DINO ROBINSON: We are recording now. So today is what? April 7, 2013, with Bettye Cone, right?

BETTYE CONES: Cones.

DR: Cones. Talking about and discussing Reverend Martha I. Dobbins.

BC: L.

DR: L. Dobbins.

BC: Martha Louise.

DR: Martha Louise. Beautiful. So I’ll be taking notes from time to time too, but this is meant to be a conversation so we both can learn more about what I’ve seen, and what -- you probably know more than I do from your research, but -- and that way we can clarify a lot of things that may just be anomalies. I don’t think -- as we’re talking about census data, it’s not always accurate because sometimes the enumerator will make assumptions. And that’s what I’ve seen in the past. If somebody’s not home and they go to a house, so depending where the household is, they may assume the family’s white when they’re -- actually they’re black. Or if they’re in different locations, they might not realize that they’re married. I saw earlier on in some
early 1900s census where there’s some interracial marriages, but the wife is at home and they marked her husband down as white, but her husband was working somewhere else and he was always there so they enumerated him married, but assumed that his wife was black. And I found I think two instances of that just because I was looking for something else, but I thought it was pretty interesting.

BC: That is interesting, the assumptions that people make.

DR: What kind of skin the risk would be.

BC: Exactly. (laughter)

DR: So let’s start -- kind of start at the beginning and try and go back as far as we can to try and construct something because my intent is to write an article about your grandmother and about what she did in -- within her church and interest in that. I think these profile sketches are very important because it really paints -- one, what I try and do with Shorefront is talk about the subjects that are not the obvious, and two, point out that we are a very diverse community. We’re not monolithic. We’re not all black Baptists, go straight Democratic, things of that nature. But we come from all walks of life and we believe in all different things. And I’ve come across and conversed with African Americans who are Jewish, and I’m
looking for them to write articles about things that they’re going through, or what they see, or the condition of the society in the United States. So -- and I find these things really intriguing because we have a greater population that just really paints us as one picture, and we’re not that. And I embrace all of this because I’m like, hey, I love our diversity. I love the fact that we’re all over the world. You can’t write history without us being in there, and I think just systematically we’ve been written out of history. And so I just want to establish the fact that we’re a part of all this global history. So maybe I should start with just you talking and share what you’ve come across, from beginning to where you came to.

BC: From my recollections with my grandmother, all my memories are from -- with her in the church are before my age of nine. Forgive me. What I first recall is that she had a church, and it was in the basement of her home. And she would tell me when I would ask her, she said, “If people ask you what you are, say you’re metaphysics and you believe in metaphysics.” She would talk about Professor James Payne who was her teacher, her mentor, and we go to his grave, and she would have this little statue of him. So I never really understood what she meant by metaphysics.
She just said metaphysics. But I do recall she would -- 
every Sunday, she would have service. People would come 
from Chicago, from Evanston, and there -- I would say there 
were about perhaps 20 to 25 people that would come every 
Sunday. And she would have her church set up, and then 
she would preach. And she would have things like bazaars 
where people would come. I remember the cakewalk 
specifically. Everybody would bring a cake and she’d have 
the table set. They’d walk around and then get the cake 
they want or what -- however that went. So she had social 
events like that. There were also times -- and I’m not 
sure when it connected. I’m -- maybe around Easter. I 
remember the basement. She’d have white sheets all over 
the floor and the chairs would be lined up all around the 
side of the basement, the walls, and covered with white 
sheets. And people would come in; they’d take their shoes 
off. They’d have to wear a special kind of robe. 
[00:05:00] And they would sit along in the chairs and wait 
for their turn to meet with her in their altar room. And 
I’d be there playing on the floor. But they’d come up. 
She’d have Mogen David wine and I guess that was like the 
blood of Jesus, and these little wafer things, and that 
reminded me of the Catholic church because I remember when 
I went to a funeral with her at a Catholic church, they had
the same thing. So I think that she took that from there. But they -- people would meet with her one-on-one in this little room. And I didn’t know what they did, but they’d come out and leave, and then somebody else would go in. And that happened -- I’m not sure if it was once year, or twice a year, or how often that happened, but that was just a vivid memory for me of that occurring. Another time, we had -- also had little fish. That might’ve been around the same time. I can’t remember. But what struck me was the she would borrow different things from different cultures. That’s what I recall later on, that -- from the Catholic faith, and from the Baptist church, and we would do and follow certain things. I remember she was very strict on me, not so much my sister. But I remember growing up because I was what -- I was her shadow. I’d follow her around all the time, and I remember her saying that girls couldn’t wear pants or wear nail polish if you were a child. That she was very -- I guess the word that comes to mind is -- as far as being a woman and being female, there are certain things you did and you didn’t do, and she stuck to that. What else do I recall? She -- later on as a teenager -- she retired from being a minster and moved to Arizona because of her husband’s health, and that was when I was nine and I’m 58 now, so however long ago that was.
DR: Maybe around 1950 she moved to Arizona?

BC: Well I’m 58 now and she moved there when I was nine. I had already turned nine. So I’m trying to -- I can’t do the math. It was ’63 maybe, ’64, somewhere around there.

DR: I’ll just say early ’60s.

