

Interview with Genevieve Chandler "Sister" Peterkin October 16, 2004
Georgetown, SC, at the home of Sis Peterkin Conducted by Whit Ashley and Catie Blocker

W: Can you tell us a little about your academic background?

S: I graduated from Coker in '49 and then worked a year in the library. I had majored in English, and I tell you, if you go to college and major in English, you're not headed for anything [laughs]. You know, I didn't get a teacher's certificate, and I wanted to study Journalism. That's what I wanted to study, but when I got to Coker, I found... I realized that they had a major in English but they had no Journalism. I knew that when I went there, but I went there planning to transfer to the University after two years and then I was just so involved with Student Affairs and you know, all my friends... I didn't want to leave, I didn't want to transfer. So I majored in English, then got out of Coker and I don't know what kind of job I could have found on Earth except; that my mother had a friend who was a librarian. They had just built a big county library in Conway and she needed an assistant. They couldn't afford to pay another librarian so they hired me. After working there a year, I went to library school in Chapel Hill.

If I'm really proud of anything in my entire life, it's that I, in my early twenties, realized that dredging would not be good for these salt creeks. There had never been any dredging in them to that time. That strip of beach out yonder was totally sand dunes and sea oats and nothing was there except wildlife and growth. My grandfather, he had bought that strip - about a mile of that beach - in 1906 or 1910 for \$300, but he was dead and my uncle sold it. The man who bought it of course was planning to develop it. So the first thing they started planning to do was to dredge a big canal from the mouth of the inlet down the back of that beach so the houses would not only have the oceanfront but the creek access too. And I didn't know anything about dredging but it just didn't sound like something that should be done in natural creeks like this. I organized something called Murrells Inlet Protective Association, and I was lucky because young people wouldn't join me at that time (when I say young people, I had brother who had been promised a big job at the marina if they could do the dredging so he was very opposed to what I was doing) but there were older people here in the community who did join me and we got a lawyer and we attempted to prevent that dredging. We learned - many years later, I realized - that at the same time there were developers planning to dredge at south Litchfield, right down the road, and this is sort of like a test case. And we lost in court, and I'm quite sure that there was political involvement. There were people who owned land in South Litchfield manipulated... We lost this case because there were developers, who, if we didn't lose, they could go on with their projects.

W: What year was this in?

S: '56. No, I married Bill in '56, so it would have been '54 that we organized and '55 that we were fighting the problem. We did lose that case, but I've been told that that was a very large and extensive dredging project in South Carolina, and I've always been angry that we lost it and that we lost it the way we did. I know there was some political manipulation there that caused us to lose it. When that happened, and of course they started dredging at south Litchfield and made waterfront lots everywhere, you know, just dredged through marsh and filled in and that sort of thing, has gone on since. Thank goodness, in the meantime, laws have become more strict about that kind of thing. Back then there were no laws governing that, and I don't recall we had any sort of environmental agency in this state at that time.

W: How was the **economy**?

S: That's a hard thing for me to answer. It was probably extremely poor. There were many many people - black and white - who made most of their income from gathering seafood. I would say more black families than white. But the community was very dependent on what the men could gather from here - oysters, clams, crab, shrimp - and sell. We had nothings like, say, Food Lion; there was no big grocery store. There were a couple of little small grocery stores. There was no place for people to be hired into jobs much. A few things nearby, like Brookgreen Gardens, was maybe 4, 5 people employed there. My mother was one of them. So I think the economy was very poor here and the World War II made a difference because the Air Base came here to Myrtle

Beach. The Air Base was there, and then residents started to build because there were all those airmen on the airbase and then their families would come to visit them, and the first motel was built at Myrtle Beach. So World War II had quite an impact on the economy here - in this area.

W: Cause I'm thinking right now, rates are so low and everything and real estate is real cheap, a lot of development has been going up more rapidly in the last couple of years.

S: When you say rates, you mean the purchase of land?

W: Interest rates.

S: Oh, interest rates. That's true, but I think as far as the prices go, they're exorbitant along the coast here. I have this lot here at the inlet that at the moment that are terribly worried about county taxes, because a person, well, such as I am, living on a set income, with no possibility of an increase at my age - and my sister next door is in the same situation, I have two brothers that are retired back here, so they're in the same situation. But especially if you're on the waterfront, the taxes are doubling. They haven't doubled this year, but they say they're having a reassessment next year. They've gone up a very lot this year. But they're going to have a reassessment in the coming year, but some of us are

really wondering if we can really afford to continue to live in the homes we're in for the rest of our lives. Some of us are fortunate enough to have some other land somewhere that we might sell, but to have to go in to selling what you hoped was your nursing home insurance, in order to just live here, is kind of scary.

There are other people who wouldn't have any other assets. But I'm very afraid that that's going to change the picture of Murrells Inlet, and places like Murrells Inlet. When my mother gave me this lot in 1960-something, probably '68, there was no house on it, but the lot of the taxes were \$9 a year. So getting up into the thousands is silly. Yet everything has increased since then - everything. I think that I'm sort of concerned about what will happen in along these coastal marshes and creeks like Murrells Inlet and places around Beaufort in the coming years. I'm so afraid that development is already messing up wetlands more than they should in the state. And we have some laws to protect wetlands, but there's always someone who can squeeze around some of these laws and that worries me a lot. And they do it a lot, and great big companies can do it better than an individual.

W: What is it that they do? It seems like, you know, in a marsh like this with changing currents and you know, how the creeks change direction after a little bit of time, I'm sure you've seen that. What happens to these developments on shore when all of a sudden they've got marsh taking over their backyard?

S: The thing is, the marsh was the backyard when they bought the land. The marsh doesn't change that much, it doesn't grow that much - it doesn't grow that fast. As long as I can remember, and that's getting into 70 years, almost, but anyway I remember as a child we lived just about where the Devine Fish House is now, down there on the waterfront. When I was growing up, we lived at the Hermitage first, which was up this way, then when my grandfather died we lived down there. So I did so much walking through this area at low tide picking up crabs and everything, the creeks out there have not changed much except for the places that were dredged. This channel right here in front of my house was dredged by my uncle in 1954. You see the straight channel along the water.

