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# Interview with Eva Carmen Rearding Her Life (FA 154)

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**Folklife Archives Project 154 – A Generation Remembers, 1900-1949**

Interview with Eva Carmen (CT 7)

TAPE1, SIDE1

EVA CARMEN: Born, just about 1986?

CHRISTOPHER CAREY: No, I was, I was saying that's what this year is.

EC: Oh.

CC: You were born in 1884.

EC: '84?

CC: Mm hm.

?: That's right.

EC: Well, you can go up to the house. I, I've done about, I haven't done anything done here.

?: She says it's, this is alright down here, if you wanted to,

CC: Mm hm.

?: Take you a little while to walk back.

EC: I started out and left my cane.

?: What did you want her to do?

CC: Okay, well, if you could just go over for me now, where you were born and,

?: Momma, do you hear him?

EC: No. I was born, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1884, at a place they called the Dogwoods. That's real close to where we, about Louisville. I don't know whether you know where Louisville is or not.

CC: Mm.

EC: ?? that's why they called it Dogwood. They call it Rosetta now. I don't know why they had an occasion to change the name but that's what they called Rosetta. And I was very young age before I can remember anything. We moved to Hudsonville, my parents did. Therefore, I don't know anything about, Dogwood. 'Course I was, very young when, when my parents moved. And we lived there for several years. There was no school there, and neither was there any at Dogwood. At that time there was no school for my people. There's white schools, but no black. We lived there quite some time 'til, until I was, able to, realize that, I was

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missing, what I should have in life, and that wasn't, be a part time education anyways, uh, uh, what'd you call the education at that time. Learn how to read and write anyway. And so my, my father tried to make arrangements for uh, we, we children wanted to go to school. There were several of us at that time. Ten sisters and brothers, and we didn't have any schools. Had to, lived on the old farm. It was left to colored people, slave people. That's where we lived. Very poor, place and, nearly, and I always had to help in the fields and we got old enough, to make a living, so, and I got to where I wanted to, get, feel, I felt like I ought to have something that, or some way so I get 'er, out of the people, I couldn't read nor write, so I wanted to go to school, and, my uncle came and took me to Hartford with 'em. That was my mother's uncle, took me to Hartford. He took me. That's where I learned, to read and write. And that was in my early days.

CC: There was a school there for black people?

EC: At Hartford, yeah. Yeah, I don't know how they got, the school there, but, I think in different places, the parents, with the help of the superintendent, would uh, have a little log cabin where they could send children to school, you know. I don't whether it was a public school or whether the parents was tryin' to pay it. And some of the white people would just, send a few for 'em, and would let 'em have a school. Anyhow that, we had a school at Hartford, and that's where I learned, to read and write.

CC: Uh, about how old were you when you went to Hartford?

EC: I musta been about eight or nine years old, seems like that, 'cause I can remember that. About eight or nine years old. And then from that I got to workin' where I could make a quarter a week, or, even, I believe I got fifty cents for it.

CC: Doing what sort of things?

EC: Mm?

CC: What kind of work were you doing?

EC: Oh, just ordinary house work. Washing dishes 'n, whatever the mistress of the house wanted me to do. And the, mm, I got placed in the house so I, that they could learn that I was willin' to try to do most anything. My mother, was a woman that didn't have any, any book learnin', but she was, well fit just for ordinary work, and she taught me how to do a lot of things in her way. And her work was always in big demand. She, got, from her, I guess, she got, where I got my longing, to be somebody. Because she couldn't read and write her name. She didn't read. I don't guess she ever did go to school. She could copy it, copy her name, but so far as learnin' your letters and, she didn't. She was a ignorant woman. But other, otherwise, she was good. When I, comin' from a, when I comin' away from Hartford, my father made arrangements with this, with the uh, the county superintendent, for us to go school. He wanted a school down

