

Dr. Shirley Nash Weber
June 30 and July 1, 2008
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
354 minutes of recording
PART 1 OF 3 PARTS

SUSAN RESNIK: Today is Monday, June 30, 2008. This is Susan Resnik. I'm here in the office of the Department of Special Collections at San Diego State University with Dr. Shirley Nash Weber. We're about to begin recording her oral history. The oral history project is funded by the San Diego State University Foundation's John and Jane Adams Humanities Grant.

In 1972, at the age of twenty-three, Dr. Shirley Weber became a professor at San Diego State University. She was responsible for shaping the development, and administering the Africana Department, which grew to become one of the strongest Africana Departments in the country.

In addition to her involvement at San Diego State, she contributed over the years to the community, and has served as the president of the San Diego Unified School Board. She has won numerous awards for her intellectual achievements and her contributions to society. They include awards from the NAACP, Urban League, Negro Business and Professional Women, California Women in Government, National Council of Black Studies, and the Living Legacy Award, given to her in 1997 by the Women's International Center as, quote, "a woman who contributes to education, justice, and humanity, having a positive and enduring impact on thousands worldwide."

It's an honor and a real treat to share this process of doing your oral history. Good morning, Dr. Weber.

SHIRLEY NASH WEBER: Good morning to you, Susan, as well.

SR: I'd like you to start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born, and tell me about your parents.

SNW: I was born Shirley Ann Nash, to David and Mildred Cooper Nash, in Hope, Arkansas, on September 20, 1948, in Hempstead County, I believe is what it's called. My parents, David and Mildred, both were born in Arkansas themselves, in Washington, Arkansas, and they, too, in Hempstead County.

My parents were farmers, sharecroppers. My mother was a homemaker in my early life. But when I look back on their past, my father's whole family was raised in Arkansas. His grandfather had been a former slave. I believe they came from Virginia, from that particular area. But my father was from a family of sixteen children. Nine of them lived, and his mother obviously died in childbirth, which was pretty common at that time. His father was a Ware [phonetic] Nash, and his mother was Alabama Nash. I believe his mother came up from Alabama, his father from Virginia. And so it was interesting that my father was from a strong sharecropping family of nine children that lived, five female, four males. It was interesting that all the females, except for one, were born before all the males. There were like four girls, then all the four boys, and then finally the last girl was born. There's only one surviving aunt that I have on my father's side, the youngest, a female, who was a schoolteacher in Arkansas.

All of my father's brothers and sisters were raised in Arkansas. They lived almost their entire life in Arkansas, in fact. My grandfather was a very religious man, never conceived of living anywhere other than Arkansas. And in

fact when my father moved to California, the joke always among the family was, when they would go to church on Sunday morning to Macedonia Church, my grandfather would pray for his son “in a foreign land.” And I asked was someone overseas? And they said, “No, your daddy was in California.” So California was a foreign land to him and his generation that was there. So my father was raised in Arkansas.

My mother was also born and raised in Arkansas. And the interesting thing in her life is she was from a very small family—just my mother, her brother, and she had one sister, Elizabeth, who died at childbirth. My father was born in 1918, March 4, 1918; and my mother was born October 1, 1920. My grandmother, who was Birdell—Hood was her maiden name, who became Birdell Cooper and then Birdell Ross—because she was a woman of many, many talents, did not find herself eligible to be living in the country. She wanted to go away. She eventually divorced my grandfather in the early 1920s, which is kind of an unheard of act, by any woman at that particular time. But she was an unusual woman, because her mother, my Great-grandmother Lucy, had been a woman who had been married before, she had several children. And then her husband died, and then she married a second husband named Hood, who was my grandmother’s father. And so my grandmother was the baby of her family. She had lots of brothers and sisters, but they were all older. So when she was born, they were like eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, so she was really like the baby-baby of the family, and as a result never worked in the fields, never did the cotton, didn’t have the hard life that the others had, because her mother was older

by that time and had remarried. So my grandmother had a different spirit than everybody else, who kind of accepted life in the country, accepted their lot in life.

She married my grandfather, who was a very tall, dark man, who had served in World War I. In fact, in 1914 he joined the Army. He was in the infantry of World War I. He loved her dearly, but country life was not for her. He worked on the railroads, but she could not stand the country, so eventually.... She loved to party, she loved the wild life. He didn't like to party, he was very religious. They separated, she moved to Texarkana, and then she moved to California, which was unheard of—a young woman, on her own, single, coming to California with some friends that she met in Texarkana, Arkansas. Worked at MGM Studios in the cafeteria, and all of my childhood life I heard about Humphrey Bogart and all the other wonderful people that she met at MGM Studios, working in the cafeteria. So she was kind of a different spirit, but that spirit was responsible, eventually, for bringing us to California.

My mother, obviously, was raised by her grandmother, because her mother had left, and her grandmother felt California and the wild life was not a place for children, so my great-grandmother raised my mother and her brother in Arkansas. My mother's first marriage was to a man by the name of Jack McFadden, and I think she also had the spirit of her mother in her, because even though she wanted a family—and she did have a large family, there were eight of us—but she was not one to “take no stuff” in the South. And so my mother and father's marriage is almost like a love story, because he met my mother early,

before she got married, at some party, and then he went off to work, because of the Depression, with the CCCs and this group and that group, out in the fields.

My mother then married. She married a man who she had two children by, who was very abusive. She had a child in 1939—my oldest sister—and my next sister in 1940. While my mother had a one-year-old and an infant, she quit her husband, was not going to allow this man to abuse her. She quit him, she moved into a one-room kind of situation, and she began to work. And it's interesting, my father came back in town and discovered that she was single, and, as they say, "took up with her" again. But the interesting thing was, her husband, because he was very domineering, was determined to get her back. So he immediately went to her employer—she worked at a store—and demanded that he fire his wife, that he was destroying his family and his children, and that he should fire her immediately. In those days, 1940, '41, that's what the man did, he fired my mother. He fired her so that she could go back to her husband.

Well, my father was always a man who took care of his business, so he explained to my mother very honestly, "If it is your desire to go back to your husband, then that's what I want you to do. But if you do *not* want to go back to him, money should not be a factor." And so he took care of my mother. And then he married her, and the six other children were born. And my father basically took care of all eight of us, because he felt as a man that's your responsibility, to take care of everyone. So he and my mother married in 1941, December 4, 1941, and remained married until her death in 1977.

It was interesting that my father and mother were quite a unique couple. My father was really kind of an unusual individual, because unlike the activities in the South, he was not one—and I guess maybe I get some of my spirit from that—he was not one to say “yes sir, no sir; yes ma’am, no ma’am,” and he never let anyone call him “boy.” And so he was known as the crazy one of the family. Of all his brothers, they were all very subservient, but my father was not. My older brother would tell stories to us. He’d be standin’ there, and a guy would walk up and say, “Hey you boys, I need somebody to clear my field.” Now, my family owned property in Arkansas, and they still do. But in those days, even if you owned your own property, in order not to demonstrate ever that you were above or equal to whites, you had to work their fields, so that even if you didn’t need to financially, you had to work their fields, because they were not going to allow you to demonstrate that you were an independent person. And so as a result of that, when they did their fields, they had to do somebody else’s fields, to constantly keep that position. So the guy would walk up and say to them as they’re standing around, “Hey boys, I need somebody to clear my fields.” And my father’s response was, “Clear you own damned fields.” And that would upset them, obviously. And so people’s perception was, “Your daddy’s gonna get killed. He’s crazy, he’s not like the rest of ’em.” And his brothers would make excuses and apologies and so forth and so on, and they would clear the fields. But my father refused to clear anybody’s fields but his own. And so he knew then he was not destined to live long in Arkansas. So when my grandmother made the offer for us to move to California—I was three years old at the time—we did.

We lived, like I said, we were farmers. We lived on a farm, my brothers and sisters talk about the fact we had wagons and not cars. And my kids find that fascinating, that when they rode in the back of the wagon they put planks across the wagon top so that they could sit down, rather than sit in the bottom of the wagon. The house that I was raised in, I was born in. We were all born at home. The six of us who were born in Arkansas were all born by midwives. So we could tease our last two, a brother and sister, that we're not really sure if they belong to us, because they could have been switched in the hospital, but we knew we were Mom and Dad's, because we were born at home. But we were born in a midwife situation. I was born in a house that had no running water, no electricity. It was probably maybe 700-800 square feet. When I was a kid, I actually visited it, because my grandfather, my dad's father, finally moved into that house and lived there. But we lived on a piece of property that was lots of land. The houses were situated where my aunt lived on the far left, and my uncle in the middle. And then we lived at the far end of the property, and it was probably maybe a block or two long, this piece of property that we had houses on, and lots of animals and farms. And so my father and his family were farmers. To this day, they still farm it. My uncle had a chicken farm there, even after Campbell came in. We still own the land there, and when we visit Arkansas now, they start planting crops months in advance so when we come we can shell plenty of peas and corn to take home. But they're still farmers, they were farmers, and my father moved to California and worked in the steel mills of Los Angeles from the time he arrived until he retired thirty-some years later.

My grandmother had come to Arkansas and decided that since she didn't really raise my mother, but she always sent things to my mother—my mother was known as “the young girl in the city,” in this little hick town, that the most beautiful clothes because they all came from California. And her mother would come with these gorgeous dresses and just really dazzled everybody when she came to town, she came to Arkansas to visit. She'd always maybe drive a Packard or somebody's car—you know, that kind of thing, they would come. She and her friends would drive to Arkansas. And so she was always in my mother's life, and so when she became an adult, my uncle, my mother's brother, joined the military and he went off to fight, and then he moved to California. So her goal then was to have her daughter come to California.

So in 1951, in August of '51, my father actually came to [California]. Many say he came basically under cover because they were after him always about him not being subservient. So he just decided to leave. He left then, because they wanted him to clear some more fields, and he said no. So he left and came to California. As soon as he got here, he got a job working in the steel mills of Los Angeles, that he kept for thirty-some odd years. And so he then worked and lived with my grandmother, and he, in December, brought us to California. We arrived in California December 1, 1951, ten years after my parents had been married. And there were six of us children. I was the baby at the time, I was three years old. I don't remember the train ride, but everybody talks about—my brothers and sisters—talk about the excitement of the train ride: my mother with six children, on a train, comin' to California, with her box of chicken, and her

deserts for everybody, and cakes and pies and the whole bit. They went to Texarkana and got on a train and came all the way to California. And the excitement of the ride, and my brothers and sisters.

So we arrived in California and lived for a number of months with my grandmother. And then eventually we moved into a house of our own. My mother applied for public housing, and they were building new houses in the Pueblos section of Los Angeles, off Fifty-second and Long Beach. We were fortunate to get a place there. Part of that, though, we lived in a small house that was truly rat infested. I can't believe the rats that I saw, and that chased me at night. I was probably four or five years old when we moved there.

I went to my first school, Trinity Elementary School. I loved school, loved Trinity Elementary, had great teachers. I think that was my hook to get me into it, because school was so wonderful, and my teachers were so committed to making sure that these kids who lived in such poverty had such exposure to the world. I always tell people I've never had clam dip like I had in kindergarten, in my *life*. My teacher made clam dip. I don't even know if it was real clam dip or came out of a box, but as a kid living in that area on Twenty-ninth, to have a teacher bring you some clam dip, and to expose us to clam dip and Ritz crackers in 1953, was just remarkable.

In 1954, we moved to the Pueblos housing project in Los Angeles. It was luxury to us, to live in the projects because it was a good-sized house. It was like a complex, unlike the projects that you think about on the East Coast, where everybody's stacked on top of each other. These were housing complexes that

had maybe a row of houses that were together, so they were like hooked together, but they were large. We had like four bedrooms, a bathroom, living room, an eating area, and a kitchen. So it was *much* larger, and we had a big front porch, and we lived in the front one. Most of them were that large, because they were large families, so they weren't crowded. They were brand new. They were made of concrete, though, but they had linoleum floors, and plenty of space for us. And we had a front and a back. And in between the complexes, these long like complexes—the complex would maybe be like four of 'em hooked together. In between it would be grass areas. So we had lots of grass so we could play and run, and we could play The Whip and all these other crazy wild games that we had as children. And then they had a huge field that we could play ball. And we were like half a block away from my elementary school, Holmes Avenue Elementary. It too was a wonderful experience for me as a kid going to school. We had teachers that were very dedicated in 1954, when I went to Holmes Avenue Elementary School in first grade. The interesting thing was, all the teachers at the school were black, even though supposedly California was not segregated, it was de facto segregation. So blacks were not allowed to teach anywhere but in black schools. And the only teacher that I saw—there were two people in my whole school that were white. One was the principal, and that's because they didn't let black people be principals. Our principal was Mr. Ditanto. I remember that quite well because I always had this thing about Mr. Ditanto and his long hooked nose. I don't know *what* that meant, but it was a mantra all we kids would say regularly. Mr. Ditanto. And then we had a guy who was gay.

And at that time, gay teachers were like being black. So he was not allowed to teach anywhere else, other than in a black school. So we had this gay teacher in the fourth grade. It was one of those kind of unusual.... And of course as a kid, you don't know what the heck "gay" means, but people would talk and whisper and whisper. But all of our teachers were black at the school. And they all had a deep, *deep*, abiding commitment to the kids in the projects, because they understood what our challenges would be, being born black, being born poor, and that we would have to be excellent, and they told us that every day. "You must be excellent, because without it, you will not survive."

And so in many ways, you look at the situation and think, "Wow, this is the worst you could be, you're living in the projects, in poverty," and so forth and so on. And yet at the same time, you've got these elements of great teachers there, who are going to make sure everybody reads, who are going to expose you to things that you wouldn't normally be exposed to. We had a band, I learned to play music. I loved music. For a dollar a year I rented a violin, because they understood that. The school was right next to Quaker Oats and some other kind of big factory, and so they sponsored us. And so we went to Disneyland when Disneyland first opened in 1955 or '54. We went to Disneyland for like a dollar or two dollars, because they would underwrite all of our trips. We went to the symphony. I got a chance to see all the great operas, whether it was "Cinderella" in opera form, whether it was "Hansel and Gretel," I still see that stove blowing up on the stage. We got a chance to go to all of those things as a cultural exposure that was underwritten by our partners, before partnerships were, quote,

“in vogue,” in schools. Quaker Oats had a commitment. Quaker Oats and Coca-Cola had a commitment to our school. And so they made sure that we had lots of exposure to cultural activities that were there, and festivals and things that would come to our school.

So even though, like I said, in the midst of this poverty, we had [great] richness. We had richness in teachers and commitment and curriculum. I can't remember a person in my school who could not read. I mean, I just can't remember that. We had music in every classroom. We had a full curriculum. And that's what's sometimes so distressing for me as an educator when I work with public schools, is that our kids don't always get that. But I had that completely. I had *full* curriculum that was there.

I was unique in the sense that I had a father in my household. My father, coming from the South, was very committed. And when he came into California, my uncle, who was already here, and my grandmother, were very committed to us as a family. And so my mother wanted to work, and they said, “No, you have six kids, you cannot work. Los Angeles is too rough, it's too violent, your kids will be running everywhere. We will help.” And so as a result, my grandmother, my uncle, and my father basically supported this family. My oldest brother, David, was always a worker. He's six or seven years older than me, but he always had a paper route. And so when we were kids, his paper route took us to the movies, and in fact his paper route—my brother was such a responsible person, and still is to this day. He took us to the movies to the Roxy Theater on Saturdays. It was twenty-five cents to get in or whatever. But he had a paper route, so we had a

deal. My older sisters folded the papers for him, that kind of stuff, put the rubber bands on it. And he'd get up early in the morning, he'd ride and throw papers. So he eventually bought himself a bicycle, so he had a bike, and we all learned to ride his bike.

He was such a big brother that we went to the movies every Saturday, and they always had these drawings at the movies to give away a bike or some game thing to get kids there. My brother was very lucky. When we were little, when we were young, he won a bicycle at the Roxy Theater. His name was pulled. All of us were there screamin' our brains out. I kind of remember this. And I remember my brother going on the stage and whispering something to this man, and this man says, "Oh! he wants a *girl's* bike," as if to say he can't ride a boy's bike. And then [David] said, "I want a girl's bike because I have a bike, but my sisters don't have a bike." And he got us our first and *only* bike we ever had, was gotten by my big brother. Instead of getting himself another bike, which we thought he would, he got us a bike. So we had this wonderful red bike that we rode 'til the pedals fell off. Every last one of us learned to ride that bike. But he got our only bike for us. So he was that kind of selfless individual who participated in the welfare of the family, who worked, who did paper routes. He then mowed lawns, and when he finished mowing lawns, he actually worked in a grocery store. So he worked his whole life, and he was a part of our family. Everyone pitched in to make sure that we as a family were safe, that we weren't the victims of the crime and the drugs and the other things that happened in the projects in our community.

And like I said, we were unique, because my father was there every day, just like clockwork. He went to work early in the morning. At 4:30 he came home. And I tell people when we're talking role models, my father was such an awesome role model, because *he* was denied an opportunity to go to school. He would tell us stories that when he became—I guess he went as far as the sixth grade, because by then in the South, that was all they felt a big black guy needed, was a sixth-grade education. Anything more would be dangerous. And so he was never allowed to go past the sixth grade. My mother went to the ninth grade. And so he had a commitment that every kid he had was going to graduate from high school, and they were not going to have to work to interfere with their schooling or whatever it was. And so he had this real strong commitment that anybody who wanted to go to school, was going to go to school. And so we lived with that reality, that school was very, very important to my dad. And each one of us did our best to do well in school. And so that was very much a part of that.

And so my brother worked and also graduated from high school and the whole bit. We were poor people, but we had such tremendous—even to this day—tremendous connection and unity with each other, a firm belief that my mother instilled in us that we had to be together as a group, we had to help each other, we had to be supportive of the family—those kinds of things that were central to our survival. And so even like I tell people we were very, very poor people, but we never knew it. I never knew it until I went to UCLA and studied sociology, how poor I really was as a kid. Because everybody in our neighborhood was poor, and we didn't have the competition for Nikes and all that

stuff they have on TV. I mean, at the most we might have competition to see who was going to get Cheerios versus something else, or some other cereal. But we didn't have this abiding thing. When I talk to my kids and tell 'em what I got for Christmas.... We generally got a doll, maybe, and some skates. And everybody in the project got skates, so Christmas morning you woke up and that's all you heard was (skitcha, skitcha, skitcha, skitcha) because we all had skates. And we took those metal skates and we rode those skates until they about fell apart. Then we would take 'em, because we lived next to a lumber yard, and I learned what a two-by-four was. I had no idea that it meant certain measurements of the wood, but I knew what it looked like. And so we all knew how to jump the fence, get some two-by-fours, bring 'em back, take apart our skates, and make a scooter. So we made scooters out of wood and two-by-fours. So by springtime, we all had scooters made from the Christmas skates that we had [receieved].

And our funny part was one time we decided to make a limousine, which was the funniest thing. Must have been about eight or nine of us put our skates together, got this *huge* piece of wood, made this limo, put some seats on it from some crates, and we rode this limo. We didn't think that this thing would not turn a corner, so every time we got close to a corner, we'd all have to get out, jump around, turn the limo, and get back on it. Of course that lasted about three days, because we all wanted to go in different directions. So we had to break up the limo for our individual scooters. But we did those things because that's what you do when you're poor and you don't have a lot of money and you don't have a lot of gifts and toys and things—you make the best that you can with what you have.

So my early childhood was filled with that, but it was very rich in terms of education and training. Holmes Avenue Elementary School was a poor school, but it had great teachers. And in fact, I run into some of those teachers in my adult life, and I thank them for what I have.

We lived in the projects until 1960, and something very unique happened to us in 1960. My father's company that he worked for, I think Sierra Steel, became Bliss and Laughlin. And as a result, they kind of collapsed their retirement plan, or something happened, and so my father then was given money from the retirement plan that they were changing. So he got \$2,000 in 1960. As a result of that, we were able to purchase a house--\$1,500 down on a \$15,000 house in South Central L.A. We moved from the projects to our own house. And that was such a change in our life. And the interesting thing is, my grandmother found the house because she wanted us near her. And we were maybe a block and a half from her. She lived in an apartment. We were a block and a half from my grandmother. And so we moved into our house on Forty-fifth Street that we owned until my father's death in 1994. But that was a turning point for most of us, to be landowners, to move out of the projects, because we never would have been able to do a budget, saving money, because there was no money to save. And so when this came about, it was like my parents were just so ecstatic.

We moved into this great house, *big* house, three bedrooms, bathroom, *big* living room-dining room, became the center of life of our family for many, many years. And it also changed our schools. We all then changed schools from the schools in the Pueblos to other schools. I eventually went to John Adams Junior

High. I finished all of my elementary years at Holmes Avenue, and then I went to John Adams in 1960. I think I did one week at Carver Junior High, because we were in the process of moving. And I spent my years at John Adams Junior High, and then eventually at Manual Arts High School.

John Adams was a very interesting school as well, because it was an integrated school in many ways. It was about thirty blocks from my house, which I walked every morning with my friends, but we walked everywhere, because fifteen cents to get on a bus was a lot of money. And we got a nickel a day to buy milk. Okay, so you carried your lunch and you bought some milk. And you didn't think about it, because everybody did the same thing. So we all walked to and from school together.

And so I went to Holmes Avenue Elementary School. [Tr.'s note: Did she mean to say Carver Jr. High? That was an interesting place for me, because they were just beginning this concept in 1960 of giftedness, and what gifted meant, and accelerated programs. And so being a kid coming in from a school where I got all "A's" and I had taken algebra in the fifth grade, and Mr. Hudson thought I was a smart little girl and did that. I then was eligible for this special program. And so I went to junior high school and was in accelerated programs, and eventually they decided to take algebra and put it into junior high, because before it was always at tenth grade. And so they experimented with us by accelerating our math in the seventh and eighth grade, and we were the first group in John Adams Junior High to experiment with algebra in the ninth grade, which made us eligible for calculus in high school. So it was kind of a transition period

in junior high and high school. We had, overall, pretty good teachers. But we ended up with one year—it was unfortunate, we had a teacher come in, in seventh grade, who wanted to be a movie star, and as a result of that, lectured daily about Gina Lola Brigida and “Go Naked in the World.” Good gracious. And so we never did anything in that English class all of seventh grade. We all got “A’s,” did nothing.

When I got to eighth grade, I had this English teacher, Mrs. Williams, who assessed us and said, “What did you guys learn last year?” because she knew this teacher—they had thrown him out. And when she found out what had happened, she said, “Okay, there are no excuses, you will learn eighth-grade English, which means now you must learn seventh grade in one semester.” And she talked to our parents and said, “They’re going to have homework every day, they’re gonna have this, they’re gonna have that, we’re gonna have some after-school things occasionally,” and we were all in shock. Many people would have just said, “Oh well, it’s not my fault, I didn’t do it, I didn’t create it.” We had to do all of our seventh-grade work in the first semester from September to December. And then in January we did our eighth-grade work. She said, “Because when it comes to ninth grade English, you will be ready.” And I mean, we worked like dogs that year. But when I reflect back on it, I was really very grateful for a teacher who did not give us an excuse and say, “Well, that’s not my fault, I didn’t do it, I wasn’t there,” that kind of thing.

So John Adams Junior High was a really interesting experience for me. I discovered, too, in junior high that I was still kind of a rebel, because I joined this

group. There was a group called “The Ladies” in those days. It was kind of like a little sorority. They would initiate you, induct you into it. But in order to be a Lady, you had to do these stupid things every day for five days. You know, like one day you couldn’t eat, or you couldn’t do something. And they always made you dress like you were homeless, with your hair uncombed, just *humiliate* you through the school day. And I refused to do it. I said, “I refuse to do it.” And everybody was like, “Oh, you’ll never be a Lady, you’ll never be a Lady.” Well, I refused to do it. And when I refused to do it, this teacher took up my cause and got on the person who was in charge of it and said, “If you’re going to make Ladies, then you ought to have high standards, and maybe they should come and not get dirty during the day,” or they should do this or that, or whatever it was. So I still became a Lady, and I refused to do all this initiation drama that was going on. And so it was kind of interesting. Everybody said, “You’ll never be a Lady, you won’t [be invited to] join the organization.” I said, “Whatever. If I don’t get in, I’m not. But I’m not gonna walk around this campus lookin’ like a fool.” That was my response. And I wouldn’t do it. And eventually one or two others stopped doing it. And then obviously this teacher took up our cause.

