

Kay Davis

[This was recorded over the phone]

KAY DAVIS: [00:00] All right.

Q: And what I'm going to do is ask about your experience growing up in Evanston --

KD: My experience what?

Q: Growing up in Evanston for a little while.

KD: Oh. What in the world can I say? (laughter) You'll have to ask me questions (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

Q: I'll ask you questions.

KD: All right.

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) prompt you with it.

KD: All right.

Q: And it will lead into your singing profession.

KD: OK.

Q: OK?

KD: All right.

Q: So I guess my first question is if you could state your full name?

KD: Kathryn Elizabeth McDonald Davis Wimp.

Q: OK. And when did you arrive to Evanston?

KD: I was born in Evanston.

Q: Born in Evanston.

KD: Mm-hmm. Nineteen twenty. My mother lived in Evanston. That was her birthplace. And when she married my father, he had a home in Bushnell, Illinois, which is near Galesburg and Peoria, in Illinois. And so after I was born, I went back down to Bushnell with my parents, and I - - we lived there until 1933, I think it was. Daddy built a house in Evanston, on Ashland Avenue, during the Depression, which is quite a feat, I think. (laughs)

Q: Yes.

KD: And we lived -- I went to Evanston Township High, and then Northwestern for five years. Mm-hmm.

Q: And what was your father's -- what is your father's name?

KD: Samuel [Ernest?] McDonald. And he was a chiropractic physician.

Q: OK. And your mother's name?

KD: Katherine Elizabeth Twiggs McDonald.

Q: And your father was born in Bushnell?

KD: Yes.

Q: OK. Why did he come to Evanston?

KD: Well, he went to the National College of Chiropractic.

Q: OK.

KD: And I've forgotten all the details of how he met Mother, but he met her when he was in Chicago. I guess -- I don't know when -- when Daddy finished school. I need to ask

somebody who might know about that. But he had a big business in Bushnell. It was -- it's a little farming town, and only -- I think there were 2,800 people at that time, so everybody knew everybody. (laughter) And there was an east side and a west side grade school, and there was a railroad track down the middle of town, you know? And so when I got to be high school age, they figured it was time to get me out of there, because we were the only black family.

Q: Wow.

KD: And that wasn't too cool when you get to be a teenager.

Q: (laughter) I can imagine.

KD: Oh. So they moved me away from all of that.

Q: (laughter) [I?] imagine.

KD: Yeah. And I went to Evanston High. And Sadie Rafferty was the music director. This is one thing I remember particularly about those years. And she decided, I guess, the -- whatever the group there at the high school decided in the music department, to have an Afro American chorus. What did they call it? A colored chorus, they called it in those days. But they didn't tell the students. And when we went to class, and there were -- there were no white people there. (laughter) And we said, "What is this?" So when she came in, she was all happy and thinking she'd done

such a great thing, and of course, we rose up in a body, and said, "No, no, no. You didn't ask us. We didn't want to do this." (laughter) She was from Texas.

Q: OK.

KD: But anyway, I started taking voice when I was in high school from a man named Roy Schuzler, and he was a pupil of Walter Allen Stults, who was a professor of voice at Northwestern. So I had planned, originally, to go to Northwestern one year. Then I wanted to go to UCLA, and then Howard, and -- oh, I was going to go to about four different colleges, and then finish up. (laughter) And of course, I got completely thrilled with Northwestern, and Mr. Stults was such a wonderful teacher that I never left. So I stayed there, and I got my master's in 1943.

Q: OK.

KD: OK.

Q: Nineteen forty-three. Yeah, I saw a newspaper clipping of that. It was in February 1943. You did a concert at Northwestern.

KD: Yeah.

Q: Let's see. What was it?

KD: Graduate recital.

Q: Yeah. I think one of the songs you sang was "Wishing You Were Here," and for the Waa-Mu Show.

KD: Oh, Waa-Mu Show. Yeah. Yeah.

Q: And some other things. So it was a nice write-up in this -
- I don't know if you saw a copy of this, ever.

KD: I -- I don't -- of the program?

Q: No, not the program, but the article that was in *Evanston Review* in [1943?].

KD: No, I don't have that. I'd love to have that.

Q: I have a copy of it, so I'll send you a copy of that.

KD: Oh, wonderful. Wonderful.

Q: OK. Because I did a little research before I called you.
(laughs)

KD: I see. You probably know more than I do.

Q: (laughter) I try real hard to.

KD: That's a long time ago.

Q: I try real hard to do a lot of research before I try and
talk, so I have some idea what to say, and --

KD: Yeah.

Q: -- and understand where you're coming from.

KD: Right.

Q: Let's see. Let me skip around here. [05:00] When you were
in Evanston, what church did you belong to?

KD: Episcopal church, St. Andrew's.

Q: OK.

KD: Before that, when I was down there with the white people, I was a Presbyterian. (laughter) I was baptized in a Presbyterian church. (laughter) Oh, shoot.

Q: So what was -- if you recall, what was your experience like growing up in Evanston? Did you like it? Did you dislike it?

KD: Oh, I enjoyed being with my people. (laughs) But they used to tease me, because in those days, I had no trace of a -- of an African American speech pattern, you know. But I had to conform. So now I can't get away from it. (laughter) Yeah, they used to tease me. They called me [Push Bush?] and all kind of weird stuff. (laughs)

Q: That never -- that hasn't changed today, so --

KD: I'll bet.

Q: (inaudible) I was in school at Loyola University, and I had some students teasing me about my voice pattern, wondering if I was from Canada all the time, and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

KD: Yeah, you don't have any -- you don't have any black [sound?].

