



Interview with Hendry and Russell

Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

Date of Interview: August 28, 2000
Name of Interviewer: Connie Paul
**Premises of Interview: Court Street School,
Freehold, NJ**
Birthdates of Subjects: not available



**Nicy Marion Ham Russell (left)
and Lillie Hendry**

The subjects for today's interview are sisters Nicy Ham Russell and Lillie Ham Hendry. They are long time residents of Freehold Borough. We will be discussing a number of events and institutions, including the Court Street School, which is where this interview is being held. Both of the sisters attended this school and are active in its preservation.

"We learned from our parents that service was the price you pay for the space you occupy on earth." Lillie Ham Hendry

Ms. Paul: Lillie, you and I met when we were both working at Marlboro High School a long time ago. I forget how many years ago, but a long time ago. You were a guidance counselor there, and I was the librarian. It was in the 1980s, maybe?

Ms. Hendry: Connie, it was 1969!

Ms. Paul: You are right! So tell me where and when you were born, and then we'll introduce your sister and talk about some of your educational experiences. And you have a wonderful story that ties the two of you together, and your educational experiences in Freehold.

Ms. Hendry: Well, I am a native of Freehold Borough. I was born and bred here, as my mother and father used to say. It was right here in Freehold, New Jersey. From the age of seven months I have lived on the street where I still reside. That street is also the street on which I went to school from kindergarten through eighth grade. So Freehold and the community of Court Street, Avenue A, Avenue C, Throckmorton Street, and Haley Street was, and still is my core community.

Ms. Paul: Your territory.

Ms. Hendry: Yes.

Ms. Paul: And Nicy, were you also born right here?

Ms. Russell: No. I was born in New Bern, North Carolina, but my family moved here. My mother brought me to the area of Freehold which is now called West Freehold, New Jersey. I was there until I was about three or four years old. Then she moved back to North Carolina, and then we moved to Philadelphia for a short time. Finally, we returned to Freehold in May of 1923.

Ms. Paul: So who was in your family then? Lillie was not yet born then, right?

Ms. Russell: At that time, there were four of us. I am the oldest, then there is my sister Kathleen, my brother Walter, and my brother Joseph.

Ms. Hendry: And Daddy, whose name was Walter Ham, Sr.

Ms. Paul: And your mother's name was what?

Ms. Russell: Lilla, or Lillian.

Ms. Paul: Ok, so you moved from North Carolina to New Jersey, Philadelphia, and then back to New Jersey. And here your family stayed.

Ms. Russell: Back to North Carolina, and then New Jersey.

Ms. Paul: To New Jersey, where you were born, Lillie. And then your family stayed there ever since, right?

Ms. Russell: Correct.

Ms. Paul: So who became the total of your family then? Did you have other siblings?

Ms. Hendry: Yes, once we were here in Freehold, the four older siblings were joined by four younger siblings. And I am the oldest of the second set. There was a sister Leona, a sister Wilma, and then the baby was a brother, David.

Ms. Paul: So that was a big family.

Ms. Hendry: Quite a family, yes. Eight children, Mother and Dad. So there were ten people in our household.

Ms. Paul: So Nicy, you were trained as a nurse?

Ms. Russell: Yes.

Ms. Paul: And you, Lillie, were trained as a teacher?

Ms. Hendry: Yes. Then we have a person who was trained in the business area. That was my sister Leona. She worked for the government at Fort Monmouth for quite a number of years, also for the government at Earl Naval Depot for a little while. Then we have Walter, who became a certified public accountant. Joseph is very, very handy with his hands and he also had my father's talent, following in my father's footsteps. His family was quite large, larger even than ours. He followed my father's footsteps in becoming the custodian of Court Street School, and continued as a custodian in the Freehold Borough system. My father did this while he was raising his children, holding many jobs to make sure that the children were taken care of properly. Then there is my sister Wilma, who is a psychiatric technician and a supervisor with the NJ Employment Service. My brother David was with the Armed Forces for a number of years, and with the National Guard for a number of years. He became a licensed practical nurse, and was in NJ law enforcement. He also served as a special policeman for Freehold Borough.

Ms. Paul: You all have a whole community represented in your family. You could practically have your own town, right? (laughter) You needed a farmer, though. Nobody grew anything?

Ms. Hendry: My sister Kathleen, the next one to Nicy, certainly did know how to farm. And she knew how to cook and to preserve. She had my mother's talent in that way. My sister Wilma knows how to sew, and Nicy sews. They received my mother's talent in that way. Also my sister Wilma has a sideline: she loves to farm. Her front yard is not grass or lawn, but a garden for vegetables.

Ms. Paul: Good for her. It sounds like a wonderful life, like a close family.

Ms. Hendry: A very closely knit family. It was a family that depended on one other, and therefore became naturally closely knit. We depended on each other because of the love that our mother and father showed for us and with us. And they also directed us by example. They showed us how to care.

Ms. Paul: My grandmother, who had twelve children herself, had a rule: you didn't have to like everybody in the family, but you did have to love them.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, we can very much identify with that. (laughter) The children in our family are very much their own individuals.

Ms. Paul: So tell me this story.

Ms. Russell: I think you should add a little more with what Wilma has done. Not only was she psychiatric technician with the State, but she was also active with the Employment Service.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, she worked on that level with the State. She also became the first Negro, Black, Afro-American, of the Borough of Freehold Elementary School District to be elected to the Board of Education.

Ms. Paul: Wonderful. She is older than you, is that right?

Ms. Hendry: No, she is younger.

Ms. Paul: So education has obviously been a big part of your family life.

Ms. Hendry: A key part of Mother and Dad's philosophy for our family.

Ms. Paul: Where did you go to school?

Ms. Hendry: I'll let Nicy say where she attended school, because she led the way.

Ms. Paul: Good.

Ms. Russell: Before we came to Freehold to live permanently in 1923, I had been to school in New Bern, North Carolina, where I was born. Instead of going to public school, I was sent to a small private school. And then we moved to Freehold, and I started the third grade here at Court Street School. When I started school here, this school was only two rooms. During my first year, they started building on two additional rooms. One was in the front, and one was in the back.

Ms. Paul: What year was this?

Ms. Russell: In 1923. We came to Freehold because there was an enormous fire, as people would say, in New Bern on Friday, December 1, 1922. It was an awful fire that raged through that community. There was a wind that blew and carried loose shingles from houses and set fires in different areas. So the town was practically burned out. The Red Cross came in and set up tents for families to live in, my family included. And we lived in that tent from



Court Street School building

the date of the fire until we moved to Freehold in May of 1923. I started school here at Court Street School in September.

Ms. Paul: And were there other siblings in school at that time?

Ms. Russell: Yes, the four of us except Joseph. Joseph was not in school yet. We used to have to walk him to where he was being kept all day while my parents worked. And the three older ones were in school.

Ms. Paul: So you graduated from Court Street School, and then what?

Ms. Russell: I graduated from Court Street School here, and it was very segregated at the time. As a matter of fact, we did not think it fair that we had to take what they called a State Examination, which has since been called the State Proficiency Test. We had to take the same one as the other children in the Broad Street School, which is located over here on Broad Street. The Broad St. School is an office building now across from that small shopping center. At that time when we came, the Broad Street School was a brown, wood frame building. Later it was replaced with the brick building you now see. Also the Hudson Street School, (which has been removed so they could put up the Hudson Manor Senior Citizen's Housing), was run for the "other children." And I am saying "other children" purposely. What is now the police station on Bennett St. was the high school. While I was at Court Street School, we paraded, asking for a newer and bigger high school to accommodate the children. Mr. Ladd, a local photographer, and his wife took the pictures. They were the ones who always took the school pictures. But in my time, they did not take pictures of the Court Street School children. So I don't have any pictures of me as a member of Court Street School. But later, by the time the younger siblings came along, they were taking pictures of all the children in the Freehold Borough School System, including the children at the Court Street School.

Ms. Paul: And you have some of those pictures in the school on display.

Ms. Russell: There are some of the pictures on display, but mine is not there, because they would not take pictures of us in the earlier years.

Ms. Paul: So you graduated from here in the eighth grade, and then where did you go?

Ms. Russell: I went to Freehold High School. That was another experience. I had passed the State Examination that I told you about, and I was told that I rated second along with children from Hudson Street School. And that school had a teacher for each subject. And we here at Court Street School used to be taught fifth through eighth grade, and one teacher taught all the subjects. Yet we had to compete with the children from Hudson Street School that had a teacher for each grade. We didn't know anything about moving from room to room, or

changing classes, or going to different teachers. We had the same teacher for all of our schoolwork.

Ms. Paul: I think that I have read that this was the northern most segregated school system. Is that right?

