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Tom Crosby Oral History Collection
Novella Mills Oral History Interview

Interviewee
Mills, Novella, 1924-

Interviewer
Crosby, Tom, 1940-

Date
May 12, 2008

Location
Irmo, South Carolina

ID Number
CROS 021

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Scope and Background Note
In this oral history interview, Novella Mills discusses her educational experiences at Pine Grove Elementary, general description and games played, being bused to Harbison Junior College from 6th grade until the school burned down in tenth grade, attending Booker T. Washington High School for one year, attending Allen University, descriptions of many teachers, and her mother's teaching career. Novella Mills was born on November 3, 1924 to Hester Aiken Mills and Tony Bates Mills of Irmo, South Carolina, one of eight children. Tom Crosby interviewed Novella Mills at her residence in Irmo, South Carolina, on May 12, 2008. Interview covers Mill's education at Pine Grove Elementary School and Harbison Junior College (of the town of Irmo, S.C.) during the early 1930s and at Booker T. Washington High School from 1940 to 1942.
Tom Crosby: Today is May 12, 2008 and I’m at the community known as Pine [Grove] community in the area of Irmo, South Carolina, which is in Lexington.

Novella Mills: Pine Grove.

TC: Pine Grove community, which is a section of [sic Richland] County in South Carolina. And I’m at the home of a lady that I met when I attended church about three Sundays ago and I’ll let her give you her name. Your name is?

NM: My name is Novella Mills and I live at 708 Piney Woods Road, Columbia, South Carolina.

TC: Okay, 708 Piney Woods Road, 708, okay, Columbia. Okay and what is your date of birth?

NM: I was born November 3, 1924.

TC: November 3, 1924. Now who were your parents?

NM: My mother’s name was Hester.

TC: Maiden name?

NM: Aiken Mills.

TC: Esther Aiken Mills.

NM: Hester.

TC: Hester, H-E-S-T-E-R. And your father?

NM: Tony Bates Mills.

TC: Okay, Tony Bates Mills, and Miss Mills, did you have brothers and sisters?

NM: Yes, I had five, it was five girls. My parents had five girls and three boys, eight children.

TC: Five girls and three boys.

NM: And I was the seventh.

TC: You were the seventh born?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: So now the eighth, well, it doesn’t matter. So you were the baby girl?

NM: Yes, that’s right.
TC: Okay. Now you attended elementary school in Lexington County in the Irmo area.
NM: Richland County.
TC: Oh, Richland County.
NM: Right between here and the church.
TC: Oh, I see. So you attended elementary school in Richland County?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: And the name of that school was, the name of your elementary school?
NM: Pine Grove Elementary School.
TC: Pine Grove Elementary School, I see. Now I think you are aware at this time that Pine Grove Elementary was a Rosenwald School, what was referred to as being a Rosenwald School. Okay, are you aware at this time what we mean when we say Rosenwald School?
NM: Well, I slightly know the story but not very well. I’d rather not try to tell it.
TC: I see. I’ll try and tell it. Okay, you remember Booker T. Washington?
NM: Of course.
TC: And he was the president of Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama and he had become a friend of a white Jewish man whose name was Julius Rosenwald. And back in the late 1800s and early 1900s the schools especially were in very bad condition for black people in the southern states. For example, some of them went to school in churches and old houses and old stores and things like that. So Booker T. Washington in 1912 convinced Julius Rosenwald, who was the owner of Sears & Roebuck, he was a wealthy man, he convinced him to give money to help build six schools in adjacent counties around Tuskegee Institute.

