

Transcript of interview with Nora Miller Rose by Suzanne Stallings, January 30, 2009

My name is Suzanne Stallings, this is 1:00 on Friday, January 30. I'm at 706 W. 10th, the home of Nora Rose. Nora, can you state your full name for us?

N: Nora Miller Rose and I was born April 23, 1943, here in Georgetown.

S: Thank you. Now, did you grow up in Georgetown?

N: I've lived in Georgetown all my life. I spent three years in Houston. I attended Texas Southern for two years and that's why I went, and then my husband got sick and we moved back to Georgetown, so I've been here ever since.

S: Where did you live when you were young?

N: Believe it or not, right across the street—703-1/2 W. 10th Street. All of those houses been torn down now, but when the urban renewal came through, but that was my home and I feel proud to be back on the same street that I lived on when I was born.

S: Yes, that means a lot, doesn't it? So, what was this neighborhood called then? Did it have a name?

N: Well, we were in what they called Grasshopper.

S: Grasshopper?

N: Um hmm. The town was kind of divided and the Tracks was "south" and then Grasshopper was "west" and then the Ridge is "north." And that's where the school was located—on the Ridge.

S: What did your parents do for a living?

N: Well, my dad was a mechanic and my mom stayed at home a long time, takin' care of us kids, but then she started doing house cleanin' for different people here in town.

S: There were a bunch of y'all?

N: Ten. I'm like seventh...yeah, seventh, from the top down.

S: You were one of the younger ones then?

N: Yeah, so I have three brothers younger than I am.

S: Did you have relatives here in Georgetown?

N: Oh, yes, we have lots of relatives and when we were growing up we wondered, you know, my dad and mom would always say, "be careful who you have a relationship with because it may be kin to you, but let us know first..." (Laughter) And my kids complained about that a lot. "We don't know even who we're related to!" I said, "just ask before anything gets started!" (more laughter) So, we always had a big joke with that with the kids.

S: Did you all belong to a church here in Georgetown?

N: Yeah, at the time we were growing up the name of our church was the Gay Hill Baptist Church. And then later, in the years when, you know, things change and with "gay" being on the name of the church, a lot of gay people started calling to see if there was a gay church, so then they ended up calling the church

Calvary Hill Baptist Church, and that's what it is now.

S: What do you remember about school when you were young—when you were in the elementary grades?

N: I know you've heard this before, but...seven or eight rooms we had at Carver where all the kids went, from first to twelfth grade. And, you know, back then, when you're young, you don't pay any attention to what's going on. You're just in school, enjoying yourself, and you know, not really realizing. But as you start to get into high school, then things change because you realize, you know, that the books you're using, they're used. Some of them didn't have all the pages in, and you go to study, especially at home, and you get to some that didn't have pages, well, you'd have to put that off until you could get back to school and find somebody else with that page in their book so you could finish up your homework. And then, you know, no typewriters, even when I went to college, I had to pay to have my papers typed because I didn't know how to type and I never took the time to learn how because once I got out of high school I did housekeepin' too before I actually went to college, and on the weekends. And that's just the way of life, you know, we had to work, too. And so...as things progressed, we just noticed more. Because the older we got the more we noticed. And then, just, oh, the activities and all...they were good because we didn't know any better. But then, you know, as we look back now, we can see where we had lost a lot. But, in our own little union we gained, too, because we knew, I guess...I don't know the word...when you don't have...then you are able to do what you need to do with what you do have. And so, we learned we really had to study hard and make the best of our education for what it was. And the teachers we had, you know, we thought they were the best. But even though, later, when you go to college you learn...well, my English wasn't quite good enough so I had to do a remedial English, a remedial math, you know, because what I was taught just didn't go with college. And so, that kind of put you back with your grades because you gotta' take that remedial course and THEN take the regular course. And so, you know, I learned a lot after that, but just bein' in school, we did good. And then, after we graduated...a lot of people went to college. I only went for a couple of years and then I went to nursing school here in Georgetown, so I worked as a nurse for forty years before I retired.

