Robert Korstad: ...where you were born, if you knew your grandparents, what your parents did and where they lived. Maybe we can talk a little bit about your childhood and memories.

Emma Gresham: You stop me because I might talk too long. I was born to an African Methodist Episcopal church minister, Reverend Marvin Rhodes. My mother's name was Ida Clark Rhodes. The two of them were team members in a sort of a way in the church. Because he was a minister they assumed he had enough education to teach school. Mama said they didn't even ask him how much education he had. They just said Reverend Rhodes, we have a school over here and we would like for you to teach. She said he didn't have any better sense than to say alright. She said when they looked at his writing they should have known he didn't have that much education. My mother finished seventh grade and at that time she was supposed to be very educated. My father finished third grade. He was self-made because he kept a dictionary inside of his pocket. Anytime he heard a new word he would get to himself and he had a good memory and he would learn that word and would use it on members of the church. That next Sunday she would hear him using those words. He read all the time. When I grew up I grew up in a home with books, books, books, a library. I learned to read quite early. I don't know when I learned to read. I don't know my first day in school. My mother said I don't remember my first day in school because he started this teaching when I was a baby. I was born April 13, 1925. He was pastoring a church in Reidsville, Georgia. He moved from Keysville, Georgia and was pastoring a church. In the Methodist church in those days
every year you might be assigned to a new church. Of course, he was assigned to this church in Reidsville, Georgia which is about a hundred and fifteen miles from Keysville. To them that was a long ways. They had a T-Model Ford and from time to time he would come back and look because he had bought property in Keysville. He would come back to see about his property. He rented his land. Someone was farming his land. He had sisters and brothers here in Keysville. When I really knew who I was, knew my name I remember living in a little town, Garfield, Georgia. He had been sent from Reidsville, Georgia to Garfield, Georgia. It was supposed to have been a bigger church I guess. I have just slight memories of Garfield. From then the next thing I remember is being back in Keysville. He was sick, in his forties, about forty-six years old and he had what people called at that time, they didn't call it hypertension, they called it high blood pressure. Ministers were well fed. Every Sunday someone would have him to their homes and he was really eating incorrectly. All of the ham, all of the fried chicken and all of the fried foods, and the cakes and the pies was against him because he didn't need that. My father died before he was fifty from hypertension. At that time they did not know how to control hypertension. My mother said his sister who cooked for one of the white families here in Keysville would bring him the best of everything they had from their table. That was not what he needed. He needed really some juice from the turnips and soups and no bread and no salt.
They didn't know any better. I was not five years old when this happened. But I learned alot from my father. He was at home during my early years and I remember seeing him doing alot of things. He would take pictures. He would fit people with glasses. He would build houses. He would do chimneys when people needed a chimney done. He would fix shoes. The very last years I remember seeing him with a shoe ( ) and something that he cut the soles from leather around and people would bring shoes to him for him to fix their shoes. I remember seeing do that alot. But while I would sit there with him my mother would have the garden.

We had three acres of land and the house. She always had the sweet potato patch, the corn patch, the big vegetable garden so there was plenty of food and kept a couple of hogs. So we never had to worry about vegetables. She would can everything in the summer and we had just rows of canned vegetables. We had chickens for eggs. Therefore, I used to hear people talk about the very hard times or the Depression, that was 1930 when he died and that was the Depression. But I didn't know it was the Depression. I just knew that we had plenty of chickens and eggs to eat and vegetables. We just had food because we were growing our own food. We had our own hogs, our own chickens. We owned our own house. It was not a big house at that time. It was two big rooms that we moved back to because he and his brothers were probably the first merchants here. They had a store before we moved away from Keysville, before I was born. The Rhodes brothers, one had a
store and what mama called an ice cream parlor and a pressing club. I wondered what was a pressing club. People would bring their pants there and they had these big irons and they would press these seams in there pants. This happened right here in Keysville. That must have been in the twenties. Then on Sundays that would end up being, they would make ice cream and people would come in there and sit in chairs and they would serve them ice cream and that was the ice cream parlor. They were really business minded people. He of course was the only brother of the three brothers who went into the ministry.

I never did see my grandfather, George Rhodes. Sometimes when I looked at this picture of Roots, I sometimes wondered if my grandfather, that bad George, if Chicken George, because my grandfather was a character according to my cousins and some of my relatives we have at the reunions. They like to talk about George Rhodes. George Rhodes was a slave. They freed the slaves and he was freed from some family in Jenkins County which was not even a hundred miles away but he thought it was a long ways away because he walked to Keysville and lived here. He told some family where he came from, from Jenkins County. He told his grandchildren and it came on down to me that he came from Jenkins County and that when he discovered that he was free he told his other sisters and brothers who were living on the Johnson plantation, I'm a free man. I am not taking the name of Johnson. I am hitting the roads. I'm going to be called Rhodes. I am a man. I'm a roads
man. Someone must have spelled this for him because he didn't know how to spell. So they spelled it Rhodes because he said I'm hitting the roads. That's how we got our name, Rhodes, from my grandfather George Rhodes. George Rhodes is someone I never knew. My grandmother, Celia Rhodes, was the person who we got alot of our religious training from and our religious heritage because she was what mother called, the pillar of the church. She was a very small woman, small feet and black. Mama said she was just like a ball of fire around the community, organizing missionary societies in the community. Before she married my daddy, she said she knew her because of her work with young people in the community. I didn't know that my grandfather was one of the ones who, he worked at the church but he was not that kind of strong worker. He used to like to do the songs in the church. He and another man used to try to get to church first so they could find out who would lead the songs. At that time they didn't have pianos or organs. They would sing by the notes. Something like do-ri-me-fa-so. They would not say the words of the songs. Just like they were singing Amazing Grace, do-re-fa-me, etc. They would learn, say singing by the notes. I'm glad they don't do that now because I would be completely lost. Another person told me that his grandfather, his grandmother told him, that his grandfather and my father were the two that would try to race to get the hymn books. The hymn books stayed at church, you know. They wanted to lead this song service before the preacher would come in. I really treasure this but I
can't name anyone beyond my grandfather.

RK: Do you know why he came to Keysville?

EG: I don't know why he came to Keysville. I think he just wanted to walk in a different direction. He said that his brothers walked in another direction. He said I am walking down this road. The road from Lewisville, from Jenkins County, to Keysville is a rather straight road anyway. I guess he just found friendly people. Keysville has always been a place where there were more black people than white. He was probably received here.

At that time he had land. The story goes on to say that George Rhodes never worked very hard or very much but he did have property. He left property. At that time maybe the property was so cheap that it was very easy to buy. Because he did have a home and some land and children. His grandson who remembered him real well used to have us laughing when we would ask him about our grandfather. I don't know whether he would be lying or not but he would say, oh, our grandfather never worked. But we always had milk and butter. We always had a cow. I said, well where did you get it from if he didn't work? He said that he said well, I worked a long time as a slave so at night I walk, in the day I sleep. He said we didn't know what he meant until we got older. He would just go someplace and milk somebody's cow and bring the milk home and churn the butter. If his chickens got low he'd just go and get him a bag of chickens and bring them and put them on his yard. That's why I said he must have been that Chicken
George. Maybe that's why he had to rush to church on Sundays to sing and pray alot to get forgiveness for his sins.

RK: What your mother's family?

EG: I was reared around my father's family alot. My mother's family was from a county called Emmanuel County. She was the child next to the baby. At that time they called the child next to the baby the knee baby. She tells her story saying that her very wealthy cousin from Keysville came down to Emmanuel County in her big horse and buggy to visit her cousins and her mother was ill. This mother knowing that she was well off said I am dying and I want you to have my knee baby. Take her back to Keysville with you and raise her. And of course she left her sisters and brothers and her father and came back to Keysville to live with Aunt Martha. I don't know why I called her Aunt Martha.

Aunt Martha to me looked like an Indian woman. The way I see pictures of Indians, I didn't know she looked like an Indian then, I just knew she was Aunt Martha. Aunt Martha was a tall, tanned looking woman with long black hair with big waves in her hair. Her hair hung way down her back. My mother had long hair but her hair was sandy hair. I used to wonder why don't I have hair like my mother? I'm not the color of my mother nor do I have hair like my mother. My mother is very fair and my mother's father was very fair and his father was fairer. My mother had gathered up these pictures after going back after being an adult to visit her father. He had given her a picture of himself and a picture of
his father. He told her, this man here is a white man. My father's father is white. But he was always very good to us and he gave us all the land. They had a lot of land in the country town in Emmanuel County. He was one of the plantation owners but he owned all of his children and gave them pieces of land. But he was a black man. His mother was black. I don't know what my grandfather's mother's name was. All I know they were Clarks. Sometimes when I see Clarks I just wonder if they were relatives of my mother because she came strictly from very close to... I think my father though came strictly from African descent. But my mother's grandparents and great grandparents were white. Sometimes it shows up, certain traits show up. Just like I have a brother who has nice hair, very nice hair. Then I have sisters who are much lighter than me. Having a black father and a very fair mother we came out all kinds of colors. You'd look around and wonder. My mother would say, well you took after some of my people that I don't know. She was the disciplinarian in the family. My mother was a stern woman. Ida Rhodes was a stern woman. My father was the person who would say, oh, it's alright, let them do that. And we would have fusses. I don't remember. As I told you he died before I was five. I want to tell you some of the things that my father taught me and I didn't know when I learned them. It seems I have known them all my life but I know I didn't. He taught me to sing the tables. When I was a little girl, first grade in school, can you imagine someone trying to
teach me the tables? I knew how to sing the tables. Two times one is two, two times two is four. And then five times one is five, five times three is fifteen and five time four is twenty. Don't you want to be excused to go in the flower garden? The teacher would get so disgusted with me. I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to sing them. But I think he had me singing the tables to make them interesting to me. I didn't know what I was doing. All I knew was that I knew them. Then I could recognize them. Then we come to the ABC's, I taught ( ) the ABC's when I went to school. I would say okay. To make me know them he would make me say them backward and forward. M,L,K,J,I,H,G,F,E,D,C,B,A..Z,Y,X,W,V,U,T,S,R,Q,P,O,N. Therefore, when I learned that I do not know. I am sixty-seven years old now. I guess if it is put in your computer brain when you are three or four you never forget it because that is the way I learned and that is the way I would say my alphabet while other people were struggling. Therefore I was a bad person in school. I would write up my tablets because I could write. I was around people doing this all the time. My mother said she would carry me to school when I was one or two years old and give me a piece of paper and a pencil and sit me on the floor. She had to help my father. The joke was my father could read anything but he was not good in math. My mother was good in math. He was the one getting the salary but the days she didn't go with him he would say to the students, study this assignment overnight and when you come back
tomorrow you'd better have it. But he would go home and study it too. If he didn't understand it well he would say Ida, you come go to school with me today, you and the baby. Mama would come to school and he would say, ya'll just get over there with her and do that math and I'm going to get this group over here. She said he'd always act like he just knew everything and she would get over there with them and teach them. Sometimes it would be long division or it would be fractions or working with decimals. Some of that stuff he didn't understand but she understood it. I think she helped me to have a good background because after I left Keysville I went to Deland, Florida, Hastings, Florida, Deland, Florida because I had a sister that was married down there. I have three brothers and all of my brothers are alive. I had four sisters and all of my sisters are dead. I'm the only sister left in this family. You wonder sometimes, why me? My sister that I am four years younger, I was completely devastated when she died. I lost about fifteen pounds. I felt like, you know, why? I always wanted to do alot of things. Although she was four years older she married when she was tenth grade. She went on and I encouraged her and she got a GED and went on to college. She didn't go to college until after her children were grown. She was going to graduate. She died before she graduated. One of her children received her diploma. She was in the hospital. I just wish she could have walked across that stage and got her own diploma. I think that's why I was so devastated. She didn't like
to read so I would read books and call her up on the phone. She lived in Jacksonville, Florida. I would call her up on the phone and say Jo, listen now, I've critiqued this book for you. This is it. Just give me some more to read for you. But I helped her with her reading a lot of times because I liked to read. She could out-sew me. She could make anything she saw. Why pay seventy-five dollars for that dress. Buy material and go back home and make it in a day. I can't do that. She had so many talents that I didn't have. When my children were growing up, I have one son and my husband has a son, I have a stepson and I have three daughters. When I finished high school in 1941 I was sixteen years old. I wanted to be a nurse. I went into the hospital and they said you've got to be eighteen. It was during wartime. I said, what's wrong with my age? The said no, you finished high school and I graduated third highest honors in the class down at Boggs Academy, Keysville, Georgia. It was a private Presbyterian boarding school. But then I didn't have any money to go to college. I went to a trade school, Dorchester Academy. That was something that Eleanor Roosevelt and Dr. McCloud, the founder of ( ) College, the two of them together set up NYA schools and projects all over the United States. I happened to go to one of those kinds of schools. It was a trade school. When I went there, you could go there and take a test. If you'd finished high school you would go into some type of trade. While I was waiting for the trade they put me in a sewing class. I was doing so many
backwards things they said did you ever have home ec in high school? I said yes, I made a C. They said we are going to get you out of here fast. They had to go through my papers and go through my tests and they found out I wanted to be a nurse. So they let me work with the nurse and the doctor. That really helped me alot because I really enjoyed working with the nurse and doctor. I would have been able to be an LPN or whatever. But December 7, 1941 when Pearl Harbor, the school closed and I had to come home. All of us were crying ready to come home. We came home there was a lady that had just walked off her job teaching school and they said Emma, would you like to teach school? I said I'd love it. I went to live in the home with a family about fifteen miles from here and taught in a little house next to a church. I think I should have paid them to let me teach. I had so much fun. No one came to give me any instructions about anything. Somebody carted me off there and I'd spend a week down there and someone would bring me home on Fridays. I would go back on Mondays. I asked the children, what is your name? I had a roll book and I didn't know how to do the roll. All those numbers, I didn't know what I was doing. But I knew how to teach. I mean I knew how to help them to learn whatever they were doing. As far as having training, I didn't have that. But I had always helped my oldest sister who lived in Keysville. She had thirteen children. I was always working with those children. They were at our house and I named alot of them. One of them I named a
ridiculous name. I named her after three sisters, Emma after me, Jo after my sister Jo, Seal after my sister ( ) - Emma Jo Seal. She was my project when I was around fourteen. I wanted her to do everything that I wanted her to do. I'd make her talk correctly. She'd like to say I'm am and I'd say no, no, no - I am.

Colloquialism, when you are in a country town you talk like you hear other people talk. She ended up, all her sisters and brothers would say, you are so proper. I'd say, you tell them you are supposed to speak properly. That's the way you are supposed to speak.