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where we lived at Hudsonville, but there wasn't enough black children, to uh, maintain a school. So, we moved from there to Irvington, where we could have a school. It was a school at that time, near there, black people, or, I just don't know what he had or anything like that when it was established, but that's where, where I went to, where I got to go to school. And I would work for people, white people, during school hours, lots of times I would go up, noon washin' dishes. Maybe we get to eat something and we could work. As I said there was a great many, sisters and brothers and that, that meant a whole lot to me to help to feed them. Meant more than any amount of money did. So I was glad to get to help. And then from there I, kinda, some, folks in Louisville that, what they had been used to school and they, got me to come to Louisville and work, and from there, I got to save a little money to, get out of the, to Frankfort, for school. If I had, gone to school in the elementary school. And then I went to Frankfort, for a while, and I was always, very studious 'cause I knew that's what it would took, if I ever got anywhere. I tried to, master what I, that was before my children, that is I tried to take advantage of every opportunity I could. 'Course somehow or another, there was just something taught me that that's what I had to do if I done anything. I don't know what you, what you call it now. So I went, I was big enough, uh, I don't know, I guess I about, thirteen years old, maybe twelve or thirteen at that time. And I got up and this cousin of mine, in Louisville, picked me up to town where she thought I could get a job. Up at Stuart Avenue at that time, I don't know what it is now. {Chuckles} But he kept a meat shop, and, when he, she told me to, she told her man that, I was lookin' for a job, and I was tryin' to go school, and I, so, he said, "Well, I'll take her inside. Go see what my wife says, but she looks mighty young, to be able to work." So I went home with him, and, he told his wife that I was, a young girl from the country, and wanted to do all I could work to finally go to school. And she questioned me a good deal, and asked me if I had ever worked for everybody in Irvington, and I told her where I lived. And she said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you, take you for the night, and you give me the name of the woman, that you last worked for, so I can call her and ask her,"

?: Were you scared that you're going to talk to her.

EC: "Ask her uh, about your work." So the next morning, she said, after I got up from, at the proper time, and went down to work, work along with her, while she's cookin' the meal in the morning, mornin' meal, and she said, "Eva, I don't, you don't have to bother with Miss Pickett." I told her Miss Pickett was the woman that I, worked for last. She said, "I said, you gonna suit me all too well." She said, "How much have you been gettin'?" And I told her, "The highest I ever got, was three dollars a week," and she's says, "Well, I'm gonna give you four dollars a week, and you can stay. If we can get along and you stay here, 'til school time." I told her, I, so, I stayed there 'til, school time, about school time, and she uh, knew when it was time for me to go school, school again at Frankfort, and she, they had what they called surreys at that time. I don't know whether you what a surrey is or not? You hitch horses to it. It was a little bit better than a buggy, I reckon. {Chuckles} If you know what a buggy is? And she, she had a house man that, had a man, a black man that tend to the horses and things, and she had 'em fix

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that, surrey up and hitch them horses to it, and, had two horses, and took me downtown and bought me some clothes to go school. And I came back to Irvington. That's how, and, but she says, "If you can three dollars a week, I'll give you four dollars, and help you all I can, when you go to school. You say you have to have a sun bonnet." So that's the way I got a education.

CC: Now, eventually you came back, uh, and were teaching,

EC: Here.

CC: Here at Hogback, you said?

EC: Yeah, Hogback.

CC: What exactly was Hogback?

EC: Huh, uh, what'd you say?

CC: Now, what was, what was Hogback? Was that just a small community, or?

EC: It was a place with a little log cabin, and grave, a graveyard. I guess where they buried the, black people when, during slavery time. Which was a graveyard all around. And woods all around. Lots of times when I was, called myself teacher, I'd have to take a boy and go and get uh, sticks and, the next day when it was cold, the sticks and the, men of the community was supposed to, keep wood and stuff to keep us comfortable in the school. Just, didn't always have it, after it burned a while when it's cold, those, same thing now if you ain't got a good supply. {Chuckles} So I depended on my boys, and we'd go out and get, and get the stick 'n wood. Didn't have that many large boys 'cause, because when uh, the weather was good they had to work, but if it was raining, they could come to school. Young men, you might say.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: Some of 'em uh, was almost as old as I was, but they didn't know anything. Had

CC: How old, how old were you then?

EC: I didn't hear it.

CC: How old were you,

EC: Seven-

CC: When you started teaching.

EC: Teen. Seventeen.

CC: So that would have been right about the turn of the century, about 1901?

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EC: Mm hm, mm, yeah. That's when I stopped. Got to go into Frankfort. Then when I got to Frankfort, you know, I had to find me a place to sleep and stay. A home, and I happen to get in with a woman, mm, thought she had a big job 'cause she, did, Chairman of washing, you know? {Chuckles} That was the job she had, you know, the job was in government,

CC: Mm hm. {Siren goes off in background}

EC: About that time. So, that was her job. And I'd come home, a lot of times and she'd have a lot of, uh, work to do, and you have napkins, and, short pieces to iron. I'd come home at twelve, from, the college, they called it then. Wasn't nothin' but a high school. I'd come home and iron, napkins and handkerchiefs, and things. Now that's the way I got, my uh, uh, knowledge of what I had. There was very little bit. I always happy to get it. And that was, about 19n01 or '02 or, '03, '02 and '03. I married in '06. Met my husband. He was Ned Carmen. I've left out a whole lot. I can't tell you all of it.

