In this oral history interview Mary Dillard discusses her educational experiences at Maple Ridge Elementary, St. Jacobs Lodge, McBeth Elementary and Sims High schools (Union County, South Carolina), her time attending Friendship Junior College and Benedict College, and her teaching experiences at various schools in Georgia and South Carolina (including Bryson High School, Sims High School, and Union High School) prior to her retirement in 1992. Dillard also discusses her work as an author of children's books like "The Bushy Tailed Cousins" and "Jeepers Creepers, the Squirrels are Coming." Mary Ellen Gregory Dillard was born on January 14, 1938, in Union, South Carolina, one of 14 children born to Arrie Belle Gilliam and Benjamin Gregory. She became a high school teacher at various schools in upstate South Carolina before retiring in 1992. Tom Crosby interviewed Mary Dillard at her residence in Union, South Carolina, on January 9, 2008.
Tom Crosby: Today is January 9, 2008 and I’m at the home of a fellow alumnae. I’m at the home of someone that also finished my high school, Sims High School in Union, South Carolina. And your name is?

Mary Dillard: My name is Mary Gregory Dillard.

TC: Okay and your date of birth?

MD: My date of birth is January 14, 1938.

TC: Who were your parents?


TC: And do you have brothers and sisters?

MD: Well I had fourteen, there were fourteen in all. All of them are deceased except three sisters.

TC: There was a total of fourteen?

MD: Fourteen.

TC: How many males?

MD: There were seven males and seven females.

TC: And three living now?

MD: Three, four of us living including me.

TC: I see, any of them still living here in Union County?

MD: Two of them live in Union County and one lives in Pennsylvania.

TC: So I am at her home in Union, South Carolina.

MD: At 116 McClure Street.

TC: 116 McClure Street. What was the name of your elementary school?

MD: The name of the elementary school I attended was Maple Ridge. I don’t know where they got that name from but it was Maple Ridge. At first we started attending
school in the lodge at St. Jacobs Lodge and then eventually they built a school on property owned by my grandparents.

TC: Congratulations. So you first started in a lodge?

MD: Yeah, on the first floor of St. Jacobs Lodge.

TC: Was the school at that time known as Maple Ridge School?

MD: It was Maple Ridge School.

TC: But it was in a lodge building?

MD: It was in a lodge.

TC: Can you describe that lodge building?

MD: The lodge building was constructed of wood, was a two-story except we never could go on the second floor.

TC: May I interrupt just a moment?

MD: Uh-huh.

TC: Now to make it clear, when you say lodge, you mean l-o-d-g-e, not large?

MD: Lodge, l-o-d-g-e.

TC: Okay.

MD: It’s like a Masonic lodge.

TC: I just wanted the transcriber to know that you were talking about l-o-d-g-e and not l-a-r-g-e.

MD: Okay.

TC: How many rooms did that building have?

MD: It had one room, no bathroom.

TC: Privy?

MD: Well, at that time we didn’t even have that in that building. We were excused to go out in the woods. We didn’t even have a bathroom at all in that Masonic lodge.

TC: How amazing, I have never heard this from anybody. So I assume the girls went one way and the boys went another way?

MD: And the boys went another.

TC: So they had decided what area the boys would go and what area the girls would go?

MD: Right.

TC: I’ll ask another interesting question. So, of course, the boys had to go further into the woods I guess?

MD: Well, I don’t remember ever going at the same time. We were excused to go when we needed to go.
TC: I see. Okay, and then they built a school?

MD: Later on they built a school, a one-room school. It had two what they called cloakrooms or closets on each side and at that time we had outside toilets, a boy’s and a girl’s.

TC: Right. So now that school had two rooms?

MD: One room.

TC: One room?

MD: One room, one teacher.

TC: And the cloakrooms were on the inside?

MD: On the inside in the entry for you to hang your coat, one-room with a woodstove and outside bathrooms or toilets.

TC: Do you have any pictures of that school now?

MD: No, I don’t have any pictures of it.

TC: Maple Ridge School. Now I have a listing of all the Rosenwald schools, for example, in Union County, all the counties in South Carolina, all forty-six. There are insurance photos of them that exist in the archives, the history archives in Columbia. I don’t recall a photo of that school.

MD: This one was probably named after the Maple Ridge Baptist Church because it was next door. That’s the next building was the Maple Ridge Baptist Church. We always refer to it as the Maple Ridge School.