RK: After your father died, you stayed here in Keysville?
EG: Stayed here with my mother. We owned our own property.
RK: What did she do to support you?
EG: She washed clothes, washed and ironed. There was no welfare at that time. Emmanuel church gave us a pension every three months. With that little pension check we would buy the shoes, clothes, whatever. It was not much. Every three months the church would send a check to her. My brothers were much older than me. There were three of us at home when he died. That was my youngest brother who is now seventy-three and my sister four years. But I think he's a little older than that. These older brothers and sisters would send a check to her. My oldest brother who is still alive and is way up in his eighties seemed to have been prospering rather good. He was in Louisville, Kentucky. He still lives in Louisville, Kentucky. He was one who just left
home with a construction company when he was about sixteen years old. He liked to worried my mother to death. He ended up being very prosperous. He learned to save his money on his own. Right now he owns homes in Louisville, Kentucky. He had a store. He had a big bar at one time. Since he's older he sold all of that.

But he was the one who sent money back. He had Mama's house wired for lights. I hadn't seen him. I had never seen him. He just didn't think about coming home. He would just send money home. So I decided I would have a write campaign. I didn't call it a write campaign. I just said I want to see my brother. Every week I wrote him a letter. He didn't answer but the Fourth of July when I was twelve years old, he came home. The first thing he did when he parked his brand new car in front of our door was, I want to see this sister that I've never seen. I just ran. I said Bob, why did you wait so long? I told him, I could have been dead. I was just twelve years old. I met him and I was so happy.

Today here I am sixty-seven years old but he calls me his baby sister right on. When I'm around him I feel real petted. This older brother, when things were coming up in school, I would write him a letter. He was in and out of marriages and he was always a workaholic. He just made money. He is a widower now. He married someone late in life and finally settled down. This woman died with cancer three years ago and Bob got married again, in his eighties. That shocked everybody. But he would always send me a big box at Christmas and send my mother some money to help take
care of us. ( ) things that he taught me that you just never ever will forget.

RK: In growing up in Keysville, you are surrounded by immediate family and relatives of various kinds. How do you remember that experience? You stayed here and went to ( ) Academy.

EG: Yes, but during the early years of my life I had a great aunt who lived directly in front of us. My mother had two family members here. The cousin who reared her died. I remember that cousin. I used to comb her hair. The one I said looked like an Indian. She lived right behind the school. Days when I didn't want to go to school I could slip to her house and get into her bed. She would walk down the road to tell Mama I was there. I didn't do that many times but I did that once or twice because I found out I could do it. She had a little store too and I liked that because I could say Aunt Martha, I want. Mama called her cousin but I called her aunt. Aunt Martha, I want a piece of candy. I'd feel better if I had a piece of candy. She would give me a piece of candy and let me go on home about the time the other children go home. I think she enjoyed it too, having me there. The next house was another aunt, my father's sister. I couldn't get by with her. She loved me dearly but I could not get by with her. That's why sometimes when you see children acting up they know what they can get by with certain people. I know I was around eight years old but I knew Aunt Harriet who lived just a
few feet away wanted me in school everyday. She wanted me to do just what I was supposed to do. She would mention my dead father who was her favorite. She didn't call him Marvin. She called him Shane. I don't know where she got that word from. Marvin would be so proud of you. I used to love to say poems in church because I could look at Aunt Harriet and she would just be smiling at me.

My youngest brother started preaching when he was twelve. Oh, she shouted all over the church. Then my brother told us later she said to him, Herman, you sound just like Shane. He said, Mama, Aunt Harriet wasn't shouting about my preaching. She was shouting because I sounded like her brother. He was so disappointed because he thought he had preached you know. Probably had. He is what you call a residing elder. He is above the preacher. He had been preaching since he was twelve years old. He is a very active minister, social and political, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

RK: The population was largely African American, I guess. Did you have much contact with whites at that point?

EG: Yes, we had contacts with whites. Not too long ago I saw a white girl, she is a woman now, who used to give me all of her music books. I wanted to play the piano. My Aunt Harriet, my father's sister, was a very good cook and she worked for these people. She would tell them, Emma would like to take music. So this girl would send me her music books. I went to visit her about three years ago when I found out she was at home. Her name
was Mattie Lawson. Her mother said, Emmarene, is that you? I said yes. She said, oh I haven't seen you in so long. I said well, you know I live in Augusta. I was living in Augusta until I came here. I was here every Sunday. I had to tell her about all of this. Then Mattie Lawson and I just hugged. We were so glad.

We hadn't seen each other in about forty years. We compared our ages and found out were are the same age. We didn't know we were the same age but when my aunt cooked for them she would walk with my aunt part of the way home and stop at my house. She and I would play and we became friends that way. Then she started sending me things by my aunt. She knew I didn't have nothing to send her. She would send me her music books. At Christmas I would get - I remember getting one of the nicest coats I'd ever had from Mattie Lawson and a couple of dresses. My aunt hid them until Christmas and gave them to me at Christmastime. She was one of my very best friends. There were other people who lived nearby. There wasn't such a big division. The postmaster and his family lived next door to the black community. Their house was right there. He was always a very kind man. Growing up I remember when he found out I was going to ( ) Academy. I was coming to get my mail and I remember getting my class ring from Hearth Jones for eight dollars and ninety-five cents. He said, oh, you're getting your class ring. He said, Miss Rhodes, you are going to graduate from high school. I came back and said Mama, Mr. Grady called me Miss Rhodes. I said do you know he called me
Miss Rhodes? She said well, you are to carry yourself like you are Miss Rhodes. Because that was never ever done. If I wanted to go to a convention for our church, my mother would fix me up a little tablet. I would like to go to the convention in, maybe Vadelia or Augusta. Would you please help me to go from my church, Mount Tabor African Methodist Episcopal Church? I would go to every merchant and they would put seventy-five cents, that was the greatest. The postmaster would always give me a dollar. He encouraged me. I guess he knew. I said, he is really my friend. My mother never worked for him. My association with him was at the post office window, talking to him about Boggs Academy and what I was doing. When I became a senior he started calling me Miss Rhodes. There was a white man who Mama washed for named Mr. Woodward. When I was big enough to go to the store, I begged to go to the store because I liked him so well. The reason I liked him was because everytime I would go to pick up the starch, the blueing and the washing powder for her to wash the clothes, he would give me a cookie or a piece of candy. Because when he gave it to me, I wouldn't leave, I would just kind of look at him. Stand around and look at him and smile. He say, oh, Emma, and he'd give me something. I remember one day he forgot. He was talking to someone else. You know what I said to him? Uncle Harry, would you give me that cookie that's broke over there in that glass. He said, you want that one Emma. I said, yessir. He gave me the cookie. My mother never heard about that until I was
grown. I told her about the day I called Mr. Harry Woodward Uncle Harry and told him the cookie I wanted and he gave it to me. She said, he didn’t say nothing? I said, he didn’t say one word, he just kind of smiled. I guess he laughed when I got out of the store at my calling him Uncle Harry. That is what white people in Keysville called black people. It you were a young adult, they would call you aunt this or uncle that. But never Mr. or Miss. I just felt like he was just so close to me. I called him uncle and felt real good about it. I remember being so sad when he died. I was just so sad that we wouldn't have to wash for Uncle Harry anymore. He died with TB or something. Those are the kinds of relationships I remember having. I remember also, there was a group of white boys by the name of the Way family. They had a store. Somehow they would play across the road and you'd have to cross the road to go to the post office and go to the store. They'd be right out there in the road playing ball. If you were walking down that road and the Ways were not out there playing, you would have to dodge or go way around. But if I'd look up and see any of the Way boys, they'd say, wait a minute, hold that ball. Everyone of them would do that. They would say hold that ball. Their daddy must have told them, or their mother or someone, when you see black children coming around, don't do that.

Because they would hold the ball and let you walk across. But it was the Way boys who would do it. But later on I heard, this is country gossip, that the mother of the Way boys had a black sister
in the neighborhood. She didn't ever visit this sister but somehow she kept up with what her sister and her sister's children were doing. She was a half sister because her father was also this woman's father. This woman was a very fair woman, looked almost white but she was married to a very fair man who was a Walker. Of course, their children came up and when those who went to New York passed. They looked white. I remember the granddaughter, one of the grandchildren coming back with blue eyes, blonde hair. When she would go to the store, everybody would look at her because she didn't look black at all. I think she married someone white in New York. She is still there.

RK: Did that happen alot? Was alot of that kind of ...?

EG: That particular family had more, there were just alot of people who looked white. In fact, the Walker family somehow, I don't know alot about their background, but I was taking a leadership course and the lieutenant governor said I'd like to speak to, and at that time I was very unpopular because people thought I was treating the people in Keysville wrong for wanting them to stand up for their rights, let the people go ahead living like they are living, they are quite comfortable. The black and the whites are getting along in Keysville. Don't stir up stuff. Let it be. They did not realize that there was an organization who invited me in and said come help us. I wasn't the one who started it. I came in to help and the more I helped, the more the leadership started putting alot of leadership on my shoulders.
You are the spokesman. You go represent us somewhere. Because I was still employed when I first started attending the meetings. Coming back to this, I found out about the lady, the Way lady being half sister just not too long ago because this lieutenant governor said and I was telling someone about it, I said he said that his roots were in Keysville and his grandfather was a Walker.

I said, I wonder how that happened. They said well, we had relatives who were Walkers that moved away. I said to the lieutenant governor once because he and I became friends, we are still friends, you know you got family still in Keysville. He just laughs about it. You can't do a thing about what your great grandparents did a long time ago. You can't do nothing about that. So you can't hold it against anyone. It just happened.

RK: What was the school situation like before you went to Boggs Academy?

EG: The school was right in our neighborhood. It was a neighborhood school, ( ) school, big two-story building and we were very proud of it. When I went there, that's what it was. I could walk home. Walk to school everyday. I could leave school at lunchtime and to home, eat my lunch and then sometime if I thought my mother had something real good I would tell my mother, the teacher wants some of this. If it was a cake or a pie or pudding, she would let me bring the teacher some of it back. Those were good days, walking to school. We had a very strong PTA. We had another strong, what people called the trustees.
These men were the men who made sure there was plenty of wood on the yard because every room had a big pot bellied stove and the men would cut a lot of wood. We had outside toilets, big old place outside with toilets, one for the girls and one for the boys. In every classroom we had a cloakroom to hang up your bags. Little chairs and all. We had about probably, I'm trying to think about how many teachers we had. We had a principal who was also the agriculture teacher. One of the highlights of the year was the fact that we would have...

Tape 1 - Side B

EG: It was primer through ninth grade for a long time. Then after primer they started first grade through ninth grade. But when I went to school it was primer. I read out of a book called Baby Ray, Baby Ray and Her Little Chicks. That was before Dick and Jane and all these other things. I told you how bad I was in school. When I was in second grade I got on the teacher's nerves so bad that she decided that she would ask her husband who was the principal to test me. And what kind of test was that? It was not an IQ test. I didn't know what they were doing. All I knew is that he came in and said Emma, come in my room and let me talk to you. I didn't know whether I had done something bad and was going to get a whipping or something. I don't remember getting whippings in school. I just remember teachers making me sit down or saying I'm going to tell your Mama. All they had to do was to say I'm going to tell your Mama and that was enough.
Because my Mama would whip me. But this principal started calling me the spelling words that the third grade was going to have that day. I spelled all the spelling words from the third grade book. Then he had me go to the board and work the problems the third grade was having. I worked all the problems of the third grade. So he went back and told his wife, just let her stay here with me. They promoted me that day to third grade, from second grade to third grade. That was quite easy, wasn't it? Promoted me to third grade and I left all the kids. I didn't want to go in there with those big children because they were bigger children than me in the third grade. They would sometimes get very angry with me because I was only seven years old in third grade. Two of them were like ten or eleven years old in third grade.

A lot of children dropped out of school at that time. By the time they were in the fourth grade they would get pregnant or married or just stay out and work in the fields. My mother had a lot of problems with my brother-in-law not sending her grandchildren to school. He had thirteen children. Out of all those children, I can count the number who finished high school. About three out of thirteen finished high school. They could have gone to ( ) because we didn't have a high school either.

RK: Did your school year have two sessions so that children could work in the fields?

EG: No it wasn't like that then. School didn't start until October so you were through with the fields, when I was going to
school. You would start in October and end in April. It was probably not a nine month school term. I remember it ending in April. We would have a little prom when we'd get in ninth grade. We'd be trying to borrow evening dresses. There was a band that would come and play upstairs of the auditorium. They was the way the ninth grade was. When I left that particular school, my sister had gotten married and wanted me to go and live with her in Florida. That's how I got a chance to go to school in Hastings, Florida for part of a semester and the second semester, Deland, Florida. That school was so different from Keysville. When I was in Hastings, it seems that I was in the tenth grade, right out of the ninth, tenth grade. I remember I had studied science.

RK: You were talking about your school in the tenth grade in Florida.

EG: Yes I was in Hastings, Florida. Hastings is called a potato town. People leave there in the spring and go to New Jersey. They'd pick the potatoes in Hastings and they would go to New Jersey for string beans at that particular time. That was in 1939. They used to do alot of seasonal work.

RK: Migrant work?

EG: I guess that is what it was called, migrant farmers. They would come back in September and the big boys would come back and go to school. One of the things that I remember most about Hastings was having lemon trees in the backyard and orange trees. That was so different to go out and get your own lemon off a tree
and made your own lemonade. And pick oranges to eat. I remember the school having a course in speech. That was the first time, even though I'd been saying poems in the church, and Keysville school always had operettas and programs the end of the school term, but in high school to have to write your own speech was something different. You would have to stand up before the class.

Mr. Ogner was his name. Members of the tenth grade class had to do this every week. Everyone in the class had to make a two minute speech. Two minutes was so long. Then sometimes you'd say a three minute speech. But he was trying to prepare us to be leaders. Some of the subjects were so hilarious. One boy wrote about when I was on the hall in New Jersey. We laughed so much we could hardly hear him. He was talking about how he spent all his money when he was with these migrant farmers and he had to try to hitchhike his way back to Florida. It might have been a lie but he had us in stitches.

The biology class was another thing that I enjoyed. I just said I'm going to be a biology major. I first started studying science in 1938, the first time I ever opened a science book. Now we had alot of books on reading, math, or English but the first time I opened a science book in 1938 I thought that was the most incredible book that I had ever read. I read my science book all the way through and went home and talked to my mother about it. I said did you know that we have other worlds? We have planets. We have nine of them. My mother was just right with me. She and I
read this book. There was no TV. That was the greatest thing there was. She learned the planets along with me. All the other sisters and brothers were married and away so my mother and I were right there reading that science book. And the teacher wasn't trying to teach it. That was the thing that worried me. That was the last period in the day and evidently she didn't like science.

