

Narrator: Lola Stallworth
Interviewer: Greta De Jong
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4700.1027 Tape 1514
Session I
24 June 1998

[Begin Tape 1514, Side A. Begin Session I.]

Greta De Jong: We're at her son's house in Baton Rouge and the date is June 24, 1998. Mrs. Stallworth, please start by giving us your date of birth and telling us where you were born.

Lola Stallworth: My date of birth is January 27, 1918. I was born in Sabine Parish, Many, Louisiana. [phone rings]

De Jong: You were born in Sabine Parish and Many, Louisiana?

Stallworth: Yes. And you spell that M-A-N-Y.

De Jong: Okay. And what did your parents do? What kind of family was it that you grew up in?

Stallworth: My life, it might be a little different. My mother's name was Lillie Mae Sibley Dee. She was married to my father Frank Dee, and my father was killed when I was a baby in arms. And my mother did not have any way of making a living. And way back in that time, black people didn't have insurance . . .

De Jong: Right.

Stallworth: . . . down here. So my grandmother took me to live with her in a little town in Sabine Parish, Fisher, Louisiana and I lived with her until my grandfather passed away. By that time my mother had gotten established and learned how to work because all of the time my father was living, he was one of the men who thought that a woman's place was in the home. So she stayed and took care of the home. I was . . . I guess I must have been about five or six years old when I came back home then to my mother in Many. And I stayed with her from then on.

De Jong: [024] What did you father do before he died?

Stallworth: Well, way back there he was doing public work, whatever that was. And he was a straw boss, whatever that was. There was a white man who told him that was a white man's job and he wanted him to quit it, and my father wouldn't quit it. And he told him he would kill him if he didn't and he did.

De Jong: Oh really?

Stallworth: And he did. He killed him.

De Jong: So the white man killed your father for not giving up his job.

Stallworth: Yes and that left my mother with four children, three girls and a boy. Her sister took the boy. My grandmother took me and she kept two girls.

De Jong: Where did your mother work at?

Stallworth: She learned to do insurance work. She worked with insurance until my grandmother had to send me home, and I was too young to be left at home while she run around collecting insurance. So then the only thing else that she knew how to do was to wash and iron so she straight washing and ironing for white people. Plus she cleaned for them also.

De Jong: [042] Now the insurance company that she worked for, was that a white company or a black company?

Stallworth: Black company. Unity Life Insurance Company.

De Jong: Okay and she was an insurance collector?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: Okay. Do you remember anything about the white people she worked for? Did they treat her well or badly?

Stallworth: Yes, they treated her very good because they . . . I don't know whether it was sorrow or whether they thought it was just wrong what had happened, but they were very good to her and as I grew up, they were very good to me. I was the youngest of the four children and the others were much older than me and they would . . . she washed for one white lady who had a daughter and she would give me her daughter's clothes. And they weren't ragged clothes either. They were good clothes that she would give me and she would encourage me to stay in school and to go to church.

De Jong: And this was still in Many, Louisiana?

Stallworth: Pardon?

De Jong: [055] This was in Many?

Stallworth: Many, yes. This was in Many.

De Jong: Okay. So did you go to school in that parish, in Sabine Parish?

Stallworth: Yes, I went to school. I finished high school in Sabine Parish. At this time, I don't . . . I have never understood it but at this time, they gave you a teaching certificate when you finished high school. You passed a state teacher's examination and you passed a state academic examination. If you passed those two, then you were given a teaching certificate. So at the age of sixteen, I got a teaching certificate and I had always wanted to be a teacher because

there were teachers in my family and I started teaching at the age of sixteen. Now this wasn't a lifetime teacher certificate. I've never understood why I got a third grade certificate which was the lowest, and the lady my mother was washing and ironing for, her daughter got a first grade teaching certificate. However, she didn't have to start teaching. She was able to go on to college.

De Jong: College.

Stallworth: Yes. So I taught school and I was lucky. They had and I understand they still have some across the country, one-teacher schools. I never taught in a one-teacher school. I was always lucky to be placed and you were placed then in what they called an Elementary Vocational Agriculture School where children learned to work with their hands and boys learned to plow and to farm and those sorts of things. My mother carried me to work with her one Saturday and she said, she asked me—my middle name is Louise—she said, “Louise, what do you plan to do this summer?” I said, “I’m going to get me a job and work, I guess.” She said, “You don’t mean to go to summer school and try to extend your teaching certificate?” I said, “Well, I didn’t make enough money to save money to go out. I only made thirty dollars a month.” And she said, “Well, I guess you couldn’t. You’re doing well to be here on that.” And next week my mother went back. She talked to me. She said, “I talked to my husband.” Her husband was a doctor and they were from New York. They weren’t from Many. She said, “Louise, I talked with my husband and we think you need to go to summer school.” I said, “Well, I don’t have the money.” She said, “We want to let you have the money and we won’t charge you any interest but by the time school is out, we will want you to have that money paid