Until he dredged that, the marsh came right up to the shore. So if you walked out into the creek, you walked through that area of the marsh. And then you found little creeks to walk through or pick up crabs or swim in or whatever. This was dredged around the Hermitage property straight down here and down to Captain Dick's Marina. Most of the inlet waterfront has been dredged by now. I believe almost everywhere has been dredged in the past And it won't be that easy for them to come back in and re-dredge again - thank goodness, I'm thankful for that. And the people, of course, begin to say, "we had deep water, we're losing our water," but they didn't have deep water before it was dredged the first time. And so my attitude is, work with the tides. That's what we did when I was growing up. You waited for the tide to come in if you wanted to get your boat out. But people who haven't lived here as long as I have don't see it that way - they want deep water and say, "why can't we dredge?" The trouble with dredging is that it turns loose now. Nowadays they do have a little better process than they

had in the old days. I think when they dredged that channel back of Garden City, which I tried to prevent and couldn't, the loose stuff was all flushed by the tides all over the rest of the inlet. The tides were moving and the stuff they were digging up and throwing on top of the marsh was washed away from there and all in over here, so lots of natural creeks were changed by that extreme dredging there. And so I know that dredging does change the whole environment. I'm really opposed to dredging in the salt marsh creek.

W: It's funny you should mention that about working with the tides. It seems like a common sense type-thing. We were in Georgetown yesterday, and we were in downtown Georgetown at the gift shop and I saw all these tide clocks and I figured the people who were buying all of those up weren't even paying attention to the tides, and if they just looked out their windows they would see whether the tide was in or out.

s: When I first heard of tide clocks, somebody gave my husband one, and we enjoyed having it because we did 'a lot of fishing. But the whole thing is, if you live by the water you don't need it. You watch and you know what's going on. But it was kinda fun, because we'd never seen one before. Ch, I think those things sell now like crazy. And when you lived here as long as I have, you know exactly how long it's going to take for the tide to rise from low to high. It's easy to look at the creek and time whether it's time to go fishing or whether it's late enough to get out there and go bogging - we call it bogging around in the mud to pick up crabs.

c: Is it the deepest the tide is going to be right now?

s: Yes, almost. It probably is, for today, but when we have a full moon - we just had a new moon, new moon and full moon the tides are higher. Looks like it's about as full high as it'll get today. Last night was a very high tide.

W: Do you ever get dolphins back up this far?

s: When I was growing up, they were in here all the time. It's very rare now. We used to literally be able to swim near them. They were not afraid of us. I think my brother told me recently that he saw some inside of the inlet. There aren't so many because of the increase in boat traffic. I imagine that the noise is what scares them away. They used to come in here to feed, I'm sure, and in fact, most of my life you would see them rolling out there. My brothers - this is a remarkable thing - when my brothers were young, which is about 60 years ago, the old Army dock was here which was built during the war. That was at least 55-60 years ago. But anyway, the boys were out at night to dig for flounder, but there was no light, you know. They would go out there in the boat and sit by the dock and they would call Old Joe. They had talked to a porpoise long enough that he knew them and he knew his name.

W: The porpoise knew his name was Old Joe?

S: Yes. And they would holler Old Joe, and Old Joe would come sailing up the creek. And this was in cold weather too, in the fall. When Old Joe would come up the middle of the main creek, all the trout - the window trout - would just sail to the edge of the marsh, and the boys would sit there and just grab them. There was no limit in those days to what you could get. I was working in those days down at the library in Georgetown, and around Christmas Eve came down to Georgetown to give away these beautiful window trout. They made the mistake of going out the night before Christmas Eve. And nobody wanted fish, they wanted turkey or chicken or something. They couldn't sell any fish, so they came down and asked me if I knew any people - because you know people didn't have freezers then - who would want them. It's easy to find people who want fresh fish. But they had a load of those beautiful window trout, but Joe, I don't know how they trained them because I was never out there with them, but I know when they called Old Joe, he would come up the creek. In fact, it's funny how things do become almost tame out there. When I lived at the summer house we had down here, we would throw things - like if we cleaned fish, we would throw the remains in the creek. We always had a habit of throwing something in the creek - not garbage, but you know if you knew the crabs were going to eat it or something was going to eat it, like scales of the fish you'd clean, you'd throw it in the water. So we would throw things off the dock like that, and the herons and the birds and things got accustomed to finding things like that there. I had several white herons that I could put my hand out on the dock and they would fly in and perch right by me because they knew that I brought food out. I remember one time in the spring a friend came down to the summer house next door and he saw this big white bird flew in and perched and he said, "Sis, how in the world did you train that bird?!" And I said, "You stay all winter it's easy."

W: You still see a lot of birds come around?

S: Yes, yes thank goodness we do. And then now we have wood storks, we never used to have them when I was young. I heard that they were nesting down in the Santee delta and over on the Pee Dee. They're beautiful big birds with a black tip on their wings. The black tip doesn't show until they're flying. I read somewhere, I guess in the paper yesterday, that they'll be migrating soon. But we have them here through the warm weather. They're the largest birds we have out here - they're much larger than the white heron or the blue heron.

C: I don't want to change the subject, but the Hermitage area next to here, is that where Alice's house was? '

S: The Hermitage House was there. It was the only house there - there was somewhat of a peninsula of land, the water goes there behind it, too. My grandfather bought that property from the river to the ocean. In 1910, I think. So the Hermitage was included. He left most of that property to my uncle, who sold

the Hermitage. My brother moved the house because the people who were buying it wanted to develop the land, they didn't care about the old house. So my brother moved it. Sunnyside House is another old house. There were only a few houses here in the really old days, like rice planting days, and these people who had rice plantations on the Waccamaw had homes over here on the inlet - a few of them. Mr. Harriet had a place down there called Woodland, I believe the house was burned in 1980. This old house had been built by Reverend Blaine. This one and Sunnyside and the Hermitage were the oldest homes on the inlet. I guess all of them but Sunnyside have been moved - well Woodland burned - but Sunnyside is the only one still in the location where it sat originally. In the 1920's period and early 1900's my grandfather came down here between 1906 and 1910 and bought land and he was living in Marion, South Carolina. And lots of his friends and some cousins kinda followed him, and a lot of people from Florence and Marion bought land down here. It developed a whole sort of summer colony of people.