Q: Yeah, exactly. (laughs)

KD: Not at all. That's great.

Q: I've had people ask me over the phone, too. It's, like, "Are you a colored?" (laughter) "Yes, ma'am, I am."

KD: (laughter) No, what -- no, you say, "What is that?"
(laughter) "What do you mean, colored?" Actually, black isn't a good description, either.

Q: No, it isn't. I'm brown.

KD: And we -- right. And listen, we don't have any real connection with Africa, (laughs) when you get right down to it.

Q: Exactly. I mean, I'm, what, eight generations here?

KD: We're American.

Q: I'm eight generations here. I'm way American. (laughs) I'm more American than most of you are.

KD: [I see?]. Mm-hmm. I would love to know my real background, you know? It would be so interesting. But see, it used -- it didn't used to be cool to know all that stuff, you know?

Q: Right.

KD: But after the *Roots*, things changed. And I would love to know -- my father's -- I know that my father's father was raised by -- he was sent to school -- he was a lawyer, I think -- by the white man that -- who parented him, you know what I mean?

Q: OK.

KD: So I know just that. Now, on the other side, I don't know my grandfather Twiggs's real background. I know he was in Davenport, I think.

Q: Right, Davenport, Iowa.

KD: But I don't know anything else. I don't know who his parents were, you know, or anything like that. You don't have any of that information --

Q: I think I do have some of that [information?].

KD: Do you?

Q: Yes, I do. I can -- you know, I can send you as much information as I can about the Twiggs side of the family that I have.

KD: Now, I know Grandmother came from Virginia. And she was a -- not a nanny -- a -- a tea-- what is it, a person who teaches privately in a home?

Q: A tutor?

KD: She was -- no, another name. Anyway, she was supposed to have been some kind of a teacher for some wealthy people.

Q: OK.

KD: And I don't know what her educational background is, you know, for her to be able to do that.

Q: OK. I have --

KD: That's fascinating.

Q: Yeah, it is. I have some of -- I interviewed Martha Walker.

KD: Yes, little Auntie Martha.

Q: Yep. And she [kind of, went back around?] pretty far, with mother and --

KD: Did she really?

Q: -- grandmother escaping from slavery.

KD: Oh. I've got to talk to Martha about that.

Q: So they went up to St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, and then coming back down.

KD: Get out of here.

Q: So -- yeah.

KD: I've never heard that.

Q: I have a family picture of the Twiggs family, and a few other shots. So what I can do is, I'll just make a lot of copies of things that I have.

KD: Oh, that's so nice of you.

Q: And I'll send it down to you.

KD: Wonderful.

Q: And I'm also going to send you latest issue of *Shorefront* -
-

KD: OK.

Q: -- that has a -- the main article was written by somebody in Florida about Mary Lee DePugh.

KD: Who was Mary Lee DePugh?

Q: She was someone that lived up in Evanston for awhile, for about 30 years, and then moved down to Florida and start -- Winter Park, Florida --

KD: Oh --

Q: -- and started a --

KD: Winter Park. That's near where I live.

Q: Yeah. She started a hospital down there.

KD: No kidding.

Q: And the Ideal Women's Club, which was the first of its kind down there, when she came down there in 1937.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: So I'll make sure -- you can read it in the article. I'll send it down to you. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

KD: Oh, that's fascinating.

Q: It's going to go into the mail tomorrow for you.

KD: You know, Winter Park is a very upscale community.

Q: Yes, it is.

KD: And, now, they have a block of black people across the tracks.

Q: Right.

KD: Are you -- do you -- have you been to Winter Park?

Q: No, I haven't, but reading the article, kind of, [keyed me in?]. The women who did it sent me maps of Winter Park and things like that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

KD: OK.

Q: -- map it out.

KD: Yeah. Well, recently, they started -- I don't know, some developer started cleaning up. There -- one block from where I used to get my hair done, there was a house and -- a, kind of, run-down house, and these black people used to sit out in the yard on an old dining table and play cards. (inaudible) Oh, my Lord, this is -- (laughter) And next door was a black church.

Q: Right.

KD: That is all gone.

Q: Yes.

KD: They went in there and they cleaned it up. But they built a -- [10:00] a couple of very nice apartment units down the street, and I hope those people that lived in those houses are in there. I don't know that they are.

Q: No, they're not.

KD: Oh.

Q: [They're doing the same as?] pretty much being gentrified.

KD: Oh.

Q: [It's either?] commercial [or?] new development.

KD: Right. It's lovely.

Q: The historic African American community was much larger than what it is now. That block has all but disappeared.

KD: Hmm. [Man?].

Q: So it's -- it's --

KD: Now, they used to sit out -- there was a park that was on one of the main streets. Well, all of a sudden, the park was gone, and they built a building. And I said, "Lord, I wonder where my people went." Well, lo and behold, they moved the park over. It's in the same area, and it's moved back. And they cleaned it up, and those same people, I think, are still over there playing cards --

Q: (laughter)

KD: -- with their -- their little junky [cars?] and everything. But they're in a very nice park now.

Q: OK.

KD: So they haven't moved, though. They refused (laughter) to do it. I said, "More power to them." They're not bothering anybody, you know?

Q: Yeah.

KD: But kitty corner across the street, there's a new restaurant -- new building, and they put a restaurant in. And then there's another -- there are three restaurants, I

think, in that area there, that weren't there before. It's fascinating how they can move us out.

Q: Yes. Very fast.

KD: But now, the rest of the -- they're nice small homes, and they're well kept, from the outside, anyway.

Q: OK.

KD: In that whole big block. There must be eight or nine blocks of houses, right behind the new Winter Park mall.
Mm-hmm.

Q: (laughs) OK.

