KIERAN TAYLOR: This looks all right. To just start us out if you'd begin by stating your name for the sake of the tape and when and where you were born.

GARY GRANT: I am Gary R. Grant. I was born in Newport News, Virginia in 1943. I'm approaching my sixtieth birthday come the 19th of August, 2003.

KT: Does your family, is your family from Newport News?

GG: No, my parents actually come out of Northampton County, Rich Square and ( ), North Carolina, which is the adjoining county to Halifax County. Both graduated high school and then they married and moved can we pause—

KT: Absolutely. [break]

GG: ( ) married and they moved to I think, I'm not sure exactly when they moved to Newport News, but I know they ended up moving to Newport News, and my father worked at the dry dock ship building there. Both of them were, my father's name is Matthew Grant. My mother's name is Florenza Moore Grant. Both of them were avid outdoors people loving farm life and gardening. They must've stayed there through 1944, '45, and then they returned to Northampton County, Rich Square North Carolina living with my grandparents, Henry Richard and Saluda Guy Moore for a year when they heard about the resettlement project and the Farmer's Home Administration and the opportunity out of USDA to get their forty acres by purchasing it. There was a mass movement from Northampton County between 1943 through '47 of folk who came. The Tillery community was already an established community, but the government in 1936 decided to put one of the New Deal resettlement communities here, and I don't know whether we need to go into all of that or not.

KT: A little, bit but this was one of the FSA demonstration communities.

GG: Right where they bought up several plantations and broke the land up into forty to sixty or eighty acre tracts. What people, the first process was for local sharecroppers to work the land. You actually became a sharecropper with the government. You had to work the land for five years to prove to them that you could manage. It didn't work real well. Then they opened it up for people from outside to come in, and they were actually going to do an interracial community but the local powers that be said no you won't either so they segregated the two parts. It was called the Tillery Farms and the Roanoke Farms. The Tillery Farms ended up being on the east side of Highway 301 and the Roanoke Farms on the west side of Highway 301, which was the main corridor that divided the county. Out of that, those two pieces from 1936 to 1940 there were ninety families who had begun to buy land here through the government program, and there was a flood in the 1940s. It's interesting that when they decided to segregate the community again, initially they were going to put black people on the west side and white people on the east side. But they found out that the east side was in the flood plain of the Roanoke river so ta-da here we go. Ninety families were purchasing ten thousand acres of twelve thousand acres that was to be sold to black people was flooded. Those ninety families lost everything that they had. At 1940 the US Department of Agriculture formed the Farmer's Home Administration, which then took over the project, and basically liquidated the project as it was and then anyone who wanted to come could come and purchase. So from the 1940s up through about '47, '48 people were coming to buy land. So there were actual people here from as far south as Florida all along the eastern seaboard up through northern Virginia and as far west as Kentucky who came to settle here creating another black community, which should have

been embraced. But it actually was an opposition to the black community that was already here and the white community that was here. So a great part of the—

KT: So there were tensions.

GG: There were tensions because the people who came and settled in the resettlement community were usually better educated even though I think ultimately there were close to three hundred families that settled here. We've only found two people who had completed high school and that was my mother and father, Matthew and Florenza Grant. But people did go as far as the sixth or seventh or eighth grade whereas in the black community that was here, people were basically still enslaved. They didn't go to school on any kind of regularity or anything like that. Very, very uneducated and lack of will power to what we would say become independent and free themselves.

KT: So these, your parents even though their roots are fairly close, they were still in the sense considered outsiders.

GG: Oh, everybody who came to the resettlement community actually they still call us the new people. [laughter] We have made a joke about it so that we're beginning to move it, make it become a part. Well, the part that I tell now is that our oldest living citizen is a hundred, will be a hundred and three in September, and she can trace her ancestry back for two generations. She has six living generations. So well, if you look at that, we are new people because I'm second generation resettlement. So we make a big joke about it, and at least it has caused people to start talking about it. The local whites saw the blacks who came here as smart aleck quote niggers and taught the sharecroppers that you don't want to get involved with them because it only leads to trouble and these, you know what happens when new folk come and da-da-da-da. So there has been a great

division. Even when I went to school in elementary school during the harvest season that we would go to school many days and be only three and four children in a classroom, which would have happened to have been the ones from the resettlement community. I mean, it's like the kids whose parents were sharecroppers from harvest time until the end of harvest time, they just didn't even show up. So I would venture, no I don't think anyone has done this study yet. I'm trying to find someone to do the study, we probably have more high school graduates out of that era, out of the 1950s, early '60s probably more than any rural community that you would find in North Carolina because of the independence. For example with my parents we would go during harvest season we went to school three days one week and two days the next. That's how we, and you were able to keep up. Well, we didn't have a whole lot to worry about keeping up because teachers weren't going to teach but so much anyhow because the other side of the community wasn't there.

KT: Now with the resettlement families or the resettlement program, that was a set aside for African Americans farmers.

GG: It was land set aside that African Americans could actually purchase. The building that we are sitting in right now was a potato-curing house. The government put everything here that was needed. There was a community center that had an auditorium that seated six hundred people with a stage. There was a health clinic with a quote drug room. That's what they referred to it as. They actually had an x-ray machine and my understanding is that for about thirty, thirty-two dollars a year family was fully insured health-wise. That was the plan and a doctor would come in once a month, and then there was a nurse that was available that somehow or another we never, I like to talk about

history. I don't like to do the research. So I need someone to do the research piece on how that piece actually worked. But there was a gristmill where the families could bring their wheat and their corn and grind for their flour and meal. There was a shelter here that housed large equipment, for example a peanut picker. So each farmer did not have to invest in that heavy equipment. There was the community store that actually had gas tanks. About everything the farmers would need they could come and get rather than having to go downtown where they were being ripped off. One of the documents that we found said that the local merchants charged anywhere from twenty to seventy percent interest as an insurance that the farmers who were working would pay off. So you could come here and you probably paid some interest, but it was nowhere near twenty percent.

KT: This building next to us was the store.

GG: The building next to us was the store. The local folklore is that the community center, the road that divides the property is called Conoconnara Road, and the community center sat on the other side, which is the north side. We are on the south side. Some minister wanted to hold a revival service in the community center, and the governing body said no and he said okay. God will take care of it. Thirty days later lightening struck it and burned it to the ground. You couldn't convince the elders in the community that it wasn't because they didn't allow the revival to go on. There was also a blacksmith shop here so everything that the farmers would need in order to keep them from being subjected to the traditional repression of local white merchants was put here. Then the local white merchants and larger landowners used that same process to further oppress the sharecroppers that they were working with and to increase the division

between the communities. There has been a real struggle in this community over the years to unite those two black communities together.

KT: So there were two, the initial FSA project was carved out of two plantations essentially.

GG: I believe it was three there. It might have been four.

KT: Who were the owners and—

GG: The plantation system was over, but the large land mass was still owned. I know one was the Boone Plantation. The Devereux plantation. We have a document on it, but I can't think.

KT: Were those the white families that were still essentially still in control of the county and local politics?

GG: I don't know who was the, the Devereuxs, the Branches, the local politicians were the Tillerys, the Martins and Joneses who were all large landowners. The Tillery family, none of their land ever became a part of the resettlement community. But when it was liquidated, they bought some of the land that was there. But those would have been the predominant names in the area.

KT: Are there, do there continue to be white politicians?

GG: Are there descendants of theirs?

