

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
Methodist University
Fayetteville, NC

Melinda Cotton Carlton

Interview Conducted by
Rachel Carlton
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Descriptive Table of Contents:

0:01

-Introduction of subject

0:21

-Subject's full name [Melinda Cotton Carlton]

0:47

-Details about where subject grew up, father was a tobacco farmer.

1:23

-Details of mother's work history.

2:09

- Subject talks about how difficult it was for her mother to become nurse.

8:22

- Opinion about how the government was growing up.
- Talks about how her father was dead against the feminist movement.
- There was a feminist movement at her work, discussion about that.

10:39

- Details of the support the movement had.

12:16

-Discussion about how some women didn't support it and why.

20:11

-Discussion about if and when she thought things started to change.

20:34

-She thinks that things started to change because of Civil Rights Movement, if employers didn't act upon it, they would get ridiculed.

22:08

-Response on if people have changed the way they act; subject agrees that things have slowly started to get better over time.

22:52

-Subject believes we will have a woman president in the next 8 years.

Interview of

MELINDA COTTON CARLTON

Interviewed by

RACHEL CARLTON

0:01

R.CARLTON: Hello, I am Rachel Carlton and I am here with my interview subject, Melinda Carlton, we are in Fayetteville, North Carolina and it is 5:20 PM on Tuesday November 17th. All right, hello and would you like to start with telling us your full name?

0:21

M.CARLTON: My name is Melinda Cotton Carlton.

0:43

R.CARLTON: All right, would you like to tell me a little about Grantham?

0:47

M.CARLTON: Grantham is a very rural farming community, sort of in the Bible belt, type of community. There was, back when I was a child, there was a lot of tobacco farmers, in fact my dad was a, (like a) 100-acre tobacco farmer, you know he had sweet potatoes and all kinds of crops. But it's basically a farming community.

1:18

R.CARLTON: All right, now you mentioned your father, what about your mother? What was she like? What did she do?

1:23

M.CARLTON: My mother, (um) was a very women's woman. When she met my father, she was a telephone operator and she did that for a couple of years and then she went to beauty school and became a beautician, and she always had her life goal, was to always become a nurse. So, when I was 10 years old, and my little sister was 2, my mother became a nurse and fulfilled her dream. And she was a nurse for 25 years before she retired.

1:58

R.CARLTON: All right, sounds good. Do you know what that was like for her, to become a nurse? Because you said she had to go through multiple steps to become a nurse, do you know what that was like for her?

2:09

M.CARLTON: It was extremely difficult for her, I was a child running around but I do remember my father was dead against my mother becoming a nurse. You know, he thought-- he always wanted her—there was always this controversy, between the two of them, where he wanted her to stay home, and you know, make sure he had meals on the table, helping with the crops if he needed her, but you know, she-- that's not what she wanted for her life, she wanted to be an independent woman, and, so that's what she did. And she basically just—you know, it wasn't easy for her, because he didn't help her a lot, you know, when she was in nursing school. I can remember her getting up at like 4 o'clock in the morning, and studying for hours. Until it was

time for us to get up, but she always had a hot meal on the table in the morning and lunch there for us, and dinner there for us. She was amazing.

8:07

R.CARLTON: All right, okay, so now I am going to talk about the government. How was the government, you know, as you were younger? And how did it transition into your pre-adulthood years and even your later adulthood years? How did it change?

8:22

M.CARLTON: You know, like I said, I was born in 1963, so I don't remember a lot about the feminist movement, but I do remember you know, the relationship between my father and mother, it was very difficult and you know my dad was dead against the feminist movement, he thought the women was supposed to be at home, and most of the farmers wives in this community were at home, they were at home, helping their mothers/husbands but my mother was different she has always been sort of a feminist, and she did what she wanted to do, it was her way or the highway. So there was a lot of controversy between them two. But I do remember when I got my first job in the 80s, me and several of my friends that were radiologist's techs, we found out that the men were getting paid more than us, so there was one particular girl that started this big, I guess you would call it a movement, in the radiology department, and we had several meetings and met with several hospital authorities and we got our pay raised. I got my pay raised from like nine dollars an hour to like thirteen dollars an hour, during that time and it progressively, I think around that time was when they looked at the job description—I think that was around the time that Wayne memorial changed everything, they

put everybody on the same scale, and so my pay dramatically went up. I was making over thirty-five dollars an hour when I retired in 2012.

10:21

R.CARLTON: Right, so you said your friend started the feminist movement at Wayne Memorial, so you supported her? What all did you do to help move along that movement? Because I know it would be hard for her to just to do it by herself, you know?

10:39

M.CARLTON: Yeah, I supported—there were several of us that supported her. But she was good at doing the paperwork part of it. But we would always show up, you know support—in the meetings, the ones that were for it, which were a lot of women, we were there having her back. And she was the one that did the good paperwork organization and she got all her facts--she was good at doing that—but I think she's the main one that started it and got everything going for the rest of us, but like I said we were all there to back her. And you know, you have better things happen with numbers. So she had a lot of the girls in the X-ray department that would stand up for her, that took a little bit on our part, because you know they could've said, okay were going to get rid of y'all and hire new people and just forget about this "hoorah" y'all are raising. But they didn't, I think they realized that we were good employees, that we were dedicated employees, we never missed work and they gave us basically what we wanted so it was great, and you know I always commended her for that, even in the future I would say Tammy's the one that got this started, because she did, she really helped us all out.

12:07

R.CARLTON: Now were there—I know you said you supported it, were there any women that did not support it or just kind of like laid back and behind the scenes?

12:16

M.CARLTON: Yes, definitely there were some women that laid back. Some of the older ladies didn't want to have any part of it. I think they were scared that they would be fired or they would—because any time you get older in a job, there's always—you have this fear, especially if you're a woman, you have this fear of them replacing you for a younger person that doesn't require as much money as your making, but that was basically it.

19:56

R.CARLTON: Now, when do you think that things started to change? Like in the government, or just the world in general? For the good or for the bad; when do you remember kind of a drastic change in the world?

20:11

M.CARLTON: I don't think it was until the late 80s or early 90s before I really saw a difference in the way employers were treating the people they hired differently.

20:25

R.CARLTON: And you think that's because of the Civil Rights Movement? —Or what?

20:34

M.CARLTON: Well, in a way I really think it had to be because--the employers were getting a lot of flack from that. Any time there's some kind of big movement, just for instance the gay rights that came out years ago, where gays weren't getting jobs and they weren't getting hired and stuff like that, there was a big movement with that at my job, you know I remember, we had to go to several meetings on that very subject of you know, treating people the same, not treating any one different just because they were gay—but I think when there's any kind of big movement going on in your state or your country that it sort of forces the employers to act upon it, if they don't their going to get ridiculed. So, they really have to.

21:56

R.CARLTON: What about now? How do you think things are now? Like the feminist movement, how do you think people act now a day? Do people still have that mindset of--?

22:08

M.CARLTON: Well, I think in some ways, they do have that mindset, but then I think some people don't. I see in government that they basically don't have that mindset anymore, although I know some people do. But there are women running for president, women doing all these various other jobs in politics. So, you know, I do think it is getting better.

22:42

R.CARLTON: Yeah, it's definitely a slow progress, I think because we still haven't had a woman president yet, were still in the making of that.

22:52

M.CARLTON: But I think it will come, I definitely think in the next 8 years it will come, we will have a woman president.