TC: I have to look. I’m almost positive that it’s not listed in this source of names of schools of Union County that I’ve seen but sometimes things don’t get listed or they get lost. How many teachers were there?

MD: Okay, at one time?

TC: Yeah.

MD: At one time we only had one teacher at a time and that teacher taught from first through the sixth or seventh grade, I’ve forgotten, sixth grade, first through sixth grade.

TC: And then the seventh grade people came to?

MD: Cohen Street.

TC: Cohen Street.

MD: It might help if I named some of the teachers but see I don’t know how you’re going to find the name of that school.

TC: I was thinking Cohen Street, was that the old Sims High building you’re talking about?

MD: No, that was a building used for McBeth, McBeth, it was McBeth then.

TC: I see, so you mean McBeth on Cohen?
MD: McBeth on Cohen Street but, why am I thinking later it became Cohen Street? I don’t know. It became Cohen Street when they took over the high school.

TC: When Sims High moved?

MD: I can’t remember what they called it then.

TC: Sims High moved.

MD: When Mr. Lionel became principal of it was Cohen Street but now I don’t know what happened to caused that to change.

TC: What happened the first building of Sims High was over there on Cohen Street?

MD: Right.

TC: And then in ’56, you know, we got the new school.

MD: Right.

TC: And then the old Sims High building was no longer in use and that’s when they named that building Cohen Street.

MD: That’s right so it was really McBeth.

TC: When you left Maple Ridge?

MD: Yes.

TC: You came to McBeth.

MD: Yes.

TC: Okay. Now do you recall your teachers at Maple Ridge?

MD: Okay, for years it was a lady whose name is Mamie Godlaw. In fact, she was my third cousin. And then Della Gilliam, Mr. Rollins, Mr. Rollins’ wife taught there sometimes and then sometimes Professor Sims’ daughters would substitute and then we started getting people who stayed a little longer, Miss Lethel Moment and then Miss Emma Jeter taught there for years.

TC: Do you remember which of Prof Sims’ daughters?

MD: One called Baby Ruth and another one.

TC: But one was named Baby Ruth?

MD: But they didn’t teach, they substituted.

TC: They substituted?

MD: They substituted. Mrs. Rollins substituted and a lady whose name was Miss Tucker substituted. But now these teachers like Miss Emma Jeter taught for years there and Miss Lethel Moment taught for some years and a lady named Mamie Godlaw taught for years there.

TC: I see. Emma Jeter also taught at my school, Poplar Grove.

MD: Yeah, she did.
TC: I see and then you came to McBeth?
MD: Right.
TC: Do you recall some of the teachers that taught you there?

MD: Okay, the principal at that time was Isaac White and then Miss Douglas was still there but she was a teacher. Maybe she was assistant principal, I’m not sure. And then there was Mr. Brockman, Mr. Hampton.

TC: Miss Goodlatte?
MD: Miss Goodlatte didn’t teach there. She taught the lower grades. She was there. And then Miss Haynes, the music teacher and Mr. Brockman, those are all that taught me.

TC: If I may make a comment, personal comment here, Miss Haynes was there when I got there too.
MD: Music.

TC: Music and my comment at this point is that looking back that was something that was kind of special you might say for black schools at that time to have music, a music teacher. And I often think about that and it was very helpful because students that played in the band, you know, it was helpful to them and just for general knowledge, you know, knowledge in general. Okay, and then after McBeth we all came to Sims High, which is located in Union, South Carolina. Now the principal at that time?
MD: Was James F. Moorer.
TC: You came to Sims High in the ninth grade and that was?
MD: I graduated in ’57 but I don’t know that date.

TC: Okay, so you came there in ’53 or somewhere like that.
MD: Yes.
TC: Okay and the principal at that time was Mr. Moorer?
MD: Moorer.
TC: I see. And you remember one teacher I’m sure.
MD: At Sims?
TC: The English teacher or did you have her?
MD: Well, I had a lady whose name was Miss Hill. Miss Hill and then I had one named Miss Capers and eventually I got around to having Miss Sims.

TC: Did Miss Hill have real long hair?
MD: Real long hair.
TC: Oh boy, I had a crush on that lady. She was really very attractive.
MD: Yeah, a lot of guys had a crush on her and sometimes they took up the time period.
(Laughter)

TC: Really? I was only in the, I was in the ninth grade. No, I was still down at McBeth but see the bus would stop, come from McBeth to pick up the kids at Sims, which was a block up, and I used to see her and I thought she was such a pretty lady with that hair hanging all down.