And then as time went on, Booker T. convinced him to give money to help build additional schools in Alabama. In 1917 other states became aware of this money that Julius Rosenwald was giving to help build black schools and he developed a fund, Rosenwald developed a fund in 1917 for all the southern states. A total of about five thousand schools of the fifteen southern states were built between 1912 and 1932. That’s when he discontinued giving money to help build black schools. And I’ll give you an example of my high school. My high school, the first building was built in 1926, that’s when it was built, and it opened in 1927. My school was up in Union County actually in the town of Union. It got twenty-one hundred dollars from the Rosenwald Fund in 1925 or ’26 and it got thirty-seven thousand nine hundred from the county and state. So since it got that money from the Rosenwald Fund, twenty-one hundred dollars, that makes it be referred to as a Rosenwald School. So any school that got some money to help build that school from the Rosenwald Fund is honorarily referred to as being a Rosenwald School. Now I should have looked before I came today to see if I could have found how much money Pine Grove Elementary got. There’s a listing of these schools all over South Carolina in each of the forty-six counties, the amount of money they got from the Rosenwald Fund. So that’s what we mean when we say a Rosenwald School. Now how many rooms did that school have?
NM: Rooms?
TC: How many rooms?
NM: It was two rooms.
TC: Had two rooms?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: Okay.
NM: And it all made in one but in the middle they had something like this.
TC: Had folding doors. I think they had a board, blackboard, wasn’t it?
NM: Yeah, the blackboard that just lifted up if you want the whole room, just lift the blackboard up and move it up there.
TC: Right, that’s kind of interesting on the basis of what I’ve read most about the school.
NM: They had something right here for the black schools to sit on right in there.
TC: So in this case, what many of the schools had, they had folding doors from one wall to the next wall and that divided the two rooms up. But what you had you didn’t have the folding doors, you had a blackboard that went up into the ceiling you might say.
NM: Yeah.
TC: And was there a little stage area at one end of the rooms do you recall?
NM: No, we didn’t have a stage.
TC: You didn’t have a stage, okay.
NM: Of course, they made their own stages if they need any. At the end of school closing they would go to the church to have those programs.
TC: Oh, I see. Well, many of those schools they would have folding doors between two rooms and they would have a stage at the end of one of those rooms. Then you fold the doors back and you’ve got like an auditorium. But in your case, you may have seen that at another school.
NM: I have seen it.
TC: I see. But in your case you didn’t have ‘school closing’ at the school, you went to the church nearby.
NM: Yeah.
TC: And had school closing.
NM: Right.
TC: I see. What was the school closing like? Did all the grades participate? It was usually at night, wasn’t it, evening?
NM: Mostly at nighttime.
TC: At night. Did all the grades participate the same day?
NM: Yeah.
TC: I see.

NM: This grade had their part and that grade had their part.

TC: All the way up to the seventh grade?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: I see.

NM: But now I wasn’t there at seventh grade because at seventh grade they started having a bus going to Harbison and I started to Harbison.

TC: Okay, so you finished Pine Grove in the sixth grade?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: I see. Okay, what were some of the ways you might say, a teaching strategy might use as a teacher, how many teachers did you have at that school?

NM: It was two.

TC: Two teachers?

NM: Two teachers.

TC: Do you remember some of the ways or things that the teachers did to teach the children, some of the strategies that they used to teach the children?

NM: Well, the room I was in, all of the classes were in the same room, you know, and like if I was in fifth grade or something like that, when they taught sixth grade I could still be hearing what they were saying you know. But you know, that gave me a little chance to kind of study your lesson, you know, listening to what they said because everybody had to be quiet.

TC: So you were learning something, even though you weren’t in the sixth grade you were still learning something.

NM: Still learning.

TC: Even though you were in the fifth grade.

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: I guess probably people went through the sixth grade, one teacher probably had first, second, and third maybe, then the other teacher had fourth, fifth, and sixth?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: Yeah. Do you recall maybe like when you were in the first, second and third, you had the same teacher or new teacher to the school?

NM: It was the same, well, they had a good many teachers because it looked like to me they would go and come pretty fast. But you mean do I remember anything they were saying or something like that?

TC: For example, did they sometimes maybe use students in one grade to maybe assist students in another grade?

NM: To be transferred from one room to the other?
TC: No, not transferred from one room to another but maybe like students in the third and fourth grade might help students in the third grade to do some math or something like that.

NM: They could do it but they couldn’t do it in there.

TC: They didn’t have it structured that way?

NM: No, they didn’t have it like that.

TC: But now when the teacher was teaching those other grades, what had to go on with reference to those children? Let’s say the first, second and third and the teacher now was teaching another class? I guess you had to be quiet.

NM: Yeah. That’s how you could learn if you listened.