KD: Eventually they'll be gone, I think.

Q: Yeah.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: Well, I want to get back to you.

KD: Oh, OK. (laughter) But the rest of Winter Park is fabulous. They have beautiful homes, and a lot of wealthy people -- old money over there.

Q: I believe it.

KD: OK. I'm finished now.

Q: (laughter) When you were in Evanston, what -- did you belong to any clubs or organizations?

KD: [I might?]. I can't even remember. Well, it -- part of the time, it was during the war, you know, in the '40s.

Q: Right.

KD: And I belonged to -- what was the girls' service organization? The GSO, I think we called ourselves. And the sailors would come down from Great Lakes every Saturday afternoon, and we would dance with them.

Q: OK.

KD: We had a good time.

Q: (laughter) And, you know, if I recall -- I've got to look it up again, but I think there was a newspaper article -- it was at the YMCA, the (inaudible) YMCA [out?] there?

KD: Yeah, yeah.

Q: I think there was, like, a group of girls introducing -- introducing themselves to sailors coming in from the war, or from the training.

KD: Yeah.

Q: I think you're in there.

KD: Oh, God.

Q: I got to look for that.

KD: There's a picture, I think. I remember --

Q: Yes, a picture.

KD: -- seeing pictures (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

Q: Right, it's a picture.

KD: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And I think I have that. I'm not --

KD: Oh, my goodness.

Q: -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) look for it.

KD: OK.

Q: I also have a picture of your high school class -- class picture.

KD: Really?

Q: Yeah.

KD: Oh, my goodness.

Q: It was in the *Daily News-Index*.

KD: Well, you know, we didn't have any prom or anything.

Q: Right.

KD: We didn't know about the prom. They didn't -- we didn't -- they didn't tell us anything about the prom. How did they do that? You know, you'd think -- look back, and you'd think, how in the world could they do that, exclude a whole group of people?

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) with a public school that --

KD: Right.

Q: -- taxpayer's money pays, say you can't come to a function.

KD: They didn't -- we didn't -- they didn't tell us about it. You know? We didn't know.

Q: Well, what was your experience like at Northwestern University?

KD: Well, that was wonderful, because the music school was small, and -- but we did find out, after we were there a short time, that they had a quota on the number of -- there were only six students, black students, in music school. And we -- we were absolutely sure, when there was a girl who was very talented -- I can't remember her name, now -- but she tried to get in Northwestern. She couldn't get in, because there were already six. And then there was a newspaper article, which I [had?] -- I don't know why I didn't hold onto that for years -- saying that Northwestern had this quota in music school, six. They had a percentage number of Jews at Northwestern. And a lot of the kids at music school were Jewish, and we got along famously, you know. Blacks and Jews can get along. And they were talented, you know. And some of my best friends in college were Jewish, you know?

Q: OK.

KD: That -- [Ann Steptoe?] -- have you ever heard about Ann?

Q: No, I haven't.

KD: [Bob Steptoe?] -- well, anyway, she was one of the six, and Ann DeRamus, and, let's see. I can't even think of the others. But we were -- we were like stars. It was fascinating. Because we were talented, you know, and when I -- we had our recitals, the room where held them was

filled. Any of the black students had full -- (laughs) a full audience. And some of the others, you know, like, half full, maybe three-quarters. (laughs) So I had a great time at Northwestern.

Q: Yeah. When did you graduate from Northwestern.

KD: Forty-two.

Q: Nineteen forty-two.

KD: And then I went back the next year for my master's.

Q: And the master's program -- was the master's program one year long, or...?

KD: Yes, just one year. Oh, I had some interesting experiences of being black. There was a [15:00] White -- what's the hamburger? White Castle.

Q: OK.

KD: There was a White Castle store right next to one of the music school buildings. It was on Sherman Avenue, I believe. Weird, you know, the situation [of it?]. Then there was another place on the corner, a restaurant. Well, we went in -- Ann DeRamus and I went in the White Castle, and they said, "Well, we'll serve you, but we won't serve her." So that took care of that. We were furious. Then we went -- a bunch of us went to this other restaurant and sat in. This was back in 1941 or so, you know.

Q: OK.

KD: We were sitting in back then. When -- when all of that stuff happened in the '60s, I said, been there, done that. (laughter) Then we went to a place downtown, Cooley's Cupboard. Is it still there?

Q: Nope, it's gone. Long gone.

KD: OK. Well, no black people ever went there. And all through high school, we would hear the white kids talk about going to Cooley's Cupboard. And longingly, you know, we would think, oh, we'd love to go there. We knew we couldn't. We didn't -- we could not go to any restaurant in Evanston.

Q: Wow.

KD: Not one. So in college, we decided we were going to Cooley's Cupboard. So about a half a dozen of us went down there. And we walked in, and they seated us, and they didn't take our order forever. And finally they took our order. And when the food came, it was full of salty. Salty, salty, salty. And we ate it, and left. (laughs) We did our little piece, made our statement, and got the hell out. (laughter) But that -- I mean, Evanston was like the Deep South. Absolutely.

Q: I believe it. From what I got -- heard from other people, yeah, it was --

KD: Oh, absolutely.

Q: It wasn't that progressive town that other people like to make it out to be.

KD: No. No. Not at all.

Q: Wow. So, I guess, two back-to-back questions, [if we can?] get into that. When did you meet your first husband, and - - or how did you meet him, and how did you meet -- get in touch with Duke Ellington?

KD: Well, I met Don Davis -- he lived with Mrs. [Cromer?]. I know you've heard of the Cromers.

Q: Yes.