BC: Early ’60s. And I used to spend vacations with her all the time and I remember she had -- her altar was set up there for her own private use, and I saw something like a crystal ball in my -- and it was a crystal ball, and I said, “Well what do you do with this?” And she said that she could see things. And so I had never heard any of these stories before and I was kind of cynical. I’m like, “OK, yeah right,” being a teenager. But she told me that she had been born with a veil and explained to me what that meant, that that meant that she could see things. And she didn’t elaborate a lot; she didn’t tell me all kinds of fantastic stories or anything. But she just said she was a healer and she did it through Christ. It was not anything that she was doing; it was coming through Christ. And so she did that, and people would come to her for advice, and she -- that’s what she was doing in the room. She said remember back in Evanston when we had the little room, and people would come in there, and she’d look in the crystal ball and tell them what she saw. And she said it wasn’t
just lay people in the community; it was also some of the
white people in government, the politicians, that would
come to her also. But she didn’t tell me any names. And
so -- and it -- I do know that she was affiliated with the
different -- with the Iroquois League, first of all, and I
would go to their meetings with her and they knew of her.
But she kind of was not like the other women. She was very
headstrong, and stubborn, and eccentric in her own ways.
She’d do her own thing. But I do remember that in one of
the pictures there was a minster, and I can’t remember his
name. But -- so she was in contact with other ministers,
but she did not follow -- she wasn’t a part of their group
or anything. If they had a ministry of -- and interacted
together, she was not a part of that. But she did meet
with others one-on-one or they’d come to her birthday
party. She always loved parties and she’d have birthday
parties or anniversary parties, and people were invited to
that. I do remember Darlene Edie because Darlene was her
(inaudible). As a child, I remember her always talking
about Darlene, Darlene. And when I got older, I met who
Darlene was, and her sister, Rosemarie. But Darlene was
her girl. And so later on [00:10:00], it was like she was
a part of the community, she was a part of the Y, but I
think people kind of thought that she was -- I’m not sure
what people thought about her. I think they were a little bit intimidated by her just because she was different in terms of she wasn’t the typical Baptist minister. She was female. I don’t know any other female ministers in Evanston at the time. And she was always going somewhere. She was always going to Arizona or always traveling. I remember earlier in my years, she and her husband ran a restaurant on Garnet Place down the street from the Iroquois League. I remember being in there.

DR: Does the -- did the restaurant have a name?

BC: If it did, I can’t think of one. I don’t know what it was.

DR: Was it on -- right across from the Iroquois League or --

BC: No, it was down the street.

DR: -- was it further close to Maple?

BC: It was closer to Maple because I remember we walked towards Ridge from the restaurant. So I want to say it was maybe a building or two in from Maple on Garnet Place, and then there was the house where Cora Watson was, and then the street.

DR: So Cora Watson lived on Garnet, down a block from the Iroquois League?

BC: Right, because the building where the women resided, that was where we had the meetings at for the Iroquois League, and that’s where I think Cora Watson lived. I don’t know
if she lived there for sure, but I knew that’s where I always saw her at night. I probably assumed that lived there.

DR: I think at one time they did live there. Her and her daughter bought the building, and then when he passed -- she passed, the daughter still had for a while and then...

BC: So then that’s where they lived.

DR: Right, and Cora Watson was -- she lived until I think 101. She lived a long time.

BC: Because she seemed old when I was young.

DR: She lived a long time. (laughter) I have a picture of Cora Watson’s daughter as a teenager.

BC: Wow.

DR: There’s two boys and two girls in the picture and I think I know which one’s her, but I’m not quite sure. But if I ever come across that photograph, I’ll show and see if that jogs any semblance somewhere that can jog a memory or something like that. But it was cool because a 1930s picture and just flapper -- just the style then was really kind of cool.

BC: I remember her daughter but in later years, and -- because I was obviously a child but -- and I think she was already an adult when I first knew her. What else do I remember? And that’s -- I mean I don’t...
DR: It sounds like she had -- you mentioned intimidated by her but I it sounded like maybe she was respected.

BC: I think she was respected. She was very much I think a community member because she would talk about Mr. Reynolds, who lived across the street. And Bob Jordan was my godfather. She rented rooms and he had a room in her house, but he was also the cook for Fanny’s, the restaurant that was down the corner, and so she would talk about Fanny Lazar and my godfather. And he would -- he lived there at the house. And Rosalie Irison, she also lived there for a while and then she got married to Bob Irison and they went on. So she was -- she rented rooms out. There was a woman that lived down the street from where Fleetwood is now on Dewey on the -- across the street at the -- it might’ve been the same block where Faith Temple is. They may have that property now. But her name was Diana or -- I can’t think of what her name was exactly, but she -- people knew her and she knew people. So she was active in the community. But I think she’s -- she didn’t -- wasn’t part of a clique or anything outside the Iroquois League. She participated. I don’t know what they thought of her. I do know that -- well my family, we lived all together in her house as an extended family. And so I was maybe four, and then we moved on Lyons, and then we moved over on Sherman.
And the landlord, Mrs. Sizemore, did not like my grandmother. I remember her yelling and fussing about that hoodoo woman and being young, I wasn’t sure what she was upset about and I know my grandmother didn’t like her either. So there was always that division, and I’m not sure how widespread in the community it went. I do know that she was very revered because when they moved, people looked out for our family because she, being the matriarch of the family [00:15:00] that was pro-- my father wasn’t making a lot of money working at Smithfield’s, and she helped out, and we always had nice clothes, and did this, and did that. But once they left, they made sure that we were taken care of. So were some that admired her for that and others that...

DR: No different from any other family. There’s always finding a reason for something to like or dislike, so -- and that was the easy thing to pick maybe because it’s misunderstood. Kind of double back a little bit. Just trying to get the family tree related. I know she -- Martha was your grandmother. Who was your mother?