W: I have a friend who lives in Summerville, and he was saying that's how it got its name, because people would just go down there for the summer.

S: Well first of all, in this area, people left the rivers. They thought there was a fume coming from the river swamps that was causing malaria. They didn't know that mosquitoes were passing it. But really that's what started these summer homes along the salt water - the breeze kept the mosquitoes away more than on the river. So all the people who could afford it that had a plantation on the river started building a summer home by the ocean or the creek. That was to get away from the malaria.

W:

got eaten up yesterday at Cap'n Sandy's,

S: They seem to be worse this year, my sister and I both were saying the other evening. Generally this porch is so high and we have a good breeze here...Are you all too warm out here?

W&C:

It feels good

S: Usually there's a breeze in the evening. I think it's rare for us to have mosquitoes up on this porch because they would be more likely to get us down around the grass at lower levels. But yesterday evening, and the day before, my sister and I both noticed mosquitoes here, which is most unusual. But we've had a lot of rain. So I think that's probably the cause of that.

W: Do you have bats around here?

S: We do, I've got a bat house on the side of my house there. I wish some bats would take it. I've never seen any come here. But we do have bats.

C:

S:

The bats help with mosquitoes.

Bats and purple martins,

W: You have purple martins?

S: Yeah. Now I've taken my house down for the winter but my brother is getting ready to get my sister's house, but the tide got too high. But we have them right there. They fill up in the spring. It's about the middle of February to the end of February when they come in, and then as soon as the little babies are ready to fly they take off. They usually leave here early in August. They're wonderful little birds - they're just sailing out there all the time eating mosquitoes. When I lived in Calhoun County, we got Calhoun County designated the Purple Martin Capital of South Carolina. This old railroad cuts through the center of town, you know this groove thing that the railroad track goes through.

C:

Is that in St. Matthews?

S: Uh huh. So we got purple martin houses like that placed all along that railroad cut, and it's really been a nice thing for St. Matthews. They say that one martin will eat *4,000* mosquitoes a day, so it's a lot better than using bug spray isn't it?

W: Yeah, that's what they have around my neighborhood, or the neighborhood next to mine. They come around at 2 or 3 in the morning with this truck that sprays for mosquitoes.

S: They do that through here. does it kill? Butterflies, I bet.

really always hate to see it, because what else

C: The spray truck comes and you have to go inside, it's obviously harmful to us too.

So it's harmful to bugs but

S: I think it's harmful for us, problem with my lungs...

do,

(Dog barks, some confusion.)

C:

He's a good watchdog for you

think it is. Especially since I've had this

S: He usually barks at every boat that goes by, as if he could tackle it. He goes to the door...He even knows when a car drives up. He barked while ago, when ya'il were coming up. That's how I knew ya'il were here. He's a wonderful little watchdog - he couldn't do much for a robber.

W: **He** just woke up that cat.

W:

think that's interesting that it made it to the internet.

S: It's with the Library of Congress, that's why. And I had heard that that Library of Congress was gradually getting it put on the internet, but I don't know how much of it is. In fact, it's more than a little bit, because that might interfere with our project. Well, the University's already accepted to publish that, and the other thing is that it's all South Carolina materials. So I think the University would still want to have it collected that way. But not long ago I thought if the internet has it alii don't know if the University would still want to publish. I'm not going to tell them.

W: Have you heard of the South Caroliniana library?

S: Yeah, yeah. Yes, I've been there. In fact, that's how we found all of Momma's work that went to the Library of Congress. We first got what they claim was all she had done, but it was only all that South Carolina has sent in there. What she did originally was sent to the South Caroliniana library, and then they sent it on to Washington, the Library of Congress. So Kincaid and I find after we got in the Library of Congress that there's this story not here and such-and-such a story not here, so then we went to the South Caroliniana library. We checked the indexes first, but the indexes didn't have all that I knew she had done. But we finally just went page by page and a lot of it wasn't indexed. So we went through 30 volumes, I think. It was turned it by different writers for the writers' project. It took us about three or four days, all day. But I'm pretty sure we got everything that's there. A lot of it was in boxes but some of it was in big folders.

W: By the time the stories have gone through this publication process that you're describing, how have they changed?

S: They do change over the years. As a child, and I think this is interesting to me, when I was a child most of the stories that we heard were from the black men. The black men were the storytellers. And I have tried to figure that out in my mind, and what I think is, is that probably by the time the families got gathered in their homes at night, the mother was in there cooking supper and trying to get things ready to feed the children and put them to bed. And the daddy probably kept them entertained by telling them stories while that was going on. The father was going out working all day, and then he had to come in at dark if he was working the fields, which most of them were. Whatever he was doing, he would have to come in at dark. I just have a feeling that the daddies became storytellers to try to keep the kids quiet while the mothers were cooking dinner. Just recently I thought about it and I thought that's why the fathers were the storytellers. So when we were children, Richard Knox and Zacky Knox, who were men that worked for my grandfather, would come by my momma's house and tell us stories before they went home at night. Usually they were waiting on Momma to give them a ride home, and they had come in the house and maybe

they were bringing some firewood - you had to have fireplace wood. They would come by the house and just do things that needed to be done that Momma couldn't do. Then she would give them a ride home. But at that time, they were always sitting down and telling us stories. Back in the '70's, the teachers in Georgetown - well at Waccamaw schools, including Pawley's - were trying to think of ways to incorporate black history back into the curriculum. I was sitting on the school board, and so I told them...Well I got Dr. Charles Joyner [Coastal Carolina University] came down to meet one day with the teachers and help

them, figure out something about that. He said you all need to get Sister to come and tell stories that her mother collected from the blacks to the school children. So that's what wound up happening. I did that for some years, and I wound up going to most of the schools in Georgetown County, instead of just Waccamaw. I just did it as a volunteer, for nothing, because it was needed and there wasn't any grant or anything to pay for it either. I think it was really useful because I could say to those children...It was a way of informing to the black children that their ancestors had contributed more than just being slaves. That they had made a big difference in our culture, here along the coast, in the way of food - the way we eat - but most especially in the storytelling. They had some African in our folklore here. We wouldn't have without them. Superstitions, all of that. It was a real good program because I could try to give the black children a sense of pride in their past, and give the white children the attitude that blacks had contributed. We did it for some years, and you know what's satisfying to me? It happens every once-in-awhile. I'll go to a store and the clerk, the person at the cash register, will say, "Oh, Ms. Peterkin, you talked to my class when I was in high school."