KD: He was rooming with Mrs. Cromer. And he was handsome, you know. And he would walk by my house, and I would drool. Anyway, (laughter) we finally met. And we were going together through my last two years, I guess, which really messed up my social life, because I wasn't able to do all the things I wanted to do, because he was -- he was seven years older than I. Anyway, I told him that we would get married when he came back from his -- on his furlough. He went in the Army in '42. And meantime, I met somebody else. So I never -- I shouldn't have married him in the first place. But I did, because I promised. Young people are stupid. (laughter) And, of course, that was over before it started.

And then I went with Ellington in the end of '44. A friend of his said, "Why don't you go sing for Duke Ellington?" And I said, "Why? He doesn't want anybody like me." And he said, "Well, just go anyway." So I -- it was like a dare, you know? So I went backstage and managed to audition. And he asked me a lot of questions, you know, what I was doing, and I told him I was having a concert the next week at Lincoln -- was it Lincoln Center, down there on 43rd Street, or something? I think it's still there.

Q: OK.

KD: Anyway -- and I thought that was the end of that, you know? So the next Sunday, I went and did my little recital. And at the end of the recital, there was a bustle at the back of the room, and there was Duke with several people. And he said -- of course, I went along with the crowd. (laughter) And he said, "Well, can you be in Baltimore next Friday?" (laughs) I said, "What?" (laughter) So of course, I was in Baltimore the next Friday. But he didn't have -- he had -- what he had planned originally was for -- see, there were three other women singers there when I got there, Joya Sherrill, Maria Cole -- Maria Ellington, her name actually was. She was married to a Tuskegee flyer who died just before that.

Q: OK.

KD: And -- oh, what's that girl's name? Rosita Davis. And he was going to do a quartet of female voices, he thought. But, see, Duke -- Duke had all these great ideas. Some of them really worked, and some, of course, didn't, like anybody that's talented as he was. And he never did write something for the four of us. But he finally did a medley of his tunes for the next -- next summer, I guess it was. He did -- when we did the theaters. We went all over the country in these different theaters. This was during the vaudeville days, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KD: And the stage show, and then a movie. And he wrote this arrangement for a medley of [20:00] his songs with Al Hibbler, and Maria, and Joya, and I. And (inaudible) we all did different things with different songs. And he did an arrangement for "It Don't Mean a Thing" for the three girls.

Q: OK.

KD: And we had -- we went to Joya's modiste in Detroit and had these suits made. They were, sort of, orange, and they had a diagonal piece of fabric that went across the chest down to the thing, and white. The rest was white. Sharp, sharp, sharp. We knew we were gorgeous. And then we went to (inaudible) or one of those cheap -- [Baker's?] -- shoe

stores, you know, and got white baby doll pumps alike. And the pumps killed us. Those cheap shoes had us just crying. (laughs) And we'd get -- we'd start giggling. Because let's face it. I was 25, and they were 23 and 22, I guess. We get out on that stage, and Joya was the only one that would sing no matter what. She never got so giggly that she couldn't sing. And Maria and I were convulsed. And I don't know why he didn't fire us, because we're standing up there shaking (laughs) half the time, because our feet are killing us. (laughter) But we managed to get through the summer singing. (laughter)

And then when Roosevelt died, that was when I got my first chance to really do something. He asked me to sing a spiritual. The Ellington band was the only jazz band, popular music band, that was allowed to play during this mourning time, of a couple of days, in April of -- when was that? Forty-five, I think. Anyway, I sang "City Called Heaven," I think. And Hibbler sang a spiritual. I've forgotten which one he did. Do you have those recordings?

Q: No, I don't have those. I have -- what I have of yours is, "On Turquoise Cloud," (inaudible), "Minnehaha." I think those are the ones I have.

KD: OK. Well, I'll send you this one, because it's, kind of, interesting, this one of the program that they did on the air --

Q: OK.

KD: -- during that time. And I think that for somebody like you, I think it would be very interesting historically, you know. And then after that, they got a whole lot of calls. Who was this woman? You know, blah, blah, blah. And then Duke asked Billy to make arrangements for me of different popular songs. And that summer, we did Treasury broadcasts. Every Saturday, no matter where we were, we would broadcast, for the bonds, you know? It was a pitch for buying bonds, and then the band would play. And they -- I got to do a lot of things, because they had to fill up this time every Saturday all summer.

Q: OK.

KD: So I got some arrangements then for me. Some were good, and some weren't so hot. I mean, as far as I'm concerned. I didn't sound that great. Because I didn't have any real style at that point. I finally developed some as the years went on. But I was a soprano, a trained soprano, and that doesn't -- you know, that doesn't work too well with jazz. (laughter) So then he decided that he'd have me do "Creole

Love Call," which he had done in 1927, I think, for Adelaide Hall. Have you ever heard that recording?

Q: Yes, I have.

KD: OK. Well, that was really got me started on the obbligatos. So then every year, he would do something for me, like "On Turquoise Cloud," and "Transblucency."

Q: Yeah. I've got that one, too, "Transblucency."

KD: OK. And "Minnehaha." I guess that was it. There were just three. And then "Creole Love Call." There were four in all.

Q: OK.

KD: So each year, when it came time for the -- the concerts would start -- I really think they started in, like, December, at Carnegie Hall. And he would get a program together. And we did that concert through the spring, you know, at different concert halls all over the country.

Q: Did you keep any of those programs?

KD: No, I don't have any of those, I don't think. The [only?] thing I have is the programs when we went to England in 1948. Do you have any of those?

Q: No, I don't. Could I get a copy of that?

KD: Sure, sure.

Q: I would love to have a copy of that.

KD: I'll see if I can find it. OK.