MD: Yeah, she was a pretty lady.

TC: Now Mrs. Sims, did you have her?

MD: I had her for one semester and I had a lady whose name was Capers, she married a Wright and those were the English teachers.

TC: Now you say that if you can go back to Miss Hill to the boys, what did they do, they had a crush on her?

MD: A lot of them did and they used to take up the class period talking to her and she didn’t teach.

TC: Really? That’s fine, just fine. I’m being bad.

MD: You see how they did. (Laughter)

TC: Now now what other teachers did you have at Sims?

MD: Okay, well let’s start with sports. I was a member of the track team and I did high jumping and, of course, relay and I had Floyd White as a coach and I had (unintelligible) Young. I had (unintelligible).

TC: Now you had biology?

MD: Biology and that was Mr. Gibbs, Mr. Walter Gibbs.

TC: I see. And geometry?

MD: Janie Williams and my favorite teacher though was Mr. Barksdale. I don’t know if you had Mr. Barksdale or not.

TC: I didn’t but I’ve heard of him.

MD: Edward Barksdale.

TC: From Spartanburg.

MD: From Spartanburg, he was the algebra teacher. Now Miss Williams or Miss Janie Goree taught geometry but Mr. Barksdale and then Mr. McAllister taught us senior algebra.

TC: Now wait a minute, why was Mr. Barksdale your favorite teacher?

MD: Because he was so good at teaching that algebra.

TC: He was kind of handsome too, wasn’t he?

MD: Well, I just liked the way he taught.

TC: Forget about the handsome.
MD: Yeah, I liked the way he taught because even when I went to college I was far ahead of the other kids, other students, because what I had learned in that algebra.

TC: You learned it well?

MD: Yeah, uh-huh.

TC: And then you had Mayor Janie Goree for geometry? [Note: she was the first black woman to be elected Mayor of a municipality in South Carolina]

MD: Janie Goree for geometry.

TC: And a lot of arguing went on in that class. I’m talking about math, the teaching process, trying to prove on theories or whatever.

MD: Well, oh yeah, but you know they have changed those theories, those propositions that we learned. When I looked at the geometry book I was surprised.

TC: Really?

MD: Yeah, it’s changed.

TC: I found her to be an interesting lady.

MD: Yeah.

TC: That geometry part because it lends itself to arguments you might say.

MD: A straight line and all.

TC: Oh yeah, all of that business. So anyway, I heard about Barksdale.

MD: Barksdale was a good teacher.

TC: Okay and you had Mrs. Sims only one semester?

MD: Yeah, I think that happened when we transferred. We moved in the middle of the year in junior class and I had her for one semester. And for social studies, are you ready for social studies?

TC: Yeah.

MD: I had Kelly Harvey, Kelly Harvey.

TC: Did he use the newspaper quite a bit for social studies?

MD: Yeah, Kelly Harvey and then I had Miss Dora Martin one semester when we moved from one school to the other.

TC: I see. Now in general, you’ve certainly been very specific at one point describing the teachers and the quality of teaching at Sims High, would you like to maybe kind of give an overall statement about academics and teachers at Sims High?

MD: The one thing I can say for sure that as a general rule they were good teachers and maybe they were good teachers because students respected them and listened. We very seldom had disruption in the classroom and they were able to teach. And I really believe as far as teaching ability is concerned, they were good teachers.
TC: Now why do you say, what accounted would you say for the students respecting the teachers, what kinds of things would you say?

MD: I think because seemingly it came from home, students at that time knew to respect adults who had authority and so I think that had a lot to do with it. But today, I won’t compare today.

TC: And they cared.

MD: Right.

TC: They were very dedicated and cared and had a good background to teach because most of the colleges at that time were almost strictly teacher preparation so they did a good job and they expected us to learn so I enjoyed it. You don’t leave Sims High yet because, if I’m not incorrect, weren’t you Miss Homecoming or homecoming queen?

MD: You want me to elaborate on that?

TC: Yes.

MD: Well, at that time to be a homecoming queen you had to raise money and the winner was the student who raised the most money. And it just so happened that my sisters and so forth helped me to collect or to make the money and I became the Miss Homecoming. It wasn’t sort of like an honor system where you earn it based on your qualifications or grades or that kind of thing; it was a source of funding, making money for the school or whatever project they were sponsoring, so that’s the way I look at that one.

