

TAPE TRANSCRIPT
Durham Civil Rights Heritage Project
CDS, Durham, NC

Interviewee: Naomi Goldston
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Interviewer: Will Atwater
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Place: St. Joseph's AME Church
2521 Fayetteville Street
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Equipment: Sony Minidisc MZ-R700
Sony microphone ECM-MS907

Tape: Sony MD 80 minidisk

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Description of Interviewee:

Circumstances of the Interview:

Will Atwater (**WA**): So what brought you out to today's event?

Naomi Goldston (**NG**): Hmm?

WA: What brought you to today's event?

NG: I was invited by one of my senior members at the W. D. Hill Center. She invited me to come down here. This is the paper she gave me to read. She told me that you all would be discussing the heritage (?).

WA: Can you talk a little bit about what is important to you about this day?

NG: What's important? Well, during that time of the struggle, we weren't able to ride the buses, you know, and different things. And, like, most of the places we had to go, there was a black place—the bathrooms were for blacks, and the water fountains were for blacks. Well, during that time, I was working at Duke Hospital, and we had to go in the amphitheater for all the activities and everything, during that time. Most everything was integrated, was for black and white, black and white. There's a lot of changes now.

WA: Are they good changes?

NG: Hmm?

WA: The changes now—

NG: There're a lot of changes, but I think it's better. Uh-huh.

WA: Why do you think it's better?

NG: Well, because we have equal rights now, supposed to have equal rights. Mm-hmm.

WA: Were you involved in the civil rights movement in the '60s, in Durham?

NG: When they had the demonstration here in Durham, I was. Because at that time, when we went to Walgreen's, you know, we had to stand at the windows. I think it was Walgreen's, that store on the corner there, and we were served at the windows. We couldn't go in and sit down,

at that time. It's a lot of changes are made now. And we can ride the buses, we can sit wherever we want to now, and all that kind of stuff. A lot of changes has been made. And when I used to go from Durham to Newark by train, traveling, and we had to sit in the back on that train. And the whites were in the front. But now it's different.

WA: How did you feel, having to go through those experiences like that, like getting in the back of the bus, or getting in the back of the train?

NG: Well, it didn't bother me, because that's the way it was in that day. That was the way the life of everything was, during that day. We, you know, didn't have any other choice.

WA: Did you dream about or envision a time when that would change, when integration would happen? Did you believe that it would happen?

NG: Did I--?

WA: Believe that there would come a time when you wouldn't have to sit in the back of the bus, when you'd have equal rights?

NG: I didn't. I didn't know if I would live to see that, in that day. But I have. At that time, I was about—I was in my twenties. I'm seventy-five—seventy-eight—now, and I've seen a lot of changes made, in the workplaces, you know, and whatnot.

WA: You said you participated in some of the marches during the civil rights in Durham.

NG: When they had the marches, I was out there on the street marching too. We were pushed. Some of us were pushed, you know, and yanked back. We made it alright, jumped in some cars and came on back home! (Laughs)

WA: Who were some of the people during that time who were important leaders to you in the community, people that you looked up to?

NG: Hmm. So in my community?

WA: Mm-hmm, in terms of like the civil rights movement in Durham.

NG: Most of them are dead now, I tell you. Most of them are gone. But the Hayeses were in my community. Elton Hayes, and the Bridges people. And the, let's see, the Lees. They were around. They all participated in it too.

WA: And what kind of things did they do for you to make—why were they important to you?

NG: I was so young, I got scared. Um, well, they taught us to do what was right. Because, I remember one old man, I was sitting on the bus, he says, he came all the way from the back up there—because I took a seat up past the cross-mark—and he said, “Gal, get on back here and set down where you belong!” I said, “Mr. Hayes, I’m sitting where I belong. Right here.” So he went on back there, and I didn’t move. But they didn’t bother us. At that time they were making a change. Martin Luther King was. Mm-hmm. And Jesse Jackson, a lot of them, they came through here. Let me see, who else was at—came through here during that time. I can’t think of everybody’s name was during that march, at that time. But changes were being made at that time, during that time.

WA: So you just related a story about a time—were you getting on the bus, and you sat down?

NG: Mm-hmm.

WA: And someone asked you to go to the back and you refused?

NG: Mm-hmm. One of the older men in the community came up to the front, asked me to come back there. I said, “Mm-mn, I’m sitting right here.” And nobody bothered me for sitting there.

WA: And this was before integration actually had happened?

NG: Before it really happened, uh-huh, but they were talking about it and demonstrating about it at that time.

WA: And so the person who was driving the bus, I presume, was white?

NG: He was white, mm-hmm.

WA: And he didn't—

NG: He didn't bother me, mm-mn. (?) didn't bother me. I stayed right there until it was time for me to get off, and then I got off.

WA: That's a pretty amazing story. What happened on that particular day that caused you to take that stand?