back.” So my mother said we could do it and I did. I went to school. I went to Southern University the first summer. But I didn’t get anything to help me with the children. I just had the courses and I didn’t like that, so the next year I got the same offer from the same people. I went to Grambling. At that time Grambling was a two-year institution. Grambling . . . so far back, I . . . but it was a two year institution and I went there. And for some reason, people saw me and saw how I was working and how hard I was working and heard my story. And the next year I received a letter that I had a scholarship of a hundred and twenty-five dollars and that would take me through summer school. [104] So I went back to Grambling and during the time, there was a health workshop going on and I was trying to teach health to the young people. And I could attend that workshop between classes and after classes in the summer. So I did that and I got credit for that. So from that, every summer I had some kind of scholarship. I didn’t have to worry about borrowing the money and paying it back. And I graduated from Grambling. By the time I graduated from Grambling, which was 1947, Grambling had some kind of relationship with Tuskegee Institute, and Tuskegee would use some of Grambling’s teachers and they would send some of their teachers down. I had finished high school out of that workshop. I finished college out of that workshop because one day the registrar called me in and I said, “Oh, the money’s out. I’m going to have to go home.” And he said, “We have some money and we don’t want it to go back. And we’ve checked your record and we want to send you upstairs.” That was to the graduate department from Tuskegee. I said, “I can’t do graduate work.” They said, “Well, let us worry about it. You just promise us you’re going to study. Then if you study, you can make it.” So I finished college out of the graduate workshop. So the next year, I got a full scholarship from that same workshop. I don’t know where all these . . . there were some

philanthropists out there who were . . . and Grambling was a small country . . . Have you ever heard of Grambling?

De Jong: I've heard of it. Yes.

Stallworth: [138] Well, it was a small country school and they were seeking funds from every . . . And we had some teachers who were going to Columbia University and some teachers who were going to U . . .

De Jong: UNO?

Stallworth: No, but the University of California.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: And those teachers would learn a lot about scholarships and programs and all that they were never told about from the Louisiana State Department of Education. And they would get all these different kinds of workshops, and we get these little twenty five and fifty dollars if we'd attend the workshop. And we would attend it at night or whatever time was available to us that we could go. So I think I have a pretty broad knowledge of teacher education with the kind of school, the kind of education that Grambling was offering. I had to go to Tuskegee. I went to Tuskegee in the summer. I was working. The year I graduated from Grambling I had been going to school. I didn't know what I had been going to school on, but I had been going to

school on an Anna T. Jeanes Fund. And that Anna T. Jeanes Fund, I learned later was a white woman who was interested in the plight of the black children in the South and when she died, she left a lot of money. They call it the Anna T. Jeanes Fund and it was to pay someone to work with the teachers in these small schools and help them to teach the children things that they needed to know more of it so they could make it when they would go to college. So they needed somebody to come down here and I didn't want to come. I was teaching by that time in Ville Platte, Louisiana in the high school department and I liked what I was doing. I liked those Creole people and we were getting along fine. I didn't want to come but my mother said, "Louise, they helped you when you needed help. Now it's your turn." [175] So back then, the children did what the parents wanted them to do. So that's how I got to Greensburg.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: And I came here in August 1947.

De Jong: Okay. When you first started out teaching, were you teaching in Sabine Parish?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: I taught in Sabine Parish.

De Jong: And then you attended the workshops and completed your college degree, and then they made you go to Tuskegee for a while?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: [181] And then you came back and taught in Ville Platte?

Stallworth: I was working in Ville Platte when I was going . . . all of my education has been through the summer.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: And I was working in Ville Platte while I was going to Tuskegee.

De Jong: Oh I see.

Stallworth: In the summer.

De Jong: I see. Okay. All right.

Stallworth: And when I finished Tuskegee, I came to . . .

De Jong: Greensburg.

Stallworth: . . . Greensburg.

De Jong: [187] Because that's where the Tuskegee people wanted you to go.

Stallworth: Let me see.

De Jong: Is it?

Stallworth: Well, I wrote this stuff but it's all mixed up.

De Jong: That's okay.

Stallworth: See I'm old now. I came here from Ville Platte.

De Jong: Right.

Stallworth: I came here from Ville Platte. Yes. Not here but Greensburg . . .

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: . . . from Ville Platte. And I came here before I finished Tuskegee. I came here the year I finished Grambling as a supervisor. I've never taught in the parish. I came as a supervisor . . .

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: [195] . . . frightened to death because we had all these teachers out there older than I and bigger than I but they were very nice people. And I've been . . . I retired in Greensburg in 1980 from the St. Helena Parish School Board.

De Jong: But you still . . . you told me you were still working at some place?

Stallworth: Pardon?

De Jong: You still work somewhere, don't you?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: Where is that again?

Stallworth: I work for the Council on Aging in Greensburg.

De Jong: That's a . . .

Stallworth: Council on Aging.

De Jong: [205] Oh, I get it. Council on Aging. Is that volunteer work or do they pay you for that.

Stallworth: I get a donation. That's what I tell them. I work for . . . well, it's a little bit above minimum wages.

De Jong: Okay. Do you have a pension or anything?

Stallworth: Do I have a pension?

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: Yes, I have retirement. I started work at teaching school in 1934 or '35 and in 1936 they instituted the teacher retirement system.

De Jong: Oh right.

Stallworth: So I worked forty-six and a half years for the State of Louisiana and in the schools in the parishes.