BC: Her mother was...

DR: I mean your mother.

BC: My mother was Martha Anne Dobbins.
DR: I just wanted to make sure that I got that. So I know she had two daughters: Mildred and Martha.

BC: No.

DR: Or it’s Mildred...

BC: Mildred -- to be honest, I don’t know if she had any children because there’s been stories and rumors that she never had any children, that these were children that she took in and raised as her own, including my mother. And so I -- she -- from my grandmother herself, she would tell me that my mother and my mother’s sister -- that she had a sister named Alice and she had a son named Henry that were her biological children. But I don’t know that to be true because later on in years when we were trying to get my mother’s birth certificate, she said don’t worry about it, she’ll get it, and she never did. And so for some reason, we’re wondering if the rumors are that my grandfather, which is her husband, that my mother was actually his sister’s child, and that my mother’s father was black, but her mother is biracial, that my grandfather is biracial. He’s very fair skinned. Maybe could pass as -- my mom sometimes, I know she’s black, but maybe if I didn’t know, she could pass as well. So -- but my grandmother would never say that. She said that that was -- they were her biological children. And so my mother doesn’t know. She
thinks that my grandmother is her -- actually her
biological child, but my father told me that he thinks her
actual father was in Ohio. So we could never find the
information. My grandmother said that she was born in --
my mother was born in Water Valley, Mississippi. But when
we tried to find records of that, there weren’t any. And
my mother being a deaf mute and not -- only knowing what
she was told from my paren-- her parents, she doesn’t know
any different and she doesn’t remember any different.

DR: That’s not unusual. She could’ve been born through a
midwife, and that’s not recorded in that way. I think my
father was born through a midwife, and for a long time, he
didn’t have records until he joined the military. Then I
had to create records for him based on what they knew. I
think for a while, my dad didn’t even have a social
security number for a while because of that. So that could
be a reason why that -- why (inaudible) if everything was
so ske-- anything before 1920, there was nothing there.
And the -- I saw on the census either about -- born about
1903 or 1905.

BC: Well I know she was born in 1900 and...

DR: And then Martha, your grandmother’s parents’ name?

BC: Etta Matthews and her father’s name was Ruben. And she had
her...
DR: Ruben Matthews?

BC: Mm-hmm. And she said that her mother was a Native American. I’m not sure if full blooded, or biracial, or -- she had a lot of siblings. She had Kitty, and Henry, and Helen were her siblings. George was a sibling. All Matthews.

DR: So you said Kitty, Helen, George?

BC: Kitty, Helen, George, Henry. I believe she -- my mother -- my grandmother was the youngest of their siblings but she took care of all them. So when...

DR: Interesting.

BC: Kitty would later live with her in Arizona until she passed away. Then when my Uncle Henry got [00:20:00] sick, she went to Tennessee and got him, and brought him back to Arizona, and took care of him until he passed away. Helen was an alcoholic. She lived in Chicago. We would visit her but she never -- Helen was kind of like the -- I want to guess you would say the black sheep of the family in a sense. So my grandmother -- she never stopped my grandmother up for help and my grandmother never really reached out and went and got her when she got sick. But they didn’t really maintain contact. But we -- as a family, my family would go out and see and visit her, and
she would ask us about her and maintain contact to a
certain degree, may over the phone.

DR: And so your father’s name is...

BC: My father is David Johnson, David Thomas Johnson.

DR: Did he have a -- you have a sister, right?

BC: He had a lot of sisters.

DR: No, you.

BC: Oh, yes. I have two sisters, Louise and [Sherana?]. I
have a brother as well. Chris David is my brother.

DR: And are you the youngest, the oldest?

BC: I’m the oldest.

DR: You’re the oldest? Great. This will just help me just
prime picture everything so I’m talking out the side of my
head. (laughter) Kind of what I saw on -- as I said, I
was on ancestry.com and just reading through pa-- or trying
to find as much information as possible. Again, because it
was hard, and what I saw -- again, is -- some of these
things can be wrong, but I just want to show you what I
found. It does say born about 1903 in Mississippi. In
1930, she showed up on a census living on 165 East Forty-
fifth Street in Chicago.

BC: That could be. She took to living in Chicago.

DR: Right, and this says married to William, who was a Pullman
porter, age 42. And she was 27, and she was a chambermaid
at a hotel. Now, I looked up on Google Map where that was. So it’s Forty-fifth and Dan Ryan basically. So there’s nothing there but open plots, which I think they tore down when they tore down the big housing projects. But before that, there would probably be row houses there or something like that that are no longer there. By 1935, they moved to Evanston. Then in the 1939 directory, they were listed at -- living at 1119 Emerson Street, and William was listed as a porter. Then in 1939, still living on Emerson Street, but it did show her as pastor, Church of Metaphysics. And then I think I saw something else that said graduate of Payne School of Metaphysics in Chicago.

BC: That must be Professor James Payne, who she always talked about.

DR: (laughs) And then 1940, doing -- still doing metaphysics. Nineteen forty-eight, directory showed her living at 1614 Simpson.

BC: Six fourteen?

DR: Yes.

BC: It could be. The only address I remember is 1514 Simpson Street.