Q: Do you have any -- also, do you have any photographs of yourself in performance?

KD: Well, I have the one that I'm standing on stage. I guess I was doing either "Creole" -- one of the obbligatos. I got my mouth hanging wide open. (laughter) It's a good picture.

Q: Is it possible to get a copy of that?

KD: I should send you a copy. I copied it. On the back of it, this guy that did the copy, Bob -- did the picture, Bob [Douglas?] -- does just that. He's been photographing jazz musicians for years.

Q: OK.

KD: And I'd met him in -- I don't know, 1941, I think, so I knew him from way back. And he took the picture in -- I think in '48.

Q: OK.

KD: And on the back, it says, "Must have the photographer's permission to copy," or whatever. So the guy from the *Tribune* who called me wanted a picture, [25:00] so he got it, and he called Bob. And I don't know what kind of arrangement they made, but he had to get permission to use it. It was in the *Tribune* several years ago. But I made a copy on the copy machine, and I can send you one of those.

Q: OK. That would be wonderful.

KD: It's a good picture. It really is.

Q: I believe it, and I can't wait to see it.

KD: Right?

Q: What I did -- because I -- when I'm also interviewing people, I also talk about, you know, archiving our own history here, because we don't have an area here where people on the North Shore can see and experience the black experience up in the North Shore area. And so I've -- you know, families have been donating pictures, and I've been making -- pictures I don't like keeping of people, because, you know, they're valuable. So what I tend to do is I make new negatives, new copies of them, and new prints, and I send back the original pictures.

KD: OK.

Q: So -- because I do that, you know, pretty much within a couple of days. That's how fast I do it, (laughs) because I'm very concerned about the privacy and the heirlooms that families do collect.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: So just so you know, everything gets kept in good hands. And I don't do anything without permission.

KD: Yeah. Well, I'll send you the picture that I copied, so you don't have to worry about that.

Q: OK. Great.

KD: I saw it the other day. I'm looking as I'm talking. Where in the world did I put it? (laughter) I'm not too organized in some areas. (laughter) If it has anything to do with cooking, I'm with it, but other than that -- I love to cook.

Q: OK. So that's one of your hobbies, cooking?

KD: Absolutely.

Q: How long have you been cooking? How long has it been --

KD: All my life.

Q: All your life?

KD: Yeah. I remember, I made my first cake from scratch when I was nine, and I used to take my parents and have Sunday morning breakfast, on the tray, up to the bedroom, when I was, like, nine, eight, nine, ten years old.

Q: OK.

KD: Love to cook. Always have. So I say, like, the kitchen is now my stage. (laughs)

Q: So when did you finally leave Evanston?

KD: Well, in '40 -- '44, end of '44, when I went with Duke.

Q: OK.

KD: And then when I came back, I got married in 1950. And I lived in Chicago from then on.

Q: OK. In Chicago. OK. [Sounds very?] exciting here.

(laughter) I finally got this tape player to tape over the phone. It just took me forever to find the thing.

KD: Uh-huh.

Q: Let's see. Let's see what other questions I have here.

How long did total -- total years, how long did you perform with Duke Ellington?

KD: From the end of '44 to '50, June of '50. I went -- I went with Ellington and Ray Nance. The band did not go in 1948, because of the union. What's the theater in London? Palladium. Didn't -- they had a pit band, a big, wonderful pit band, and they did not want to mess with that. And in order to put another band in, you had to pay a whole lot of money. Well, they weren't going to do that. So Ellington took me and Ray Nance over there. The band had a vacation. And we were over there -- I think it was about five weeks. Anyway, we did the Palladium one week, I think. And then we toured the provinces.

Q: OK.

KD: We went to a lot of different places and did concerts, just the three of us. And there was a trio that traveled with us. And when I went to Leeds several years ago for the International Duke Ellington Society, they paid my way. They sent for me. I was thrilled, because this is the

first thing that happened to me like that. (laughs) After all these years, you know. I had, kind of, thrown it out of my mind, you know? And all of a sudden, I became a star. (laughter) It was really funny. So anyway, when I got over there, here was this trio. I had not seen those guys since 1948. Hadn't thought about them, really, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KD: And this one -- the leader of the trio was Malcolm Mitchell, a guitar player. Lovely, lovely man. He and his wife were there. Charming people. Very sophisticated people. And [Frank?] just fell in love with them. So the last day that we were there, we had coffee together, and promised to get together, and they said they were coming over here. One of their sons is going to Harvard or Yale or someplace. And --

END OF AUDIO FILE

KAY DAVIS: -- [00:00] it broke our hearts, because we thought we had new friends, you know. We were so excited about them, because they were so nice. Anyway, when I went over on the Concorde last March, I had gotten in touch with

Irene, and she met Delores Parker Morgan, who used to be with the band?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KD: She met us at the Ritz in London. We had tea. So I got to see her again.

Q: OK.

KD: But anyway, this trio was there. Since that time, there's only one left. The drummer died not too long ago, I understand. So only the bass player is left. But it was so exciting to see those people after all those years. And they had pictures. This girl that was responsible for getting me over there and whatnot had some fascinating pictures. Great big pictures of me on a motorbike with this one guy. (laughter) And I remember riding on the motorbike, but I didn't remember that I had been with him. (laughter) Huge picture. I'm talking like 24 by 18.

Q: Wow.

KD: (laughter) And they had these things on display.

Q: Did she ever send you a copy of it?

KD: Oh, I have a copy of this great big thing.

Q: (laughter) Wow.