De Jong: Okay. Going back to when you were growing up, can you tell me anything about your mother and what kinds of things she taught you or did you gain any . . . the way you thought about life or the system, did you gain anything from her?

Stallworth: [220] Yes, I did. I learned that you have to work for what you get. I learned that you had to have a positive but a cordial attitude toward all people even though you might be put down. You have these beliefs and you don't show things through anger and all that. You just show it through your ability to do a job and that is the way that I always had. If there was a better job in teaching back there, I was lucky enough to get into one of the better schools always mainly because of my attitude toward my superiors. My grandmother, I remember a lot about her even though I was very young. The white man that killed my daddy, they came to her and said he was acting as though he was going to lose his mind and said Frank—that was my daddy's name—Frank worried him to death. He couldn't sleep for him. He couldn't eat for himself. He was just there all the time and they wanted to get him out, whatever kind of out was back in those days. And she told the officials who came to her—I was sitting in there—she said, “You don't expect me to answer you today, do you?” And they said, “Well, we would like for you to but if you can't answer today, if you think you're going to have an answer, tell us when to come back.” She said, “Give me a month to pray about it.” She said, “And the Lord will reveal to me what I should do.” And when they came back, she said, “Let the man go free.” She said, “He will never really be free no matter where he is but let the Lord do his work.” And she was very cordial about it and everything and there was no pressure put on her for it. She said she wanted it done that way. She wanted God to punish him. She said man could never punish him for killing her son. She said, “I want God to do it and he can't do it while man is trying.” So he was let out and that taught me something. It really taught me something. It has gone with me through all my trials and tribulations, my ups and my downs. I would take it to the Lord in prayer, and I'm eighty years old now and I'm still taking it to the Lord in prayer. He can handle things if you let him.

De Jong: [269] Do you know if your father was the kind of man who often stood up to white people or refused to do what they told him?

Stallworth: How do you mean?

De Jong: The white people told your grandmother that they thought he was going crazy, right?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: So would that have been because he was often acting like black people weren't supposed to act in a way? They weren't supposed to be aggressive and they weren't supposed to stand up for themselves. And I wonder if your father had when he refused to give up his job just because the white man told him to. And I'm wondering if that had been a pattern in his life whether he had been a very strong or a person who wouldn't give in easily kind of person, do you know?

Stallworth: Well, my mother said . . . I don't remember my father, but my mother said he was a strong believer in whatever he thought was right no matter who, and he said what he wanted to say to them and never backed down. So I guess that's where I got some of mine from even though I don't know him. During my forty-six and a half years, I haven't backed off of anything that I felt was right even though . . . go back to the Head Start days.

De Jong: [289] Oh, tell me about that.

Stallworth: Even during the Head Start . . . almost everybody in the state of Louisiana had a Head Start but Greensburg. I belonged to the Louisiana Education Association and I went to the president and I asked him. He said, "Lola, you're not afraid to try Head Start in Greensburg?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, we are sponsoring Head Starts and if you want to try it, we've got a spot." So we did. I didn't know this until it was early spring and it was summer Head Start then. I started asking. We had no teachers qualified for preschool education of children but we had some good first and second grade teachers. I started asking questions to the teachers, "What do you think about us having a Head Start?" They said, "No, these white folks aren't going to let us have no Head Start." I said, "Suppose we can get it, would you be afraid?" "I don't know. I just don't know. I'm not afraid, but I don't want them to bother me and they may take my job." Poor things did not know that as long as they met the tenure law in teaching, nobody could take their job. And that was the stand that I always took. I'm going to do my best. I'm going to follow this thing down, and I'm not going to go against the grain but I'm going to work with the flow. So I got enough of the first, second, and third grade teachers to say they were willing to try it and went back to the president of the LEA. I said, "We have people who will teach." I said, "Now they're going to have to have somewhere to teach." I said, "How do I go about getting?" And he told me how to approach the superintendent. [323] But back then, black people didn't go to the board meeting. He told me how to approach the superintendent, and he said, "You call Daniel Byrd's name when you talk with him and you call . . ." The name is gone. He died. He was a judge, Supreme Court Judge Marshal. He said, "You call Thurgood Marshall's name because they know you. You call those names and you tell them that they said they thought we

needed a Head Start to make living in St. Helena better, not to make it worse but to make it better.” So later he said, “You can try it but you aren’t going to be successful with it.” The biggest obstacle was it had to be integrated and this was 1965, before integration. Even though we had a visiting teacher—they called them back then. They have a high fluting name for them now. But they had this visiting teacher who kept the records of children entering school and I went to her, and I asked her if she would release her record to me of the children who were going to enter school in August. She said, “I don’t have that.” I said, “That’s strange. They told me at the state department I could get it from you.” She said, “Oh no, see we don’t have preschool roundup and all of that here. We just don’t do it.” Population in St. Helena is predominately black. At that time, we had more than twelve hundred black school-aged children and less than a thousand school age white children. She wouldn’t release any of the names of people who had these children because I was going to go to them to ask them if they would send their children to Head Start. So we had to figure out another step and we had a bus operator, teachers; we didn’t have no principals. We were afraid to fool with the principals because the school board kind of squeezed them in, and they had to do what the school board wanted them to do. But the bus operators were independent owners of their buses. So they could do what they pleased during the summer months. We got a committee of black people to go around knocking on doors, and it’s the strangest thing. They knocked on almost every door in St. Helena Parish and there was not a white family who said they had a child going to the first grade that year. Didn’t have a one. So well, what do we do now? We also had to have an integrated faculty. What are we going to do now? [381] The committee and I came back to the Louisiana Education Association and just happened, Thurgood Marshall was down visiting his good friend J.K. Hanes, and he said, “Lola, I thought you were a pretty bright girl.” He said, “But you don’t know a thing.” I said, “I guess