But I graduated from John Adams Junior High. I was an officer at the school, served on the student government, and I was, I guess, what they called their chief justice, because I served on their court. So I handed out justice for folks who did things like throw trash on the ground, and all those kinds of wonderful things that kids did. And that was kind of fun. But I enjoyed junior high school. I think that was my last year in the orchestra, though, because when

I got to high school, my schedule was too heavy, things were different, and I just couldn't continue it.

But I graduated from junior high and then went to Manual Arts High School, where I also graduated from high school in 1966. My years at Manual were interesting and eventful—typical. When I was in junior high, I didn't have a boyfriend because my sisters teased me *too* much, and I just figured no guy was worth being teased over. I mean, it was not worth having your older sisters talk about your long-headed boyfriend, or whatever he had, and that kind of stuff. So any guy called me, I would first say on the phone, (gruffly) "What do you want?" And he would say, "Well, I just want to talk to you." "Well, goodbye, you've talked." And that would be it, in junior high. I was not about to be stuck with a boyfriend, and to be teased, because my sisters were *vicious* when it came to teasing me. I'm number six in the family, so I had all these people harassing me, and I just couldn't handle it. So when I got to high school, I thought, "This is going to be even more difficult, because now I might have to get a boyfriend that won't be so much teasing." But by then, some of my sisters had gotten married and moved on, so I was not the center of their attention, thank God, and I might consider it.

High school was interesting for me. It was a real growth period because when I first got to high school, my older sister, the one right over me, Lois, was in high school with me. And my sister Lois was always the one who always wanted [us] to dress alike. She was a student government person, she was senior, and every day we came to school looking alike—which was cool, I guess, because she

was my *best* friend, and still is. So we ended up doing things together. But then she was only there one semester and she graduated, and then I was there by myself, so I could be the individual I wanted to be in [high school]. And I was by that time in all the accelerated classes. And my high school was interesting. I went to Manual Arts. Manual was probably 99.9% black. However, the rest of the population was Asian. We had all these people who had come from China in the early 1960s. Many of their parents didn't speak English at all—the kids did. And most of them were placed into the gifted programs. Despite the fact that I was in this school where almost everybody was black, in the classroom I was probably the only black person in the class—occasionally one or two others. But if there was a class of 30 students, about 3 of us were African Americans and the rest were all [Asian]. And there were two white kids in our class, which was interesting. Eventually then another guy came. But there were like two white females and one white male, and all the others were Asians—Chinese and Japanese—in our school. And so it was really quite an interesting experience for me to be in the midst of a black community, and then be exposed to this new culture. I got to be very good friends with all of them, their parents, got to know their families and visit.

It was interesting, because other kids on the campus were like, “Can you tell the difference between a Chinese and a Japanese?” They could not. I could, because I was in class with them. I said, “Oh, they're very different.” “How could you tell the difference?!” “Well, because I see them up close. I know their names, I see them, I see the facial differences, the complexion that's different

between a Chinese and a Japanese.” So I saw the difference, and no one else, my other friends at school, could see the difference between them, because they said, “They all look alike.” I said, “Well, I’m in class with them, so I know what they look like, I know what they’re like.”

Our school ended up, the class that I was in, because we also, once again, had accelerated programs—when I graduated in 1966, I was vice-president of the school, I spoke at graduation, I was a part of their top ten whatever, with all the honors. Our graduating class received over half a million dollars in 1966—a very decorated class in terms of what the potential was that people had for kids. I remember writing my senior paper, and my senior thesis was graded on whether or not it would pass at a college level. It was written on thesis paper for your master’s, so it all had to be typed within the blue lines. We had to have a minimum of ten to fifteen footnotes, and thirty books in the bibliography. We had to develop a thesis. And when I took my exams in all of my classes—and this is in the heart of the inner city, this is really in poor black neighborhoods—when I took my exams, like we had to take the statewide history test to see if you knew facts—we took that as an exercise, the professor said, “Because you’ll all do 90 on that, we know that.” But then my exams were three days long, an hour a day, written in blue books. So we had essays. I never had multiple choice, true-false, I always had essays. In my literature class, my history classes, it was amazing. And I just thought that was the norm, until one day, as a senior, I went into this teacher’s class, who was my English teacher, to take him this scholarship application that he was doing for me, and I was amazed at the curriculum that he

had for the other children at that school. The difference between my class and the other students was day and night. And the treatment of us was so different, that it really pained me at that point to think that here I am thinking everybody's doing the same thing at this school, and when I go in this other classroom, the curriculum is so dumbed down, the kids are not being taught to write, and those kinds of things. And yet I'm in these classes where there are thirty of us who are given the highest level of challenge and curriculum that one could imagine at any inner-city high school. Our class went to Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard, Dartmouth, Yale, you name it. There was Stanford, there was not a major university that we were not eligible to attend, and that we were not admitted to. Many of us had five and six different letters of acceptance, and had our choice of where we wanted to go.

And so it was really interesting for me, that I saw that tremendous difference between what goes on at a school and a curriculum that's there.

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SR: Today is Tuesday, July 1, 2008. This is Susan Resnik, continuing the oral history of Dr. Shirley Nash Weber. Good morning, Dr. Weber.

SNW: Good morning, Susan.

Well of course my graduation from high school, as all of our graduations from high school in my family, were tremendous events for my family. My father, as I pointed out earlier, was one who was denied an opportunity to go to school. So graduating from high school was the one thing he was going to make sure all eight of his children did; as well as any opportunity that they wanted. He

made sure that we knew that if we wanted to go to college, that he would do whatever was possible. His favorite phrase was he would “drink muddy water and sleep in a hollow log” if his kid wanted to go to school. And he meant that very honestly. So when I decided I was going to go to a four-year institution—my sisters and brothers had gone to two years or trade schools—and when I decided I was going to go to a four-year institution, that was like the high point of my dad’s life. He made sure that I had whatever resources I needed to apply to school. We were poor, but yet he wanted to make sure that I did not *not* apply simply because I didn’t have the ten dollars for the application fee, or whatever it was. And so going to college was very, very important. My choices were tremendous. Because of the education I’d had in high school, I had a chance to apply to an array of institutions. And I applied to UCLA, to UC-Berkeley, to USC, Stanford. I applied eventually to Howard University in Washington, D.C.

And interestingly enough, my heart was set on Howard University. I had heard about a black college, knew nothing about it because for some reason HBCUs, historically black colleges [and universities]], were not really *that* well known unless you had a history and a tradition of attending them, or you lived in the South. And so I didn’t know a lot about it, but there was a college night that happened in my senior or junior year, and Howard University came. And I was just enthralled over the fact that there was this institution that was a black college, and I *wanted* to go. But interestingly enough, my parents were so opposed to it, mainly because they were afraid. They were afraid of me going that far away from home, and them having such limited resources. My mother’s greatest fear

was, “If you get sick, who’s gonna care for you? How are we going to get to you?” None of them had ever been in a plane before. We didn’t travel by plane, we traveled by car and bus, and so as a result, this was just such a *foreign* experience for them, to even think about sending a child that far away, that they fought against it tooth and nail. So I somehow or another said to my mother, “Okay, I won’t go,” because I was kind of fearful too. You know, if your parents tell you something bad might happen to you, then you figure that it might happen, and so you say, “Okay.” I figured, “Well, UCLA’s not a bad choice.” It was not my first choice, but my parents thought it was great. My dad was a basketball nut, so he knew that Lew Alcindor [phonetic] was already at UCLA, had done his freshman year, was going to play the year that I entered. He was fully aware of the USC-UCLA rivalry. We lived near SC, but SC was so expensive, and they’d given a scholarship, but their scholarship would by no means have covered the education that I needed. And my parents felt UCLA was best of all anyway. So as a result, I capitulated and went to UCLA, and my parents were ecstatic about that and me going.

Interestingly enough, we had no idea, my father had no idea, how we would pay for UCLA. We had no idea how I would *get* to UCLA. We had no idea *whatever* with regard to UCLA, but my parents knew that I was going to go to UCLA. And I didn’t know that my father had actually made arrangements with a friend of his—because we only had one car—to actually give me his car for the four years that I was going to go to UCLA, and he was going to catch a ride every morning, all the way across town, with this friend, to go to work. That was their

initial plan. I had grandparents who lived in Venice, and so the thought was, “Oh, you can go live with them.” But God, were they boring! And they were not my exciting grandmother, they were my very religious *grandfather*, who was my mother’s father that my exciting grandmother had divorced. And of course I loved him very dearly, but he and his new wife were really very, very quiet, very boring. We’d spend nights with them when we were kids, we’d have to spend every Easter Eve at their home, and that would really be like punishment. So I thought, “Wow, if I [live there while] I go to college, I’ll have such a *boring* time.” But nonetheless, I was committed to go to college, and I was going to do whatever was necessary to get there and to be there.

Fortunately for me, I had graduated with a number of scholarships available to me—not enough to cover everything that was there—but my father said, “Don’t worry, you’ll go to college.” The summer of 1966—I graduated in June of ’66—the summer of 1966, for some reason, was the beginning of EOP [Economic Opportunity Program] at UCLA. They had not implemented it in terms of outreach and recruitment of students, but they had gotten this funding for the fall. And so I get this call in the middle of summer that says, “This is UCLA. We’re calling you because we think you meet the requirements for financial assistance”—and so forth and so on—“can you come to UCLA?” And I was just shocked, because somebody’s gonna call me and tell me they’re gonna help me get to UCLA. So my mother got the car the next day. My dad hitched a ride to work, and we went to UCLA.

Now, the interesting thing is, you never know how small your world is until you really have to do something else. And I'd lived in Los Angeles almost all my life, and my parents had too, and we thought we knew the world. We had never been to UCLA, and it was only fifteen miles away on the freeway. We didn't even know where UCLA was. This is how crazy it was. I'm gonna go to college, we have no idea where the school is even located in Los Angeles. And so we took the advice of a friend and we drove from South Central L.A., down Figueroa to Wilshire Boulevard, and we drove all the way on Wilshire to UCLA. It took us about an hour. It was amazing, because when we figured out, much later on, it took fifteen minutes on the freeway. But we took the scenic route. And that really was the first time in my life I'd actually been to Beverly Hills. I had been in various areas around Los Angeles, but had never really spent [time] driving through that area. And so it was really interesting to me that here was a place so close to my home, and yet so far away from my reality.

But we went to UCLA and sat there, and of course they discovered that we surely were poor, that I was one of the persons targeted toward encouragement to go to college, and so they gave me financial aid, which was wonderful—lots of grant money, they gave me a dorm room, and so that was wonderful, so I didn't have to stay with my grandparents, and my dad didn't have to give up his car. I got a dorm room, I even got an orientation week that they paid for. And we were just in *shock* that this stuff was falling in my lap, because it solved one of our biggest problems, which was “how is she gonna get to school?” The vision was, I was going to initially ride the bus. And riding the bus to UCLA was like a two-

hour ride, but I figured I could study on the bus goin' and comin'—ha ha—and basically enjoy school when I was there. So actually, it fell into my lap, the beginning of EOP. I didn't get admitted through EOP, but I surely benefited immensely from the financial support that came as a result of that program that came into existence in 1966.

Well, going to UCLA in the fall was really quite an experience for me. It was a culture shock, a real culture shock, because keep in mind, this is 1966, there is no “Different World” [i.e., “Different Strokes” starring Gary Coleman, et al.? (Tr.)] on television, there aren't black people, comedians and what have you, that people see regularly. They're very seldom seen in movies. And so people in the dorm had never really *seen* an African American. They had not had them in their schools, they had not been around them, they had no idea who they were. The people they saw were maybe Bill Cosby on “I Spy,” which was really a tennis player in Europe somewhere, doing some spy work—but no real exposure to culture. “Julia” on TV was some affluent woman who was a nurse who wore \$400 dresses. So that didn't match anybody's reality either. And so as a result, there was really no [realistic (Tr.)] concept of African Americans on the campus.

At the time I entered UCLA, there were over 30,000 students at UCLA, undergraduate and graduate students, and less than 300 African Americans at the graduate and undergraduate level. So that in itself was really an eye-opener. I think in the dorm there were something like 600 of us living in the dorm, 600 students, and out of that there might have been—I think two of us were African American females. Eventually, the next year, one or two more came. And I think

there might have been two or three African American males out of the 600 students in the dorm. So truly, when you saw an African American on campus, it was like one of those slow [motion (Tr.)] commercials where you start running to meet the person. And oftentimes you discovered it was just a glare of the sun, they weren't really African American at all.

But it was an experience. It was a culture shock. I mean, everything I said, I felt like I spoke a foreign language, because it was not like the hip-hop generation now where there's a crossover of language. No. If I said something, people thought I was like from a foreign country, and when *they* said something, I thought, "Wait a minute!" I remember surfing terminology was in at the time, and this girl says, "Gee, you are really bitchin'." And I go, "Hold up! You don't call me a bitch. I'm from South Central." And I had no idea what she was talkin' about, and they said, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! This is really a good term." And I'm lookin' at them like, "This is *not* a good term." At the same time, I remember this girl was really getting on my nerves, and I said, "Would you please lighten up." And she looked at me and goes, "Would you like a match?" I thought, "What?!" I was like, "God, where am I?! Who has dropped me here?!"

The food was different. If we said, "Well, let's get grits in the dorm...." That was before the "Beverly Hillbillies" or whatever. And so we had a petition, and people looked at us like, "Well, what will this do to you?" "What do you mean?! It's *food!*" So it was really, really a unique experience. I didn't even know what a bagel was. This is how bizarre it was. And I wasn't living that far from Fairfax, which is like the Jewish capital of the West Coast. And I remember

we used to have these *huge* experiences of studying in the dorm. And they would always have these committees to go, and we'd buy food for every night, midnight they'd bring in stuff to eat. And so my friend said, "You sit on the committee, that way we'll have good stuff." So I got on the committee, and, you know, they had different things. And finally someone said, "Let's get bagels and cream cheese." And I go, "What the heck is that?!" And they go, "Oh, it's really delicious. It's this bread and it has cream cheese," and went on and on. So I'm thinking like Danishes, bear claws, something of this nature. And my friends, I was telling them what it was, and they go, "What's that?" I said, "Well, they say it's really good, like bear claws or Danishes or somethin'." And that night when they came in with this little bag of rocks and this hard bucket of cream cheese, my friends wanted to kill me. We were *so* hungry. We had no idea *what* this stuff was, it was so hard. And I laugh about that, because as my kids have grown up, my daughter's favorite breakfast food was bagels and cream cheese, which is kind of funny, that whole distance between culture and reality.

But it really was a change in me, in terms of seeing what the world was about, and different people, different languages, different lifestyles. For many of the persons I met in the dorm, they had never met an African American up close before. They had never had any kind of training in terms of race relations, so sometimes the things they said were *so* racist and so raw, in terms of what they thought. "Well, I wouldn't mind if black people lived next door to me, although the property value would definitely go down." You know, that kind of stuff. And I'm thinking to myself, "You live in a very exclusive neighborhood. Anybody

who moves next door to you is not going to affect your property value.” It’s that kind of thing. So it was really, really, a very, very unique experience that was there for us in terms of cultural and social activities. Music was not our music. Dance was not our dance. You know, that whole exposure. So you really go through this world, kind of looking at things in a weird way, and so the few of us who were African Americans were kind of clustered together, because it was really a weird, weird experience, with a few who kind of joined us. And it was impacted by not only race, but also by economics, because it was clearly a place where very affluent people went, who lived in the dorm. Their exposure, their discussions of traveling to Europe and around the world, was so foreign to [me]. And so it was really, really a....

But it was an eye-opener for me, that here I lived eighteen years of my life fairly secure and comfortable in my world, without actually realizing that in some ways I had not had certain exposures. But in other ways, I had *wonderful* exposure, because of the support I had. I saw kids who had *great* things in terms of resources, but who were so screwed up personally that it made you cry. They had tragedies. The first semester I was in the dorm, a young man committed suicide because his father was a big-time elected official somewhere in the Valley of Los Angeles. He was an “A” student, he was pre-med, he’d come to the university and he’s struggling, he’s getting “C’s.” He’s struggling in these science classes, struggling to survive. And on my way back to the dorm—my parents picked me up every weekend, and I’d go back on Sundays—we’re driving along, and there’s a notice on the news that a young man has jumped off of Weber

Hall and splattered. And that's my dorm. He had done that Saturday night and killed himself. They talked about his grades and the problem that he was having in not being able to face his parents. And it was interesting, because we were going down the street, and my mother said to my father, "Pull over." And he pulled over and she turned around and said, "Nothing in the world is worth you killing yourself over. We are proud of you, regardless of the grades that you will get"—they didn't know what grades I was getting that semester—"but you will *not* take your life for *this*." And they were *real* clear about that. That is not that important. And so I felt always that there was this level of encouragement and support that was always there, that as long as I did my best and tried to do my best, my parents would be proud of me. I was fortunate to that extent, because I saw kids who could not face their parents, because they were not living up to whatever tradition or expectation that was there. And my parents had the expectation that I would do well, that I would do my best. And whatever I did, they were proud of it. And as long as I *tried*—if I didn't try, they would be upset—but as long as I tried, they felt proud. First one to go off to college, they're happy, that [I've] done something extremely well and unique. And so with that in mind, at least I had the sense of assurance that no matter what, I was in good stead with my parents, and so I felt good about that.

So living in the dorm was a really interesting, *interesting* experience, real cultural challenge in some ways one could not even believe that was there. And you had to stake out your position as to where you were, because I didn't really

want to get lost at UCLA, culturally or in terms of my own identity, my own sense of self. And so fortunately, I didn't have to do that.

It was academically challenging, obviously, because I had been in a world where the majority of the students I had known were African American, and I knew Chinese students and Japanese students who were in the advanced classes. But you know, you hear the myths always that blacks are not as smart as everybody else, you're not going to do as well, lots of kids are flunking out, this is UCLA, this is their world it's not your world. And so you're really scared. I mean, you're scared your first semester, you're apprehensive about will you pass your tests, do you know enough. The professors were not that welcoming. They were not that open, they were not that supportive.

SR: That's what I was going to ask you about. Were there any African American professors?

SNW: There was really one that I knew of on the campus. There might have been one or two others. Actually, I ended up majoring in speech because of the one that was there. That was Dr. Asante—his name at the time was Arthur Smith—was the support system for me and many other students. But basically we didn't meet any black faculty. He was the only black professor I had as an undergraduate, *period*. I only had one *female* professor as an undergraduate. And like I said, it's really quite interesting, because you didn't see yourself there, and you also felt very reluctant to ask questions, to be involved, and if you did, you were sometimes made to feel stupid for the questions that you asked, or people would look at you like, "Why are you asking that question?" So you had to make sure whatever you

asked was really, really a good and intelligent question, because you're in a class of 500, 600 sometimes 200, and you're the only African American, and you're conscious of the fact that you really represent what these people think of black people—which is a tremendous burden to bear, that you are *the representative*, because there's not enough of you to say, "Well, black people come in all shapes, sizes, and all intellects." There's not enough of you to do that, so whatever you do is what black people do. And so as a result, it was very, very challenging, that was there. Even being in EOP, they hadn't really figured out what EOP was supposed to do, so there wasn't really a lot of support for tutoring and those kinds of things. And so you'd make your way to try to find out who was there, what students were there, who could you network with to try to create some sense of community on the campus. And as I said, the departments were not that supportive, they were not encouraging in terms of your interests and what you wanted to do. I remember as a speech major I was never allowed, as an undergraduate, to do any topic that was African American. I mean, if we did research, I couldn't do stuff on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. I remember I had to do a special project in order to graduate, and I wanted to do it on Malcolm X, I was really interested in Malcolm X and his rhetoric of "ballot or the bullet." And this professor said, "No, that's too limiting." Now, mind you, I'd spent my whole academic career studying white speakers and theory, so when I decided to do something black "it's very limiting." And he made me do this paper on—I remember, I still have the paper—seventy-eight pages on Michael Davitt. No one I have ever met knows Michael Davitt. Michael Davitt was some Irishman

engaged in the potato famine of the late 1800s, who was fighting in the parliament. I mean, I read *The London Times* until I thought I was gonna go blind, on microfiche. It was one of these topics I had no interest in whatsoever, *but* it was what I had to do in order to get my bachelor's degree. And so I suffered through that process. I said at the end of that process—I said to them in the graduate school, "I'm going to decide what I want to do from this point forward. I had to do that, but I'm not going to do that again, ever again."

SR: How did you decide on what you were going to major in?

SNW: I entered UCLA as a math major, because I liked math. And I took a math class or so and did okay, but I realized I really didn't like math enough, that I liked people. And so I thought, "Well, maybe I'll major in sociology or something of that nature." And then I took a speech class, and I liked it! I liked the speech class, I liked the theory concept, and then I decided to take another one. Well, at that point I met Dr. Asante. Interestingly enough, I had known Asante for a long time, because he was once a minister in an adjoining church of ours. And so I had seen him, and knew who he was, and he was an energetic, very intelligent, young scholar, who's now really the most renown scholar in black studies—Asante is, at this point. But he became my mentor, and I took classes with him. And he taught things on black language, and black communications, and black rhetorical theory. He wrote about those subjects *before* there was a Black Studies Department. So that sparked my interest in the discipline. Plus he was very interested in me as a student. He wanted to make sure that whatever the Speech Department was doing, that I knew about it, that I was a part of it—where others didn't. You

know, you just take class, you move on, no one would ever acknowledge you, know you were there, those kinds of things. And because the Speech Department was a small department, you felt like you had a sense of home. And so oftentimes you'd gravitate toward those areas that would pique your academic interest, but also make you feel comfortable in the environment. And so I ended up being a communications major, really because of Dr. Asante and the environment in which he put me.

I had decided years ago that I'd be a teacher. Stories of my life know that I taught from the time I was five years old, on my back porch. I love teaching, I love watching people learn, I love sharing information. And in my family, being a teacher is the highest thing you could *ever* do, because I had aunts who were teachers, and my parents always respected teachers and what teachers could do. And so I was going to be a teacher, but I had decided early that I'd either teach elementary school or college—no middle school, no high school—I wanted the *good* years when kids are enthused about school, or folks are committed to graduating. And so I thought, “Well, maybe I'll be an elementary school teacher.”

And that was really where I was headed, until one day Dr. Asante came up to me and said, “I'm going to nominate you to be a Woodrow Wilson Fellow.” And I said, “Oh, you shouldn't waste your nomination. I'm not going to be a Woodrow Wilson Fellow.” And he goes, “Yes you will. I'm going to nominate you.” And I said, “Why would you nominate me when there's so many other people?” He said, “Because it's the right thing to do, and I'm going to nominate

you. I'm not going to nominate anybody else." So I said, "Oh, okay." I felt, "Wow, this is too unfortunate, because I'll never get this thing." So he nominated me, I filled out all the papers and forms, and so I went on to the interviews in my senior year. And it was interesting, because the interviews were held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. And so I went and I walk in this room, and I'm a decent student, I'm like maybe a 3.0, 2.9 or something like that. But I'm like a 3.5 or 3.6 in my discipline. And my grades have consistently improved from the time I was a freshman. When I came in, I was basically getting all "C's," a few "B's." By the time I was getting ready to graduate, I was on the dean's list, because I'd figured out what the university was about. I was comfortable and confident in the university. I was taking 20 credits in a quarter and getting a 4.0—you know, that kind of stuff. I had figured it out by then.

So I went to this meeting, this interview, but I'm thinking to myself—I walk into the room and I'm sitting there, and all the students are white, and I'm asking them, and they're like the micro, micro, micro majors. (laughs) I mean, they've got these majors that are humongous in name and title. They're minute scientists and all kinds of stuff. I thought, "Oh God, this is a total waste of my day. These kids here are eggheads, they're all 4.0's, they're all valedictorians or whatever, I don't know." So I sat there and I thought, "Wow, this is a morning wasted."