TC: Right. And if they weren’t quiet what might happen sometimes?

NM: Well, they’d have to go in the corner and stand up. Some of them had to go in there and hold up a leg.

(Laughter)

TC: Really?

NM: Yes.

TC: I think I remember something like that. Had to stand on one foot?

NM: Stand on one foot.

TC: I see.

NM: They’d give us a certain length of time to stand on that foot. They had to lean on the wall to keep from falling.

TC: Now how did they discipline the students in other ways? Would they have a little belt or switch?

NM: They had those belts.

TC: How about a switch?

NM: Or a switch sometimes some had switches if they didn’t have belts. TC: Now would they use it, the teacher use it?

NM: Some did.

TC: They didn’t play sometimes?

NM: But I didn’t want it so I was quiet.

TC: Plus you knew when you got home if you had been bad.

NM: You’d get another one.

TC: You’d get another one, right. Now I think you told me some time ago that your mother also taught?

NM: Well, she was the one they had up to the church.
TC: You’re telling me now that at one point there was a church and this church built a school on the church grounds?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: And your mom went to what grade at that school?

NM: Went to seventh grade.

TC: Seventh grade at that school?

NM: At that school, Allen University. That’s all the high they were going at that time.

TC: Now what about Allen University?

NM: Huh?

TC: What about Allen University?

NM: She went to seventh grade and then she started teaching up there.

TC: Oh, so she went to school at Allen University?

NM: Yes.

TC: Beginning in the first grade?

NM: I guess so.

TC: Oh, so after she finished the seventh grade at Allen University she then started teaching at her school at the church, Pine Grove Church?

NM: Yeah.

TC: A school that the church built, she started teaching there after finishing the seventh grade at Allen University because it went from the first grade through the years actually up until 1930 I think it was. It went up to the eleventh grade I think it was at that time. But the point is that Allen at one point went from the first grade all the way up to the high school level. I think the last grade at the high school level back in the ‘30s, you might say, I know it was, in the 1930’s it was up to the eleventh grade. The twelfth grade if I’m correct in the public schools didn’t start until 1948. I’m really not positive whether Allen had the twelfth grade in 1930’s or not but I know it went up to the eleventh grade and also at the college level too. So after finishing Allen in the seventh grade she taught at this school that was built by the church?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: Okay, and she finished the seventh grade and then became a teacher.

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: Was there any other teacher at that school with her or you’re not sure?

NM: Yeah, they had two teachers in there. I forgot the other one’s name.

TC: Now do you have any idea how old your mother may have been when she finished the seventh grade? The reason I’m asking the question that way, you know sometimes things were bad way back and people didn’t always start to school let’s say at six years as they should have or they may have dropped out or other things may have prevented them from going to school
continuously as they should. So I don’t know whether you have any idea. Now normally you would think if she finished the seventh grade as they do now, start to school when they’re six years old so you’re around twelve years old or thirteen, something like that. So I guess you don’t really know exactly how old she was but the important thing that I’m trying to point out here now in my opinion is that was a real early age to, you know, attempt to teach other children after finishing the seventh grade.

NM: She had to be older than that I’m sure.

TC: Well, I’m not sure. We don’t really know.

NM: We don’t know about that.

TC: Right. Now do you know, okay, she finished at Allen. Do you recall her saying what it was like to be a teacher for her?

NM: Well, she enjoyed going to school and she enjoyed her teaching up there. There was a man that lived up there at a house right up there by that little trailer and every time he got drunk he used to walk by here and talk about what she taught him.

TC: Really? I see. Now if I may ask, how old was your mother when she passed?

NM: She was eighty-two.

TC: Eighty-two and she passed in, do you recall the year she passed?

NM: Nineteen seventy-one.

TC: Seventy-one, she was eighty-two when she passed and you think she passed in ’71?

NM: It was ’71 or 2 but I think it was ’71. Daddy passed in ’69.

TC: Now I think you also told me some time ago this past week or so, told me about the blackboard that she used. Did they have a blackboard?

NM: Oh, on the wall.

TC: I see. So your mother told you that they painted the wall of the classroom black?