I don't." I said, "Tell me what I should know." He said, "You don't need but one white child." He said, "This is the white man's idea of integration. Put one black in there with all those whites and you're integrated." He said, "You go find you a white child from anywhere. It doesn't have to be from Greensburg, anywhere you can find him, if his parents can get him there." We came to Baton Rouge and we found a white teacher willing to come and teach, and that white teacher's neighbor had a little child and she brought that little child. So we had integrated. And how many centers did we have? This has been so long ago to . . . it's kind of hard. But we had four centers. We have four for Head Start.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: And we had this committee made up of citizens of the community, and we didn't have any teachers on that committee because despite the tenure law that would protect us, they still thought they could be fired. So we didn't have any but we had on that committee a teacher's husband. And then we had some citizens and some of the citizens had a lot of children and right here . . . that's the schools. So every time you get something going, you had another obstacle. I was called and said, "You've got to go in training. So you can't operate without going in training." And said, "It's just a five day workshop."

De Jong: [428] Okay.

Stallworth: So they tried LSU. They were already crowded out. It was late. They tried Southern University. They were crowded out. And they tried Grambling and the resident of

Grambling called me and said, "What in the world are you trying to do down there?" And I said, "We want to have a Head Start." He said, "Do you know what you're getting into?" I said, "I sure don't." I said, "Everybody else is getting one and I thought we should have one too." He said, "Now, you know I'm going to find some room in a corner somewhere for a five day workshop for St. Helena Parish." He said, "But I don't want y'all to back out on me now." I said, "They won't." And this was on a Friday night that he called me. We had to be there for Monday. I said, "How am I going to get these people. They're not going to want to go. We don't have enough transportation. I don't know what we're going to do." My husband said, "Call them together and tell them to bring their husbands with them and tell them to meet." We met at our house. So we got the word out and they came to a meeting at my house on a Saturday night. And we told them what was happening and all. They said, "That isn't no problem. How many people you got?" I said, "I haven't stopped to count them actually but we have teachers, and we have custodians, and we have nutrition people who have to go." We had one big burly black man there who was half white and he said, "Get them together." Then he started asking, "You have a good car? You have no car? Can your car go?" "Well, it needs servicing." "Well I'll arrange for the servicing." So he arranged and I guess money changed people's mind because he arranged for all those cars to get serviced. And the garage was closed on Saturday afternoon and we had to leave that Sunday so we'd be at Grambling Monday morning ready to go to class. [478] But anyway, those cars were serviced and those teachers went to Grambling for a week, and they said it was the best time they had ever spent anywhere. They had a good time. They learned a lot and they were very, very happy. And somehow we got the little group that was working because there was always this outside group agitating, but we got this little group that was working to believe that come August, you're going to have your teaching position

or we're going to take the school board to court. And we managed and . . . of course my life was threatened. My life wasn't really threatened. They tried to scare me. It was a scary tactic that they were using but I went to the superintendent and I told him that I needed to direct this first Head Start. He said, "You can't do that. You're already on the payroll. You work year around." I said, "Well, if I can do my supervisory work and do this Head Start, could I do that?" And he said, "I guess so. I'll talk to the board." But by that time, we were having federal people coming in and we were having CORE coming in. And we had some of those CORE people. They were actually afraid of those CORE people because they didn't talk. When they would drive, see them on the highway or something, that's all they would do. They wouldn't say a word.

De Jong: [517] Just make a peace sign.

Stallworth: Yes. And they didn't bother and we had those centers. Nobody bothered.

De Jong: Do you think the white people were a little bit afraid of CORE and the federal government coming in and . . . ?

Stallworth: Yes. That's what they were afraid of. Now in St. Helena Parish that's one thing. If they think that you have any connections, any kind of way with the federal government, you can get by with whatever. We had one case of the Klan when we were trying to get registered to vote. A small group went that morning and a man met us with a shotgun. We were told that this might happen and what for us to do. So when he threatened us, we just turned and walked away. But when we turned and walked away, the feds were already there because they were expecting

it. And we went on just like we didn't know what was happening and all. This was the first primary. They were begging us to come back in the second primary. So we went back and we've been voting ever since.

De Jong: [547] Was that in the 1960s?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: Back in the sixties. It was kind of rough but it could have been . . . it wasn't nearly as rough as it was in some places because these people were afraid of the federal government and so much of what they have . . . see we are a poverty parish, so much of what we get come from the federal government, and they were not going to cut the hand that was feeding their mouths.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: But if they could have got us to back down, they would have.

De Jong: Y'all have been registered to vote since the fifties, haven't you? Were you involved in the NAACP?