That was one of the subjects she had to teach. She would come in and say everybody, study chapter twelve and write the answers to the questions. Most of the time, that's what she did. I knew the book. One day I said, let's do something different. Let's don't open the book let's just write cat, dog, anything on your paper. I encouraged everybody in the class to do that. They did it and turned the papers in. She didn't say nothing about that. That proved she was not reading our papers. But there was a cottage next door to the school and she was, I think, the one who did the cooking for the whole group. That last period she would just walk out the back door and go to the cottage. Then she would come back in. I don't know if the principal even knew she was doing it. I doubt that he did. She was so mean we were very quiet and then sometimes we would just talk about the science lesson. We taught ourselves the science lesson. I would tell them how interesting it is to read your own book. I said because you don't know what is in this book. This is some book! When I went to Hastings, Florida, because it was so beautiful, you know the scenery and the grasses and the trees, we had to make a ( ) book. We went around
on the campus and found the names of all the plants. We had to classify plants according to the phylums and give the scientific name and the family name. We had to do experiments in the lab. We didn't have a lab in Keysville at our school. Being a lover of science I just fell in love with it. After the first semester, my brother-in-law worked at the dry cleaners and found a better job.

A job that was going to pay him guess what, his job was paying him twelve dollars a week in Hastings. He job a job over at Deland, Florida and they were paying him eighteen dollars a week and paying for a house for him to live in. He said well, we're going to move. He told his boss I'm going to operate this cleaners for this guy and he is going to get me a house, pay my house rent and pay me eighteen dollars a week. So we packed that old car. It was a little car with a roll seat. My sister wanted me to live with her because she had one child and I was her babysitter more than anything. So we loaded up and we got a truck to haul all of our things to this little house on Four Heath Street in Deland, Florida. The bright lights of Hastings was a new country town. I got a job working at the restaurant up the street, living on a business street, oh, this was a big city. The school was so much bigger than any school that I'd ever been to. I had a chance to take typing. I signed up to take this course in biology and the day I got there, they were into their semester test. So I sat in the room and told the instructor, I know this. He said this little country girl, he said take the test. I took
the test and made an A. I remember he was a cross-eyed man, Mr. Jackson. He said the next day, Emma Rhodes, I want you to take this test over. Sit right here. I took the test and made another A. He said I want you to join the biology club.

When I got in the algebra class - you know if a child likes what they are doing, they will learn alot on their own. I think my mother and I doing work together in the home and she would look at my work everyday. We shared the lessons that I was doing because some of the work, she didn't do because she finished in seventh grade. So she would encourage me, let me see what you are doing with that algebra. I would show her how long this problem was. Mama this was a whole page full. She would just brag on it and the two of us would just have so much fun. She would tell me, you might not be as well-dressed as those other girls, but look what you've got in your head. What you've got in your head, no one can ever take that from you. One thing about it, you're going to always smell good because you are going to be clean. If you are clean and you smell good and you've got all this knowledge in your head, look what it will do for you. So I would sit up there, she made my clothes, I couldn't go to the store and buy clothes, in my homemade clothes and when the principal would go around to everyone about making a problem, I'd be up there putting it on the board. Being the youngest in the class all the time at that time.

When I was there I remember going to that algebra class and you know if you've never been to a class when everybody else has been
there a whole semester, you're the new kid from Hastings, Florida, from Georgia - oh, she don't know nothing - and I would sit very quiet and listen but I'd just be waiting my turn to show my stuff.

Then I'd get to the board. So the first day I was in there, he'd say, you're a member of the algebra club. I became a member of the algebra club, a member of the biology club and you know what kind of self-esteem that did for me. I was feeling good about myself. And friends - I didn't get picked on. They came to me, help me with my lessons. I stayed one year there. I got homesick and my Mama was by herself. I wanted to come back and stay with my Mama. RK: So you came back.

EG: That's when I enrolled in Boggs.

RK: Could you tell me a little bit about the history of Boggs Academy?

EG: Yes. Boggs Academy was organized in, I think, 1907 or 1906, one of those years. I don't know why I can't think of the exact date but I can find it out for you before you leave, by a man by the name of John Phelps who graduated from Payne College who is a Presbyterian. He wanted to do outreach work in the rural areas. Therefore, he was told to come this way from Augusta. Payne College is located in Augusta, Georgia. He had some kind of transportation and he came to our house. They pointed him out to the preacher's house. My father was living in Keysville at that time. My father said the first night that Phelps spent the night he spent the night in his house. That's the way people did at
that time. There were no hotels or motels. They would send you
to the preacher's house to spend the night. He told my father his
dream of wanting to build a school. My father wanted him to build
a school in Keysville. Therefore, he influenced the pastor of the
church to let Phelps preach at the AME church. Some of the people
in the Baptist church got very worried and in the Methodist church
too, this man is going to try to change us and make us
Presbyterians which wouldn't have made any difference. They would
only let him preach in the AME church because of my father's
influence. But he never could get a chance to preach in the
Baptist churches. He would travel around during the day and when
he travelled eight miles away in an area, there was another set of
Walkers, black folks were Walkers and Greshams, the Walkers and
the Greshams in that community, they told him, you come down here.
We'll give you the land to build your school. And we'll join
your church. They got him down there and that's where Boggs
Academy is. Eight miles south of here. They gave him the land
and he wrote the Presbyterian church and they came, missionaries
sent money and they built him a home and Boggs Academy. They sent
clothing for the children who wanted to go to Boggs. Boggs
Academy was from first grade through twelfth at that time. Kids
could come from all over the country and live. They lived in the
house. They built a dormitory for the girls and a dormitory for
the boys. The children who had never had a chance to go to high
school before were able to pay their way in school by bringing the
products from their home. It is in the history of Boggs how Boggs accumulated cows and hogs from the farmers who would send their children. For a year two cows. They ate whatever was brought to them. They would butcher them and feed the children. When I went there in 1940, I graduated in 1941, Boggs had a big dairy farm and had a big chicken farm and children lived at Boggs year round. Boggs has about two hundred acres of land even now. It closed down in 1977. But Boggs reopened two years ago as a Boggs Rural Life Center. The Presbyterian church forgave Boggs over a billion dollar debt and gave it to them to do outreach. There is an Olympic size swimming pool there, tennis court. The buildings were never destroyed. We take our kids from Keysville there to the swimming pool. We take them there to some of the other buildings that have been refurbished and they got a grant to refurbish the academic building and the library. The non-profit organization that helped in the reactivation of Keysville is a part of Boggs Rural Life. There are five organizations that makes up Boggs Rural Life Center. The church is there. The church has a daycare center next door. The daycare center never closed. A lot of kids from this area are picked up and carried to the daycare center.

RK: What was that experience like coming back here and going to that school?

EG: Well, I was with my friends. A lot of the kids who I was in ninth grade with were down there. At that time you graduated
from high school in the eleventh grade. So I was with my friends. That's why they voted for me to be president of the class when I got back. There were other folks there but I think the Keysville group had more people. They had alot of boarding students but there was a bus.

RK: So you lived at home?

EG: I was at home with my Mother. The school colors were blue and gold. The blue and gold bus would pick us up. The missionary folks bought a bus. That was the first bus that any black children had travelled on in this area or any other place around. That bus would pick us up and go all around wherever there were students that wanted to go to Boggs. No one was ever turned away if you wanted to really go to school. At that time it was not first through twelfth grade in 1940. It was eighth through twelfth grades.

RK: What were the teachers like?

EG: At that time there were no white teachers. There we just very dedicated teachers. They lived on the campus in the dormitories as house parents. They made sure you'd get your lessons. You had to have a study hour if you lived on the campus. Of course, that's where I met my husband. He is a graduate of Boggs Academy. He graduated one year before I did. He was a basketball player, star basketball player. I felt like he was a great guy.

RK: Were there other black schools around they would play
sports?

EG: They would go to Beddings Academy in South Carolina and play. I don't know how they were at that time but I know that other black high schools would come to Boggs. There was no gym at that time. They played only on the grounds. I remember when other schools would come and play basketball with Keysville. They would come up and have a game. The little home ec room there at the school at Keysville would have hot chocolate. They would make cakes for the students after the games. At that time, I don't remember seeing a whole lot of hot dogs and hamburgers. I do remember the first time I saw a hamburger. People must didn't eat hamburgers along then. I don't know what kind of sandwiches they ate. They didn't have hamburgers.

RK: Were you aware of the differences in the quality of education between black students and white students at that point?

EG: At that time when I was a senior in high school, I never thought about it. I never thought about black and white folks not getting along because of my relationship with the few white people I knew, with all of the white people that I knew, not the few. There was always a very few white people in Keysville anyway. There were not alot of white people. There were more black folks in Keysville than it was white. The people who worked in the homes never talked about the people. I never worked in a home in Keysville for a long period of time. I remember one Christmas I worked in a lady's home and took care of her baby while she was
making her cakes for Christmas. She likes to tell people that she is still alive. Yes, Emma worked for me. I worked for one year and maybe I got a dollar or two dollars for a whole week. I don't know. I know a lady who worked for two dollars for a week and she was an adult. I probably got seventy-five cents. I don't know what I got. I don't remember. But I had fun because I was taking care of her baby who is now an adult, teaching and one of the persons who I have problems with. I just don't remember blacks and whites ever having a clash in Keysville.

RK: It didn't seem odd that the children didn't go to school together?

EG: How would it seem odd if that was all that I had ever seen? I had never seen anything else. When I was in Florida, we didn't go to school together. I guess if I had gone to the northern states it would have been different. But I hadn't visited the northern states. In my getting along, I just thought that was the way you got along. That was a way of life. It was really very evident in how I thought because in our years of living, I remember my son during the sixties was in college in Talladega, Alabama. My husband had been transferred there to work with the Anaston defense project over there. My husband is a trained upholsterer. When he got out of the Army that's what he went in to. We all moved there. My son came back talking about the movement and the struggle, using words like that. I said, what struggle? I was teaching. I knew that there were some
differences. By that time I had gone to school and finished college and we talked about it sometimes in the classroom. My first experience with white teachers was when I went to Payne College. I got married and didn't go to Payne College until my son was about eighteen years old. I enrolled at Payne College when my husband was overseas. I wanted to do something and I said I'll go to Payne College. I want to finish college. I can't be a nurse, I can be a teacher. That was my first experience ever really sitting down with white teachers. Payne College is the Methodist College. There are Christian folks there. These teachers were very caring. Payne College was just a real good experience. There were black students with white teachers. Some black teachers but many white teachers. There was a white president. It was just alot of good getting along with everyone. No one referred to you as nigger or any kind of obscene words that we would make us feel badly. When I said to my son, why are you in this, he said, Mama, you don't know what is happening all over the world. I said, in Keysville, I don't remember anyone having fusses or fights. If someone would die in Keysville, black or white, everyone came to that house and helped. If someone would get very sick like my father was, everybody would send food. But ordinarily you did not sit down and eat together nor did you go to their church. But if someone died, everyone would go to their church. There was one revival that was held here in Keysville once a year by a holiness man. A man who ran the
sawmill became a preacher. This man who became a preacher would have this open air revival. He had a pavilion and got someone from somewhere to come. There was a woman here who played a guitar. Have you ever read *Tobacco Road*? They got some of her character from this woman who was married to a young man who was a drunk. She was always trying to save him and save the people in Keysville. She would play the guitar and they would have a revival. But everyone in Keysville would go to that revival. That was just like a carnival. That kind of thing. I'd be running. My mother never went but she'd always let us go to this big revival.

RK: The white and blacks?

EG: The white and blacks would go to that particular revival. He encouraged it. But now we sat in the back. The whites sat in the front and we sat in the back. In all of the talking to my son, he'd say Mama, you never bothered, you just didn't know. You were living up there in a house that your daddy bought so you didn't work on a farm. You never had to work in a house and hear words said of being put down. You just worked in the summer or maybe for two days for someone. I used to sweep a yard one time for a lady who saw me passing by one day, my mother and I. My mother was very broke. This particular lady said, come here. We went to her house and she said would you please mop my floor for me? I'm sick and my daughter is not coming. And would you let your little girl sweep the yards, rake the yards for me?
My mother stopped and she said to me, you know, the Lord will always provide. I needed this. And we went in there and I did such a good job raking her yards and just singing and just happy that I was going to get some pay. Our pay was maybe fifty cents.

But she gave my mama sausage, bacon, ham, all kinds of meats. And Mama did not have money enough to buy anything but a roll of skins, some kind of skins for a meat for that next day to cook some greens in. That's all she had. So when we left there we had a big bag. She said, we killed hogs and we've got some cured meat here and here's a big bag of meat for you. Is there anything else that I have in here that you want? Mama was just almost in tears.

She said no. She said now any Saturday you want to you come back and help me. I said your little girl could come and help me. I remember her saying, you know, your little girl is very bright. I left there and said Mama, what does she mean? I'm not bright. She said I know you're not bright but she is talking about your head, you're smart. I worked for that lady for a long time, raking her yards, coming in talking with her, enjoying her. She and I enjoyed each other on Saturdays. When I finished raking the yards she would say, Emma, come on in. I've got lunch for you. Her husband ran a store. The two of us would sit there and eat lunch and just talk. I don't know what we talked about but we would just talk. That was before I went to school to Jacksonville, Florida. I was probably eighth or ninth grade. I just loved her, Mrs. Smith. I was married, going to Payne College
and back home and I didn't know where Mrs. Smith was. I got on a little bus going to Augusta and look in the bus and saw Mrs. Smith. At that time you did not sit down by white people. You would go and sit behind them. I sat right behind her. I said Mrs. Smith. She said, that you Emma? I haven't seen you. You have grown up on me. She said, I'm so glad. My daughter was supposed to meet me on Broad Street because I'm supposed to get some glasses. Now I have you. We got off the bus together. She took my hand and there we were walking along. I found the place she was going and carried her there to get her glasses. I haven't seen her since. She said, my daughter will know where to find me. She said, let me give you a hug and I can tell my daughter who brought me here to this place. You know those kinds of experiences will make you have a different feeling. I just didn't have any bad feelings when I was growing up. There are some people who actually hate white people because they have been treated badly, kicked or abused. I never had that in my life. I heard of other people having that happen to them and I used to tell my son, it didn't happen to me but it happened to other folks. So I have to be a part of the struggle.