TC: Do you remember how much you raised or about how much you raised?

MD: Okay, I remember when I took the money that I had collected at home and the teacher was so surprised that I had that much money. I think it was between fifty and forty dollars or something like that, I think it was. And then, of course, the class had money to add to that.

TC: Do you remember how much they had?

MD: I don’t remember the total and I don’t know if they ever told me the total. They just announced me as the winner but I don’t remember the total.

TC: What looks like they would have told how much. This was 1950?

MD: Fifty, just look at the teachers would have known.

TC: But this was 1956, right?

MD: Yes. The teachers may have known but they didn’t tell.

TC: You were a senior, right?

MD: No, I was a junior. I was homecoming queen as a junior. The teachers may have known but I didn’t know.

TC: That was 1955 then?
MD: No, 1956 when I was Miss Homecoming. It was the same year I was a senior but it was in the fall of 1956 and ’57 I graduated. But teachers probably did know. Students didn’t know.

TC: It just looks like the highest amount would have been something like maybe ten or fifteen dollars but it wasn’t that or it may have been because you said the classroom had some.

MD: Well, okay, the money I took is all I know and the money the class raised, I didn’t know.

TC: So they raised money too?

MD: Yeah, the class raised money too. No one ever told me what the total was. It wasn’t even announced. I was just announced as being the winner. I was in Janie Goree’s class and she didn’t tell me how much money we had.

TC: But it was her class?

MD: She was shocked at the amount that I turned in on my own but she didn’t tell me how much it was.

TC: And the amount you turned in was forty something?

MD: And they didn’t announce it in the class.

TC: No, but you know what you took from home.

MD: That’s all I know.

TC: Which was forty something?

MD: Between forty to fifty but I don’t know. It’s somewhere in that area but she didn’t tell me. She didn’t tell me the total amount after I gave her that.

TC: Any other activities you participated in at Sims?

MD: Okay, basically, oh okay, sports.

TC: You did sports?

MD: Yes, track.

TC: No choir or drama club?

MD: Well, not really. Well, I did participate in a play but we didn’t have a drama club that I remember but I was in a play and I was also a member of the choir at one time.

TC: Do you remember the director of the choir at that time?

MD: Mr. Gibbs.

TC: Gibbs, really? He was a science teacher, right, biology?

MD: Biology teacher.

TC: So was the choir pretty good or good?
MD: The only time I remember practicing was for graduation. They practiced for graduation.

TC: Now there’s a lady that was very popular and formed two clubs, a club for guys and a club for girls. I don’t remember if she was there where you were there or not.

MD: Are you talking about?

TC: TPC and so forth.

MD: Okay, that was Miss Pride. The year before I went, now I watched from the bus those people being initiated but the year before I got to that point they done away with that.

TC: Really?

MD: Uh-huh, so I never witnessed anything except watching the people before me.

TC: What did you see?

MD: What did I see?

TC: Yeah.

MD: Well, I wasn’t allowed to go in that room. I know that was the first thing. From the bus I would see them with rolls; people come out crying and carrying on with rolls of newspaper.

TC: Crying?

MD: Yes sir, they had roles of newspaper and, yeah, they were crying and then the one girl that had to stand on, she had to wear a gown and she had to stand on the street with a bucket and a roll of toilet paper in her hand. That was Minnie Lee McKinney and that was my area and stand on the street with a roll of toilet paper and a bucket, I guess it was a night pot, in her hand. I don’t know if it was a night pot or bucket but anyway, that was the end, that’s what it meant to be, little gown.

TC: I think that club was known as TPC for the females.

MD: Well now I don’t know.

TC: I think it was. The one for the guys was called UDC. That was for guys. Did you see the guys, the activities for them?

MD: The only time we could see is when they were coming out whenever they were initiating them and they were coming out and I remember these girls crying because they had been beaten with these newspapers and that kind of thing. But we were not allowed into the building.

TC: I have a photo of a guy’s club that was taken according to, handwritten on the photo, 1930 and William Shelton’s brother is in that picture.

MD: Puddin.