Stallworth: We started back I don't know exactly but we started long before we got registered.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: [566] It didn't happen overnight. We started long and we couldn't hold any public meetings. Schools were the only places available to have public meetings and all. And preachers were afraid to let you do it in the churches. And we had a hard time. We would have to get small groups of people and slip off in the woods, way away to where somebody who was not afraid and hold our meetings. And then we would make ourselves sort of delegate. [knock on door] Excuse me.

[End Tape 1514, Side A. Begin Tape 1514, Side B.]

Stallworth: . . . committee. We had two women and one, two, three, four, five men and we could depend on that citizens committee to do. We would take them to Baton Rouge to meet with the lawyers to keep us on the right track because you had to know what you were doing when you walked out there. Now this announcement about the Head Starts came through the—what they called then—the welfare office. And we never heard a word about it. We were never told anything about it. We didn't know how to get it or what to do until the Louisiana Education Association stepped in and helped us. And then the man said yes, he had gotten the information but he wasn't interested in it. So that's how come we didn't ever know what was going on. We just didn't have any open communications. The same thing with the Council on Aging where I

work . . . we were the last parish to get a Council on Aging and I can't remember what year that was. I can't remember but it was before I retired and somehow . . . I don't know how we got the information on the Council of Aging to tell you the truth but somehow we got it. And there was a black woman working for the Louisiana Extension Department and I talked with her about it, and she said, "Yes, Dee. [017] They have those all over the state." Said, "I don't know why they don't have one here." And I said, "Well, if they have them everywhere, we're supposed to have one too." And my boss man, the superintendent was going to the meeting. He was on this particular board whatever it was that was meeting, and I just asked him out of the clear blue sky. I thought he was going to say no because it was on work time. I said, "Are you going to go to that meeting?" "Yes, if you want to. There isn't nothing in it. I just go because I'm on the board but you can go." And I went and then I asked the question—they asked if anybody had a question—if that particular committee knew anything about the Council on Aging and you talk about silence. There was total silence and my boss man got up and started clearing his throat because he knew. And the Agricultural Extension of men . . . they have men and they have ladies. The man said, "Mrs. Stallworth, if you want to know something about the Council on Aging, come by my office. I have some information." And that's the way we got started with Council on Aging. I mean it hasn't been an easy thing to do but I guess my mother and my grandmother taught me not to be afraid but neither tried to push in knowing everything and demanding things. Work it out and we have been successful. When I went to St. Helena Parish, we had twenty-seven black schools and we had six white schools. We had one high school and the whites had one, two, three. They did have four but then they consolidated one because of a lack of students. But the blacks, we had . . . the high school was the only school housed in a school building. We went to school in churches until World War Two and then the courts and all

of that. And we are still coming through it down there. We are still coming through it. We haven't arrived. We've got a long ways to go yet. And sometimes I think we're going backwards.

De Jong: [065] A lot of people have said that to me.

Stallworth: Yes. I think we're going backwards. We get wrapped up in money and I'm not saying we don't need money. We have to have it.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: But when the whole thing is centered around money, we lose what we're fighting for. When I went to St. Helena Parish, a black teacher could not go to the bank and borrow money unless she signed her check to go to the bank. And she would go to the bank to get what was left. She paid her note and then they'd give her what was left. I thought that was the most ridiculous. I was taught that school teaching was something. You were somebody when you were a schoolteacher and I just couldn't see demeaning oneself like that. I'm supposed to be one of the most trustworthy people. They trust their children with us, and here we can't go and borrow. And you could borrow no more than you could pay back during the school year.

De Jong: [083] Okay.

Stallworth: So then, that bothered me. I went to the Louisiana Educational Association, and I said, "I'm off down here in this parish that don't know slaves have been freed, and I don't know what we're going to do." And I told them the story and they said, "Well, how would you like to work up a credit union?" Here I go, never heard of credit union before and I said, "Well, yes. What do you do?" And they said what you do and you work up the credit union. And so I called together bus drivers, teachers, custodians, and lunchroom workers, and some of them said that they didn't have no money to put in no credit union and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But we got enough people that we could apply for it, but Louisiana turned us down flat. They said you have less than a hundred employees and looking at the record, we don't see any progress in St. Helena Parish soon. It wouldn't be worth the try. They sent our little check back that we had sent them for membership. So then I went back to the LEA. So they said "Well, let's try federal." So federal took us like that and everybody who worked the credit union were volunteer workers. We had no money so they were all volunteers and it's still going on. It's going slowly, much more slowly than I had anticipated after people started making more money, but then they started buying bigger cars and brand shoes and all that kind of stuff. But we're moving toward a million dollars and we don't have too many people that refuse to pay and all, but here again that was a fight.

De Jong: [109] When did you set that up? Do you remember?

Stallworth: I don't remember and I tried to find out this morning. I tried to call the credit union and it wasn't open this morning when I called. See I have all that at home. I have the records at home.

De Jong: Was it around the civil rights movement or later or before?

Stallworth: Before, I think.

De Jong: So maybe in the 1950s? Would that be right? 1940s?

Stallworth: It wasn't in the forties but it was either . . . it might have been early sixties.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: Gosh. I'm going to send you that and the names of the people who were responsible.