W: Would the stories mean the same things to the kids that you think they might have meant originally?

S: A lot of the stories had some sort of moral, a lesson to teach or something. Yeah, I think that they really did enjoy hearing those stories. They would say, "Ms. Peterkin, let our teacher get you to come back tomorrow." In other words, they didn't have to do the work for class. So there was that side of it. But the first time I went to tell stories up at a Waccamaw school I was talking to an 8th grade class, and I said something like, "I wish Zacky Knox could be here today to tell you this the way he told it to me when I was a child, because I can't tell it just as he did but I'm going to try to because that'd mean pretty much a Gullah sound." Then when class was over, this cute little boy came running up to me and asked if I'd stay and eat lunch with one of them. I said I could, and they had lunch in the bandroom and so he ran off. Then I came in the bandroom and there were six little girls and that little boy around a table, and there was a chair for me. So I sat down and said "Ya'll tell me your names," and he said, "I'm Barry Knox - Zach is my granddaddy." He said, "How come you know my granddaddy?" And what happened to me was I got tears in my eyes. But it turned out that every child at that table was the grandchild or great-grandchild of somebody Momma had interviewed. It really was, I think, the most rewarding experience

that I could have ever had because then I felt like at least I could pass on to them what their families had passed on to us. At that point in time, I don't know if their families were still telling those stories at home. Now I do remember this. When I was talking to students in school, a teacher, a black teacher, came up to me and said, "Ms. Peterkin, we love it when you come here and tell those stories. I haven't heard those stories since I was little, since my daddy used to tell them." And she said "my daddy," and that's what keeps me thinking that it's the father that told the stories.

W: What do the kids like for you to tell them about?

S: Well, the things that I told them I didn't probably give them any choice. Usually the things that sound like ghost stories. Not ghosts, but hags and plat- eyes. The things that are in the black culture. I would say they probably favor those. But also animal stories. You know, like Brer Rabbit type things. Mama collected as many Brer Rabbit stories as George Chandler Harris did in Georgia. And a lot of them are similar. You know they came from Africa. They were brought by word of mouth from there, and they came to Georgia and South Carolina and Florida. Have you ever heard of Zora Neale Hurston?

W: Yes, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

S: Yeah. When I read her things, I realized that she was exposed to the same stuff down there as we were here. I don't remember how I learned about her, but I've enjoyed reading her work. I think the WPA paid my Momma by the word. You know, if it was like 150 words I don't know she was paid, maybe like 5 cents a word. It wasn't much, but on the other hand it made her a living so she could take care of us until she got the job at Brookgreen. I think it was interesting how among her black friends here, that I don't know how they learned but they learned that she was paid by the word. And I remember Lillie Knox saying, "Ms. Jenny, I was gonna try to stretch this story this morning." Because the longer you could make it, the more pay she might get. Lillie worked for Momma and took care of us while Momma was running around talking to people. This is interesting, and this is I'm sure the truth but I didn't think about it until I became an adult. Daddy died when I was 8, and three weeks later I quit walking, and I know perfectly well it was some sort of a psychosomatic thing. But at the time the doctor decided I had rheumatic fever. I did have a pain in my legs, but I'm pretty sure that what was going on with me was that my daddy had a massive stroke and lived three days, but was completely paralyzed on one side, and then he died. And I have a feeling that what went on with me was I was afraid that if I left home, if I went back to school, my Momma might be gone like he did. I think I connived that illness in order to stay home with her. And it worked wonderfully because what happened was she couldn't send me to school because there was so much pain in my legs, and then the doctor said I had to stay in bed a year. Momma couldn't leave me right there in the bed because she was having to get out and talk to these people and make a living, so she put me in the car. You

see, it made my life completely different than it would have been because I was going with her to meet these people. What's happened because of that is in my old age now I'm still in touch with the families that she used to interview the grandparents. We've been good friends all these years and it's been good for me because it's a totally different relationship with the black community than a white child would normally have. Just like they go to chapel this past Sunday, they have a breakfast and they always call and ask me to bring my family. They sell the breakfast but still they always take time to remind me to come and invite us to come. I appreciate those things, that they want us to be in touch. I think that Heaven's Gate two weeks ago had the Sunday they call Family and Friends which is a once-a-year dinner they have. I was sick and couldn't go, but they reminded me to come to that. I appreciate that what Momma did back in those days has connected me in a different way to the black community.

W: I saw in that same gift shop I talked about awhile back these little copper bracelets that claim to be good for arthritis and stuff.

S: Yeah, so many people say so, and I've known so many people that wear them that I wouldn't doubt that they feel some difference. I have never thought about getting one, but I know white people and black people who wear those. There's just know telling if there's something in that metal. I had a white friend with serious arthritis in her fingers and she wore one on each hand, and she thought that it did help her. She's been dead for some years, but she was the first white person that I saw wearing the copper bracelet.

W: You saw black people wearing them first?

S: I think so, I think so but I'm not positive about that. It may be just my nature to think that most superstitions come from them. I may be saying that just because I think it probably is so, whereas it may not be at all. I think that as far as bracelets go, that's something that's spread around the country. You see them in magazines, you know, where you can order them. But we have so many other superstitions locally here that I think come from them. I had wished two things: that I had written down all the different proverbs I heard from black people, like, "Coward man don't tote broke bone." In other words, if you're a coward you're not gonna get in a fight and get hurt. I just wish I'd written down every one that I'd ever heard. And then the other thing, the superstitions. Like yesterday, my brother was coming in the yard to pick me up for a meeting, and he headed around the oak tree on one side and I was about to go the other way but I turned around to go around the same side he did. In childhood, you learn not to let something come between you. These little things we do automatically - and I don't think I would consider myself an extremely superstitious person - but then I might be a little fogged if I didn't remember to do it. Don't walk under a ladder. As a little kid, you didn't walk on the line on the sidewalk.

C

I've heard you're not supposed to get out of your bed on the hour or half-hour.

W:

S

actually do that.

don't know why

You must have heard it.

do it.