NM: Well now she didn’t have to tell us that because that building was still up there when we used to go to Sunday school up there and we could see it painted on the wall. The building was still there, stayed there a good while after the church was there.

TC: When you were in elementary school I guess.

NM: Yeah.

TC: The building was still there.

NM: The building was still there.

TC: Really?

NM: They were using it for other little things, the kids up there at the church.

TC: I see. How many rooms did it have?

NM: It didn’t have but just the two rooms.
TC: It had two rooms?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: I see.
NM: I don’t know if there was a petition between there or what but anyway.
TC: Now you didn’t go to that school.
NM: No, no, no.
TC: Okay so we’re talking about the school that was built by the church where your mother taught after finishing the seventh grade at Allen University.
NM: That’s right.
TC: And so they painted one side of the wall, an area of one side of the wall, with black paint and that was the blackboard?
NM: That was the blackboard.
TC: Isn’t that amazing.
NM: Yeah.
TC: And you saw it?
NM: I saw the blackboard.
TC: About how long would you say it was, maybe six feet?
NM: The blackboard?
TC: I’m six feet.
NM: You’re six feet? It was about as big as that little area there.
TC: That’s about six feet, about five or six feet. And was the paint in pretty good condition last time you saw it?
NM: Well, it wasn’t all that good.
TC: Was it peeling?
NM: No, looked like it was soaked in or something like that.
TC: It seemed to have been a smooth area?
NM: No, it wasn’t that smooth, you know, just plain.
TC: Boards?
NM: Boards.
TC: Wasn’t a continuous piece of wood?
NM: No.
TC: You know, like this right here.
NM: No, no.
TC: Just smooth?
NM: Smooth.
TC: It was smooth or kind of rough as you remember?
NM: The wood it wasn’t smooth but it wasn’t exactly like the other part.
TC: Of the building, I see, okay. So it could have been made of a little smoother material than the other part of the wall.
NM: It could have been.
TC: But you don’t remember right now?
NM: No.
TC: Do you know what they used to write on the board? Do you know if they used chalk as we have today? Well, we don’t use chalk too much these days. But you don’t know what they used to write on the board?
NM: I don’t know but it had to be a different color else you couldn’t see it.
TC: Right. I was talking to someone this past week and they were saying and also this person said that he had seen something on TV, you know this white clay dirt that sometimes people used to eat? Do you know what I’m talking about?
NM: My sister used to eat that.
TC: Did she? And when it’s dry I suspect it’s kind of hard and I’m wondering if they may have used that.
NM: I thought about that one time but I’m just not sure if they used that.
TC: They may have used that or they may have used something else. They may have actually had chalk, who knows. I can kind of figure it out, I can’t do it right now, as to what year that may have been when your mother started teaching there but I wait and do it after we finish talking today and how old she may have been and what year it may have been when she started. Okay, now so what kinds of games you may have played when you were in elementary school. Now this is when you were at Pine Grove. You remember any games that you played at that school?
NM: Yeah, we used to play here we go round the mulberry bush and ball, play ball, baseball.
TC: Any basketball?
NM: No, we didn’t play basketball then. The girls would be on one side of the school and the boys on the other side of the school playing.
TC: So they didn’t play together?
NM: No, we didn’t play together.
TC: So the boys always played by themselves?
NM: Yes.

TC: The girls always playing by themselves?

NM: Yeah.

TC: When I was in elementary school I don’t think we had to be by ourselves. I know because I remember now. Do you remember any books that you may have used in school, names of any books that you may have used in school or things in some of the books? Do you remember this book about Spot?

NM: We were still using Little Red Hen.

TC: Little Red Hen, that was the name of, that’s a little story or the name of a book?

NM: That’s a little story book. It’s a story and a little book that we used to have.

TC: Little Red Hen?

NM: Yeah, with all those little nursery rhymes and things in it. That’s what they use for nursery rhymes and things now. We were using them when we started to school.

TC: Do you remember one of the stories in it?

NM: About the Little Red Hen?

TC: Uh-huh.

NM: I guess everybody remembers the Little Red Hen.

TC: What was it like? I don’t remember right now.

NM: I guess they probably didn’t have that when you came along.