Ms. Hendry: Not necessarily. Monmouth County had some. In the Freehold area, there was sort of a movie done, sort of a spoof on the area. But it also had some very factual things in the movie, and I have forgotten now what year that movie was done. But it had old flicks in it from past years, and they did depict the schools of Freehold Borough. It showed the children going into and out of the schools. And they depicted not only the Freehold Borough schools, but also Freehold Township and Marlboro. Of all of the pictures that I viewed on that movie, Freehold Borough's Court Street School was the only completely segregated one. In the Township School pictures, classes were desegregated, and the children were all together. And in the Marlboro pictures, the children were all together. However, I did note that in those pictures there were not as many Black youngsters as there were in Freehold. So I think we had a larger population of Black children, enough that the school system felt that they could build a separate school for them. You wouldn't build a separate school for only twelve children, like there were in the other areas. And I believe that the migrant workers and those who came to work in domestic homes were the original way in which the Black population began to stay here. Since the Freehold area had more people who stayed and settled with their families, there were more Black children who had to be integrated with the community schools. And integration was not a completely accepted form of education, as it still isn't in some places, although it would appear so on the surface. But here in Freehold, they had enough Black youngsters that it may have disrupted the whole so-called traditional provincial atmosphere here in Freehold. Therefore there was justification for establishing a Black school. But the original school was a house down at the foot of the hill on the western side of Avenue A. But that house became too small as more children and families began to settle here and stay.

Ms. Paul: Do you know when that house was started as a school?

Ms. Hendry: 1915.

Ms. Paul: And what did they do before that?

Ms. Hendry: I think most of the immigrants just moved on. But then they did allocate that little house as a school, and the first teacher there was Mr. Fenderson. I wish I had brought his bio, because I have a copy of that. But I did not bring that today. He evidently came from New England, and he had been a law student there. He came to Freehold and liked it as a little town, and he tried to get work in the law offices here. But the only thing he could get was clerking, or acting as a gopher for other lawyers. Then the opportunity came up for him to

teach, and so he accepted. He was a magnificent role model and inspiration for the youngsters he taught in that little building.

Ms. Paul: So that was like a K-8 school all in one building.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, in one building.

Ms. Paul: And then in 1919 to 1921, they built this school where we are now. It had two classrooms.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, because the population outgrew that little house.

Ms. Russell: I think the church had something to do with that because they had started to set up an African Methodist Episcopal Church. They had set up a church in what was known as Squirreltown. Squirreltown is next door to the St. Rose of Lima Cemetery. The church had a small frame building there on a one-acre lot, and the people all went there to church. They worked in farms and in homes here in this area. But as their families grew, their church became too small. They moved to Freehold Borough at the corner of Avenue A and Haley Street. The church still stands there, and the cornerstone reads 1885. They had started their church out there in 1840, but the membership kept growing and growing. Those people's children had to have schooling. So that helped the census for the building that they had at what is now Rhea Street. Then of course they had their school at Rhea Street from 1915 until 1921, when we got this building. But by 1923 or 1924, this building was too small. So they had to add on the two rooms.

Ms. Hendry: And since they were going to do a building project in Freehold Borough anyway, including the new high school, the two rooms for the Court Street School were built at the same time that the high school was built.

Ms. Paul: So the high school was built in 1921?

Ms. Hendry: 1926.

Ms. Paul: So you came from a two-room school, where you stayed in one room for fifth to eighth grade room all the time, and then you were sent to a high school that was integrated and much larger. So that must have been very confusing then.

Ms. Russell: My first week, I cried every day. The reason was I wasn't accustomed to changing rooms or teachers. I was used to having the same room, the same teacher, and the same seat in that room. When I went to high school, I will never forget it. My first day I walked into the room, and I was told I didn't belong there. I looked at my card I had, and it said that was the room number I was supposed to be in. So I went in, and they told me I didn't belong

there. So I left. I didn't know that you had a principal that you go to when you have a problem. I was standing out in the hall crying, and I'll never forget. The principal saw me out in the hall, and she came and wanted to know why I was crying. I told her that I didn't have any room or any seat, that everywhere I went they told me I didn't belong there. So she finally took me to a classroom, and took me to the teacher, and the teacher told me to go and sit down. At that time the desks were hooked onto a seat. Well, I was given the very first one that didn't have a desk part to it. I was told to sit there. So I sat there. I had not been given any books or anything, and the teacher told everyone to take out their books. I told the teacher that I didn't have any, and that teacher told me to just sit there and twiddle my thumbs. So I cried again. I did not want to go back to school. I went home and told my parents, and mother told me to try and make it. She said if I did well, my father and she would see what they could do. So I went back. The next teacher I went to in that high school was the English teacher. I went into the room, and that person called out and asked me for my name. When I said Nicy Ham, the kids all laughed and started making jokes. So she stopped them, and she told me not to let it bother me. She said, "Nicy, ham and bacon are close together. We should be good friends." Because her name was Ruth Bacon, and my name was Nicy Ham. (laughter)

Ms. Paul: Oh, that's lovely.

Ms. Russell: So from that, I learned to take it lightly when they teased me about my name. I got to the place when they would start laughing at my name, I would say, "My name is Nicy, and it's the nearest thing to Spicy. Too bad I wasn't named Virginia, then I'd be a Virginia Ham." (laughter) Until I finished and came back here to work, nobody called me Nicy. They all called me Marion. They made such a joke out of my name, I just used Marion all the time.

Ms. Paul: Where does the name come from, do you know?

Ms. Russell: The name Nicy is from my grandmother on my mother's side. Her name was Nicy. She had said she wanted her first granddaughter to be named Nicy, so I am the oldest and the first of my mother's children. I got the name Nicy.

Ms. Paul: That's very nice.

Ms. Russell: I like it. It doesn't bother me that they teased me about it. I'll tell you anytime that my name is Nicy, and I write it down as my name.

Ms. Paul: So you stayed in Freehold Borough High School.

Ms. Russell: Yes, and graduated in the upper third of my class.

Ms. Paul: That's the tough thing about being the oldest in the family, because then none of your siblings had to go through that. You could show them where

everything was and what the ropes were. I am the oldest in my family, too, you see. So I am sympathetic.

Ms. Russell: So you know.

Ms. Hendry: She really did lead the way. Although she wasn't always welcome, Mother and Dad told her not to expect to be welcomed. They told her she was there to learn and participate, and not just to be welcomed. And she became the first member of the high school orchestra. But she had a difficult time even doing that.

Ms. Russell: They had a teacher in from Asbury Park, and her name was Madame Kowashima. She taught music, violin lessons, to some of the children here in Freehold. I was the only Afro-American child that she had. When we all went to high school, the White children were put in the orchestra. So she told me, when I was graduating, that I needed to sign up for the orchestra in high school. I signed up. It took one whole year for me to get accepted to the orchestra. I was not given any excuse, I was just not told to come to the rehearsals or tryouts. And finally Madame Kowashima kept pursuing it, and she told me I played as well and better than some of the students that were already in the orchestra. And she didn't understand why I wasn't in the orchestra. So she took up the fight, and I was called to come to rehearsal. When I went, nobody else had to play anything to show their talent in playing the violin or viola. I was the only one. And I'll tell you one thing, I haven't touched my instrument in years, but I bet I could play Schubert's March Militaire. Because that was the piece of music that I had to play for them, and I played the first part for my audition. The first part carries the melody. You know you have first and second parts. The first part is the melody. The second part is just "da da." Well, when I was given a part to play in the orchestra (I was given the second part, which is the simplest part, but that was what I had to play), I played in the orchestra, and I cried. I didn't want to go. At that time Mrs. Jeanette Stitt was the music teacher. She came to this school, as well as the other schools. At one time we didn't have the Regional District. We had what was called Freehold High School, and the children from Farmingdale, Adelphia, Englishtown, Manalapan, Marlboro, and Colts Neck all came to Freehold High School.

Ms. Hendry: The capacity of the school at that time was 600 students.

Ms. Russell: I graduated June 17, 1932. My graduating class was 108 students. There were 100 Caucasian students, and eight Afro-Americans.

Ms. Paul: Those were really tough times for any family to keep their kids in school then. So that was a real tribute to all of you.

Ms. Russell: Teachers didn't help. I think it was vested interest because they took us on class trips. We were told we had to pay. It wasn't like they do now

where the Board of Education makes sure that all children can participate in whatever activities they have, because they feel they are all learning experiences. When they were going anywhere, your parents had to find the money for you to go. And if they didn't find the money for you, you just didn't go. Our Afro-American families, and some of them are still here in part of the community, would find the money for their children to go...

Ms. Hendry: Or their churches would support their pursuit of a high school education.

Ms. Russell: And yet when they got there, they couldn't participate in all the activities. For example, I don't eat at Child's Restaurant today. They took me there for my high school senior trip. When we got there, it was late. We went to the Foreign Exchange.

Ms. Paul: Was this New York City?

Ms. Russell: Yes, New York City. We went to the Paramount Theatre, and I'll never forget that we saw Billy Holiday. That was the show that we saw. Afterwards, we were taken to Child's Restaurant, and we had paid the same amount of money that everybody else did for our dinner. And for some reason, the eight of us could not eat there. We were taken to Nedicks, where I don't eat anymore either. We were told we could have hot dogs and diluted orange drink, and that's what we were given.

Ms. Paul: The teachers told you that?

