

Methodist University Community Oral History Project

Methodist University

Fayetteville, NC

Wanda Jeanne Hunter

Interviewed conducted by

Laura Allred

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Fayetteville, NC

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Interview of

WANDA JEANNE HUNTER

Interviewed by

LAURA ALLRED

0:01

ALLRED: So, my name is Laura Allred, and today I will be interviewing Wanda Hunter on the subject of the Jim Crow era and civil rights. Wanda, do you mind stating your full name, date of birth, and where you were born?

0:21

HUNTER: Wanda Jeanne Hunter. Date of birth is January the first, 1951, and I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina.

0:34

ALLRED: Okay. You have recently told me in the beginning, just before our interview, that by the time you had gone to college that the Civil Rights movement was almost over. Can you explain, like, the little bit of detail how college life was for you?

0:50

HUNTER: Well, at first I attended community college and decided it wasn't for me, and then I went to a private school, which was St. Augustine's College in Raleigh.

1:08

ALLRED: What year was that?

1:09

HUNTER: And that was 1970. '70, '71, and then I transferred from St. Augustine's College to the North Carolina Central University in Durham, and graduated in 1975. And then—.

1:33

ALLRED: What did you earn your degree in?

1:34

HUNTER: My degree was in Health Education with a concentration in community organization. And that allowed me to work in the health organization like the American Cancer Society and the Heart Association, those types of agencies.

1:53

ALLRED: Did you ever go to graduate school or anything?

1:55

HUNTER: Well, I went to graduate school after I got married and had my child and I was in my forties. So, yes, I went back to North Carolina Central University, where I obtained a Master's degree in Library Science.

2:11

ALLRED: What was your first paid job?

2:13

HUNTER: My first paid job was with the American Cancer Society as a field director in Hyattsville, Maryland.

2:24

ALLRED: And there was, like, no effects of Civil Rights movement during that time?

2:26

HUNTER: No, the only thing that I saw that was—. They interviewed me three times for the position, because I was the first black in their office, which I thought was sort of odd. But, I realized that they were trying to get the right person because I would have to work with all races, so I could understand that.

2:52

ALLRED: Absolutely. Was there any differences between, you know, gender—like, was there, like, more of the—? Let's just say, were the men and the women treated differently when they were applying for jobs or anything?

3:07

HUNTER: I don't think so. We had about the same number of men and women, except the executive direct was a male—of the whole state—and my unit's manager or executive was a male. But we had—I worked with another white woman and a Jewish man with also field directors.

3:40

ALLRED: Okay, so there was no racial, no religion differences?

3:43

HUNTER: No.

3:34

ALLRED: Then that's really good, then. [Laughs.] So let's go back to the beginning. How many members were in your family?

3:52

HUNTER: I had four brothers, one sister, mom and dad, and then grandma and the first cousin.

4:03

ALLRED: Oh wow, that's a family! Were you the oldest, or the youngest, or the middle child?

4:11

HUNTER: I'm the second child. I have an older sister and I have four younger brothers.

4:18

ALLRED: Oh, wow. So can you tell me how, like, you know, the family life was whenever you were growing up through that time?

4:21

HUNTER: Well, I remember my mother working—she did domestic work—and my grandmother babysat us, around the time I must have been about eight years old. ‘Cause I don’t remember us having a babysitter until me being about the third grade. And it was my grandmother, because she lived down the road from us at that time.

4:53

ALLRED: So pretty much all family members lived close in range?

4:56

HUNTER: Yeah, my grandmother—my grandmother at first lived with others, with her son, and then later on she came to live with us, so that’s how she got in the household with us.

5:17

ALLRED: At least she was close by. So, whenever you were growing up through your childhood, did you ever have the chance to travel?

5:21

HUNTER: Well, we went to the Virginia line. The Virginia line, there was a state park up there, which is now Kerr Lake, but at that time it was called—some kind of park. [Hunter may be referring to Occoneechee State Park in Virginia.] We went there, because—it was segregated—but we went there, and it was, like, a man-made lake and it has a man-made beach, so we had a picnic and played in the water, came home. And that’s the only place I remembered going as a child, except when I was about I guess seventeen: we went to Myrtle Beach, and Myrtle Beach had a section, also, for African Americans. And we went there one time. But other than that, no traveling outside of North Carolina.