C: The lady that used to keep me was from around this area, and she moved to Bamberg. She would come wake me up from a nap at that certain time.

W: You mentioned some of those proverbs that you wish you'd written down, and one that I remember by lora Neale Hurston is "You got to go there to know there."

S: That's good. I don't remember reading that, but I think I've read most of her work. It was so sad - I read a biography about her too - but the fact that she was in such bad financial straits when she was old. On the other hand, in that period of time, it would have been difficult for a black woman to invest if she ever made money. That thing wouldn't have happened.

W: She died in Florida. Apparently she didn't even want a grave marker.

S:

That's right.

I'd forgotten that.

W: We went to the graveyard in Hobcaw, and they had different trinkets on the graves.

S: They're still there? That's good, because they wouldn't be if people were allowed in - if it were public. All the black cemeteries when I was young had different things there. One thing that was always there were medicine bottles. was whatever they were taking when they died. The medicine stuff was put down on the graves. Then sometimes like a kerosene lamp, or a household thing that they seemed to think they might need. Maybe a favorite cup, or just things that were very personal things. When I lived in the Fort Mott area, there were a lot of cemeteries like that, and the

things just disappeared from people coming in and walking around and things like that.

C:

Do black celebrate death more than whites?

It

S: You know I think they do have that attitude even more than we whites do. I can remember being at a funeral years ago while I was young, and the preacher was saying, "She's eating at the welcome table today." And they always referred to the "welcome table" in heaven. "And she ain't gonna have to beg for no mo' grits.. .she ain't gon have to beg no mo'. She's eating at the welcome table today." And they'd have honey, milk and honey. I don't why that appeals - I wouldn't want that. But that seems to be an ideal food. I would say maybe steak and potatoes. But somehow I was always wondering about the milk and honey, two separate things. But that main thing - "she won't have to beg no mo' grits."

W: The Spanish do a similar thing with their Day of the Dead.

S: Yes, and obviously they don't need those things in the afterlife because they're still there. Daddy died when I was eight and my grandparents died when I was six and 14, so we had a cemetery plot there already. Momma would take us there to rake the leaves - there's a big ole live oak tree over at the cemetery.

She would take us out there to clean up the cemetery lot, rake the leaves and all. I can remember how Momma used to say how much closer she felt to Daddy when we were there. I thought she did **all** that to clean up the cemetery lot, but I did personally feel close to him by the grave.

S: Oh did he? They're the best friends. He wants to play with her, and she just sort of ignores him. But she doesn't fight him off. She was a stray. There's a restaurant called Seaweed Restaurant on 17 on the way to Charleston down below Owindall. And I came out of there one day, I was having lunch, and I thought it was a little baby bird peeping, it sounded like a pathetic little cry in the bushes. There were some young Hispanic man coming out right behind me, who had eaten in there, and I said, "Could you men see if you could find that little baby bird for me?" I thought it was a little baby bird. And then went down and came up with this little kitten in their hands. The waitress came out and told me the mother had abandoned them two days before.

C:

had a cat like that when I was young

S: I like cats and I always have but I don't like the way they go after birds. I snatched a little bird out there away from the cat and put him in a little cage in there, and after about four hours he was alright. She came up the stairs with that in her mouth. You cannot feed a cat so well that it will not go after a bird, I learned that long ago. I give them all the Fancy Feast they want, and still, they're gonna get a bird if they can catch him. But thank goodness that's the first time I've seen her with one in her mouth. I fussed at her, and she's not accustomed to being fussed at so it might've registered.

W: Does she ever mess with anything as big as a gull?

S: No, no.

W: Do they ever come around here?

S: They perch on the post out there. They're usually out there a lot. They don't perch here in the yard; they fly over. We have little marsh hens out there in the creek that don't fly as much, of course, as a gull, but the cats don't bother them. The cats don't care about the water, so they're not gonna wade out there to bother them.

W: Are marsh hens and swamp chickens the same thing?

S: Probably. I've never heard them called swamp chickens. They're good to eat, really. They have a little taste that's wild, you know like wild meat. I haven't had any in a long time but my brothers used to hunt them when I was young. They are beautiful little things. They hatch their little babies usually around the full moon in June, and when you see them swimming by with all these little babies behind them, they're like little baby chicks. Hurricane Hugo was probably a lot of loss of marsh hens during that storm. I remember because I didn't see as many. But they've certainly come back.

W: Do you ever eat at those restaurants here on 17?

S: Yes. If I go out to a restaurant, generally it's at lunch instead of evenings. They're just so busy in the evenings and I'm just not up to standing in line or wait too long. Actually, I just get kinda tired by evening.

C: We went to Bovine's the other night and it was really good.

S: I haven't been to Bovine's in a good many years. Really, if you live here, they're just so many. Sometimes I've had people call me that don't even know me but have somehow heard my name and they'll call and say, "I know since you live here you can tell me the best restaurant to eat at," and I can't because if you live here there are too many - you can't have gone to all of them. There was a time when I could have said, "Oh, yes," but there wasn't but two or three. But I wouldn't like to try to name one over the others. Bovine's has a good reputation. Probably about 25 years ago, my brother had up where Devine Fish House is, he had one called The Anchor Restaurant. Long before Hugo. Where Bovine's is, there was one called The Galley. I guess it was Hugo that wiped those out. It actually damaged the buildings so much they had to rebuild.

W: We've been going to Oliver's Lodge for awhile.

s: You know, this is interesting. A man from New York state has bought it now. And I haven't eaten there since he's had it, but I've heard nothing but nice things about it. I don't think that's got anything to do with anything. He's fixing it up -

he's painted it for the first time in its history. It's painted on the outside. And he said after Thanksgiving when they close for the winter he's gonna do a lot more

renovation on the inside. When I was growing up, and I'd go over there to play with Maxine, there were really cracks in the floor. That house was built right around the turn of the century. Momma told me she thought it was built in 1903,

but right after 1900.

W: Who would stay there?

S: Captain Bill Oliver and his wife owned it then, and they ran it as a boarding house. And in those days, men would come down to fish in the fall or to duck hunt, so it was mostly their customers were men who came to fish or hunt without their families. They served good food. It's a boarding house - they served three meals a day. It wasn't a restaurant at all. Then her granddaughter started it as a restaurant... Well maybe Maxine's parents started it as a restaurant - I'm not quite sure which one.