CC: What was life like uh, right at the turn of the century?

EC: What was what?

CC: What was life like right around the turn of the century?

EC: Oh, I didn't, I couldn't tell you of anything that was, uplifting to a person, you know, that would give you any heart to live except, I was tryin' to get, enough education, to get me a job so that I could help my people. This was my idea. I wanted to help my people, get out of the rut, where they didn't know, they could, they couldn't read, they couldn't write, and I wanted to able to be help them, to get of that rut. That was my ambition from the time I understood anything. Even now, what little I can do, and, with the opportunities now, it grieves me a lot of times to see them take such a little interest. I'm talkin' about Eva Carmen's people.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: Because your people was always outstanding, at that time, and the only, and they all lived well, as far as that concerned.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: So, that, that's, that was my ambition. You know, I just worked from there. I've had more life since I been, I've enjoyed life just bein' leisure, since I been hurt this time, than I ever did in my life, 'cause I raised a large family.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: Well, I had, it was seven that I mothered, and I had them children, I had them. 'Course I had my husband was healthy, but there was no money in sitting, that he could get ahold of. That, that I could be satisfied with. Just sittin' in the house, and doin' what I should have

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done as a mother and wife, 'cause I always had to help. You know, I've been, I have enjoyed though, I'm, I'm, I'm happy to know, that, I had as much of an opportunity as I did have. There were so many of my, you know, women that, of my age at that time, that just didn't apply themselves. They couldn't see, where that would benefit them, with the circumstances that was around. They just thought they had to, just go ahead and do what the white people said, and always be a slave, I reckon, that's the way it appeared. But, I didn't have that kind of determination. I was determined to do something, or else do nothing, just quit. That has always been my, nothing got too hard for me to try to do. That's what I tried. I'd try, whether I could do it or not. If I couldn't do it, I'd have to stop. {Chuckles} So, there wudn't very much pleasure, at that time, for a person who wanted to get out of the condition that, we were in, 'course I had to be always wonderin' what, to do, for the best thing next. Now then, that's what I, I was teachin', called it teachin' would be nothin' now, I guess, the way they teach now but, lots of times when I'd be workin' for the white people, I'd, write my spellin' off at night, 'n tack it up, where I'd have to wash the dishes, where I could get one word at a time. One word. One word, learn it, and I'd go ahead and do another. I'd learn my lesson at the house, we'd have to have. Let's move in the shade.

??: {Chuckles} I thought maybe you all would

EC: Move in the shade. Move up.

CC: Oh, okay. {Sounds of moving around}

EC: This is farther than I've walked this morning.

CC: You were, you were talking about the conditions of the time, for you, for black people. What were those conditions?

EC: Well, the condition was bad enough, I thought. They had no, they had to live in, uh, log cabins or wherever the white people had, had fixed for 'em to live, and they, had to do what the white man said. They had no, say so over their children, and uh, it just, so bad I can't, couldn't tell it. They didn't have uh, they couldn't say what they wanted to do, 'til they asked Miss Jane, or whatever the lady of the house was at, that was, that's what I, uh, worried about. I didn't have no say so over myself. I mean that, I wudn't no slave, understand, I never was a slave for the white people, but my grandmother told my mother what I knew about her, she told me, I never told.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: And my mother was no slave, but my grandmother, and grandmother raised my mother, you see, and she had to tell her, that. My grandmother had to work in the field, then, finally, when my mother arrived, why, 'course, it, {Chuckles} it was sayin' people have a right to do what they, want to do, but everybody at that time didn't have the right, at that time. I

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know, with the black women, if they had a master, they could do what they want to do with them. You understand what I mean?

CC: Mm hm, mm hm.

EC: And that's how my mother got here. And how, how, my mother, Sarah, her name was Sarah Duncan, and her master was, I can't think what his first name was, but I don't, I don't recall his name, but life was very, horrible at the time. You know, when I was born, and no one was to be in my shield, nobody, so that's the reason I said I've had the, happiest days of, oh, to just be, to know that I could live without workin', since I been sick here. My daughter was with me. 'Course I, was in the hospital then. First time I ever was in a hospital. I had seven children and never went in the hospital for any of 'em.

CC: Mm.