Ms. Russell: The teachers allowed it to be done to us. And one teacher went with us to Nedicks, but that wasn't a part of what they had sent home for us of what we were going to get. So I don't eat at Child's, and I don't eat at Nedicks. And I know Nedicks had nothing to do with it. They were not to blame. But I also feel that the teachers had a vested interest in their jobs so they didn't make any fuss about it. We were just given hot dogs and diluted orange juice.

Ms. Paul: In the 1930s, were there a lot of segregated eating places in New York City?

Ms. Russell: That was in 1932. And it is still going on. I'll say this much. We can have all kinds of laws and say they are in effect, but it's what is inside the people's hearts, souls and bodies that cannot be enforced. I have been working with a group that I would figure to be the last place you'd find segregation or mishandling of people's rights. But I found it. And I'm giving them my service, which is not a service that you can pick up from just anybody. It took the monies that my parents put down for me to go to school, to get that knowledge, to be able to give that service. They are glad to receive my service, but I found them being very prejudiced.

Ms. Paul: And it still hurts, doesn't it?

Ms. Russell: It hurts. But I stay there because I figure if I don't try to work it out, what will happen to the others? I have been with this group over twenty-one years.

Ms. Hendry: And it's a government group.

Ms. Russell: It is a County group. I have more experience and more educational background than one of the young ladies that was of another persuasion. I was told, when I was sworn in, that the chairmanship of the committee moved according to seniority. When it was my turn to be the Chairman, the young lady brought me all the materials to read and told me to be prepared. I took it home and went over it all. When we had the next meeting, someone else had been made the Chairman.

Ms. Paul: And what did they say?

Ms. Russell: She said it was not her doing, it was out of her hands. So I went to the Judge, and I asked for an appointment. And he told me the experiences that he had, because he was of another persuasion. But I eventually got to be Chairman. And this is all volunteer work. And if that young lady had been more qualified than I, I wouldn't have said a word. But it goes on still.

Ms. Hendry: And that was within the last five years.

Ms. Paul: I'm sure that is true.

Ms. Russell: And they can't keep an Afro-American in there. There have been about four or five. One has expired, one moved, and I don't know what has happened to the others. But they disappeared and didn't stay with it. You say to yourself, "Why give my services and take this kind of treatment?"

Ms. Paul: So you graduated from Freehold Borough in 1932.

Ms. Russell: Yes. I went to Wilberforce University for one year, in Zenia, Ohio. During that one year, I did one and a half year's work, because my dad and mother told me not to play with their money.

Ms. Paul: Because there were seven more behind you.

Ms. Russell: They told me I was going there to learn, and learn I did. But my sister Kathleen was very ill and hospitalized, and I knew those were expenses for my parents. At that time, we didn't have health insurance or things like that. So instead, I got myself a position at Marlboro State Hospital. There again, it was an experience. Here I was, a graduate of high school with one and a half years of

college work. I was told that I could have a position working with the patients. However, when I arrived I was told I was assigned as a domestic in a doctor's home. But the others were not even finishing high school, and they were working in the patient cottages and in the offices. I can also tell you that when World War II came along, we were working there for forty dollars a month. When the War broke out, in order to keep the people at Marlboro, the state raised the salaries of those of us who worked in the doctors' cottages from forty to sixty dollars a month. There were five of us Afro-Americans working there. Do you know they did not give us the extra twenty dollars a month?

Ms. Paul: And how could they get away with that?

Ms. Russell: They got away with it until I took it up. The one girl who worked for Dr. Baker asked me if I had received my raise. I told her no. She told me they had all received a twenty dollar raise. I did go to the library to try to find the newspaper that carried the article. I got the article; we didn't have copiers then. So I had to copy it down. And I asked the librarian if I could borrow the original one, if I had to. I took it in, showed it to them, and asked where was our twenty dollar raise. We finally got the twenty dollars a month more, but it was not retroactive.

Ms. Paul: So you had to fight for it.

Ms. Russell: I have had to fight all of my life for what I was due. I wasn't asking for something that I wasn't due. I was telling you I had gone to Wilberforce. I decided maybe I could go into nursing, and I wanted to try it and see how I liked it. They were giving this course at night at the Broad Street School. I went and asked to sign up, and they said no. That's how I ended up going to Harlem Hospital, because the schools in New Jersey were not accepting Afro-Americans. Rider College did send me an application for scholarship before I went to Wilberforce, but I went to Wilberforce because I didn't want to be rejected. I didn't think that Rider knew that I was an Afro-American. (laughter) I didn't want to take any chances. Wilberforce offered me a small scholarship. I took that.

Ms. Paul: So you went to Harlem Hospital and studied nursing there?

Ms. Russell: Yes.

Ms. Paul: And when was that?

Ms. Russell: I went in February of 1943, because they were taking students every six months. I enrolled February 1, 1943, and I graduated February 1, 1946.

Ms. Paul: And were you working at the hospital during that time, as well as studying there?

Ms. Russell: It was a work-study program, and they gave you a diploma. I went into Cadet Nursing at that time when World War II was on.

Ms. Paul: Was that through the Army?

Ms. Russell: It was through the government. They said you didn't have to go into the Armed Services when you finished, so I took a chance on it. I was the last one in my class to sign up.

Ms. Paul: So you graduated in 1946. Did you start work as a nurse then?

Ms. Russell: Yes, I worked in Harlem. Well, during my Cadet nursing period, they were so short of nurses, that they took what they called "strong students" and made us Head Nurses, so I got the experience of being a Head Nurse in the Communicable Disease Hospital then. I was often supervising my classmates and others.

Ms. Paul: So you lived in New York at that time?

Ms. Russell: In my student days, I lived in the student quarters there. During the training you went through Communicable Diseases. We had to go through tuberculosis out at Sea View on the Island, and we went to Bellevue Hospital for psychiatric training. And that was another experience, because we had the students coming from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. They didn't want anything to do with us, even sharing an elevator or sitting at the table to eat with us. When one of us would sit down at the table where one of them was sitting, they would say, "Suddenly I lost my appetite." So we had them "lose their appetite" all the time.

Ms. Paul: And that was while you were doing your practice of nursing?

Ms. Russell: Yes. So then we had graduation. In the meantime, because we were part of the Cadet Nursing Program, Uncle Sam sent you to different hospitals for the last six months. I was sent to Tuskegee, Alabama for my last six months of training. I worked with the veterans at a Veteran's Hospital there. That was an experience because we got to work on some of the soldiers, with some of their injections or whatever. And I found out what it meant to work in a larger government institution. I finished from there and came back to Harlem for graduation. And after graduation, I started working at Harlem. And that was another experience.

Ms. Hendry: But that wasn't the end of her education.

Ms. Russell: No. While working at Harlem, I moved up. I never had to ask for a promotion. I got my promotions by them picking me, so much so that I got tired of hearing, "I'm looking for a strong..." (laughter) I didn't want to hear that anymore.

But it helped. I have my Diploma of Nursing. I took my State Board, and I passed it the very first time I took it. Then I went on to finish up and get my Bachelor of Science Degree.

Ms. Paul: Where did you go?

Ms. Russell: Hunter College. At the time I went to Hunter College, it was all girls. It was all females and no males. After finishing there, I thought I was in the lineup, going through rehearsal for graduation exercises. But everything was clear when I got a call to come to the Bursar's Office. When I got there, he told me my records didn't show that I was graduating. It was a good thing that I had carried my school reports. I don't know why I did that, but the Good Lord watches out for fools, old folks, and drunks. So I guess I fit in there somewhere. Anyway, I had carried my records with me to that rehearsal. I took them out and showed them to him. And he told me to go back to my rehearsal. At the time when you are young, you know, you don't know all the things you should do. I was working at Harlem, and I had to take my days off when I worked 3:30 to 12:00 so I could go to night classes. I had a class that overlapped just a few minutes, like ten or fifteen minutes. So I asked one teacher if I could come to her class ten minutes late, and I asked the other teacher if I could leave her class ten minutes early, because of this overlap. They both agreed, and I was happy about it. I did not think I had to get it in writing. It never dawned on me. So when this came up that I was called to the Bursar's Office, one of the teachers who had said I could come to her class fifteen minutes later...and you can only have three tardiness times...she had said I had four tardiness times. The reason I had asked the two teachers was that if there was something being discussed in class that was important enough that I stay, then I could go to the other class late. Or if there wasn't anything much I would be missing, then I could leave and be on time for the other class. Well, it just so happened that I had four tardiness times instead of three. And she had decided to say that although she gave me an A- for my work, she took off for that. So I took the case to the Grievance Committee, and I won. I told them I didn't know I should have gotten it in writing. But her name was Gottdank and you know what I was calling her.

Ms. Paul: Yes, I'm sure. (laughter)

Ms. Russell: But anyway, I got my points back and I didn't lose out on that.

Ms. Hendry: But she wasn't satisfied, so she went on and did her social work at Kean College. She got her New Jersey Social Work Certification, and she ended up right back here in Freehold serving the community for the Freehold Board of Education as its Educational Social Worker, which was her third career in her life. She spent thirteen years with the Freehold Borough Elementary School System as their social worker.