S: Where were you a nurse?

N: Here in Georgetown. At Georgetown Hospital. I started off with Dr. Benold and Dr. Gaddy and Dr. Shepherd. And it's just...you know, you have to be the very best in order to be black and get a job and...this may be out of order when I talk about my job, but when we all graduated, I was the first honor graduate in my class, but, when it came time to be hired, we had interviews at the hospital and there was three of us being interviewed. And so, the two white girls were interviewed before I was and then one of them—it was an 11 to 7 job, so she didn't want that—and so, Ms. Kalmbach, who was director of nurses, she truthfully told me, she said, "if the other girl hadn't decided she didn't want 11 to 7, we wouldn't have a spot for you." And so, by her not wantin' that job, I got the 11 to 7 job. And then, Ms. Kalmbach, you know when you work, we're used to doin' the best that we can do, you know, and so, she always told me every time she'd see me, "I don't know what I would've did if I hadn't of hired you." That always made me feel good and this is the way we just have to do—we just have to be the best in order to get some positions. And I think that's the way it's been with a lot of them. So, back to the school...

S: Oh, back to the school! What about your fond memories...you were saying you liked a lot of the teachers...about your friends and your activities.

N: Oh, we had good relationships. You know, you'd have your little dickerin' at times, just like anybody else, because that's what's normal, but as a small group we got along well. It was eleven in my graduating class in 1961. And I was the valedictorian of my class and you know, we had our little junior-senior proms and have them right there in the chapel. And what we called the chapel is the 9th and 10th grade class and the 6th and 7th ...or 7th and 8th grade class...was in a divided room where you pulled up a partition and then once we have something "big," we call it...they would move the partition and then we would have one big room to do whatever we needed to do. And so we'd invite other schools, like Round Rock and Belton and Bartlett so we'd have a good time and all the kids worked real good together. We had a football team and we'd get to play at the white field because our field wasn't anything but dirt. We

didn't have any grass...dirt and rocks...and that's what they practiced on. But, when they'd have a real game, in the '60s...it might have been worse before my time but...this is kind of how they played and we played on the opposite day from what the other kids would play at Georgetown High School. And we had our little band...one drum...and we had our majorette and we'd have on blue and white shirts...back then we didn't know what wearin' pants was. We all had to wear dresses or skirts. And so we had our blue skirts on...the boys had on their blue pants and white tops and then the majorettes, they did have little suits that somebody had made for them...they were nice. And so, at halftime we'd march. There'd be about 20 of us...maybe not that many, but oh, we were so proud. And then later on they got a band, you know...it was after my time, but this is what I had.

S: Good memories!

N: Oh, yeah, very good! And the same thing with basketball, you know, I played basketball, me and my sister Ella—she's expired—but, we were kind of stars on the team back then, so we loved basketball because then we'd get to travel. Just like I say, it was a small group but we were together and we enjoyed it. And everybody watched after everybody, so that really made it good.

S: Did you graduate from high school in Georgetown, and if so, what school did you graduate from?

N: I graduated from Carver, and that was in 1961.

S: What was it like to go there?

N: Well, this was the only school I knew. I went to that school the whole time I was in...we didn't have kindergarten...a lady out in the city kind of had a little kindergarten she did on her own. That was Mary Bailey and that's what started Mary Bailey Daycare Center—Headstart? And so she taught the kids just there in her daycare. So that's where kids went that she had room for, for kindergarten. And then we started with first grade and first through twelfth we went to Carver. And before that time it was Marshall and then it was Marshall-Carver, so then it ended up being Carver.

S: Do you have some not-so-good memories of school?