EC: Midwife was a white woman from here. Old white woman. So, my mother, {Chuckles} took up to work of a, bein' a midwife. She would watch the old white woman, whatever she did, and so, she was considered a pretty good, midwife, my mother.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: And when she died, they laid it on me. {Chuckles} I delivered, oh, how many children here in this community. I never had a lesson though in my life, see, along that line, only what mother told me. So I got my little kit up. {Chuckles} But they'd call on me any time of night. I was right, right there deliverin' babies. Five dollars, and some of them, some of them babies I delivered then, their daddies owe me fer. {Chuckles} I did it for five dollars a delivery, and medicine, and dressed the mother and baby every day for nine days after the baby was born.

CC: Now, how old were you when you were doin' that?

EC: Oh, let's see, I said I was seventeen, I was about eighteen years old. Eighteen, when I started. I didn't have so much do then, but I would watch my mother with 'em. That's where I got, my idea, 'course she, died, that I might be able to do what she had done. And bein' in the, the community where there a lot of black people, 'n babies bein' born pretty rapidly. {Chuckles} You see that there, there are somebody who did some.

CC: When did she die?

EC: '49. 1949. My father died in the spring of '49 and she died in the fall, the fall of, both of 'em died in '49.

CC: So you were a midwife from, about, eighteen, when you, when you were eighteen, you started working with your mother?

EC: Grown.

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CC: Most of the babies you delivered, when did you do that?

EC: How many?

CC: Well, when you were delivering them, what years were those?

EC: Oh.

CC: What decades?

EC: That was along, along, let's see now, I believe where I was trying to teach. In 1917 and '18, about that I would think.

CC: Okay. You taught on and off,

EC: Yeah.

CC: I guess, until about the '40s when you were having children.

EC: That's right, the '40s, the, in 1940 I taught my last school. Oh, I substituted a lot. Taught the last one, I taught, on the, I remember one time, I, you had to make a reports every month. I didn't know how to make my report, so I went to, one of the ladies that, assisted the Superintendent, and she says, "Well, I don't know exactly, {Chuckles} how to make it. You ask, Leonard Miller. He'll tell you. That's one of the black teachers." {Chuckles} So you see, she didn't know how what it took, all together, but, she was in that position. She was the Assistant Superintendent. And I didn't exactly know how to make my report, 'cause I had, hadn't made any. But I got over it. The Superintendent of the schools, all of 'em, seemed to think, that when, with my ambitions that I had, desire to go far, that I someday would succeed. Always had the good will of them. He was willing to help me, because they could see that I wanted to be. So that's the way I got, that's just part of the story.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: That's what I call it.

CC: Now, your husband, what did he do, for a living?

EC: Ordinary work. He worked at this, rock quarry here for a long time. Just, odd jobs, in the fields, sawmill, or anywhere he could work, to make fifty cents a day. And I expect, when he, made, sometimes he didn't have that much to do, but you always had that little ol', if you didn't have a farmer, that you could work for people, the white people, out in the yard for the, fifty cents. But it was so much made on the farm, for you to live on it.

CC: Mm hm.

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EC: That'd you have to pay dear for, for now. Cows and horses, hogs, chickens, had everything like that. Had, poor enough houses, log cabin, but you had the meat house out there, and every year you'd meat in it, you see. Molasses, everything what you could raise on a farm. So, we lived, we had plenty to eat, nothing about starvation. There might be if the people had to live on then what we lived on, uh, I mean, now what we lived on then, now, 'course they have, different stuff to eat. {Chuckles} That's what they think, but I'll tell 'em, I know better than that, 'cause I lived on soup a long time. {Chuckles}

CC: Day after day, huh?

EC: Oh my goodness.

CC: What did black do for, for diversions, entertainment?

EC: Well, now, I told somebody that they, they didn't think of anything but, I remember when they used to have play parties. Now, I don't know whether I can explain this. Throw your partners and have a dance you know? And you'd, when you'd talk about a play party, everybody was, ready to go to a play party. And they had meetings, cake meetings, outdoors. Brush arbor meetings. I know when I taught down here to Webster. You know where Webster is? Down, down in there?

CC: Mm hm.

EC: When I, when, when I taught I, in the fall of the year, I had me brush arbor meeting and had the preacher come and we had a big meeting, big meeting in that day. Under that brush arbor. Logs for 'em to sit on. Pillows under 'em, and the people could, that, if they lived there now, could bring a chair or a seat or whatever they want. And we had preachin'. And various things like that we would have and that would make 'em, nothing educational, that's what, what's where we failed. 'Cause, I believe the saying, at that time didn't, if you want, keep a black man, where he would serve ya. Don't educate him, don't, don't, did you ever hear a saying like that?

CC: I think I've heard something like that.

EC: Something like it? When you get, when you get to educated at that time, or, don't have 'em be educated, just got to know, have some book learnin', you, he's being unfitted for a slave. He wants something else. Naturally, you know?

