, not many years, but a few years, she didn't have the touch that I had. Because we could be coming from piano lessons and I had a little book bag. I'll never forget this as long as I live. And they would put their music in my book bag--book satchel was what we called it. And we took turns carrying it. And we'd pass the drug store on Charlotte St.--it's where she has a baby store now [where Just Ducky was until summer, 2009] right on the corner [of Charlotte and Chestnut]. Yes, it used to be a drug store. Our music teacher, she was, they were African American but all of them looked white except her husband, and he was the black barber but he cut white people's hair right downtown on Lexington Ave. Mr. Bowman. [His shop would have been at the corner of Lexington College, where there is currently a parking lot. ] And he only cut white people's hair. And his wife taught us piano, she was about, oh my gawd, Ms. Bowman had to be about ninety. She had to be with an aide. She always had to wear long dresses; she'd remind you of someone in a book. But she was brilliant. At that time she had home-schooled all of her children and they were the only black people living on Albemarle Rd out Charlotte St. And we were going there to take music lessons. And her whole family was musical: they played violins; her daughter even played a saw. Have you ever heard anybody play a musical saw?

KV: Yes, I have. But not for years.

TC: And I regret that I did not have her daughter to teach me that; she was a teacher here--one of the best teachers here, but she taught out in the county. She would take that saw crooked in her leg and play it with a violin bow. I regret that I did not have her teach me how to play that saw at that time. We laughed at her playing the saw. We said, "If we're going to program . . . (indiscernible) , is Ms. Bowman going to play the saw?" Now I say that I hate that I did not have the nerve to ask her to teach me how to play that saw.

But anyway, she taught us piano lessons.

We would go out there every Monday. Sometimes we'd catch the bus, but most of the time we'd walk from East End out Charlotte St. We'd take a little shortcut, go up the steps and that's where her house -- her house was not far from The Manor grounds--an apartment complex; there was the old Manor Hotel out there.

KV: That would have been a pretty good hike.

TC: See, we didn't mind walking in those days. Maybe that's why we're so healthy. We didn't mind walking. We didn't have cars, and we saved our bus fare to buy a

sandwich or something, and we'd walk--sure. So we always walked to piano lessons. And we were coming back that afternoon, kind of late afternoon, and it was one of my friend's turn to carry the book bag. And we were passing that drug store, there was a sign there for it, and one of my friends--she just threw that bag up on the sign and it hung up there. So we went in and I said, "Sir, could you get my book bag down from your sign?" And he said, "How did it get up there?" I said, "I didn't do it." And one of my friends was standing there and he said [to another girl] "You did it 'cause it's written all over your face!" She says, "Please erase it off." But she wasn't the one who did it; it was the other girl who'd done it. Yes, she did. Just little mean things like that; I couldn't understand why they'd do they did it. It would hurt me, but I would still be their friend. But then as I got grown and a little older, I realized, "Oh, that's why." I think it was a little jealousy because of my playing the piano so well.

But life is what you make it. I've enjoyed it. Nothing is smooth. Right?

KV: That's the truth! But you're saying the Bowmans were living up on Abermarle Rd?

TC: Now this is not the Bowmans that you may know; Jan Bowman and Richard Bowman. Noooo. This was another set of Bowmans.

KV: But you're talking about an African American family.

TC: But most of them looked white. But her husband was more brown, but he wasn't dark. And he had that shop down on Lexington Ave.--most of the buildings are gone now--. I'm going to give you the location: you know that little coffee shop used to be called Bean Streets? You know where that parking lot is right behind Bean Streets?

KV: Yes.

TC: On the side, not behind. There were some old buildings there, and his barber shop was right in there. They tore some of those businesses out to make that parking lot. Mr. Bowman's Barber Shop was right there, cutting only white men's hair. And her granddaughters went to Allen High. They didn't go to Stephens-Lee. No, she didn't want them to. A lot of parents who did not like Stephens-Lee, they send their children to Allen.

KV: Do you mind talking about the difference between Stephens-Lee and Allen? I know Allen was a private school.

TC: For girls. Now I understand that at one time young men went there, but I don't know anything about that. No, they [young men] went there way back. But it was an all girls school [in my era]. I think that Dr. Holt had gone to Allen, but that was way [drawn out] before my time. The time that I remember it was an all-girls private school run by the A.M.E. Church, the Methodist church. It was all right, we just didn't like it because it was all girls. We just had a little personal bias, going to Stephens-Lee. You know.

One famous graduate [ of Allen] is -- oh my goodness I can't think of her name--her name was Eunice Waymon, she was from Tryon--Nina Simone. She graduated from Allen.

KV: Did she really?

TC: Yes, she did. Did you ever read her life? There's a thing about Allen in there--in any thing written about her, there's a reference to Allen. I remember we would be at programs sometimes in different churches than Stephens-Lee participated in, and if we didn't [participate] I would go because I wanted to hear some singing and stuff. She accompanied their choir. Yes she was excellent. She was excellent [even] then. Her name was Eunice Waymon from Tryon, NC. She got famous and changed her name to Nina Simone.

KV: Was Allen H.S. probably more attractive to people who lived outside the Asheville Public Schools' system?

TC: Well, we had a lot of people from out of town there and people in town went to Allen.

KV: If they wanted their daughters to be enrolled in an all-girls' school?