KT: Yeah, ( )

GG: Well, the community, one of the letters that we found going to the government asking them not to send any more black folk here, well, not to send anymore niggers because they were already outnumbered seven to one, currently the community is ninety-eight percent maybe ninety-nine percent African American. There is only one

descendant of the Tillery family who maintains a partial home here. He and his wife had restored the local, their homestead, his grandparents' homestead or great grandparents' homestead, the plantation and all of that that's now on state and national historic registry.

KT: As I was driving in 481—

GG: Now that's not the one. There were two brothers and the one on 481 is the actual beginning of Tillery. That family owned a hundred and fifty slaves. I believe the plantation was something, twenty-two, twenty-five thousand acres of land. That one has been sold. At the turn of the century, 1900 the Cary Lumber Company was doing a lot of lumbering in the area. The fliers say town for sale, not a plantation but town for sale. It was bought by a northern philanthropist by the name of—I forget his first name, but the last name was Fries, F-R-I-E-S who created the, you wouldn't know anything about this because people can afford to buy shoes now. But you've heard people talk about corns on their toes and bunions, and there is a thing called Frieson that you could put on. He was a physicist, a chemist or something and he created that as well as the mechanism we understand for shooting between the propellers, a machine gun between the propellers of an airplane. So Tillery got to be a rest haven, hunting facility, hunting lodge. It was used mostly according to community folklore during the, it was like his winter retreat from upstate New York. They tell us that dukes and duchesses from England also spent time here. He added two wings to the house, and so now the house has something like twelve bedrooms and eight baths.

KT: That's still in his family.

GG: No, that probably has changed hands now one, two, three, I know of three times. So that is completely out of the Tillery family, but the other brother where the

descendant is here that land is still whatever they ended up owning. I think they have something around, it's either something between two and five thousand acres. It's still in their hands. I have to gather this bit by bit because I am an outsider so no one wants to sit down and talk to you and tell you about it. But there was the downtown area was really something. There was a general store that employed I think fifteen people. There were three grocery stores, a couple of barbershops, dance halls, a couple of restaurants.

KT: This was just in the—

GG: This was at the crossroads that you can through. It was a really a place, and on Saturday evening even as I grew up in the 1950s I mean you go out there and it was just hundreds of people.

KT: So you can remember that.

GG: Yep, back when main, downtown Tillery. Well, see Tillery was, the new people used to laugh at the old black community because they would say Tillries. Educated folk don't say Tillries. What we found out in tracking the history is the plantation was here. But it was a midway point with all of the other plantations, and it was actually called Tillery's Crossing where the train stopped to do the mail drop. Well, over time you stopped calling it Tillery's Crossing and it becomes Tillery's. There were I believe four freight trains a day and three passenger trains that came through here everyday. So it was quite a bustling place, and even when I came there was, the sawmill was still going. The cotton gin was here. So it was quite a busy place.

KT: Over the years have you had any contact with the community in Mileston, Mississippi, Holmes County.

GG: We just, we have not had direct contact , but through a young man at the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison by the name of Spencer Wood that we have learned of the community there. He's done a great deal of his graduate studies on that community. We're, the Concerned Citizens of Tillery that I am director of is celebrating twenty-five years this year, and so what we've been doing is having some kind of a celebration every month and last month, last month was July. We didn't do anything. June we had professor from Tuskegee University Robert [Sobala?] who has done a lot of studying on the New Deal, studying and writing on the New Deal who came and presented to us. He came and presented on those communities and Anniston, and there was one in Alabama that is still pretty much intact that we understand.

KT: I spent a little bit of time in Holmes County and Mileston has a very similar—it's very similar history. I mean the community center was strong, independent, black community.

GG: Right. Exactly.

KT: They've got a book of oral histories that you may have heard about on their civil rights movement there.

GG: I've heard about it. I have not read it. We've just, see we didn't even because we came in on the tail end that we never understood it. In 1984 we did a health fair with the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition and a young woman out of that just found us so fascinating. She decided that she would do her senior honors thesis at Duke University on the Tillery community. It was out of that thesis that we found out the gold mine that we are sitting on because the Halifax County is still probably one of

the most segregated, racist, plantation-minded Jim Crow counties that you will find in the United States, not just North Carolina, not just ( ) I mean in the entire--. One would really think that you could still be in Mississippi, in the Deep South. I don't think they're dragging black people out and lynching them anymore but depends on how you define the lynching. A county that is fifty-three African American and [three?] percent Native American but when you go to the courthouse it's like oh, all the white folk are on that side of doing the prosecuting and all the black folk are the ones and Native Americans are the ones that are being prosecuted. Still very much what happened, and I even remember as a child growing up that over in old black Tillery on Saturday night people get drunk. It was the only freedom that they had so they spent probably from eleven o'clock Saturday night through eleven o'clock Sunday night in jail, and then they would go get them so they'd be ready to go back to the fields on Monday. So same process is still pretty much going on.

KT: And the county seat is—

GG: It's Halifax.

KT: It's forty-five percent white, the county.

GG: The county is forty-three, forty-four, only forty-two percent.

KT: Where are white folks living?

GG: In an area called Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina that will probably become the one hundred and first county of the state of North Carolina.

KT: They're seceding.

GG: If it's possible, that's what they'll do. They run everything. They control the county, all the industry that comes in. Up until 1980—I don't know for sure but I

would say the mid eighties all commissioners were elected at large, and so you might get one from this end of the county. But out of six, five of them would be out of Roanoke Rapids. So now we have three districts and three at-large seats. So you have three out of Roanoke Rapids and, so you still have the interests of Roanoke Rapids still being very much maintained.

KT: That was JP Stevens.

GG: The JP Stevens struggle. Right. There has never been, it was just recently well, within the last couple of months. I didn't go see the movie—what's it?

KT: *Norma Rae*.

GG: *Norma Rae* and there was no—I just found out recently that Norma Rae was based on Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. They have made no, they have not tried to exploit it in any way.

KT: Not claimed that.

GG: They have not claimed that history whatsoever, none whatsoever. According to my father, black people really had to be out back in the 1950s and early '60s--by six o'clock, black people had to be out of the city limits of Roanoke Rapids. Today Roanoke Rapids still gerrymanders its school districts. The blacks who live in the city limits are gerrymandered outside of the schools. So their school is like ninety-five to ninety-eight percent white. The county school district is ninety-three percent black, three percent Native American. Then there's a Weldon School District that's ninety-eight percent black. So we have probably eighty percent of all white people who live in the county live within the city limits of Roanoke Rapids. It's one of their big marketing pieces. I believe there are a hundred and twelve school districts in the state now.

Roanoke Rapids ranks in the top ten. Halifax and Weldon rank in the bottom ten, right here together. Whenever we raise the issue of merger, Roanoke Rapids has a supplemental school tax, so does Weldon. So if you merge, then you'd have to start paying that supplemental property tax, and the taxpayers just don't want to have to pay that anything to maintain segregation. Then we had one, two, Hobgood, Halifax, Enfield-Whitakers and Roanoke Rapids, and actually in the late '60s, early '70s we had four white Christian academies that sprang up and one of them has just announced, the Enfield-Whitakers, has announced this year that they will have to close. So everything has still been done to completely continue segregation of the races here, and even if you go to Northampton County, it's a little more progressive. If you go to Edgecombe County it's a little more progressive. If you go to Nash County, it's a little more progressive. If you go to Warren County, it's a little more progressive. I mean can you imagine the fourth poorest county in the state of North Carolina managing not only managing but sustaining three public school districts and four private Christian academies. The fourth poorest county in the state. Yeah. It's just unbelievable.