So when they came out, they said, "We're going to start the interviews." There were like four or five guys from Harvard, Princeton, all these places. We were in a suite, and they said, "Who wants to go first?" I said "I will go first,"

because I figured this is a total waste, I'm gonna go, get out of here, go to lunch and enjoy my day. So they had seven or eight of us to interview for the morning. I think it was six or seven of us. So I go into the interview and it starts about nine o'clock in the morning. And they're asking me questions about my life and what had happened, and the college experience, and how I had to learn the university—you know, those kinds of things. And we just had a wonderful time. And they looked up, and it was 11:30! So they had to rush the next six through in like thirty or forty minutes, because they said, "Oh my God, we've spent two and a half hours chatting with you," blah, blah, blah. And I think they were surprised that as an African American student or person, I could actually speak, and speak well, and explain my world, and those kinds of things. And I left. And Asante said, "How did it go?" I said, "Oh, it went okay. I talked too long, but you know, whatever." And I went on about my business. So I was one of seventeen Woodrow Wilson Fellows out of the 6,000 graduating class. Which obviously opened up doors for grad school and fellowships and those kinds of things for me to go on to graduate school. I was surprised, I was shocked. I told Asante, and he said, "No, you're a good candidate, because you have life experiences that others don't have, and you've overcome some challenges that others didn't have: economic, social, cultural," those kinds of things that *I* didn't really see as being of value. And that's why I tell students now who apply for scholarships, "You know, you have to tell your story, because while you think that what you're doing is just okay, you've overcome some challenges and some obstacles that others don't know about, and you need to tell your story." I also tell my daughter and

my son, “You know what, you have a story, but it’s not a good story. Your mother’s a professor, your daddy’s a judge. You don’t have a good story, so you’d better be *brilliant*. You’ve got to be 4.3 when you graduate from high school. You’ve got to have 1300-1400 on the SAT. *You* must be brilliant, because you don’t have a story. I’m first-generation college, you are not. You have too many advantages.” And I say that to them. When a kid who doesn’t have advantages gets things that they don’t get, I understand that. I say, “That’s your mom. That was my story in life, and it’s my responsibility to fill in the gaps for you. So I have to pay for you to go to school, or pay for these things, because I can do it, and others could not.” And I understand the story, so I’m not bitter about the story. I understand it, I understand the reality. But I told ’em, “*You* folks don’t have a good story. *I* had a good story. *You* don’t have a good story. You have too many privileges in life.”

So I was fortunate to be admitted to UCLA’s grad school, to Northwestern, I think a couple of other places. I had good GRE scores, those kinds of things. And so I was thinking of where I wanted to go, and UCLA wanted me to stay, wanted to give me a full fellowship to go to grad school, and so I said okay. It was comfortable, it was where I lived, it was home, and so I said okay. So I stayed and went to UCLA for my graduate work. And I think also I remained there because Asante was there, and you always try to get to graduate school where you have someone to mentor you, to support you through the process. Because even though I was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, had done all the things that people wanted me to do in grad school, I still suffered a

tremendous amount of indifference and alienation from the larger faculty. I had passed all their classes, getting “A’s” in everything they offered, and still I was not their prize student, I was not their little [teaching (Tr.)] assistant, I was not their research assistant, I got no financial support from them *at all*. And it was really quite interesting, because even my girlfriend who was in the program said.... Well, you know, really, we began to teach at the City College and then at Cal State L.A., but I never had a chance to ever teach just an undergraduate course at UCLA as a grad student, which is normally what people offered. When they finally offered me something, it was quite interesting, I had already gotten an assistant professorship, tenure track, *here*. And so the guy who offered me, was an assistant professor *there*. I said, “Well, I’m gonna go do the same thing you’re doin’, somewhere else.” But [they] did not support me, and didn’t counsel me. It was really quite interesting.

And so it was strange in a way, but beneficial in another way, because what happened was, I got my master’s in a year, and I entered their doctoral program. Because no one told me anything of what I should do and not do, I did more than I *should* do. So I took like sixteen units in graduate school, which normally is four to eight. So I ended up finishing all of my doctoral work in a year and a quarter. So in one year I had finished all coursework for my Ph.D. That shocked them, because when I came to San Diego, the assumption was, “She’ll drop out. She goes away, she’ll drop out.” And that’s what they were banking on. They didn’t know I had already finished all my courses.

And so it was interesting, because I came to San Diego in '72, and immediately the chair of the department tried to put me out of the graduate program. He called me to UCLA and said, "I think you should leave the program." When he did that, that was in the spring of '73. I'd just gotten married, and I was shocked when he said, "I think you should go away." That's what he said to me. He called me to UCLA, I went. "I think you should go away." I said, "Okay, where do you want me to go?" I'm thinking he's going to offer me some money to go on a research tour. He says, "No, I think you should just leave." I go, "Why?" He says, "I don't think you'll ever finish." Now, mind you, I'd only been in the Ph.D. program *one year*. I was twenty-four years old. I said, "Well, why are you saying that?" He said, "Well, I don't think anybody wants to be on your committee." I said, "Well, I haven't *asked* anyone to be on my committee." He said, "Well, I don't think you'll ever finish. You haven't passed your language exam." I said, "I haven't *taken* my language exams." So this went on in circles. He said, "Well, I just think you should go away. I don't think anybody wants to be on your committee...." And this went on and on.

So I was *very* discouraged. I left, and I was telling my husband about it, and he goes, "Oh no, we've got to fight this." So we stayed in L.A. a little longer, and I called Asante, my professor who was my mentor. He was getting ready to go to SUNY-Buffalo to chair the department there. And he said, "I don't respect this man's opinion, I've seen stuff he's written about me," so forth and so on. "So you should appeal this. Don't worry, I will help you get a committee together."

It was interesting. I then called the graduate school the next day to explain to them what was going on, and that I'd been asked to leave the graduate program. I had gone in and told the lady I wanted to speak with the dean of graduate studies, so she saw that I was African American, he wasn't in. So I left. I said, "I'll call back tomorrow." So when I called, he was waiting for me, had never read my files, and his response was pretty pat, "Well, Ms. Weber, you must understand that you have eight years to finish your doctorate, and in eight years, if you have not, we have a right not to renew your contract." I said, "Obviously you've not read my file. I have not been out of *high school* for eight years, number one, and I already have two degrees from your institution." He goes, "Oh. *Well*, you know you must maintain at least a 3.0 in order to remain in grad school." I said, "Exactly. And I have a 3.79. Now what are we *really* talking about? My understanding is that my contract with the university, through the catalog it is a *contract*. I have satisfied my portion. You must satisfy yours. If not, my husband will file an injunction against the University of California *in the morning*." He said, "We will get a committee together if *I* have to serve on it." I said, "I really don't care at this point."

It was really quite interesting, because then when I passed my language exams, the secretary of the department said the guy said, "God, I'm really surprised." Now, it was really interesting because this was a professor who I had taken—he was the guy who I had to do this Michael Davitt project with, that I got an "A" from, and I had gotten an "A" in every class he'd ever taught. I never got anything less than an "A" in *any* class he'd ever taught, or any paper I'd ever

written for him. And so it was really quite interesting that all of a sudden I'm being asked to leave. And then I went to an event, because some professors were going to other places, and I discovered that there were people in the room, some woman, who had had her contract renewed. She was in her twelfth year of her doctorate. Every student who came in with me, who had graduated.... I actually finished my doctorate before every student who entered the program with me, and some students who were working on their master's when I was an undergraduate. I finished the doctoral program before them. So it was an eye-opener in terms of seeing what the institution can and cannot do for you, or how it tries to discourage people from achieving their goals, and how easily you can be *really* discouraged. Because [I] sit there, and I'm talking to a man, that I had worked with personally as a research [supervisor], when I did my individual, independent research project; that I'd taken every class he'd ever offered; so therefore he was not a stranger to me, and I was not a stranger to him, academically. And for him to tell me this, it's kind of devastating. You wonder, "Wow, maybe I'm *not* that good." You don't know. And I was kind of like, "Wow." I was tired by then, and my husband goes, "No, you have spent too much time in graduate school to give this up. You will not do this, you will finish." And so we went through the process.

And as I went along, I discovered that students who were their prize students could never pass their language exams. I had graduated and finished, and these students are still trying to pass Spanish. I had taken my degree in Italian. You know, they couldn't pass the written exams. They're three-day-long exams, I passed all of those. All the things that people talked about you're

supposed to do, I was just doin' 'em! And yet I was asked to leave the program. And when I met with some of the others, I asked them, they had never gotten a call, they had never been asked to leave, they had never been told "we're downsizing," or whatever story he came up with concerning me, that I should just leave. He said he just felt I'd never finish.

SR: I was wondering whether part of that was at the times, given the sixties and all of this, also about women, and the fact that you were married.

SNW: Well, you know, it was interesting that the issue of women.... First of all, I don't think they knew I was married, because I'd been married a couple of months. There were a number of women in the department that were their prized students. But they were obviously, probably, more agreeable to [certain (Tr.)] activities than I was. You know, the standard joke was, "Oh, she's going to pass her language exam—she has on a mini-skirt today." You know, one of those kind of things. Well, one student who couldn't pass her written exam decided to take it orally. So all those kinds of things. And I was never into that. I was always business. Then too, I recognized the fact that I didn't play the graduate game. I didn't hang around the department. I had a job. I had a life beyond the university. I worked in the community. I helped kids. I had a job downtown as a social worker.

SR: Tell me more about that. What were you doing?

SNW: Well, as an undergraduate, I got a job. I worked, first of all at ... not J.C. Penney ... Newberry. I did a lot of work there, but I realized that standing on my feet was not the kind of job I wanted to have. So when I went to get another job at the

university, I said, “Okay, I want a job”—I went to our career service—“where I can have a seat.” (laughs) I mean, just high expectations—a chair! I wanted something that I had the option to sit or stand, but not to have to stand and fold all day long. So it was really kind of funny, it didn’t pay much more than the other. And so I ended up with this job at the Episcopal City Mission Society. I went in as a clerical worker in the Episcopal City Mission Society, which was an agency of the Episcopal Church, downtown Los Angeles. And I met some of the most wonderful people. Mrs. Boyd became like a mentor to me in many ways—an older white woman in the Episcopal Church, who really just—she and her husband basically just kind of nurtured me through my last two years of college, and into grad school. I worked there until I actually came to San Diego State.

But what happened was, this job opened up an opportunity for me really to kind of expand my skills. I not only did clerical work, but then they discovered, “Hm, she’s pretty intelligent.” And so as a result of that, I ended up becoming like the assistant to Mrs. Boyd. I ran the office. I basically handled clients. I did their annual reports. I made their presentations to the United Way, and I learned a lot about nonprofit as a result of working with this agency. We handled the indigents. I went out and also worked with another social worker who worked part-time, and we evaluated board and care facilities. So I learned a lot about board and care facilities for the elderly, convalescent homes, those kinds of things. We assessed them, we evaluated them, we made recommendations concerning them. So it became a really interesting job. I *loved* my job. It was also one where we trusted each other immensely, so that I was supposed to be to

work at eight, I often got there at a quarter to eight. But if I got there at 8:10, it wasn't the end of the world, because we were all very responsible individuals. And so I just kept assuming these responsibilities so much, that when I finally had to leave to come to San Diego, I said "I've got to go teach, you guys." It was quite interesting, because they had to hire like three people to take my job, I had taken on so many different.... They tried one—that didn't work. So they ended up hiring three people to take my job. But like I said, it was a very interesting experience, and they supported me academically.

I remember I decided I was going to work full-time because I had moved into an apartment in L.A. And so I said, "Well, I can't work full-time," because I had a seminar at four in the afternoon, and I had to go to my class. So I had to leave at three to get to my seminar. They said, "No problem, we'll pay you full-time, you still go to your seminar." So it didn't matter that I had a seminar at three one day, or something else. "Because you work all the time, and you take care of our business, you do this and this." So it was a very, very supportive environment. It was a very diverse environment, too. I was the youngest one in the office, but I was like the assistant director. The director was an older white female who was really wonderful. The social worker who worked under me and with me was Japanese. My secretary was a Hispanic male. And then my other secretary was a South African woman who left South Africa because of apartheid. So we had a *really* interesting office, and I got a chance to really meet all of these people at a very personal level, because we went to each other's homes, we shared dinners and cooked with each other, and those kinds of things. And so working at

the Episcopal City Mission Society was a really wonderful experience for me, for life-long friends and colleagues. And so I enjoyed that immensely. I knew I wanted to be a teacher, though, that I'd never be there forever—even though they said, “You should be a social worker, you should stay here forever!” And I thought about it for a minute, and I thought, “No, my heart and my calling is into teaching. At some point I've got to break loose and do some teaching and do some more of that.”

I also worked extensively in the community where I lived. I had moved to UCLA to live in the dorm. After living two years of living in the dorm, I had had it! I mean, you know, you can only do so much dorm living before you think you'll lose your mind. And so I told my mother I wanted to leave the dorm and move home. And she just couldn't understand why, because to them, it was ideal. My first two years, it *was* ideal, because when you're a kid and you're in a family of eight, you never have a room to yourself; you seldom have a *bed* to yourself. So when I walked into a dorm room, everybody who had resources was complaining about this small little room. I'm thinkin', “This bed is mine, by myself?! That's a good thing! Only one other person in this room? That's a *great* thing.”

SR: You had a roommate?

SNW: I had a roommate. And it was great. My first roommate was kind of strange, when I was a freshman. She was this white, kind of female, who was overly protective, had known black people, but she was okay, but she was overly protective, and it lasted maybe one semester. My mother would call, and I'd be

like downstairs studying, or I'd be somewhere, and she would be in a panic.

“(gasp) Ms. Nash, I don't know where she is! I don't know....” And my mother would think, “Oh my God, my daughter's fallen off the face of the earth, nobody knows where she is!” I'd come up, and maybe the next morning she'd tell me, “Your mother called.” And I called my mother back. “(frantically) Where have you been?! What have you done?!” “I was downstairs studying.” She said, “That roommate of yours is driving me crazy!” She was driving me crazy too.

So first quarter we were roommates. The second quarter we changed, and I got this other roommate, and she was okay. But then she got kicked out of school, soon as the quarter began. She was a white female who was pretty cool. She was poor, struggling, had a little moped. And as soon as we got in school, the semester began, she got kicked out. So I was left by myself. And the thing that was interesting though, because my family didn't have money, I couldn't afford a single room. So what they did was, they found all the people who had single rooms, and they were going to put us all together. Well, I didn't get this notice until late that afternoon, because I was in class all day. So there was a woman in our dorm, and being eighteen years old, you're scared of everybody. There was a woman in our dorm that nobody wanted to room with. She probably was okay, but she shaved every day. She had a serious beard. And so by the time I get the notice in the evening, the woman's knockin' on my door—it's the lady with the beard. I just said, “Oh, God.” My mother was like.... And so here I am, eighteen years old, I don't want a roommate with a beard. And so I called home, it's an extra \$100 or so for the whole quarter to have a private room. And I hated to

bother my parents, although they were always there for me. I called home in tears, I said, “Mom, Mom, my roommate has a beard! If I don’t have \$100...,” and this whole thing. And my mother goes, “Don’t panic. Your dad will be up there tomorrow with the \$100. We’ll find it, whatever. You don’t need a roommate with a beard. Nobody knows this stuff.” It was really funny. So I ended up letting the girl know, “You know, I’m going to do a private room,” whatever. So I did that.

Then the third quarter, I ended up with Irene, this woman who’s now an attorney. She became my roommate—Hispanic female. And she was good, but then she started going through a crisis. Her boyfriend quit her. She was dating this white guy in San Bernardino who had all these issues—his family didn’t like her because she was Mexican. So he decides to quit her while she’s *my* roommate. You know, one of these other crises. And so she then went on this whole thing that she was not going to sleep or bathe for the semester. So you can imagine the smell in my room. I’m telling you, this woman was depressed over this man. She didn’t like to sleep, because she’d think of him. So she studied like a nut. She got good grades that semester, but my God, the odor was *horrible*. So when I left on Friday to go home, and I’d come back on Sunday, she would study all week long, and then maybe crash and go to sleep. I’d come in, and my room would have this odor that was just unbelievable. So I struggled through that semester, and I kept telling her, “You have got to get over this guy. You have got to take a bath. You have got to do something other than this! This is crazy!” She wore the same black pants every day. It was crazy, it was crazy.

So at the end of that quarter, I was so happy to get rid of her. We remained friends, but roommates, no! Finally, by that time, this one girl named Shirley—we have the same name—Shirley Wilson, was in the dorm, and she didn't have a roommate because her roommate had gotten kicked out too. African American. We said, "Ah-ha! We have found each other!" We had been friends all along. So we became roommates that last year, and that was a wonderful last year of a roommate, because she kept to herself, I did my thing, we were kind of agreeable. She was a really good friend of my friend who didn't take baths, because they came from San Bernardino together. It was just the craziest experience. But you know, those things, like I tell 'em, if they don't kill you, they make you strong. It's one of those kind of things. You know, you learn to live with anything and everything, and you move on. And I think coming from a large family, like I told people, I wasn't too picky about a whole lot of stuff. I remember different ones were picky, "Oh my God, someone moved my lotion!" And I go, "Oh, we have lotion? That's good!" Because when you're a family of eight, you hope somebody *leaves* some lotion for you. You don't worry about where it is, you'll find it. You'll find it, whether it's in the bathroom or the bedroom, but is there any left? And so to me there was some fundamental issues that everybody else was freakin' out about, and to me it was the basic stuff like, "There *is* lotion? Great!"

There was a fire once in my dorm room. That was weird. People did pranks all the time in the dorms, which I thought was infantile and stupid. And they seemed to target—at least I found in the dorm—they seemed to target those

who were the most vulnerable, who worked a lot. I remember there was one woman who worked, who was a student who had to work like thirty hours a week in the library—she really had to. Poor white kid who was tall, but she worked, and she didn't complain. And so she worked almost every night 'til midnight in the library. And she would study while she was there, but she had to work. And so she'd come home at eleven o'clock, and she had classes at eight or nine in the morning. Really nice person. They decided to prank this girl. I thinkin', "Why would you do this to this girl?" They must have put 300 Dixie cups of water on her bed, laid out in a way so that when she opened the door, the water—you know, it was just like one right after the other fell and just soaked her bed. So here you come home from work, you've been working all these hours, and your bed gets soaked, and they're standing in the hallway laughing, because they're frivolous. They have nothing to do but do pranks on people.

So it was funny, because at that time, in the sixties, of course, that's the time of the Black Panthers, the Us Organization, all those kinds of things, and here we are, myself and.... There were four African Americans on the floor. We were all poor, from South Central L.A., and here we're faced with these pranks and these little stupid things in the midst of us coming of age. So we became these radicals in the dorm. I remember once we had gone to see Richard Pryor at the Troubadour one night, and we didn't have class until ten the next morning, so we go and do the last show, because that was the cheapest show, and we see Richard Pryor. My boyfriend drives up, we all go see Richard Pryor.

Well, we come in the next morning and we're tired, and you walk into the bathroom. Incidentally, we had maids in the dorms to clean our rooms every week, and still people had filthy rooms, because they were from such affluent families, they never picked up, they kept crap everywhere, bugs and this and that. So it was really inexcusable when we had people cleaning our dorms regularly.

So we get up in the morning, my girlfriend and I would go in the bathroom, the bright lights, fluorescent lights. So we go in one area, we come back out, and here on the sink someone has decided to shave their legs, and there's little hairs *everywhere*. So naturally we had put our toothpaste and toothbrush into this hair, not seeing what it was, and so we were just furious. The laundry room was always filthy. And so we decided one day—by this time we were fed up, we had had enough of this middle-class culture that was filthy. So we then created a list of rules. We went and got this big poster paper, and we created these cleanliness rules, posted on both sides of the dorm. The women on our floor about went crazy over this. They were furious! So we had this big house meeting about cleanliness. “Who's gonna enforce this?!” Well, by this time, my friend, who lived in another room, is a Black Panther. So she's in a black leather jacket, she's radical, she's a “take no names” kind of person. And so she goes, “*I'll* enforce it!” And they look at her like, “Oh my God!” These little princesses from the dorm, you know. And they say, “Well, you won't know who did it.” She says, “Yes I will. I'll start kickin' butt at 601. By the time I get to 630, one of you cowards will have confessed.” I mean, she was just so great. It was funny. Because she said, “We're gonna have a clean floor!” And I mean,

everybody was like.... I mean, this is like novel, “We’re gonna give a clean floor? What are you talkin’ about?”

But it emphasized to us so dramatically the difference, because people didn’t clean up after themselves. We had clean linen in our dorm. We didn’t even have to wash sheets in the dorm at that time. All we had to do, every day on your day, was to go down to the basement floor and exchange your linen for clean linen. Every Friday the maid cleaned our room on our floor. All you had to do was stack your stuff off the bookcases. She dusted, she mopped, she cleaned our rooms. Why do we have filthy rooms in this dorm? It was almost like a hotel. If you took food up into your room from the night before, if you put your tray outside your room, the housekeeper would get it. Okay? We had people who had trays stacked in their rooms for *weeks* of crap and filth and smell. So it really was a shocker to us to be in this kind of environment. Because coming out of the environments that we lived in, cleanliness was next to godliness. You cleaned your house, you cleaned yourself. You did that, and those who didn’t were not considered to be nice people. And so here we are now in this very affluent community, with people who had maids and whatever, and they just could not pick up after themselves. We actually called the health department on one girl who was next door to Joan, because these big roaches were coming out of *her* room, walkin’ into Joan’s. So Joan called the health department. Her parents were furious because they had to pay to have this girl’s room fumigated. It was terrible!

So we lived in the dorm, and the dorm life was exciting. We were also exposed, UCLA at the time was in the heart of, the middle of the kind of black power movement, as I said. It was interesting, on the campus, there was an encouragement for what I thought was intellectual growth. It was interesting, because when Ronald Reagan became governor he said that one of the problems with the University of California was that students had too much time on their hands. And so he immediately set out to eliminate all this free time we had, by increasing tuition, limiting loans and grants, and those kinds of things. When I was there, very few people had *real* jobs, because it cost \$80 a quarter to go to school. Each year the fees went up, because of that kind of thing.

But we had a good chance to see Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, the women in the women's movement who came by as it was beginning to get started. There were always sessions of women or the Us Organization would come to campus and have sessions with students. The Black Panthers. That was when *Roots* was written, and so Alex Haley came to campus to do the lecture to talk about his new book he was writing.

SR: That's terrific.

SNW: So there was a tremendous exposure to the movement itself, the whole anti-war movement. There was *some* protest, something going on all the time. There was intellectual stimulation. And the campus was organized so that I think it was two days a week we didn't have classes from eleven to twelve, or twelve to one. There were *no* classes on campus—which was ideal for lectures. So anytime there was a lecture, like Stokely Carmichael or H. Rap Brown, or even Lincoln

Rockwell, the conservative, was there. The Pauley Pavilion was packed with 15,000-20,000 kids listening to this lecture, because that time was set aside just for speakers and activities.

Of course now I'm sure people nowadays consider that a waste of time, because you can cram classes in it, and it doesn't exist anymore. But I was amazed that we had this time, this hour set aside every week where we had lecture, we had somebody. And the campus invested a tremendous amount of resources in bringing people in. So you had this ongoing stimulation of thought that was different, that was new, the exposure outside of your world. So it was a time that we all began to assess ourselves, to grow, to figure out who we were, how we fit in the world, how we served the world, those kinds of things.

And so that drove me, as I lived in the dorm, to move back home. I said, "I've got to leave here." I left campus in my junior year to move back home. I told my mother I had two choices: they could either help me buy a car and I'd live at home, or I could move in an apartment. Well, since no one but no one in my family had ever moved away from my mother's house into an apartment—and nice girls don't do that—my parents were very agreeable to helping me get a car, and live at home—which worked out well, because recognizing what I didn't have, it gave me a unique opportunity to volunteer. I volunteered at Malcolm X Youth Center. That was a couple of blocks from my house. That had educational programs and cultural activities for kids in the neighborhood. Most of them did not know anybody who went to college, so it was a great opportunity for me to relate to the kids on my block. So that if we were going to go to UCLA to study at

night, I'd take kids with me. And I said, "Okay, you can go, but you've got to be quiet, you've got to bring something to read." And so it was a unique time for them to see UCLA. They had no idea where it was, what it was all about, those kinds of things. And they never knew anybody who went to college. So that was a great experience for them to actually know a living person who went off to a big place like UCLA, who lived in their neighborhood, who could still talk like them, walk like them, who understood their issues.