DR: It could be right. I guess that sometimes the census takers either have sloppy handwriting or what have you.
But at that time, it said 1614. But it could be 1514; they just were lazy. (laughter) And sometimes --

BC: I just wanted to make sure my head worked and I --

DR: And sometimes the census, they get sloppy with -- the translator trying to make an electric form will mistype a lot of stuff, and I’ve gone on there and corrected people (inaudible) and then give reasoning why it’s correct, and then I get an email saying, “You’re correct and we’ll put that in there.” It helps to know. And I think some of the directories are showing is that -- I was looking for something else about history of Kenil-- blacks in Kenilworth, and because the directory was combined Evanston, Wilmette, and Kenilworth, they always listed these families living in Evanston when they were actually living in Kenilworth. And they didn’t look because it translated, but they didn’t bother to look at the top heading thing, Kenilworth.

BC: I was going to say that’s a big -- I mean it’s something like Skokie or something.

DR: Right, exactly. But I think the public -- the directory was a big publication, so they just kind of combined to save money instead of making this thin one for Kenilworth and just different publishing things. It’s easier to combine those and make one big publication. So it worked
out. So that’s as far as I got, and then daughters Martha A. and Mildred B. But now [00:25:00] you’re saying that they could’ve been --

BC: I said I don’t remember anybody -- it could be -- it might be somebody -- I do remember that she -- Mildred B. I don’t recall her ever talking about anybody named Mildred.

DR: Mildred Bernette Dobbins.

BC: I wonder -- I don’t know. I know she talked about a daughter, Alice, that she kicked out of the house because she got pregnant. But she never told me why she put her out. She just said that she was not a good girl. She didn’t’ want to listen and obey the rules, and kind of held that as a threat over everybody else.

DR: So there could’ve been another daughter. So it could’ve been three daughters.

BC: It could’ve been. Could’ve been. And I know that my sister, Sherana, who is 15 years younger than me, talked about how somebody came when they move -- lived over on (inaudible) and said that they were our mother’s nephew. But my mom, having been so young at the time herself when her sister was kicked out, she didn’t connect I don’t think that this man was -- actually could be her nephew, and kind of dismissed him as being maybe a stranger. And he never came back, but they never got his name or anything. By
then, I was growing up in -- away out of the house, so I never heard this story until recently. A couple years ago, my sister was talking about it. Well why didn’t you ever tell me? Because at least we could’ve followed up because we didn’t ha-- we don’t have any information on it (inaudible).

DR: And the curiosity to meet all your family members. It’s possible. I have a cousin that lives out in Scandinavia, but the chances of us ever meeting probably -- it’s not -- and she would be about my age.

BC: And they would not know because maybe they didn’t hear the stories because I was -- my grandmother -- I was the one that was closest to her, and I was the one that went and visited with her and had the communication. So just these stories -- and my mom would talk to me about her sister and all -- so just the fact that I knew that -- by then that she was kicked out because she was pregnant. This could’ve been her child because it was an older man, and my mother at the time was three when her sister was left at -- or maybe a little older. But she was young and didn’t have anymore contact with her after that. So maybe this was...

DR: That could be it.

BC: Could’ve been.
DR: Just kind of swept under the rug because of your grandmother’s position. That’s not something you want to advertise around because it kind of messes up with the whole vibe of what she’s practicing. Either way, it messes it up, whether she stays in and takes care of. And what are you teaching? And just the times too. I mean...

BC: And I’m wondering if the -- her people that she had rooming like Rosalie Irison who was there. I mean I didn’t ask them for information. I thought I was too young and you don’t talk to your elders about family stuff.

DR: I met Rosalie Irison.

BC: She was -- I mean she was very well connected with my grandmother and my mom, and she was one of the people that we still maintained contact with after -- her and her husband after my grandparents moved to Arizona.

DR: So you’re also saying that your grandmother had -- was married to --

BC: William Dobbins.

DR: -- William Dobbins. But you said that he -- she was married to someone else possibly?

BC: Right, before then. But I don’t know his name. She said that he was a hermaphrodite. You know what that means?

DR: Yeah.

BC: OK. That’s what she told me.
DR: Oh, that her first husband was a hermaphrodite?

BC: Right.

DR: So that didn’t vibe well either, I take it? (laughter)

BC: She doesn’t talk a whole lot about -- and I -- she was probably very young when she married him so...

DR: So your -- Martha’s marriage to William was about what year? When they came to Evanston they did or just bef-- shortly before they came to Evanston?

BC: I don’t recall. I’m trying to think if there’s anything -- any clues.

DR: I’m trying to paint the picture of what it would have been like living in Mississippi at the turn of the century. It wasn’t necessarily pleasant. You had a lot of black families down there as sharecroppers. The climate in the black -- between blacks and whites was not very safe for blacks. Was an early marriage a chance to escape out of Mississippi into somewhere else? Those are some of the questions that came to mind. What [00:30:00] was the reason for Mississippi or -- other than the Great Migration? Was it only her that moved up or was it other family members that came up as well?

BC: She talked about -- and I remember her telling me as a teenager, and I asked her, “Well did they -- anything ever happen to you?” And she said no. She said there were
white-only parts but she would walk through there and dare anybody to say anything to her and I can see that because she had that kind of personality.

DR: She sounds like she was really strong willed, like you said.

BC: She was very strong willed, and I mean she did - she went - even as a teenager and then young adult, she intimidated me across the -- I lived here in Evanston and she was all the way there, and I’m like OK, no, I’ve got to tell her this or she’s going to find this out. And I think she had that effect on a lot of people. But she never really did anything to me physically. I think it was just that she would just be very disappointed and I knew if I let her down, I’d face wrath in terms of her being disappointed, and I loved her so much, I didn’t want that to happen.