N: Oh, yes, I do. It's just lookin' back, where one of the things I mentioned, about the books, and then the fact that we didn't have courses that would lead us through to a better college start—after we got started in college and made our way through the first year. I'm speakin' for myself. Other people may not have had this problem, but I did even though I was the valedictorian of my class. When I got to college it was altogether different. And just the thought that we had to walk back and forth to school—that was good, we'd all walk in groups, back and forth—but on those rainy days, we didn't have a bus that would come and pick us up. We still had to bundle up and try to get to school the best way we could, in the rain and bad weather, or whatever. And the same thing with eatin' in the lunch room. There was a few people that could afford to eat in the lunch room, but we couldn't, so...occasionally we'd get to eat in the lunch room, but we would walk home at lunch time...eat...and then walk back to school. It's just, I don't know, some...back with the books and courses and the fact that we didn't have nice football fields and things like that. But, like I said, that's all we had, so we did the best we could with that.

S: Now, what did you and your family and friends do for fun in Georgetown?

N: Well, let me see what did we?...ahh...we went to church and we had different activities in church and we would visit each other...I had one...well, I had some other friends, but my very BEST friend was Cynthia Mason. We'd visit almost every day, back and forth. We were both in walkin' distance and it was a railroad track up about two blocks from here, and then she lived on West Street, so we'd walk the railroad tracks...I'd walk her almost home and if we weren't through with our conversation she'd walk me back...we'd do that two or three times cause we were still talkin' and havin' fun and just havin' something to do. And that was a lot...just visitin' from people's homes, you know, it wasn't a whole lot to do back then. And so, when you get good friends...you'd just visit with them and go to church, and, you know, that was kind of it for me.

S: How did your life change after school? You told me a little bit about what you did—this says, did you get married? Did you have kids? Get a new job? Continue your education? You went on to college...

N: After I graduated from school I went to college at Texas Southern in Houston for two years. And then my husband got sick, so we moved back to Georgetown and then once I got back to Georgetown I started having babies early...I had one even when I went to college—my oldest son, but my mom and my sister kept him while I attended school. And then, once I got back to Georgetown my mom continued to help me with my children and then I was having a bad time with my marriage and eventually I got divorced. But I decided I needed to get some type of education...some type of vocational study that I could, so that if anything happened to my marriage I would be able to take care of my children. So I went to the Georgetown Hospital LVN course. And at that time the school was held right there at the hospital, and we'd have our classes and then we'd get to go out on the floor and work. And while we were in school they gave us a little stipend, you know, while we worked, to help us along. And then, like I said, when we finished, we were offered a job there at the hospital. So I told you my situation with being hired. Since that time I've worked at Georgetown Hospital for 40 years. I just retired. I started in '67 and I retired in '07, well, actually, late '06. So I was there the whole time. So, I worked all different areas, met so many interesting people and just being the best that you can be...and I'm not braggin' on myself, but I got so many compliments, where when patients would come in they'd request me to be their nurse...or ask if I was on, you know, if they was bein' admitted...and I had several patients that whenever they came in, it was just a joy, so they'd always say, "Oh, you just make my day! I'm so glad to see your face!" I knew a lot of people and met a lot of people, and so, that's about the only job...that WAS the only job I had so I don't know anything else about the workin' process. That was it for me and I loved it and ended up hurtin' my back so I had to quit. And then after that I started with all these other medical problems.

S: Were you involved in the effort to desegregate Georgetown schools?

N: At that time I was in Houston 'cause it was during '62-'63, I think, that they really got started, but they didn't get integrated until '68, so I was back during that time, but, you know, I didn't really have a big part in what was going on.

S: What did you think should be done? What do you think should have happened about it all?

N: Ah, the integration process itself?

S: Yes, yes.

N: Well, I was glad to see it happen, just the fact that I knew from experience that the kids would have a hard time otherwise, because, you know, kids were beginning to be more aware of different careers and all and you know, if you wanted to be a doctor or anything in science, chemistry, we just didn't have those subjects. So, if you wanted to go to college you'd be completely lost if you were going to be even an RN, probably, because there's so much you would be missing. A lot of the kids went to school and we had some lawyers, and doctors, and schoolteachers, and you know, a little bit of everything and I don't know, you know, how much they had to struggle to get going, but I'm sure the kids that graduated a lot later than WE did, and graduated in the white schools, had more advantage on courses and things they could decide what their career was goin' to be, once they finished school.