Ms. Paul: So that's why you were passing on students that you had in the elementary school, Nicy, to your sister at the high school, you were double-teaming them. (laughter)

Ms. Russell: When I caught one of the kids doing something he shouldn't, he said, "Miss Russell, you know I'm going to high school next year." And I told him he needed to meet my sister. He looked at me with wide eyes, and he was so surprised. So sure enough, one day he was flying down the hall at the high school and bumped into Lillie. And Lillie let him know who she was. (laughter)

Ms. Paul: You can run, but you can't hide. Oh, that's wonderful. And it's wonderful for the community, that you had that kind of continuity with the kids and could keep your eye out for them.

Ms. Russell: Right now, in the school, I felt good. But many of the kids are in Catch 22, I guess I would call it. I had asked the principal and even the superintendent not to keep suspending the kids. I told them to send them to me instead. I had a little office, and I used to open the door, swing it back and say, "Would you step into the parlor said the spider to the fly." (laughter)

Ms. Paul: Oh, that probably made them really comfortable!

Ms. Russell: And they would go in there, and I would thrash them out. And after I thrashed them out, I said, "Now if it gets back, you'll tell it because I won't." And the principal and the superintendent used to ask me what I did or said when the kids would come back all nice and apologetic. And I would tell them I wouldn't say. And I never told them. When I asked to have the kids go to the Y for Water Safety, I couldn't get a single teacher who wanted to give up time to go with that busload of kids to the Y in East Freehold. So I said I would take them. And I took the whole busload of kids. The Y provided the bus and the driver, but we had to have someone for the supervision of the students. I didn't have any problems. I walked around the pool, and I had no problems with them. One kid's watch disappeared, and I asked for that watch to be returned. It hadn't been returned. We got back to the school, and I told them I wanted the watch. I told them I wouldn't ask any questions, but I just wanted the watch back. And all of a sudden the watch went up in the air! And I got the watch back, and I never had any more problems. I had been in the girls' dressing room, and I carried this big purse so I could carry any small article or anything the kids wanted me to keep safe for them. So I told the boys that since this watch had disappeared, I would be in the boys' dressing room if it didn't reappear. And I never had to go into the boys' room.

Ms. Paul: So what years did you work for Freehold Borough?

Ms. Russell: From 1966 until 1981.

Ms. Hendry: When she started with the Borough, I left the Borough as a Guidance Counselor to go to the high school, as I was invited to do. But I was sure to leave someone there that I could always communicate with in reference to youngsters. Not that I couldn't communicate with anyone in the system, but we had a special communication. She came in as I left.

Ms. Russell: It was really September of 1965.

Ms. Hendry: But we were not there together.

Ms. Paul: OK. Lillie, what is your story?

Ms. Hendry: My story is very small in reference to her story. The beginning of my story is Nicy. She always was what we would call a pathfinder in our family. Mother and Dad always said if you were older than the next one, you were watched. And therefore, you had to be a good leader. So she had seven people watching her. I was lucky, because I had only three watching me. (laughter) However, not only did we watch her, but we also looked up to her. And she watched us. We were taught that the older ones were responsible for the younger ones. So it was a two-way watch, and it was very, very beneficial to all of us. We learned to be responsible not just for ourselves, but for those with whom we came in contact. We learned that service was the price you pay for the space you occupy on earth. And so you served. We learned that you are where you are because others cared. And so you should care so that others could also progress. These were all philosophies from our parents. And what our lives have been are products of that philosophy.

Yes, I was born here in Freehold. Freehold is my hometown, as well as somebody else who wrote a song about it. And I went to Court Street School, as well. I went from kindergarten through eighth grade. I loved every moment of it. My first grade teacher, Rosa B. Reed, was the wife of the principal, George I. Reed. She was my ideal through kindergarten and first grade; I looked up to her because she was so patient. She could read a story and have you visualize the pictures, even though there were no pictures in the book. She taught us how to be polite, and how little girls should sit like little ladies. She taught the little boys how to behave. And she taught it all in the sweetest voice and with the sweetest smile you could ever imagine.

Ms. Paul: How many kindergarten students were there?

Ms. Hendry: It was a kindergarten/first grade combination, so you were lucky enough to have her for two years. Now all students may not have felt so lucky, but personally, I felt it was really a wonderful thing to be in the classroom for two years with the same teacher. What you didn't learn one year, you learned the next. Also what you learned, you reviewed so that you really knew. So I appreciated the fact that there were two grades that were together in the same

room. Now when we got to Mr. Reed's room, it was the sixth through eighth grade. My friend, Mabel Banks, and I often wanted to be with the younger children. We just liked younger children. So when we went out for recess, we would play with the younger children as much as we played with the older children. Mrs. Reed sometimes had sick days, and Black substitutes were not that plentiful. Therefore, Mr. Reed would tell us if we did our work and got it correct, we could be in that younger classroom to help out when Mrs. Reed was not well. And that was my first experience of teaching. I always had my work done, as did Mabel, and Lugenia Harris Jefferson.

Ms. Paul: I know her from Habitat.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, she was another very good student. And there was Dorothy Lee and several more of us.

Ms. Paul: What a smart man.

Ms. Hendry: Mr. Reed would tell us when Mrs. Reed did not come in, and he would ask for volunteers. Mabel and I would always volunteer. We did not mind leaving our peer group, and we wanted to come into this room, which was the size of the regular room now, and be with the younger ones. So I think from those experiences and from having Mrs. Reed as a teacher, I got the teaching bug. I got through elementary school here at Court Street School with guidance from Mr. Reed, who always instilled in the students before you left the school, the pride that the school and the teachers had in you, and what they expected you to do. You knew they expected you to exemplify this school when you were in other places. He said, "I always wanted to hear that people know you came from Court Street School because of the way you behave, because of what you achieve, and because of the way you plan for your future."

Ms. Paul: He sounds like a wonderful man.

Ms. Russell: He was. And he not only stuck with you while you were in school. As Lillie told you, we students had to substitute because we did not have substitutes like you have now in schools. The students had to do it. I did it for the classes while I was here, just like she and Lugenia did it for their classes. But also when I went into Nursing School, I had been out of school seven and a half years and my concentration was not the best. I wrote Mr. Reed a note and told him the problem I was having. That man sent me a book on concentration, and I used it. And I got right back into being able to do my work. I just couldn't concentrate, and for some reason things just were not clicking. I guess I had been away from it for so long. But Mr. Reed sent me that book, and I read it. He was like that.

Ms. Hendry: He also said when we went to high school or in life, if we had need of his services or the services of any other teacher in Court Street School, we

should not hesitate to come back. Miss Louise B. Jones, who graduated from the school and lived in the community, tutored students all summer long, free of charge. So you always knew that if you came from Court Street School, you had people "in your corner." And you would always be welcomed back and not admonished because you had to come back. But you would be welcomed back cheerfully because there was something else they could do for you. That kind of spirit was the spirit of Court Street School.

Ms. Paul: No wonder you are both still so attached to it now. That really does go a long way to explain why the place means so much to you.

Ms. Hendry: And so much to the alumni of the school, which is why we really campaigned not to have the building destroyed. Now we were lucky, too, in reference to Court Street School. There was a gentleman who moved into our community whose name was Ralph Allen. He also was with Habitat, and also a community minded man. Now he came from South Jersey. I have forgotten the name of the town. But he said in his town was a segregated school, very much like Court Street School. He said so much of his talent and motivation to learn and serve came from there. People in his town tried to save that little school, and they were not successful. So he said if we wanted to save this one, he would help us save it. He did a tremendous job of campaigning for the preservation of the Court Street School, working with the legislators, the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders, and the New Jersey Historic Trust to get the grants to restore the school. He also worked with the program facilitators in designing and researching the needs of the community for possible programs for the school. So Ralph Allen really needs to be very much appreciated for what he did. Anyway, let's get back to Court Street School. I graduated from there and went to the high school, as did most of the youngsters from Court Street School. Even though I didn't go Freehold High School until 1943, I was confronted with some of the similar things that my sister had met up with years before. When we went to the school, we had our schedules and our room assignments. But I was told also that I didn't belong in some of the classes because my course was called the "classical course" at that time. It was the college prep course. It was almost a foregone conclusion, even then and with other Black students who had gone through the high school and gone on to college, that you were not supposed to be in the college prep course. There was either the classical course or the scientific course, and those were the two college prep extremes. So I sat in the auditorium, waiting for my schedule to be changed, which it should not have been. It was the way it was supposed to be. At that time, we did not have guidance counselors. We had class advisors. And my class advisor said to me, "Your parents have a lot of children. You'll probably have to work after high school to help with the family." Well, there were three younger than me, and there were four older that she had nothing to do with. They were out on their own. None of the four were still in high school when I went to school. So they must have been successful. But it was as if she was saying that was my obligation. And I wasn't told to sit and twiddle my thumbs, but I did it. Then my

mom and dad made an appointment with the same principal who had helped Marion out. She was still there, Lillian Lawlor. They came to the school, and we went into her office. Mother and Daddy explained to her that the teachers had no right to tell their child what the future was going to be. It was the mother and father's responsibility to do that. They told her I was enrolled in the classical course, and I was to stay in that course if I could succeed there. They also told her if I didn't succeed, to let them know, and they would remove me, because it would be for my own good. But she was to give me the chance to succeed.