TC: They may not or they may have.

NM: The little red hen, the little red hen had some corn. She said who will help me to pick some corn and nobody would help. Not I said the pig. Not I said the dog. Not I said the cow. All the animals said not I. Then she said, anyway, I won’t go through the whole thing. (Laughter)

TC: But those were some of the things?

NM: Those were some of the things we said and so when she got ready to eat, she said who will help me to eat some corn. Nobody said a word. Everybody started coming but she wouldn’t let them eat. (Laughter)

TC: Because they wouldn’t help her.

NM: They wouldn’t help her.

TC: I see. Yeah, I remember something. I don’t know.

NM: Something sort of like that, huh?

TC: Yeah. I remember one when I went to elementary. I was in second grade. I guess it might be the same thing you’re talking about, those little Mother Goose tales or stories or something like that.

NM: Yeah.
TC: I think that’s slightly different I believe but anyway I remember Mother Goose had planned a party and I’ve forgotten what time the people were supposed to be there. It got closer and closer and closer to the time for the party to start and nobody was there and she finally realized that she had forgotten to invite the people to the party. And that’s the one I’ve never forgotten because I thought it was so funny and serious too you know for something like that to happen. Yeah, okay now after finishing Pine Grove Elementary, which was a Rosenwald School, you attended high school, Harbison?

NM: I went there in seventh grade.

TC: Okay, was it called Harbison School or Harbison Junior College at that time, do you remember?

NM: At that time when we went there it was the Harbison School.

TC: And that was probably the elementary and the high school part.

NM: Well now they had another school right before you get to Harbison. It was called, a grammar school, that’s what it was and they went as high as seventh grade too. When I started up there I just went straight on to Harbison. I was in seventh grade at Harbison. But at that time we had to wait because Harbison burned down same year I went there. It wasn’t quite the same then but I was in seventh grade when I went there. And then when it burned we had to go to school in the churches and the gyms and different places to finish out at that time. Some left there and went other places but the ones that stayed there we met in different buildings.

TC: And you stayed there until you were in the eleventh grade or twelfth?

NM: Eleventh.

TC: Eleventh.

NM: Then I went to Booker Washington. At that time I graduated from the eleventh grade. It wasn’t going any further than eleventh.

TC: No twelfth grade at that time.

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: Okay so actually you went to Booker Washington High School for one year?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: Okay so when you left Harbison, that’s H-A-R-B-I-S-O-N, you left there in the tenth grade?

NM: Yeah.

TC: Yeah, you finished the tenth grade and the school burned?

NM: Yeah, burned down.

TC: And then you went to Booker T. Washington High School, which is in Columbia?

NM: Right.

TC: Okay.
NM: Had to catch a ride to go down there, no buses.
TC: Yeah, so to get to Booker, no buses, and how did you get there sometimes?
NM: Parents had to get the children there the best they could if they wanted to go.
TC: Right, now Booker T. Washington High School, which was in Columbia, and that’s about ten miles from here?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: It’s about ten miles.
NM: Ten good miles.
TC: From where you went to Harbison School?
NM: Uh-huh, supposed to be eight miles from right out there on the highway.
TC: I see, so you got there the best way you could I guess.
NM: Uh-huh, so Mother was riding with, for a while we rode with my oldest brother, not the oldest one but next to the oldest. He was working downtown at that time. That’s the way we.
TC: Got to school.
NM: To and fro.
TC: So when school was out where would you be until he got off from work?
NM: Waiting until he got off from work.
TC: And he would pick you up at the school?
NM: No, Mother was working with this white woman up there on Elmwood Street and we had a certain place to meet.
TC: And he would pick you up at the location?
NM: Yeah.
TC: How many of you?
NM: It wasn’t but just me and my mother.
TC: Oh, you and your mother?
NM: Yeah, at that time.
TC: Let me go back to your mother teaching at the school on the church property. Do you know how long she worked there at that school or you’re not?
NM: You know I really don’t.
TC: Don’t know.
NM: It wasn’t too long because they built this place down here, the Rosenwald School.
TC: Well now did your mom ever finish high school, do you know?
NM: No, I don’t think so. I didn’t hear her say anything about that I don’t believe.
TC: Did you hear her talk about, and I may have asked you before, what was it like to teach those kids after she had finished the seventh grade as a teacher?