Another thing, when I started teaching school, I had to sign a paper with a list of organizations on it saying I am not a member of these organizations. If I had said I was I would not have gotten a job. I needed the job. When I taught in Alabama and left Georgia I had to sign that same piece of paper. There
were all types of organizations, the NAACP was on it. SCLC was on there. But I'd give money to those organizations, just cash money. I'm going to tell you, really when my eyes were opened toward Keysville was when this club came and people in the club said don't you see how Keysville is falling down? I said yes, all the stores are about down. That was in the 1980's. The people who I knew were dead. Their children were taking over. I didn't know their children. One or two older people were around who knew my mother. I would say to people in the club when I was in the club meeting with them, you don't know Keysville like I know Keysville. I'm sure if you would talk to some of the older people that we could have a very peaceful coming together and that we won't have to be talking about going to court and doing all these things. The city county commissioner came around. And I got introduced to the county commissioner, Herman Lodge, who had to fight and go to the Supreme Court. He said, Emma Gresham, you don't know this town. You have not lived in this town. You've been alot of other places but you just go to church here every Sunday. He would shake his head. You just go to church here every Sunday. But you have not lived in this town! You don't know Burke County. You know Richmond County. There's as much difference in Richmond County and Burke County as there is in chalk and cheese. Even though Richmond County and ( ) are just right neighboring counties, there are alot of differences. I didn't listen to Mr. Herman at first. I said let's have a meeting
with the powers and the people who are the power makers of Keysville. A group of us went to have this meeting down at the convalescent home and there was an old lady down there that said Emma Gresham, your mama, Ida Rhodes, was a Christian woman but you have come home and started a mess. I said, Miss Geneva, to me this is the same Geneva who taught us and ran around and played with us when she was a teenager and I was a little girl. She was the first one I remember seeing Halloween, starting something like that, or Fourth of July saying fantastic, fantastic, and all that. Same Geneva that I remembered only she was about ten or fifteen years older than I am. I said but if the courts or the legislators say that we can reactivate, don't you agree that we should sit down together as a community and work things out together without anyone coming in working it out for us? She took her fist and hit on the table as hard as she could hit and said you will never have an election in Keysville. You talk about a very hurt person, was me. I didn't want to believe it. I didn't want to tell Herman Lodge my experience. I just was completely hurt. I didn't know that people could act like this. I said why were we getting along so good before? My son came back and said, by that time he had finished college, teaching in a college in social studies, and a social worker, he said Mama, when you don't rock the boat things can remain the same a long time. But whenever you start going against the status quo that's when people rise up and say there's a word called power. That's what you all
are trying to do. Power? What kind of power? In this little old country town there isn't any power to be gotten. You ain't no power in Keysville! I didn't even think about the word power. I never thought about the word power. He said you'd better wake up. That's what it is. So I kind of forgot about that word power and I said what we are going to try to do is make living conditions better and that's what I told this lady. I said Miss Geneva - and she said, if you do it, I'm going to sue you, taking all of you to court. And she did.

RK: The woman who owns, who ran, the convalescent home?

EG: Who owns it and owns a whole lot of other stuff around here. She got a group together. In 1985 the Attorney General said I've never heard of somebody activating a town. I don't know what to tell you to do. This is just my opinion. You all can have a meeting, advertise it in the paper, elect you a superintendent of election, run it in the papers and elect you some officers because your charter is viable. Or you can go and see the governor and have the governor to appoint you a slate of officers. Carry him a list of officers and have him appoint them.

Or you can take your case to the legislators as a bill and let the legislators settle it for you. We said now which one do we want to do? We said we think the people ought to be involved. So we called a meeting, had the people to elect a superintendent and we got there, white and black, because the meeting was advertised.

Of course the county commissioners were the ones who carried the
meeting out. He was the spokesman at the meeting, telling why we were there. We were going to reactivate the town of Keysville. The white woman who said it would never happen was just talking loud, trying to drown him out. Her daughter curses alot and her daughter starting cursing him and asking him who asked you to do this? Did I ask you to do it? He said well when you asked me to fix your streets and when you asked me to help you get something passed for your convalescent home, I'd do that for you. But they asked me to help them reactivate the town. Well, who gave you the power to do that? He said I'm your county commissioner. The next meeting we had, we had to have a policeman there. Every meeting thereafter there was a policeman. But that night a black woman was elected by the people to be the superintendent of election and the woman's daughter said we need a white person too and I move here. He said okay, we'll have four superintendents of election.

So this guy accepted and we invited him to come to our next community meeting and we had ( ) sister and alot of us were there. We shook his hand, welcomed him and the two of them said they were going to work together during this election. The next week we had a meeting and she said come on up, he said for what? She said we're the superintendents of election. He said no, I'm not.

She said, remember we were sworn in the other day? I don't know why I was sworn in. I know I'm not going to be no superintendent of elections. I'm not going to mess with no election in Keysville. She said, well I guess I'll just have to do it by
myself then because we are going to have this meeting. We've already advertised and we want to let you know it's going to be in the paper what day we are going to have where you can go to qualify at the store. Qualifying period will be open at such-and-such a time and the election is on such-and-such a time. According to the charter, the first Monday in January, 1985 we had the election, everybody qualified, not one white person qualified. They ignored it. They laughed at it. They told us, they would send word or they would see us, that is so silly. Nothing is going to happen with that. The ( ) this and she's sending her report to the Secretary of State and he said you don't have to have an election. You only have one slate of officers, no one is opposing anyone. So you may go ahead and get sworn in. That is when things started happening fast. We sat the time to be sworn in like three days when it was announced in the newspaper there would not be an election. These folks won by default. Alot of pictures were taken and put on the newspaper like that Tuesday. We went to be sworn in, the lawyer must have known something, the county lawyer. He had a long time trying to find that little piece of paper for us to be sworn in by. Herman Lodge had to go down there. He found out we had been there an hour waiting to be sworn in. Finally, he brought it back in his hand. He didn't want to be involved with it because he was having alot of pressure too. The woman who was doing the swearing in was having alot of pressure. But, she had seen it in the news and the Secretary of
State had the letter. After the swearing in I had the whole day off and the other folks went back to work. The person who was the superintendent of relations said I have to go to court at three o'clock today. We went on with her to court. She and Herman Lodge had been supenoed to come to court. It was a private hearing. It wasn't a big courtroom. Of course, we got there and saw two guys from Keysville, ( ) the father and a son-in-law with a check laying face down on the table.

Tape 2 - Side A

RK: Talk about after you got married, getting married and moving to Augusta and going to school. Maybe a little bit about what Payne College was like, the teachers, the courses. You talked a little bit about it before. Talk a little bit more about it.

EG: When I enrolled at Payne College the first time, I was eighteen with a little boy, Junior. My husband was in ( ) overseas. He was in the Army. It meant that I lived in Augusta with my oldest sister and her husband. It was just great living there, coming home every Friday on the train. It meant coming home on the train every Friday evening and going back on the train on Saturday or Sunday.

RK: So you stayed in?

EG: Keysville. My sister who's husband was in the Army was there. I was telling you about my college years and how I was so excited to go to college. The tuition was seventy-five dollars
per semester if you lived off campus. The next year it was ninety
dollars per semester if you lived off campus. Every year it would
get a little higher and higher. Of course, I was getting a check
from my husband who was in the Army. It was easy for me to just
turn that check over. It wasn't a big check and it wasn't alot of
expense living with my sister and her husband. My niece and I
shared the bed. She was working at Fort Gordon and I was going to
school everyday. My mother and my sister were taking care of
Junior. My sister had two kids.

RK: So he stayed down here with them?

EG: He stayed down here with them and would cry every Sunday
evening to go. He called my sister Mother Dear. And she's the
one who potty trained him and everything while I was in school.
Going to school was something that I really wanted to do. I
really wanted to go to college. I remember the first courses that
we had. Freshman English, history, the arts. Going to a liberal
arts college you have to take alot of courses that you don't need
to take. It was a state school, taking all the philosophies and
religion and ethics. I took more of my share because I was very
interested in philosophy and religion. In fact, if I had not been
a married woman, I would not have majored in elementary education.
I think I would have majored in philosophy and religion. Probably
would have ended up being a teacher somewhere in some
college. I was offered a scholarship to Boston University but
didn't go because when I finished I wanted to go ahead and teach
and be with my children. At that time I had two children. After attending one year there and getting really into the spirit of going to school and learning, I had been out of school for about four years, out of high school, learning how to study all over again, I made it great ( ). I think I made a B in science instead of an A. As much as I loved science. I made a B in algebra and math. I said, you know, I've forgotten some of this stuff. My mind is on Junior and my mind is on alot of other things. It's quite different being married and going to school and having a child than it is when it's just yourself. But I made fairly good grades. I made a C though in some course. I think it might have been one of the English courses. Because we were doing a whole lot of writing and term papers and I had not had alot of experience doing a term paper, doing research. I got better at that later on but that first year back I had to kind of relearn alot of stuff. Another thing, I think I kind of feared the very strictness of the teachers. In high school you get to know the teachers there year after year. That was my first year there as a freshman and I just felt like these women and these men were so educated. I was an adult and I was trying to put my best foot forward and I was just tense. Alot of days I stood up in that classroom very tense. And I was not doing any type of socializing. They said okay, we are going to that place for the soldiers, the old USO. I said no, I'm not going to USO, I'm a married woman. I was always announcing that I was a married
woman. They said, you're married? I said yes, I'm married. At that time I weighed about a hundred and ten pounds to my two hundred and forty now. Two or two hundred and twenty-five now really. But I weighed about a hundred and ten pounds, looked young I'm sure at eighteen. They didn't want to believe I was married. I said I am married and I have a child in Keysville. A lot of times the boys would want to date you and I'd not I'm a married woman. Where's your husband? My husband is overseas and I write him every night. Really, if I had dated someone, my mother would have killed me. Clinton and I were very close. This year we have been married fifty years. The subjects there at Payne College, the kind of ways that they teach and the tests, they'd give you quizzes in a minute. Sometimes you'd go in the classroom and you'd have a quiz when you walked in the door. If you thought you were going to open a book, and then I'll be ready, sometimes it was a surprise because you might walk in the door and the teacher would say - many of them would do this at that time - fold your paper and tear it in half and number from one to ten. You're having a quiz on the work you've already studied. I can remember that so often. You'd wonder what is she going to do this time or what is he going to do this time? One of the courses, Greek mythology, and I had never heard of Greek mythology in high school. Now Greek mythology is taught in high school. But I had never heard of Greek mythology and all these, I call fictitious characters. It was so comical for me to read Greek mythology.
was quite comfortable with a lot of other courses because they would follow literature, the sciences, the biology, the economics and all of that were things that I had read about before. Then after the first year of college I got pregnant with my second child. Instead of just going on to school, I said I have to stay home and take care of this baby for awhile. It was my choice. I did that and stayed out of school for three years. I went back to school when Laverne was three years old. My mother kept her and then we had her in the daycare center, then kindergarten. My mother then the daycare center the next year, not daycare but kindergarten. She must have gone to kindergarten when she was four. And when I graduated from college, she was graduating from kindergarten to go to first grade. That was a great experience. The day that I graduated from college was a great day. It was great for me because my mother was there. My youngest brother came from where he was pastoring. Our family is a family that always has to have a big dinner for every celebration. All of us were there eating and enjoying each other after the graduation exercises. I didn't know that a person on the Board of Trustees was a cousin of mine until I had the list of trustees. I was reading someone from St. Louis, Missouri, a Dr. Grant. Mama said what's his name? She said did you know that was your cousin? I said from St. Louis, Missouri? She said yes. She said I want to meet him. I said well, I just shook hands with him. All the seniors had to meet with the board. The next way went to one of
the programs. She walked up to him and she said how are you? I pointed him out to her. She said I'm Ida Park Rhodes and you haven't seen me since you were a little boy. He said where are you from? She said I'm from Keysville, Georgia. He was just trying to remember. He said I have some relatives in that area. She whispered something in his ear and he just laughed so loud. I said what did you say to him? Then he hugged her. He said you are my cousin. I said what did you say to him? The two of them just laughed and embraced. She said I called him his nickname, Tinkdom. I said Tinkdom. He said you are. But after forty years they didn't look alike. They didn't either one look like the other person. She said he was just a little nappy headed boy when I knew him and now he is a big dentist. After that he gave her his business card and I had a brother who was doing alot of travelling at that time as a minister. One of my brothers lived in New Haven, Connecticut. This particular brother visited him in his home several times. I never got a chance to visit him before he died. But he was on the board and I felt very good to know that I had a cousin who was on the board who had finished Payne College. Because I didn't know that I'd ever had any relatives to finish Payne College before that time.

My first job after finishing Payne College and receiving honors I did get a chance to work in the office at Payne College because of my grades in religion and philosophy. I was asked if I wanted to do some work at the school and that they would pay me.
I never even thought about asking about working at the school I guess because of having the children at home. They said you work at your own convenience in the Office of Philosophy and Religion.

But that was a great experience because I had to grade papers and run off papers. I had a good friend who flunked philosophy twice. The third time she was taking it I said now I can't tell you anything but I can tell you to study. Now some days when I'm just walking home with you, because I couldn't drive a car at that time and the two of us would walk home together, if I'm just saying to you study, please study. Would you please just study that night?

Somehow she came out with a C that year. I said now I didn't really tell you the answers to any question. She said no, you wouldn't tell me the answers. I said, well at least you knew when to study real hard. She must have had a phobia about it. She couldn't remember anything, all of the old philosophers. Sometimes I said let's talk about Socrates. I don't want to talk about Socrates. She just hated philosophy and religion. She said it's a dumb subject. But most of the time I've found out there are very few people who want to talk philosophy and religion. Very few people. Some of the things that I learned, I have forgotten because you don't have a conversation. The theory of Aristotle or the theory of Plato. I finished college in 1953. That was a long time ago.

RK: So during the war you went to school for awhile?

EG: I went to school and I stopped and stayed out with my
next baby and I went back for three years.

RK: When he came back from the Army, did you move?

EG: When he came back from the Army I was in Keysville. Then we moved to Augusta and stayed in Augusta for a long time. His brother died and we decided that we were going to come and live on the farm and get the FHA to give us the money to buy a farm because we were young at the time. I told him that I would go back to college so I could pay for the work being done and he and whoever we hired to work would do the farming. At that time the FHA would give you a farm land, all the cattle, all that you needed for the farm and they would build this beautiful home and give you about, I guess, twenty acres of land. We had ( ) for two homes like that. So he and I felt, this is really what we are going to do. We got an answer from that letter and they approved us in about two weeks. I said, now I don't want to do this. I've changed my mind. I have changed my mind and don't want to do this. He said, well if you don't want to do it, I don't want to do it. I said let's go back to Augusta. We had moved out to Boggs in a little house that carried his brother's farm out. We moved and went back to Augusta and bought a little house. I finished and then after that, the first year after I'd finished, we decided we really wanted to buy a nice house. We put out money together and we bought a nice house in an area called ( ) Subdivision. We really thought, now here's a house we don't have to make a fire in a fireplace anymore. Or any heater. We could
turn it on, just turn the thermostat up. Our kids can be warm all
night. Now you talk about someone that was happy to be in that
house. The first night I was in that house, I couldn't sleep
hardly. I was just too overjoyed to be in a nice home. It was
just a two bedroom house. A living room, two bedrooms, kitchen,
front porch, front stoop, little back porch and utility room.
You'd think we were in a three or four bedroom house split-level
the way we were acting. But that was our first new house. Brand
new we called it. We're in a brand new house. Then we got us a
brand new car.