KT: What accounts for the, I mean, what would be the difference between Northampton and Halifax?

GG: That in Northampton there was only one Christian academy that was established, and white people didn't flee even didn't flee the public school system. Even back when my parents went to school, Northampton County in a segregated system what they did was to close down the black schools during harvest. I mean, this year-round school thing, the split school thing that Raleigh is on. They think they've got something new. Northampton County was way ahead of them. In the 1920s and '30s, '30s and

‘40s, ‘40s and ‘50s they would close down the black schools during harvest season so black children would go to school let’s say January through May. They’d go back to school in July until mid-September and then the schools were closed and then they reopened in December. So what we have is a more educated class of blacks coming out of Northampton County than comes out of Halifax County because the schools were left open and the children just didn’t go.

KT: As far as the virulence of the racism can you—

GG: That’s why I’m telling you that’s why because if you, even if you, my father says that even there that racism in Northampton County was not like what it was in Halifax County. That even it seems that the slave masters treated their slaves better than what they were treated here in Halifax. You actually had a very progressive black community. Well, if people are educated, doesn’t that change? We know that that changes how they perceive things and all. Even though segregation was still there, the relationships between the races was not as stressed and strained as it is here in Halifax County. Even the stress and strain that we have today is greater than what listening to my parents talk than what was experienced in Northampton back in the early ‘20s and ‘30s, even during Jim Crow.

KT: So you grew up on the farm—

GG: Grew up on the farm, on our forty-seven acre farm.

KT: Your parents left or your father at least left the shipyard to take advantage of—

GG: Being able to purchase and own his own land.

KT: What did they farm?

GG: Oh we grew peanuts, cotton, corn, soybeans. It's also interesting that when they segregated the resettlement community, they sent all of the tobacco allotments to the west side of the resettlement so black people here did not have a cash crop, the good cash crop let me say. Their cash crop was peanuts. When my parents, my parents moved here in 1947 and let's say from that '42 period on there were probably somewhere between ten to twelve families that moved here from Northampton County. When they moved here, people were making like ten to twelve bags of peanuts an acre which would be, that's a thousand to twelve hundred pounds. The first year that my parents were here and my mother's brother also came that year that they made twenty-five bags to the acre, which meant we were making two thousand—. They doubled what the local people were able to do. It all had to do with education.

KT: So—

GG: That just made them that much more smart niggers that the local whites had to set out to destroy.

KT: Were you parents targeted?

GG: I don't think they were targeted early on. So you have them coming in 1947. You have a Supreme Court ruling. The division was definitely being taught all through the '40s. You have a Supreme Court ruling in 1954 on education. The first NAACP to be created in this county, the chapter was right here in the building.

KT: Is that right?

GG: Next door. The first blacks in the county to take their children to the white high school in Scotland Neck, North Carolina were from the Tillery community. So that's at the point that you get targeted. As we review the history every person who was

ever president of this NAACP chapter lost their land, ended up losing their farm except for my father, and he has been in foreclosure for twenty-seven years. We lost both parents in 2001 within four months of each other, and we're still trying to settle discrimination claim against the United States Department of Agriculture.

KT: How was he in foreclosure for twenty-seven years?

GG: That's a good question, isn't it. That's how long they've been trying to put him off the land. It's just amazing.

KT: That's the same land you grew up on.

GG: The same land I grew up. In the late '50s early '60s, mid '60s we had the, what we called the, industrial revolution when tractors came so we had a number of farmers who lost out because they could not make the transition. We refer to the farms as tracks. My family ended up with four tracts. My mother and father ended up with four tracts. So we have about a hundred fifty, hundred sixty acres. There actually ended up out of those three hundred farm families Matthew Grant, Russell Manley, Booker T. Marrow, William Taylor, Charlie Walden, Raymond Moore, Clarence Walden—I think that's all of them. My sister would kill me for not naming the wives. So it's Matthew and Florenza Moore Grant. Clarence and Lucille Walden, Charlie and Rosa Walden. Raymond and Mary Emma Moore, William and Madeleine Taylor. There was also James and Ruth Johnson. It was somebody else I named that I'm missing now. I believe Hosey and Adele Davis ended up being the large, I mean, they were large farmers. I know my family in the 1960s early '70s was working somewhere between a thousand and twelve hundred acres of land. So you had those families doing that during the quote industrial revolution as mechanization came to the farm. Well, the interesting thing about

it was that if someone lost their land they didn't necessarily lose their home because as you bought the land you cut out the home place and people still had a place to live. Well, whoop ti do in the 1970s when the government decided, the local good old white boys decided, whoa we've got to get all of this land back. You lost home and everything in that process, which is the struggle the black farmers.

KT: As you were growing up, did other people, who worked your farm?

GG: We worked the farm, but we also hired—

KT: ( )

GG: We hired day labor during the summer and the fall and from old, what we called the old black community in Tillery. We have the community organization now it's called the Concerned Citizens of Tillery, which has been preceded by several other community organizations. The one I grew up under was the Tillery Improvement Association. There was one before that. That's one of the things that we can give the government credit for was bringing this resettlement community together to govern itself. Even though they didn't allow them to do it, the vestiges of it carried over and after the 1940s it did govern itself. It did decide what it was going to do. I grew up large farm days where these black folk would actually get the white merchants out of Scotland Neck and Roanoke Rapids and Weldon to bring large pieces of farm equipment down here. It was just a very, very festive day right here on the grounds where we are. So we now laugh about with some of the old black Tillery descendants that we went to school with who talk about quote yeah, them old rich folk on the other side of the creek. We'll say but people had cars. Ain't nobody had cars but the folk on the other side of the creek. So it's very clear what happened with people who were buying their land versus people who

were still sharecropping and day laborers. It's good that we can laugh about it and talk about it. We also out of the *Behind the Veil* series now followed up with even some more, and we probably have about a hundred, a hundred twenty life histories that have been recorded. We continue to do it. One of the ways that we do it is we've become a research center. Everybody wants to know about Tillery, North Carolina now that we've been able to promote who we are and what it is. We get lots. Actually right now this summer a professor from the University of Wisconsin has been doing something that we needed to have done for a long time and that is what happened to the land out of these two resettlement communities. They have actually tracked the purchasing of the land up to whoever owns it today. One of the pieces that the professor wants to look at was, were the black compensated at the same rate that whites were compensated as the land changed hands. It will be quite interesting. It will be very, very interesting. For once we finally have the full list of all of the folk, the original owners of this twelve thousand acres that was sold to black people. That's been real good.

KT: So when does your father, when did he become the head of the NAACP?

GG: He was the founding president as a matter of fact.

KT: So in what year was that?

GG: 1954.

KT: '54. So do you, I take it then he was an activist.

GG: Well, my father was very quiet. William Taylor also has played a great role and we founded the land lost fund here in 1981, and in 1986 we held a five-year anniversary and it's videotaped. I'm so happy that we did. Mr. Taylor talks about every time I'd look up coming across the field was Mr. Grant. Mr. Grant always had these

ideas. My father was a visionary. After serving as the president of the NAACP he never served as president of anything else up until—I don't know though. He probably served a short term as president of the improvement association, but Mr. Taylor ended up being the president of everything. But it was because--he called him Mr. Matthew--because Mr. Matthew would come with the vision and Mr. Taylor would follow. My mother was a very strong and outspoken person. She was the first woman in the resettlement community, black woman, to register to vote. She was the first woman to have a driver's license. The registering to vote piece was a real struggle in the 1950s where you had to read and write portions of the constitution while white people just walked in and registered. So they were doing the testing piece and everything.