And so I became involved in that. I became very involved in my church. I was always a Sunday school teacher at church. I'd been teaching Sunday school since I was about fourteen, I think. I was a certified Sunday school teacher, I went to all the classes and got certified. And I continued to teach Sunday school every Sunday while I was at UCLA. That was one thing I did: I went home every weekend to teach my Sunday school class, and I enjoyed it. But I also became very involved in the church, and in youth activities, running youth programs. I directed a youth choir. In fact, my choir made an album that we still have. And we traveled across the country promoting this album in the summer of 1970. But I directed an octet, and we were called the Celestial Singers, and we were an a cappella choir. And so I traveled extensively cross country. I traveled with my church. From the time I was fifteen I used to go to national youth conferences. I was always a national speaker on the youth conference circuit. So I went to those conferences and participated in youth activities. Started a Thanksgiving dinner in our church to the extent that we got donations, and the teens basically served Thanksgiving dinner to the homeless and the seniors every

Thanksgiving. I felt that church was an outreach—it's not just a Sunday morning experience. And I was kind of radical in my thinking about that, because people were like, "Oh my God, you're gonna bring all kinds of people in the church?" "Yeah." "You're gonna do certain kinds of things?" "Yes."

And of course by then I was sporting a big Afro, which most folks thought I had become *really* out of my mind. They thought I was *such* a nice girl before I got an Afro. In fact, some of them told me that. "You know, Shirley, you were such a *nice* girl." And I'm thinking, "What did I do? All I did was change my hairstyle." And my mother goes, "Oh, they're not going to like you anymore, because you've got this radical hairstyle." I mean, really, people really didn't want to talk to me. I mean, a lot of 'em didn't. And I often laugh about it, because I was telling my students that because I had been a speech major and I learned a little bit about argumentation, so I get this Afro in '68-'69, and I'm immediately seen as somebody different than the folks in the church. But I continued to go to church, I continued to be active. In fact, I remember they were having a national youth conference coming to California, and someone said, "Are you going to allow Shirley to speak with her hair like that?" They asked the director. He goes, "I don't think we have any requirements about that kind of stuff."

And so it was really kind of interesting, but I was in this meeting with church, and so I learned a little bit about logic and reasoning, and they were talking about the wonders and the glory of God, and how good He is, and how man messes up everything God does—whether it's the environment.... You

know, He creates beautiful trees and we destroy them. You know, the whole bit—the good stuff of God. And so I thought, “Ah-ha! I have found my argument.” So we were talking, and I said, “You know, you ladies”—and these are older [ladies]—I said, “You know, you’re absolutely correct. Man attempts to tinker with God’s invention, and every time he does, he makes a mess of it.” And they go, “Yes, yes, amen! You’re right! Absolutely correct!” And we kept talking about it, and I said, “Just like....” And I used several examples of the environment, or this or that, whatever, whatever. And I said, “Anything that God creates in its natural form is really its most beautiful form, and we should accept it.” They said, “Exactly.” I said, “Just like my hair.” (Resnik laughs) And they stopped for a moment, didn’t get a couple of “amens,” didn’t get anything. They were so shocked, as if to say, “She tricked us! She tricked us! She tricked us!”

SR: That’s wonderful.

SNW: And it was funny, I told folks I don’t know if they thought I had some epiphany and saw God himself or something in my hair, but at least they didn’t harass me anymore, they understood. But it was kind of funny, because it was a time that people were very afraid of those radicals that came out of UCLA or out of anywhere. And all they saw were the ones on TV, but they didn’t see the others. And so eventually, though, as people kind of softened a bit, I did seminars in the church on the relationship between black power and Christianity, and how those kinds of things were important. Asante, interestingly enough, my mentor, had been a minister in the church. So I invited him to come and do a whole thing, a month’s discussion, on black power and Christianity. And so it was really quite

interesting to kind of begin to open people's minds and thoughts about who you were, and the historical relationships that were there. And it was not necessarily a theory of hate, it's a theory of self-determination, and people embracing themselves and not feeling bad and ashamed of what they were, but really celebrating themselves, and finding strength in that.

And so I was very active in my church, and remain that way, because most of the people in the church are very, very supportive of me. I mean, from the time I was a kid, I used to speak and travel and sing for choirs. And because I was poor, there was always some benefactor, somebody who was going to send me, who was gonna make sure I had the resources to go. And when I went to UCLA, there was a woman by the name of Sister Larry. She was an older woman, she was on, I guess, government assistance, old-age pension, or whatever they called it at the time—very limited resources, not very much money. But Sister Larry gave me five dollars every month as her personal college scholarship. And it made a difference. I mean, I thought twice about every time I spent her five dollars—not on frivolous things, but something important—paper, pens, those kinds of things. And she was so ecstatic when I graduated from UCLA, as [were] *all* the older people in my church, because I didn't leave the church, I didn't leave them like some people, "Oh, they're so irrelevant, they're not with me, they're not this, they're not that." And I didn't see that. As I pointed out to them, I didn't go to college to lose myself. I went to college to increase my options of how I was going to live. I *liked* being Shirley. I thought she was pretty cool. I liked her family, I liked her environment. I liked the culture that she was in. I liked her

church and her friends. So I didn't go there to lose all my friends and find another person. I went there because my dad told me if I went there I'd have greater options and opportunities for the rest of my life, in terms of where I live and what I do. And even now, I live in the black community. I just built a new home in the black community, because I like the culture in which I live. I don't have to get identity by living around a whole group of other people. And at the same time, I interact with everybody, but I feel good about being myself, and that's important. And I think I got that from my parents. I got that from the community in which I lived, because people never spoke negatively of the community in which I lived, or the people that I lived with, or those kinds of things.

And we had challenges economically. But I always said we lived in the ghetto, but the ghetto didn't live in us. And so we had opportunities, we traveled extensively. We went to Arkansas almost every four years, which was *really* weird, and we enjoyed Arkansas. We did not find ourselves in a situation where we *couldn't* go. Our relatives *insisted* that we come. My aunt, because they felt we were in a foreign land, as my grandfather said anyway, thought we needed to come back to Arkansas to know our people. And so we, every four years, packed up the car, drove across country to Arkansas, and enjoyed our experience there, living in the country, doing certain kinds of things.

As I pointed out, my father, because he was a very radical person in his thinking, knew that he could not live *long* in Arkansas, but we went regularly to visit. And every now and then, we'd go visit, and there'd be these racial incidents that would occur with my father and my brother. I remember once, because there

were so many of us, in a van—you're talking about a station wagon, seating 3-3-3 all the way. Exactly! Through the heat, no air conditioning, and those kinds of things. And it was really funny, because we got to Arkansas one time, and we had to ship our—we would ship our clothes, because we'd be there for a couple of weeks with my aunt. And then we'd ship the clothes back. And so my father had gone to the train station to ship our clothes, and he's standing there with my brother, who was about thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen at the time, and a guy comes along and says to my brother, who's standing there, "Where's that boy that was here with you?" And my brother said, "What boy?" And he goes, "That boy that was here. You were here with a boy." My brother goes, "I wasn't here with a boy." And this goes back and forth. And the guy says, "Yes you were! There was a boy here with you, and I'm supposed to deal with this boy...." And my brother is just really—doesn't know what the man's talking about. He goes, "I was not here with a boy." And this went on for a while. And so finally the guy left. And so when my dad came back and was trying to conduct business, my brother said, "Dad, this guy was here, and he said I was with a boy, and I wasn't with any boy, I was here with you." And oh ... my ... God. They said my father looked for this man at the train station. The guy had gone home, thank God, and we were leaving the next day. Because my father was *furious* that someone had called him a boy. But that was typical [for that time]. I think we were there in '58.

SR: Well, because of the whole Little Rock situation, and the integration, were you aware of that at the time?

SNW: You know, we weren't really aware of it, because we were in California. But we were aware of what was on the news. We had some cousins who lived in Little Rock, and we were aware of the fact that many of our cousins didn't go to school for a year because of the shutting down of the schools in Arkansas. When we went back, some of them who were supposed to be in a certain grade were not there. And I go, "What happened to *you*?" And they go, "Well, we didn't have school last year." And I'm thinkin', "That's great!" (laughs) But it *wasn't* so great. They said, "No, it wasn't, because we had to do this and do that," and so forth and so on. But the whole element of segregation was real apparent, that you could sense when you went to Arkansas. I mean, when we drove across country as children, we could not stop at night to rest. We drove straight through, changing drivers. Every now and then my dad would be—because initially when we first went, my mother didn't drive—and so my dad would pull over in a safe place, just to get a couple of hours of sleep, and then get up and drive again. We had to carry all the food you wanted, there were no restrooms you could stop at. There weren't fast food places like McDonald's and Burger Kings and things like that. So whatever you took, you ate. But as a kid in a car, it was fun. I didn't know that we couldn't stop places. I didn't know that we couldn't go in certain places, because my parents were very protective, and they wanted to make sure that when we stopped places, that those were places that we *could* go to the restroom. We did not take the bus, so we didn't have to deal with sitting in the back of the bus. Those kinds of things.

I do remember when my grandfather died, my dad drove to Arkansas with a cousin of his, and they didn't eat the whole time they were on the road, because they stopped at one or two places, and the guy said, "Well, we can feed you, but it will be in the back." And his cousin said, "Okay," and my dad said, "No." They got back in the car and drove away. He refused to eat in the back. He said, "I'm not gonna pay the same price for food you serve me through a back window." And the guy said, "Well, we won't serve you at all." Dad said, "Fine." And the guy who was with him was a big guy, he goes, "Oh my God, we gotta *eat*." And Daddy said, "Not in these places!" and they just kept drivin'.

And so he refused to subject us to anything like that. So we went to the bathroom on the road, those kinds of things. Fortunately, in some places, they did have nice places where you could stop and they had benches and we would eat. So we made sure we had plenty of that, but my father did not want to expose us to that level of discrimination. When we went to movies in Arkansas, we only went once, and then my dad said, "You're not gonna do *that* again." We had to sit in the balcony, and the balcony had low railings, so you could barely see, there was no lights—those kinds of things—going through the back way. And when we got home, my dad said, "Where'd you guys go?" And we told him, and he said, "You won't do *that* again." So we were not allowed to really subject ourselves to that level of discrimination. He was not gonna do that to us. And so we knew it was there, those who came by, we were never allowed to say "yes sir, no sir; yes ma'am, no ma'am," even to black people, we were not allowed. Dad said, "No, that is subjection. I'm not gonna have my kids do that. No." So we never did it.

My aunt would say, “But they’re being rude! They’re saying ‘yes’ and ‘no.’” He said, “They say ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ they don’t say ‘yes ma’am, no ma’am,’ no.”

And so we were not allowed to do those kinds of things that other people did. My dad said, “You just don’t have to do ’em. You won’t do them.” And so we lived with that kind of as a spirit about ourselves, in terms of what we were going to accept and not going to accept. And we were not in a position.... He was not going to compromise that for anything. Even on his job, where he worked for thirty-some odd years, he refused to compromise his position. I think once he was there he got in an altercation because some man was talking negatively about my mother, and he didn’t know her, but he felt he could sit around and talk about my mother as if she was some neighborhood whore, and didn’t know my mother. And my father confronted him, and let the people at the job know that he was not going to have that done about his family. He did not engage in that conversation, and it wasn’t gonna happen. And it had happened with some of the other men, and they just kind of felt, “Well, we have to endure this.” My father said, “No, you don’t have to endure any of that.” And so he was always this kind of person.

SR: Pride.

SNW: Very prideful of who he was, very protective of his children, never told us, “Well, you’ve got to go along to get along,” kind of attitude. Never had that kind of perspective on us, and so we didn’t operate that way. We operated a little differently, with a different sense of confidence about ourselves.

So going into the black power movement, we already had kind of the mentality for it. My father listened—he loved the news, and he loved to listen to radio—and I remember him talking about Malcolm X. Long before I knew who Malcolm was, my father would listen to Malcolm X on the Joe Pyne show or something on the radio. And he goes, “This guy’s got a lot of good sense. He says we’re African American, and we really are.” And I’m thinking, “How did Daddy get all this information?” So he really got into this discussion of that by listening. Like I said, his greatest pain in life was he was not *allowed* to go to school. At a certain point, they would not allow them to go to school. They had to work the fields, they had had enough [education] at fifth or sixth grade. And so he always felt he did not have that. But he was always confident. My mother had good skills, she was good at math and good in writing, and he never felt intimidated by her, he never tried to talk about her, as some men would say, “Oh, you think you’re smart.” Never. My dad always said, “Your mother’s very smart. She knows what she’s doing. You listen to your mother. She can help you with your homework. Oh, Mildred has *beautiful* handwriting.” He always encouraged my mother’s brilliance.

SR: That’s great.

SNW: And it was always interesting to me, because like I said, I never knew a man who was intimidated by women. And my dad would tell us as young girls, “You’ve got to go to school, because you’re going to have to take care of yourself some day.” And I would say to him, “But Dad, you take care of Mom.” He goes, “Everybody ain’t like me. You’ve got to be prepared so whatever happens in this

life, you can take care of yourself.” And he encouraged us to go to school, he never made a difference between the girls and the boys in our family. He never made any difference between my two older sisters, who were really his step-children. Never made a difference in any of them. I remember before, when he was filling out some wills after my mother died or something, he said, “Just put down ‘my children.’” I said, “Well, Dad, you know sometimes people might say Evelyn and [Gert?] are not your children.” He goes, “Yes they are. Okay, put down ‘my *eight* kids.’” If anybody said, “How many kids you got?” “I’ve got eight.” He took care of eight children. I mean, that was him. He loved kids, he was always supportive of any kid who wanted to go to school, wanted to do well. If they came by to visit or whatever it was, my father was always there.

It was interesting, the kind of job that my dad had. He didn’t have these professional days off, he didn’t have extra days, and he only got sick leave if he was really, really sick, had to be sick for several days, not just a cold. And the thirty-five, thirty-four years, whatever Dad worked at this place, he was only out one time, and that was with the Hong Kong flu in the sixties. He was off for one week out of his whole career. But he always took off a half day of work anytime there was graduation. It was really quite interesting, because anytime he went into his office to request a half day off, the first thing they would say is, “One of your kids must be graduating.” And he said, “Yeah.” Because Daddy was comin’ to graduation. And that was the one thing he was going to do. When he had grandkids, I remember my brother called one morning and said, “Oh, we gotta go up here to Cal State Long Beach ’cause Delaine [phonetic] is graduating

from Cal State Long Beach.” My father was so mad! He said, “He’s having a graduation, and you haven’t called me?!” He went off. He said, “You come get me, you come get me!” So my brother said, “Oh-oh-kay. We just thought it was....” No, it was very important.

SR: Absolutely.

SNW: And I remember when I did my bachelor’s degree I marched. When I did my master’s, my parents were away, my aunt had died, so I didn’t have to march. I said, “Great.” Because, you know, it was like a big, 6,000 [graduates] experience. And I didn’t want to march in the first place for my undergraduate degree, and I told my parents about that, and my father said, “No, you must march.” I said, “You won’t even *see* me, there’s 6,000 people! You won’t see me.” He said, “Yes I will. I will know that you’re there.” It was funny. And I got in the line to march, and somehow or other, you know, they just tell you [where] to stand. They had to divide you up. You don’t know what the system is, you’re just walkin’ and walkin’, and somebody who’s a marshal goes, “This way, that way; this way, that way.” And somehow or other, “this way, that way” led me to be at the front of the line, staring right at my father at graduation. So it was really [unclear]. He said, “I told you I would see you.” So it was kind of interesting.

But when I did my doctorate, I wasn’t going to march. I had graduated in August of 1975, and I said, “I’m not going to go back to UCLA to march in June, that’s a long way off.” So I got this letter saying something about graduation, and I told my dad, “I’m not gonna do that.” And he’d always say, “If I was gettin’ a Ph.D., *I’d* sure march.” That’s what he always said, “If I was gettin’ a Ph.D., I

would sure march.” And I go, “Dad, I don’t want to do it, I’m married, I live somewhere [else]. I don’t want to do it.”

So when I got the notice about graduation, it was interesting to me, because it was on Fathers Day, June 17, 1976. I thought, “Oh my God, it’s on *Fathers Day*.” So I called my sisters and I said, “You know what, I had not planned to march for this doctorate, but it’s on Fathers Day, and so I think I’m gonna have to do it.” I didn’t tell my dad, though. What I did, I said, “It’ll be a good surprise for Dad.” So we all had decided that it would be a surprise. So I went up to L.A. for that day, and I’d gotten the robe and stuff in advance, and had it in the closet at the house. So my dad is fussin’ because we’re gonna go to dinner—we told him we were gonna go to dinner—and he’s like, “Well, let’s go! ’Cause I’m hungry. What are we waiting for?”—it was after church—“Let’s go to dinner, it’s Fathers Day!” And all my brothers and sisters had come, and one of my brothers was a photographer. So we decided that.... And my father’s saying he’s hungry, hungry, hungry. So we said, “Oh my God, we’d better go get some Kentucky Fried Chicken, because this man will die if he has to eat *after* graduation.” So graduation is at, like, three o’clock. So it was funny, we were out there about 1:30, close to 2:00, and Dad’s fussing about eating.

And so my brother says, “Well, why don’t we all take at least one family picture today for Fathers Day,” etc., etc. Okay. So everybody comes outside, and then I go inside and put on my cap and gown. And I come out and he goes, “Oh! We have a Ph.D. with us!” He’s still not connecting it to graduation. I said, “Yes, and we’re going to go to graduation.” He about died. He said, “Let’s go!”

We're gonna be late! We're gonna get bad seats!" And he's goin' on. I said, "But we got some chicken to eat." [He said,] "Who wants to eat?!" Everybody said, "Wait a minute! We want to eat!" He said, "No! We gotta get there, because we'll be the last ones!" And it was really kind of funny. So I ended up marching in graduation, and he was so happy, he was ecstatic. But I hadn't planned to do it, but it was on Fathers Day.

SR: That's a wonderful story.

SNW: It was on *Fathers Day*—what else can you do? So he enjoyed it, but my dad was that support system from beginning to end, and always there, always there. Education was driven into us, and driven into him and his kids from Day One. I remember calling him once, even after I lived in San Diego, and I called him one day and I couldn't find him. He was at my sister's house, because her daughter was a college student and she had a baby, and so my dad was there. I said, "What are you doing?"—he was retired—"What are you doing over there?" He goes, "Well, I'm babysittin'." He was babysitting this three-month-old baby. And I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, Christine needs to go to class. Her baby has a cold, she doesn't need to take it out to the sitter's. So I'm here keepin' this baby, because I don't want her to miss her class." I said, "Okay." But that was him. If you had to go to school, Daddy's gonna figure out how to help you get to school. And he was that support for every niece, nephew, grandkid, everybody he ever had. Everybody knew that that was one of the most important things in his life.

SR: How special.

SNW: What was the most important thing in his life was supporting his kids. And all of us trying to get through school and doing the very best we could. So he was always a proud dad, very proud of his kids. One of the things he did, was always kind of interesting, when I graduated from high school.... He worked for Bliss and Laughlin, which was really a company and employees that were not that supportive of people of color, but he tells people he worked there because he had to feed his family. I remember after he'd been there thirty-some-odd years, they interviewed him in the newspaper, the magazine. They said, "Well, how did you stay so long?" They thought he was going to say wonderful benefits, great job. He said, "I had eight kids and a wife to feed. And if I had had any education, I'd have been out of here." That's what he told them. I hope they didn't put all that in the paper!

But my dad, it was funny, his company had a scholarship fund, and I applied for their scholarship, and I didn't get it. I got like second place, honorable mention, or something. My dad *never* forgot that. Every award I ever got, every newspaper article that ever existed, my dad came in and showed it to the people in his office. When I graduated from UCLA and I was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, he brought it in. When I got my master's, Dad brought it to them. I mean, he brought it to them every step of the way. He reminded them. He said, "I want them to know what they missed out on." And I totally forgot the little \$500 they had, or whatever scholarship it was. And yet his Masons gave me money, because he was a Mason, and they were always supportive. Every activity I did, they took credit for the scholarship they gave me, "See? This is our investment in

the future!” Which was wonderful. But Dad was one who encouraged us throughout our entire academic career. (recording paused)

SR: Okay, I’ll put it on, and hopefully it’s right.

SNW: Obviously, one of the central elements of a doctoral program is the production of the dissertation. As I pointed out, my road toward a dissertation wasn’t always the easiest, because there weren’t that many people to support me, as there were other students, in terms of faculty taking them under their wing, helping them with their research, those kinds of things. I was pretty much kind of on my own a lot. But I found it to be okay, because I was accustomed, having been at UCLA that long, to pretty much knowing that whatever I was going to do was going to be because I had to do it myself. There was not a lot of support.

But it was interesting, I met this guy, actually who turned out to be my husband, and I was at his apartment and I was looking at some books that he had on the shelf. And one of the books he had was on Marcus Garvey. It was called *Black Moses*. And I thought, “What is that all about?” And he goes, “You don’t know anything about this?” And I’m thinking, “No, not really.” I’d kind of heard the name, and I saw some pictures of a guy that looked like him years ago, but never saw the whole story. So he said, “You must read this.” So I took the book and I read it. I was amazed at what I learned in that short period of time, in terms of about 1970-71. What I learned about this man named Marcus Garvey, who had the largest organization in the United States, that even his enemies said he had 2 million members, so he must have had 5 to 6 million worldwide. He was very intellectual, conducted this major movement in the United States, and I knew

nothing about him. That bothered me, because you wonder, “Well, what do you *really* know? And why hasn’t this information been given to me? And what is it about this man that might be information that might be beneficial to my own personal growth and development, as well as others?” So I then embarked upon this mission to learn more about Marcus Garvey.

I also, by this time, had done my undergraduate work in what we call group theory. And so I’d done stuff on group interaction, interpersonal communication, what have you. And it was interesting. And then I did my master’s work basically on rhetorical theory concepts of rhetoric. That’s why, as a doctorate, my minor area was in history, and my major area was in rhetorical theory and movement studies. I was interested in what happens in a movement, and some of the theories of movement, and looking at the fact that African Americans had had a *lot* of movements. In fact, their lives in this country have been one *continuous* movement. And how do you move forward, what causes movements to be successful, what causes them to fail? And what was this thing about this Marcus Garvey movement that was so unique?

And so I then began to delve into Marcus Garvey, the concepts of nationalism, to begin to look at his relationship, which led me into research and work on [W.E.B.] Du Bois, and looking at Du Bois’ relationship to Marcus Garvey. Other people like Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and his anti-Garvey movement, those kinds of things, looking at the NAACP and the Niagara Movement, and all the things that happened in the 1920s. So I really began to do research and work in the 1920s, looking at the great migration of Africans moving

from the South to the North, what happened in that whole process. And so I became a Garvey person, a Garveyite.

I hooked up with another scholar, Emery Tolbert [phonetic], who was a historian at UCLA. He was doing his work on Marcus Garvey as well. And we began to share research. So even though I didn't have the faculty piece there, I had a student colleague who was doing historical work on Garvey. And we shared stuff. We shared tapes of Garvey. He was able to find some old 1919, 1920 tapes of Garvey's voice. To begin to ask questions about what made this man, what was his movement like, why was it successful, and in the end did it actually—what were all the myths about Marcus Garvey, and were they true?

Was he just a charismatic leader?

[Sound file Weber-2.MP3, at about Minute 79:40. Go to new document for continuation.]