DR: You keep talking. (inaudible) because they’re just -- they got...

BC: Two talking. I didn’t even pay attention. So I think she talked about when she was a child, somebody coming to her parents’ home, the white person who owned their home, and threatening her mother with putting them out if they didn’t have the rent by the time -- such and such a time. And she said she remember that and swore to herself that she was going to get a home for her parents so that they wouldn’t
ever have to face that, and she did. Now, I know she might’ve did that were for -- in my mind, that I hadn’t heard of happening before or hadn’t known of happening with other people. She did these -- and may have been atypical. She played the violin. I have a picture of her playing with a violin. And she -- it sounds as if she kind of did her own thing, and even as an adult with her siblings Kitty, who was older than she was, she would -- they kind of all listened to her like it -- as if they were in awe of her. Her brother, Henry, they listened to her as if they were in awe of her and kind of didn’t give her any argument if she said for them to do something, and they would do it. And she -- I remember in Arizona, people -- she got -- she was very friendly with the neighbors. Children would come and hang out over at her house. And she kind of had -- she was -- she -- before she left here, we became a part of Unity School of Christianity, and in Arizona, that was also her home church for her. So...

DR: Was that located here in Evanston?

BC: It’s 3434 Central Street. I went -- remember going there as a child. It was diverse. It was -- black families went, white families. It was primarily white but...

DR: Is that over there? Is that still kind of there?

BC: It’s still there.
BC: Yes. Still there. Same church, same building, and everything. So we -- from her side, we became affiliated. From my father’s side, they were -- their home church is Ebenezer, so we were -- had both worlds in a sense, my family because sometimes we were at Ebenezer, sometimes we were at Unity. And that’s kind of how we were growing up. We could interact with a certain group of people, then we would go interact with a different group of people in the same, combined group, and that’s how she was in Arizona. She had different people that came to see her. And I’m trying to think. I don’t recall any white families that came to her church here, but I’m wondering. I don’t know how she advertised because -- but I do know that she had people that came all the way from the south side of Chicago out to the church and maybe the people she had met when she lived in Chicago and they just came out here. I’m not sure when she started the ministry, if it was something she --

BC: -- built up. I don’t recall her having a church somewhere else other than on Simpson. But it could’ve been in her house for all I know. So...

DR: I’ve got probably tons more questions. The photographs you gave Shorefront of your mom in the church, it looked like
there was large groups of people there. Do you recall if that was for any type of celebration or it was just -- was that one of the cake walks or --

BC: I think it was primarily --

DR: -- anniversary thing?

BC: -- her birthday party [00:35:00] or her -- an anniversary party.

DR: One of them looked like it might’ve been an anniversary party because she was holding her husband’s hand and all. I think there was a kiss. I think there was another one where she was sitting down and clearly looking up, maybe at her husband, and somebody took a picture from that angle, but didn’t get the husband in the picture. But -- and his chair was empty, so maybe it was him taking the picture.

BC: That could be. It’s probably and anniver-- I remember her doing an anniversary party and the birthday parties primarily.

DR: I think there was two other groups. I think there was a group of younger, maybe teenagers down there, is a good picture, and another one that maybe looked like it was either a women’s guild, or a choir, or something like that.

BC: I don’t know.

DR: Does that ring bell?
BC: Not the choir because I know that there was a man that used to come and sing every Sunday, but he didn’t nece-- he didn’t -- there weren’t -- it wasn’t a choir. But she might’ve had -- there might’ve been younger people and they might’ve been children of -- because she didn’t have Sunday school. So if anybody came to the church, the kids -- everybody was there together, and if there were parties, the children would come too, or if -- the bazaar, she would have bazaars where she would like to sew and make things, and she would sell them, and people I guess could bring their crafts.

DR: What did she make?

BC: Little doilies, blankets, anything, clothes. I remember her telling me that I needed to learn to sew because of the Depression and that she had to make my mother’s clothes from my grandfather’s shirts, and that was important to know how to do that. But she would make curtains. She would make couch covers, blankets. She made everything.

DR: Cool. So I’m calling up the images that you had gave Shorefront, and I’m just trying to find the right picture. I mean I look at these -- actually, it’s funny because I look at these pictures a lot just looking at people and just trying to -- in my mind, I try and paint a picture. What was going on in this scene? What was the
conversation? Just to try and paint dialogue, what was happening.

BC: I do the same thing because -- and hindsight is twenty-twenty, but when you’re a child, back then it was like children should be seen and not heard, so I wasn’t -- I wouldn’t ask questions, or interrupt, or even really pay attention to what they were saying. But later on, after understanding what was going on in our society during that time, there could’ve been some deep conversations or things that -- and then they might’ve hidden that from us too. I think a lot of stuff, they didn’t want us to know about or didn’t expose to use.

DR: I think that was purposely done to just maybe safeguard us or that they thought they were too young to understand. But it’s funny as kids what we pick up. And then that pick up gets taken out of context but if it comes to historic fact. It’s like so and so did such and such. No, really what happened was totally different from what you thought it was. But it’s funny what our perception would be. So here’s one group here.

BC: Let’s see. This is probably something that -- some kind of function that she had because we were required -- she’d have us wear certain things. They had to wear these robes or you had to wear -- she had the basement all --
everything was in white, probably for purity or something. But I don’t know -- we didn’t have a choir, but this must’ve been for something. But I don’t recognize any of these people.

DR: Because I -- I mean it looked like they’re kind of in a uniform. They’re all wearing corsages, wearing all black with white shirts underneath.