De Jong: Oh lovely. For the union?

Stallworth: For the credit union. Yes.

De Jong: Okay. That would be good.

Stallworth: [120] Because there's so much I don't remember now. I guess when you get eighty, you just don't remember.

De Jong: That's okay.

Stallworth: I was trying to write those people's name down this morning, and I could not think of but four people's name but it was more than four people. I mean I called them but nobody answered so I guess they got a day off. I called them too early or something.

De Jong: You were married at one time?

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: When did you get married?

Stallworth: I got married back in . . . I always have to stop and think and I shouldn't have to stop and think about when I got married. I got married in 1937.

De Jong: Okay. What did your husband do?

Stallworth: [130] At that time my husband was an insurance man and he was an orderly at Baton Rouge General Hospital. And some doctor was in there. He finished college at Southern University, and this doctor was talking with him and he told him he had been watching him. He said, "You need to be in somebody's classroom teaching children." And he told me. He said well, I don't have a teaching certificate because when I went to college, he struggled just like I did. When I went to college, I was not able to go out in the state to do practice work and I just got a B.A. degree instead of a B.S. degree. And somehow he got him interested in going back to Southern University. He went back and qualified for math and this is when he started working in

Greensburg. Then we didn't have a counselor but all the kids came to him for counseling. And I said, "You might as well get paid for it. Why don't you go to school and be a counselor?" We'd go to Los Angeles every summer. We'd carry my mother and she would not fly. So we had to drive her to Los Angeles. I said, "When we carry mamma to Los Angeles, you go to school." So he did. He finished from USC. I don't have any biological children but I had this little girl who came to me and asked me, could she come and live with me. And soon after I got to Greensburg, I said, "Well, I'll find out." And so I told my husband. He said, "Why she want to come live with you?" I said, "I don't know." But anyway we told her to come on, and she did and she's been wonderful. She's been wonderful. After she got to be an adult, I asked her. I said, "Irma, tell me." I said, "You were not an unwanted child. You came to school just as pretty and clean every day, and your people in California were always sending you nice things and all that. Why did you want to come live with me?" She said, "Because I wanted to be a teacher and I knew my mother was not going to be able to send me to college. And I said I'm going to live with Mrs. Dee." So she came. She stayed with me. Then I had another girl who came and stayed with me. I got three foster daughters and one adopted son.

De Jong: [168] And is that . . .

Stallworth: This is Harold.

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: So we . . .

De Jong: When you were getting involved in the civil rights movement, was your husband still around then and what did he think of . . . did he support you in any way?

Stallworth: He supported me everything that . . . he never had too much to say and nobody . . . you know how you can read people? You couldn't read him. The white people tried to read him and he'd just moseyed on along. But he supported me in everything that I did. He supported me. And we were married fifty-four years. Kind of rough being without him.

De Jong: [181] Can you explain . . .

Stallworth: You asked somewhere on there something about something that you remembered.

De Jong: What?

Stallworth: Let's see what did I see that said when I was a child, the Ku Klux Klan visited our church . . .

De Jong: Oh okay.

Stallworth: . . . once. They were having a meeting and they had out of town and out of state ministers at this meeting and that night, they were having church and they had this minister. I don't know where he was from. I was a child and those people came in there with their hoods on and everything and just marched around inside the church. And this minister was up there and

he preached right on whatever he was preaching about and they went on out. After they had gone out, he said, "You know we should've had a little heavenly action in here but I guess we didn't think about it." He said, "Now you see those people. We don't know who they are but we should have started shouting. Everybody should have started shouting, had a good . . . and shouted those robes off those people." [laughs] And that has stayed with me. The next thing about the Ku Klux Klan in St. Helena when we had these people in different communities organized and learning how to vote. And they had to learn something. I forgot what they had to learn now but anyway, we would teach them whatever it was they had to learn and they didn't seem to be frightening the people at all. All of the printed material they would throw out and all that. Nobody paid any attention to it. So they decided to go down one night in a truck to one of the leader's homes and they were going to burn a cross. And later, the man got out to . . . they say the cross is sharp on the end and you do that to set them up. And one does that and set them up and one light it, and they get away. But when the man bent over to . . . the black man shot him in the behind. The other people got in the truck and ran away.

De Jong: [218] Do you remember who the black man was?

Stallworth: I don't know that man's first name but he was a Lee.

De Jong: Oh really.

Stallworth: Yes. He was a Lee. But they carried him to Baton Rouge General. My husband was working there as an orderly and when he came home that weekend, he said, "You all out

here shooting the Ku Klux up, huh?" I said, "Who told you that and how do you know that?" He said, "They brought him to the Baton Rouge General and said they didn't know where I was from, and they told him he's from Greensburg." So those are two instances that I'll never forget. Oh boy. We've had some pretty hard times.

De Jong: It seems to me that black people quite often fought back against threats and intimidation.