Dr. Shirley Nash Weber
June 30, July 1 and 2, 2008
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
354 minutes of recording
PART 2 OF 3 PARTS

[Sound file Weber-2.MP3, at about Minute 79:39]

SHIRLEY NASH WEBER: [¶] And so I think in my dissertation I basically attempted to reveal that, one, Garvey's movement was extremely well organized, and it was also a movement that was the first really *true* what we call black nationalist movement, because prior to that, people had different pieces. And even since then, you have someone like the Panthers became a political nationalist. The Us became a cultural nationalist. Then you had the black empowerment movement, that became an economic nationalist organization. Garvey had economic, social, and political. He had all three. He had a complete movement, and out of it grew the Muslims, the Nation of Islam. Elijah Mohammed was a member of the Garvey movement in 1927. Malcolm X's father was a Garveyite, and was killed because he was a Garveyite. So Malcolm X had this kind of nationalist ideology from his father, and remembers his father as a Garveyite. And so when we go through, we look at this tremendous impact that his man had, as well as the fact that it was not really just a charismatic movement, because in order to have charisma you have to see people, and most people never saw Marcus Garvey who were his members. His strongest chapters were, interestingly enough, in San Diego and Los Angeles. Believe it or not, they lasted long after Garvey had been deported from the United States, and they never actually physically saw Marcus Garvey. What they had of Marcus Garvey was the cold medium: they had the

newspaper, they had the articles that were written. And he published his own newspaper, so he was smart to the extent that he told his own story, rather than letting other people tell it, because I did research looking at *The Chicago Defender* and the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *New York Age*, which were all the newspapers during that time, looking at what *they* said about Garvey, and looking at what Garvey's people said about himself. And so that was quite interesting.

I've since then done some additional work, and haven't decided what I'm going to do with it, on the women in the Garvey movement, because one of the things I discovered later on, as we all do at some point, is that even in my own interest, and in my own training and knowledge, it was not only very European-centered, so I had to change my thinking of how I see things; but it was also very male dominated, that we always look to the men, we never see the women. The research is always done about the men, seldom about the women. And so when somebody asked me one day as I was doing a presentation on Garvey and had written some articles on Marcus Garvey and the movement, out of my dissertation, and somebody said, "Well, what did women do during the Garvey movement?" I thought, "Wow, I've got to go back and look," because I knew there were women's organizations, and I talked about those women's organizations, the Black Cross Nurses, and a couple of other groups that they had. But then I began to look—then I said, "Well, let me see." And when I began to look, I noticed, here it was on these microfilms, and I have lots and lots of copies of the articles—every time Marcus Garvey gave a speech, there was a woman

who spoke before him by the name of Henrietta Vinton Davis. And it was interesting to me that every time I picked up the microfilm to do his speeches and to copy out his speeches, and transcribe them, I just skipped right over this woman's name, and all the stuff she said, and went to Marcus Garvey—consistently. And here was this woman, Henrietta Vinton Davis, who I discovered was the president of the organization. They had like a United States president and an international president. And she was like president of the United States.

I also discovered that in the Garvey movement, every chapter there was a male and a female president in the Garvey movement. I mean, he empowered women. I have copies of the FBI reports, because those are some of the *best* reports of all the black movements, because J. Edgar Hoover was very active against the Garvey movement in the 1920s. It's *amazing* how much this man did. But when you read the Garvey papers, you discover that some of the major issues in the Garvey movement were the role of women, and he was a strong advocate for women having equal roles, equal responsibility. His whole body guard corps, a group of individuals who rode and who protected him, basically. And they were really run by the women. There were men in it, but the leaders of the corps were women. And so it was amazing how much women had to do in the Garvey movement in that time frame.

So I've been in the process now of bringing some of this out, because it's interesting to me that as we grapple with the questions of equal rights and opportunities and so forth and so on, it really was the women in the Garvey

movement who were strong. When Garvey was in prison in the United States, and deported, it was the women who kept the movement alive. He had one wife, but his second wife, Amy Szhake [phonetic] was the one who saved all the papers. She and Henrietta Vinton Davis ran the national organization, kept it alive, kept the conventions going. They were the heart of the organization. When the men were envious of each other, and all this ego, all the extra testosterone roamin' around the room, bumpin' each other off—it was the women who pretty much kept this organization afloat, and kept it going. But it was interesting. I told someone it revealed just how male dominated my perspective was, period—despite all the things you say, when you look, you go right to the man that you see, you miss all the women standing around getting everything together. And that's consistent. Even the civil rights movement now, they're beginning to look at the women who were responsible for duplicating and xeroxing all the flyers for the Montgomery bus boycott, and who did all these things. King got up and gave a speech, but my goodness, they built the platform. So it was that kind of thing that was there. So my research has led me into that area of interest.

My research, also, because as an undergraduate I was also involved in linguistics, in speech theory, that my specialization also has been in black language. So some of my research and writing has to do with understanding African-American language and its relationship socially and politically to African-American culture. And so I've done a number of things with that. In fact, interestingly enough, I guess last year one of my articles that must be quoted in I don't know how many books, that's repeated, but it was recently published in

Polish, so I thought that was kind of interesting. I can't read it, but I have a copy of it, that looks impressive, to know that somebody in Poland wants to read about black language in a multicultural text on language and diversity. So it really was quite interesting. Somebody said, "Can you read it?" I said, "No, but the description of me sounds accurate, so I know it's the article that's there.

But that became really my focus. And since then it's grown from that, because like I say, I thought that when I began the doctorate that I would definitely do my work on Malcolm X. I thought I would definitely do Malcolm. But I became so intrigued and enthralled with Marcus Garvey, and continued to do presentations around the country on Marcus Garvey, and to look at what he gave the African-American community, which is so extensive, that it's been really quite interesting to continue to study him, to read his works. When I was in Jamaica a few years ago—my son says I turn every vacation into some kind of educational experience, "Mom, you just can't relax." I did, for three days, on the beach, and that got old, so I said, "It's time to go see somethin'." So I went to St. Ann's Bay to visit Marcus Garvey's home, and also to look at the library that was built—because that was his home in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica. And then up into the rainforest. But it was kind of funny, my son said, "You just can't relax. Everything becomes a field trip! We've got to go on a field trip!" I said, "You do not have to follow me. Stay here." Of course they all followed me anyway—afraid I'd see something they couldn't see.

But that was my experience, and like I said, my dissertation was really quite interesting. I traveled to Philadelphia to meet some Garveyites. And this

was in 1974, because I was married in '73 and we traveled in '74. We went to Philadelphia, I went to Atlanta, to do research, and a couple of other places where Garvey had landed, and papers were there. But the most exciting piece—we were gone about three, four weeks, my husband and I—I went to Philadelphia and I met a man by the name of Thomas Harvey. This was in 1973 now. Thomas Harvey was a Garveyite from 1973. Now, here it was, 1973, he'd been a Garveyite in the 1920s. And it was amazing to me, we talked with him, he shared material with us, and he was on his way to a Garvey convention in New York that summer. And there were all these old Garveyites who were still active. And the thing that was amazing to me more than anything—because as you study movements, you know that sometimes people join movements for various reasons, and if you don't get what they call the content or the logos message of the movement, then you get the emotional message. The emotional message is never sustaining. You're excited and you have to consistently be re-energized, because you don't have the theory, you don't have the philosophy, it's not incorporated in your existence. Evidently Garvey had really planted in these individuals the message, the logic of his position and his theory, because this man was sitting in front of me, fifty years later, who was just as clear about his position as a Garveyite as he was fifty years earlier. And that was amazing to me, because you don't see that very often. And it's interesting to me because a friend of mine's mother here in San Diego, and I'm supposed to get with her, she was ill recently, but she's well again, her mother, I ran across her at my book club, and she told her mother, "This is the woman who does work on Garvey." Her mother

was a child during the Garvey movement, and her mother remembers the meetings. And her mother's mother, in other words my friend's grandmother, was an active Garveyite—their family was. And so she was brought to all the little Garvey meetings. So when I met her, this woman—she's probably in her seventies—she was so enthused to meet me. She said, "I've got stuff to share." And she shared stuff with me from when she was a kid in the Garvey movement. But she was so excited. She said she, to this day, remembers the excitement of her parents when they went to the Garvey movement, how they felt empowered, how they felt this was really going to lift them out of poverty, that this was really going to be the thing that was going to give them a sense of confidence, and how proud they were, and those kinds of things. And it was interesting, because she was talking, she said people said that African Americans were not interested in going back to Africa, they were not interested in this whole African thing. She said, "But they really were." This sense of pride, this sense of womanhood, manhood, the independence was clear. And so it was interesting to listen to her tell me about how proud her parents were, because I got the same thing from Mr. Harvey in '73. I got the same thing from someone else who was a Garvey member in Los Angeles. And when I look at the chapter that we were talking about some of the stuff that happened in San Diego—I mean, very strong positions that people took, and very proud positions that people took about their lives and how they lived, and their pride in being who they were. And so Garvey gave them that. Garvey gave us the black flag—red, black, and green. He gave us the whole concept of Africaness. He had a whole movement to tell us that

Jesus was black, and those kinds of things, so the churches went through movements to take down the white Madonnas and put up the black ones in the churches. And the whole sense of pride that people had, so that those who joined his organization were very proud individuals—very proud.

And it was tragic because Du Bois worked against him. Du Bois was upset with Garvey, that Garvey was basically stealing his thunder in some way—envy that was there. Du Bois lived to be ninety-six years old, I think it was—ninety-five or ninety-six—and he died in Ghana. But the one thing he said prior to his death, he said as he looked at his life and tried to decide the good, the bad, he said there was one regret he lived with his whole life, and that regret was that he helped to destroy Marcus Garvey. He said because when he looks at everybody and everyone that had come along, he felt at one point that Marcus Garvey was the one person who really had the plan and the program to elevate African Americans out of their poverty, out of their poor political situation, and those kinds of things, and he participated in the destruction of Marcus Garvey. So it was kind of sobering that he would come at ninety-five to come to say, “You know, when I look about what I did that was good, what I did that was bad, this is the one thing I really, really regret, and that was I helped to destroy this one man who probably had the answer.” Because in the end, Du Bois went to live in Ghana, and he became a nationalist in his ideology. And so it was really kind of full circle in terms of his own thinking, so it was kind of interesting.

But I still enjoy working with Marcus Garvey and women—nationalism—and like I say, do a little bit more now on women, because now that I see that I’m

so male dominated in my research, in my work. But writing a dissertation was an interesting experience for me, simply because there was so little support. Even the formation of my committee, I had a guy from History who was on my committee, Workman, who was very good. And then I had two people in my department, Mr. Richardson and Dr. Phelps. Richardson and Phelps were on my committee. Neither one knew anything about Marcus Garvey, nor did they care. By then they were serving on a committee. Asante wanted to serve on my committee, but he was in New York. And the chair of our department was angry that Asante had gotten this wonderful position in New York, that he refused to let Asante serve on my doctoral committee—even though Asante said, “I will fly back at my own expense for her meetings, and I will help her,” dah-dah-dah. He said no. He had the option to say no, and so he said no. So Asante found two people who were agreeable to serving on my committee for me, and Phelps and Richardson were agreeable. And they were okay. I mean, they were good. It was interesting, when I’d written the dissertation, Richardson left town to go to Mexico, the whole bit, and wasn’t very helpful. And I had actually been writing the dissertation, had gotten support and had really finished it and gotten it signed by the two people. Richardson had never read it—as yet had not. He was an interesting man. I think he kind of had it in for me at some point—some undergraduate work we had done.

[Richardson] finally comes back from Mexico, and my husband has said, “Get the dissertation typed. You’ve already had it rewritten several times.” I had a deadline to get it in by the end of that August, in order to graduate that summer.

If not, I would have graduated in December, whenever. I said, “Well, what if he wants changes?” And that was before computers. So you just make all kinds of changes. And I said, “We’d have to have it retyped,” dah-dah-dah. My husband said, “Hey, you’re gonna take it off on your taxes anyway as an expense, so it’s just one of those expenses that we’ll have. Get it done anyway.” So I said okay. So I had it typed. I remember very clearly Richardson finally came in town. I took the dissertation to him. I took it to campus, he got it. And so he said, “Well, I see you’ve had it professionally typed.” I said, “Yeah. The other two have signed, but feel free to make changes, feel free to do what you want to do with it.” “Well, this will be an expense.” I said, “I understand that, but don’t you worry about it, Professor Richardson. Whatever you need, we’ll get it done. He says, “Well, I know you need this done in order to keep your job at San Diego State.” That’s what he told me. I said, “Well, not really. I’ve already had a renewal of my contract for the next two years. I’ve gone through the evaluation process, so I’m good, don’t worry about that, I’ll be okay.” And he was like, “Dang, I can’t catch her on that, can’t catch her on....” I mean, he really was—he was throwing these things out as if to say, “I know you really need me.” And I said, “Dr. Richardson, you take your time. If you don’t meet the deadline in a couple of days, that’s okay. And if I have to do some rewrites, don’t worry about the expense, and do not worry about me having a job because it’s already done.” So he said “Well, I’m not sure when I’ll get around to reading it.” I said, “Take your time, you will eventually.” That was like Wednesday. I was at my mother’s house in L.A., I told him all this good stuff. Thursday morning, eight o’clock, I

get a phone call. “Well, good morning Dr. Weber.” I said, “Oh, Dr. Richardson, you had time to read my dissertation!” I don’t know if he did or not. And he said, “Yes, I did.” I said, “Okay. When can I pick it up?” He said, “Well, I’m at home.” I said, “I’ll come to your house.” So I went to his house in Santa Monica to pick up my dissertation. He sat there for two hours, grilling me on various things. And all he had was a number of negative things to say—not about the dissertation, but about Marcus Garvey. “Well, you know, he was a con artist. You know he was a this, he was a that.” I said, “Oh really? Did you read that in my dissertation?” “No.” He went through this whole thing. But, you know, I was at a point where I’m not going to argue about this thing. The objective is to finish this monster and end the party.

SUSAN RESNIK: I understand.

SNW: You know exactly. End the party. I don’t want to make any statements of position. It’s not that kind of situation by this time. It’s like “get it over with.” So he signed it and I left, and I took it up to campus and got it done. But it was really funny, because he had all these things, and he couldn’t do, he couldn’t get to it, he couldn’t read it. I said, “Okay, take your time. I’m with you no matter what. You need this, you need that.” And so yeah, I guess in a day’s time he either read it or decided “what the heck, everybody else has read it and signed it,” so he signed off on it, and that was the end of the doctoral experience at UCLA. As I tell people, it’s not always about—what you really get to know is about your ability to endure.

SR: Oh, I understand.

SNW: The ability to endure the crap and to get through it, and hopefully you'll have a good enough experience that it won't taint you. I think when I finished my dissertation in '75, though, I realized that I had been in school all of my life, and it was kind of funny. So that fall, my girlfriend said, "Let's sign up for a tennis class," I said, "No, I do not want my name on anybody's list. I don't want nobody callin' role and wonderin' where I am. I don't want to be enrolled in anything at this point—not even a tennis class. I will play tennis with you, but I will not be in a class." And so it took me a couple of years to really get over the experience of being a student and having someone look for you, and bein' on a list. I just thought, "I have been in school since I was four and a half. And I am twenty-six right now, and I don't want to be in anybody's school. After twenty-two years of education, I just need a break, I just need a break." And so it was one of those kinds of things. But since then I've gotten over it. I've gotten over that. I can join a class without shaking. I still had that experience.

But in the midst of all of that, obviously, the dissertation and what have you, I came to San Diego State.

SR: And what was San Diego State like? Give me a sense of what the environment was like when you came here.

SNW: Well, I came to San Diego State, I think, because I thought it would not be like UCLA. And unfortunately, it has become UCLA. I have to say that now. But I came here because I *didn't* want to be in a paper mill, a publish-or-perish, do or die. I had lived through that as an undergraduate, and I wasn't impressed with it. I had lived through an experience where you go to class with 600 people, and I

lived through the experience, and I can't remember hardly *any* of my professors' names, because there's 600 in this class, 300 in that, so many here, the students you never know. So when I came to San Diego State, I was impressed that the largest class was forty students. I was impressed that the largest history class was forty students at this university. There would not be sixty, seventy-student kind of classes, or even 100, 200 or the 500 that we have now. But we were really a teaching institution with forty students, professors who cared about students, and I think many of them still do, who put students, who put their research and their interest in students equal on the scale, and saw their research as a way to improve themselves as professors, rather than just improve themselves in the status of the field.

And so when I came to San Diego State, there were about 25,000 students. San Diego was somewhat backwards in a weird sense, because we had some quirky things here, like when I first came I couldn't figure out why there was like thousands of people on this grass, lined up. They were registering. I'm thinking, "Have you guys heard of computers?!" I had registered by computer since the day I entered UCLA in 1966. You know, fill out this little form, mail it in—mail registration. And here they were, every student had to come *in person, in person*, to actually register for campus [i.e., classes]. Twenty-five thousand kids! And to this day we still have what I call "hunting licenses" for parking lots. Because at UCLA, you get Lot Number A, or F, or 10, or 17, whatever the number is, and you know when you go to that lot—because they figured it out—any time of day, you put your little key in, there's going to be a park[ing spot] somewhere in that

lot for you. And even if you're at a lot out at Wilshire Boulevard, and they have to shuttle you back and forth, you know that that's your lot, and that's where you parked. So you go to the lot every day. I was here at San Diego State probably about a week before I had a car accident. Somebody hit me trying to get a [parking spot]. We both saw the spot. We don't know whose fault it was, because we're in this parking lot, and it's panic time, and there's one [spot] and we both head for it—bam! I don't know who was right, wrong, or whatever, but I thought, "This is ridiculous!" And it was that way. And in fact we had a lot less parking than we have today. And the campus was known as a place where you purchased a hunting license, not a parking license but a hunting license. And you hunted for a park[ing spot] every time you came to this campus. And it was really horrible. I mean, we had such a horrible reputation. No one wanted to come to campus if they didn't have to come, in terms of community and people like that—because we didn't have these huge parking structures across the street and places. We had these various little lots, poorly mapped out. So here we have this wonderful campus, 25,000 students, growing in terms of its prominence and importance as a campus, and you've got this. When I came here, we were San Diego State College, and then we became Cal State System, and we thought, "Okay, we'll be CSU-SD." And everybody in San Diego, because we have this identity problem down here, they had a fit! They petitioned, they this, they that, and so we, along with, I guess, San Francisco State, and one or two other campuses, San Jose, got a chance to be San Jose State University, SDSU. We got a chance to have our identity within the CSU. I thought, "What a bunch of crap!"

But anyway, it didn't matter to me. I thought it was kind of cool, being a part of the CSU, but everybody wanted the identity, and I didn't have the long history of San Diego. So it was fine with me, not to have to deal with that.

But when I came to San Diego State, obviously there had just been.... How I got here was interesting. I had begun to teach part-time at Cal State L.A., and I had no intentions, first of all, of ever being in black studies. That's the interesting piece. My area was speech communication with rhetorical theory, focused on African-American movements. I was teaching a class in the speech department at Cal State L.A., part-time, and I had done really well, had great evaluations, and so the chair of the department sent me a note saying, "We just got this notice, thought you might be interested." And it was from San Diego State, and it was a position opening at San Diego State for an assistant professor to teach in the black studies department, but to teach speech. Because one of the things that I discovered when I came here was that this black studies unit was called a school of African-American studies initially. And contained within the school we had speech classes, we had writing classes, we had math classes, so there was a component in it to support students academically so they could be successful in everything else. So I was invited to come down. So I sent my resume in thinking it'd be interesting, and I got a call to come for an interview. Harold Brown was coordinating.

Well, I got here and discovered, first of all, that there had been some protests on campus that year, that the black studies department had kind of started back in the late sixties, and about '68, '69—'69, Carroll Waymon was telling

me—and they had started, but they really hadn't developed the department. They had an agreement with various departments about classes, so that the history class was still listed as History 1-something-something. Speech was still 103, the class we taught. So every class existed, but it was still under the auspices of the traditional department. And they had people hired to teach. Well, Carroll Waymon became.... And Carroll, I think, was one of the persons kind of coordinating this effort. He was a psychologist. So the students, however, decided that they wanted a full-fledged department. They didn't want this stuff scattered around. There'd been a number of things that had happened on campus, and so as a result, they had this protest on campus. I understand they burned a couple of trash cans in front of the president's office, so forth and so on.

SR: Was it then that Brage Golding was president?

SNW: No, this was Walker. Walker was president, a guy by the name of Walker. I never met Walker, because by the time I got here, Colburn [phonetic] was really running the show, until Brage Golding came the next year. But Walker was president when they were burning trash cans and stuff, and that kind of thing, and had this protest. So then they brought in Harold Brown, who was a former student at San Diego State—I guess he had a degree in P.E. or something—but he was brought in as the assistant to the assistant president or something. He was assistant to the vice-president. And this was the kind of position they were forming around the country—they'd bring in these black people who were assistant to somebody—somebody to kind of organize and coordinate stuff. So Harold was brought in, really wasn't an academician, but brought in. His area

was in business and athletics. Was brought in because he had run CORE, I think, in San Diego—Congress of Racial Equality—was kind of a homegrown entity. So he was brought in to basically organize us, and to bring together a black studies unit. And he came in and began to do that—in other words, keep the natives from getting restless, and those kinds of things. And so I came down for one of the interviews. When I got here, there was a woman who had been brought in, in the spring, and she really was the first tenure track hired. That was Florence Gilkerson. She was a historian, actually in the doctoral program at UCLA, and she was already here the spring semester before most of us came in the fall.

So Harold Brown's task was to put together a group of people to come in to develop a black studies department. I thought about it. I got this job offer and at the time I was thinking, "Oh, I don't know. San Diego is 120 miles away." And my mother was livid by then, because she just figured there's no way in the world I'm going to move 120 miles away from Los Angeles. First of all, I had moved into an apartment. By the time I got my bachelor's degree, I moved into an apartment, which is unheard of in my family, because there are eight of us, six girls, two boys, I'm number six in line, so there are four sisters older than me, and one younger. And so none of them had ever moved out. Everybody had moved from Mama's house to their husband's house. Okay? But my sisters told me when I was at UCLA, whatever you do, don't allow Mama to not let you move into an apartment. Don't force yourself to get married simply because you want to get out of the house. And of course I was a little different than my sisters anyway, so I said, "Well, you know that's not likely to happen," because I always

had this kind of rebellious spirit anyway. So I said, “That is not likely to happen for me.” So by the time I graduated and got my bachelor’s degree—in fact, I was working on my master’s—I’d moved into an apartment. And my mother was just—she thought that was the worst thing in the world. In fact, she called the minister of the church to tell him that I needed to go home, to have him to convince me to come home. And he was like, “Ah, Sister Nash, ah, you know, Shirley’s like twenty-two years old. I really don’t think I need to call her to come home. She’s got a bachelor’s degree, working on a master’s, she’s got more degrees than I have! What am I gonna tell her? She’s a good kid.” She’s *grown*, in other words. My mother just thought it was horrible, one, that I moved into an apartment. That was number one—horrible! Then I wanted to move to San Diego, 120 miles away. So obviously I’m beginning to exhibit all these unusual characteristics of my grandmother. I’m going to move to San Diego, I don’t know a soul in San Diego, I don’t know anybody, but I’m coming to San Diego. So my mother was really very much opposed to that. But I think my dad was not opposed to it. He said, “Well, first of all, she’s only 120 miles. You can get there in two hours.” At that time PSA, the airline here, kind of like Southwest, but it was called PSA at the time, it was sixteen dollars round trip from L.A. to San Diego. Delta was \$8.40-some cents round trip. It’s just crazy that such tremendous change in costs. So to fly here it was thirty minutes, back and forth, if you really wanted to fly. Two hours to drive. And when I moved here, Irvine wasn’t really developed very well. Irvine was onion fields, all that wonderful development. In fact, once you kind of left Costa Mesa, it took you almost to get

to probably Del Mar or someplace like that before you really saw civilization or Oceanside. So you really saw civilization again, because everything in between, ah, maybe San Clemente was there. San Clemente was there, but a lot of that was nothing. All those condos and the development—they were all farmland and fields and everything else. So my parents thought it was a little bit creepy for me to drive sometimes, because once you left one place, you didn't see a service station forever. And so at the time, I was dating my husband, and so if I had to stay late, he would drive me back to San Diego and then fly home, because it was only eight dollars to fly home—big, big deal. But I moved to San Diego, like I said, and that was unheard of. And my sisters were like—they thought it was so funny because they said, “Mom was praying all the time that you're safe, that you're this, you're that,” because it was just unheard of for me to move to a place, an apartment, I didn't know anybody, I'm coming to a job, and that whole kind of thing. But my dad said, “You know what, you have to expect this. She's done all this education, she's done all this training, she's gotta go somewhere. She's gonna leave the nest.” So *he* wasn't upset, he was kind of proud about it. You know, my mom was a little bit, “Oh my God!” You know, that kind of stuff. And everybody kept saying, “It's only 120 miles, it's only 120 miles away.” And so she finally adjusted to it. I didn't get married that year, I got married after I got here, in April I finally married my husband. And we had this huge wedding, and so my parents felt a little bit more comfortable, because at least I had somebody down here to take care of me.