CC: Mm.

EC: If I, if I'm gettin' out of a subject you're gettin' out of, I want some of that, too. And, took the, took the black man a long time, I guess, to know, after he had to handle that hoe so long, to know that he could ever become anything, but finally they got to knowin' that, every

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man's created the same. I studied on that so much, every man or woman in the, created alike, and what you long to have, I do, too. I long. Not all of my

END TAPE1, SIDE1

TAPE1, SIDE2

EC: here, they call it Lincoln Leadership Training School. And Mr. Tobin's wife up, that I spoke of awhile ago, was one of the women that was in Irvington that, seen that I got to go. She and another lady, Miss P-, Miss Picket. There's a lot of the white ladies helped, but they were the main ones. And, uh, I would, they'd send me to Frankfort, where they had ladies there and, to train and, people to speak, on things for the black that would be an incentive, I think, to go farther. Every year, we had that school, and then most of the white people, well the, the, the white people that supported me then, a lot of 'em, have passed on. This, I told you, Miss Picket's gone, and Mr. Tobin's wife is gone, but Tobin is here. know when, uh, one year I went, when I came back they, had me to come to their home, the Tobins, and had a little, just a get-together for any of the white people that wanted to come, but all of then, all of the colored people who were, the black people, were invited, that wanted to come, and Mr. Tobin was at ??, used to make, {Chuckles} huh, ice cream in these old freezers, and he helped to make that ice cream, {Chuckles} and now he's the leading man in town, now, he's the man that, he owns I don't know how many banks, a bank here and bank in, bank in Hamburg, and bank in Louisville. That's his last bank he bought was in Louisville, but he's livin' it. He knows about this, so, if I could, I've always shown respect to him, as far as they could, because they let me go to school, long before the law was passed that I had, that privilege, but any other thing they, were very nice to me.

CC: Um, after the turn of the century, there was a lot of technological advances in farming, and the automobile appeared, all those sorts of things. How did that affect you?

EC: Well, some of those things, I didn't think that ever I would be able, to ob-, to uh, put in uh, or to own, to own, because I had so much, little things here to straighten up before I could reach the, now people can, fix that you know, you know what I mean. I had too many little things, that I had to reach before I could, was able, to uh, own these things that, these kind of auto-, automobile and things like that. But I did want to own a home. That's the first thing I, I uh, just strove to do. I was striding to get me a home. Here, I've always owned a home, ever' since, well, not before I married, but, after I married but, after I married when we bought this little ol' house here.

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CC: This one?

EC: Mm. That's the first home I ever owned. This little ol', my children, the first child wasn't born here. The second child was born at the crusher down here. That's where my husband worked, and they just had little shacks. Little shacks built to accommodate the men, you know, that worked. Of course, they were bad, married it, {Chuckles} you knew before you married him, you was gonna to live in a shack. So I had to go there and live, and I thought I was doomed to nothin' then. I didn't think about that, when the man was comin' to see me, but I thought about it afterwards. Movin' in a shack, and two or three of my children were born in the shack. And my husband, had to go to Webster, wasn't no telephone, you know, I mean near, he had to walk to Webster to get a doctor. First he'd walk to Irvington, the uh, the uh, place where my husband worked was about a mile or two from, the place where we lived. He had to come 'bout a mile, from where we lived to Irvington to get my mother to stay with me, him, while he'd go to Webster and get the doctor. That's when the, first child was born and we moved to Webster. In a little old shack, and they had one place, one that had two rooms to it, one to cook in and one to sleep. So, you can figure from what I, told you that I've had a pretty, a pretty tough, but I'm thankful that, something told me to stick with it. That was hard it was hard to, just like havin' a religion, I guess, it was. It wudn't always, good when ya, sometimes I had to take a lot but, didn't nobody know but me and the Lord. White boys 'n girls sometimes tryin' to make, they said to make fun, I tell 'em I never did have nobody make fun of me. {Chuckles} I guess I have, but I paid such little attention. If ever I had anybody make fun of me, I don't know. I don't know, of any, I couldn't take of the white boys or girls, the opportunities, I knew how far I, I could go, and I tried to maybe grit away all this sorrow I did know. I tried to put it just, to good use, so that's a just part of my life, part of.

CC: What were some of the more important local events that you remember, from the first half of the century?