S: How did your family feel about all this...as it was goin' on?

N: Well, it was kinda scary for my parents because my brother, Harvey Miller, was a big part of all of this. And he's the one that really got it goin', him and his wife, she was a PTA president, so workin' with PTA and him, and other people, he started workin' and then the people from Southwestern they chimed in, and so they got him started and then when it was gettin' ready to go to court, they, you know, I think had asked him, well, have you ever been up there to try to enroll anybody, and he said no. And so, he got some of his kids—my nieces and nephews and all—to go and just try to enter the schools. And at that point, you know, they said...and everybody knew everybody because then it was such a small town, so

they knew Harvey by name...and they told him, Harvey, you know we can't do this...said, you know, we'll build you all a school before we let THIS happen. And that's what they tried to do. And my parents...and this is something I had just talked to him not too long ago about...I know my parents were kind of scared for him because so much was goin' on and with him bein' the leader of tryin' to get the schools integrated when everybody else wanted to keep them segregated...well, it put a strain on everybody.

And this is one thing...and I called him and asked him...that didn't come up in the discussion that they had (panel discussion about desegregation in August 2008), because, like I say, a part of it I was in Houston and part of it I wasn't really active in because I was goin' to school, too, then...my nursin' school. And I asked him, because this didn't come up and I didn't know if they were tryin' to not say a whole lot because Dr. Benold was there or what and I don't want to say...I'm just goin' to say it and then you can cut out what you want to...the fact that he had got a lot of threaten' telephone calls...plus somebody burnt a cross in front of his house. And that didn't come up in that discussion and that's what I was saying...is this something I wasn't supposed to say anything about or whatever, because I wanted to get up and ask him the question: didn't this happen? And then I said, well, he didn't bring it up, so you know, I didn't want to say anything. And he said, yeah, that did happen and he thought about that after everything was over with. And then, you know, seemed like they tried to smooth things over I thought. I didn't think they was tellin' things just like it really was, you know, because we did have a hard time, and just like I was talkin' about the books, the football field, not having the classes we needed, no music until we had people volunteer--Mrs. Hausenfluke. She was a great pianist here in Georgetown, and Mrs. Bowden, you know and that's where they started the Fine Arts School. And then...we would go to Interstate...Interscholastic League, you know, the competition...once a year we'd go to Prairie View and Mrs. Hausenfluke would always go with us before we got a music teacher because she would teach solo to one of the students—and that was my good friend, Cynthia Fisher...I mean Mason. So she'd travel with us to Prairie View every year and she'd have the best time. And me and Cynthia, we were always together, so we competed in spellin' and with Miss Agnes Wilson—she was the first grade teacher—so we always had a good time with that. It was a lot of strain, but good times.

S: When all this was going on, did your family members and your neighbors and your friends agree?

N: No, it was...some people didn't agree at all. I don't know if they were just afraid of...you know, because a lot of people did domestic work, and I don't know if they were afraid of their jobs...just afraid of confrontation, or whatever, because of some of the things that had happened during that time. And then I know, we had a couple of local black teachers—Paulette Taylor was one, and Charles Miller was one—and at that time, neither one of them wanted to see the schools integrated, I think because of their jobs. But when schools did integrate, those two, they did take to the white schools. Paulette was in...what is it? Special kids? and Charles Miller was a coach and then he taught some of the school...I mean, courses. Then, when it came time to integrate, none of our other teachers were hired. And so that made it kind of bad because the fact that, you know, they were good enough to teach US and with the disabilities we had with classroom work and the tools we had to work with, they were fine. But when it came time to transfer them to the white schools, they weren't good enough. And so, it makes you feel bad, the fact that, well, they're good enough to teach us, but they're not good enough to be over here and teaching our (white people's) kids, you know. And eventually, after so many problems and complaints, they did start hirin' some black teachers, just, I think, kind of as a token, to have them there because people were complainin', but even before that time of integration they built a school, which is the Carver now—it used to be Westside when we were goin'-- mean, I had graduated--but when kids were still goin' to school there...it was Westside—and they put in typin' and they put in some chemistry and they put in some things, you know, that we had requested, to try to make it seem like everything was fair, still before they would integrate. And so, that's kind of the way it stood until finally in 1968 all the schools were...beginnin' to be integrated, even if it was so many grades. And that's when Harvey took the kids to the schools, because he went to Brown & Brown, I think it was? The court? And after they got the OK that they could be integrated so many grades, then his kids, my younger brothers, and, you know, all the kids that age group, started integratin' the schools. And so, you know, all of this is new when I talk to my kids about it. And the same thing, we have a family reunion once a year, and Harvey always brings up history of the reunion, of the schools, you know, and some of the kids, they don't remember, they say, "All I ever remember is goin' to a white school." And I said, "yeah, well that was...we were 'way back when' I guess.