But anyway it was started as a restaurant probably in the late 50's. I suppose that anyway you look at it, it's the oldest place on the inlet that serves food all these years.

W: How much do them Yankees come down here and start developing?

S: Oooh... Not that I don't like Yankees, I just don't like so many people coming. But I told somebody not long ago, and I'll let you keep this on the tape, thank God that they're retired and too old to reproduce, because we would be overrun.

Even so, we're becoming overrun. If you go to the grocery store, you would think you were in Ohio or New Jersey. I mean it's that sort of thing that I notice. It's a rare thing to... Even among the clerks - a lot of them are retired, but they'll, you know, part time jobs. So you walk into the stores around here and you wouldn't believe you were on the coast of South Carolina. Because of the difference in

the accents. I've told some of them who are close friends, thank goodness they didn't come down here just to play golf. A lot of them have contributed so much to the community. They get involved with things, join our Murrells Inlet Property Owners Association, and they work really hard with things like that. They really do contribute a lot as people who come to live here. Then they're so interested in the history, but they don't know anything about the area. I think that probably it's good for the community except we are becoming from here to Myrtle Beach and all along the bypass, they're all these communities off the bypass and they're all becoming... Well, you know, the residents of the property are probably past 55,

60, 65, so I don't know whether we're gonna have enough nursing homes in the area to take care of the population in the future. But then, of course, lots of them stay here and then wind up going back with children or something like when they're real real old. But I think we have certainly become far more of a retirement community. I don't mean Murrells Inlet right here, but the whole Waccamaw Neck.

W: They come down here, and do they have to make changes in their own lifestyle?

S: Yeah. Well, and another thing is, they're really trying to change us. For instance, this is a really good example - the casino boats that wanna come in here. You see, none of them... I shouldn't say none of them object, but I'd say 90% of them think that would be great. Because if they lived in New Jersey, they had casino boats. They had gambling. And we think it would be the worst thing that could happen to Murrells Inlet. And I would still maintain that it would be the worst thing that could happen to Murrells Inlet. But anyway, I would say they're great differences like that. Their culture, their background is different than ours. And we've always been more like country community. And they're accustomed

to where they can go to a casino and gamble and there for awhile, these people - a lot of these local people - fighting having gambling boats come in. I would say a lot of those people have moved here from other places would just think that would be great. And it would be not great for Murrells Inlet. We don't have the parking for one thing, for all those people to be coming and getting on boats. But just the noise, the continuous coming and going all evening long. They have to go three miles off-shore. Then - I don't know that I'm right about this - but I imagine they serve drinks on those boats, and I imagine it would probably increase the driving under the influence on the roads out here; I would think it would. I just think there are a lot of reasons why it would not be a good thing for

Murrells Inlet. Unfortunately for us, if they can get the casino boats in here they're five minutes from the ocean. In Georgetown, they're three miles or something. More than that, I think it's more than three miles, it's more like three hours. Anyway, it's a long trip from Georgetown marina to the ocean. That's why they're trying to come here, and Pawley's doesn't have a marina large enough to handle them. And they're fortunate there that don't. I hope we can keep them out of here.

W: It's the same deal up there in Little River.

S: Qh yeah, it's happened. I went to...We had the first hearing we had against having casino boats on the coast of South Carolina was in Columbia. And the Little River people went, and I met a lot of them that day, and we went - a bunch of us from here: both my brothers and their wives and a number of other people. Glenn McConnell was a Senator in Charleston. I'd like to choke him.

W: **Yeah wouldn't you?**

S: I mean if I could I would. If I could legally get by with it, I would. You know, the reason I don't like him is because the day that we went to that hearing in Columbia trying to prevent this ever happening, he was up there. First of all what he did, was so un-democratic I coulda shot him. We were supposed to be there you might say 11 :00 for a hearing; I forget the time now, I may be wrong. We got there, and it was probably three hours before the hearing started and I think that all they were doing was trying to stall, stall, stall and maybe these Murrells Inlet people would get the hell back to the inlet. Then finally, the meeting did start.

His former Congressman John McClear from Darlington was an attorney with a gambling boat interest, I guess, was there to speak in favor of letting those boats come into South Carolina waters. So Glenn McConnell, as chairman of the committee, recognized, he said, "This gentleman, John McFear, has come from Washington to argue this case, and we have to let him go first because he has to all the way back, fly back to Washington this evening." It's not like he had driven all the way to Columbia.

C: His flight was shorter than your drive.

S: Sure, of course. And then we were gonna have to drive back. So John McFear got up and what he did was what Ole Strom used to do in Washington - he filibustered. He stood for I don't know how long and finally he was getting out of breath and one of his assistants got up and took over and they talked until there was no time left for the hearing. It was just a lot of babble, mostly. Just babble. But whatever - they disrupted the meeting, they took over all the time. And by the time that any of us could get up to say anything, most of the audience had left because they had to go back to Little River, Murrells Inlet. I was so angry that day, but we certainly made no headway by going to the meeting and I would never forgive Glenn McConnell for doing that. It was wrong, it was wrong.

W:

don't see why Charleston keeps putting him in office.

S: I don't either. I'm amazed. That's the only thing he's done that's personally affected me, but he's done some things down there that I don't think helped the people there any. It's funny, but when you get turned off badly by a politician like that you don't forgive him. You don't forget and you don't forgive.

W: He's President of the Senate.

S: Yeah, I really don't know how that happened either. I think now he's of course made a big name for himself on the Hunley being pulled up. He worked hard on that.

W: He led the funeral march, all Confederate-general style.

S: I remember reading about that and it was on TV but I didn't see it. The reason he bumped us on the casino boats was, these tour ships come into Charleston and they have gambling on board, but what I can't understand is why can't it be a simple matter for the legislature of the city of Charleston to get a different ordinance controlling those and other boats. I can't understand why in the world they can't separate the two. But they say if they stop the casino boats, then they'll force these tour boats to stop coming in to Charleston. I've been on one tour on a tour boat. June and I went to the Mediterranean and they had gambling going on all the time if you wanted to do it. If people want to do it, it's not that I'm so hipped on being opposed to gambling, I just am opposed to having the gambling interest of South Carolina people take over my Murrells Inlet. I don't think anything good comes out of that for a community like as small as this.