KT: Do you remember this as it was going on?

GG: Vaguely, but they have told the story so much until it's just—I mean it's like almost like I was there. My mother was very fair skinned. Actually my great grandfather was German and my great grandmother was Native American. So she's sitting there. They've been up three or four times to test, and they always sent--. My mother would go because now remember you've got to read and write if you get to the point. There was a woman named Thelma Manley also who was the wife of Russell Manley. She would go because she didn't have a high school diploma. That was going to be the witness. They would still tell them that you have to read and write the Constitution. We're not going to do that. The Supreme Court has said that we don't have to do that. Local white boy said yes you do. One day my mom was in there, and young woman walked in aged twenty-one and the registrar told her well, you just step right over there and Miss so and so and so will get you registered. My mother said well tell me how is it that she can walk right

in and just get registered, and I have to go through all this that you're putting me through. He said well, she's grandfathered in. Her grandfather was white. My mother said well, my grandfather was white. Give me the Constitution, and I mean it just pissed her off to such a degree she read the Constitution to him and then that was the day that she registered. As she was reading it to her she would tell him what words he was mispronouncing. She loved to tell the story. Thelma Manley vouched that that is exactly what happened. It was something. One of the stories that I do remember is her being in the drug store in Scotland Neck once. The clerk at that time black people had to go to the break in the counter to be waited on. The clerk was showing her all of these make ups and everything, and my mother asked for some Red Fox stockings. The clerk went Red Fox. You don't need Red Fox. Red Fox was strictly for black folks. She said they're for black people. They're for nigras. My mother said, well what do you think I am. All of this nicety that she had been receiving all of a sudden, it was over. So they were visionaries. They were community-oriented people. They were community-minded. Even when we were taking piano lessons, we always never understood why she always picked up two or three other children along the way for piano lessons. She said what's the use in you knowing how to play the piano if no one can appreciate it.

KT: Do you remember the sit ins, the sit ins?

GG: Yeah, I remember the sit ins. I was a—

KT: You were a senior.

GG: I was a senior in high school and couldn't wait to—it's interesting how you didn't think that that was supposed to happen in your town but you had to go away to participate in it. I'm actually the first black to view a movie in the Carolina Theater

downstairs. The night was very clear. Big robust policeman was standing in the door and a big robust North Carolina college football was confronting him, and so they had their legs spread and while they were arguing I just went through the legs. I weighed about a hundred and ten pounds or something. Went through the legs and I was the only one who got in the movie that night. But yes—

KT: This was the Carolina Theater in—

GG: Durham, North Carolina.

KT: In Durham.

GG: The great Carolina Theater. I went with a friend there to see something and he, a white friend, and he did not understand my, it was the first time I had been back and it was just very painful. He couldn't understand, but it's integrated now. When you start thinking about what you had to go through for something like that to be integrated. It was just very, very painful. But I've been back a couple of times since then. It's not quite as bad. But was the Howard Johnson out on I-85 I was in the group that, we killed a jailer that night because they put about two hundred of us in jail in a cell that was built for eighty-five people. So we were supposed to be real quiet and everything and we sang all night long. The man had a heart attack.

KT: I've heard this story.

GG: So I was with that group. There was the—

KT: So did you go to Central?

GG: I went to the North Carolina College—it was called North Carolina College at Durham at that time.

KT: So that's where you went after graduating high school.

GG: After graduating from high school right.

KT: You were, got right into the movement.

GG: Right into the movement. Couldn't wait. Just couldn't wait.

KT: Even as you were here as a senior.

GG: As a senior—well, you see also there's, again you have to remember who Matthew and Florenza were. There's the Franklinton Center, which is twelve miles up the road and when this property was liquidated, the United church of Christ purchased this property and still allowed the community to use it as a community center, and all we had to do was to maintain the buildings. Of course we didn't do too good of a job at that. But also I went to interracial work camps in Franklinton Center in the 1950s when the Klan would burn crosses on the lawn once they found out that we were there, those kinds of things. So you come out of a movement. You just didn't understand what was--. I don't think we were as mature and understanding what was going on. But there was this the director was named the Reverend Dr. Judson King and his wife was named Plossy King who was very fair skinned. She was. He was very black to the point that when they drove through the South, she had to sit in the back of the car to keep him from being stopped and lynched for them thinking that he was with a white woman. So he was—

KT: These were UCC camps at Franklinton--

GG: At Franklinton Center—

KT: That you would go to—

GG: So we had, you had a good start. Your community—we didn't even know about racism here because we had separate—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

GG: I mean if you have to come back and finish it it's fine.

KT: We can do that too.

GG: But the people from Northampton County actually went back to Northampton County to do their grocery shopping because eventually this store went out of business and it became a center. For most of my growing up years and yeah, even, growing up and even when I came back from college, basically my family went back to Northampton County to buy their groceries, which was not subjected to the twenty to seventy percent that the local merchants were doing here. Then in Scotland Neck my parents were the first to open a business on the white side of town we would say. Twelfth Street divided the black community from the white community. We opened a service station in 1960—it must've been 1964, 1965 or '66, I can't remember which—on the white side of town. My father also was a barber in Rich Square, North Carolina. So very progressive and when farm jobs started disappearing because of the mechanization he opened a small casket manufacturing concern, they. We talk about my father because he--but it's my mother and father. At one point had twelve employees at that casket factory so it was, you come out of that kind of a family. You don't sit on your butt. You go off and there is action to get involved in.

KT: So what did you study?

GG: Dramatic arts and English.

KT: Okay. Was this, did your parents approve of this?

GG: We had a very progressive parents. They wanted a doctor. They wanted a lawyer. They wanted a minister. But they never forced, they just said these are our

wishes. They were very supportive of us whatever we wanted. I had one brother who went off to A&T that was going into pre-med. He was going to be a dentist, but A&T got to him or whatever. I have a sister who went to Central who's a writer. My youngest sister went to Hampton and she's a teacher. So they pretty much ended up getting—they didn't get them out of that generation. But we now have a lawyer, judge in the grandchildren. We have another one that's off to law school, and we have the youngest son is now entering his, will complete his master's in business administration. They didn't do too badly in setting it up for us.

KT: But you returned—

GG: I came back because I never will forget when I told my mother that I'm going to New York and be a stage actor on Broadway. Again you must remember I knew nothing about racism. I didn't know that black folk weren't supposed to be on Broadway or at least you thought in New York everything was okay. I had an uncle who is an actor in New York who all he had to do was to deny his ancestry or deny who he was and he would've made it. But he wouldn't. He tells the story about going to a party one night and everyone that was coming in was being introduced as the duke and Duchess of somewhere and the prince of somewhere. So he was introduced as the Prince of Lambertson which is the plantation that he grew up on, the sharecropping plantation that he grew up on. My mother said well what are you going to do with it? My junior year she insisted that I take education. Even if this is what you're going to do, you have to have something to fall back on. So at that time what they call now lateral entry, we could actually like take a minor in education, and if you passed the NTE you would teach on probation for a year and then become fully certified, and that's what I ended up doing. I

did go to New York eventually but decided that was not where I wanted to be. So I came back.

KT: But immediately after school you came here?