Ms. Paul: Were there other Blacks in the classical course at that time?

Ms. Hendry: One, Ann Edwards. The others were in clerical, home economics, or general. Ann and I were in the classical course. Ann was a year older than I was. So we went back, and we had our Latin, English, and all the other classes. I succeeded! My advisor said I was doing well. Mother and Dad told me to go right back to Court Street School if I needed anything. I did come back for my writing skills and my punctuation skills. I did not have to come back for public speaking. (laughter)

Ms. Russell: I had the same thing. I was told that I couldn't have the classical course, because that's what I had signed up for. It turned out that they came to see my mother and father twice. First they came to see them at lunch time about my music and playing in the orchestra. And they came to see them about what they planned to do about my going to college.

Ms. Hendry: You know there is a difference between the time she was there and when I was there. They came to the house to see Mom and Dad when she was there. But my mother and father went to the school when I was there. That, to me, is a significant change. I always wanted to be active in the school activities because at Court Street we had plays, music, and exhibits for our parents. Children were always participating. But at the high school, when I tried to sign up for the school play, the only role that was available in the play was that of a maid.

Ms. Paul: How did I guess that, somehow!

Ms. Hendry: The maid's name was Little More. My Black peers were very much against my playing that part. So I came home and talked to Mother and Dad, who, you can gather now, were our counselors besides being our parents. We brought everything to them. And somehow or other, they helped us solve things. They said, "Well, Daught," and that was short for daughter. They said, "Well, Daught, if you want to do it, you do it. If you don't want to do it, don't. But you make the decision." I felt in my heart that if I didn't take that part in that play, I would never get a part in another play in high school. So I took the part, and I played it well. And I got ostracized by my peers. But the next year when the play came up, I was given an angelic role. And my name was Angelica, and I played an angel. The other persuasion was surprised at a Black angel. But I'd rather

they be surprised at a Black angel than very, very accepting of another Black slave. Then my senior year, I got to be the student director of the play. So I learned that you really have to crawl before you can walk, and then once you walk you can run.

Ms. Paul: So you graduated from Freehold High School.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, before it was regionalized. During that time, I was in the orchestra and played the viola. I followed in my sister's footsteps and played the viola, and I was also in the band. I played percussion. I was also in the school plays and the dance club, because I loved to dance. I was in Student Council. So high school was an extension of Court Street School's participation.

Ms. Paul: It explains to me why it has taken me months to schedule this interview, because you are never home. This has been the pattern of your life, right? Involved in a dozen different things?

Ms. Hendry: Well, my mother and dad always said, "Don't ever let me catch you idle." And they meant that.

Ms. Paul: And they obviously never did catch you. But I don't know about the others. Good heavens, Lillie! (laughter)

Ms. Hendry: High school was a good experience for me. I didn't have as many bitter experiences as Nicy. Or perhaps because of her, I knew how they could happen, so I was psychologically ready for them. And that was a gift that she gave us, as well. I wrote the graduation song, for the farewell. We had a twentieth century daisy chain, in 1947, and of course that was just after the War. The fellows came back from the War in 1946. So we got through all of that, and we also lived through air raid sheltering. Court Street School served as an air raid shelter during the War, and it was fascinating. We lived right down the street from the school, and we could watch the air raid drills with the air raid wardens with their helmets and their flashlights. We also had to know what to do in the schools, and we had an air raid drill mandated as well as a fire drill. You would get out into the hall against your locker, with your arms up, or on the floor. So you knew just what to do. So I have to really give credit to the school system. They did participate in all the preparations for disaster or whatever. And that was a time when you didn't know what was going to happen.

Ms. Paul: Well there were submarines right off of New Jersey, right? So it was a scary time.

Ms. Hendry: That's correct, it was scary. But you felt secure because you were taught what to do. So that was a good thing, too.

Ms. Russell: The rationing was done here at Court Street School, also.

Ms. Hendry: It was the ration station. And the students in seventh and eighth grade, as Nicy Marion said, "the strong students," were allowed to issue ration stamps and books for gasoline, sugar, butter, flour, and soap. There were certain ration tickets or stamps that you issued for each item. And that was a responsibility of citizenship that we learned very early. So when we talk about the twentieth century, that was a part of it.

Ms. Paul: Well I was born in 1944. And there were no rubber pants then, so my mother told me about how embarrassed she was at a family reunion. I had gotten her all wet in church, and she was out in the parking lot walking up and down trying to dry her dress before the luncheon started. (laughter)

Ms. Hendry: And there was no plastic. Television was not there. It was a different time. But then after high school, or during my senior year, I applied to several colleges. It was a foregone conclusion that you were going to go off to college. I knew that I wanted to teach. I truly knew that I wanted to teach. So I applied to colleges, and I got a full scholarship to Hampton University in Virginia, which is a Black college. I got another one from the college my sister went to, Wilberforce, in Ohio. There was another one that I got. But it didn't matter to me, because I knew where I wanted to go. I applied for scholarship aid for the State of New Jersey, because I did not want to go far away from home. Many youngsters want to get as far away from home as they can. I didn't. I think that was really credited to the fact that our family had such a strong bond. I didn't feel that secure too far outside of that bond. So I applied to Trenton State College, and at that time it was difficult to get in. And it is now. However, my advisor helped me with my application. I think she did it sort of shaking her head, but she did it. I got the interview, and that was an experience. We had what we called "the doodle bug," which was the little two or three-car train that came through Freehold from Asbury Park to Trenton. I was given the date for the interview, and Daddy took me down and put me on the train. He gave me taxi-money from the train station out to the college for my interview. I had done the application, and I had written a composition about my life, and all of that. I prepared for the interview. Mother had made me wear a hat and gloves, so I would make the right impression. I got there ahead of time, and I found someone and asked them how to get to Green Hall, which is where my interview was being held. I got to Green Hall and into the room, and I was sitting there waiting for whomever was going to come in. This very Victorian-looking person came in. She sat down and she said, "Well, you're Lillie Ham." And I said, "Yes, I am." And she said, "From Freehold, New Jersey." And I said, "Yes, I am." I tried to smile, because she was so stoic. She said, "You think this is a laughing matter?" And I said, "No, I don't." She said, "Well, let's just get right down to business." She began to go over facts that she wanted to know about my life and why I wanted to teach. She asked where I wanted to teach, and what grade level did I think that I wanted. I said, "Any two grades would be ok." She said, "What do you mean any two grades?" And I explained what had been my experience. She said, "Do you not know that there is one grade per classroom?" And I said, "I was never in a classroom with just

one grade." She said, "You weren't?" And I said, "No, each of my classrooms had two or more grades." At the end of the interview she said, "Do you want to know what I think of you?" I thought she was going to tell me whether or not she felt I could come to the college. I was ready for either answer. I told her yes. She said, "I think you are peculiar." I always remember how my heart sank! I could live with being called a failure or a success with getting into college, but peculiar? That's somewhere out there that you don't know what you are! So I came home and asked my mom, "What about me is peculiar?"

Ms. Paul: She didn't say anything except that?

Ms. Hendry: That's all she said. And she asked me if I wanted to know. And I often wondered what she would have said if I had told her I didn't want to know. But I said yes. So I asked my mom what was peculiar about me. And she said she felt I had a nice voice, she felt that I sang beautifully, but I hadn't sung for this woman, but had sung in choirs, etc. And she also said I was very serious. I told Mom that this lady said I thought it was a laughing matter. None of those descriptions of myself that my mother gave me fit the situation. So my whole four years of college, this lady was my advisor because she was head of my department. Every time she looked at me, I knew she felt I was peculiar. One of the most inspiring experiences that I had at Trenton State was during my sophomore year: There was a lady by the name of Bertha Lawrence, who was a dean of the college and who visited every class of our particular curriculum, which was the Kindergarten/Primary curriculum. That evidently was her domain. She called me into her office. All of our classmates were very bonded together. When I first went, I was the only Afro-American in the class. When we went for our Big Sister/Little Sister Day at orientation, I had four other Little Sisters. We were all with, thank goodness, a girl from my hometown. She lived right up Court Street near Main Street. When she got my name, she came down to the house and told me I would be in her Little Sister group. And I was thrilled. Her name was Marianne Vanderveer. Marianne and I had waved hello as I walked down Court Street going to town quite often. So I felt very good that she was going to be my Big Sister. She had four others, and none of them had ever had any association with a Black American. So Marianne's job was to get everybody speaking to each other, with nobody being excluded. And she did a wonderful job of it, she really did. So our class eventually really knitted together. There were sixty-two of us to begin with. We graduated from Trenton State with fifteen!

Ms. Paul: Oh, my!