Stallworth: [233] You know that's what I can't understand now. What's happening is because the blacks in St. Helena Parish have always fought back. They are homeowners. They are landowners. They are business people. They do their own job. They do their own thing. But right now, you can't get anybody to bite the bullet and I can't understand that. We're going to lose everything that we got right now. And I know you've read about voter incidents here where people buy the black vote, and we have tried to teach against that but they don't seem to understand that. Then they come back and they want the police jury to do certain things, like their road is bad and blah, blah, blah, blah. I tell them. I said, "They don't owe you nothing." I said, "Didn't you promise to vote for somebody if they gave you a six pack of beer?" I say, "That's your pay." I said, "When you pay for something, you don't owe anymore." "Well, I am not going to do that no more." And the next time, they do it again. They . . .

De Jong: When you were talking about Head Start earlier, you mentioned an outside group agitating. Can you explain who they were? Were they giving you trouble with the program?

Stallworth: No, they didn't. It was just agitation. It was trying to frighten those people off from sending their children to Head Start.

De Jong: Right. So these were white?

Stallworth: But they never did come to the Head Start and do anything.

De Jong: Oh.

Stallworth: [262] But they tried to frighten the people. And I guess we're going to have to get us another CORE group to come to protect us so we won't be afraid. Because we weren't afraid when those CORE people were around. And my office was on the high school campus and of course it became the Head Start office. And there was two CORE people who everyday came, sat out under a tree right across from where they could see in the office. And I don't know if they were reading but they would always have a book and they would sit there and sit there. They never accepted a drink of water. They never accepted a cold drink. Nothing. "No, thank you. I'm doing fine." "No, thank you. I'm doing fine." "Are you doing all right?" And that was it. And if we got there before they did some mornings, we were wondering where's our friend who sits under the tree. But those CORE people were . . . just their presence meant so much.

De Jong: Yes. How did they come to be there? Did the local people invite them in or did they approach you? How did that work?

Stallworth: [282] When I knew anything, they were there. I don't know how they got there.

De Jong: They were just there.

Stallworth: And when I knew anything, they were there and I was glad of it.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: But how they got there, I'll never know because they didn't talk to us. They didn't talk to us. They didn't say anything. And when somebody would come and we'd go out to visit the Head Start centers, I had to go with this person and they said some things about me riding with a white man and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah but that didn't bother me at all. He had his job to do and he didn't know the way to the schools so somebody had to carry him to the centers.

De Jong: Yes. Can you explain the teacher tenure law? I've read about it but I'm not exactly clear on how it worked. As I understand it, teachers didn't get tenure until after they had worked for a few years. Is that right?

Stallworth: [302] Oh, yes. That's right now.

De Jong: Now.

Stallworth: The tenure law is you do not have tenure until you start working on the fourth year.

De Jong: Right. And did that apply back then as well? I mean were there younger teachers who didn't have tenure?

Stallworth: With the older teachers when the law came in, they were "grandfathered in." They had been working so many years and they didn't have to work four years before they got tenure, three years and start on the fourth year. But any beginning teacher that does not have tenure simply because he signed a contract to work this year . . .

De Jong: Okay.

Stallworth: . . . he has to work one day on that fourth year before he has tenure. They are on probation. That's my son.

De Jong: [320] I know that a lot of teachers stayed out of the movement. As you said, "They were afraid of losing their jobs."

Stallworth: Yes.

De Jong: So what kinds of people were involved, did become involved?

Stallworth: Well, as I said, we had some citizens who came in and worked hard. Now teachers who were on the job and doing their work were not too concerned but we had people—you can't put this in your writing because I can't prove it—we had people who they say were paying for their jobs.

De Jong: Teachers?

Stallworth: Yes. Teachers were paying for their jobs and they were fraidy cats.

De Jong: Fraidy cats.

Stallworth: Yes, they were fraidy cats. Then we had people who were teaching that were not good at it. Naturally they were . . . but the teachers who were, they didn't want to become a part of the movement but they knew their rights. We had one lady that I always refer to. Her name is Imogene Knighten. Her husband Clarence Knighten was one of the men in the struggle and Imogene was with us all the way. Whatever we wanted to do, however we wanted to do it, she was right there and she wasn't afraid. But she was doing her job and she didn't have anything to be afraid of.

De Jong: So they never tried to fire you, the white people?

Stallworth: [347] No. No. They never that I knew of. Nobody ever bothered me, but for instance, when they equalized salaries, they equalized everybody's salary but mine. And I said,

“Well, I guess it’s taking up time to work this out.” That’s what my husband told me. It’s going to take them some time to work this out. So finally one day, I figured time was out for that because they were supposed to start doing it in July and it was November and I asked the bookkeeper about my salary. I said, “My salary is remaining the same.” I said, “And I’m certified and I’m qualified and why or when?” I said, “Tell me something.” He said, “Yes, I’ll tell you. They told me just go on and make your check like they told me to change it.” And I said, “Okay.” I said, “That’s fine.” I said, “You give this check back to them and tell them I said keep it until they make a decision but they better hurry up and make it.” In two days I had my check with all my back pay. I don’t know whether they were trying to get me to quit or just what they were doing. But openly they would question principals about me and some of the principals would tell me. By the way we had one principal and he was one of the main informants to school board people and the superintendent. When they integrated the school where he was principal, one day a white teacher kicked a black student. The child’s grandmother was a lunchroom worker—we called them then—the cafeteria, I don’t know something else now. But they were lunchroom workers back then. And she knew where her husband was working and she just took her apron off and went and told her husband. And her husband came up there and somebody told the principal that Mrs. Toney is going to get Mr. Toney. And Mr. and Mrs. Toney were bad people. But when he saw them coming back, he asked them to come in the office and Mr. Toney told him what he’d come there to do. [392] He had come there to beat the hell out that man that kicked his grandchild. And he said, “I don’t want to kill him.” He said, “But you don’t [?]. If he’s in his room, he can whip him, whatever it takes to get his attention but don’t kick him.” Well, the teacher got afraid and left. And he went to the school board office and told them about the incident and the superintendent called the principal in. And they