TC: Puddin they used to call him. But he had a brother, I think his brother’s name Lewis.
MD: Yeah, I remember them.
TC: Yeah. I’ll show it to you one day, that photo. And that lady that was in charge of these clubs, her name was Pride.
MD: I heard that too but I didn’t meet her.
TC: Yeah, she established those two clubs.
MD: But anyway, I remember when I saw them I told some other girls that I knew, told Bessie Lee Porter, she was in my neighborhood, that I would never do it. She said well, you won’t be counted as a senior if you don’t do it and so she told me that and I said well, I’m just not doing that, because I saw people coming out crying and carrying on and all that standing on the street, boys wearing dresses.
TC: Boys wearing dresses?
MD: Yeah.
TC: Really?
MD: Really, I saw all that.
TC: I know, that’s why I’m asking you what was it like because you’re giving me more information than anybody. I’ve asked several persons and they have not described it like you.
MD: Well see now I made up my mind and I told her I said I’ll never do it. She said well, you won’t be counted as a senior if you don’t do it.
TC: Who told you that?
MD: Her name was Bessie Lee Porter.
TC: Oh, another student?
MD: Well, she was a senior. She was one of those had the rolled newspaper. But I was at McBeth but I was on the bus watching. So I told her because she was in my neighborhood and I told her that I would never do it. But before I got there though somehow they did away with it.
TC: I think I heard that Mr. Moorer, they had done something that was very bad.
MD: They were bad, now I’m just telling you.
TC: Mr. Moorer discontinued it.
MD: They were bad. I’m telling you these people were crying. They were bad.
TC: So they really were like sororities and fraternities.
MD: Yes sir.
TC: Now that brings us to the next educational level and we talk about fraternities and sororities. So after finishing Sims High School you attended?
MD: Well, I started out, I’m going to tell you about my background. I came from, grew up on a farm, and the time I tried to go away to school my parents had grown, they were old. They were only getting something like social security. So I remember I wanted to go to school and my daddy said he would help me as best he could but I knew he was getting older and I sat down and I tried to figure out a way to go to school. I remember sitting down picking out teacher’s schools that I could attend and I ended up with Friendship Junior College in Rock Hill.

TC: I never knew that.

MD: They’re no longer there.

TC: Yeah, I know but I never knew you went to Friendship.

MD: Yeah, I did but I went there because I was trying to find a place where my daddy could afford to let me go and so I found that and I went there. They were sort of associated with Benedict and almost all, I’d say between ninety-five and ninety-eight percent of those people left Friendship and went to Benedict and that’s what I did. So I did get student loans and then I went on to school and I also worked. I also cleaned dormitories and bathrooms.

TC: At Benedict College?

MD: No, I did that at Friendship.

TC: Oh, at Friendship?

MD: Yeah. See I had to work and my daddy helped me some and I had to work. We didn’t have the kind of money for education so I worked and when I finished at Friendship I transferred to Benedict. And I didn’t work at Benedict but what I did, I lived off campus so it would be cheaper and that’s how I went to school basically, you know, doing the best I can. For instance, I remember times when I would wear my niece’s clothes and I’d bring them home, she’d wear them and I’d take some back, that kind of thing, to get through school.

TC: Well, we have gone through some things but we’ve benefited from them.

MD: It was hard times, yes.

TC: It makes you appreciate the success that you have.

MD: Right.

TC: You know, it really could have been worse.

MD: Right.

TC: And at Benedict you majored in?

MD: Well, I started in business education all the way. Like I said, there was no problem transferring from one to the other because they were both Baptist schools, you know, so I majored in business education. And I didn’t have time or money for any frills. I mean I wasn’t in any clubs that I know of because I moved off campus. In other words, I went to school really fisted. I didn’t have any frills.
TC: Yeah, you worked on campus?
MD: Well, at Benedict I didn’t because I didn’t apply for work study in advance so the jobs were taken. So what I did I moved off campus. I lived off campus. I was an off campus student and I didn’t have to pay the tuition.
TC: But did you work off campus?
MD: No, my daddy paid the rent but I had nothing for frills.
TC: What street did you live on?
MD: On Heidt Street.
TC: Heidt Street, okay. And then you did student teaching of course?
MD: Did student teaching, you want to hear my sad story?
TC: Yes.
MD: I don’t know if you remember this, but my brother.
TC: If you think it’s too personal.
MD: No, I wanted to mention it. My brother barricaded himself in the house and the police came in but they didn’t understand that he was mentally ill because it wasn’t reported until he actually did it.
TC: Your home house?
MD: Yeah, you might remember that, where he barricaded himself in the house they shot the house up?
TC: Uh-huh, and then they shot him?
MD: No, they didn’t. They pumped in tear gas after tear gas but somehow he survived it and that morning after they thought he was dead my daddy went to the back door and called his name and he walked out of there unscathed really. But see he stayed in a mental hospital for years, about fifteen years, and then they let him out. But he came from the mental hospital in Pennsylvania, somebody helped him get home.
TC: So again, he was not killed?
MD: He was not killed and he was not hurt but the house was totally destroyed. So when I did my practice teaching I came home to do it, trying to save money, but I had to stay with a sister because our house was destroyed. I did my practice teaching at Sims under a lady whose name was Betty Martin.
TC: Oh yeah, I had typing under her.
MD: She didn’t teach me but Mrs. Harper taught me.
TC: I see. But you did student teaching under Betty Martin?
MD: Right. That was a crucial time because that had happened, that was my senior year and the house.
TC: It was a lot to deal with.
MD: Yeah, it was a lot to deal with.