Ms. Hendry: The attrition rate was tremendous. Of course every time someone left or did not return, we all were shaking in our boots. Because that same lady who interviewed us was our advisor, and she remained stoic throughout. But I think the fifteen of us survived because we learned to bond together and to be supportive of one another. In our sophomore year, we were not yet down to fifteen. But during that year, Miss Lawrence came into our music class and asked

if I would come with her back to her office...in the middle of the class. And everybody wondered what I had done now. (laughter) I liked fun, I really did. And sometimes I guess because people weren't used to us and our type of humor, I just broke the class up. Anyway, I walked across the campus with Miss Lawrence. And she was chattering away happily, and I wondered why I was being called into her office. When we got there, there were two representatives from the State House in Trenton. They had come to her because they were going to have a naturalization ceremony for people to become citizens of the United States. And they needed a student speaker. And she had suggested me! I told you in high school I had never had to worry about public speaking. And I was so excited to think about speaking to people who wanted to become American citizens. It was unbelievable. I went back to my class and told my classmates, and we had no more class that day. (laughter) And they all helped me write my speech. And mother insisted I wear the hat and gloves. Miss Lawrence drove me to the State House, to this big mahogany room. It was the chambers, and it was just something. Anyway, it went well. The faces of those people who were from all over the world! There were about fifty-three of them, if I remember correctly. And I don't know now exactly how those words came out, but they affected the people I was looking at the way I wanted. You can study a speech, you know, but it doesn't always come out the way that you studied it. But this evidently came out even better. And so it was a wonderful success. I got back to the college, and of course all the girls wanted to know what happened and how it went. And I told them it went well. And they said, "Oh, we didn't know our prayers would be answered." In the middle of a class, they had all stopped and folded their hands and bowed their heads. And the teacher told me the next day that I was the only one that could get our class quiet.

Ms. Paul: Oh, I love hearing that.

Ms. Hendry: It was really a thrilling experience, and I will always remember that from Trenton State. It was difficult there, but I had to come back to the community of Freehold Borough, especially the Black community. I could always come home to my church for encouragement, which was Bethel AME Church. And I could go to the members of the congregation because many of the older mothers of the church just adopted all of the children. There was my mom, of course, and then my second mom was Miss Sadie Lewis. And then there was Miss Dora Jackson. They would cook and send things to you. When you came home from school to church, you had to go back into the choir even if you hadn't been there for rehearsal. And everybody was always so glad to see you. So you got through college and the hard times because of the Black community that surrounded you with love, acceptance, and support. Of course, there was always the thought that when you came back, you would serve. It wasn't repeated to you, but it was always in the back of your mind. You saw it being done all the time. So there was no other way that you envisioned life except to come back and serve. Well, we got down to fifteen classmates for college graduation. And we were a happy fifteen people, let me tell you. But before graduation, we had to

do our practice teaching. And I did my practice teaching in Red Bank. That was an experience, too, because there was no train between here and Red Bank. There was a bus, which ran some of the time. My dad would have to take me in his old car, and sometimes we didn't know if it would get off the block much less onto the road! He would try to get me to Matawan Station to catch the train from there to Red Bank. Then I'd load all my school things up, get back on the train to Matawan, and get picked up there. There was a person with whom I became very good friends, whose husband rode a motorcycle. She worked at Bendix in Red Bank. Her husband would ride her on the motorcycle to Bendix. And when the bus didn't run, I would be the third person on the motorcycle. He would drop her off at Bendix and motorcycle me over to my practice-teaching school. Then at the end of the day, I would take a train back to Matawan. And it was dark in that station, because I practice taught during the winter quarter. And I was scared to death until my dad got there. But I got through it. I lost twenty-three pounds during practice teaching because I often slept only three hours a night because of all the preparation and travel. But I made it.

Ms. Paul: You were doing student teaching in kindergarten or first grade?

Ms. Hendry: I was doing second grade student teaching. Kindergarten/Primary meant preschool through fourth grade. So you could be assigned anywhere in there. My teacher at Red Bank and my school there were marvelous. They had not had a Black teacher over there, either.

Ms. Paul: What school was that?

Ms. Hendry: Oakland Street School. It is now a restaurant. And my cooperating teacher, Mrs. Narry, is now in the senior citizen's development. We became connected again about two years ago, through my brother, Walter, who taught her the mature driving course. When he announced himself as the instructor, she asked if he knew me. He told her that was his sister. She told him who she was and asked all about me. So we connected again. A year ago, we had lunch together in the Oakland Street School Restaurant, in the space that once was our classroom. So you see, life just really binds together. Mrs. Narry came down with appendicitis in the third week of practice teaching. And she had to be removed from the room, of course, because she had surgery. They had a substitute who had never subbed in the primary grades. Therefore, Mrs. Jordan, who was the principal, called me and asked me to take over the class. She said they'd give me all the support I needed. Usually with practice teaching, you didn't take over the class until the fourth or fifth week. But the third week, I took over the class. The children were marvelous! The substitute teacher let me do anything I wanted to do. There was another one of my classmates named Geneva Height. She taught in Red Bank, as well. And whenever our advisor from college was coming to observe us, Geneva would call and let me know if she went to visit her first. She would call the office and tell them to tell me she had a red pencil for me. That was the signal that the advisor was in town and coming my way. (laughter) So I

would get myself together. Then if the advisor got to me first, I'd call her school and leave the same message. That's the way we connected. That's how bonded our class was, to see that each of us succeeded and that we lost no more of us. The experience at Red Bank was a marvelous one. We had an end-of-the-quarter exhibit and play for the parents, and they just loved it. My report back to the college was glowing, and the advisor said she never thought she'd see me teach, but that I was doing it. That was a compliment and a half!

Ms. Paul: So when you graduated, what did you do?

Ms. Hendry: This was another example of the twentieth century. I was scheduled to graduate in 1951. All of us, of course, were sending out applications by 1950 for openings. I was invited to come back to Freehold to teach in the integrated school here, Court Street School. Freehold had built a new school, the Intermediate School on Park Avenue. And I said I would love to come back and teach in my own community. And I asked if I could teach at the Intermediate School because I knew there were some vacancies. And they said no, they wanted me to teach at Court Street School. Well, I think in my mind, I thought no one was going to do that to me again. So I said thank you and would let them know. Howell Township was another place that invited me to come. But Howell, in my mind and experience, had been a less than welcoming situation. I wasn't sure I was ready for that. Roosevelt, out near Hightstown, was a little community that also invited me. But transportation would have been a problem. I did not drive at all, and there was no public transportation to go out to Roosevelt. But I did love the surroundings and the school. The Board of Education members who interviewed me were very kind, but I thought I'd better not teach there because I wasn't sure how I could get there. But Hamilton Township, New Jersey, sent a representative to the college, who was the Elementary Curriculum Supervisor. They described that they wanted to integrate their system and their staff, and Bertha Lawrence recommended me for the position. She felt I would be a good one to do it. And I thought, "Not again."

Ms. Paul: You were tired of carrying flags, I guess. (laughter)

Ms. Hendry: But this supervisor, Mrs. Johnson, was so down to earth. And she did not mince her words, but she was kind with her words. She said it would be a challenge, and that word always did motivate me. When you use the word "challenge," I am motivated. So I said I would do it. She said the reason she came out to the college to interview me was because she could not really afford to have me come there and be seen being interviewed. And I said that was perfectly all right. Then I got a letter in the mail, and I guess she had the power to do the hiring, salary, and all of that. The salary was \$1800 a year. To me it sounded like a gold mine. I hadn't ever made that much. I had done domestic work during college, but I hadn't had a job like that. So I went to Hamilton Township. One of the church members at Mount Zion in Trenton, which was a part of our denomination, recommended a home in which I could live. And it was

only two blocks from the school, so I could walk to school. The home was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Payne, and they were marvelous to me. They just adopted me as their daughter, treated me as their daughter, and spoiled me as their daughter. They made it a very nice situation for me to go to and from their house to school. And so I taught there for eight years. The first day was horrible. I had gone to Hamilton Township to move in, to go to the school to get my room all fixed up, and to meet the principal.

Ms. Paul: What grade?

Ms. Hendry: First grade. So I did all that ahead of time. The day school started, the youngsters came in, and I had only one Black child in class. They had grouped their children according to the top, middle, and bottom of the class. It was a primary school, which I loved. It was kindergarten through fourth grade only. But the parents who brought their children to school were not sure they wanted to leave them with me. Children were crying, many of them. And the parents were outside the classroom door, not feeling very comfortable. And the principal was walking back and forth, wondering how I was going to control this whole situation. So I opened the door, and one parent said, "Would you get the teacher?" I said, "I am the teacher." She said she thought I was just watching the children until the teacher came. I told her to see the principal, who would tell them I was the teacher. The principal came into the classroom, and I asked her what I should do. And she looked at me and said, "Handle it." And then she turned around and walked out. So I said to the parents, "If you would just entrust your children to me today, we'll talk about the situation tomorrow. I must get them settled down now, because the school day has begun." And I closed the door. The parents were outside the door, and I just took all of my nerve, went over to my desk, picked up a few books, and dropped them to the floor. And the noise quieted the kids. And I said, "Now, I don't want to hear any more noise out of you. If you don't want to hear the noise of these books, I don't want to hear your noise. My name is Lillie Ham, and I would like to know each of your names." And they quieted down. I got on with my day, and one by one the parents left. We sang, clapped hands, kept rhythm with our feet, and we enjoyed our time together. And the next day, the parents brought their children back to school. They still stood outside my door, but they didn't make any noise about me having their children. And the kids were fine. I got into the school year. I was the second Black teacher hired there. They had hired a man the February before, and he was very supportive. He said he knew what I had to go through, and he was here to help me. So it all worked out, and I was there for seven years. Then I received the honor of going to England to teach, under the Fullbright Scholarship. It was the Fullbright Exchange Teaching Program. I had gone for that interview, and I took my baby sister Wilma with me. I didn't tell my parents anything about it, because they would have had a fit if they thought I was going three thousand miles away.