6:10

ALLRED: Okay. So how was North Carolina—whenever you were growing up here, even though you didn’t do much of the traveling, how was, like, you know, the Jim Crow?

6:23

HUNTER: Okay, I remember my school until I was in the tenth grade—no, I’m sorry, until I was in the eleventh grade—I went to a segregated school, so we had two buses coming to the same road. One bus went—was for the white children—they went to Millbrook High School; the other bus was with the black kids and we had to be bused over to Cary (Raleigh). So, they built a school for us over in Cary, which is way out of our way, and that was called West Cary High School. And then two years later, they built a new Millbrook High School, and then we went back to Millbrook. But I didn’t stay at Millbrook. I went to live in the city with my other, my paternal, grandmother, and went to school at Enloe High School, and that’s where I graduated: WG Enloe High School. But the other thing I remember, I remember I used to babysit a lot for

white people's children, and there was one family that I was particularly fond of and they were fond of me 'cause I liked their two little boys, and they would spend a week at Wrightsville Beach. And they would ask me to go along with them, and the only thing I remember: during the daytime I would have the boys on the beach and at evening time I would have them with me, too. But when they went out to eat I could not go. And I could go in the shops sometimes, but the biggest thing that scared me was the first time we went down, I was fourteen years old, we were on 70 Highway in Smithfield, North Carolina, which is in Johnston County, and had this big billboard that said, "Welcome to Johnston County, the home of the Grand Wizard KKK!"

8:22

ALLRED: Oh wow!

8:23

HUNTER: And I was sitting in the car with them, and I see this big sign, I'm saying, "Oh Lord."

8:29

ALLRED: So, that's when you thought, "Oh, I can't be here."

8:32

HUNTER: Oh no!

8:36

ALLRED: Was that your first interracial identity that you kind of—.

8:39

HUNTER: We lived, as a matter of fact until I was nine years old, we lived on a road, and next to the road there was a farm right next to us and that was the Barnes, B-A-R-N-E-S, and we would see those guys all the time, because they had—they were the wildest boys. They had convertible cars and they were just wild. And you know we talked to them and then next to the Barnes', back in the woods was a very poor white family. They were the Nines, N-I-N-E-S, and they were very, very poor, poorer than we were. And then we had, the man that rented us the house, he lived up the road from us about no more than a quarter of a mile. And I can't remember his name, if I remember his name—I can't remember him—but they used to come down, because they allowed us to pick up pecans. We'd pick pecans and we gave them some and we took some.

9:43

ALLRED: So, like a equal share?

9:46

HUNTER: Yeah, like a equal—yeah.

9:47

ALLRED: Which is nice. So whenever you lived with your family, did y'all live in an all-African American community or was it African Americans and whites?

9:56

HUNTER: When I was, from the time I was about five, let's see—was I five? My sister was in the second grade—I think I was about five years old, when we moved from the city out to the country, which is now North Raleigh. And on that road, which is Strickland Road now, there was a mixture of blacks and whites that lived on the same road. So, I guess you would have said the neighborhood was mixed, okay, because you had the Thompsons, the Halls, the Bledsoes, which is my family, and then you had the Nines, and the Barnes, and the Hunters. And the Wakefields—the Wakefields were the other family, Wakefields.

10:46

ALLRED: Okay, so while you were growing up, you actually got to interact and play with young white children and white people.

10:53

HUNTER: Somewhat. And the reason why we had interaction with the Nines is because their dad and the boys could repair cars, they repaired—they could fix a car and make any kind of car work. And so if you had any problems, need a tire repaired or a muffler, or something in your car, my dad would go over there, they ran sort of almost like a junk yard, and they repaired—. So you'd just go down that road way back in the woods and just tell them what you needed. And you saw them sometimes—they would go to this store, there was a black woman, her name was Fanny Canon Hall, and she had a property and she ran the store. And mostly blacks went to her store, but the Nines children—because the bus would stop, the bus for the white children would

stop right there in front of that store. So they would go to her store sometimes. And she did not allow any disrespect from the black kids or the white kids. She'll put you out of her store, quickly. So—. But, no we had a mixed neighborhood, sort of—you know, we all lived in the same area. Now, whether we were—and we were sort of like neighbors, but we didn't visit each other unless there was a special need, you know.