TC: But you made it.

MD: Yes, I made it. So my educational background is not an easy thing to talk about. I suffered the whole time.

TC: Yeah, and I congratulate you and especially now we come to something else. But before we go to another issue, after finishing your student teaching you taught at a high school?

MD: Well, when I finished, I graduated in August and that summer I did a substitute over in Great Falls, South Carolina. A lady was expecting and I finished a year for her. Then after that year my husband, I was married by that time and he was stationed in Georgia so I got a job in Georgia. By the time I got the job he was transferred to Fort Dix, New Jersey and sent from there to Berlin. That’s during the Berlin crisis and they were no longer taking dependents so I stayed in Georgia for two years then I came back to Greenville, South Carolina and taught there I think two years.

TC: What school?

MD: Bryson High School. And then from Bryson High School I came to Union.

TC: I see. And you came to Union in the ‘70s?

MD: No, it was in the ‘60s, either ’65 or somewhere along in there.

TC: Okay, were you still working at Sims when integration came?

MD: Oh yes, I was part of that.

TC: You were still there?

MD: I was part of that. See once I got to Union I never stopped. I was part of that.

TC: So I have seen that there were two white people at Sims for one or two years. I don’t think they actually taught, they did something else.

MD: Well, one did. I think her name was Mrs. Jester. Oh, before, before integration or after?

TC: Yeah.

MD: Maurice Bevis taught business education there because he was teaching business education when I came there from Greenville, Maurice Bevis.

TC: And there was a lady also who worked there in some capacity at one point.

MD: I’m thinking Miss Ruthie Jackie was teaching art but I’m not sure.

TC: So this must have been around 1968, somewhere like that, ’69. It must have been around 1968. I left Sims in ’62, so anyway, I’m getting confused here. So that must have been, it was in the late ‘60s.

MD: Well, when I came it as about ’65 or ’66.

TC: When you came?
MD: Yeah and Maurice Bevis was in the business department. He taught in the business department and he was white. The other one I’m thinking, Ruthie Jackson, was in art but I might be incorrect on that.

TC: Oh, I see, so you came in ’65?

MD: Either ’65 or ’66.

TC: I left in ’65. Yeah, I taught there for two years and I left in ’65. So my point is that the slow process of integration and desegregation started at Sims around ’65 or ’66 because that guy was there.

MD: Well, the transferring probably started in ’65.

TC: I mean the, you might say, moving into total integration kind of started when that (unintelligible) man was there, came there. You know what I mean? And then the school eventually discontinued in the 1970.

MD: No, it didn’t. In ’69, somewhere like that.

TC: The last graduating class was 1970 because I have a nephew.

MD: Nineteen seventy was the last graduating class?

TC: Yes.

MD: Okay.

TC: But I was just trying to indicate how desegregation or integration started you might say in Union County and at Sims at the high school level.

MD: It had to be ’65 and ‘70 but there’s a group of students that went over before that. See I don’t know how they chose these students. They sent some students to Union High School before then and a couple of teachers.

TC: That was around, see I left Sims in ’65 and none of that was going on so that had to have been around ’66, ’67.

MD: Miss Free was one of them, Miss Juanita Free and some other black teachers they sent over there before they integrated. And they sent some, I don’t know how they selected these students but they sent some students over there to integrate class before they.

TC: Totally?

MD: Yeah.

TC: About how many students are you talking about?

MD: I remember three going and the only one I know is Molly Moore.

TC: If I may interrupt, one of those students I remember someone telling me the name of that student.

MD: Molly Moore?
TC: What I really want to point out here, it’s my understanding that they were very light in complexion.