Ms. Paul: And you took your hat and gloves too, right?

Ms. Hendry: No, I didn't take those. (laughter) For my first interview, I was under the impression that I was on a list with others. They had to get my credentials, my records, and do a character check, because it comes out of Washington. And it's amazing what they do with a character check. It scared me then. They did all of that, and they told me I was on a list. If I was accepted, finally approved, and Congress approved it, then I would go within the next five years. And I thought that was fine, because I would have lots of time to prepare my books. Huh! I went the next year. I went for three interviews. One was in Jersey City, one was in Trenton, and one was in Philadelphia. And my baby sister Wilma went with me, but nobody else knew. Then in February, I got the letter that I was to go in August. And I had to say yes or no. Well I couldn't make that decision without consulting the family. So then I had to let everybody know, and we talked it over and over. I had to let them know by the end of March. Well, I finally let them know that I could go.

Ms. Paul: That's so exciting! You must have developed a lot of self confidence in the meantime, from a girl who didn't want to go away to college to somebody who was going to go to England.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, but it was a challenge.

Ms. Paul: So where did you go?

Ms. Hendry: Just outside London, in Middlesex County. It was a fabulous year. I lived with a British family, with whom I still communicate. I taught in three English schools and lectured in four more. And it was just wonderful. I didn't want to come home, I actually wanted my family to move over there with me. It was just an altogether different atmosphere to be in. I was with a family that had never had any association with a Black person before. But they were so loving and unquestioning. They had no preconceived notions. And I was in a school that was just fascinated with the fact that there was an American there, not a Black American, but an American. And I really felt American before I felt Black, which is an experience I had never had here. So it was just very different. And then traveling was so easy, getting from different cultures and different people and seeing their likeness and differences. I couldn't do that here with any comfort. So it was really a very, worthwhile, growing year. One time my mom said I may have grown out of my britches because I came back expecting much more of the surroundings than I had expected before, and almost diplomatically demanding more. And I started advising others how to get more. I could have come back a rebel; however, I didn't. I just felt I was blessed, and I should share the blessings. And if they were truly blessings and shared, they wouldn't be rebellious. So I came back after that year. A teacher from England had taught in my stead, here. She had met my family and come to visit my town, as I had gotten to know hers. So it was a wonderful exchange experience. However, I found when I got back to my school in Hamilton, jealousies had arisen from top to bottom. Why should I have had that experience? Well, all I did was to share my experience with the

PTA and the children. My family had been gracious enough to scrape together pennies to buy me an 8mm motion picture camera so that I could take pictures of everything to bring back to share with everybody. I think I had a thousand feet of film that I shared with PTAs, church groups, and with everybody. And that way, everybody was included in my experience. And the jealousies disappeared. And the experience was wonderful when I was teaching Social Studies to my children. So it was a good year, which I am still sharing in many ways.

Ms. Paul: So you went back to Hamilton?

Ms. Hendry: Yes. That was the agreement. If your system allows you to go, then you must return to them. And I didn't mind returning. I liked my school. But then my mother became very ill, and we all took off time to be with her. She left us, and of course she also left my dad. So then I had to make a decision. My itchy feet were still itchy, and I still wanted to travel and have new experiences in other places. But I had to sit down and talk to myself very, very hard. I decided I would be in Freehold to stay. Before my mom passed away, we had planned to build a new home for her and my dad. After she passed away, I had to make the decision as to whether or not to go through with that. I decided to do that, because they, Mother and Dad, had both been a part of the beginning. So we built a new home, and once there was a home, here I am. I applied here, to Freehold Borough School System again, and this time they let me go to the Intermediate School. And that was a very good experience.

Ms. Paul: When was that?

Ms. Hendry: That was in 1960. Of course many of the teachers there knew me, because some of them had come from the high school when the Regional began. The year I was in England, the high school district regionalized. The teachers were given a choice of staying with the regional district or coming with the elementary district.

Ms. Paul: Oh, I never even thought about that.

Ms. Hendry: So some of them came to the elementary school district, and some of them stayed with the high school district. Many of the teachers were new to the elementary school district. They became my co-workers. Two of them had been my high school teachers. My principal had been my teacher at the high school. He said he was so glad I was there. He said he was hoping I would come. And we worked hand in glove. I had never taught sixth grade. I came into the Borough teaching sixth through eighth grade Social Studies and English. It was a middle stream, because classes were homogeneously grouped in what we called developmental classes, which are now resource classes. I wrote the curriculum for my developmental class, and I insisted that I keep the same class through all three grades so I could complete that curriculum with them. My youngsters and I bonded. Joseph Summers, who was superintendent, wanted

their guidance department program in the elementary school to be developed, which was not very popular then. It just wasn't well-known at the elementary level, you know. So we worked together on the elementary school guidance program, and I became the counselor, in addition to my teaching assignment. And that was a very heavy load. But it worked. Every eighth grader who left that school had to come to my classroom. I made sure that they had what the high school needed, as well as the life skills that I had been taught in Court Street School. They had been successful for me. The guidance program was one of the highlighted ones in New Jersey, and we had many people come to observe it. I had a group of youngsters for whom I was almost a second parent. They all said they would miss me when they had to go to high school. Ironically, my advisor from high school days had become a guidance counselor when the program came to the regional school. She called me one day and told me she was retiring. She said there was nothing she would like better than for me to take her place. I just didn't know what to say, except to thank her for her offer. I told her I didn't think she could hire me, and she said she had already talked with the principal about it. And so I told her if the district wanted me, I would come. I got in touch with my sister Nicy and told her I was going to the high school, and that the elementary system needed to replace me there. She had been working in the system during summers, anyway, with their summer school program. So she was acquainted with the setup. I had told them I would only go to Freehold Borough High School, and I didn't want to go to any other high school. I had gone back to college and had gotten my Masters Degree. I had received all my certification for K-12. I never dreamed of doing that when I first started. I thought I would just teach pre-school through fourth grade, that's it. But things developed, and I met the challenges and went on. Well, the summer before I was to start at the high school, they said they needed an experienced person at Marlboro High School, which was a new school opening. And that's how I got to Marlboro. I told them I wanted to be at Freehold Borough, and they said if I agreed to spend that first year at Marlboro, they'd agree to consider taking me back to Freehold Borough after that. I loved Marlboro. But Mr. Schned came in February, and said he had to review our agreement. He wondered if I still wanted it that way. I said I still wanted to go back to Freehold Borough. That's the way I got back to the Borough, where I stayed twenty-one years. I hope I made a difference. That was the whole goal in my life, to make a positive contribution and difference.

Ms. Paul: And you knew from the teachers that you had, what a difference you can make in the life of a child.

Ms. Hendry: Yes. So that's the story of our twentieth century existence up to now. I have been retired for ten years from the Freehold Regional District, having been there as a Guidance Counselor, a Guidance Supervisor, a Counselor in the adult evening programs, and also at Brookdale College in their evening program. Now I am on the Planning Board of Freehold Borough community, and I love watching the community change, develop, and restore. Of course I have my church work at Bethel AME Church with the Scholarship Committee. There is

now my pet project, Court Street School Education Community Center, a re-developing movement away from excluding a community to including all communities.

Ms. Russell: We made it "in spite of..." I really feel when I look at the children, like Lillie said, she says she hopes she made a difference, and I hope a little bit of me rubbed off on each of them that passed my way.

Ms. Paul: When did you retire, Nicy?

Ms. Russell: 1981. I retired from the Elementary School District in 1981.

Ms. Hendry: But she has never retired from community service.

Ms. Paul: So what are you involved in?

Ms. Russell: Right now, I am working with my church, Bethel AME. I am a Trustee, and I took my dad's place on the Board of Trustees.

Ms. Paul: (Laughing) Are these inherited positions?

Ms. Russell: Yes.

Ms. Paul: I guess it works that way.

Ms. Russell: I was the liaison for the building of the new church. I was the person representing the church with the contractor, the lawyers, and all of that.

Ms. Hendry: And with both Freehold Township and both Freehold Borough, since the land is in both, you had to work with both municipalities.

Ms. Russell: So I was the representative from our church for that. We have a cemetery next to Saint Rose of Lima. I worked with that and gave an interview with the Asbury Park Press. This caught the eye of our present Sheriff , and he got his men to get in touch with me from what I had said in that interview. And they cleaned the property off for us. The Boy Scouts working on their Eagle badge came here each year, but they couldn't do as thorough a job as Sheriff Oxley's Office, because they had more equipment with which to do it. They put us in touch with the Marine Corps, who made crosses for the unmarked graves.