EC: Well, the most thing, is just going to church, getting ready to go to church on Sunday, and the rest of the time workin' the field. Goin' to church until I got that idea that I was gonna try to go to school. Just ordinarily that's all we had, what you had. You go in to church or to prayer meeting or whatever the religious activities were carried on. I don't know whether any church did that or the homes of people, just like a church that I remember, when they used to call 'em prayer meeting in a home, in the home, they bundled up pieces laying down here from a man in Webster, and he started up with the public churches, and built a cabin, the first Methodist Church. I well remember that. But, I'm just so happy, at this age, to know that I just went on regardless, of what I had to go through. I could have given up, very easily, but I didn't. I just had an idea that I could make it through.

CC: Were you hurt by the Depression at all, or were things, already, hard enough for black people that that really didn't matter?

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EC: Well, I, some day, that's when the ration things were rationed. Is that what you're talkin' about?

CC: Well, it's, it's, when times were really hard, businesses were bad.

EC: Mm hm. Yes, I couldn't, you know, at that time there wasn't any, work for black people. You had to take, put up with, a little bit of whatever you could to get to live because you couldn't reach everything, you wanted, or that you should have had. But I still thought that some day the world would open. That's what my mother, always said, "Just hold out. Someday the world be open." And she died, she, she passed before, all this, that I can enjoy now if I had my health. She passed before she could see me, enjoy, so much of it. But, as I said, in some way, the Lord provided for me to get where I am now, and I'm 'bout ready, ready to quit now. {Chuckles} I just, can't, lie in bed at night, and think of so many things, that I could do if I was just was able, I mean, physically able to, and, educationally, too, because what I call ed-, what was called education in my day, would be different, well much, much more than high school.

CC: What sort of things were you taught?

EC: Mm?

CC: What sort of things were you taught?

EC: Oh, you, you mean what subjects?

CC: Right, and,

EC: Just, just same as anybody else, or not as many. We had arithmetic and reading, spellin'. That's what I tried to teach 'em when, when I started in teaching, as little as I knew about them. I taught the best I could. I guess it was a little better than nothin'. {Both chuckle} I, seem to think it was, and the older people at that time looked like they appreciated it, the effort that I tried to do, every effort I tried to, to engage in, they thought it was all right. And they looked up to me as their leader, you see, when I wasn't much more than, a student just startin' now. That's what you would be considered now, what I knew then, I'm young. Being places like Irvington, and I don't know what we'd do to hear, uh, to cause the people to have more, uh, love for living the right life. I guess that, that's the best, best I can put it. For havin' more, uh, ambition, to go forward, and do what everybody else is doing, what, now, the newspaper, we don't have uh, newspaper here in this town, not a black newspaper. When we get any news, we got to take the white, {Car goes by} paper, and how much do you think, news, how much would be a, a black paper be to you, if you just picked it up and you just read what the blacks did. Would that be very interesting?

CC: It might be interesting but it might not connect with my life.

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EC: Oh, excuse me. Well, now that's uh, that's what people, what it is, here now. All such as that, just car-, carried on by the white people. {Car goes by} How long have you lived in this, county?

CC: I've lived in Kentucky three years.

EC: Three years. Where'd you come from, hon?

CC: From Iowa.

EC: Well, if I don't know how I use it all, but, I do know, now all we, we're consider, citizens now, my people are. When you see a face like mine, we're considered citizens, but now you go down to where the laws are made, for the town people, and see how many, faces you see like mine, in the office. Wouldn't that kind of discourage you? I left my paper back in the house. {Both chuckle} I have to stew 'bout, get a few things, now that's what I tell the, the uh, officials, of this county. You ought to have some black people around there, to help make the laws. We got to live by 'em, we've got to pay taxes, that's the kind of thoughts I have at night and days when I, able to think.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: Are we getting our just, just rights now. Uh, do you think, do you think, just your honest opinion, we're citizens, we pay taxes. Sometimes, we maybe take the last thing to pay taxes but we're gonna pay it, or there are some that don't, some of that, hard earned, hard worked, uh, land go, but there are some among our people who, pay these taxes, everything, but when you go where the laws are made, you don't see a black person, and I'm not satisfied. It's not always the white people's fault, all together, because, I worked hard here one year to get, a man on, a black man on the Board of Education, and he just sat still until about the time, that it, it was time to show up and he got up and worked in the, well, darn it, I call that his fault. That he hadn't worked, and, put the interest in it that he should have, maybe he would have, we would have had uh, black man on the Board Education, Board of, Education, but now they're gonna put a black man, all these black children, histories, of what men have done in the past. How many black, how many schools in Breckinridge County have Black, History, taught in it. Don't you think there ought to be some Black History there?

CC: Sure.