GG: I came home and—

KT: Why would you do that after the excitement--

GG: Well, didn't have anything to do. The year that I graduated I was the first African American to appear in the Utah Shakespearean Festival. Imagine their surprise when I arrived. I had to threaten to call the NAACP on them out there because I knew my acting abilities were greater than what I was seeing people getting roles, and they didn't know that I was black until I got there. By that time I had a good tan and all that. I was very, I was probably as fair as you and had curly hair, blondish. I can—

KT: You could pass.

GG: Easily pass. Until by the time I got there I had a nice tan like I have now. Woah. What are we going to do with this one? But I was the first to integrate the Utah Shakespearean Festival in Cedar City, Utah. So I left, we graduated June 12th or something like that. I left for Utah June 20th and didn't get back until mid-August.

KT: 1960—

GG: 1965.

KT: Five.

GG: So then what are you going to do? I said well, I'm going to graduate school, and they said well, did you get admitted. Well, no, I didn't. I didn't think about that. My mom said, well, let's get one thing here. We promised you four years. We have done that. We have three other kids, and I think you need to go up and see if you can get

a job. I went to the local school board office, and I had a right nice resume. I'll never forget it. You've heard all these stories about the superintendent. Segregation was here and all that. So was talking with him and all, and I looked him in his eye and said to him, I want you to understand one thing. I'm not going to be hopping and jumping because some white folk come on campus. I listed out my father has four hundred acres of peanuts and two hundred acres of cotton and three hundred acres of soybeans and four hundred acres of corn. I know what got me my education, and I'm not too proud to go back and do it. The local, they told me where the openings were, and you have to go sell yourself to the principal. The same principal that I went to school under had a vacancy had no, there were probably eighteen teachers and only him and one other male teacher. So he was real happy for another male to come along.

KT: Did you teach English?

GG: To teach in a self-contained classroom, my first year was with sixth and seventh graders. Self-contained means everything. So I learned my math. I learned my geography. I learned my history.

KT: That's the way to learn it.

GG: Best ways was on the job. I had a former student that stopped by last Friday as a matter of fact who was laughing about I taught her in eighth grade, and about the time I went from the sixth and seventh grade to the next year seventh and eighth grade. They came with this thing called modern math where minus one plus a positive one equals zero where you taught them to add the positives and the negatives. She was laughing about I'm still teaching math Mr. Grant because she had to I'd have to literally sit with her before class in order to understand what it was that I was supposed to be

getting over to the other students. So we had a good laugh about that. My students come back now and tell me about how proud they are and what a good job I did because I never lied to them. Stand up, I had a degree in English and I do not know how to spell. That's why each of you have a dictionary under your desk. So if I'm writing on the board and I misspell a word, you need to catch it because well, I might be doing it to see whether you're paying attention. So they became very comfortable with saying, hey that word is misspelled and this is at a time when children were not supposed to ( ) the teacher ( ). Oh it could cause all kinds of disturbances. But we made it and I integrated the camporee that's held in eastern north Carolina in 1976 I believe, '74 I don't know. It was '76 I think it was. The camporee is when boy scouts in a district all come together, and we go for this freedom of choice. We could go to the segregated one or we could integrate. I had sixty scouts, six patrols, and we showed up down there, and there were four thousand nine hundred and forty white boy scouts and I had sixty. They put us far back in the woods as they possibly could put us. Then you had to lash these, make flagpoles and that must end up being certain heights and all and I think they are supposed to be about twenty feet high or something. By the time we had lashed the poles and got ready to raise the flag, when we looked around under all of the, where you put your American flag, there are two poles. One is for the American flag. One is for the troop flag. Under all of the American flags were flying the rebel flag. Not a small one, great big boy. I had done pretty good at preparing the boys for this, had taught them all the freedom songs, had taught them how to drill and march to tunes and everything and also believed very much in them being spokespersons for themselves. We sent them over to the headquarters and had them to explain to the, I didn't go with them but had them to

explain to whoever was managing why we needed to take these rebel flags down. They were told they couldn't come down. So they came back and told me, and I went over and I made an humble plea and they told me, it's just tradition. It's not causing any harm, and I said no, but it is causing harm and they said Mr. Grant, we just can't do that. I said okay, no problem. We went back to the camp site, and I sent my assistant scout master was seventeen years old, and I had just bought Cordobas, in '76 the Cordobas had come out, Chrysler Cordoba. I sent him to Little Washington with my car and this kid had probably never driven from Tillery to Rocky Mount less more. He left us at about five o'clock, and he got back somewhere around eleven o'clock or eleven-thirty that night, scared me to death because I didn't know whether he had had an accident or they had lynched him or whatever. But anyway we sent for Muslim cloth and ( ) markers and that night we drew us a big black power fist on this Muslim cloth, and we outlined it in red and we printed under it Black Power. The next morning you have to have flag raising ceremonies, and we get ready and everybody comes to attention and salute and you raise the American flag and pledge allegiance to the flag. Then we raised the troop flag and you do the boy scout oath, and everybody in between times you do at ease and all that stuff. By this time all the other troops had dismissed, and we had one more to go. I called attention one more time Hut, and sixty black fists went up into the air and we raised this black power flag. Well, by the time we had it tied off they were over there telling me that I couldn't fly it. I said but you said that you could—. But that's a, that's an understanding. Well, this is just what that is. I said, I'll tell you what. You take that one down. I'll take this one down. Within about ten minutes they were all down.

KT: That's great.

GG: They said well, now we have some patrols that are called the rebel patrols. At the time those flags were on a five-foot pole. I've got no problem with that. We can handle that. When we came back, we wrote the council, and they issued an edict that no rebel flags could be flown.

KT: That's great.

GG: So you didn't realize what you were being prepared for even as a child going to these work camps and being subjected to that kind of thing and all. When I got, I do remember, when I came back home and went to the movie and wanted to sit downstairs, and they told me it's cheaper to sit upstairs. I mean it's always amazing how want to, they market it to you. Even here the other night I was, excuse me, over in Lowe's in Rocky Mount, and there was a black man waiting on me, and I was telling him a window that I wanted. He kept telling me how much it cost. I mean, it's just so ingrained that you're just not—finally I had to say to him. Man, I am remodeling my house. I have already spent seventeen thousand dollars in windows. I know what I want. What? Yeah, seventeen thousand dollars in windows. So now would you show me what it is that I want? But it's just, this is cheaper. You're just supposed to have second rate no matter what.

KT: Did you maintain any affiliations with other, with outside organizations?

GG: When I came home.

KT: Yeah, during your late '60s, '70s.

GG: Not really. The NAACP locally was active, which had by that time had moved up to Weldon. I think it was based in Weldon, North Carolina so we were just basically confined here within the county.

KT: Was there a local movement in the ‘60s?

GG: There was the local movement in the ‘60s and ‘70s. The woman who has recently done, her name will come to me too, a history on the Franklinton Center because that used to be--. It’s called the brick school to be a junior college for black people. She’s recently completed a video on it, and she was teaching in the county school systems and got on a picket line in Enfield, North Carolina, and she was actually fired from her job for participating.

KT: This is recently.

GG: This is 1970—no, they wouldn't do that now. I hope they wouldn't. I’m not sure. They probably would. But now we have a black superintendent and a predominantly black school board though. I don’t think we would have to worry about that. This was in the ‘70s because by that time we had gotten the, it was actually an assistant superintendent, and they told him to go and fire her and he told them if you want to fire her, you’re going to have to do it. They didn’t have any better sense than to do it. They fired her. She sued the system. The rest is history as they say. But so there were local struggles that were going on. There were still massive registration, voter education going on. So we were part of all of that.