SR: Was he from San Diego?

SNW: My husband was actually from New Orleans, but he lived in Los Angeles. I met him when he was a law student at UCLA, so we met on the campus of UCLA, and dated for, I think, a couple of years. And then after I moved to San Diego, he finished law school, and then he decided to come to San Diego. He decided we'd get married. He was studying for the bar, so he moved to San Diego. My thinking was I'd be in San Diego for about a year, because this was a slow town. I thought, "Okay, in one year I'm outta here!" And thirty-some odd years later, [I'm] still in San Diego. I thought I'd be gone. But I came here, and I liked the San Diego community. Initially, he and I spent a lot of time traveling back and forth to L.A., because all our friends were there. And then we came to realize, "This is kind of ridiculous, you've got to establish a life in San Diego." San Diego, the campus itself, was—I found the campus to be very welcoming in terms of the students. And I think that was the attractive part to me, because many students who lived in Los Angeles came to San Diego, because it was far enough to be independent, close enough to be *dependent*. So they could beg for money, run up and pick up stuff, take their dirty clothes home. But at the same time, they could be in San Diego, and Mom not know that they're dating somebody that she would never approve of. So as a result, there were lots of students who came to San Diego. In fact, there were more kids, African-American students, *in* San Diego, who were not San Diegans, than there *were*. San Diego does a very poor job, and still does, to a certain extent, of attracting the kids from San Diego, because naturally they want to go away, so they go to L.A. And the L.A. kids come here. So I found a tremendous group of young people who were really

interested in going to school here, who really needed mentors and support, and there were so few of us. I think when I came on campus, there might have been two, maybe three, African-American faculty outside of black studies, and most of them had only been here a short while. Wally Miles [phonetic] had been here I think the longest. Wally had probably been here since the mid sixties, because he came at a time when they couldn't even find housing for him, because no one would rent to an African American in this area.

SR: What is his field?

SNW: Wally Miles. He's a political scientist. And he was very instrumental in the development of black studies, because he became our one personnel member who was tenured full professor, who could serve on committees for us, who represented all of us on personnel committees, who was instrumental in getting our contracts done with Harold Brown. And so Wally Miles was a full professor when I arrived here. He's retired since then. He retired a few years ago. But he was one of the first faculty members to come to San Diego State. He wasn't the first, but among the first, and the one who stayed the longest, in terms of coming; and was very instrumental in helping us.

But the campus itself was very small in terms of its thinking. In many ways it was a small college with a whole bunch of students, because it didn't conceptualize things like registration by mail. Because like I said, I [unclear 114:55] why are these 25,000 people standin' on this grass?!" I was just blown away. I thought it was a protest—coming out of UCLA. I'm thinkin', "Okay, where's *my* sign?" I'm trying to figure out, "What are we protesting against

today?” And I discovered these people are not protesting, they’re lining up to register. I thought, “Are you crazy?!” And they had to register—school started in September—the whole month of August, if you had priority registration and you lived in New York, and your registration was August 1, you flew back to be registered, because classes would be so overcrowded, that it was crazy. And so that was kind of a shock. And then I learned new terminology, like “crashing class,” because they said, “A lot of students are gonna want to crash your class.” I’m thinking, “Oh my God, are they going to destroy stuff, tear up stuff?” “No, they just want to get enrolled.” “Okay.” Different terminology, different world. But it was an interesting experience.

When I came here, I was twenty-three years old initially. I turned twenty-four my first semester here. But I was twenty-three, so naturally all the guys who had been.... And the campus had this program called—some PINTO program, which had a lot of parolees out. It was interesting. And so a lot of guys had been to prison. A *significant* number of my students were much older than I was. In fact, some of them were retired. I’ve had some students who were working at the university, going to school. And since then they have retired and have grandkids. I’m actually working on my second set of grandkids from one of my students. So it was really kind of interesting. So here I was, twenty-three years old, all the guys trying to hit on me because they’re like twenty-five, twenty-six. And I’m thinking, “I’m not dating you guys, you’re my students!”

I remember many of the students were so much older. “Do you really know anything?” I mean, it was that kind of attitude. I remember one time, it

was really interesting because at this time these guys who thought they got black studies started—you know, the macho guys on campus—they figured black studies was going to be an easy thing. They're not going to really come to class, but they're going to get "A's" because that's what it's all about. So these guys come to me once, and they figured, "This is a little kid from L.A. She's probably been in school her whole life, very naïve." They didn't know I was raised in the projects, real survival techniques, a big family. So they come in, and this guy sits down, and he's gonna tell me what's gonna happen in my class. He says, "You know, I want you to understand the rules of this university, and that we don't plan to come to class, but we also plan to get 'A's.'" He's tellin' me this crazy stuff. So I'm looking at this *nut*, and I said, "Obviously you don't understand the nature of this game. There's only one person directing the rules in this class, and I'm that person. So you either play by the game, or you don't join this game at all." "You don't understand, little girl, we could put sugar in your tank, we know what kind of car you have." And I laughed, and I think they thought I was crazy. I started laughing. I said, "You know what? We did that in the projects when I was a kid. We put sugar in people's tanks in the projects when I was a kid. *Now*, my friends go on 103rd and Compton and find somebody, and you'll never be found again." And they looked at me, their eyes got big, like, "Oh my God, this woman's the mafia or somethin'." But it was really funny. I said, "You're gonna put *sugar* in my tank?! Oh my God, we did that in kindergarten, elementary school, in the projects. I lived in the Pueblos." And they go, "Oh...." I mean, the Pueblos were the famous projects. And I'm thinking, "Hey, we did that when we

were kids.” I said, “You guys gotta grow up. If you’re gonna attack me, at least come as an adult.” And so they decided at some point, one of the guys said, “The guys on campus say you’re crazy.” I said, “I am. That’s a good thing, though.” And so in the end they didn’t enroll in my class, and it was wonderful, because I told ’em, “You’re gonna play by these rules or you don’t play the game at all.” But I guess it was all a testing thing to see, one, is she going to be intimidated, is this gonna be somebody we can really rip off and do this kind of stuff. And they learned very quickly it didn’t happen that way, wasn’t gonna happen. And so you either go by the program, or you don’t. And so they never took my class, they said I was too hard. I said, “Yeah, I am, because I require you to come to class, and that’s a hard thing—and to do your work.”

But it was interesting, I came here, and like I said, I had no idea what kind of experience I would have. It was unique, because the people when we first came, they had structure. They thought about what kind of support students would need to survive on this campus. And so what they thought about was, okay, they need basic skills because they had kids coming who couldn’t write, who could not speak well, and those kinds of things. So they said, “We need to do speech, we need to do writing, we need to do....” And those pieces are still essential to the department. We even had math and statistics at one point in the department. But they became central to at least introducing students to the field of black studies, but also giving them the necessary skills they need to be able to negotiate the university, and for them to meet a professor that they would probably be able to relate to in a class of twenty to thirty students, and mentor

those students through the process of the university. So we recognized that that was a part of it, that we had a unique role on campus to not only teach classes, but to represent the interests of African-American students and community. We recognized the fact that the community protested to get us here. We were all very qualified and credentialed, but we recognized that that was not what got us here. What got us here was a group of people who demanded that they hire people of color to come. And in *my* case, I recognized that much of my travel and my journey through academia was made easier by a professor who believed in me, who supported me, who exposed me to the things that others would not expose me to. And so I made that kind of my mission to make sure that students get other things—not only the class, but they learn about professional organizations, they travel to conferences, they get the mentorship, they get the internships, they get the international travel. They get those things that make a difference in their lives. And so we set out to build this department.

None of us had ever been in black studies before, so there are lots of trials and errors. We all came from different areas. None of us had ever *taught* black studies before. We'd studied African Americans, but we had not conceptualized the idea of a discipline or a set of courses, what is central. So you start from the basics of history and literature and those kinds of things. And then you begin to start networking. And so it was interesting for us initially because our task was to develop a department to present to the academic senate in the spring. We were sponsored in a number of activities. I know that I went to a couple of conferences at San Francisco State that had started the first black studies department, had a

chance to meet with Nathan Hare [phonetic] who started black studies in San Francisco, and in fact we ended up inviting Nathan Hare to come to campus to speak to us. We began to look at what other people were doing around the country. But keep in mind, in 1972, most departments are doing the same thing we were doing: asking questions, trying to figure out what the discipline was really all about. There were a few departments like San Francisco and others—North Ridge, Cal State L.A.—that were a little bit ahead of us. But we had all the challenges that were there, in terms of a department. So our first year was spent in meetings. I can't even begin to tell you the number of meetings we had. I mean, we must have met three to four times a week; hours upon hours. I can remember falling asleep in meetings at midnight at somebody's house, where we were talking about curriculum and arguing about courses and content and materials, and things that had to be put together, and those kinds of things. So it was really intense. There were about thirteen or fourteen of us brought in, which was quite interesting, because it's the largest the department has ever been. Many of them were not all tenured—about six or seven of us that were tenure track—but we had something called H-BUD that was brought in. H-B-U-D. It was Human Behavior and Urban Development, H-BUD. Human Behavior, Urban Development. And Dr. Chambers, who was the tenure track psychologist, was the director of the H-BUD. Harold had gotten a special grant, and this was really a counseling center for black students to come in and to be supported and counseled to do well in school. And in that H-BUD center were three other

psychologists, so we had these three counselors tied into it full-time, whose task was to work with students and what have you.

The center lasted one year, it wasn't refunded. It could have been, it should have been, because it was really a good center. But it was soft money that they got for this one year. So the counseling component went away, but Dr. Chambers remained, and so did the other members of the faculty. And it was interesting. At this time, the campus, unlike it is now, was divided into—like EOP was not EOP. The one program, it had black EOP, chicano EOP, Asian EOP, and some other. It had three or four different EOP offices. Every one was a separate office, a separate little miniature director, and a program geared toward particular students. So it's really quite interesting. I'd not seen that at any other campus before. And that lasted for maybe three or four years. Then they combined it into one. And that was kind of intense for people, because they didn't know how it would turn out, who would be left out, who would be included. People thought, "Well, you know, African Americans will take over." "No, the Hispanics will." Who will work to make EOP? And the tensions around it continues even to this day as to whether or not every group has adequate input and representation into EOP with recruitment and retention of students. But at one point, everybody had their own. And their programs were geared towards African-American students, all those programs were there to support them, to nurture them, and that kind of thing. And the same is true of Hispanics, same true of Asians, and what have you. And then it was combined into one—supposedly

for financial savings and other kinds of things, and so EOP became one, after several years of being divided.

The battle for black studies on this campus was really quite interesting, because we had some natural allies that were supportive. In other words we had people, like a guy named Nick Nichols. He was a white professor in literature. Nick ran our literature classes for us, and invited professors in to teach. Before I even got here, he invited professors in to teach in his classes, in his comparative lit classes, about African-American literature. So he and some others like him, particularly in the comp-lit area, were natural supporters of us, in terms of what we were doing. A guy by the name of Cheek [phonetic], who was teaching history in the history department—Professor Cheek was teaching black history. He basically taught the courses until Florence Gilkerson came along, and then he continued to be supportive of her.

So we had developed some relationships through the years, but one of the realities we live with consistently is that whenever there was budget cuts, whenever there was a shortage of something, people on the campus naturally looked over to black studies and said, “Why can’t we get rid of them?” So there were always these efforts to combine us. President Day had one effort when he first came here. He wanted to combine the black [i.e., minority] studies departments. President Golding had a program to combine us. The current president doesn’t have one, but I remember when one of the efforts in the late seventies, during one of the economic crises, they were going to combine black studies, chicano studies, and Indian studies, and somebody else, into one

department. And we fought it, and we were successful, because one of the things we had always done, and continue to do, is that we've always maintained a relationship with the larger black community. And so any time there's an attack on one of us, we can immediately pick up the phone and call, and it's not like we have to explain who we are. We don't have to say, "Oh, you remember us? We did this and that." No, because we stay in constant contact with the various communities. And so it was easy for us to say, "This is what's going on, we need support." And then we were able to realize.... I think at some point the president realized that it wasn't worth the headaches to try to combine the black studies and chicano studies. We got together as a department, and we've kind of worked well together as the various departments over the years, because one of the things we did when they were trying to combine us, unlike other departments, we sat down and we said, "First of all, we're not going to fight each other. We're not going to *allow* ourselves to be consolidated. We're not going to discuss who's going to be chair over everybody and who's not, because we're not going to get into that battle. We're going to remain separate departments." And so we all organized our community around the issue that we are separate departments, and that we're very different. And as I told him, the only thing we share is the oppression [by] whites. I mean, that's the only thing we share. Chicanos are very different than black people. Indians are very different than everybody. We have some commonalities, but our histories are different, how we got here is different, how our cultures exist is different, so there are all these differences, so how all of a sudden are you gonna throw us together? I said, "You'd be better, basically,

combining history and literature, than you'd be combining us, because of the commonality of those areas." So we fought it the first time, and we were successful. And since then, people have talked about it occasionally, but never in the sense of combining them again, because we generally respect each other's area of expertise, and we move on from that.

The early stages of black studies, we did certain things to keep ourselves, I think, connected to the larger picture of black studies, and connected nationally and internationally. One of the things we did for probably the first ten years of the life of the department, was that we held an annual conference at San Diego State. That was well attended. It was a two-day conference on black studies. And it brought in our community colleges, other Cal State campuses in Southern California, so that we could then continue to discuss issues of curriculum, those kinds of things. And that was really before the National Council for Black Studies became such a large organization, and a venue before which we could actually take many of our issues. So we participated in a lot of very local conferences and organized our own local conference here in San Diego.

The department itself went through a number of.... Like I said, we were initially called the School of Afro-American Studies, and that quickly changed, because we realized we were not a school. There was a school of education before there was a college of education. And we thought, okay, if we're a school, we gotta have a dean, we need to have more money, we need to have this, this, this. And even though we *called* ourselves that, we were not a school. So eventually we agreed to go into the college of arts and letters. They told us, "You

have a choice. You can do professional studies, fine arts, arts....” So we chose arts and letters. Chicano studies chose professional studies and fine arts—why, I don’t know—but since then they’ve moved to arts and letters. We found ourselves more aligned with the social sciences and humanities than with the other areas that were there. But I think they did, because they liked the dean that was in the college of professional studies and fine arts. And our dean was not always the nicest person in the world, but it made more sense to us to be aligned with arts and letters than necessarily to be aligned with the college of professional studies and fine arts. We were pleased with that, because once we became a department, unlike this nebulous group hanging out here called a school, without a dean, without anything else, we then became the recipient of all the other benefits that departments get—not only in staffing and those kinds of things, but we then had a seat at the table of the college, so that the arts and letters college has one black chair, and I’m it. They’ve had others over the years, in other disciplines, like sociology had Phil Gay for a year or two, and somebody else had.... I think Spanish had a guy for one or two years, but at least it put you at the table of decision-making about curriculum. It also put you in a position to be eligible to run for academic senate. I spent six years on the academic senate because I was in the college of arts and letters. So those kinds of things that really talk about power base, participation in curriculum on the senate level, those kinds of things, become important. And they were very important for us, because in our initial stage we were forever defending our existence. I mean, any time there was anything at the senate to talk about cutting or change, they looked at us. Any time

there was a question of what is really the core of the university, they looked at us, because they didn't see us as central to the university, as core of the university. So we were forever writing documents, writing papers, sending things to the senate, because somebody would immediately attack us as not being central to the mission of the university, or whatever it might be. And so we spent a tremendous amount of our time on the defense in the department: writing things, attending meetings. We were so, at a point, paranoid, that we could never afford *not* to be at a meeting—you know, if it's the senate. We could never afford *not* to be on a committee. When I look at my early résumé of the *doggone* committees I served on.... I mean, I have served on every major committee on this campus, whether it's the affirmative action committee, I've been on the academic senate, president of academic planning and policy. I've been on curriculum committees in the college, in the university. You name it! I've served on search committees for dean of undergraduate studies, blah-de-blah-de-blah. We *had* to serve. I did six years on the senate, boring myself to death in the academic senate. But it was one of those critical periods where if we were not there, we wouldn't exist. If it's a G.E. committee, general education, when they're rewriting all the G.E., we had to fight to continue to remain in general education. And so we *had* to be there. And we'd have people questioning the validity of our discipline. I always tell students, I remember once some woman in classic and oriental languages had the nerve to say, (haughtily) "But what can you do with a degree in black studies?" I said, "Of all the people at the university, you are the last one to ask me that question! What could I do with your discipline?" And that made, immediately, people stop and

think. And I said, “Well, what can you do with a degree in sociology? What can you do with any degree? We’re not a training school.” So we became very good at understanding the university and how universities operate, that there are probably two degrees here that you can do something with: one is nursing and the other one is accounting. Beyond that, we’re all going to have to market ourselves to be something, whether it’s English or whatever, you’ve got to figure out how to teach, you’re going to have to do something. So we ended up.... We were warriors in terms of reading everything that came out of the academic senate, every document. I became such a debater in the senate, because every issue had to be really understood and explained, and there was such inconsistency and such a double standard when it came to proposals that we had, versus other people’s proposals—things that we wanted, versus others. Such a double standard when it came even to kids of color. I mean, I felt I had to defend the kids of color consistently.

I remember when I went to the senate once because there was a whole issue about remedial education at the university—and is it the role of the university to have classes to help students who don’t write well, and so forth and so on? “How low do we go?” quote unquote, so forth and so on. And this was at a time when our university could afford to exclude students, because we had more students than we needed. We had a lot of students, and we rejected students, and we felt overwhelmed. And any time we do that, any time this university feels it has a lot of students, then it figures, “we have to up the ante,” we have to get the best of the best of the best of the best, regardless of what the mission of the Cal

State system is statewide. And so here we have these people in the senate, fighting about not wanting to offer the basic English, like the lower-level English for students who did not do well on the writing test, but needed a pre-English to take the basic English. So we had this debate. Well, it was interesting to me, because after all that happened, and we decided we would do the courses, we had to have the study skills courses or whatever they were, I then go to, about a couple years later, we have an influx of Southeast Asians to come to campus. And we discovered that even though we have basic English and then we have the remedial English, they needed something before remedial, because they really had very poor writing skills and speaking skills. And so it was interesting that the senate was going to make a proposal to even have a *lower* level of English class, which I was not opposed to. But the argument incensed me so much, that I had to go to the senate, once again, to point out their racism, if even no more than just as a teaching moment. Here I got this letter saying to me that we need this class because the people are not proficient and so forth and so on, and that we know they're brilliant, even though they can't articulate it. So I'm just trying to figure out how in the heck do you know anyone is brilliant if they cannot tell you in some form?! Okay? So I immediately had to go to the senate, pull out some papers I had from two years before or something, talking about how this institution is not designed to help people who are not ready for it. Okay? And yet you know these people are intelligent, but they can't tell you. "I want someone in this senate to tell me how you know they're intelligent, other than you have decided because they're of Asian descent, that they must be intelligent. And if so,

then that shows your racism even more.” And of course the senate was like quiet. I said, “Now don’t get me wrong, I am 100% in favor of this proposal, but I want you people to understand what you told me two years ago. I want you to confront your own racism that you gave me two years ago.” But it was one of those things, I said, you have to consistently find yourself in these positions. You can’t fight every battle, and I don’t fight every battle, because Lord that would kill me. But at some times you have to say, “Okay, here comes my battle again. Is this the one where I make the point, because *maybe*, just maybe, somebody’s listening, and maybe just maybe they won’t make the same mistake again.

But it’s that kind of thing that we lived with in the early part of black studies. So much so that one day I was sitting in a meeting, and this guy—and once again, I’m here defending some curriculum, some other drama—I don’t even know what it was, but I had *had* it at that point. And he looks at me and he says to me, “Why are you here?” And I said, “You know what? I decided last year that I’m gonna stop tellin’ old white men why I’m here. It is your job to research it and find it out. And when you come back with an intelligent question, I will give you an answer.” Everybody in the room was like, (gasp). And from that moment on, I have never defended my existence on this campus until you articulate a good position. And I was telling someone, I realized in my research and study on movement studies, that the greatest strategy is always to keep people on the defense. Because if you’re on the defense, you can never score. And the way you keep people on defense is ask one question, “Why? Why did you do that?” And you can spend all day answering something that people don’t even

have a desire for the answer. And when you finish answering that, they'll ask you the other why, "Well, why didn't you do something else?" And so you could then write all these papers and do all these things and in the end they really don't care, they really don't care. And so I stopped answering questions of people who cannot give me a good answer, or at least make a question that has some sense. So if you ask me why is black studies here? I will not answer you, because it is not worth my time, because you really aren't interested. You have to write a paper on why it *shouldn't* be here, and then I'll respond to it. See, that takes a lot more time, so most people aren't going to do that.

So I tell everybody sometimes things happen and they want a defense, I don't even go. I was invited to go to Larry Elder's TV program, which I would not want to be caught on TV with *him*, and he wanted me to defend why we have a black baccalaureate. "Why do you have a black graduation ceremony?," blah blah blah. And so someone called me and said, "Oh, Larry Elder wants you on TV," and I laughed. And I said, "Has he written a documentation on why there should not be a black baccalaureate service that has this and that is not a substitution for graduation? Has he done some paper on that, that I can respond to?" They go, "No." "Then I will not go on his program." They said, "Why?" I said, "For what?! I'm not going to stand here and defend something that's almost thirty years old, that has some value to a community, that has some pride to students, that does not in any way denigrate the traditional graduation, that actually enhances that traditional graduation, because students go to all of the services. I am not going to stand here and defend this to a man who has no

interest in it in the first place. Period.” And so I just stopped defending things that don’t make sense, and it has made my life easier and calmer, obviously, because I said, “You’d be crazy, dealing with all this stuff.”

Over the years, the department has structured a number of things, I think that are significant, and I’ve been fortunate to be a part of that over the years—always thinking, “I’m gonna leave, I’m gonna leave, I’m gonna leave.” And then somebody says, “Well, you can’t leave until I finish.” “Okay, I’ll wait ’til you finish.” Then there’s another group that says, “You can’t leave ’til I finish. Well, I’ve got to do my doctoral dissertation. I need you at San Diego State so I can finish it.” And so we’ve worked with students over the years to help them to actually improve themselves, and to be the kind of citizens that most of us would love to have been if we had greater support and greater opportunity.

We as a department have had a number of chairs over the years, and have come and gone. I think I’ve served the longest. I think of the almost thirty-some odd years of the department I’ve probably either served in a leadership role over fifteen, sixteen years on and off, in the department—and probably have more a sense of the department, where it’s gone, its direction, and things it’s done. Over the years, it’s done some exciting things. We once had a gospel choir that was wonderful. For a number of years, for about ten years, we had a dance troupe in the department, the San Diego State University Black Repertory Total Theatrical Experience. It stopped when our director died of AIDS, unfortunately—Danny Scarborough—in 1989. But it was an award-winning dance company that we have lots of videos and tapes of. It won an Emmy. And Danny’s hallmark was

that he would take students who had no dance experience at all, and turn them into marvelous dancers. He even got men to dance with him—black men who were macho, who were football players and all those kinds of things—to dance. In fact, there's a dance company at Bayview Baptist Church, as a result of Danny Scarborough, because Steve Beard was his first male dancer, and Steve Beard directs a dance group very much similar to Danny's in terms of style and performance. And so the dance company was important for students because it created a sense of ownership at San Diego State, and a sense of pride. When it first began with Danny in about 1979, 1980, we could not find a place for it to dance on this campus. The kids practiced in Montezuma Hall, and we could not find a venue for them to perform. And we would perform at the local high schools: Gompers and other places like that.