NG: Well, I'd heard so much about—their speeches and whatnot, you heard so much about what was going on and what he was trying to do for us, you know, at that time. There were a lot of fights in the streets during that time, up on Main Street. I know we had to go to Henderson to do some shopping over there, because of those demonstrations and whatnot. We were afraid to go in the stores, you know. We would be beaten up.

WA: Do you remember anything specific about that day, prior to getting on the bus? Did you know that you were going to do that?

NG: I didn't know I was going to do that. I didn't know I was going to be approached by him like that, you know, because we—everybody was getting on, sitting down where they wanted to, you know. And I sat down. We had a special line, you had to go behind that line, you know, on that bus. So I sat in the front of that line, on that bus.

WA: And from that day forward, did you continue to sit—

NG: Mm-hmm. I did. Nothing happened to me. Mm-hmm.

WA: Do you remember the date, what year that was?

NG: It was during that demonstration. I don't remember the day. I sure don't remember what day that was.

WA: Did the word spread around the community about—

NG: Well, a lot of people were on there, and some of them were making different remarks: “You’re going to get beat up, you’re going to get beat up.” Nobody bothered me. Mm-hmm. Nothing happened.

WA: During the time that you were sitting there, can you remember what was going through your mind? It must have been—

NG: Well, it wasn’t too long before it was time for me to get off! (Laughs) I knew nothing was going to happen to me. But I do remember the crowds in the street, as we were being pushed (?) down the street and whatnot, going to those stores. Some people started in the stores, and they were yanked back by the coats. I remember one old lady had on this brown coat, and pulled her. She was pulled back out of there, because we couldn’t go in there. We weren’t allowed to go in. But we were just trying different things anyway, because it was Martin Luther King, you know. Mm-hmm.

WA: It sounds like one of the probably most memorable times is when you decided to sit in the front of the bus.

NG: The sit-in, mm-hmm.

WA: Is there any other moment, or memories, that kind of stand out in your mind, about that time?

NG: Can’t remember too much, see, because I moved to New Jersey during that time, after that. I left and went to New Jersey to live.

WA: And eventually you moved back here?

NG: I came back. I came back in 19—I got married here. I came back, and then-- But this was in, ah, let me see. This was in the—I’m getting mixed up now. This was in the ‘60s, I

believe, when this happened, in the '60s. I was already back here then. I was already back here. Mm-hmm. Um, let me see. Was it '60—'63, I was working at the VA Hospital. I went to the VA Hospital in '61. It was between that time of leaving, up to his death, I worked up there. I worked two to three years at the VA.

WA: Perhaps that might have been where you were headed when you were sitting on the bus.

NG: Might—I was going downtown, mm-hmm. Yeah. A lot of us were on the bus. I had to come way from east Durham, downtown, and I was sitting up there. So that was a big ride, from east Durham. At the time it was called Hayestown. Mm-hmm.

WA: How has Durham changed since the '60s, during that time?

NG: Hmm?

WA: How has Durham changed, in your opinion?

NG: Since the '60s? Well, black and whites have been able to go to school together, and we have been able to just go in different places where we couldn't go, where the whites— participate. And we can use the same water fountains, and things that we couldn't use at that time. We can use them now. Things are different now. Everything's changed now, since then.

WA: Are all the changes for the better?

NG: I think it's, in some way, for the better, but things have gotten out of hand too. But I don't know if it's because of that or what. It's just—time changes, you know, bring on changes. Some things I—the morals and different things are different from what they were a long time ago. The way the people dress, the way they talk and everything. And I think now things are different. Hmm. Younger people don't have respect for each other like we had along back in those days, you know. We had respect, and loved each other. We didn't think of killing people like they are doing today. And things are just out of hand.

WA: What are some changes that need to be made to improve things?

NG: What are some changes that need to be done? Oh. I don't know. We need more God in our lives, I tell you. But you know, changes have taken place. Now you can't even talk about God in different places now. I didn't think I'd ever see that day, you can't—they've taken God out of schools, you know, you can't pray, can't do this and can't do that in schools, if it relates to God. I'm about God, myself. I believe in Him, and I believe that you can't do anything without God, if you don't put Him in it.

WA: So do you think that that was kind of a big driving force for people during the movement, to have, to be kind of rooted in their faith—

NG: Mm-hmm.

WA: --kind of helped them through those difficult times?

NG: I think so. 'Cause that's what he was about, you know.

WA: What church did you grow up in, in Durham?

NG: What church did I grow up in? Zion Temple Christian Church. In east Durham. I grew up in that church, and I believed in what they taught us, my grandfather and the people in the church, you know. And everybody, just about everybody, had the same beliefs and whatnot, you know.

WA: So was the church really active during the civil rights?

NG: Hmm?

WA: Was the church that you attended as a child, was it active—

NG: Active?

WA: --during the civil rights movement? Were there meetings held there? What kind of role did it play?