RK: This is in the mid-fifties?

EG: Yes, this is in 1954 after I had worked for a year. In
1954 we bought this house and bought this new car and moved in ( )
Subdivision. There were alot of other people who were teachers.
It was a very good area to live in. Our children had alot of good
playmates. People with different values. That's what you look
for, people with the same values that you have. A bus would come
around and pick them up and take them to school. I was surrounded
by teachers. Two of them taught at the same school where I was
working. We would pool our rides to school, back and forth each
day to school and PTA meetings. At Christmas we would have brunch
at each other's homes. Christmas Eve a group of us got together
and sang Christmas carols around in the neighborhood. We were out
from Augusta and we didn't even have bus service out that way. If
the kids wanted to go to the movies on a Saturday, some parent
would take them all to the movies and bring them back. I had been a scout master for a long time. I really liked boy scouting. I guess I must have been kind of, maybe because of that oldest son. I prayed so hard that God would give me a son for my first child. I thought I need a son, and then I'll have daughters and then my son will kind of protect my daughters. When that son was born I guess I put a lot of heavy dependency on him. But I was not in scouting right at that particular time but I had been in scouting.

I had to take a course at Payne College in leadership. That was one of the required courses. I chose scouting so I could be a den mother and be with my son in scouting. I really kind of got hung up on it. When I went to ( ) Subdivision, we organized a little club down there for the kids. My son was still in scouting but I was not involved in it for a couple of years. Then the school where I was working, the school principal had been a scout master for my son some time ago and he said, we've got a lady who knows something about scouting out here. He worked with the scouts and he was a Silver Beaver holder. If you're a Silver Beaver you've got over twenty-five years of volunteer experience with scouting.

So I joined the ladies there who were working with the boys and we started a big troop of boy scouts and den for boys at that school. Levi White School became a part of my life and still is. Still is a great part of my life because I worked there for quite a long time.

RK: Were you involved in church work too?
EG: I never left Keysville. I was always coming to Keysville on Fridays and Saturdays to stay with my mother. Sundays my church work was in Keysville as long as she was living.

Even when I was married and teaching, my husband and I would pack up on Friday evening or Saturday morning and come to my mother's.

We had a room just like, you know, this is my room. My children, although I have all these other sisters and brothers I am the youngest and they were out of town so I lived close and I would come and hang out with Mama. Mama would come to see me. Especially that last year in school, my mother stayed at my house most all the time. I could come in from school and when I'd get there my mother would have my dinner fixed and my clothes on the line, washed and ironed and was looking after the kids. During the last year I was practice teaching and trying to juggle my housework and study too. She was a widow and she would come and stay two weeks at a time, come home and do something at home. At that time there was a bus from Keysville to Augusta and she would get on that bus and come on up. If I didn't have anything to eat, she'd buy food and put int he refrigerator. It was great. She really encouraged and shared whatever she had with Clinton and I during those years. It made schooling very successful for me. When I went back during my sophomore year I decided I was going to work a little bit and go to school, with these kids now. That was just a little bit too much. I ended up with - the first six weeks I had a D in literature. Dr. Batholmew said, come here Emma
Gresham. She was one I feared most. She had been to England to study and so many places and she walked very straight, blonde looking hair. What is it Dr. Batholmew? She said you're burning the candle on both ends. I heard someone say you were working. When you were in Payne College before you were a freshman and you made C's and B's. Now you can do better than a D. I said thank you. I know I can do better. Okay, the next six weeks we were studying Shakespeare. I remembered a quote we had learned about Shakespeare from Julius Caesar back in 1939. I said this is a place I can use this quote. What did Shakespeare think about life? I said life is like a walking player, ( ) ( ) way up on the stage and hurry no more is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and theories signifying nothing. I probably didn't say it correctly but that's the gist of it. I knew it then. I wrote that on my paper and she said in that little writing, good. After that, she gave me my paper back the next time she said Gresham, you are doing well. It was nothing I had studied then. I was just given a chance to remember something I had learned a long time ago. From that my grades started coming up. The next six weeks I jumped from a D to a B. The next six weeks I had an A. We started studying MacBeth and I really got into it then. We studied the ( ). Then something else happened. I had my western civilization history and my literature and I said these books are the same. I wonder if anybody else knows that these books are the same. It is just written in a different literary style. I study
about the ( ) and study about England and it all goes together. ( ) and the Canterbury Tales and all this stuff. It all goes together. I said this is so easy. If I can make an A in literature, I can make an A in history. Then I started making A's in history. The man who was teaching history didn't want any woman to make A's in history. He wanted only his football players to make A's. He made sure they would have tutors and everyone else. He had meant for those big guys to play football. I would get so angry because he wouldn't call on me. You would just have your hands up. Okay, Mr. James. He called everybody Mr. Recite, tell us about the Canterbury Tales. And this big boy wouldn't even know what to say. He'd just help him along and pull it out of him. You, know about this. You know that. They would end up getting a B. One day I got so angry with him, especially after I had gotten this job working in the Philosophy Department and his office was across the hall, I guess I felt big. I walked down the hall on the way to my office. I said Mr. Brown, you never look at me. You never call on me. He said okay, young lady, I'm going to call on you. You young women don't like history noway. I said, well I do. I got in the classroom the next morning and he wanted me to tell him all about Zoroastrianism. Tell me everything about Zoroastrianism. Just luckily I had walked to school and recited Zoroastrianism that morning. I'm intrigued about new things and Zoroastrianism is something I hadn't heard of before. I just had read it. I said this is my lucky day. I stood up. He
wanted you to recite. Lay your book down and stand up and recite it, he said. I recited it. I had no more problems with Mr. Brown. I proved and he thought that I could do that everyday but I couldn't. He would call on me every now and then. It ended up being two girls he would call on. A girl named Mildred Hill who ended up being a Ph.D. and he would call on me. But he really did not worry. A girl could sit there and never say a word and make a grade on a test, you know pretty good, you'd get a good grade but he didn't try to give you over a B. He told me one day, girls don't hardly make over a B in my class. That was really terrible.

RK: I'm interested in the kind of missionary work that you did. Maybe we can digress a little bit, going back and talking about that. I'm interested in some of the organizational leadership experience that you had.

EG: All of my life I've been to the AME church. Being my grandmother's grandmother member of Mount Tabor. They gave me a sense of belonging and a sense of not only belonging, well I guess belonging. I felt that I was really obligated almost. It was a such a thing as, you have to support Mount Tabor. Sometimes it's almost hard to describe. No matter where I ever lived, when I lived in Talladega, Alabama the little church, Mount Tabor, had church service at that time only once per month. That's the way alot of churches in the rural area were. But my mother was with me. My mother lived with me until she passed and she became very forgetful during her last years when she was in her seventies,
almost eighty. She would say, what Sunday is it? If I'd say the
first Sunday, she would say it is about time for us to go home
isn't it? My husband teased her alot. She was a good sport. She
could take a joke. He'd say, oh yes I guess it is because next
Sunday is the second Sunday. All you would have to say, it would
ring a bell of Mount Tabor. My mother served as a missionary.
She organized a missionary society after the person who had it
passed. Local missionaries having something like...and I've set
many a day with her in the church doing these organized meetings
where the women were praying and women were gathering food for
people who needed food. A group of them here in Keysville used to
go to give baths to the dead. If a person would die late in the
night, someone would knock on their doors and they would have to
go, three or four of the women who worked with the missionary
society. This crossed denomination lines, Baptist or Methodist
women. They were Christian older women. They would go to this
home and get something that you called, I'm trying to think, it's
a bad smell, it began with a C. But it is a bad smelling
something that people used instead of using peroxide. They would
put it in the water. It would smell real bad. It was a brown
looking stuff. But you put it in the water and you could smell
that all over the town for the next day or so. They would give
the person when they died a bath and call the undertaker. And
they would lay the body out. Lay the body out means some boards
covered with a sheet and stretch out the body on this sheet. They
would take a rag and tie around their head to close the mouth that
was not closed. They would put pennies on the eyes to make sure
the eyes were closed. Because people die many times with their
eyes open and their mouths open. They would get through doing all
this operation they would call this stuff ( ) but I don't even
know whether that's the correct name. You know alot of people,
just like for a long time I thought that a tree, there was a tree
around Keysville called the ( ) tree. I found out later that it
was ( ). And people called the grass moody grass and I found out
it was bermuda grass. I don't even know if this was ( ) or ( ) or
what it is. It was a brown substance in a bottle that I don't see
anyone buying or using nowadays. But that was the thing that they
would put in this water and clean up the dead with that. Mama
would come back home, that was when my sister and I were there and
my brother, we wouldn't even want her to come in there with her
hands. We didn't want her to make any bread. You know you have
to eat bread. There was nobody buying bread in those times. But
that was the work of a missionary in Keysville in the 1930's.
Later on people started calling for undertakers to come pick up
the bodies. They don't use that practice anymore. Alot of people
used to sit with the dead. When a person was dying you had what
was called a sitting up. So you go to the sitting up until the
person died. I've never been to a sitting up. But I've heard my
Mother talk about those last days or the last hours if you're not
giving that person medication to make them sleep how some people
rattle on and tell everything they've ever done. I guess it's good that medication can inject you and make you go to sleep. They would just be talking. Sometimes these people would even talk to other people in the room. I did remember seeing a lady once who's voice sounded like a child's voice. I went to see her. She was an old lady that I knew. She had gone back into a child's voice and she was talking to her mama: Mama, mama, alright mama. I said now this is really something to see because she was at home dying. The hospital had said that she was dying and there was no need to keep her there. She was old. She was about ninety. So she died at home. That's the way she was carrying on. She was talking to her mother. There are a lot of things about death and dying that a lot of people don't know. I know I don't know a lot about that. I'm sure there are people who are studying about it. It was amazing for me to see her voice change like that.

RK: Did anybody actually do missionary work outside the community?

EG: No the missionary work that they did was right in Keysville. What they did, another thing, the AME church is organized on the local level, area level that we call districts, conference level, state level and national level. My mother worked on the local and the area levels. She never worked on the conference level. About I guess fifteen years ago, or earlier than that, in 1968, I had the opportunity to represent my church
on the national level. That was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me in my life. Right from Mount Tabor Church. I was sitting there and the pastor said Emma, I think you can represent us as good as any of those other people going. Every four years we have a national meeting that we call the general conference. We vote for our bishops and we vote for legislation for the church. We have a book of laws that governs our church. You go to what we call an electoral college and you run for, each conference has so many delegates, how many laymen and how many pastors. Our conference could get six lay delegates and each one of us had to get up and talk. I was shaking. You have ballots ready to pass out to people to vote for you, only the people who are from the electoral college. Everyone is not running, just some people. But other people are there to support you. After I talked and told who my father was, Marvin Rhodes and that he never got a chance to go to a general conference I would love the opportunity to go for him and for my mother who was deceased who worked as a missionary. They were saying Amen because those ministers sitting there had been to her table. It was easy for me to get elected to go. Then when I got there I said, now what am I going to do? All these people from Africa, from all over the world, from the islands, from everywhere, Canada, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. We were in this big place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As far as I could look I could see people. They had these big signs up in the mikes. Each
delegation in Georgia is called the Sixth Episcopal District. We had a leader for the delegation. The leaders for the delegation have a room somewhere in their hotel to have your delegation meeting every night. Every night you had to go to a meeting. They would tell you what to vote on and who you were going to vote on. You had to stick with your delegation. Georgia is going to do this. I talked with my brother who was not in Georgia. He was in the First Episcopal District which is New York and Philadelphia. He said now if you disagree, you keep that to yourself. If you go in the booth and vote and want to vote your own conviction, just keep it to yourself. If you don't you won't ever be another delegate. But it was interesting because about ninety-eight of us were there representing Georgia. I was forty years old or in my forties and I was the youngest delegate from Georgia. Because it happened during the school term in May. My principal was a CME, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and he had encouraged me but my pastor had mentioned it to my principal.

I said how do I get off school for two weeks? He said just take sick leave. You've got sick leave days. I said what doctor is going to sign this saying I am sick? He said well I think you look sick. I talked to my doctor and he said if you stay off that long and you're doing something good I'll just sign a sick statement for you. That was real wrong but he did it. They are all dead now anyway so it won't hurt them. But I enjoyed that. I really enjoyed that. I had always worked at the local level until
1968 like my mother. Working with the missionary society and teaching Sunday School. I taught Sunday School when I was twelve years old. I wrote plays for the church when I was twelve and thirteen. I would tell my mother, you can't tell anybody I wrote this play because the other children won't act. So my mother would direct the play. She was a Sunday School teacher and sometimes the superintendent. But I would write the whole play for Christmas. As soon as Christmas was over I'd write another whole play for Easter, another whole play for a day we called Children's Day. In fact I started writing poetry when I was eight years old, that I called poetry. I don't know whether I was writing it or not early. But I do know one of my best friend's grandmother passed and they moved to Boston, Massachusetts. I was so sad that I just started writing. My mother would say alot of times you're sad you just write. I just wrote a poem about her. I probably could think about what I wrote. The name of it was "Misfortune." That's what I call misfortune. I wasn't ten. I said something about, it came drooped, weary and bent and to some neighbors it was lent, but it was gone, the job was done, another house was on the run. Misfortune. I'm surprised I even thought of that. But my mother told me to just keep my poems. I never had a poem printed but I done alot of writing. I remember two or three young men who went into the ministry. My work in 1968 was working in youth missions but I was appointed to work with youth missions not on the area level but on the another higher level
called the conference level. We called that the Young People's Division of AME Church. Organizing programs and study groups for them. Taking them on retreats. You are called the director but you have the young people and the president and the officers. So you've got to teach them parliamentary procedures. That along with my boy scouting because I was a den mother. Then I became not only a den mother but a den leader, scout master. One time I had both and it wasn't right at that time because they didn't have women as scout masters. But I had to be the scout master because the scout master was so sorry. So I would teach the boys what they had to do and let them go off and take a test and use his name. I had boy scouts and had the other boys. Those kinds of leadership roles and that kind of volunteering because when you are doing scouting, that is strictly volunteer. Alot of people don't ever get the knowledge of the great feeling you get doing volunteer work. Some of the teachers used to say to me, you going to stay after school again? I said yes, the boys are coming. They would be just walking down the hall and they knew by then my room was a den room. I would get all my stuff up on the wall. On my honor I will try to do my best to do my duty to God and my country and help other people at all times to obey the laws of the pack. ( ) and you take a test and you go down there and you get ready for all the different activities that we had to do. Getting ready for the parade and getting people to teach them how to march. Getting ready for a big exhibit. I remember the first
time we made a space shuttle. Not a space shuttle, a satellite.