MD: Yes, well, Molly Moore, I can’t remember the other two. One was Molly Moore but I can’t remember the other two but they were, they were.

TC: And there was a reason for that. I think there was a reason.

MD: But why?

TC: Because even through the years the light skinned.

MD: Okay, now you’re addressing that point too?

TC: Yeah.

MD: Okay, go ahead. I can say or speak on that one.

TC: Yeah, you know that they have said through the years that light skinned black persons were favored. You know what I mean?

MD: Yeah, I know, I know.

TC: So a point, how Sims High band played out. What color were those majorettes?

MD: Except for one, now remember Geneva Bell.

TC: That was Geneva Bell.

MD: Okay, except for one.

TC: I think there were two light skinned on each side and there was Geneva Bell extremely dark in the middle. I understand that they had some stuff going on at Sims about somebody from Kelton, female, Miss Homecoming, Miss Sims High and they say the teachers tried to prevent her becoming Miss Sims High. Do you remember anything along that line?

MD: Based on color?

TC: Yeah.

MD: No, the only one I can think is Sarah Jeter.

TC: There was somebody, it might have been Kelton or Pea Ridge or Lockhart and this person was real dark skinned but the rumor is that some of the teachers prevented or tried to prevent her from becoming Miss Sims High. You said you heard some stories about the skin complexion.

MD: I was going to make the statement that whites are rough on blacks but then blacks are rough on blacks. But then we just knew that light skinned people excelled with the black teachers. It was just that way in most cases. Almost all the cases they didn’t have to work as hard and they excelled with black teachers. It was just common knowledge.

TC: Really?

MD: Yeah.

TC: Really?
MD: Uh-huh, I thought so. I thought so when I was in school.
TC: Did you see any direct evidence of it?
MD: No, just the air, just an understanding.
TC: In the classroom they?
MD: Yeah, I can name some like Gloria Far. They didn’t have to do, they were just there.
TC: Gloria Far, (unintelligible). I’m just kidding you.
MD: Okay, Sol Foster, they were just there. You knew that they were going to (unintelligible).
TC: I’m just kidding. I don’t mean that.
MD: Well, I’ll probably tell it. But the truth is that it was just an understanding that black, I can give you another example. Take Mrs. McKissick, she got to get her library club she got almost every one of them light skinned except Geneva Bell.
TC: That lady is still living.
MD: Is she still living? I thought she passed up in Connecticut. She didn’t pass?
TC: I’m not sure.
MD: We need to check on that.
TC: Somebody passed about a month ago.
MD: Not recently, I thought she passed up in Connecticut but I’m not sure.
TC: Anyway, we’re telling the truth, right?
MD: Well, you know.
TC: No, no, no.
MD: But you do know though.
TC: I’m talking about Mrs. McKissick. Anyway, whatever we have said here, we’re telling the truth.
MD: Uh-huh. But don’t say she did that but I can show it to you.
TC: Show me what? Whoever’s doing this transcription they know we’re laughing but we are telling the truth. However, I also heard that they gave those, that lighter skinned were given more attention, and that’s what you’re saying.
MD: Yes.
TC: And if you remember when they integrated the colleges, as a whole the same thing went on in the colleges.
MD: And even if they weren’t, another thing black people did too, if they thought the parents were somebody, that student excelled too.
TC: We’re telling it to be honest.

MD: Yeah but it’s just the way we are. It’s just the way people are. You got to be what they call somebody and if you were that student of parents who were considered as somebody, you had it made too.

TC: I’ve heard that. I really have.

MD: I can’t say about whites but black people are that way.

TC: So anyway, let’s move on.

MD: But they don’t know to be somebody is simply being yourself.

TC: That’s right and working hard.

MD: Uh-huh.

TC: And knowing how to conduct yourself. Now leaving Sims, not leaving Sims but after integration came, you went over to Union High?

MD: To Union High School in the same teaching position and then I went to, then we got a vocational center and I taught there and then they got a comprehensive high school and it was vocational and academic and I taught in that until I retired. Once I started teaching though I didn’t miss a year so I finished kind of early my thirty years so I didn’t miss a year.

TC: I see, so what year did you retire?

MD: In ’92.

TC: Ninety-two?

MD: Nineteen ninety-two.

TC: I see. Okay and then since you have been retired you have had time to not do anything.

MD: Well, no.

TC: I’m kidding. And then eventually you started doing some writing?