KT: Were there any groups like SCLC ever come through here?

GG: Yeah.

KT: There were.

GG: There were groups like that. They did not get—I don't think they got as, this county because of the--I don't know there is somehow or another the peace movement was more appealing to them than being resistant so King was the one to follow.

KT: As far as what in this county.

GG: As far as trying to make things happen. We'll do it gently. We won't be, we won't knock the door down. We'll knock on the door and see if they'll open it is pretty much the attitude.

KT: That was the attitude of the NAACP.

GG: NAACP.

KT: Largely.

GG: Right because by that time you had a largely uneducated populace that was part of that, the teachers and all who were also still afraid of their jobs and all of that kind of stuff.

KT: That's who led the local movement.

GG: That's who led the local movement

KT: Was there, how about black power? Did that ever have any kind of hold on the—

GG: Among the young people, but it did not, it didn't really grab.

KT: Nothing lasted.

GG: Nothing lasted. I'm telling you. This is worse than Mississippi. You had an elite class that took over, an elite class of blacks that basically took over everything. Even the minister of the church that I grew up in, the Tillery Chapel Baptist Church here back when we were demonstrating in Durham preached one Sunday and told our parents

if you have children who are participating in this nonsense, you go get them. You bring them home and you wait for God to fight the battle. This was the great Reverend Roger Johnson who was receiving probably a twenty-five dollars tip on Monday morning from the local white merchants telling to--. So it's that, I'm saying that it's that kind of an attitude that has been pervasive across this county and that you must do it gently and that you can't make it rough or anything like that. Then the 1970s there were some who became disenchanted with the NAACP and a group was formed called the Halifax County Coalition for Progress. They began massive voter registration, and we were able to support black state candidates that were running for office.

KT: Were you at all a part of that?

GG: Yeah, founding member. I have my certificate.

KT: Where was its base of support? Was that in this community as well?

GG: No, that was based in Enfield. Enfield was where we met, and there was a place over there called the Little Palace. The Coffield family in Enfield and Weldon are morticians. The woman who actually got fired was a Coffield. County, they didn't think real hard on that. So they were in there morticians so they were very independent people. By this time see the parents here had educated their children away from the community so you had this great out migration. They were tired of fighting. They would fight for themselves, but they were not ready to take on any big struggle. Also the farm situation was tightening up and—

KT: What year was the Halifax County Coalition for Progress?

GG: I would say 1970—somewhere the '73, '74. Those same names, Matthew Grant, William Taylor, Russell Manley, B.T. Marrow, that was B.T. and Ruby Marrow.

That was the couple that I didn't know. Those were the large farmers and those were the ones that ended up being a part of that until it became so elitist that these farmers were feeling alienated and they just came home.

KT: Elitist in what sense? Who were the--

GG: The teachers—

KT: The teachers then sort of dominated.

GG: Dominated that organization as well.

KT: Even though that was a kind of more militant split from the NAACP.

GG: Right. So we had that through the '70s and in 1981, we had a group that was created that was called the Halifax County Black Caucus. So finally we have a group that is not afraid to use the word black. This was a group that did not believe in knocking on the door. It believed in kicking the damned door down and going in. Reverend, oh boy, McCullum, C.E. McCullum was the founding president. They had been to a meeting one night with the Halifax County Coalition for Progress and could not come to agreement on what needed to be done. As a result of that group being formed, in 1980—for the 1982 election we registered four thousand new registered voters in forty-five days. We knew every child in the household. We knew where everybody, this was your assignment. That was the year that we took over the Halifax County Board of Education and brought in the first black superintendent to the county school system.

KT: Was there a, in terms of a trajectory of activism, was there a sort of thrust of, was the move to politics, voter registration was that pretty consistent or did that become a focus at some point?

GG: Well, voter registration had been a focal point even since the 1954 but then what was the use in having people registered if they weren't going to the polls.

KT: As far as putting out slates. I mean that must've been a new development.

GG: That was the first time was with the black caucus.

KT: In '82.

GG: In '82 where we actually put out a slate and—

KT: And won.

GG: And won.

KT: That's impressive.

GG: I won't forget right here in my local precinct that people that we had registered. The white folks found out what we were doing and the folk who were living on sharecroppers were actually showing up with the slate for white candidates and you'd go up to them, why would—here you are. You've been on this man's farm for all this time, and he's never told you that you could register to vote. So why do you think he wants you to vote for these candidates? Today, right now, the NAACP is still here. We don't have, we keep having these our political movements rise and fall and rise and fall. Just the other day we're having this struggle around our local community college president, Ted Gasper who is a white man, progressive who came in and promoted two black women who had been at the community college for twenty-some years and not had any real, excuse me, one was the dean of the night school. The dean of the night school. He promoted her to the vice president of the college and another one to the dean of students. Oh boy. All hell has broken loose. So they've been, ever since then they've been trying to get rid of him. Now they're trying to say that he has used taxpayer money

and facilities to coordinate a fund-raiser for Congressman Frank Ballance when he was running for his election. So we held a press conference the other day and we have, the Concerned Citizens of Tillery have become a very powerful organization, not only within Halifax County. We have the respect in the county. They don't like us. But international, we've won international awards. We've created the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network. It is out of our land loss fund that I told you we established back in 1981 that the Black Farmer and Aricultural Association known as BEFA has emerged that actually sued the United States Department of Agriculture. We don't mind talking about race. We're independent people. We have land. We don't have to answer to white people. So even the other day as we were getting ready to hold this press conference and our belief is that we still have a white racist good old boy network in place, and the president of the NAACP didn't want us to have that in the press statement.

KT: The local.

GG: Yeah, the local president and he's a young man. But he grew up in this county. He's an attorney. He knows that it's true, but we don't want to alienate the good white folks. This is the thing that I never understand. It's all right for the good white folk to alienate, the bad white folk to alienate the black people but we can't alienate people. So I said no problem. We really went back through the press release and took out most of the references to white and most of the references to racism because I know, no problem. I'm going to read the statement, and once I've read the statement, the press is going to ask questions and hey. When they ask the question. So we ended up in the paper, there stood me as the director of the Concerned Citizens of Tillery and the

convenor of a group that's now called the Political Awareness Council, the president of the NAACP and a very progressive black businessman who all made statements. When the picture came out in the paper, there was only me and three people from the Concerned Citizens of Tillery pictured. The article is probably, there's a half-page second page this wide and almost this much on the front page. The only person, the person, not the only, the person who is mostly quoted is Gary Grant and it's not from the press statement. It's form the questions that they asked and it's when I said the racist powers that be because I know that's what—number one, that's what sells the papers. So they're going to print that. But also it's the truth. It's what we're dealing with on a daily basis here. So the struggle continues.

KT: Were there times over the course of the '60s, '70s and '80s where you felt more optimistic, more or less optimistic about the direction of the—

GG: I would say there have been two times. Once was during college that things were going to change. I felt really good.

KT: Felt real optimistic.