NM: Oh, she loved it.

TC: She liked it?

NM: Oh, yes, she did. She said she had so much fun and they had so much fun.

TC: Together?

NM: Yeah, together like that.

TC: Now was another teacher there also at the school?

NM: Yes.

TC: There were two of them?

NM: Two there at the time.

TC: Now do you know if the other teacher had finished high school or not, you don’t know, or college?

NM: No, I don’t know. I don’t know.

TC: Okay so then you went to Booker T. Washington High School for one year and do you want to tell something about what it was like to go to Booker T. Washington for that one year?

NM: Yes, I can tell that. I didn’t like it too well but I went on anyway.

TC: You didn’t like it I guess for one reason you didn’t really know the students.

NM: No, I didn’t know the students. Of course, I made friends out there. Saw one not too long ago. Not but a few of us left around.

TC: Now do you remember some of your teachers at Booker T. Washington High?

NM: I remember them but I forgot their names.

TC: Miss Adams, she wasn’t there at that time?

NM: Yes, Miss Adams was there.

TC: She was teaching?

NM: Yeah, I believe she taught home ec I believe.

TC: Fannie Phelps Adams.

NM: Fannie Phelps Adams. I don’t think she taught me though because it was another Home Ec teacher too and she’s the one that taught me.

TC: She was there when I finished Allen in ’63 and she was there when I was there.

NM: She was there a long time.

TC: Yeah, she was there. For some reason I don’t remember seeing her. There was one lady I remember seeing and I think I told you before and that was Miss Margaret Walker. You know her and I remember her.
NM: I know of her.
TC: Let’s see, Rutherford, he wasn’t your principal, was he your principal?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: Mr. Rutherford, he was principal when I was there.
NM: He was?
TC: Uh-huh. It could have been his son. Your principal could have been the grandfather or something, I’m not sure, you understand?
NM: He was too old to be.
TC: The Rutherford that I knew must have been his father.
NM: Could have been.
TC: Yeah. And then after finishing Booker T. Washington High School you went to Allen University?
NM: Well, first I didn’t. I was out for a year, I worked, and then the next year I went to Allen University.
TC: I see. Now if I may ask were you out specifically for that one year for the purpose of making money to go to college?
NM: Exactly.
TC: I see.
NM: That’s what it was for.
TC: And I’m sure your parents did their best to help.
NM: Yeah, they did their best. They planted sweet potatoes and corn and cotton and stuff and they made it.
TC: Yeah, I see, near the Pine Grove School, in that general area or away, where the farm was?
NM: I’m sitting in the middle of Mother’s potato patch right now.
TC: Really? And all out through that area there was corn and so forth I guess?
NM: Yes, but our crops didn’t go any further. You see where my car is parked right there?
TC: Yeah.
NM: My daddy gave them this road to go up to the church up there.
TC: Oh, really? So your father provided the land for the road to be built up to the church?
NM: Yeah and so when they built the bigger church, not the one we’re in now, but that first one they built the church around all kinds of ways.
TC: I guess the first church was probably wood.
NM: Yes.
TC: The one that you knew first.
NM: Right, it was.

TC: I see. Now if we may go back, excuse me, to the Allen experience. What was it like? What were some of your experiences at Allen?

NM: Well, you know, I liked Allen.

TC: May I ask what were some reasons you liked Allen?

NM: Well, I don’t know. It was more people there I knew than it was at Booker Washington when I went there. But anyway, I liked the courses. I was taking home ec there also and when they got down to farming and all that kind of stuff.

TC: You wanted nothing to do with that?

NM: No, I didn’t.

TC: You’d already had enough.

NM: I’d had enough of that. (Laughter)

TC: Now with reference to getting down to farming, as you say, what were you expected to do?

NM: We had to take a course in horticulture and that’s what I didn’t like.

TC: You didn’t like that?

NM: No. Of course, that’s not why I quit.

TC: I know but the horticulture part you didn’t like, there they were talking about I guess names of plants and how to root them and how to grow them.