Tape 2 – Side B

EG: ...If you weigh a hundred and ten how much would you weigh on the moon? There were people who were just coming up and they didn't know that they guys had little slip up under there. Step right up. We'll tell you your weight on the moon. They had a long line of people coming around because that's the way you were judged by the number of people you could keep coming to your booth. Those little guys know your weight on the moon. Then we had the space shuttle there. You could walk in. Take a ride on our space ship. We'd open the door and let you get in there and see the field. We would shake it a little bit and make people come out laughing. They got a blue ribbon. They won first place. We started just having a series of winnings.

But I was going to say, those roles with scouting and with those young people helps me right now especially when I have adults who act like children. It helps me to have patience. Leaders have to have patience. One of the greatest things is to like what you're doing. You pressure isn't going up when you like what you're doing. I used to tell young people when they were complain in the lounge, those old kids -- you know if they were not here, we wouldn't have a job. If you doing something you don't like to do, you don't need to stay in teaching. There are other occupations. You've got to like people. Teaching is something you've got to like people. You've got to remember that
kids are going to do crazy things. So you are trying to change that they are trying to do. You are an agent for change. That's what you are. You'd better get your mind together or get out of it. Because you will be unhappy. I would say that to any person on any job. Do what you like to do best and then it won't seem like going to work. You're going to work and you're making money but it won't seem hard to you. I was elevated from working with conference level in my eight years and boy scouting all at the same time and teaching and being mother to three. By that time the youngest child was born, Kay was born. So Kay got a dose of running from scout meeting to missionary meeting. My Saturdays were not my own from probably 1972 on. My Saturdays were not mine. I'd have her work with me. I'd have the last two. I've got three girls. The very last two children know a whole lot about running with Mama to scout functions and to church functions. And they enjoyed it. They liked going to hotels and spending the weekend somewhere. Going to Atlanta. They'd be packing before I would. We're going to Atlanta to spend the weekend or we're going to Savannah or we're going to Macon, Georgia. Or we are going to have a youth meeting, because I was working with other young people. I became director of the state of Georgia. Oh they were so happy. Mama, now you've got to get you a new wardrobe. Our colors are green and white, green for growing and white for purity. I have stood up at a conference because I had six conferences who I directed. I imagine these six
conferences had areas, looks just like the Augusta, Georgia conference for example, had three areas. These three areas have local churches. You know that means about three or four hundred young people at a conference. You have six conferences in the state of Georgia. You've got to organize and get programs for them to do. Doing black history month, you're going to do that. You write little letters once a month. At the first of the year you say send me your calendar and here's our agenda. Because I got my information from the national level from Washington, D.C. Then I would integrate it into what we wanted to do here in Georgia. Then I would have to meet sometimes in New Orleans, to meet with all the state level people. One of daughters, the middle one who is a journalist, ended up running for director of young people's division of mission in 1980 and won. While we were in New Orleans we had more than a bus load of young people from Georgia. They said vote for a Georgia peach. They enjoyed that campaign. They campaigned all over that hotel. We were right across from the Superdome and a big hotel we lived in. They enjoyed that. The day that she won, young people came in and she won over all the other people. The youngest daughter who is always just a pain all the time was just crying. I said well, why are you crying Kay? She said I'm crying because my sister won. I didn't even know she loved her that much. But she was crying. There was a young man who was running against her and at the last minute he said I give up. She has too many people.
RK: It sounds like all of the volunteer work and the teaching too and your maintaining these ties to Keysville, you never really left in a sense. So when they asked you to come back to help with this organization that was a natural thing for you to do in a way.

EG: Yes it was.

RK: One question, then I'd like to go back and finish up by talking about some specific things in Keysville. Once you got your charter, we'll pick up where we left off. But maybe just for a minute you could talk a little bit about the impact of the sixties and the civil rights movement. You mentioned a little bit before that your son seemed to be when you were living in Alabama much more involved in these things. But you're giving money and doing things in a very different way, in complimentary ways.

EG: I was not active. I remember many times Martin Luther King was right there in Talladega at the college. I didn't go to see him. I said well, I'm not involved. My son felt so bad about it. I said well he's doing a great job and I thought alot of him. But I want to kick myself right now. I could sit in the audience. I'm not involved but I could have sat in the audience. I liked to cook. I baked alot of pies and carried them to a church once where he was coming. I could have just sat there and listened. That's one of the things I feel real guilty about. That could be a motivating spirit for me too today. I really believe in nonviolence. I truly believe in nonviolence. I feel
like no matter what and I think that if I had not been a person who believed in nonviolence that there would have been violence in Keysville. But I thank God that whenever I talked to some of the younger people, the younger adults here, when they would come to me wanting to do something. Like the first time we put up city limits signs and the signs were shot down. Someone just shot through the signs and tore them up and threw them away. They said we are going to come and sit right by those signs. We are going to sit there with our shotguns late at night. Whoever knock that sign down, we are going to kill them. I said no you're not. If you want to work with me you will not do it. If you want to work on your own, do what you want to do. But I thought you said you wanted to work with me. I got them to listen. But I really, during the years when I never left Keysville because my son had a college professor who marched. He is a German. He was fired from Talladega College because the president of the college was about twenty years behind times. He fired this guy and told him, this is not your fight. I got to be very close to Dr. Eisman. Dr. Eisman would come to my house and say can you imagine them telling me it is not my fight? I'm a citizen of the United States and I know what it means to struggle for your rights. He said I'm married to a Jewish woman. My family doesn't even want me because I'm married to a Jewish woman. He said I know what it means to be ostracized by your own family. He said so yes, I'm going to march again with them. He really got fired. But he found another job
and it was better later. But during the process he became very...

I said Dr. Eisman I know one town where there's no racial strife. He said where? Where in the United States? I said Keysville, Georgia. Dr. Eisman got in his car and drove to ( ) and to Keysville. I didn't know he was going to do that. He said I stopped by this little store in Keysville and I said do you know Emma Gresham? They said, yes, that's Ida Rhodes' daughter. He said they said so much about your mama. Your mama was really a great woman. I said not was, is, because she was living then. Your mama is a great woman in Keysville. She was living up there with us. Mama just smiled. They said alot of good things about you. They said you all were real good Christian folks. That's what Keysville said. But I was disappointed when I came back home. Those people were not.

RK: Maybe you could just tell a little bit of the story after, back to a point you stopped at a little earlier, when they filed suit after the first swearing in.

EG: After the first swearing in we ended up in court about four o'clock that day in this small room. There was our attorney from Atlanta, a northerner with an accent. I said oh Lord. I felt like, he's not going to be heard. And he wasn't. Before everything started he said to their lawyer, did you file this at the courthouse? He said no, I didn't get a chance to file it. So that's the first thing he hit him with. This has not even been filed in the courthouse. Judge Pickett said and he doesn't have
to. He said well my clients would like to talk. He looked at the lawyer and said, is this the case you were telling me about yesterday? Their lawyer said yes. He said well, I want to tell you this. It is their right. He said you don't have to tell me anything. Case dismissed. Temporary restraining order. The charter says the election should have been held by the officials of the city. There were no officials on hand. After all, the officials have not ever given up their posts. Officials were dead. That was 1985. The last election was in 1933. We left there so puzzled. We said do you think there is one person in Keysville who was an official? We dug into everything because no one would give us any papers, any kind, our lawyers. On of the ladies went and took a photograph of the last man's grave. She said if we ever go back to court I think we'll show the photograph of his grave. Thomas Radford is dead. We can't find out any other officials. We went to the county. They pretended they didn't have any records of that. Then we went to the ( ) Institute. It's now called, it's not called ( ). Southern Justice – but I'm a member of the board. I'm supposed to know the name of it. I think it's Southern Justice. My daughter who I told you was a journalist was working for the black newspaper at that time and they had some type of meeting in Durham or somewhere nearby. She was talking with some of the people who were working with ( ) about her mother and her hometown, where she goes to church. All of my children are devout African Methodist
Episcopal. My husband is a devout Presbyterian. Still Presbyterian, Boggs Academy. But my children have gone on and supported and my son does not talk about me too bad now. He wrote the first position paper for Keysville. He said Mama, you need to write something down. I was visiting him in Atlanta. He said sit down, everybody else had to go and we were in the kitchen. He said you know, why are you getting involved in this? I told him what we'd been doing in the meetings. I said the first meeting we went to the people said they suspected they were drinking contaminated water. I said the first meeting I went to they said we don't have street lights. We don't know why anything happens in Keysville. When it happens it just happens. Even a road name.

You get a map or you get your tax map and you see the name of your street has changed and you don't know who did it. The stores that we once had were all broken down. You can't get a playground for the children. We need a clinic for the elderly and for other people who can't get care. We need to be able to, when elections come, we got a group of people who will open ( ) and take them to vote for certain people. And you don't know the issues because you just know one, whatever they think that's what happens. They wanted to be able to think for themselves and govern themselves. This was just about eight people who were very strong in this organization. We said do they have by-laws and constitutions? Are they incorporated? I went back to the meeting and I said, now here's some things, a statement like a position, paper, that my
son helped me to write. I didn't help him, he wrote it. He said if you pass this out among them and they see number one, why you want it and what can be done, this will give them a clear picture of what they want and what they need. He already believed in Dr. King's philosophy. I'm the slow learner. I guess my last fifteen years of teaching intermediate special education children, I think alot of it must have rubbed off on me. I was a slow learner. But we read alot about, he called it a fact sheet. He didn't call it position sheet. He called it a fact sheet about Keysville. We started adding to that fact sheet. We got the support of the county commissioners and the local Catholic church met with us, some of the members. It was hard to get some of the other ministers. They were kind of shy. Then we started writing a constitution. It ended up almost being my job by myself. They said Emma, you're a teacher, you know how to do this. There are few people in Keysville who finished college, very few, maybe two or three. The school that we had that I talked to you about all the good things that we used to do in the school at Keysville, we had a cannery when I was a little girl. We had canned all the vegetables and fruits for people. The principal had to be an Ag teacher and a principal. Everyone had gardens. The kids used to go off and make speeches because they were members of FHA. Everybody was having projects and there was alot of enthusiasm going around. The teachers lived in the cottage, lived in the town. They were role models for all of us. This same family who
owns a convalescent home, when integration came about, bought the school and tore the school down from the county. That school is gone. There's nothing similar to that school anymore. I think that school somehow mysteriously burned down and left a lunchroom there. The lunchroom that was left is the place where we vote now. It is called the County Soul Lunchroom Area for a Community House for Keysville. Of course, when we were first having our meetings that's where we had them until they saw that we were really going to do something and they started charging us twenty-five dollars to have the meetings there. Then later on they wouldn't even accept twenty-five dollars. They said you can't have anymore meetings here because we don't have enough insurance to pay for all these people at the meeting. We said well, is this a community house? Well, it belongs to three churches. We said, well we have a church here too. Your church is not included in these churches. So we stopped having community meetings in there. We started having community meetings in the AME Church. Of course sometimes we'd get some of the whites citizens to come to the meetings. Then sometimes they'd get angry and walk out. We had a big meeting in 1985, right after this temporary restraining order. We started getting sympathy from people and some of the white citizens didn't realize if they had gone on, no one would have ever known anything about this. It wouldn't have gotten out in the news like it did. We didn't put it in the news but it happened. That day we came back home and we were so hurt and we
said well, we will not stop. We continued to have meetings. I would come out here every Wednesday and we would have meetings in the houses. We said we can't stop having them. We've got to have a meeting every week. We've got to pay our dues. We don't have any money for a lawyer but that's when Kristy came in. That's my daughter. She went to this meeting and someone just called me and I recognized the voice that I heard on the phone was white. I said aren't you white? He said yes. I said you don't want to be bothered with this. It's a group of black folks down here. It seems that the white citizens happen to be the minority and they don't want the town reactivated and I know you don't want to get involved in this. He said you are fighting for justice, aren't you? I said yes, we are. He said well I believe in justice. I said well if you believe in justice and you want to fool with people who don't have any money. I said what does Kristy mean anyway? He said Kristy counts for Christian. He had me then. He found his way down here. I said I'll reserve you a room. He said I can spend the night with you. Do you have room? I said well, I have a ( ) house in Augusta and I have plenty of room. I said okay. He brought another lawyer, a female who doesn't eat meat and I was cooking biscuits and sausage and bacon. I was going to give them a big southern spread. She sat there and ate coffee and biscuits. But Kris ate all he could eat. From that he came down and stayed. My husband was retired already but I had to go to work. He visited both white and blacks so he could really get a
picture of why. One of the ladies, the same one that said there wasn't going to be ( ), said all the black people love me. They know that I'm good to them. I don't know why those Negra up there in that church... He later said to her, why did you say Negra? I didn't say that. He told us. He had us laughing about that. Because some people do say Negra instead of Negroes. It is a known thing that most black folks don't want to be called a nigger. They don't mind you saying Negro but they don't want to be called nigger. I had that confrontation in a course I was taking up at Fort Gordon. I had to stop somebody and say you know, there's a way you can pronounce that. It was a white teacher that was talking. I said you didn't ever have any problems using that word like that in your classroom? She said no. The teacher was a white professor who said it is very simple.

NEGRO- Negro, two syllable word. She looked so funny. I said really, that is so simple to say. You didn't have to say Negra. All the Negroes in that classroom was so angry with her. She did not know that was just a thing that you don't do.

Going back to Keysville, we just had to really get together, organize, write constitutions, write by-laws, send off and get incorporated. Then we decided we would have a big bash rally at a church and get someone who was really big, some of our state representatives. We called our state representative, and he was white, and he said no, I can't. I said well let us come and talk to you. I went to his office to talk with him and carried all the
city council. That was before the city council could talk then. He was nervous. I said that man is actually shaking. I could see him at his desk. There weren't but five of us that went but I said maybe that was just too many. He said this is like a hot potato. I can't touch it. I have friends on both sides. I left him alone for awhile. I tried to talk to the senator. He just completely ignored it. I said we're in a dilemma. We are trying to have a reactivation. The only person that stuck with us was this county commissioner, Herman Lodge. He said, they are right and I am going to fight with them to the end. He had already been in this lawsuit. He was accustomed to going to court. But I had never, until that time, had never in my life been to a court, never been arrested. Never even been to court for nothing for me.