TC: Yes, that's what they did. And a lot of people thought the students at Stephens-Lee--I guess they didn't trust their children going to school with young men; you know how mothers can be sometimes. And years ago, I think a guy was shot in the halls at Stephens-Lee and that scared some parents. That was very rare at that time, for anybody to get killed in a school. I wasn't at Stephens-Lee at that time. I think . . . . (indiscernible) was over there at that time, and the guy was killed. And he made the gun then and I think the guy shot him. I think. So that kind of frightened some parents. My mother told me, "I'm going to send you to Allen." I said, "Oh no, you're not. You send me to Allen, I'll run away!" I wanted to be in the Band. I wanted to go to Stephens-Lee and be in the band.

KV: I imagine you looked forward to that for years.

TC: She said, "I'm going to send you to Allen." I said, "I'll run away." But they had to pay (at Allen), too. That wasn't a public school, that was private.

KV: So your mother must have been pinching pennies for a number of years.

TC: She could save a dollar. That money went to build our home, you know. My senior year she worked, she was working in a school at that time, I think, in the kitchen. She was one of the cooks in the kitchen. She was a very brilliant woman, but she didn't get to go to college. She knew--her math was just [snaps her fingers] like that. She was a very brilliant person. But she didn't have the chance to go to college because, you know, my granddaddy just didn't save; the old ones sent the young ones. But I

think their oldest son went to college--Knoxville College or some place. I had two uncles who went away, but I don't know how they got there; paid for it, but anyway they went. And the youngest, too. He went to A and T. And when they built--my mother and daddy built the house--she started saving at that time, my goodness, tuition wasn't but \$300 / semester in the '50's. When I first started going to Morgan, eventually it went up every year, but when I first started going it wasn't that expensive. And when I got on that train, I had my check for that first semester. My mother had saved that money; she was just that [kind of person]; she could save. She could, and she never made a whole lot of money like educated people.

But when she passed away, she didn't pass away broke; I'll tell you that. She could save some money. And my brother and I, we're benefitting from the fruits of her labor. Financially and every other -ancillary. (chuckles) And my daddy, too. My daddy, he always worked hard. He wasn't, didn't have that strong personality like my mother; But he was so sweet, gentle man. And my brother's like that, very kind. You know, you see some men that are kind. Now my husband's nice, but he wasn't kind. How can I say this?

Some men have different personalities, gentle and kinder than others. My daddy and brother are like that. My husband wasn't gentle and, like, kind like that. But my father was; a very kind man.

KV: That's a good thing to have for a father.

TC: That's right. Because it could be afraid of my mother, but I was never afraid of my father.

KV: Oh, no kidding?

TC: I was never just like some children who are afraid of their daddy. I was like my daddy's, I was his girl; I was never like afraid of him. Now you didn't push him but so far now. You couldn't make him decide, but he was always more gentle. And I was sort of afraid of my mother, not afraid, but afraid to ask for trouble.

KV: Did you ever have any kids?

TC: I have two children. I lost my son, and my daughter lives in Jersey City now; she's a former Alvin Ailey dancer. She danced w/ the Alvin Ailey Dance Co. She danced w/ the American Dance Theater for, oh my goodness, many years. She danced for about two years w/ Judith Jameson when Judith Jameson took over. By me going to New York, my children got to the best schools. Simon went to the School of Art and Design and my daughter went to Performing Arts--the school they made [the TV series] Fame. They were exposed to everything. That's one reason why I was glad that I got there. They got lessons, dance lessons and everything. And my son got a scholarship to Pratt

Institute in Brooklyn; he was just in second grade, I think. He was an artist, and my son passed away at 29 years old.

KV: Ooooh.

TC: You know, you can't be the boss and tell them what to do and not do; he was not sick, and it like to kill me. But we did the best we could do. You don't get over it; you get through it. A beautiful artist. In fact, if he were living now, he'd set Asheville or any city on fire. He was just an excellent artist. If you ever come to my home, I'll show you of his works. And then my daughter is married. Her husband is from Holland. She went over there to do Josephine Baker. While she was coming back home, she met this guy; he's very nice though. They married here in 2000. Got married, and right after that I lost my father. They got married here, over at the Grove Park Inn; that's where she wanted to get married. They wanted that winter Alps look because the lived in Munich a while, and they wanted that winter mountain grandeur look. They got married in February; it was cold, but nice cold. And both of them live in Jersey City, N J, now. She's working on a little production company of her own. You know you're always afraid when your children venture out like that, and I'm hoping--I couldn't do it. But she knows what she's doing, knows what she wants, so I have to be in her corner, I guess.

KV: Yes, when they've the fire in the belly . . . .

TC: She knows what she's doing, but I, I, you know it's something you're always afraid of whether they're doing the right thing. And times are so hard and so different now, that you just wonder how things are going to be, once they take off. So I'm just hoping they'll be all right.

I had two children. I have one daughter now.

KV: That must have been tough.

TC: Right.

KV: Were you a member of Mt. Zion Church?

TC: [The minister there baptized me} Joined in 1950, I think, when I was in the eighth grade. He also married Sam and me. When I moved back, Dr. John Grant is my pastor now. The whole time I was gone I was in New York [and therefore have nothing to say about the activity of Mt. Zion during Urban Renewal]. Rev. White was the one who was pastoring then.

Interview ends at this point.