GG: Um hmm and in the 1980s with the Halifax County Black Caucus. I felt really good because we were, even the local paper printed they are a power to be reckoned with, quote unquote, and we were doing things. We were electing blacks to offices. Out of that movement the county was sued for district voting on commissioners. We got our first commissioner appointed to the county commissioners' board. So you felt very good about that. The problem with black people and our movements is we've not been able to transfer the leadership from the elders to the young people. I call it the Baptist Church syndrome that I'm in this position and I'm going to stay here until I die. I

think even as I look at why new organizations have to be created, is one thing is that it keeps black communities divided. It also keeps white folk happy because they know it won't be here for long, and they will do what they need to do to help it die by buying off whomever they can. Someone was asking me the other day how have you kept this bunch of black folk together for twenty-five years. I guess that's another story we'll have to talk about at some point. Until we learn to transfer and until we learn that the elders need to step back and give the wisdom and let young people make their mistakes. Even if you tell them, they're still going to do, but also they won't make some of the mistakes that you've made. But as long as the powers know that they can come to the elders and everything will be done calmly. We're going to do it, but we just have to do it gradually. The elders swallow that while the Kiwanis are meeting and the golf course pieces are taking place and whatever happens in the white church conference meeting is all being ( ). Give you a perfect example. In this movement to try and save the president of the community college, we decided that we would send petitions. What's happening is we have a black woman whose term is up on the community college board, and we wanted her reappointed. We have three blacks on our county commissioners and three whites. Well, whoop ti do. The three white boys come in with a white woman's name to replace the black woman. So the commissioners split. It goes from the commissioners to the local judge who campaigned on an age discrimination platform to get reelected, and of course rural Halifax County is primarily aged and African American and we supported him. Well, now I don't think he, he didn't want to touch it. It's too hot a political potato so it then goes to the governor. We look up, and one day the local white community has taken the governor a petition with seven hundred names supporting this white woman.

So we said no problem. Okay, that's the way they want to do it. So we sent out letters to all the black churches with the petition in it asking them to get names on it for us by Monday morning. We figured we'd get eight, nine hundred names. Well, my community group, the senior group meets on Tuesdays so we were going to get their names on the petitions on Tuesday and we have class from East Carolina—do you really want all this on tape?

KT: Yeah, I do. Absolutely.

GG: We had a class from East Carolina University on gerontology and something to do with aging, a graduate class that was coming to be with us. Well, I'm going to show them how you radicalize older people by getting them pumped up to sign this petition. I pull up on the grounds here and I started towards the building, and there stands this woman who says, Well, hello Gary. I'm Willa Dickens from the Halifax Community College. Well, oh boy. Okay, here we go. So the question now is how are you going to get this petition signed because I didn't know what position she took in regards to where the president stood, and there was nobody that I could get it, this short notice. So anyway I decided not to go through that process. When I get back to my office, I'm called by the John Locke Society who publishes the *Carolina Journal* who has been very instrumental on the attacks on Congressman Frank Balance, and he says I have this petition and this cover letter with your name on it. I'm going you have what? Well, we had not distributed it here, which means some black person. It had to be a black person. So you see we're still thinking. We're very divided in all of that. He says that I've been doing a lot of writing on this issue, and I said how well I know that you have. Well, I haven't been able to write Mr. Gasper's point because Mr. Gasper won't give me an interview. I

said, how wise of Mr. Gasper. Very smart. He said and I just want to know are you all a nonprofit organization. I said, well, Mr. Gasper hasn't given you an interview and I'm not going to give you an interview. Thank you very much for calling. I wish good luck.

KT: 501(c)3.

GG: 501(c)3 and every group that has received from that foundation that Congressman Ballance set up while he was a state senator has been audited by the state. It's just, I mean but you talk about a gentle, a more gentle. Yeah, it's gentler. Let's put it that way. They don't drag you out the back door and hang you. They just—

KT: It's kinder and gentler.

GG: Kinder and gentler and destroy everything that you've worked to do. Our local Republican party guy told, we had to raise taxes this year. Our schools are just terrible and he threatened. He told the county commissioners if you vote for this tax increase we can assure you, you will be a one-term commissioner. But if I, what is that if that's not saying if you build this school for these niggers, but I'm not supposed to say white racism. I'm not supposed to say the white powers that be. The racist white people that live in this county. If you're not a racist, then I'm not talking about you. But if you are, hey, well, hello. I'm talking about the NAACP still wanting to be nice and calm and gentle about it. I figure fifty-three percent black folk, we've got twenty, it's either twenty-three or thirty-three county government departments, and we don't have one black person in charge of anything in the county.

KT: Not a single department.

GG: Not a single department. We had two, the health department and the department of social services. Department of Social Services published a thing tracking

the Medicaid dollars that come into this county that showed who got them, and next thing we knew it was time for her to go. That's right. The health director left on her own, but they didn't replace her with a black. Brought in somebody from upstate New York. Now get real but he was a very conservative republican. We in the history of, well, a hundred and twenty years they say we elected our first Republican to our county commissioners board in 2002. That's right in a county that probably has less than three thousand registered Republicans. Came in second.

KT: So it's pretty much still a one party—

GG: No, well, you I said we only have probably less than three thousand registered Republicans. Yeah, democrat but the second highest vote getter for our county commissioners' seat was a Republican.

KT: I'm wondering if on thinking about how is it that, well, there is I'm wondering do you have any involvement in the Scotland Neck case where it was a pastor's wife?

GG: Yeah, that shot one over in the black community. It was about the same time that CCT was—

KT: Early to mid '70s.

GG: No, it was 1977, wasn't it?

KT: '77.

GG: Because the, we were struggling to save the school, the young parents were, and the people who had grown up with this community were struggling. The church had decided to sell this.

KT: ( )

GG: Yeah.

KT: So CCT decided to sell this property.

GG: Um hmm.

KT: And you were—

GG: Had about—

KT: To save the school building.

GG: The school building. Well, they were going to close the school because in 1965 when I came back to teach, we had like almost six hundred children in grades one through eight. By 1981 we had less than one hundred in K-six. It's amazing, out migration. So they announced in the spring of 1978 that the school would be closed in the fall, and that's how the Concerned Citizens of Tillery was born. So it might have been—it was the summer of '78 when she shot that guy. Yeah. Because we were doing the protests, and they marched from Scotland Neck to Halifax.

KT: I don't, I only know the—

GG: Well, the young man, her son I can't even think of their names now. But her son was selling a paper called the *GRIT* newspaper over in the black community, and some black guy roughed him up a little bit over there, an adult.

KT: So he was selling the *GRIT*. This was the minister's son.

GG: Minister's son, right.

KT: What was the *GRIT*?

GG: It was a—

KT: Like a southern nationalist.

GG: It was a paper something, it wasn't a weed rag but it was something that was a weekly paper that you could make money off of by selling it more so than you could the local paper. You'd have to go back and do some research on. It was a very popular paper back during that time. So they said some, he probably called somebody a nigger is what he did, and this was also you have to remember Vietnam so you've got folk coming home. Black folk don't take to stuff they used to take. He went home and told his mother. She got the gun and they got in the car and started driving through the black neighborhood, and he pointed to this fellow. She stopped the car, went over to him, and they had this confrontation from what the neighbors could see. Anyway, it was said he told her he had not touched her son. The bicycle wasn't in his yard. So what do you--. He had an ax. He was chopping wood. This is a Vietnam veteran. He was chopping wood for his mother. He turned to go into the house, and she shot him in the back of the head. Her thing was that he had an ax in his hand. Well, now if he had fine. But why, how did you manage to shoot him in the back of the head if he was coming at you with an ax because the young man knew where he was. The young man had worked for us up at the service station. We knew, I knew him. He wasn't that kind of. He wasn't a violent kind of guy or anything like that. I don't think he would've taken any trash off of any little white kid calling him a nigger or anything, but I honestly don't think that he was the guy.