BC: But that might’ve been what she told them they had to wear that day, something black and...

DR: And then I have this one here. Well that -- is that Darlene?

BC: I think that’s Darlene. And this -- Mrs. Richardson. I think that’s who that is. I can’t remember her first name.

DR: And then there’s this one here. Now this is the one I was (inaudible) about the teen group.

BC: No, I think because everybody came to the church, there wasn’t Sunday school that I know of. I mean there could’ve been Sunday school. Maybe this was the Sunday school class or something.

DR: And this would be Martha right there?

BC: That’s her.

DR: She has a very distinct look: her glasses, her hair always pulled back in a bun.
BC: And later is -- she always had -- I thought it grew that way, but she would dye her hair black and these two side strips would be grey, and she’D pull it back in a bun or -- and I would [00:40:00] figure out if she just didn’t dye that part. But that was her look. It was like OK. She was...

DR: I mean she had a distinct look. I mean it was -- just watching -- looking at this...

BC: That’s her. That’s her.

DR: Very conservative and -- but that’s my look. You can point me out anywhere. (laughter) But these are kind of -- they’re fun to look at, and you can just tell stories.

BC: Now this is Darlene too, and this is Mrs. Se-- Ozzy Settles. She’s one of people that kind of took -- looked after us after my grandmother retired, and this is Mrs. Irison, Rosalie Irison. What was her name? Sister McCoy right there. She was the one that came from Chicago. And this is Mr. Settles. That’s Ozzy’s husband, Rally. And that’s my grandfather. But that might’ve been an anniversary or a birthday celebration. That looks like my mom standing back there, right here.

DR: Probably going to enhance that picture later on.

BC: Mrs. Richardson.

DR: It’s another angle.
BC: This is Rosalie and Bob Irison. That’s my dad. That’s my -- this must’ve been their anniversary. It’s Mrs. Richardson. And maybe see what they’re wearing. If they’re wearing the same clothing, it might’ve been the same event. There’s -- she’s not sitting in the same place. That’s Mrs. Ozzy Settles. That’s all I recognize for now.

DR: Going to switch. Saw that already. Saw that already.

Which ones? This one I told you about. That’s Jordane-- Edmund B. Jordaine, Junior.

BC: Now if I ever met him, I don’t remember. So I don’t know. It seems like there was a special event that he might’ve been invited to and came to.

DR: He would still be alderman at that time because he was out of his aldermanship in 1947.

BC: So this could’ve been before I was even born then because I wasn’t born until ’54.

DR: And she had moved in ’60, right?

BC: She moved to Arizona in the ’60s. I don’t know when she came to Evanston and started the church.

DR: But it would be after 1935.

BC: And this is Mrs. Richardson, and this is my godfather, Bob Robert Jordan, and I don’t -- this was my grandmother’s housekeeper from what I -- if I remember correctly. And I
think -- I want to say that her name is Lulu. I can’t remember her last name.

DR: Let’s switch pictures again.

BC: Same thing. I guess this is the same anniversary party.

DR: I can see her portrait back here. And there’s some (inaudible) so this is 1514 Simpson, right?

BC: Right, that’s -- yeah. And you would go around this way to get to the church. There was an entryway down there.

DR: Let me correct this data on this because I have 514. So that’s what I saw on here but it’s probably just got cut off. Fifteen fourteen. God, that’s great now.

BC: I’ll never forget that address. It’s 1514 Simpson Street.

DR: Now I’ve been looking forever on a map and I saw 514. I’ve been looking at it and say no, it can’t be there. See, that’s why -- and I had the newspaper clipping that you also let us scan. It talks about they just came back from a trip.

BC: So to me, I mean if they were in the -- because I think that was from the Evanston Review, so I’m thinking they must’ve been somewhat prominent in the community at that time because how often would they put a black family and a social event in the Review? So...
DR: So it was significant enough that she got a lot of attention. So I’d love to have -- I mean I like looking at these pictures.

BC: And she probably had a ton but -- except that she store -- kept everything, but not in any particular order. And I remember when we had to bring [00:45:00] her back here, it was all of the sudden.

DR: So she -- after living in Arizona, you did bring her back here to Evanston?

BC: I brought her -- she -- I had to put her in a nursing home. I thought I could have her live with me, but I didn’t realize the extent of her dementia or Alzheimer’s.

DR: When did she come back to Evanston?

BC: In ’94.

DR: So was she -- did -- was she buried locally?

BC: No, I buried her back in Arizona. She had everything all taken care of: where she wanted to be. And so we had services for her here and then we took her back to Arizona.

DR: When did she pass?

BC: Ninety-seven. She was ninety-seven years old.

DR: You sure I can’t get you any water?

BC: I’m fine.

DR: I’m think I’m going to double back and talk on the side note about the Iroquois League. You were involved in that
-- your grandmother was very involved in that, and I think you showed me a picture or you have a picture. I think we probably have that picture too of you going to a tea.

BC: It was -- I don't know what -- it was in a room. I just remember standing -- the picture of me standing by her, and that -- I think -- I had that picture, but then I saw it at the Evanston History Center or in the paper when they did that writing about the Iroquois League. I didn't -- I never really knew the name of the group. I just remember going to their meetings with them over on Garnet Place and the teas at -- they use to have Community Hospital on the lawn part, they would have teas, and I remember dressing up and going to those. But I never knew that it was all part of the Iroquois League. So that was my memories of that, and as you say, I was the only child there in their pictures. She used to take me everywhere.