said, "The school board is talking about firing you. You let Mr. Toney come there on the job and you shouldn't have let him come on the job." And blah, blah, blah. That poor man was so scared he came to me. Now he was one of the people who had told the white people that I was trying to get a bank against the bank that they had in Greensburg and every move that I made, he was one of the informants. So he came and he said, "I want you to call Mr. Haynes." And Mr. Haynes is the President of the Louisiana Education Association. And I said, "Well, I can give you his number and you can call him." "No, no. I want you to call him. He'll come if you call him. He may not come if I call him." So I called Mr. Haynes and I told him what had happened. He said, "Do you want us to protect him or do you want us to let those white folks beat him up?" I said, "Well," I said, "He's a good man. Let's protect him." So he told him what to do and all. He said, "Now they can't fire you but they can call you before the board, and you let them know you are willing to come before the board to tell your side of the story." So the day that the board was meeting—by this time they had moved me up in the school board office—Mr. Jones stepped in. And Mr. Jones was one of these tall black men, big burly man. And he came in. That was our representative for protection and when he came in and the superintendent saw him out there, he went in his office and told the secretary to tell me to come to his office. I was in my office. So he said, "That fellow out there, who is he?" And I told him. He said, "Well, why is he here?" I said, "Is Mr. Matthews supposed to come before the board this morning?" He said, "Yes." I said, "That's his protection." I don't know what they did but Mr. Matthews didn't come before the board. And Mr. Jones just set up out there until all of the . . . I invited him in my office. He said, "No, I want to stay close to this door so I can run." [441] And he sat right there until the board meeting was over and everybody left. We haven't heard anymore from that. But teachers are protected. If they're doing their job, they are protected. And the Louisiana Education

Association is the J. K. Haynes Foundation now. The name has changed because associations had to integrate. They named the other one LAE and that's the association that protects teachers now. Well, that's just about it.

De Jong: [476] That's about all the questions but the one thing. After you set up Head Start, which I think was around 1966 or '67 when you finally got it going well anyway, how long did you keep Head Start going after you were able set it up?

Stallworth: Oh, we did Head Start that summer. Then they integrated a school. They consolidated, not integrated, consolidated a school. The name of the school was Centerville and the board accepted the responsibility of carrying out the Head Start program.

De Jong: Oh.

Stallworth: So they did it one year and they had this board that was over them, the Regina Chile Board. They decided that they wanted to manage St. Helena Head Start. So that's who has it now. Now we have a Head Start building and we have qualified Head Start people. They have to be trained to work for Head Start and we have qualified people. And I talked with the director this morning. They have a summer program going. They have thirty-seven children in the summer program and she said they weren't supposed to have but thirty but they let them take the extra seven and they're getting along good. But here again my church that I belong to, we have land. Head Start wanted to buy to build on church property. And after so many years, the

building would become the property of the church. My pastor turned that down flat because I guess he's afraid of the federal government.

De Jong: Why would he be afraid?

Stallworth: I can't understand. Like a lady who called me yesterday said, "I intended to come and see you but I can't come see you today because I've got to go meet those income tax people and I'm just so scared. I'm scared to death." I said, "What are you scared of? Did you tell them the truth on your . . .

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: [530] Evidently she didn't tell the truth. I can't understand what people are afraid of if you're right. And even if you get shot down for it, there are always people who have always gotten killed for trying to do things. But we have a good Head Start program now. The children used to have to ride the public school buses and the school board was just fussing all the time about paying for them Head Start children and all. They have two buses of their own and they're doing real good.

De Jong: That's good.

Stallworth: I don't know of anything that I started with that has failed as yet.

De Jong: That must be a good feeling.

Stallworth: It is.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: It's a good feeling because if things didn't last, you would say, "Well, what was wrong?" But we have our own water works system in Greensburg. We named it the Crossroads Waterworks and credit union is still going. Head Start is still going and we're still voting even though I'm not happy with it at the way it's going.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: [561] And things are working pretty good if we could just do something and get it on track. That's what bothers me is because at the rate we are going, it will soon be too late to try to get on track. We'll be too far-gone. But I don't know. I don't know. All that stuff, I know you read about our sheriff and all of that.

De Jong: Yes.

Stallworth: And by the way, this was the sheriff's daddy that got shot in the behind.

De Jong: Oh, was it really? Do you remember his name?

Stallworth: I don't know what . . . mister . . . I don't know what his name is.

De Jong: I'll see if I can find out. Thank you very much Mrs. Stallworth. You've been very helpful.

[End Tape 1514, Side B. End Session I.]