EC: Black men helped, they did the hard work but, the hard work had to be done before this easy work come on, doin', so they's the ones that, put out the hard labor, and it seem to me that they should have some recognition. I don't see nothin' wrong with what they ought to have Black History in this, in this county schools. I get to study that at night by myself. But I can't, maybe it comes to passin' now. One thing I could have done when I was younger, may be I failed to do, that was uh, spurred the, white man or whoever was at the head, to include some

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black people, and back to the newspaper, 'cause I wouldn't read it, tell me what the white boys doin' with the white girls. Nowaday I see a black face, it's in there too 'cause you. That's all you see, just white men.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: I mean, around here. But, I always thought where you live is where you ought to work to improve, where your born and where you live. Now, some say that I'm wrong in that, but I, I have yet to see why I'm wrong. If I was born and lived in a place, until I was maybe eighty three years old or older, I ought to be able to see what, I could do to help make it better. So that's the way it is, I got to own those things, to think about them, now Hardinsburg's full of blacks. {Both chuckle} I can't do anything worth-, worthwhile any more.

CC: How much um, outright racism did you experience early in your life? Was there any Klu Klux Klan activity around here or anything like that?

EC: I wouldn't be bothered with, with this, because they did say the Klu Klux were around here, but that's about the time that we organized our NAACP, in '51. I've never been bothered by, that's what I was, the only thing I'm proud of, so many towns have been bothered, you know, with the, with things like that, burnin' the, black people's houses and such, but we have never, when little things would occur, after we organized the NAACP, could, try to keep my people quiet. Don't make a big stir, make uh, go out and demonstrate like they did. Sometimes when you're quiet, all things like that, life goes better for you, so we never have had any trouble between the whites and the blacks. Down there in Hardinsburg, I think that, they hung one black man and, but that, was before, best I recall, or was just years before.

CC: People have mentioned around here the hanging of Sam Jennings, uh,

EC: Of?

CC: The hanging of Sam Jennings is, as one of the instances that sort of set blacks and whites apart. Do you remember that at all?

EC: I remembered it. I remember, they liked to, {Clears throat} they liked to, {Clears throat} horses, hang Sam Jennings. I was livin' in a house down by the, Baptist Church down in Lebanon, and the, people rode horses in. You could just see the horses, people, and a few of 'em had cars, real cars go in, and I, find out that that's what they was going to see, the hanging, see then, and the, when they was to hang, and I was a'working, I was working for the undertaker, at that time, for about three dollars a week. No, I forget now where that was, I was in his employ, and he went, and I told him I's gonna quit work 'cause, {Chuckles} 'cause he went to the hanging. He said he, well, he went to the hanging for it. He went to clean his body, 'cause he was the undertaker.

CC: Mm hm.

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EC: His body, get the money, and I don't know whether that was what he went for or not. I know he went.

CC: And what did they hang Mr. Jennings for?

EC: I think it was, concerning a white woman. I don't know whether he, for, or, some rape or somethin', they said he, they, concerning a white woman, and held him. I know one thing, {Clears throat} the, the black, community, they was uh, real. Black people, you know some of these churches now, and some of them, some of our people now, you can't tell 'em from me, you can't tell 'em from white people but they got to be black, that meant what either brother or father was a black man.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: But, if there was a, the white one, he always was in, demanded it, did no woman on that side and make a man, do her wrong. They all, when it was a wrong done, it had to first be in the male, in the, so, I said I couldn't see why that they'd have so much animosity a-, among the black people, than we did have, because, it was bound to be the white man that bested up the situation. Had you ever thought of that?

CC: Yes, I,

EC: Now, think,

CC: I didn't...

EC: Of a black woman goin' out and comparin' a white man to, to mess it up, and you know, you know what I'm goin' to mess it up?

CC: Mm hm.

EC: You don't hear that. I have never heard, but if you have, it's going on. But, the wrong comes on, whose side? If the black woman don't go out and compare a, a white man to mess her, the wrong has come on the, on the other side and I don't like it.

CC: Mm.

EC: But I'm, tryin' to say, when you got to church now, you see as many half white ones there, as you do, my color. Now, now, now, whose fault for that? When I taught my last school at, Louisville, there was, there was a little boy in there, well, he was, he was, six years old, old enough to go to school. Come to find out, they said he was a half white boy, half negro, they called him. They liked to say niggers.

CC: Mm hm.

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EC: Half white, and they didn't want him in the school with the white, all though he was half. So they brought him down and put him on us. 'Course we, we had to take him, just had to, but, I'm talkin' about, why would they would so much animosity and then for, the blacks, some of 'em, 'cause I've got good white friends, I've got good friends, you know, that are white, but some of 'em look like they think well, she's a black, or she's a nigger. They used to say, let her stay with the niggers. I'm gonna help to bring up the black folk. That's the, that's the tone of some people, the old colored, but not all of us do, you know, I've got some good white friends, scattered all over this county, and I know it, so, that'll put you in position some time, put you in you have to study long time before you can make a decision. Do what you should do.