Ms. Hendry: Because there are Black soldiers from the Civil War buried there.

Ms. Russell: They built a new sign for us, and that was part of my community church work. I'm on the Scholarship Committee and the Kitchen Committee. And the reason I am on the Kitchen Committee is our aunt had left money to the church building fund. Since I was the one that was coordinating the building and

whatever, I put it towards the kitchen. We didn't have a kitchen, dining room or all-purpose room before that. I took my mother's spot on the Stewardess Board. I really didn't want to be a part of it, because I didn't think I was qualified. But others in the church persuaded me, so I took her place on that. I had a very nice thing that happened to me. Our overall church, where they have the connection at the top with the bishops, contacted me three different times asking me to send them my biography. I had been putting it off. Lillie told me if I would write it, she would get it typed for me and send it in. They have what they call the AME Registry Select. It has the life of the bishops, general officers, and other members they want to recognize.

Ms. Hendry: People who have made outstanding contributions to the church, in talent and service.

Ms. Russell: So Lillie got it typed for me, so I'm in the AME Registry Select, the first copy...my whole history. Last Saturday, I was also honored by the New Jersey Conference Lay Organization. They are the ones that take all the churches in the State of New Jersey and honor the unsung heroes. And I was honored. I received a lovely certificate for my work with the church and my community. I also received a plaque and cards. And in the cards I received some checks.

Ms. Hendry: And she walked away with a whole lot of flowers. (laughter)

Ms. Russell: And a big bouquet of roses, and another separate rose and a corsage.

Ms. Hendry: She was really overwhelmed Saturday.

Ms. Russell: The pastor is on vacation, and he and his wife sent me the corsage.

Ms. Paul: Oh, that's lovely.

Ms. Russell: I had organized the lay organization in our local church. Last summer when I got sick, the vice president had to take over. And she sent me the nicest card and said I had made such a difference. The way I had left things made it easy for her to take over. She said how much she appreciated it and the support I had given her. She said I was her mentor. It brought tears to my eyes.

Ms. Paul: That's wonderful, it really is.

Ms. Hendry: The twentieth century for us, was an ever-developing time. There were eight of us, and there were developments in all of our lives. This meant our whole family history in this community was ongoing...the community itself, the people, the atmosphere and its changes. And I think you can see how the

atmosphere changed according to the times and in our lives. And it's still changing in the lives of the younger people.

Ms. Paul: You gave me a tour of the Court Street School before we started. But we haven't really, for this program, talked about something. Was the school integrated in 1947?

Ms. Hendry: 1949.

Ms. Paul: It became integrated in 1949 and then was a school until 1971?

Ms. Hendry: Yes.

Ms. Paul: And then it was closed down in 1971. And was it empty most of that time?

Ms. Hendry: For a short time the building became the Freehold Borough's Administration Building. Then the building was sold to Monmouth County. The Probation Department was to be located in the west wing of the new Court House. While the West Wing was being built, the Probation Department was located at the Court Street School building because it was a county building. And it still is owned by the County but leased to the Board of Trustees of the Court Street School Education Community Center for a dollar a year for the next fifty years.

Ms. Paul: So when was your Community Center really started?

Ms. Hendry: 1997. The restoration of the school proper...let me see if I can get it straight for you. In 1990 the Center was incorporated. In 1991 we signed a fifty-year lease for rental with the Board of Freeholders of Monmouth County. In 1992 we received a wonderful grant for the restoration design plan for the Court Street School. In February of 1993, the New Jersey Historic Trust gave us a grant for the restoration of the school. Monmouth County Board of Freeholders gave us another grant in November 1993. In February 1994, the Black United Fund approved another grant for general support of the renovation. And in the summer of 1995, the school restoration was nearly completed. By 1997, all of the contracts were completed, plus all of the approvals. Then we opened for programs in the fall of 1997. We restored the school as a tribute to its unique role in the history of Freehold. And we still have our dream of bringing together various peoples, groups, cultures, and organizations in a common cause. And we have the challenge to use the Court Street School as a center for providing a variety of services for all of the people in the community of Freehold.

Ms. Paul: So it really functions as a museum in one sense, but a very active community center in another sense. It has kind of a dual role, then.

Ms. Hendry: We don't call it a museum. We call it a historic site. We have one room in the building which is preserved historically. It has its original floors and the original wood design. The lamps that we have in the entire building are designed according to photographs. The room itself has a dedication area, to the teachers who served here for so many years. It also has pictures of some of the classes from the 1940s. The school also has been redesigned for community use, such as a computer lab for workshops and programs, one of which is the after school homework assistance program for youngsters preschool through seventh grade. Children come after school from four to six on Mondays and Wednesdays each week to be tutored by volunteers. The operation here at the school is completely volunteer. There is no paid staff. We exist on funds that are donations from various auxiliaries, organizations, and individuals. And those donations have kept us going so that we have the program for after school homework assistance, and we also have a program for the Hispanic population of the community to learn better English communication skills. And that program is a special one, because it also involves high school students from the foreign language department at the high school. They give up an evening/week to come here and help facilitate the English language with Hispanic citizens of the community. It's a two-way program in that the Hispanic citizens also help the high school students with their Spanish. Also we have a program with the Dunbar Repertory Theatre, which comes to give us services with our youngsters in dramatic arts. We also have a program with an artist, a muralist, who helped our youngsters with creative arts and painting a historic mural in the basement of the school. It depicts the history of the school from 1921 through 1997, when the building was opened. We have a program that we had with the Floyd's Club of Monmouth County on environmental science, a summer camp whereby the Floyd's Club youngsters help younger people from our community study environmental conservation. We have a computer program for the community, which conducts periodic workshops on Saturday mornings, and it's open to the entire community. And we have volunteers who come in and help with computer skills. We have had donations of computers, which help us to facilitate that program. So we are involved in several programs for the community, but by far, we hope to be involved in more when we have the facility for funding.

Ms. Paul: You said Summit Bank had just given you some furniture.

Ms. Hendry: Yes, Summit Bank has been very supportive with our programs, and they have donated furniture for our buildings, for our offices. They also donated computers for us, and their staff has donated many volunteer hours to help our youngsters with computer skills and also our community workshops. We also have the Pioneers of Lucent Technology, who have helped to maintain the appearance of the building. They have spent Saturdays with us in painting the outside of the building, the façade, and also with renewing the paint inside. They have also cleaned our carpets and done other services for us. We have various groups, such as United Black Families of Freehold Township, who have been constant supporters, both with volunteers and with financial support for our

programs here. Also the Women's Club of Freehold Township has donated books for our youngsters and supplies. The Molly Pitcher Women's Club has donated books and supplies for our youngsters' programs in computer and in homework assist. We had many parents who have donated volunteer time to spend with our programs, as well as friends from as far away as Keyport. They have come into the school because they feel that the programs here that service the youngsters are certainly worth their volunteer time. The Presbytery of Monmouth County has also contributed to the Center's Community Self-Help Nutrition program.

Ms. Paul: That's wonderful.

Ms. Hendry: There is more that we would like to do for the community. We would like to have an administrator, possibly an assistant administrator or community coordinator, and also a part-time clerical staff so that we might be able to expand the services for the community. The facility is a marvelous one, and it really should be used fully. So we need the help of people who can see the value of the programs that are here and continue with supporting the youth of the community through financial donations, grants and support. And we hope to get on board an administrator who can facilitate broadening the program.

Ms. Russell: Lillie, did you tell them it's on The Historical Site list?

Ms. Hendry: Yes, I would like to read into the record a letter that we received from Dorothy P. Grozzo, who was Administrator with the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Division of Parks and Forestry and the Historic Preservation Office. This was presented to the Court Street School Education Community Center September 11, 1995. It says she is pleased to inform the Education Community Center that the Court Street School, Freehold Borough, Monmouth County, was entered into the National Registry of Historic Places on October 4, 1995. The National Registry is the official list of cultural resources significant in American history in reference to architecture, engineering or culture. Listing in the National Registry insures that the property is affected by undertakings that are federally executed, licensed or financially assisted and will be subject to review and will always be a National Historic Place. And so we are on the Historic Registry.

Ms. Russell: And that took a lot of time.

Ms. Hendry: From 1982 to 1995.

Ms. Russell: We have gone through all of the old records of the Board of Education to get the information to send to them in order to get it. Lillie and I spent many a night going through the records.

Ms. Paul: Well, the two of you have done marvelous work. I know you said it's with the help of a lot of other people, but you are two people who wanted to make a difference. I don't think there is any question about the difference the two of you have made in the lives of so many people. And I'm just so excited about the chance to spend this afternoon with you. It has just been wonderful.

Ms. Hendry: We have really enjoyed it. Especially I have, that we are reacquainting ourselves after so many years. It has just been a pleasure to see you again, to talk with you again, and to share with you again.

Ms. Paul: It's been wonderful. Thank you both so much.

Ms. Russell: Thank you for coming.