W: **It** sounds like you've done some activist work in your day.

S: Oh Lord. Yeah. I suppose the dredging is the first thing that ever got me going as I told you about. I have always been a little bit stronger on civil rights issues than most of my contemporaries. Calhoun County - you can imagine because you're from Orangeburg - it was a different place in the sense of race. I think the creek had a lot to do with that. Black people and white people would be out there gathering oysters together. You know what I mean? There was sort of a relationship between the black and white people of the community. But there is another thing about that Calhoun County and Orangeburg County most of the black were dependent on some white farmer or some white someone for a job. And the blacks down here that come for freedom more independent little families and settlements down here they some how made the way in between gathering seafood and they weren't dependent on the local white farmer. And in Calhoun County they definitely were and I could see that so clearly when I went to a meeting at The Office of Economic Opportunity. It was the first meeting they had at the courthouse in Calhoun County and Bill and I had heard there were some

civil rights workers young girls, young women down in Orangeburg and Calhoun. But we went to the meeting on the thing, The Office of Economic Opportunity and there were these young women who were civil rights workers some of the people who lived on our farm told us they had been coming to their houses and talking to them. And so I went up to one of the young girls and told her that I knew you had been out to our home at Fort Mott but when you come out again I hope you come by to see Bill and me in fact I hope you come by to have lunch with us and low and behold they did start coming out to see us and then they did come and have lunch a lot because it was the first time whites had made an approach to them, normally the white community was "get the hell back to Ohio". Anyhow, in the midst of getting to know them, Bill was wonderful he allowed me to be like I was and not only did he allow me but he charmed me and we share attitudes like that and we could just not see the girls being punished like that. One of the girls was arrested, she was going home and I could have made the same mistake like that, I could make it now. She had gone and drawn her money out of the bank and closed her account and she made a mistake in her balance of two dollars, until she made a check to draw out the balance and the check was two dollars more than she had. The next thing I knew they had her in jail for writing the bad check and you know I wouldn't have been put in jail for writing a bad check in St. Matthews that same day so we went and bailed her out of jail. So I got a reputation for going overboard and things like that. But, I think that it's interesting that when I was in college I remember in '48, it was when Strom Thurmond was elected governor. That I always respected that old man in some ways but I never shared his attitude on politics.

C

think a lot of people had respect for him.

S: Uh-huh, but there again I never could have shared his attitudes. Anyway, I think that's when I began to...Yeah, he ran on, his whole issue was segregation. And that's when I found South Carolina politics hard to deal with. But I did one time come home from college on a bus, a Greyhound bus, I was in the back of the bus and I was sitting in the last seat before the black people were right behind me. But I was on a seat that had an empty seat beside me. And then across from me were white people and right behind us they were black. And in front were white. As it was, in those days, it filled from the front back and from the back forward, and wherever it stopped depended on if there were more blacks or more whites getting on. That's where you divided. Anyhow, a black girl out in the country around Socastee, we stopped and picked up this young woman who was probably about 17. Maybe 18. And she had a little child, a little toddler. He could stand up and walk. Little young child. She had him in her arms when she came in on the bus and then before she could hardly walk to the back of the bus and grab something to steady herself, the driver took off. And she almost, well she kinda wobbled holding the child. And there I was sitting with the empty seat beside me, so blacks were behind me but whites were across. I looked up at her and said, "You can sit down here,

honey." She said "No, no," and I said, "It's alright, I don't mind," And she said, "No, no," and I said, "Go

ahead and sit down, it's alright." Well Lord have mercy, she sat down and put the child on her lap, and the driver hit the brake so hard that the bus just went uerked], just stopped, and he turned around and ordered her to get up. And I told her, I said, "It's alright, I told her she could sit by me." [Driver to Sis] "If you don't shut your mouth, I'll put you off the bus too." And he didn't put her off, but he threatened to. I know he scared her to death because he scared me to death. But she stood up and she held that child until we got to Myrtle Beach. But I mean, when you grew up seeing stuff like that, you have a pretty low tolerance for people being treated wrongly.

W: You still see evidence of that?

S: Yeah, yeah. We sure do. We do. I don't know that it'll ever go away. You know what's happening right now, in fact telling you that makes me think of what I was watching on television earlier this morning - there's so many Hispanics coming in here now. And now what's going to happen is we're going to have people becoming prejudiced toward them. When people don't know people, they leave them alone. But when they start invading their territories they go to start going to put them down or get them out of the way or whatever. I mean I just, you know it hit me. This is going to be the next issue around here, because the restaurants are filling up with people of Hispanic origin who are working, and the community is...Just seeing on television how they were talking about voting and how many Hispanics have registered in this area recently. I cannot barely see them now being put through what prejudice puts people through.

W: I'll tell you a bizarre story if you feel like hearing it. Back up where we come from in Columbia. Have you been around Columbia much?

S: **Well** when was 11,12.

was a child

W: **Which part?**

lived with my godmother there, but that's only when

S:

Laurel Street. She had a gorgeous beautiful, old mansion on that street.

W: That's one thing I've notice about Laurel Street, there are still some of those houses there.

S: Yeah, yeah. Her home has become the headquarters for the South Carolina- it's a women's group - well, I can't remember the name. The group was very active in the 50's against the

prejudice of the blacks. I stuck my neck out back there with that group and almost lost my job. I shouldn't have; my mother's friend was head of that group. It wasn't, of course, the NAACP - it was not just an organization to promote integration, but they did, among other things. They were promoting integration in the schools and things that hadn't happened at that time.

W: There's this one part of town

S:

Uh-uh [no]

Do you know who The Fabulous Moolah is?

W: She was a pro wrestler, and she lives in this little neighborhood. But she lives by herself, except for these midget wrestlers that she trains. Also in the neighborhood are the migrant workers, and the neighborhood is primarily black. But there, the midgets and the migrant workers hate the black people and even gang up on them, antagonizing them.

S: Gh, Lord. That is terrible.

W: Is there that sort of bad attitude down here?