MD: No, I have written all along. Usually when I needed plays or something in the classroom I wrote them and I had written practically before I finished college, but not on a level that I’m doing now but I have written all along.

TC: So you would say that you started writing in college?

MD: Yeah, in college, yes. As soon as I graduated college I started writing but not, on a large level just writing anything I needed to have written I would do it.

TC: So you wrote things for the classroom when you were teaching?

MD: Right.

TC: You were teaching business ed, right?

MD: If I needed cases for law, business law, I wrote them myself.
TC: So you told the scripts or you had students do?
MD: It was script where they played a part out like script writing. It was like a play.
TC: It was like a play?
MD: I directed plays for a long time too.
TC: In high school?
MD: In high schools, mostly in the Georgia schools. I did plays for contests. I directed plays.
TC: And you wrote them?
MD: I directed pageants too.
TC: You wrote the plays sometimes?
MD: The plays I directed I did not write. I got the play books and I directed the plays and then I also directed pageants, beauty pageants for (unintelligible).
TC: Something interesting to me, interesting about your, when you taught business law you wrote a case, you might say.
MD: Yeah, I wrote the cases like in the play role of like the plaintiff and the defendant.
TC: So the students had to, of course, read what you had written and then act that out.
MD: Right.
TC: I see. They probably liked that, didn’t they?
MD: They did. You know, it adds variety to a classroom. They were taking the course and to make it more meaningful when you actually play the part, the judge.
TC: So I guess the business law class was mostly, was the only one in which you did that?
MD: Well, I mentioned that one but then when I taught the summer program too I did some work like that just based on any little thing.
TC: To illustrate something?
MD: Yeah.
TC: But most of it was in the business law?
MD: Well, that comes to mind more so than any other, the business law does.
TC: So you taught business law and maybe like accounting?
MD: I taught accounting for years, plus keyboarding, which was typing, basically accounting and keyboarding and business law and business English and I had business math at one time too.
TC: Okay, so that really was the beginning to some extent of your interest in writing.
MD: Well, yeah, but see I even, well, I was interested in writing. When I graduated college I entered a contest over at Clemson University but I wasn’t able to pay for the
course at the time so I didn’t take the course. I was interviewed but I didn’t take the course but I didn’t stop writing. I just wrote every chance I’d get. I’ve always been interested in it and so it isn’t something that I just started.

**TC:** Okay and then your first publication, what was it?

**MD:** Okay, first publication was a short story, “The Perfect Wedding Dress,” in Christian Woman’s magazine. That was the first. I was encouraged to start writing short stories first and I did that but I don’t do very well writing short. I’m more like a novelist. I write long sagas. I write long stories. But anyway, I wrote short stories and it was published and a very beautiful picture on it. I’ll see if I can find a copy. So then after that I went to children’s books. I was instructed to do this. To get into publishing you need to start writing short stories or children’s books and that’s how I got involved in this because my idea wasn’t writing children’s books, I’m a novelist, to get my foot in the door, so that’s why I started that.

**TC:** I see. And then you branched out into children’s books?

**MD:** Because as a way of getting my foot in the door I did children’s books. I liked them okay but at first I had a lot of difficulty with them because when I would send them off they’d say you’re writing for children. They wanted me to write down for children and I just didn’t want to do that. And so eventually this company doesn’t require me to write down to children because children read any type literature that’s suitable for them. But to write down to them I didn’t feel like doing that. I couldn’t do that so I had difficulty with that but I knew to get into publishing I had to start from somewhere so I was encouraged to start writing children’s books and so that’s why I started doing that.

**TC:** I see. And how many children’s books have you written?

**MD:** Okay, well, I’ve got maybe six or seven but these are the only two that are published. On this one I wrote a collection of short stories called “The Bushy Tailed Cousins” and I pulled this one from that collection and made it into a book. I write pretty rapidly.

**TC:** And this one?

**MD:** That one was the first book I had published.

**TC:** Your most recent?

**MD:** This is the most recent.

**TC:** And the title is?

**MD:** “Jeepers Creepers, the Squirrels Are Coming.”

**TC:** What initiated your interest in writing this book?

**MD:** In “Jeepers Creepers, the Squirrels Are Coming,” I got the idea; well, I used to be an avid gardener. I used to garden a lot in the back yard. So there were squirrels in that pecan tree back there and usually when the…

End of interview
[Note: original audio cassette was double-checked; Side B is blank]