And then one day a woman by the name of Betty Nezbaugh [phonetic], who was associate dean in the college of arts and letters, as a tree-planter for her out there between the social science—in the social science buildings at the bottom near Storm [phonetic] Hall—she was our first female kind of associate dean on campus, and she was a woman who had come back to school after raising six or seven children, and became a very good political scientist, and a wonderful woman. And so Betty Nezbaugh saw the dance company once in Montezuma Hall, perform, and was so impressed she called me and said she wanted to meet with me. So she met with us and said, “We've got to figure out a way for this campus to highlight this dance company. It is criminal that these kids are not performing on this campus.” And so we then start working, because the dance

department did not want us dancing in their facilities. They did not want us rehearsing in their gym, because it was their space. And so we didn't have—you know, they wouldn't let us use their facilities, even though there was no one using them. It was one of those crazy kind of territorial things. But our dean got together at the time, and got together—I think it was Dean Detweiler [phonetic]—and met with the dean of professional studies and fine arts. And they began to work on agreement between the departments concerning, one, the gymnasium for rehearsal. So our dean invested some money in having a dance room put together for us—a small room that had ventilation, had mirrors on the wall, that our students could practice in. So they were ecstatic about having a rehearsal room. And then we worked out an arrangement so that our groups performed on main stage at Don Powell [phonetic] Theater. Right after the drama department had done all of its performances and what have you, we did a main stage production every year during finals week. So it was the highlight of the community, that we'd have the theater for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and we'd fill the theater with 500 people every time, for this marvelous production. Danny Scarborough then reached out to high school students, and even my kids who were six and seven and eight years old, danced with the dance company. He would create a position for small children to be in the dance performances. So I've got great pictures of them dancing. And it was really, I mean, one of the best performances. The reviews by the city were excellent, of this dance company. And Danny took these untrained dancers and taught them to dance. They danced almost like the Alvin Ailey Dancers out of New York. Wonderful productions,

beautiful videotapes of the students that were done, and just transformed the lives, really, of these young people. It was something that our kids held onto. And it's interesting, because I was talking to a former dancer who runs the dance program at Lincoln High School, and he was one of Danny's dancers, and he's a teacher now, and he's saying he wants to commit himself to come back and try to do the dance company. We tried a couple of times, but it was interesting, after Danny's death, we went to organize a dance troupe, to discover that the dance department had destroyed our rehearsal room. Exactly. We scheduled class in there, and they go, "Oh, you can't do that." I went down there and it didn't exist anymore. Then we tried to have a rehearsal space at some other place, and that fell apart. So it was really just—once again, the obstacles after two years of not having it, they just decimated it. And it was always a sense of rivalry between Danny Scarborough's dance company, and the campus' dance company, because they were not doing the kind of cultural productions that Danny was doing, nor getting the kind of attention that they were getting from the dance company that was there. But it was a marvelous experience for students in terms of identity. This coming year the dance company, the students who were in the dance company—they've done a production since Danny's death about ten years ago. They all got together and exercised for a year. In fact, I got an e-mail from one who's turning fifty this year. And so they all exercised furiously, about ten, twelve years ago, and they did a production at Balboa Park. Because they did productions on campus, they did them in Balboa Park. We worked closely with the African Arts

Committee. I think they did a thing called “Juma Juma” [phonetic] in Balboa Park one time.

SR: I think I’ve heard of that.

SNW: And that was just a marvelous production to help raise money for the African Arts Committee of Balboa Park. So our dance company became an outreach program. It was also instrumental in bringing in a person by the name of Jack Kimbrough [phonetic], who was the first black dentist in San Diego, first president of the NAACP in San Diego, and was instrumental in many of the sit-ins during the 1960s. And Dr. Kimbrough was an avid collector of African art and materials. He eventually became an adjunct professor for us. And he would do productions in the library, major displays of his books. He had first-edition books by Frederic Douglas and those kinds of individuals. So we’d have a major display in the center of the library, the old library, and he would do lectures on his material, because he was a great lecturer. Then he’d put on display his masks. He had masks from all over the world. He would put on a mask and he would do a production, or lecture on that. He had all this metalwork that came out of certain parts of Africa, and he’d have displays. So he was a wonderful, wonderful addition, as an adjunct, to the faculty. He would do lectures for our classes, he never got paid. If we had calls to say, “we’d like someone to come lecture at a school,” Dr. Kimbrough would load his stuff in his car, and he’d go and do these lectures for us, and those kinds of things. He was an interesting person who ended up being really the.... I think he was the grandson of Andrew Jackson—or the great-grandson of him, one [or the other]. His mother looked just like Andrew

Jackson, which is a horrible thought. But I remember they did a special on him in San Diego, and he had a picture of his mother, and they superimposed Andrew Jackson's face on his mother's, and they looked almost identical. I think she was either his out-of-wedlock daughter, typical kind of thing, or granddaughter—one [or the other]. But he was a descendant of Andrew Jackson. So his name was Jackson Kimbrough. Jack Jackson Kimbrough. And a *marvelous* addition to the campus, marvelous outreach person—he and his wife Concella [phonetic].

And so we had this wonderful relationship built from the dance troupe with Dr. Kimbrough and the culture that was there. So the department engaged in a lot of cultural activities in its initial phase. In fact, my secretary was telling me—she's going through all the files and stuff to give to the library—and she was saying, “Wow, you guys did all these great black history programs!” Because we did, in the initial phase of struggling to get identity on campus, and what have you, we would appeal to every department on campus to basically help us to do something in the area of black history. And so every department on campus would sponsor a black history event. So we'd have this huge calendar. People in the sciences would do things on black scientists; or engineering; or journalism; or whatever it was. And so we had this very extensive program on black history that was there. And that was important.

I first became chair in 1979. Our graduations on this campus were things.... I mean, we're civilized now, but in the 1970s and early eighties, we were known throughout the city as having the most disruptive graduations probably on the face of the earth. I mean, we were out in this bowl outside that

was so depersonalized, nobody's name was ever called. So students would get beach balls and they'd hit beach balls all during graduation. I can remember when Yvonne Braithwaite Burke came here to speak. Marvelous congresswoman. And here they were, beach balls flying all around the field while she's talking. Students would bring in maybe five or six champagne bottles underneath their robe. They're corking champagne bottles all during graduation. I mean, it was really embarrassing. And the newspapers and the media would come to take pictures of all the students doing these crazy things. It was just totally embarrassing.

So we said, "Okay, let's do something different for graduation." So we decided, based on the African-American tradition of black colleges, that we would have a baccalaureate service—not a graduation, not to rival with graduation—but a baccalaureate service, and that we'd have it in the community. We'd host it in a black church, and we would structure it so that it was a right of passage for students and their families. So we began the first one in 1980, and we had it held at this small Lutheran church on 54th Street. Maybe 150 people showed up for the service. We even had dancers at the service. From that, it grew to a couple hundred, and then it grew to the point where now we have to look for space, because we're 1,500 people at baccalaureate service. Students start calling us far in advance, wanting to know where it is, when is it, those kinds of things. And this coming year, in May of this year, we'll celebrate the 30th anniversary of the black baccalaureate. When we did the 25th anniversary, we invited students back from all twenty-five of the classes. And so we had twenty-

five former graduates to march in the baccalaureate, who had been a part of the baccalaureate experience from the beginning. And so it's really a tradition that students call us still about, asking about the baccalaureate and participation in it and those kinds of things. And interestingly enough, out of it has grown others, because I remember a woman came here from Indiana, maybe after we'd had about nine or ten of them, and she was there for the graduation of her kid. She worked for the University of Indiana, and she called and said, "Could you help us develop a program?" So we sent her all of our materials, so they do one. UC-Irvine now does one. UC-SD does one. And others began to develop these baccalaureate services. I said, "We're not in competition with graduation, we're not pretending to give a degree or anything like that. That's for the university to do. This is a time when, as a community, we come together to celebrate the achievement of our children, but also the achievement of the community.

SR: That's lovely.

SNW: But every graduate stands on the shoulders of all these hopes and dreams of former slaves, who would have done this if they could. And so it's a time for families, it's a time for community, for people to really celebrate. And that's why we take it to the community, so that little kids up and down the street can say, "Wow, look, there's a whole bunch of kids over there with those funny-lookin' robes on, who are graduating," who are basically celebrating their achievement. So we do this every year, as I said, and we've done it in various ways. We've raised money for it. In fact, when we first began, I always begin because I come from a poverty mentality, students can't afford to do this, so we raised money.

The students had car washes and link sales, and then one day I got tired of that. I said, “You know what, I think these students have money.” So I said, “Okay, the baccalaureate costs you \$25.” No problem, everybody paid. I said, “Why am I washing cars? Why are we having link sales? Why are we doing these crazy things?” These students buy CDs, they buy everything in the world they want. Okay? So we just said, “Baccalaureate’s \$25,” and they all came across with \$25. I think we’ve been charging now for about ten years or so, and I’ve only had one person who didn’t have the money. I said, “Fine,” and they just marched. But I’ve never had a person say, “I don’t have \$25, I don’t have \$30,” whatever it is. And it’s really kind of funny, because here I was thinking, “Oh, these poor students like me, they probably don’t have money. I don’t want a student to be denied an opportunity,” dah, dah, dah. But after I got tired I said, “We’ll just charge ’em.” Because I had a committee that didn’t want to raise money. You know, we’d have a committee of students, and they wanted to do this. I said, “Well, just charge ’em.” And they all had money. I thought, “Oh my God, wake up, Shirley. These students can afford what they want.” And so we began that process, so it made it a whole lot easier for us. But at our service we give the students a piece of kente cloth. That represents their heritage and their culture, for them to wear at the main graduation. So they wear their kente at the main graduation. We have African drummers. We videotape it so we have lots of videotapes we can give to the university of all of our baccalaureate services. And it’s usually a really wonderful experience of gospel choirs, African drummers, students who speak. We used to let the honor students speak, but then we realized

they don't always have a story to tell. Sometimes they're honor students because they had nothing going but going to school, so what can they tell us? So we stopped that. We did that one year, and we found out those speeches were kind of boring. Some of them were okay, but many of them were very boring. So we said rather than getting the *summa cum* and the *magna cum* and the *cuma cum* to speak, let's find out who has a story.

SR: I love it.

SNW: So we started a competition. We said, "Okay, if you want to speak at the baccalaureate, you have to come and prepare a five-minute speech on the topic." And the faculty sits and listens to these speeches, and see who has something to say to the graduates and their families. And so that's how we choose our speakers. We select one of the ministers from the community to give the charge, and then we select students who have a message. And then we'll select one student who will accept the charge from the graduates, and that one student is someone who has done something significant to improve the lives of students on campus.

SR: That's wonderful.

SNW: And as a result, it ends up being a good program.

SR: That's wonderful. (recording paused) So I'll just put it on, and you can pick up.

SNW: Clearly, the Africana Studies Department became, in many ways, a central piece of the cultural life and the activities of students on the campus. We became significant because we were the body of, say, black experts on campus, who could really represent the interests of students and communities. So we became the link

between the larger community, the black student community, and the university, in terms of making sure that the issues of diversity and equal opportunity were always on the table. And as I said, we took that responsibility seriously, because if we didn't, no one else would. We felt we also had a responsibility to try to educate the university about people of color, and to work very hard to make sure that people of color, that women, had a place and a space at a university like this—which was not always welcome, and not always easy, because you're dealing with a campus that's predominantly male, oftentimes white male. Expectations are that you will do the white male thing, even if you're not the white male—if you're the female, that you will still do the white male thing, that you would be the carrier of that particular viewpoint and culture wherever you went. So we found ourselves in a position where we were constantly trying to make sure the university would be receptive, that we would be able to take our community, and bring our community into the campus, and vice versa. And so to that extent, we did a lot of things that were outreach efforts in the community, whether it's working with high school students, we wanted to make sure that we did those kinds of things that were there, making sure that the curriculum we had was one that was not only supportive of students on campus, but off campus.

We mentored an awful lot of students, a tremendous number of students. There's probably very few African-American students who went through this campus that did not in some way meet the faculty, become a part of the faculty, become a part of our families, become known by the faculty, and that we helped to get to grad schools and Ph.D. programs, and all those kinds of things. I mean, I

still serve on Ph.D. programs of students who were former students of mine years ago, who were at Pepperdine. I just did one at S.C. recently. You know, the California School of Professional Psychology. All of us have been on those doctoral committees around the nation, because of our work and our mentorship, not only our research, but our work and our mentorship with those students who were on this campus. Being on a campus like this can be a very alienating experience for many students who come. And I can identify with that, because you're a small population, you're about 3% of the total student population. If you've not had much contact with universities before, what they do here can be very different and foreign to you. You're apprehensive about approaching faculty. So sometimes students who actually come to black studies, some come because they're interested, they want to be in the discipline, they take classes that have interest to them. And then we end up with some students who come to us, as I always say, through the back door: after they've been somewhere else, they've been sometimes bruised in some fashion, either their sense of self or their academics have been abused in some way. They then come to us looking for somebody to listen to, knock on the door and say, "I've got this problem. Somebody told me I should come over here to figure out how I can solve it." Since there are not that many counselors on the campus that are African American, those kinds of things, I recognize students are sometimes apprehensive to tell their story to people who they feel will not appreciate it, or will simply say, "Oh, that's what's wrong with black people. That's why you've got this kind of problem." And so we have students who come, and who give us their story, and

we do our best in some way to try to help and advocate for those students to have a decent academic career on this campus. So it has been that kind of spirit that has always existed for us. Through our outreach efforts, through the classes we've offered, through the dance company, through our baccalaureate service, through our black history programs, and a host of other kinds of things, we've done that. More recently we began to realize that a significant part of the life of students on *any* university nowadays is study abroad, that students want to go abroad, that they need to have an international experience that's unique. So we naturally felt that the place for our students would be to go to Africa.

I first took some students to Africa—they weren't SDSU students, they were actually middle school students—to Africa when I was involved with the NAACP's Young Scholar Program. But after that, we began to network with different groups in Africa, and began to realize that we needed to develop a program. So we started something called the alternative spring break in 2001. We were participating in the alternative spring break with Costa Rica and with Mexico. As a department, we just kind of helped to sponsor it in general, because we had a faculty member, Pat Washington, who was very interested in it, and she was in women's studies.

But in the fall of 2002, I was approached by a student who said, "Why don't you go to South Africa?" So I thought to myself, "That's crazy! That's 10,000 miles away! How are we going to get students to South Africa?" But I thought, okay. I talked to the guy he referred me to, because he was our student body president, and he had gone. And so he said, "Talk to this guy, Marlon

Smith.” So I called Marlon and Marlon was in the States, and Marlon came to see me. Marlon was part of a program called Success By Choice, run out of L.A., but he lived half of the year in South Africa—U.S. citizen. So I talked to Marlon. He came down, we had this lunch, and we talked about going to South Africa and what he could do and so forth and so on. So I was kind of apprehensive, but I thought, “whatever.” So Pat and I were going to do this South Africa thing, and then she couldn’t go, so I took one of my other faculty members. But we started advertising and hustling and begging and borrowing and asking students to go. And our service learning program sponsored the faculty to go. So we finally were able to scrape together, by pushing and pulling, about eleven or twelve students to go to South Africa for our very first trip. And it was one of these exploratory trips, but I mean we were begging and borrowing and finding money and cajoling students to go, and saying, “You gotta go, you gotta go, you gotta go.” So we ended up with a pretty diverse group of students, about half of them African American, the others white, Hispanic, and Asian students.

So we all pack up and we go 10,000 miles to South Africa. And it was a marvelous experience. I mean, it was a wonderful experience. The campus wasn’t that excited about us going to South Africa. In fact, we had not really gotten much encouragement *period* about going to Africa, period. People felt, “Oh, nobody really wants to go, the university has its own thing.” I mean, this was the initial phase. No one was excited about us going to South Africa, or Africa period.

So after we came back, we said, “Okay, we’ve got this South Africa alternative spring break thing goin’. And each year, it got better. I remember meeting with Nancy Marlin, and we talked—the provost—because she was real big on study abroad. I said, “Well, our best sales people will be the students who go and come back and talk about their experience. That will sell the program.” We struggled to get the first group together. I mean, we *really* struggled to get those few students to come up with \$3,300 to go to South Africa. The next year, we went from thirteen to about twenty students. Our third year we went up to about twenty-five or so. Our fourth year we had forty-four students to go to South Africa. Our last year—not this one—then our fifth year, we had forty students to go to South Africa. This past year we cut it off at thirty-six, I think, students—thirty-five or thirty-six to go to South Africa. It has been a wonderful experience where we’ve blended culture and academics and studying about racism and apartheid and Jim Crow; with service, so that we go and we contribute to the South African community, our kids volunteer at youth centers, we take shoes, we take school supplies, we take things for children. This year we started a feeding program as a result of last year’s project. We’re basically providing lunch, because we raised the money through the community and through the National Council of Black Studies—lunch for students at a middle school for every day for a poor school where kids did not have lunch. And the principal said to me—well, really breakfast—he said to me last year when I was there in 2007, “If you could give my kids a piece of bread, some peanut butter and some tea with a little sugar in it for energy, it would make a world of difference in the academic life of the

children at this school, Romolelle School.” And this was out in a small place called Sharpville. So I said okay. So I came back and I said, “How much would that cost me?” They said it would cost you \$300 a month to feed the children that little menu at that school—about \$300-\$400 a month. So I went to my friends and others around the city—I had Kwanzaas at my house and told folks what I wanted. Then I went to a friend of mine [unclear 165:13] with the National Council of Black Studies, and they gave me \$3,600 for the first year of breakfast for this group, along with the other money I had raised. But our kids give back. A significant part of that is that we give back. So in 2006, I believe it was, I got this call about my trip to South Africa. That’s when I had forty-four people, and I had already had my forty-some odd students to go, and we were just overwhelmed. Not only does this program now have students, but we also have high school students that go with us, because a friend of mine at Crawford who does a group called Diamonds in the Rough, said, “One of these times, Shirley, I’m gonna go to South Africa with you.” So the year she decided to take off work and go to South Africa, I said, “Excuse me, you have not been invited to go.” She said, “Well, I’m gonna go anyway.” I said, “Well, I’m not gonna take you, *unless* you take high school students.” She goes, “Oh my God, now I’ve got to raise money for a bunch of kids.” So we took five high school students from Crawford to South Africa with us. That was a life-changing experience for five kids who had been all kinds of issues in their lives. But they raised that money, they did all kinds of things. And so we took students from Crawford, we took senior citizens—one of our members was seventy-five—we took maybe five or six of

them, a couple of teachers. So we had about thirty-some odd students, and about eight or nine community leaders. So we kind of had this intergenerational thing going to South Africa.

So I've got my kids ready to go, and all of a sudden I get this call. I come in from my office and my administrative coordinator says, (hurriedly) "Dr. Weber, Dr. Weber, Dr. Weber! MTV called, and they want to go to South Africa!" I said, "No way." And I kept going. "You must call them back." "No I don't." And my students are standing there with their mouths open, "You're not gonna call ... M ... T ... V?! Oh my God! You gotta call ... M ... T ... V!" It's like *Jesus* had called. I said, "No, I don't have to call MTV!" They were just devastated. So MTV called again. So finally I called MTV, and the lady says, "We really want to come talk to you." I said, "How did you find out about me?" She said, "Well, we do this spring break thing, with all the wet tee shirts and the drunk students at the beaches and things, and someone said, 'You should do something positive. Alternative spring break,' blah, blah, blah, blah. So we Googled 'alternative spring break' and what pops up but San Diego State. We read about your program, we talked to a couple of people, we want to go to South Africa with you." I said, "I have to think about it." So they came to San Diego, and they assured me, "We will not intervene, we will not make this into this, we will not take over, we will just follow you," dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. I said okay. So my students were just ecstatic, of course.

So MTV joined us in South Africa, in something called "The Amazing Break." And they picked five programs in the nation to basically travel with, and

to look at what they did. So we were featured internationally on “The Amazing Break.” It was a wonderful experience for the students. I mean, to me it was so-so, it was okay, it was MTV, you know. And it was maybe five minutes of television time, but they did a really nice job about our kids, what they do, the schools, the shoes that we took to the school, our volunteer work of a center that has a thousand kids who’d been abused, we work with them. The things our kids learned. They had a chance to talk about what they did, and so it was a good experience. Of course that immediately sparked the next forty students to go to South Africa.

And we also televised. When I had a radio program, we actually broadcast live from South Africa. I wasn’t there. I said, “I’m going to be in South Africa, but I’m going to broadcast live on one of the local channels.” And because the channel was on the internet as well as local here, we called in, they waited for us, and our people, the kids’ parents, and the citizens of San Diego heard us live for an entire hour from South Africa over the phone.

SR: That’s great.

SNW: So it was a live broadcast from South Africa. It was like two or three o’clock in the morning in South Africa, in Johannesburg. I was in my suite, and the students came to my suite and we had about three or four phones—we didn’t have a speaker phone—and the kids could go back and forth using the phone. They called us and our kids were live. I had a friend of mine to go into the studio to kind of emcee for us, and we got call-in questions from parents and family members and friends about South Africa. So that was great.

We try each year to do something different. We tried for several years to do a live broadcast, video conference, from South Africa. And every year they didn't have the right hookup, they didn't have the right cord, they didn't have something. Even in the embassy they don't have great technology. So we did just the oral thing, just a live conference, taping, but we didn't do the video. This year, for the first time, at Vits University—Vitteron University—we had the live hookup, video conference from South Africa to our campus. And it was exciting. So now we know we can do it. In fact, all credit to our campus, because each year we tried for about three years to try to do this hookup and we couldn't. So I said, "Forget it, screw it, it ain't gonna work." Okay, we don't have to do it. But our guy over here says, "Nothing defeats me, Shirley. We are going to have this conference. I think I've got it down." I mean, he was determined, he was determined. And I had given up, I said "forget it." And we were live. In fact, we were at Vits University, being hosted by a women's group there. It's called Every Woman, is the name of this women's group. They host us every year at a reception and a discussion with our students, because they love to be with our students. And so I said fine. So we were there, and when the guy came in and said—my other faculty member, he was over there when it came on—he came runnin' back across campus, "We are on, we are live, it's gonna happen!" This is like the culmination of four years of struggle, to have a live video conference. Even in the embassy we couldn't hook up. And so fortunately this time we were live with the students from South Africa, with our kids, and the parents here in San Diego were cheering in the audience to see us, and they were ecstatic,

because here we were, 10,000 miles away, talking to our family, letting them meet our friends in South Africa, talking about the issues in San Diego as well as the issues in South Africa. So this year we look forward to going back again and maybe structuring the conference so that it really is a panel discussion of individuals, of issues in South Africa, issues in the U.S. So we were able to do that this year—for the first time we did a live video conference from South Africa. So each year our program gets better, it grows. Also, aside from the program, because of our relationship we developed with the embassy with programs there, this year was the first time the embassy hosted a *huge* barbecue for us. So our students got a chance to eat giraffe, wildebeest, zebra—all those things they pet in the zoo, they had a chance to have it for lunch. Some of them were like, “Oh no, I can’t,” but they ate it, they enjoyed it, and it was delicious, because they had sausages and hamburgers and steaks made out of it. It didn’t look like the giraffe, so it was fine. But we had a gentleman at the embassy, a woman’s husband, who does this game hunting, and so he went out the week before, specially for us, he said, to hunt the game. And next week, he said he’ll get us some wart hog. He said that is really delicious. So next year we’ll try the wart hog.

But also as a result of that, we work with kids from South Africa, and they come to visit us now. So last year was our first visit of twelve students from South Africa, high school students who were here for the Tony Robbins Leadership Camp. They came to San Diego, the camp was always held in San Diego. And so they came this time to San Diego, but they wanted to spend time

with us. And so we had them for three days in our homes. We had members of the community to host them, and we hosted them on campus. One church did a barbecue for them at the beach. We went to Mission Beach and they had a whole barbecue for them. So they got a chance to meet young people, they lived in our homes, they got to know us personally. This year in August we're having twenty of them come. There'll be seventeen students, three chaperones. We're in the process of organizing all their lodging and what have you. They'll be doing their camp, and they'll be with us for two days. We've already got churches organized that want to host dinners for them, rap group with young people. Our dean is going to have a session with them. The international program is going to do some stuff with them. So we will get a chance, our students will get a chance, to be exposed to kids internationally for that period of time. And I tell students I think that's extremely important.