KD: But anyway, that was a great experience, going to Leeds and seeing -- and, you know, you just have -- don't have any idea -- at least I had no idea -- of the way people idolize

Ellington. And all these people from all over the world -- all over Europe, mainly -- were there. Just, I mean, worshipping at the shrine, you know? It was fascinating. And they -- I mean, they knew more about Duke than I would ever know. I mean, they know everything. They know all about all of the music. You see, after I left the band, I really didn't pay that much attention anymore. I was living my life, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KD: And they know all about all of those different suites that he did, you know, (inaudible).

Q: Yes, they do. (laughter) Yes, they do.

KD: Every note.

Q: There are some serious Duke Ellington [people out there?].

KD: I mean. I mean.

Q: And you cannot say anything negative.

KD: Oh, no. No.

Q: Do that, and you might as well just sign your death.

(laughs)

KD: That's right. And then another very interesting thing.

There was a band there -- well, there were two bands. They had a band from a little college in Leeds. Terrific musicians. I mean (phone beeps) those -- those scores. They sounded like Duke, you know? That sounded like the

band. They were wonderful. And some of them had great solos and everything. Then they had a [phone beeps] professional band that came the last night we were there, I think. And I mean, this guy, he played -- I think he played clarinet and saxophone. And then they had a girl singer who did some of the stuff. They were fantastic.

Q: Wow.

KD: I mean, they had that stuff down, better than most anybody I've heard except the band itself, you know? They were really wonderful. I mean, they hit every note. They have those scores. (laughs) They sound like Duke Ellington's orchestra.

Q: I have a friend here in Evanston -- actually, he's [probably?] moving on to California now. My age. He's -- we're both 33.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: He's a music composer.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: And (inaudible) from the Smithsonian Institution --

KD: Yeah?

Q: -- he's one of three who are licensed to transcribe Duke Ellington music.

KD: Oh? Licensed?

Q: Licensed. You have to be licensed in order to -- because what he does is that Duke -- someone found a reel -- a film reel with a Duke Ellington song, and there's no written sheet music of it.

KD: Yeah?

Q: He takes that, listens to it, and rewrites the music.

KD: OK. But you have to have a license to do that.

Q: So -- he has to have a license. He has to be licensed and commissioned to do that. And he's -- and he does that.

KD: OK.

Q: Real interesting.

KD: Well, I don't know where they got those scores, but they were exact, you know. You could tell. They sounded just like the band.

Q: Yes.

KD: And I had heard that stuff enough, you know, because I used to -- I loved Duke Ellington before I joined the band. I had collected Ellington records when I was in college.

Q: OK.

KD: And I was really a fan, you know? And I played his stuff over and over and over. And then when I got there, I remember, for weeks, I wouldn't miss a show. And they're doing five and six shows a day on weekends. I would go down and listen to every show. Because at first, I wasn't

doing anything anyway. He didn't have anything for me to do, so I would listen, listen, listen. So I pretty much know in my ears what -- (laughter) what it's supposed to sound like. Oh.

Q: After your career with Ellington, what did you do?

KD: I became a housewife, happily. And I didn't do anything else. You know, I was in charitable [05:00] organizations, that kind of stuff.

Q: OK. What [kind of?] organizations?

KD: Well, I was on the -- I was in the charter group of Children's Home & Aid.

Q: OK.

KD: It was called Illinois Children's Home & Aid in those days. And then I -- the bravo chapter of the Lyric Opera was started at my house.

Q: OK.

KD: And for a while, I was on the women's board at Billings Hospital. That wasn't long. But for a little while. And what else did I do? I was busy. I went to the Y and learned how to make hats. They had a hat class, you know? Because I thought that my husband was going to be home much more than he was, so I had to find something to kill my -- fill my time, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KD: So I made hats. I sold hats for a while.

Q: Oh.

KD: Real -- that was during the -- see, this was in the late '50s, early '60s. People -- women were really wearing hats. Well, Jackie Kennedy, you know, with the pillbox and all that stuff. And I was making hats during those years. I had a good time. I enjoyed it.

Q: Do you still have any of those hats?

KD: No. (laughter) I wish I did. I really wish I did. They all got away from me.

Q: Well, somebody has, and they're probably, like, collector's items now. (laughter) When did you move to Florida from Chicago?

KD: I got the first house in '88, and we went back and forth. When my husband was alive, we went back and forth, until he died in '91. And then in '91, I met Fred, and we became an item. And then I built a second house right across the street -- it's in the same development -- in '92. And this is where -- I go from here to Oakwood Cemetery. No more houses.

Q: (laughter) Well, I think that's all the questions I have.

KD: All right.

Q: But what I'll do is -- today, actually, I'm going to put together a package to send down to you --

KD: All right.

Q: -- all the things I have of the Twiggs family --

KD: OK.

Q: -- and any other articles I have of you.

KD: OK.

Q: And send them your way.

KD: OK. And I've got this picture and this tape of the -- what do you call it? Anyway, the tape of the broadcast, Roosevelt broadcast.

Q: OK, great.

KD: Which I think you'll enjoy.

Q: OK. Because I don't know if I told you. I'm working on an exhibit right now on musicians that were from Evanston, and you are part of that exhibit.

KD: OK.

Q: And when I get it up, I'm going to take a couple of pictures of it and send you a copy of it down --

KD: Oh, wonderful.

Q: -- so you can see what it looks like, because there's quite a few musician (inaudible) that have done a lot of things.

KD: T.S. finally died, T.S. Mims.

Q: Really? He did?

KD: Oh, you didn't know that?

Q: No, I didn't.

KD: Oh, my goodness. He's been dead for months.

Q: Oh, wow. I didn't --

KD: Not a year, yet, I don't think, but yeah.

Q: Wow.

KD: Yeah. That's amazing that they didn't -- nobody told you.
Huh.