NG: Well, let me see. I tell you, during that time everybody was so afraid of what was going to be happening, you know, because of that. (Sighs) But we would have prayer meetings, like on Wednesdays and Sundays, Sunday afternoons, and whatnot. We'd have meetings about what was going on. But our deacon (?), and the ministers, were very much—you know, in favor of what he was—what Dr. Martin Luther King was talking about. For making changes and whatnot. But we didn't know what was going to happen during that time.

WA: Do you have any other thoughts or memories you'd like to share, just for the record?

NG: Hmm?

WA: Anything that you think about that's important, that you want to state for the record?

NG: From my church?

WA: Or just from anything, from your experiences in the '60s, or from your church, or—

NG: Let me see. The only thing I have was the speeches that, you know, collected, about him. I have those. That's all.

WA: Why are those—

NG: Nothing terribly (?) him, you know, in the church. But I can remember.

WA: Why are those speeches important to you?

NG: Because he was a brave man, and a God man, and I was just really proud of him.

Because, you know, because he was trying to make a change for us, for the black people. That's why I thought he was so important. And I wish we had more people like him. You know. I wish everybody could get along. And that's what he wanted. Everybody would be lovely, and just—believe in God, and not be killing people. And do the right thing. You know. I enjoyed his speeches and whatnot.

WA: Were you able to see him when he came through Durham?

NG: Yes. Mm-hmm. I was very young when that happened, but I can remember some of the things that went on back then, in those days. The demonstrations and whatnot. And how we would run. Well, in Hayestown, they didn't come down there too much and bother us. We did pretty much what our parents told us to do, and the older people in the churches, in the communities.

WA: And so your parents, during that time, were they really active? Did they participate in marches?

NG: I lost my mother when I was eight years old, so I lived with my daddy, and I had a step-mother. And I left home when I was sixteen, to live with my aunt in New Jersey. So- But when I came back home, after staying up there for a while, and got married in 1946. And then I sort of listened to what the people had to say. I grew up under some good people, you know, and I believed in their teachings and whatnot.

WA: So what kind of stuff did you pass on to your children from your experience in the '60s?

NG: Ah, put God first in your life, and do the right thing. And if you believe in the Lord, you know, and put Him first in your life, you'll make it. Just have faith and trust in Him, and you'll make it. And I believe that today. I was baptized when I was twelve years old. I haven't been perfect, but I tried to let Him guide me and take me through in His work. Mm-hmm. I have been working fifty-some years in nursing. I'm still working.

WA: Oh, really? Where do you work now?

NG: Ah, I'm doing private care in the homes. I'm a licensed LPN. And I was the first one to go to the VA, in 1961, one of the first blacks, LPNs.

WA: What was that like, being one of the first—

NG: Nurse?

WA: --blacks to go to—

NG: Well, at that time they weren't hiring none of us over there, and I was one of the first ones.

WA: So how did that happen? How did that end up—

NG: My husband was killed in service, and I, you had to be related to the military some way or another. So my husband was killed in service, so that's how I got in. He was killed in 1951, in the Korean War. That's how I got in over there.

WA: So what was it like when you first started working there? Were the people accepting of you?

NG: Well, a lot of them men resented me. They would tell me that that was no place for a woman to come and work, taking care of men. I said, "Well, I'll give it a try." I was working at Duke at that time, and I went across the street and got the job over there. So I said, "If the men can take care of women, I can take care of the men." And so I went there, and I didn't have any problems. Some things I didn't like doing, but I had to do it, you know, in order to keep the job.

WA: But in terms of—there was no racial issues?

NG: Hmm?

WA: You didn't have any trouble with racial issues?

NG: Racial, no. Mm-mn. No. Mm-mn. But I enjoyed it, and I worked there for thirty years.

WA: Thirty years.

NG: Hmm.

WA: Okay. Well, thank you.

NG: Okay. I may have been helpful a little bit to you.

WA: Oh, no, no, that was perfect. That was perfect.

NG: Well, thank you. I wish I had known more—you know, I didn't know I was going to be interviewed like this, or I would have tried to have something prepared for you.

WA: Oh, no, that's fine. No, this is totally fine. I think it's really useful.

NG: Yeah, I came up in the days when you could buy sodas for five and ten cent and all that.

(Laughs) You don't believe that. A Pepsi and a Coke. Mm-mn. Yeah.

WA: At the end of the tape, what I want to do is just get you to state your name, because I didn't do it at the beginning, and then I will just state mine.

NG: What you want me to say?

WA: Tell us who you are.

NG: I am Naomi Goldston, and I live 1312 Willowdale Drive, Durham North Carolina.

WA: Thank you.

NG: Mm-hmm. (Break in recording)

WA: Will Atwater. It is January 19th, 2004, St. Joseph's AME Church. Just interviewed Ms. Naomi Goldston. (End of recording)