S: You know, I hadn't thought about it. There might be - vaguely. In fact, remember I told you while ago that ugly remark when I was talking to some local folks here, we gotta quit worrying about the Yankees moving in, because at least they're so old they're not able to reproduce. And that wasn't very kind. But yes, there is sort of a feeling of being overwhelmed. Now the church I belong to, I would say at this point in time, those people who have lived in this area are extremely in the minority. Not that that bothers me, I'm just saying that that's the change of way things...In other words, so many people have moved in, when I was a child that church probably didn't have more than 12 members, that's counting children and adults. It was a very small church. Anyway, now it's thriving.

W: What church is it?

S: Blane Hill. They have 2,000 members now. And when I was a child I was a member of Blane Hill. But I changed denominations when I married a Lutheran.

I go to a church at Litchfield and it's almost totally Northern. You know, Lutheran wasn't a big denomination in the South, so most of the people who are Lutheran down here now came from the North.

W: Did you ever practice Methodism?

S:

W:

S

Yeah

was Methodist growing up

Do you know a fellow named Bill Bouknight?

You know, somehow I know that name,

Is he a minister or something?

W: Yeah, I don't. think he's down here anymore. But he was at our church for awhile. I go to Trenholm Road United Methodist, and he was there, and then he moved down to Georgetown.

S: Uh-huh. I bet that's why I've heard it. Because I didn't ever attend in Georgetown but I certainly do know that name. I was Methodist all of my growing-up years, and then when I married Bill I became Lutheran. No I didn't; I got that all backwards. I was an Episcopalian for 28 years, and when I moved back down here I was in an Episcopal church nearby - All Saints of Georgetown. You know they were further away than Murrells Inlet. I started going to Episcopal Church in Surfside, which is nearer - the Church of the Resurrection. Then my sister, she had become a Lutheran when she married. Her husband was Lutheran. Then she moved down here, and she joined the Episcopal Church with me because there wasn't a Lutheran church here. And then suddenly we met-this Lutheran minister trying to establish a church. So I thought I'd be a better member of a little church trying to build than one that, you know, doesn't need me. So we both went, but she wanted to go to that Lutheran church. I became Lutheran, but that was about 20 years ago.

C: I'm Episcopalian, but the church that I attend is smaller than the original All- Saints church. It's Christ Church in Denmark, and then the Church of the Redeemer in Orangeburg.

S: Yeah, we'll remember when I was on the Board for Christian Education for The Dioceses, and I used to go to meetings in Denmark a good bit.

C: They have Voorhees, the Episcopal College, so the majority of African-Americans.. .

S: Yeah, yeah. There was a lovely black woman teaching at that college back then, but I don't know if she's there anymore. She was a nice person. I think her last name was White, something White. I might be wrong about that.

W: How did you get to church [down here]?

S: When we were children growing up, daddy died when I was eight, and then momma was fortunate because Brookgreen Gardens had just opened just about the time that daddy died. Momma got a job there. First, she worked for the federal writers' project - the WPA, the Works Progress Administration. It was Roosevelt. I guess the whole project was the Works Progress Administration - the WPA - but they created jobs, from digging ditches to all kinds of things. And Momma was so fortunate because she had some short stories in *Scrivener's* magazine and *Mademoiselle*, so they hired her to collect folklore, primarily from the black community and the Waccamaw Neck area. I think she had some things published in *Southwestern Review*, which was a college-oriented magazine from Southwestern University. They wanted to collect from the whites, too. But *the* black people had a lot more of that, you know - the oral tradition of telling stories. When the writers' project was beginning, a friend of mine was hired to head the federal writers' project - Mable Montgomery - and she had grown up near Momma. They both grew up in Marion, South Carolina, and so

Ms. Mable actually got the job for Momma because she knew that Momma could write. So she got her hired to collect folklore from the blacks and as I said the whites, too, if she could find it and if they had any folklore to tell. She did that in probably '37 or '38 - Daddy died in November '36. Brookgreen opened about that time, as that project was phased out. And so Momma was really fortunate. She had five of us; I was eight when Daddy died, my sister was 11, and my three little brothers - the youngest was a year and a half. Then Momma went to work at Brookgreen and stayed there for 28 years.

W: You were talking about oral stories.

wonder if any of them got put to paper.

S: Oh yeah. They did, yeah. The South Carolina University published a thing called *Tales of the Supernatural*. There were several publications from USC, and I've had them but I'm not sure if I lost them in Hurricane Hugo. I was thinking the other day that I haven't seen them lately, and of course they're out of print. But there were some publications. I'll tell you where you can get them, sooner or later. Kincaid Mills, a young man from Chattanooga, Tennessee, he and I worked in archaeology as volunteers over in Wachasaw in Richmond Hills back in about '87. He was just a young thing; he was in high school when I first met him. But his brother was in charge of the project. He was an archaeologist. Kincaid told me later that I was always telling him stories of the stuff Momma had collected around here. He was a senior at Sewanee, and he called me and said, "If I do my senior thesis on Gullah, would you help me?" and I said, "Sure." Then he got down here, and I guess he got more sidetracked on the stories than the language. So now he and I have published all the work that Momma did in that period, and the University of South Carolina has accepted it. They called in October (a year ago) and told me that they were having to rethink it. It was too much for one volume and they'd have to do two. The other thing was that we had photographs. There was a woman named Brior Beaten from Chapel Hill who had photographs of these people that Momma was interviewing in those days. It was going to make it more expensive to use those photographs, the coverage. Then they say it'll have to be two volumes. The other thing is, the man who's in charge - Alex Moore - he told me that once that board of the University accepts something for publication, it will be published. He said you can rest assured that they'll never go back on that. The thing that'll hold it up is how much it costs and where he can get the funding. So that's what's holding it up. I imagine budget cuts are worse than usual. They planned to have it out this spring, and they haven't even started publishing. In the meantime, they said it's got to be two volumes, I'm expecting, but I think they're going to have to come back and get Kincaid and me to decide where to divide it and do another introduction, too, which I haven't heard anything about. It was all ready to go, as far as we were concerned, and then all this started happening. We had all this stuff that Momma gathered, but you can find a good bit of it on the internet. I haven't done it, so I don't know how to find it, but her name was Genevieve Chandler, and it would be under "federal writers' project" or "WPA". A lot of people have told me lately that they've found a lot of her work online.