NM: How to grow them, yeah. I didn’t like getting out there digging. I had to stay out. I’d done enough of that.

TC: So you actually had to have plants?

NM: Yeah. When I took home ec we had to go over to the practice house as they called it.

TC: That was near the [St. Martin De Porres], Catholic school the practice house I believe.

NM: Yeah.

TC: Behind, I don’t know whether Reed Hall had been built. Reed Hall was built in 1941 or ’47.

NM: It was something like that.

TC: You lived in that dormitory on the corner of Pine and Hampton?

NM: No, I lived at home.

TC: Oh, you didn’t live on campus?

NM: I didn’t live on campus and for a while when I was going there that first year, Dr. Pride was there and he wanted somebody to come out there and stay with him and take his little boy to school, you know, take him to school every morning.

TC: His name was Pride?
NM: Yeah. You know Dr. Pride, don’t you?
TC: No, I never knew him. Now they had an area where they grew the plants and I guess they planted.
NM: Yeah, it was close to the practice house somewhere. It wasn’t no great big place. It was a practice place where people could plant.
TC: Maybe like half an acre or less than half an acre, quarter of an acre?
NM: It was about, might have been a fourth of an acre.
TC: I see. It wasn’t a large area. But anyway, you didn’t like that.
NM: No, I didn’t like that, never did like that.
TC: Okay, how about the other courses you took?
NM: They were fine. No, not all. Uh-huh because I had to take chemistry and I didn’t like that either.
TC: Do you remember the name of your chemistry teacher?
NM: Miss Nelson. (Laughter)
TC: Oh, my. I see.
NM: I can see her now.
TC: Did you have to go by Fitzpatrick?
NM: No. I knew him but he didn’t teach.
TC: He didn’t teach me anything, I see. I think you told me eventually you were not able to finish home ec at Allen.
NM: No, I didn’t finish.
TC: I see. You were there for about two years?
NM: Yeah, I was there two years.
TC: Now were you in the teacher preparation program? Did you have to take some education courses?
NM: Oh, yeah, regular courses, you know, English and math and all the stuff like that.
TC: So you did have to do one or two education courses?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: I see. Now Dr. Swenson, was she there when you, Sylvia Swenson?
NM: The one that taught?
TC: Elementary.
NM: Elementary. I don’t think so.
TC: She may have been in graduate school or something.
NM: I don’t think she was there then.

TC: Her husband a little short man, Mr. Swenson.

NM: I know him.

TC: *(unintelligible)* Tony.

NM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TC: Was he coaching football at that time or do you remember?

NM: You know, I don’t know.

TC: Did he bring the students to the auditorium and have a pep rally and things like that? Do you remember? You don’t recall that?

NM: Well, now when I first went there all the freshman had to, you know how they used to go to the fairgrounds and have these games and things? We had to march on the field once.

TC: Did you?

NM: Yes and we had to form Allen.

TC: Oh, Allen University?

NM: Uh-huh.

TC: The freshman did?

NM: Yeah, got all the freshmen and I think they got a few more to go with us.

TC: Now the fair that you’re talking about at that time, that was the state fair, the black state fair?

NM: Right, right.

TC: I just realized there was a black state fair and a white state fair two or three years ago. I guess we never came. Obviously we didn’t come to the state fair but there was a black state fair. Okay, do you have anything else you’d like to say about the elementary level or being at Pine Grove School or Harbison at this time, anything you’d like to say that we haven’t said thus far, maybe something about the teachers in general?

NM: Well, I remember when I was in Harbison we used to, we had to take a foreign language so I took French. I didn’t learn that much in it though but I took it. I took the course and we had a teacher and he died. He lived a long time. He was in his nineties too when he died not too long ago. And used to call him *(unintelligible).* That was a French word.

*(Laughter)*

TC: For what?

NM: I don’t know. I don’t know what it was but everybody called him *(unintelligible).*

TC: I see. And you don’t know what it meant?

NM: No, I didn’t know what it meant.

TC: It could have been something bad.
NM:  *(Laughter)*

TC:  But he didn’t hear you call him that?