Out of that I have a sister, her name is Evangeline. She attended the hearings and all of that stuff. She became very much more so radicalized behind that. You might want to interview her sometime. She's also a death penalty opponent. She married

James Briley, the Briley brothers out of Virginia that escaped out of a maximum-security penitentiary that no one was supposed to escape from.

KT: Sounds like ( )

GG: Yeah.

KT: So that became a big community campaign.

GG: It became a big community campaign and but even then the elitist, the black bourgeois one of them said one day in a bank that well, who was he? Woman, this could be your son. So you get the class division and stuff like that, and the SCLC came back. By that time it was getting a real bad name about taking money from communities. I can't remember what was his name.

KT: Was it Frenks?

GG: Frenks, Golden Frenks. That name was going around about him taking money and stuff and the NAACP—

KT: Interloper.

GG: So they used that. What actually killed it was they, the young man's mother was on welfare. They cut off her welfare stuff, and I believe they eventually gave her, it was three or five thousand. I can't remember what it was and restored her welfare rights and food stamps and stuff like that. I told you they still hang you, just not at the tree anymore. It's still being done.

KT: I assume the woman was acquitted or never—

GG: She was acquitted. She never—they arraigned her in the judge's chamber, bed chamber, bedroom. In his bedroom they arraigned her and let her go home because she was a minister's wife, a white minister's wife, a white racist minister's wife.

KT: You don't know if she's still living.

GG: No, they've gone. They left soon after she was acquitted. They were scared to death, and they probably had every right to be because somebody should have. God forgive me.

KT: What were the, since the '60s what do you think have been the major struggles that you've been involved in or that locally that have--?

GG: Locally here. Primarily the—

KT: What do you think have been the most—

GG: They've been political.

KT: Either memorable or most important.

GG: The political ones. The peace, well, I would say first my struggle with education and coming back and becoming to the realization that everybody didn't have running water in their home. That was a rude awakening and that children were being graded not by what they knew but who they were even in the black school. So my first piece would be of teaching children that they were somebody. The second would have been the, was it, Lord what's his name? Who was the mayor of Chapel Hill? Howard Lee when he ran for Congress. That which was part of the creation of the Coalition for Progress. I think we were created right after that because the local NAACP did such a lousy job or became so pompous. I never will forget the meeting we were in and the president of the NAACP told Howard Lee who did he think he was that he could come in here registering people and not come past him. Oh. You will never get elected. What was his name? He was a reverend. That's all I know. The Coalition, the Halifax County Coalition for Progress when it initially started, and there was a lot of young energy in

there, and we really, we did a relatively good job at registering some people and making some plans to do stuff. But probably the greatest was the—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

GG: County coalition who did what everyone else had dreamed about and brought about, took over the school board, brought about the change in the at-large election for commissioners and then self-destructed as most black organizations do because of a struggle over power.

KT: When did that take place the destruction, the demise?

GG: The demise took place in let's see '82, '84, in between '84 and '86. The state came out with this trial thing on extending the school day and extending the school year and the superintendent that we brought in came out of the state department. So he had an inside road, and the board decided to go with it. There were some educators in the caucus who didn't think it was the best thing to do, never have understood it. We're talking about thirty minutes on the day and another twenty days at the end of the year. I mean, the kinds of incentives that they were offering for people to do it was just, I just don't even understand but change. They're resistant to change.

KT: So the split then was between the people you had elected to the board and some of the educators within the caucus.

GG: And the educators within the caucus.

KT: That was enough to—

GG: That was enough to break it. It probably had already begun some because there were folk in the caucus who really thought they should dictate to the board of education what you were supposed to do. We had elected the three strongest non-traditional educators to the board and that was Reverend C. McCullum the chairman, Willie Lowe, the vice-chairman and myself had been elected to the board. I mean, it's

not that we didn't need to have conversation with the caucus, but certainly serving on a board, there are guidelines. There are some things that you have to do.

KT: So you were on the board of education.

GG: I served on the board of education.

KT: From?

GG: From '82 to '86. They did such a wonderful job as each one of our terms came up, our own people who had elected us.

KT: Were you still teaching at that time?

GG: No, you can't, I came out of the classroom in 1978. I actually, or '77, I came out the spring, I resigned the spring of whenever it was in that fall, it was '77 because it was the next year when they had decided to close the school.

KT: That's when you began working full-time.

GG: Well, not full-time, I was working full-time with my parents. We had a small casket factory that I told you about and the farm.

KT: I remember that. And the farm.

GG: And the farm. You are going to have to come back because there is still, I'm serious. ( ) that have to be told because we haven't even gotten to the farm thing.

KT: ( ) farms.

GG: We haven't even gotten to CCT as a whole piece because we started out meeting once a month, and the goal was to buy this property back. The church wanted to sell it to the churches in the community, but they had to come together to do it. They couldn't do it. We took the same people who couldn't come together under the name of

the church and had paid it off in three years. It's just so amazing. From that we did it all without any grant money or anything like that. We also had two nuns who came at about that time. Maureen Finland and oh, what is the other one's name because I had never heard of grants and things. But at any rate.

KT: From what order?

GG: God. The sisters of something. They were the strangest nuns that we had ever seen in our life. They did not wear habit. They wore pants, and we got ready for a community meeting one night, and we were all supposed to bring a covered dish. I was running a little store down the road, and they showed up with a six-pack in each hand. [laughter] The other one's name was Iva Gregory. I'm going, where are you going? With Baptist folk and you've got beer. So we've had some real laughter about that one. They were here--. We marched from our school all the way to the school board. We had gathered petitions and everything. After we had bought the property they helped us to put together the first grant and we got ten thousand dollars from Z. Smith Reynolds to renovate the building. We've been moving forward ever since. In 1993 we won what is known as the international, the very first International Healthier Communities Award that was sponsored by the health care forum and international organization that's based in California. Judging was done by the World Health Organization members. There were eighty-three domestic communities and seven foreign countries that were vying for the title. A project that we have, this building here and our health project with East Carolina University School of Medicine and we won. We've been traveling, say that we were doing fifty-five. We've been doing eighty miles per hour ever since. So stuff just—

KT: Yeah, we should get into that at some point.

GG: Because all of that is still about, I mean when we talk about the [hog?] piece and having this woman who is going to turn a hundred and three who never voted until she was eighty-one, who had never attended a government meeting until she was eighty-eight years old. It's still all about politics and education and justice. That's what the group is about even though we do it in the most delicate way.

KT: Through clinics.

GG: Through clinics and meetings, community meetings—

KT: Seminars.

GG: And seminars and teach-ins. They think I'm the greatest thing since sliced bread, and I think they're the greatest thing since grits. I mean, it's wonderful. You have a woman who never voted until she was eighty-one years old, had never attended a government meeting until she was eighty-eight and six months later she's speaking to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Management and Health even though she didn't have a long speech. She only said two or three sentence, but just the fact that that's what it was all about.

KT: Do you have any kind of final thoughts on anything we've discussed or just—

GG: Well, I think each one of the pieces that we have tapped on is, well, I've got to write my life history at some point but that I'm becoming more and more to believe that we're destined to be places. Though I wanted to be on Broadway, it was I have my own Broadway and that the things that have been accomplished that I've been involved in, I feel really good about it, even those that didn't last. There has always been progress made and that without making steps going backwards and that people have been in

power, that people do understand that they are truly somebody and that they can have some say so in their destiny.

KT: Thanks for spending this time with me.

GG: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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