DR: You're like I don't want to be here. (laughs)

BC: Actually, I did. I loved going with her. I always -- I would cry. Remember they went on a trip to Arizona? I think I was five at the time, and they took the Santa Fe train, and my parents, and we all took them to the station. And I remember kicking and screaming, having a full, out-and-out temper tantrum, and my dad having a hold of me. I'm screaming, "Don't leave me, grandma. Don't leave me."
And I vividly remember that so I wanted to go. I mean if she didn’t take me -- I was heartbroken when she moved to Arizona, and I loved spending time with her. I spent spring break, Christmas break. She would pay for me to come out there. My sister -- we’re two years apart, me and my next sister, and she was more like my daddy’s girl, my mommy’s girl. I was my grandmother’s girl, and so I would go there. I couldn’t wait to get out there. And I did that up until I brought her back here. We vacationed, our family, my husband, my kids. We went to Arizona to be with her. And then we brought her back here and I had to put her in the nursing home. I’d go visit her, and then we she passed on, that was -- it was -- it was time for her. She was ready. But it was...

DR: I think we have an obituary. I mean I’m just -- because we have a large obituary collection and I kind of remember seeing the portrait of her. I kind of remember seeing that, just thinking about it. But in case we don’t, do you have a copy of the obituary?

BC: I’m sure I do. I’m sure I have one at home somewhere.

DR: And do you have any other artifacts or items relating to your grandmother?
BC: No, but -- and it’s -- Mary Harvey was her cousin, and I think Mary Harvey’s passed on now. Her husband was Bishop Harvey.

DR: Bishop Harvey. He’s still living.

BC: He may also have some information about her, being older than me. He might also be a person to talk to that might recall because they -- his family -- him and Mary also took care of me and my sister. We’d spend weeke-- the night over there on Saturday nights with Mary and Bishop, and they’d do for us after my grandparents moved. So but he might also have some information about her and know about her earlier life outside of the church or he might -- and the church as well because they were also members. I mean they would come to the services.

DR: That’s good to know.

BC: And he may know some of the people in those pictures.

DR: Do you think Darlene Edie would know any -- have any information?

BC: She was so young, she was -- I don’t know if she would recall. She might. You can ask her. I don’t know if she does or not.

DR: I just want to just ask her a few things. I’m trying to probably keep those -- the article [00:50:00] just -- I think it should just be more about your grandmother’s
personality, who -- kind of who she was based on recollections. I just find it interesting at that time period -- have a female pastor in Evanston when it was male dominated. She probably was the only pastor at that time leading a church. I mean there were other female leaders in the church, but not top tier, the leader.

BC: She was -- did everything. She would garden in addition to sewing. She loved to cook. People -- and bake. So she did a -- she dabbled in what seems like a little bit of everything. She was very dominating in terms of she would take care of you, she would help you, but you have to go be -- live by her rules. You didn’t, you were gone. And she was -- had always been that way. Very headstrong. And people listened to her though. It’s -- it wasn’t until -- I remember when -- I guess it had to have been honestly maybe ‘93, ’92. My mom was with me and it was myself, and we went to visit her, and I didn’t realize at the time that she was already in the early stages of dementia. But she wanted to go to the store, and going to the store is an all-day adventure with my grandmother because it’s not just one store. She could be in the grocery store for two hours because she speaks to everybody and has converstaions. And we were out there and it was very hot. She didn’t drive and there was no car for me to drive. And so we took cabs
places, and we had taken a cab and gotten out at some
little strip mall, and then she wanted to go to Camelback
Mountain. Now, mind you, we had already been -- it’s four
in the afternoon. We had already been out since about 10
o’clock that morning and it was very hot, and she said,
“Well let’s go to -- up to the mountain.” I said, “Grand
mommy,” I said, “I am not going to the mountain. I’m going
home.” And she looked at me and she said, “Well you don’t
have to be so mad about it.” (laughter) It was like
usually, we wouldn’t -- whatever she wanted to do, we would
go ahead and do. Whether we wanted to do it or not, we
would go along. But that day, I’m like, “I’m not putting
up with this. I’m not going -- I can’t go another inch let
alone to the mountains. For what?” So we went home and it
was that -- at that point I realized she wasn’t going to do
anything to us if we didn’t want to -- if we had objected,
but that was just her hold on everybody. And to -- I told
my mom -- my mom still was a grown woman, older than me,
would still be intimidated by her mother. So I’m like, no,
that was it for me. So that was her personality. She was
very strong willed and you did what she said, or face her
wrath and she would make you feel like she would murder you
or something. And she was also very -- the word that comes
to mind capable. She would know what to do. She was very
much in control all the time. I remember waking up one morning to realize that there had been a fire in the house at 1514 Simpson Street in her altar room because she would always have a candle burning, and somehow it caught -- something caught fire because of the candle. And it wasn’t until the next morning, and I came downstairs, and I realized that there had been a fire there and that I slept through the whole thing. And it was only that one room that was on fire. And she would say and do things -- I remember when my grandfather passed away and I didn’t go for the services but my mom did, and my mom came back and told me about how they had been lying in bed and a blue something or another came into the room, and that my grandmother told my mom that it was her father that -- his spirit. And I’m like, “OK.” But knowing her, it probably was, I mean, because she was very open to that kind of thing and things would happen. She would make things happen. You’d hear later on about how if you put in your dreams or your desire in a book -- if you want a nice house, you find the house [00:55:00] you want, put it in a book, and you make your -- a dream book or whatever. She had one of those from way back when before maybe people even talked about that as being a possibility. And she showed it to me when I was very young, when she first moved
out there, so I had to have been maybe nine or so. And she pulled it out, and it was the photo album where you could -- you had to put the pictures, and she had these different pictures in there of things that she wanted to have. And she said, “This is my dream book, and you should make a dream book for you.” So...