Q: Well, (inaudible) find out now. (laughs)

KD: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Q: Do some digging around again, and say, OK, when was -- when was that? Because I try to be informed about what's going on.

KD: He was in high school. We were in high school together.

Q: OK.

KD: Mm-hmm. He was a nice man.

Q: Was he playing then?

KD: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. But after that, he really was playing, you know. I saw him in Hilton Head -- he had a home down there -- several years ago. I saw him down there.

Q: Got it. Well, it was wonderful speaking with you.

KD: OK.

Q: And I'm --

KD: Well, thank you so much.

Q: I will stay -- remain -- I'll keep in touch with you, still, so you'll know --

KD: OK.

Q: -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) I'm doing. And have you gotten other issues of *Shorefront* before?

KD: Yes. Yes, I have several.

Q: OK, good. I just wanted to make sure you were already getting them.

KD: Yes. Thank you. No, I don't get them regularly.

Q: OK.

KD: Mm-hmm.

Q: Well, I'll make sure you get this one, here.

KD: OK.

Q: OK?

KD: Thanks so much.

Q: All right. Have a great -- have a great rest of the day.

KD: Same to you.

Q: Bye-bye.

KD: All right. Bye.

Q: This was recorded -- (beep) this was recorded January 28, 2001, between the hours of twelve o'clock -- 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. Bye-bye. (three busy signal beeps) [10:00]

END OF AUDIO FILE

KAY DAVIS: [00:00] -- and we had a very pleasant time. She gave me a book from [being the?] -- 150th anniversary book from Northwestern. I looked. I got my alumni news yesterday. The book's 45 dollars, and I got that for nothing, and lunch. (laughter)

Q: (inaudible) you get lunch.

KD: Yeah, right. So I got to send her a -- I -- have you happened to see a book? It has a picture of Duke in a high hat, one of those early pictures. The book is called *Reminiscing In Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington*, by Stuart Nicholson.

Q: I think I've seen that before.

KD: Have you? Oh, well, I hadn't. It was at the local Borders, I guess it was, and I picked it up. It is all interviews. It's not, you know, a book in chapters or anything, just one interview -- and it is -- to me, it's fascinating. I can't imagine it being so interesting to somebody who didn't know those people and whatnot, but maybe it is. But anyway, all through there, there are different quotes. One, Lawrence Brown talking about when they recorded -- I think it was "On a Turquoise Cloud," and how he had to put -- he said my voice was very beautiful but very piercing, and he had to put a -- you know the metal derby that they use, you know, to mute trumpets and

trombones and stuff? He put that, and he said he put a towel in it, and put that in front of my face, so that my -- I would blend in with the instruments better. (laughter) I don't remember that at all. And I know that when we did it on stage, they didn't do that. I know I just -- I just opened my mouth and just let it go. (laughter) But I thought that was fascinating. I had never -- (laughs) I don't remember at all. So many things I don't remember, you know?

Q: If I'm able to share these -- when I last talked to you on the phone and interviewed you over the phone, I'm able to tape it, because I do now a slide exhibit -- a slide show lecture on musicians that came out of Evanston.

KD: Oh, really?

Q: And I incorporate comments and thoughts of people I've interviewed, you know, especially -- like you. And I, kind of, told how I -- I always tell the story of how you and Duke Ellington met, and the kids get a kick out of that.

KD: No kidding.

Q: They get a tremendous kick out of that.

KD: Oh, that's good.

Q: You know, I, kind of, teach them a lesson [as they do it?]. So here are things they can do on a dare, you know?

KD: Uh-huh, but -- (laughter)

Q: Who knows where you're going to go on a dare?

KD: Yes.

Q: Just try it.

KD: (laughter) Well, I certainly never expected that, you can believe me. (laughs)

Q: So, yeah. It's funny. And I tell the story, and kids are just, like, "Wow."

KD: (laughter) Uh-huh. About what age are they?

Q: These are high schoolers --

KD: OK, OK.

Q: -- that I'm talking to. Really exciting.

KD: Very good.

Q: The slide show I do now, it's about a half hour, [with slides?], and I play samples of the music, about a minute of the music. So I played a sample of when you sang, "When I Walk With You." I played that one for them.

KD: "When I Walk With You."

Q: That's the one I sent you the recording on.

KD: Yeah, that I never -- I can't remember at all.

Q: (laughter)

KD: That is the weirdest thing. Talk about a bad memory. Whoo.

Q: Probably done so much of it, though, probably, like, half of it, you don't know if it was recorded or not.

KD: Oh, I don't know.

Q: Yeah? (laughs)

KD: I don't know. And I tell you, I can't remember the song at all. It must have come from (inaudible) or something.

Q: The show was at [Cyril's Restaurant?].

KD: Pardon?

Q: It was at Cyril's Restaurant.

KD: Oh, OK. Well, that -- see, that was really early.

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Yeah. It was a radio production, and somebody had found the tapes and then put it on record.

KD: OK. So that was something somebody -- was the -- the person -- who wrote it? Do you know?

Q: I --

KD: Was that on the tape?

Q: It's not really -- no, it's not on there. Just says, "Live recording from radio broadcast."

KD: OK. See, Cyril's. Good grief. That was, like, 1946-ish, or '7.

Q: Right. Exactly.

KD: And that was early in the time when I was there. And that was probably something that was only done a couple of times, you know? Somebody -- probably somebody wrote it out there in California, and Duke said, "OK, we'll do

this." And I know -- I'm fairly certain that I didn't do it many, many times, or I certainly would remember, for goodness sakes. But I don't remember it at all, you know. That's what -- that's one of the strangest things.