It was a real different experience to look at judging who were showing prejudice, the judges in this area, in Waynesboro. I couldn't believe it. I said, not now. I thought that happened back in the sixties. I didn't know it was still happening like that. And then the opposition would bring a crowd. We have a couple in Keysville, a black couple, who always sits with the white folks. They said these are our friends. Ya'll just starting some mess. We never had no trouble in Keysville before until integration got here. I said, I've been here all the time. But you were right there in that church. You weren't working with that club. They just thought that I was pushing the people. I said I'm not pushing, I'm talking maybe sometimes but alot of
people are thinking just like I'm thinking. They couldn't articulate it like I was doing it. We had this rally at the church and alot of people came. We had a choir to sing. Alot of people really liked choirs to sing. So the choir sang and the people talked. Believe it or not, the way we got Tyron Brooks' statement, when I couldn't get the white ones I got a black. One lady said I know an activist who worked with King. Because she followed Dr. King around, different from me. She was just a maid at the school. But she was a maid who was in politics up to here in Richmond County. Every kind of situation that would come out.

Then she was in Eastern Star, Worthy Major and all that stuff that I don't know nothing about. But she said, let me tell you who to call. I said who? Call Tyron Brooks. I said you think he will talk to me? She said he'll talk to anybody. So I wrote him a letter and then I called him. I introduced myself to him and he said oh, I'd be happy to come. I said I'll get Charles Walker. I taught Charles Walker in second grade and he was state representative from Richmond County. I knew he knew me. So I said we'll get him to introduce you and bring you to Keysville. He said well my home is Warrenton, Georgia just thirty-five miles from Keysville. I know how to get to Keysville. I said that's alright, I'm going to get Charles Walker to introduce you. I wanted to get Charles Walker involved. Of course, they came and that was something. We called the media that time and we had people there from the newspapers, from the television stations,
believe it or not because we had a state representative there. Then the papers had shown about the election was voided that was another reason the newspapers and the TV people came. That happened and that's really when we started getting more publicity. When we started getting more publicity people started writing letters to us and sympathizing and coming by to talk with me and talking to us. Newspapers, Kris started coming down here once a month. Sometimes they would stay a whole week. They knew other contact folks. They would contact people. Because I know every major newspaper that I know of, Detroit, Los Angeles, ( ), Newsweek came and did pictures. The papers in Atlanta, the Constitution, Atlanta Journal, were here every time you looked around. They were here taking pictures and talking. One of the local TV stations, a black guy who knew someone who knew me, if you would just call him he was here at the drop of a hat. We had real good relationships with both stations, but that station particularly. Now Keysville is doing this and that. It was right before your face everytime you looked. That was 1986 and 1987. The rest of 1985 and 1986 and 1987. December of 1985 was when this happened and all of 1986 and all of 1987. Kris said we will remember to get a pre-clearance from the Justice Department because this is a change. We will remember to this. We are going to cross every T and dot every I. And we will have an election. We tried to have an election in 1987 which didn't come through. Tryon Brooks talked to the Justice Department, talked to the
Attorney General. He told him, you're a young man, it would be good if you would release ( ) what is happening in Keysville. And he said if I can get someone, they're saying that they don't know the boundary, that's why you could never have an election, but I've found an old man who is ninety-three who knows the boundaries. They asked why does he know the boundaries? He said that he used to clay the town. When he finished with his crops, the mayor would hire him to put clay on his wagon. The whole town was very sandy, especially around the stores. He would clay and pack it with something. All over the town he would put this clay and they would tell him how far to go, which way to go in each direction. So he knew where the boundaries were. They called him Mr. Man Key. His name was Henry Key. He likes to say I'm a man! My name is Man Key. Then he sat there and said I'll tell you what. My greatgrandaddy named the town. Who was your greatgrandaddy? Joshua Key. Mr. Key, Joshua Key was a white man. I know it. He got across the fence. Everybody started asking him that because he would sit back and say I know it, he got across ( ). Josh Key left his children so much land because his wife had no children. That's where they got all of this land. It will take you I don't know how long to walk. You can't walk that distance. Just plenty of land they owned. Some of the descendants now talk to a point about their history and then they stop because of the fact they still have some relatives in Keysville and they know each other real well. The white folks
don't want it known that they are related to these folks. But they look like they're white. I know one of the reporters one day we had a rally. We started having a rally each month. The National Council of Churches came to Keysville and marched all over Keysville. That was a mixed group looking at the conditions and looking at our fact sheet of why we are doing this and what we want. They encouraged us. We had people from SOCK and some of every kind of organization you could think of to come and march with us. Then we went to the capital. We got to the point where we had a, we decided we would go around with a petition and see how many people we could get to sign this petition saying we want a government. We got a hundred and seventeen names. I had to mail it. I still wasn't yet ready I don't think, Kris thought I was. He called me about a week later and said did you mail that to the governor requesting, and then they had a list of people that we had chosen, the same people who had been sworn in, that we want him to appoint these folks for our government? He finally wrote me a letter saying my legal advisor said that I could not further this because you have been to court with it. He would not touch it either. That's when we decided that we would march in the capital. We got a bus load of folks, forty-six people, to go to the capital and we had a peaceful demonstration. During that time we had people along the street to come and get in the march, march against Governor Harris. Just people who were having lunch breaks, these were white folks. We would give them a fact sheet
and they would see what we were marching for. We had alot of white folks marching right with us. Then too the banners we made were not offensive. They were not racially toned. They were just saying, look at us. Give us clean water. Look at us, we want a clinic for our people. Richard Dent was a state representative who was born in Keysville and was well liked by all of Georgia. This is Papa Dent's home. Governor Harris will you not hear us? Those were the kind of things we were trying to say because we made sure this will not be, we will not have racial overtones. Now if anybody wants to say it, because there were some people from ( ), this is the year that you can really talk about this. Tell me about how bad it is racially there. I said now, I live there. I want to keep on living there. I want better relations there.

But one of the greatest things that we have to learn about change is that people are afraid of change. And when you change system, you are going to have people who will be afraid of you, who will even go to war with you about change. Your church, your school, any organization - change brings about alot of uneasiness.

So I don't know whether it is all racial or whether it's fear. So I will not deal with that. That was exactly how I felt. I still feel that all of it was not racial. But they fought hard because of that same word power. They didn't want those people to have the power because there's more of them than of us. If they ever get it in their hands, we will never be able to tell people,
this is who we voted for. At one time, no black person knew who they were going to vote for until Miss Geneva would tell them. That's what I heard later. She would tell them who to vote for. At that time they could go into the ... they would let her, Burke County would let her do anything she wanted to do. Go in the voting booth and vote for people. They didn't have to sign any paper saying I'm helping anyone. She would let some of her workers stay off work that day and paid them double. You stay down there all day so you can help everybody who can't write vote for my man. Well of course, what did that do? That made her very popular at the State Department. The governor would know her. The state representatives knew her. But we were not known, you see. That's why that state senator and that state representative said I can't touch that.

RK: I noticed in some of these other articles that alot of the systems were opposing the reincorporation or kept complaining about they were worried that their taxes were going to go up or something like that.

EG: That's what they were told. They were told by her that we were going to take their land. That we just wanted to do this so we could ... to not trust us. Emma Gresham was an educated woman. She will trick you. Don't trust her. And they are going to bring in people that's going to take your land. They are going to charge tax for all these things that they are doing. Ain't no way in the world you're going to get a water system when you don't
have no money. I kept saying grants. They said oh, you can't get a grant for a water system. And thousands and thousands of dollars. We got that grant for four hundred thousand dollars for our water system. It was in the paper. One white guy called me and said I just want to congratulate you. He said I'm in my house sick. I read this in the paper and I just want to congratulate you and I want to meet you one day. Would you come to my house and meet me? And I went to his house. He has emphysema and he never gets out. He said I just wanted to see you in person. I heard alot of things but you have shown all of us that things can be done if you just stay with it. That's what I told him. I said, you know what, I don't have anything but time. I'm a victim of cancer and God blessed me to not ever have to take chemotherapy nor radiation with cancer. I said he must have done it for a real, real good reason because my best friend who told me to get Tyron Brooks to come and speak is dead, has been dead two years. She didn't even know she had cancer. Breast removed and after that cancer all through her bones. Operation on her brain. She just had cancer all over. This man, his wife and I talk all the time. And I have made friends with other white folks. Even the man who said divide the town and ran against me twice. In 1988 he ran against me. In 1989 he ran against me. Believe it or not, he's my city councilman. Just got elected Tuesday night. When he came in here and decided he wanted to run for city council I was shocked. And he'd have to run because we had someone who had
resigned and that's the seat he ran for. I told the rest of the people, don't get in that spot. Let him run unopposed. So he ran unopposed. The day of election I shook his hand and introduced him to the post mistress and said I want to introduce you to my city council person. He was just smiling. I said shake hands with the honorable Mr. Upton Cochran. Yes, he's my city councilman.

RK: The ways in which you have gone about in proving, getting these grants and really doing what people deserve, all other cities get that kind of money. We pay our taxes to the government in various ways and it is supposed to come back down. It is always amazing in these little communities how the people in power, even when it doesn't cost them anything, they still - I mean you go into the Delta and up into the mountains in Kentucky and the story is the same anywhere. Some of these people had rather see people be sick and hungry and not have good water and everything than to make the effort to try to do that.

EG: The same word is power.

RK: Because it gives people jobs and power and access to things. How have you been able to, once you actually were able to get the town reincorporated and start moving on these things, how have you been able to go about really putting in place or meeting some of the needs the community had? If you could just talk about it because you have been very successful at that on a variety of different levels.
EG: Well, one of the things that we worked on from day one was water. We couldn't get the local health department to come and test the water. We made friends with the Department of Community Affairs. There's an organization called the Mayors of Georgia, Incorporated. I went to one of those meetings and there was a woman from the Department of Community Affairs, a black woman who is an attorney. She said here's my address, use me. Not only am I an attorney, I am working with the Department of Community Affairs and I am able to help small towns. Monday morning I wrote her because I didn't have a secretary. I wrote her a letter and said Keysville is requesting the Department of Community Affairs to send us help. We need assistance. We just need alot of help. Two men came down. Two men from the Department of Community Affairs found Keysville. We looked at the map and looked at some of our problems. We had been elected. That was in 1988. They couldn't help us until we were elected. First thing he said to me, who works in this office with you? I said, no one, I work here by myself. What's your pay? I said, there's no money so I can't get any pay. I said I'm a volunteer anyway. I'm used to volunteering. He said I think I can get you some help. I want you to write this person and tell them you need some help. You find two people, fifty-five years old or older and you can get an organization called the Green Thumb, Incorporated to give you people to work in your office and you will not have to pay them a dime. They will be covered with health insurance and
all of that. So I said...

Tape 3 - Side A

EG: That was my first dealings with the Department of Community Affairs to have someone so that if I walk out there's someone there. And then later on I was able to get two more people, two men. They did alot of cutting grass and picking up paper all over the town. I lost them because one became sick and I haven't been able to find an older man with small salary. And one moved away. But we are eligible to get someone who has a salary and the age to qualify. I was also able to get another woman to work here. I was passing out, we started doing a newsletter. We would ride around the town and take the newsletter to the people because I really wanted to get to know the white folks better. There were new people that I didn't know because they didn't go to my church. I knew everybody who went to my church. I went to the Baptist Church. But I didn't know the white community. So what I would do, I would go around and say hello, here's a newsletter for you. And I just would not let them act mean. I said they don't know me. They can't put judgement on me. I'm not trying to hurt anybody. That's what I'd be saying to myself you know. I'd just give them the newsletter and I'd say you're going to read it because we would have just things to tell them what we are doing, what we have done, what we plan to do. That's all it was about. One page newsletter. We went to this white woman's house who said, oh, the Lord sent you all here. I
looked at her. She said I am so lonely. Her husband had died, had been dead about three months she said. I wish I had something to do. I said do you want to work with me? Do you want to work for the city? She said, you would have me? But she said that because her husband was one of the people who sued us. Everytime!

I said yes, you can work for us. When I told the city council that I had told her that, they said Miss Gresham, you are crazy. You let your Christianity get in your way sometimes. You've lost your mind. You know that woman is a spy coming to see what we're doing. I said well, what are we doing wrong? If you're not doing anything wrong, you don't care who see it, who know it. I said we don't have any money, for sure. All we have is good will. So I said we'll try her. First job she had was to count every, to take an inventory of all the books because we had people to start sending us books for a library. So she had a job. They said just keep her out of the office trying to find out all your business. She ended up being one of the best people that you've ever seen to work here in this office. She worked in the library. I miss her now. But she got a job paying more than Green Thumb was paying. She stopped working here. But she's a friend of Keysville. She also gives alot of insight into why her husband was doing what he was doing. She said my husband was a great Christian. Her husband just had a massive heart attack and died. He was a great Christian she said. He would read the Bible every night. She said but his next door neighbor, the same guy who was running for
mayor each time, intimidated him by saying you have to give her your hundred dollars. He'd jump across that fence and say give me your hundred dollars. She said he'd have to pull out that hundred dollars or write a check for it each month. They raised the money that way getting not under one hundred dollars but one hundred dollars from different people to pay those bills. When you go to the Supreme Court twice you know that is alot of money. That's what happened. But until this day, you know, 1988 one white guy became a city council person. He stayed on for six months. I decided I would have a meeting one Saturday, like a town meeting. We advertised we're having a town meeting to see after six months, what are we doing, how far have we gone? We were still in that same little room. I guess alot of people felt like we hadn't gone nowhere. But we did have a Green Thumb worker. I said we do have a secretary. Let's think about some good things. We're about to get through the street lights. And we haven't said anything about tax paying. Well, there were people who were giving private donations. Everyday I'd get a bunch of letters and people were sending money through the mail for the city of Keysville. I would give it to the city of Keysville. There is someone in North Carolina. I know now what town but I don't know who the person was. In 1989 they sent an anonymous amount of ten thousand dollars. That's how we got this land. I never will know who it was because the person said it's anonymous. Then after that the county must have been a little ashamed. That was
amazing. Mr. Cochran wrote a letter to me. I want to know who is this anonymous donor. I said, Mr. Cochran, what does anonymous mean? It means you don't know. You don't know who it is. No name. I sat up in the council meeting one night and I said I know he knows better because he was an officer in the Navy or Airforce. But I think he just wanted to irritate someone that night. But that was really true. They sent it through a foundation, Vanguard Foundation to make sure it was anonymous. Then Georgia Power gave us this building. There was someone at Georgia Power, a black guy who is vice-president at Georgia Power, and after the first election I was invited for the first time to come to a barbecue that Georgia Power was having down at Plant Vocal, this plant down here. I said I think I'll go. It's the first invitation I have from Burke County or some big group to meet. When I walked there who did I see but this guy, Senator English who had said... But I had gotten elected and things had been cleared by the Attorney General who accepted this guy's statement and affidavit. He had lawyers to prove that what this guy was saying is correct. That's why they couldn't throw that out anymore. But Senator English, hi there, Mayor. I started to run almost. After awhile state representative English spoke. They were at least speaking. I said I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to go to the state representative's house every year after the legislative session and ask him to please ( ) to the senator. The senator came to me too because the senator had opposition and the guy who was
opposing him said Keysville, vote for me and I'll get your charter passed. I'll get you a charter. I'll have it done up. So this senator said I know how I can get your charter ready, a new charter, right there in the capital. ( ) We have people there to write the charter. So the Department of Community Affairs person got a model charter and got our old charter and the two of us carried it to the office there, the clerical office where all the lawyers were working. They worked on it and she read it and proofread it. Then they got a chance to send it to them and they were proofreading it. But yet they would not take it before the legislative body. I went to see the state representative again. I got to his office, I had a white guy with me who lives in this community that used to type for me alot, and a black guy. I said I'm not going to take that many people this time. I said I'll take a white person and a black person. These two guys knew what I was up to. They had laughed all the way over there. I got a young guy. He said what are you going to do this time? I said I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm praying hard, ya'll just drive me on there. I got there and went in the office I said I'd like to speak to state representative ( ). She said he's busy. I said we'll wait, ya'll sit down. All three of us sat. She said, let me see. She went back there and ( ) came walking out the door. He didn't have anyone in his office. She thought we were going to turn around and leave. I said you know what, I don't want a thing. I just came by to speak to you. You and I have got
to get to know each other better. She wasn't born here in Lewisville, Georgia. I was born in Keysville. My daddy was a poor Methodist preacher. I'm used to doing volunteer work and you just don't know me. That's why you haven't been trying to pass our legislation. You've got to get to know me better. Well I'm going to tell you the truth. I don't know too many people but Miss Geneva. But she hasn't been talking to me very much. Mr. Cochran calls me all the time about ya'll. I said well you got to get to know me and know what I'm up to because I'm not up to anything but trying to get a better quality of life in Keysville.