DR: Who has that? Where’s that dream book now?

BC: Who knows? I was going to tell you before she -- she collect -- she had a lot of stuff and she took it with her. And had I been thinking, I would’ve started going through it. But she had -- in Arizona, she had the kind -- a kind of garage that’s open on one end but everything else is enclosed, and she had boxes, and boxes, and boxes of things stacked up for years. And when I went out to get her in ’94, everything was so -- I had two weeks to do everything.

DR: To clear out things.

BC: And she had stuff in the house, and I’m like -- I didn’t know -- everything was mixed up. I didn’t know if I should keep anything. So what I basically did was throw everything into storage in the house and I had to let everything go that was in the garage, which I know had information from when she was here. So a lot of stuff is probably gone that would have some historical basis. I still maintain the storage unit just in case there was
something in the house that she had kept that I would want. But that’s in Arizona, and --

DR: And you’re up here.

BC: -- and I’m up here, and I just pay the storage unit to keep it, and then hopefully with a -- then out there, it’s like that’s Arizona. It’s an outdoor storage, although the storage is enclosed. But going through there, it’s all dusty, and there could be mice in there or snakes, and -- so the guy said what our best bet to do is to have somebody come out there and go through it for us, and then we could...

DR: Make a determination what to do.

BC: Whether we want to keep it or not. But that takes time and -- as well.

DR: It does take time. Time, money, and -- it’s actually, and that’s the story I hear a lot, of -- especially with the passing of family members and what do siblings or relatives do. It’s a lot of stuff; it’s overwhelming. And it’s out of context when you have a finite amount of time to do all these things, to get all this stuff done. It could be the closing of the house, selling of it. Then you have your own life to get back to work, and my family, and all this other stuff. So what ends up happening is I give up. Take this room right here and just dump it all. Or we’re not
sure, just throw it into storage and maybe we’ll get to it, then later on, dump it. Because it just gets too much, and only afterwards, it’s like oh my God, they could’ve had this, this, and this in there.

BC: And I know she did because she had a lot of -- I brought back a lot of her linen that she had because it was very nice and I know that she had a nice China collection. I had to let that go because I couldn’t bring all that back, but I remember wanting to go through the boxes when I would go and visit because they were stacked up from the floor to the ceiling. But then of course there’s snakes back there. (laughter)

DR: You don’t want to find snakes the hard way.

BC: Not -- and just getting to it. It was just her and I, so I -- it was -- if she felt like doing it, which she -- I always would be there for maybe a week or two at a time, so I -- what do I really want to tackle. But in my head, I’m thinking at some point I’ve got to go through this stuff, and that time never happens until it’s too late. You don’t realize timeframes. So all that is gone. But I remember she had a nice bible. I don’t know where it was in the garage, but I know -- I do have one of them from -- that she had. I do have that one, but there was not a lot of information in there. I’m trying to think of what else.
DR: Does she have any invitations or anything like that done for any of her services, or bazaars, or anything like that?

BC: She might have. I would have...

DR: Somewhere in storage?

BC: That might be right. In storage somewhere, or in a box, or something that I haven’t looked at yet. I remember I had a card that talked about Madame Dobbins and available for -- for them people to come see her or whatever. I will try to find that. I think I know where that is. Now it’s kind of mixed up with my father’s stuff and my mom’s stuff. I got to reorganize all of that. It’s -- what else did she have?

In terms of [01:00:00] personality, she could be the sweetest person, but she could also be very mean at the same time and cut you off. She -- my husband talks about she’s the reason that he married me because we were living together at first and -- but he would talk to her and we would call on the phone. He would talk to her, and he said that she said to him, “Don’t you think you and Bettye Anne --,” she called me Bettye Anne, “Don’t you think you and Bettye Anne should get married?” And he said yeah.

(laughter) So that’s how we got married. But it’s not like -- my husband’s no shrinking violet, but she had that way of making him feel as if you should do what she says or what she suggests that you do. So I’m like OK.
DR: I just realized that my wife has my car and I wonder if she left her car keys with me because I got to pick up my daughter. We’ll see what happens.

BC: What time do you have to pick up your daughter?

DR: She’s out of practice about now but she said she’ll text me when she’s ready. So she might end up staying there to do other stuff though so that would buy me some time.

BC: How old is she?

DR: She’s 13 now.

BC: Wow.

DR: My little boss.

BC: That’s how they are.

DR: Yes, they are.

BC: That’s teenagers.

DR: So I think I don’t have any other questions at this point. I think you filled in a lot of stuff. Very interesting story of all the things that she’s done. And it just for me, for Shorefront, I just -- it paints a bigger picture of our communities here, and what we have done, where we pioneered, and we’re not afraid to step out. And I like to find, like I said, the not so obvious to showcase instead of the obvious. We can find a lot about [Reverend Twiggs?]. We can find a lot about Isabella [Garndet?] or Elizabeth Hill. Those are -- you hear all the time. But
it’s the others that you don’t hear about, and how equally important they are all. And hang on. I’m going to stop the recording from here. Hang on again. Hang on for a second, sweetie. Let me pause.

END OF AUDIO FILE