Q: (laughter) Well, and I do so much creative stuff around town, and I remember seeing something, a graphic thing, that I did a long time ago, that I did not remember doing.

KD: Oh-oh.

Q: I was sitting there, looking, going, wow, this is, kind of, amazing. But it looks so familiar to me.

KD: Yeah.

Q: I wonder who did this?

KD: Oh! So you're as bad as I am.

Q: So I'm raking -- I'm raking my brain, like, who did this? And (laughter) it, kind of, looked familiar. And then, like, months later, I was looking through my files, [and all of a sudden, I'm, like?], oh, I did this.

KD: (laughter) I don't feel so bad now. Because you're young, [05:00] and you can't remember.

Q: Sometimes I'm getting old.

KD: (laughter) Well, are you 30?

Q: I'm 30 -- I'll be 34 soon.

KD: Oh, my goodness.

Q: And having a daughter, I think, is making me forget a lot of things now.

KD: Oh. How old is your daughter?

Q: She's just over a year old.

KD: Oh, a little baby. Yeah. That's nice.

Q: Keeping me extremely busy.

KD: Yes, I bet. Mm-hmm.

Q: So I just wanted to call and touch bases with you.

KD: OK.

Q: And I found that song, and I was really excited to find it. I just keep finding something new, [and every?] time, I get excited and will call the person. (laughs)

KD: Yeah. Well, I'll get that tape off one day. (laughter)
We're not too far out along the way. I (inaudible), I've had a lot of little personal things, though, and we've been doing a lot of stuff. And we'll continue. We're going on an Alaskan cruise at the end of May.

Q: Oh, [good for you?].

KD: And then I'm supposed to -- you know Bobby Short, or heard of him.

Q: Yes, I have.

KD: Well, Bobby Short was here in Florida for a series of concerts, and I've known him since in the '40s, so I -- I called him, and I asked him why he didn't come through

Orlando on his way to Lakeland and a few other places. And he said, "Well, OK." Set it up with [Stephanie?], or whatever her name was. So we did, and he came. And I had a party for him, and he spent the night. And the next day, the limo picked him up. And see, I-4, that's one of our main thoroughfares here. You know, Florida doesn't have a whole lot of big streets, big highways. So much of it is the swamp, or, you know, the -- what do they call it? The Okeechobee. The -- oh, mercy. What's the name for all that? You know, it's a national forest. Anyway --

Q: Okefenokee, or whatever?

KD: Well, anyway, there are not a whole lot of big highways, and I-4 is one of the main arteries across the state in the central section. And we had a brush fire, and it screwed up I-4. I-4 had a -- they took -- they went off of it, around a section where it was -- you know, the stuff [had fallen?] on the highway and everything? And so the man who was to pick him up went this route, and it took him forever. And he was so late, it was scary, because the concert was at 7:30, and he was supposed to have been picked up at 11:00, and he didn't get here till after 1:00

Q: Wow.

KD: So by that time, even Bobby had got -- because he wasn't there. In the beginning, he said, "Oh, they'll get here.

I'll get there. Don't worry." You know? And then finally, about 15 minutes before the man came, he started to worry. (laughs) But anyway, they took him on, and we went that night. We took another route to get over to where he was and enjoy the concert. But anyway, he's invited me to come over to his place in the south of France in the summer, and I'm all worked up over that. So I haven't made any final air travel or anything, but I'm going to do it, I think.

Q: OK.

KD: So I've been excited. I've had all these things happening. (laughter) Have you seen any of my relatives lately?

Q: I talked to [Katie?] not too long ago. She [borrowed?] an exhibit of mine to put up, the same exhibit I brought over to your family reunion.

KD: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

Q: She borrowed that to put up at Dawes School.

KD: Oh, good.

Q: [Where?] (inaudible) school.

KD: She does a whole lot of things.

Q: Yes, she does.

KD: Very nice.

Q: Yeah. So I said more than -- I'd give to her, more than happy to give it out, because it doesn't do any good sitting in my basement.

KD: Right.

Q: I want it to be out. So that's the last time I spoke with her.

KD: Uh-huh.

Q: Oh, you mentioned Bobby Short. Did he ever live in Evanston?

KD: Yeah, I think so. His family lived there, but I'm not sure whether he ever actually did.

Q: OK.

KD: He (inaudible) born in Danville, Illinois.

Q: Right.

KD: But I think his brother -- in fact, I'm pretty sure his brother -- (inaudible) their name -- lived in Evanston. He used to come down to Chicago to see him at different places when he was in the Chicago area.

Q: All right. I was wondering, because some people used to say that Bobby Short did live in Evanston.

KD: Yes. He may have been there a short time.

Q: Yes.

KD: When I met him, it was 1945, I think, out in California, and he was playing at a club up in the hills of Hollywood,

and Delores Parker and I went up to hear him. And he was staying at Lawrence Brown's brother's house, so that's where I actually met him, and then we went up there to hear him play and sing. That was in 1945, I think, so I've known him since then.

Q: OK.

KD: And I'm pretty sure he -- he probably lived there in and out, or something. Because he started -- he started working at 12. He had little white tails, you know, and he'd go around. He was a child prodigy.

Q: OK.

KD: He was playing in joints. He says he's the last of the saloon players. (laughter) He's a lot of fun. OK.

Q: OK, well --

KD: Well, thanks for calling, you know.

Q: OK. And when you get a chance, just pop [the tape?] in the mail.

KD: I will. I will. All right.

Q: And I'll keep sending you the *Shorefronts*.

KD: OK.

Q: OK.

KD: All right.

Q: Bye-bye.

KD: Bye-bye. [10:00]

END OF AUDIO FILE