CC: What are some other things that we haven't talked about that you want to mention?

EC: Oh, I don't know.

?: Aren't you all getting hot?

EC: {Chuckles} Huh, uh?

?: Aren't you gettin' hot?

EC: Got to move again.

?: Seems like it time to get you turned around, you're fine.

EC: Well, I don't know, uh, what, anything else, only, as I said while ago about the paper business, now, I take the, *Hardinsburg Herald*. I take the, uh, the *Chronicle*, what's the?

?: The *Pioneer* or something.

EC: The *Pioneer*, and another one, white paper, I tell ya I just got one black paper, and that's the *Louisville Defender*. Well, there's no black paper company around here. And, I know there's not very much in the white paper, that would make, a non-interested person, interested, but if you are interested, you wanta look see if they, give you any credit for anything you do. And when I get the paper every week, I gotta begin to look, and you know what I see most of the times is the ball player. Now, when it comes to these lettered jobs, you don't see very many, academic work, I think that's what they call the lettered, uh, people that are, in the community. And a lot of the ball players have, they didn't finish their work, I think the rule is that you got to keep your uh, your book work up, in order to be played.

CC: Mm hm.

EC: And some of the best ball players don't do book work. Now, whose fault is that? Is that the, ball player's fault, or whose fault is it? After a man gets, a woman gets a certain age, you ought to have, understanding and know what is best for him or what he should, thinks that best is for 'em, after you get a certain age, what do you get to, exercise that feeling that ought to

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have something in mind. I don't know whether I've answered your question or not but, it seem to me like, that's the way it ought to be. You oughta have somethin', you oughta have a goal, to work towards, for college, so uh, it seems as though as, most of 'em have, and most of 'em, and what I fault myself with, is I confine my thoughts to Irvington and community, but I shouldn't do it, 'cause, all you've got to do is go away from here, go away from Irvington and you'll find black people in good position, you know that, you see, you'll find black people in good position. But I want Irvington, I was raised here most of my life and I'd like to see it, step up. Oh, we have some, we have several, Breckinridge County that, girls that made teachers, but they went off into Indiana, and some of 'em the, I had a girl here the other week, come away, and from Mississippi, that was born right here in Irvington, and different states. But when they got the, ability to help make Irvington better, they went their way to other places. And then I say to myself sometimes, "I oughta be fair, because, when these went to other places, went to other places to work, somebody there, came in and helped us, so that would make it fair." Fair, but it seems to me like I ought to know more about whether Irvington, Irvington needs to progress more then you would go to, you just come from Oklahoma or where ever you're from. Iowa. You know more about Iowa than you would, Kentucky.

CC: One thing I forgot to ask you, you said you raised seven children, um, what was that like during those years without a lot of the modern medicine and modern conveniences and those sort of things?

EC: Mm, it was bad enough, because I had uh, desire for my children to, try to get the best education for 'em that I could. That's what you mean?

CC: Mm hm.

EC: And the, see, see that the chances were very slim that you get that time. The chances were slim 'cause, when my son graduated from high school, I wondered how I was gonna get to send him further, and you know how I get to send him further? I work, I worked politically a long time, for politicians, and this man that I worked for, told me if I'd work for him, he would give me seventy-five dollars cash, if he was elected, and surely he was elected. I took that seventy-five dollars and sent this son, to Lincoln Ridge. That's, that's how he got to go. And the rest of my daughters, after they finished high school, just went on their own, to Louisville, and then from Louisville they just scattered about from Cincinnati and Cleveland, and my second daughter, liked beauty work, and she went to Cleveland and stayed with my brother, and he send her to, St. Louis to Madame Walker's School. You've heard of it? And, from that all the other girls went in to, got on, two or three of 'em, went in with her and they formed, a cosmetic business, had a business, in Cleveland, in the beauty work. I could show you a picture of, what was that called, if I could find it, of them when they was in beauty working. And that's the way she got her ability, about my brother, my brother was a hotel man. He could get a job at a hotel, so he provided what he had to help send this girl to, Madame Walker's so that she could

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set up a place of her own. So they had uh, a shop in Cleveland, and that was, for most of them, to have a hold a little money, extra money.

CC: You said the son you sent to Lincoln Ridge, when did that happen, when you worked for the politician?

EC: That was [tape ends]

END TAPE1, SIDE2