NM:  Oh, yeah.  We just called him that.

TC:  Oh, it was in a positive way then.

NM:  Yeah.

TC:  Wasn’t negative.

NM:  Yeah.

TC:  And did you have science at Harbison?

NM:  Biology.

TC:  You had biology?

NM:  Yes.

TC:  I see.  And then when you got to Allen you had chemistry under Miss Nelson.

NM:  I think she had something to do with me not liking that.  *(Laughter)*

TC:  Not liking chemistry?

NM:  Yeah, chemistry.

TC:  Yeah, I had her too and we’ll leave it at that.

NM:  Yeah, we’ll leave it at that.

TC:  Now what was the choir like at Allen when you were there?

NM:  The choir was pretty good.  Yeah, it was pretty good.

TC:  Who was the choir director, do you recall?  Was it Mr. Hunter, John Hunter?

NM:  Yes.

TC:  John Wesley Hunter.

NM:  He was there a long time.

TC:  Yeah and there was another man I think his name was Pride, Price.  Price, that was later on maybe after your time probably.

NM:  I know that Hunter was there.

TC:  Now at Harbison did they have sports, Harbison Junior College?

NM:  Of course, they did and I went out there said I was going to play basketball and I went out to practice that day and that girl knocked me down on the floor.  *(Laughter)*

TC:  And that was it?

NM:  I stopped.

TC:  That was the last day?

NM:  Uh-huh.
TC: You didn’t go back?
NM: No, I didn’t go back.
TC: I see.
NM: I didn’t really want to play that bad but I went maybe just to get outside or something like that.
TC: One thing I was asking you about what were the teachers like.
NM: At Harbison?
TC: Actually elementary all the way through college. One thing that people often say is about how dedicated they were and concerned as a whole about the students and they wanted them to learn.
NM: Well, yeah. It seemed that way mostly at Harbison to me. They did seem like they were dedicated and you know just worked with the children if they thought they didn’t know anything that much.
TC: Yeah and they gave them a lot of encouragement.
NM: Yeah.
TC: Along with a lot of discipline.
NM: Right. I think I liked Harbison better than any of them.
TC: Did you?
NM: I believe I did.
TC: Yeah.
NM: That was good down there at the elementary school. It was fine.
TC: But that chemistry wasn’t so good for you?
NM: No.
TC: Miss Nelson, it’s a long story, as you know, with reference to and we all have our personalities.
NM: Right, right, right.
TC: Okay, Mrs. Mills, if you don’t have any additional questions or maybe comments.
NM: Well, let’s see. I did like the choir at Harbison. They had a good choir.
TC: They had a good choir?
NM: Yeah. I used to like to hear Miss Porter sing.
TC: Uh-huh, she sang well?
NM: She did. It sounded good to me.
TC: Was she the choir director?
NM: No. That was the president’s wife.
TC: What was her name?
NM: Porter.
TC: Porter was the name of the president when you were there?
NM: Uh-huh, Dr. Porter.
TC: And you graduated from high school what year?
NM: Nineteen forty-two.
TC: Forty-two?
NM: Uh-huh.
TC: I don’t know when Harbison closed but after ’42. It closed sometime after ’42.
NM: Yeah, it closed after that but I was at Booker Washington when I graduated.
TC: I see. Okay, well I have certainly learned a lot today about what it was like for you in elementary school and then going on to Harbison School. Sometimes they say Harbison Junior College, and then to Allen.
NM: It became junior college after it got burned down.
TC: I see. So after it was rebuilt?
NM: After it was rebuilt.
TC: Became junior college?
NM: Junior college and then you could stay on campus I think.
TC: Dormitories?
NM: Dormitories.
TC: It was church supported?
NM: Presbyterian church.
TC: I see. So it was a Presbyterian school?
NM: Yeah.
TC: I see.
NM: It was a white man that started that school.
TC: For the black kids.
NM: For the black kids.
TC: I see. Okay, well I certainly have enjoyed it and you have given me a lot of information about what it was like and one thing that really interested me was the black school that was built by the church and your mother teaching there after finishing the seventh grade and using part of the wall painted in black paint as the blackboard. That was unique.

End of interview