(Both laugh) So, it's good to keep the kids up on the history and that's why I'm doin' a scrapbook on Barack Obama—just stuff I've been cuttin' out of the paper, you know, and I'm puttin' it together...and anyway I said, my great-great-grandkids are going to remember it, you know, because it's just something I never thought I'd see in my lifetime—I'll just put it like that!

S: This last one you kind of already answered: How were you affected by desegregation when it came. We kind of talked about that...

N: Yeah, I guess just the fact that...I don't really know how to put it in words...it affected my kids more than anything, just the fact that I KNEW they would have a better education than I did. And, you know, that was a great concern because I had five children that went through the school system. Right now they're doing good and they have good jobs, so I'm just thankful for that. I only had one to go to college, and that was the only one that had a desire to go, and I was divorced at that time but I worked hard doin' extra jobs—I'd do home health after I got off—that was her money for school beside her grants. And so she did a five-year...four-year...college and then an internship and she's a probation officer here in Georgetown now. And then I have one that works for the City. One worked for the hospital, they just got laid off, you know when St. David's came in they were layin' off so many people, so she was one of those people, but she's been in the clerical (surgical?)field and worked there for fifteen years. It's just one of those things that happens. So, she's lookin' for a job now. And my oldest son, he's disabled. He has some back problems. And then I have a son that he does flooring on his off time, but then he works for, kind of a chemical spray company that installs those sprayers in barns and things to keep the flies and things away from the animals. So, you know, with all of this it just made it better for the kids...our kids and the future...for others.

S: Do you have any questions of me?

N: No, I've enjoyed talking to you. You know it's amazing when you don't mention all this stuff and then everything comes back to you when you start and you just...think where I started and where I am now, it's just amazing.

S: You've been great! I appreciate you! Is there anybody else that we should talk to?

N: I've been trying to think...we don't have a lot of people left here in Georgetown and so many people have died out. And Harvey, he's already on the list, but like I said, he wanted to send you that information if it would help. Do you all have things in the library that's going to be in booklet form? Everything's going to be put on...? On the TV?

S: It will all be in the library when it's transcribed. It will be on a hard copy, you know, it will be available in the library. And then they're going to put it on their website, too, so that will be a thing that a lot of people...

N: Cause he has so much information...my brother Harvey...and I told him it does no good to be in his garage when it could be on display at the library or somewhere. And it's not hearsay, it's newspaper clippings, things that nobody can dispute what happened because it's in writing—not from him, but from the local papers, even the Austin papers. He's so brave, he even called the President of the United States and doin' different things. And with Obama, he said that he just made some calendars...I'll get you one, cause he said he's makin' them...and he said he's going to send one to Obama. He's already talked to somebody in the office...he just got elected president now and he's already talked to somebody in his office to get his signature on one—he's going to send him one. I said, "Harvey, you'll try anything!" He said, "Well, they work!" He's really active in San Marcos. He's done as much there, since he's moved to San Marcos, as he did here in Georgetown.

S: Thank you so much for doing this.

N: Thank you, I've enjoyed it! I'm not a talkative person in public, but one-on-one, I don't have any problems!