I did that several times. That day he decided he wanted to be so sick. He said it's almost time for me to go back to work but I've got a bad heart. I said, oh, I'm so sorry. When I left out of there I was sympathizing with him so much and the white guy said, why do you sympathize with him so much mean as he's been to you? I said Ed, he's a person. You are supposed to sympathize with him too. You say you're a good Catholic. He said I didn't sympathize with him because I knew he'd been giving you hell for a long time.

But I did really sympathize with him because he was acting like he was going to die. But then I wrote him and letter and wished him well. Wrote the senator. I told him you told us to vote for you and we voted for you. Now you had the charter redone. What point are you going to carry it in? That first time he carried it in the state representative wouldn't even sign it. The legislative session was over. The next year, it didn't even come
up. That next year I went to him again. I carried on of the other mayors who said he was such a good guy. Then we just started. But what happened the Justice Department the second time just said everything was okay, unanimously all things against Keysville was over. So of course you know they signed the charter. They weren't doing us a great big favor. The county started being kinder after we took some courses. They started seeing me participating in the life of Burke County. And not going down to the county commissioners meeting and acting like a fool. Storming in on them. Marching in on them. I believe in justice but I believe in peaceful demonstrations too. I said I just want to talk to you and get to know you better. They kind of laughed sometimes when I would say, what are you going to do about the potholes in our road? Finally I got a letter from DOT saying, you're a state official and you're the mayor, let us know how many roads you want done this year. I said this is what you mean by power. I wrote every name of every street in Keysville. They said what is your priority list? I said all of them. I said get two in the black community and get two in the white community. Nobody can fuss. Little why little people start seeing where you are coming from. And we did that. The county knows everything you do. First time we tried to get some matching money for this.

We proved, the state department checked out the first water samples when the county wouldn't check us out. The county health department was going to get angry with us. How did ya'll get that
water to the state? I said because I went there and told them I could not get the health department of the county to check it out.

Finally the man said I'm from a small town too. He said Mrs. Gresham, you know when you are going to find things better? When there are some more funerals. When we have some more funerals in Keysville. I thought that was so comical. He said if you'll send me your samples I'll get someone from another county to check it out. We'll make sure you get an emergency grant. He sympathized because he knew what we were trying to do. He said the county is supposed to do that for you. Because of that fact, we got enough money to get that emergency well. We call that well there an emergency well for people who identified, they were able to come with their pails, use their water from their individual wells, individual pumps for the toilets and for washing clothes. But they started drinking that water. Mine was one of them too. We stopped drinking our water and we kept a container always, two containers always full of fresh water from down here. Then they were able to hook the water from over there in here and at the clinic. How did they get the clinic? They got the clinic by talking with the rural, something in Rock Hill, North Carolina - the Students Rural Health Coalition. Some of those folks came down with black workers for justice. ( ) Do you know ( )? ( ) was working with ( ) at the time and she brought a group of those students who came. I said I'm concerned about the health of the people. We've been drinking this water all the time. We found
out alot of kids needed their shots. Alot of them had sorry mamas and daddys who would not take them to the clinic. This was eighteen miles away and no doctor around. Ten miles to a doctor, eighteen miles. So one of the guys there, Rick ( ) said, let's have a health fair. I said I don't know nothing about a health fair. He said okay, I'll help you organize it. He came down in his big old jalopy, with his guitar, and all of his tofu and helped me to organize a health fair. He made up the evaluation sheets. We saw fifty-six people that day at the health fair. Then he said, we can't stop here. Carry the results back to the health department. Mr. Womble with the health department said well if you had a clinic, where would you put it? You don't have nowhere in Keysville for a clinic. I said we got the church. The church has a study. We have church just twice a month. The pastor don't really need the study. I hadn't talked to the pastor but when he got to church one day, there I was, the examining tables in there, with her records in his office. When he walked up the steps I said you believe in outreach, missionary outreach just like me don't you? He said oh, yeah, Sister Gresham. I said because that's what we are doing at Mount Tabor now. I said open your office door. He looked at all the equipment and said what are you doing? There's a clinic right here. I said we are going into the other old church and that's where people sit until time to come see the nurse. He said that's great. He had a good sermon that day. He's a great guy anyway. After that happened
then I went back again to visit her. How did you like the report? She called a woman and said how would you like to do a health clinic in Keysville? This lady said, great! I often ask the nurse now, she's still working at the clinic, she said because I'd been wanting to come do that and they said that ya'll didn't have any place. All the other little towns have a health clinic in it, a satellite in it. She's Filipino, a nurse practitioner, can write prescriptions and she is great. She has white and black people coming. They we found out that there was this doctor who was leaving and was leaving this clinic well equipped because when we moved down here, I moved her in that office that I used. It was a big place and she was glad to move. We moved out of the church. So she fixed up that one big room and we used this room for the patients to sit. I said I think we are going to get a place for you to have a real clinic. We went down. We wrote letters. Then you know, ( ) you may do something like that and then you just kind of wait awhile. Then you sit back and you wait another six months. Then you go back again with the report. Have you all decided to give us that building for a clinic? Finally just all of a sudden, we'll give you the clinic on lease. We're not giving it to you, we're leasing it to you. Do you think I've got any kind of paper yet? Not one piece of paper. And we are paying the insurance part and we're having it moved for you. I said I don't have anything to fuss about. They sent people here to clean the grounds off. That's where they put the clinic. And
it is beautiful. She had all of her rooms, everything in there. We are just so proud to have that clinic. My pressure had not really been handled correctly. My pressure is better now than it was ten years ago because she makes sure that I come about every week. She talks to me about my diet and she talks to me about everything. I think the fussing that she does and the medication she's put me on. I went to see my doctor the other day. He said who's taking care of your pressure? I said the nurse practitioner. He said, is that your doctor? I taught my doctor too when he was in second grade. He said well as long as she takes care of your pressure and keeps you like this, but don't let her do nothing else.

RK: Let me ask just one final question and we'll wrap up here. You've accomplished a tremendous amount in the last few years. What continuing problems are still here in the community that you want to deal with?

EG: Education is still with us. We still have many young adults who will enroll in school and we have a house that the Keysville Concerned Citizens bought. We call it our Education House. That's the name of it. The same governor that we marched on, Governor Harris, had his secretary call me back in 1991. She said Governor Harris would like you to serve on an adult education committee for the state of Georgia. I said he doesn't know me and who are you anyway? I really thought it was someone playing. She said yes he does know you and he really does want you to serve. I
was so embarrassed then. She said could you come next week and be sworn in? My husband and I and my son went to the Capitol and I was sworn in. I am still serving on that committee, adult education. It gives me an in-road to know some of the things and to be able to go to workshops. We have two qualified teachers. One of them is my oldest daughter who is also a conference youth missionary person. She took on the roles that I had some years ago. We have another young lady who works in a school system in Richmond County who comes here on Mondays and Wednesdays to teach adults. We have a big team of people who supports what we do. We have had workshops with this team of people; workshops for our teachers and we passed the test to become a participating certified literate community. We were the seventh city to pass that test. Since we have a new governor, the new governor has heard or he has seen me or something because he had his secretary call and said I want you to serve on the youth and children's committee of the state of Georgia because so many children are being incarcerated into the youth development centers and we want to keep them in school. Well I serve on the Burke County citizen's school board. It could have been some of them who talked about me because we not only have that adult education we have an after school probe that's really been identified as a citizen school program because we work with parents and children. If you child is there, you have to work with us. We give them snacks and they study down at the Education House for an hour and
a half everyday. They get perfect attendance certificates. We are planning a Thanksgiving dinner for the students and their parents. The lady who is my secretary for three hours in the evening, she comes after the senior worker leaves, is one of the main teachers in this program. She carries the key. She keeps it open. She leaves and a young lady who is in tenth grade, the one you saw come in here, works after school. She has taken a course in computer education and sometimes they come here and they do math games on the computers. They like the days that she brings them here for that. She also is what you call a teacher's aide helping the young people. Their grades have improved. No one in Keysville has dropped out of school in the last two years. That's our goal - to keep kids in school. That's what teaching school is about. Keeping students motivated to the point that they will stay in school. The last commission that I was assigned to was a commission with the lieutenant governor. He asked if I would come and be sworn in to work with the women's commission of Georgia. They call them Blue Ribbon Committee serving with some of the conditions under which women work and talking about the problems and eliminating problems for women in Georgia. That is the most interesting committee I've ever worked on. Because everyone is so top heavy and everyone wants to be the boss on that committee. I laugh. Most of the time when I'm on that committee, that's a good catharsis for me to sit there and look and laugh. I said to one young lady who is much younger than I am, I said this is a group
of powerful women in here. She just laughed. Dr. this...I am over the Democratic party. Mrs. Gresham, are you a member of the Democratic party? I said I'm nonpartisan. I might vote anyway. Any kind of way I decide to vote. That's quite interesting to be a member of those organizations. But I'll tell you what it does in a nutshell. Networking with the county and getting on the good foot with the county, showing them that I'm not out for personal gain for me, being on the board, citizen's school in the county, I work with the ( ) Mental Health Board on the county level and I volunteer for whatever I can do. I go to visit the schools in the county when our children are having problems. Of course for the first time in my life I had a superintendent of schools to visit my house, my mobile home. I live in a mobile home here. Washington Post said why are you living in this place and you got a house in Augusta? I said, you've never been black. You don't understand the struggles of black people and how they feel obligated to their mamas and their daddys to do things. And I never left Keysville so I'm here doing this for them and for the unborn children that will come on in Keysville. I want to make a difference to them. But I said all that to say this, here was the superintendent of schools knocking at my door one day. I said hi, Mr. ( ). Mrs. Gresham, I need your vote. I said you didn't have to come up here to get my vote. But I wanted the people of Keysville to know. Well there were two people running, hard and this was an election year. He works with cities and schools and
I'm on that board. He felt he knew me well enough to know. It must have got around that Emma Gresham can influence people to vote for certain issues. And I'm not a politician. I might be a person who really believes. I believe in children. I believe in people. I believe you can't ever give up on people. People change. I don't care what you say, people can learn even when they are old. Because I've learned a lot of things. And people can change if they want to change. But you've got to have the right support and the right motivation to make that person want to change. That was really a surprise. I said I'm very honored to have you. Oh, Mrs. Gresham, I wanted...and anytime something happens in Keysville, let me know before time. Now the principals call the unofficial social worker of Keysville because when I see kids walking around and not in school, I don't care whose child they are, I'll walk up to them and say why aren't you in school. Sometimes I'm looking for them to say something ugly. They say, Mrs. Gresham, I got kicked off... I say, oh no, come on. I have made many children come in here and read books. I'll call the school and find out why you're out and let them know they are in this library today reading books. I've given them a book on their level. Then I'll listen to them read. I've done that many days. I've had children hide from me if they miss school because they don't want to come down here and read. Their mama's working and I'll get them and their mamas don't care if I get them. I guess that's a very strange kind of mayor. But I've done that so many
times until now I have some crazy requests. People sometimes think I'm a real social worker or something. The other day I had this call. Mrs. Gresham, I don't have my money. I've used all my money and I don't have any food stamps and my food is out. My church has an emergency food plan. My youngest daughter, Kay, is president of the missionary society. So I called Kay to come down that evening and give these people some food. I said now this is not city. That food is church and you should come to church sometime. I said now don't think it's city. I just did it because my daughter just happened to be the president of the missionary society and she has the keys to the building. Okay, here comes another person calling. Mrs. Gresham, if you can call over to ( ) and tell them not to turn off my lights. I said how can I stop your lights from being cut off? Mrs. Gresham, I know they won't cut them off if you call. Well I did that for one person and told them not to tell it. And that person told someone else that I kept their lights on. ( ) over there said Mrs. Gresham if you say they really need them, I'll just wait. But you tell them that they are way behind. So I told them. I said now don't tell anyone that I did this. Here comes a lady. That particular man that I helped, I ended up letting him have fifty dollars of my money because he was so far behind he had to carry some and he's not working and he didn't have any money. He hasn't paid me back either. He won't get anymore.

RK: You're right. You do function like a social worker.
EG: It's not like a mayor, is it?

RK: I think one of the interesting things there is that in some ways you are trying to create that community that you grew up in. When people looked out for each other and helped each other.

EG: That is true. Because we did alot of sharing in Keysville. If you killed a hog, everybody had meat. If you had a garden, everybody had vegetables. My mother would walk out the door to go to Sunday School. I have some children who will follow me but my mother used to have everybody following her. Because children and parents were a little bit different. They'll follow me on a trip because out of this group called the Keysville Junior Concerned Citizens, I've carried those children to Chesapeake, Virginia on a trip. Forty people, parents and children. It was paid for by the Virginia Water Projects. I spoke for the Virginia Water Projects board meeting. They wanted to pay me and I said don't pay me. We are sister cities with a little community out of Chesapeake call ( ) community. I'd love to go there and be in a celebration and take my children. And if ya'll can help us to go that would be better than paying me. I gave them three tee shirts of Keysville.