One of the benefits of my life as a child who didn't have much, there was always somebody wanting to do something at my school that was great. And I had a teacher when I was in junior high—I don't remember which one it was—whose mother went to Australia, and came back with a list of kids who wanted pen pals. And I had a pen pal from the time I was in junior high, until I graduated and went to college. And he sent me wonderful little gifts, and I sent him little gifts. I still have the tea cloth with the giraffe on it or something, that I had from when I was in junior high school; a charm bracelet that my wrist can no longer accommodate, but I still have it. And so I had a wonderful pen pal that we wrote to every day. And I thought writing was so important in those days. And we

started off, many people started writing and they stopped, but I kept my pen pal the whole time. And he would always write me and ask me one critical question: “Have you seen any movie stars today?” And I don’t know what he thought happened in Los Angeles in South Central L.A., but I’d have to tell him, “I’ve probably seen as many as you’ve seen—on the screen. But I’ve not seen any lately.” But he always thought there would be movie stars walking up and down the streets of Los Angeles. But I got a peep into his world in Australia, and it was really wonderful. We exchanged photographs and things of that nature, and it was just great having a pen pal on the other side of the world. So I tell students having friends around the world is really important, it enhances your horizons, it gives you hope about what is possible for the world, and the good things that are there.

So over the years Africana Studies has made an effort to constantly be in a state of transition. One of the things, our latest transition now is the offering of courses in the larger community. We offer a class at the Malcolm X Library, free to the community. And we were amazed when we first offered this course—I offered it about four or five years ago—that so many people showed up, that people were interested in knowledge. We did it one time, we had an eight-week session when we first started, and it was called Africana Cultural Exposure: A Legacy of Resistance and Resiliency. And we had different professors do a different night on a particular topic related to that on their specialty. We duplicated materials, we said, “Okay, the first fifty people who register will get free material,” because I’d gotten a grant to get this done, from the community—a

\$1,500 grant. I came back. I left and sent the stuff, and the Malcolm X Library sent out a notice to everybody in the community. By the time I came back to my office the next morning, I thought, “Who did I insult? I have fifty-some odd messages on my machine.” I thought, “Oh my God.” I was trying to think, what was I in the paper about? Did I do something, as usual, you know, to make somebody upset? They were all people registering for the class, wanting that material. He said he had so many at the library. We ended up with about a hundred and some people in this class aged from eight to eighty. We had one woman who had kind of after-school care for parents who worked at night, and she had eight, nine, and ten-year-old kids. She had eight of them. She brought them to the class every Thursday night. We had senior citizens who came. I ended up having to get an additional grant to pay for the material to duplicate for people. And at the end of it, we did a study of the group, asking them questions, surveying them. And all of them said yeah, they would come, they would even pay to come. So we charged them \$5 for the materials or whatever, and we offered a class in the fall and one in the spring every year. And we ended up giving academic credit for students who wanted to enroll through extension. So I think students ended up getting about 4 university credits out of all the eight classes we offered—those who chose to. We had people who came to every class, and the classes ranged sometimes forty, fifty people in the class, up to maybe, like I say, a hundred and some in the first one. And so as a result, at some point, we promised the library we’d do two classes this fall again, but we will also offer classes, a regular class that we offer at the university, at the library, so that our

students can go there and go to class. But it was interesting, because the first year we did it, it showed up in the newspaper as one of the best bets in the *Union Trib*—this is the best bet. You get a free class, taught by professors, and university interaction, discussion, films, all kinds of things, wonderful experience. And it was really an exciting class—and it still is, when we offer our students. We still have a list of the students, we send them a notice, and they enroll. So it says to me very clear that this community wants to learn. And like what I told them, what I missed in the community was intellectual exchange, and so now we have an opportunity to have intellectual exchange, we have all kinds of folks that come to the class.

We also have our court schools for kids who've been in trouble and pregnant and so forth and so on. They come. The teachers come and give the students academic credit for coming to class. So those students, some of them come with newborn babies and all kinds of stuff. They come to the class, they enjoy it. We have people who live in the community who are non-African Americans. In fact, there's one guy who's white and his son, they come to every class. So we have just a real good cross section of individuals who come to listen to the professors, to get the materials, engage in the discussions. And my faculty, I thought I'd have to twist arms for the faculty. They love it! Anytime I say, "Are we willing to do it?" everybody says, "Put me down, I want to do so and so. I want to do this." Because they love the exchange that occurs with the students, with the community. And now, for our students, if they take two of the classes, they can get one unit of credit for coming, so now some of our students show up

as well. So we're working to do more outreach so that we can truly impact the academics and the intellectual development of the southeast community.

SR: That's wonderful.

[END SOUND FILE "WEBER-2.MP3," BEGIN SOUND FILE "WEBER-3.MP3"]

SR: Today is Wednesday, July 2, 2008. This is Susan Resnik, continuing with the oral history of Dr. Shirley Nash Weber. Good morning.

SNW: Good morning.

SR: Tell me a little bit more about the community in San Diego. You mentioned it yesterday, and I'd like to hear more.

SNW: Well, I think one of the unique things of being in Africana Studies at San Diego State University is the fact, unlike many other departments, being involved in the community, having connections to the African-American community was expected—not only of the university to a certain extent, but most importantly from the people who lived in those communities. They saw Africana Studies as their resource and connection to the university. So immediately that put us in a position of *needing* to be involved in the San Diego community and figuring out what it was, where it was, and those kinds of things. It was kind of interesting, because as oftentimes, there are faculty who don't like that; they've come to the university with a clear perspective that they're faculty, and that their task is to do research and teach classes, and they're not into being, quote, "involved in the community." And we had a number of people who came in and out of the department at various times who didn't see that as their task or their job or their responsibility. I always felt very strongly that it was my responsibility whether

I'd been in Africana Studies or not, to have some outreach, because I live with the principle to whom much is given, much is required. And I have been very fortunate and blessed in my life, not only with parents and other kinds of things despite all the economic and social challenges that I faced, that I had a responsibility to give back. I always say my mother had this philosophy in life called the open hand philosophy. She'd always say you leave your hand open to give, and in that process, yeah, you might drop something—kind of like having coins in your hand, you might drop something. But if you keep your hand open as you give, you're also open and receptive to receive. And so you'll always get as much, if not more, *back*, than you actually gave. So I operate with that particular principle.

The San Diego community was very interesting when I came to San Diego, coming from Los Angeles, because, one, I was accustomed to a much larger African-American community. I was accustomed to a community that was larger in percentage, and more concentrated in terms of where people lived. What I found here in San Diego was that, one, it was a smaller population, it was about 7% or 8%, in terms of the total population. And two, there really weren't large pockets of African-Americans living in any particular place. There were, once upon a time, large areas. Communities developed, like Emerald Hills, which still has probably the largest pocket of African Americans in terms of residential homes. But also Valencia Park was a place where new homes were being built, and the up-and-coming kind of progressive African Americans lived. But once integration came in, and once people began to work to integrate in Clairemont and

El Cajon and Del Cerro and other kinds of areas such as that, housing integration came, those communities became less African American in terms of large percentages, and more diverse. It's interesting, even now in 2008, because I am still relatively strongly involved in schools, that there's really only one elementary school that's predominantly African American, which sounds really strange. Some have 30%, 20%, but Johnson Elementary continues to be the one elementary school, I think, that has over 70% of its student population African American. And it's a small school of 500, 600, 700 kids. It's not a very big elementary school, but it's located in the Emerald Hills area, and has a long tradition of excellent education, a long tradition of generations of young people going there so that people who went there years ago, now their children go there, and their grandparents still live in the neighborhood of Emerald Hills. So it's an unusual community.

It's also unusual because it's not always a very *open* community. That's the thing that's also very interesting. It's almost like a little town. I often tell people when I first came to San Diego in 1972, to look for a place to stay, I was with—he wasn't my fiancé at the time—but my fiancé who eventually became my husband, brought me to San Diego to meet some of his friends who were lawyers here in San Diego. And at that time in '72, there might have been four or five black lawyers in *all* of San Diego. So I think I met them all at once—kind of interesting. But we came to San Diego, and it was interesting because we were being shown around by some guy for me to look for an apartment, and this guy began to tell me all the gossip of San Diego. He told me different famous

people—supposedly famous—who were cheating on their wives, who were having children out of wedlock—you know, all kinds of things. And I was just kind of blown away because in Los Angeles you seldom hear that, only because there's no way in the world you'd ever meet these people, so why tell you about Joe Blow, knowing that you will never, ever meet Joe Blow. In Los Angeles you could move from one block to the next and start a whole new lifestyle, having been a mass murder only two blocks away, and no one would care probably, and no one would even know.

So as I get this information, I'm thinking, "This is really crazy. I will never meet these people." In less than six months, I must have met everybody that this person talked about—which says to me this is a really small town, this is a very parochial kind of setting, these are people who—you know, everybody knows everybody. And so it's really, really interesting that I did that, but it was an eye-opener to me that this is a different kind of community, this is a very small community, a few people doing lots of things, most people not doing a whole lot of things, and that it's the kind of community that is also very protective of its people, those who live here who are, quote, "real San Diegans," feel somehow or another that they're under attack from the outsiders, and they're not as open and receptive to outsiders. So that Los Angeles was like—there were a number of people from Los Angeles, who came to San Diego thinking, "Okay, this is a hick town, I can make it big. I'm a small fish in a big pond in L.A., but here I'm a giant, I'm a whale, and I can really, really take over this little town and run it." And the people in San Diego were very resistant to that. They were very resistant

to this outside, slick person coming in, who was going to slick 'em out of everything. So that was a community that was interesting for me, in trying to figure out how do I make a difference, given the fact that my whole life had been involved in communities. I had a sense of involvement, my mother did, my family did, of believing that you have to give back, that you have to work. And I'm on a campus that demands, in *my* mind, a sense of community involvement. But it was really quite interesting, but then I realized the difference for me would be that I was not here on a temporary basis. Initially I thought I would be, but as San Diego became my home, I realized, "Okay, I'm here for the distance. I'm the distance runner, I'm not the sprinter." And so I'm not running through San Diego, trying to snatch what I could get very quickly. I'm here to create a better world in San Diego. And I firmly believe that, and I believe that my name was my bond, that there's nothing better than a good name, that honesty, honor, truth, those kinds of things, was what I was raised on, what I lived by, and that would mean something. So for me, being involved in the community was significant, and really taking my time with that involvement, so a lot of times people say, "How did you get so involved or so recognized in the San Diego community?" I say, "My God, I've been here over thirty-five years now, and it's not like an overnight experience, or a quick love affair—this is a life-long experience." And so I recognized that and became involved in San Diego—beginning small, really, in my church, and recognizing that there were a number of individuals there who were.... And it's interesting, I've always gone to what people call the non-educated church. In my church, the Church of Christ, there are always these high-

class churches where you have everybody with a degree. And then you have the everyday people who go to church at another congregation. I've always gone to the everyday church, because I always found the people there more genuine, more giving, more receptive. I found them looking at me initially like, "Okay, this is one of those smart kids," but then learning very quickly that yeah, I'm smart, have lots of skills, but I'm willing to give you my skills if you need me to write something, organize something for you, you can be the leader, I can be the worker bee. And so I found myself joining quilting groups because I wanted to learn to quilt, and that's where I got to know all the old ladies in the church. And so when I eventually had children, they were the ones who embraced me and my children. I joined a quilting group, we sat around.... I mean, *old-time* quilting. We had like the saw horse kind [of quilt frames], not with the sewing machine. And ladies would make the tops, and then we'd put the batting on and roll it up. They showed me how to do all this stuff, and we'd sit around on Tuesday night, I think it was, drinking coffee and [eating] cookies, and sewing on top of this quilt. So I learned how to quilt from these older ladies, which I thought was really quite exciting. But more importantly, I learned a lot about San Diego, simply by listening to what they were about, how long they'd been there, what the city was like, what the values were—you know, those kinds of things that were central and important. And that was important to me, to know San Diego, much more than just the data and the statistics, but really to know the people of San Diego. And I found being at that quilting group gave me a wonderful opportunity to talk to women who were much older than myself—thirty, forty years older than me—but

yet able to share with me in a very simple way, in a very concerned way, their love for San Diego, their love for their families, their love for what they were doing, and how important it was. They obviously became very proud of me, because here I was, at the time I didn't have my Ph.D., but in that process I got my Ph.D., and they felt a part of that process that was there.

Out of that grew a number of organizations. We began working because we were quilting. It was like, "What are we gonna do with these quilts?" So I decided, because where I came from in Los Angeles we worked on Christian education. And there was a black college in Terrell, Texas, that our church is a part of, that I actually serve on the board for now. I began to say, "Well, why don't we raffle these quilts and give the money to this college?" So every month we'd have this little breakfast, and we would raffle these quilts. We would sell the tickets for a dollar and raffle the quilt, maybe make \$100-\$150 a month. And it was a nice way of giving back, or teaching them how to give back in a bigger way than they'd ever thought of before, because they had not thought of participating in a *national* thing to educate young people around the nation. So we did this, and it was really kind of funny, because the lady who did the quilts, Miss Bea—Bea Presley was her name—wonderful woman, still alive—she was the one who really put the quilts together and wrapped 'em up and did a lot of hard work for us before we got there to sew. It was almost like she's the luckiest woman in the world because almost every breakfast she won the quilt. And so she would say, "Well, you guys keep it, that way I won't have to work so hard next month to make a *new* quilt." So it was always interesting that she did that.

Out of that, also, grew—we hooked into a national group called the Ladies Auxiliary for Christian Education—called LACE. We then began to participate in LACE activities with them, established a club, and women had membership in it, to send to Southwestern [Christian] College. And then we began to offer, to organize, these *huge* dinners for 500-600 people, who sold tickets, who came to this dinner, and we raised thousands of [dollars] to send to this college. So it was really kind of an empowering experience, an expansion for these women who had never believed in their minds that this would be something that they would do at such a grand scale. And I was privileged because they allowed me to work with them, to take them to that level, to help them to organize. They were just excited as could be every year. For about ten or fifteen years we gave this dinner, and sent money to Southwestern Christian College. So I think as a result of that, I was eventually invited, and recently have joined the executive board of the Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, to represent the nation in terms of education and opportunity.

But out of that experience of working with that large community, came a lot of involvement with other kinds of communities that were there, because once you began to do things like that, and my connection with the university, which always gave me a platform, I think, to provide expertise, to support agencies and organizations, and people in trouble, and people trying to get in the university, and workshops on how to improve their kids' education, and those kinds of things—it opened up an opportunity for me just to go into so many different directions. That opportunity, as well as.... By then I had gotten married in 1973

to Daniel Weber, who became an attorney, and eventually a state judge. I became involved in lawyers' wives' kinds of activities. You know, you get involved. My husband and my kids always say, "You always have to start something, Mom! You could never just come in and take it in its rawest form." And I thought, "Well, you're absolutely correct. I'm not going to argue about my life and my past at this point. I'm too old to do that." So we started a lawyers' wives' organization. And it was interesting, because we started giving scholarships to individuals who wanted to be lawyers. And I got a chance to meet a lot of the lawyers' wives, because it was a small group of us, maybe about ten or fifteen lawyers at the time. And we started doing scholarship activities. We started doing a Halloween thing called the Spooks Ball, which was really quite interesting. And it was in Balboa Park where everybody came dressed in costumes, to raise money for scholarships and those kinds of things. So I became involved in that and went to a lot of the national conventions for the lawyers' wives, and did my little thing at that level.

But out of that also came my interest in something I'd read about in the *Union Tribune*, that had to do with battered women and battered women's services. Ashley Walker Hooper was the director of a facility that had been opened at the downtown YWCA, that dealt with battered women. And so she came to campus and did a lecture for us once. It was very revealing. She was an African-American woman in this area where really the center kind of catered more to white women, because black women didn't get into so much an exposure of batteredness, because the image of us is that we're supposed to "handle our

business” in essence, so if we’re being beat up by a man, we’re supposed to beat him up first. I mean, this whole image of black women that carries over into everything else. And so we didn’t have a lot of people coming in, but Ashley was a wonderful advocate and an educator on this area. So it was interesting to me, so as a result I said to the lawyers’ wives, “We must help this project, because this black woman is involved in it, and somehow or another it may have some impact in our community.” So the lawyers’ wives began to, every holiday, to adopt the battered women’s services. We would figure out what they needed, we would take down clothing for children, we’d give money, we had the room painted to decorate for the children to look nice at the “Y,” and those kinds of things. And as a result of that, when Ashley then finally really institutionalized battered women’s services, she called me and said, “You know, I really need you on my board.” And I thought that was kind of interesting. I thought, “Well, I don’t want to be on another board. I’m fine.” “No, no, no, I really need you on there for a host of reasons.” So I served on battered women’s services’ board, and I found it very rewarding because it really was, at that time, in the early eighties, it was really on the cutting edge of looking at what was happening to women, that had not been revealed at the time, that whole idea that it’s not her fault, and we need to educate women about that, that women don’t have to go back to their husbands, and those kinds of things. And so I’ve always had a special passion about the battered women’s services and what it does, and looking at it over time, because eventually many, many years later, maybe ten years later, of course, I served on the board of the “Y,” mainly because of my involvement with battered women’s

services, and my commitment to the YWCA in keeping that facility, and a special shelter facility for women who were in crisis. And meeting so many women who didn't have home support, family support, to do those things. As I've been at the university, every experience emphasized to me in some very bizarre way how truly blessed I've been in my life: that if I had been a person who was being battered, that I think my sisters and my brothers would have come to my rescue. I know that my parents would have supported me. You know, those kinds of things. And you look at people who—you say, "Well, did you tell your...." "Oh yeah, but they said I need to stay with him." And coming out of a situation where I had a mother who had been abused back in the 1930s and forties by her first husband, and saying, "There's no way this side of heaven or hell I'm gonna accept *this!*" And she leaves in 1940. This is unique in terms of women, or my grandmother.

So this whole idea of me as a woman, having *some* control over my existence, I realized at that point how truly blessed I was that I had as a part of my psyche and my personality, that I was not going to tolerate the level of abuse that these women had tolerated. So it was really an eye-opener for me to see this at battered women's services. But out of that, it led me into so many different directions. I probably have lectured for every organization in San Diego—literally—and sometimes more than once. So that if it's an organization that needs a speaker or something of that nature, they know they can call me. If I'm available, I will do it. I do that for my church. Even though I may charge universities ridiculous rates, I don't charge churches. In fact, I've got three

women's seminars to do this year in Los Angeles, in Atlanta, and in Tennessee, and I've already done a couple this year, because I really believe that if I have a message, or I have something to give, that I can give to change the lives of women, to change the lives of those less fortunate, then it's my responsibility to give it. It costs me very little to do that, other than to be there, and they'll pay my air fare to get there. And I will do that, because if it changes someone's life, or if it enhances an organization, makes it stronger, better, more productive, because they can advertise that I'm coming to lecture—hey, that's what I'm supposed to do, that's what life is all about. [Minute 19:00 of sound file "Weber-3.MP3"]

[GO TO NEW DOCUMENT, "Weber Part 3, Draft 1" FOR CONTINUATION]

Dr. Shirley Nash Weber
June 30, July 1 and 2, 2008
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
354 minutes of recording
PART 3 OF 3 PARTS

[Sound file Weber-3.MP3, at about Minute 19:00.]

SHIRLEY NASH WEBER: [¶] So my life in the city was really involved in providing resources and services and support for women's organizations, for the Urban League, the NAACP, the ACLU—all those organizations I've been recognized, awarded for, for my service to *all* of them. And I saw that as something that you do. I always tell people I operate on the premise that any time I enter a room, the world ought to be better. I believe that. Not that I think that I'm such a powerful person, but I firmly believe that each one of us has a unique ability to change the world in which we exist, and if you don't use that, then who are you, *what* are you, *why* are you? I mean, what's your role in this world? So if I'm on a board, it's going to be a better board. If I'm at a school, it's going to be a better school. When I put my kids in Encanto Elementary School, I said, "It's gonna be a better school." Why? Because Shirley Weber's here. And I'm a parent, I'm an involved parent. I'm going to make the parents better, I'm going to make the teachers better. It's going to be a better school. And it *was*, the six years I was there. I just firmly believe that we have this power within us, that most of us deny, that can transform any place where we are, if we choose to. And regardless of the [unclear 20:17]—and it doesn't have to be a *huge* transformation. But I just [figure] that my spot on this world ought to be better. So when I enter a board, I enter a board trying to figure out, "What can I do that's different? What can I bring that's unique?" I think boards are made up of real diverse people, and you ought to release that diversity wherever you are; and that you bring a unique perspective, and if I don't understand your world, you ought to explain your world to me so I can understand it, so I can understand where you're coming from; so that I make better decisions because I now know what kind of world you live in and where you come from. So like I said, I participated in an *awful* lot of things.

So it was interesting to me that in 1987, I got this phone call from Miss Thelma Pryor, and Thelma says, "Shirley, *we* had a meeting." I said, "Who in the heck is 'we'?" Well, it was George Walker Smith and Dorothy Smith, and I think one other guy, and somebody else. About four or five people met at this church. "We had a meeting"—this is in the summer of '87—"and we decided that you should run for the school board. Dorothy's decided that she's not going to run for reelection, and we had a meeting and made this decision." My response was, "I am confident that there is someone else who can run for the school board, and we just need to find them and support them." You know, there are some good people out there, and this will happen. "Well, we've made this decision, so we want you to talk it over with your family, discuss it, and get back to us." I said, "Fine." So my husband came home and I told *him*, because he had tried about four years earlier to get me to run for state assembly. But my kids were small, I'm not goin' anywhere. So I said, "Oh, no, no, no, I can't do that, that's impossible." And he says, "Well, you really should." And I thought, "Nah, nah, nah," and I left it alone. So when I told him about the school board, he said, "I've been tryin' to get you to run for stuff for the longest [time], so you really should run." And I'm thinking, "This is insane." So I figured, "Well, if I don't call 'em back, they'll go away." That's my theory sometimes about illness: if you don't pay attention to it, you'll get well. You know, that kind of thing. So I didn't call them back. So maybe about four months later, Thelma calls me again and said, "You really didn't call us back, so we're assuming that you're running." I said, "Uh, I really hadn't thought about it Thelma. I just assumed that by now you guys had found someone else." She said, "No, we have found *you*,

this is it!" And then she proceeded to tell me things I had said in speeches in the past about responsibility; about taking charge; when your time is up it's like a call, you've got to respond. I mean, so this woman is quoting me about responsibility on the phone, and I'm thinkin', "Oh my God, the chickens have come home to roost. All this stuff I've been talkin' is now knockin' at my door." I thought, "Okay." So I said, "Well, you know, Thelma, I'm in the middle of my career at the university," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. She said, "Yeah, I understand all of that, Shirley, but we really need somebody to take the helm now. Dorothy is retiring," so forth and so on. I thought, "Oh my God." "And there's nobody we trust to advocate for us like you." So I said, "Okay." I thought about it and said, "Okay. My husband says fine," so forth and so on, "we'll move forward." Little did I know what I was getting into. But I told them at the time, "But understand this, I'm a professor at the university and I love what I do. This is going to have a profound impact on my career, what I'm doing. It's almost like putting my research, my life, on hold. But I will do it for two terms. At the end of eight years, I'm out. And I firmly believe that." And I'm glad I made that statement early on, because I think after eight years you really have burned out, you've done some things. And people [couldn't] understand why I would leave at eight years, because I was being very effective. But I discovered at the end of eight years, you stop, you become the system: Rather than an advocate for children, you become an advocate for the system. And nobody needs another advocate for the system on the school board. We need an advocate for children. And so I said okay.

I learned a lot in the campaigning—wow, did I learn a lot—because I had *no* idea what campaigns were about. I was kind of involved in terms of my husband would have fund-raisers at the house. We'd give money, and I'd go away. If somebody called, I might go do a little phone banking, but I really had no idea of what happens, the large level of politics, the campaign managers, the things that take place. And San Diego City Schools is a large school district. It's the second-largest in California, seventh in the nation, so being on the school board is a tremendous responsibility. So I had no idea all the campaign stuff that happened. But I was telling someone I learned something that was really unique, because in the process of this whole campaign thing, I learned that there is a whole 'nother world out there that makes decisions, that my community knows very little about.

And I often refer to being black in America is not having a glass ceiling, but a steel ceiling. And I said, "The value of a glass ceiling is that I can see what's upstairs. I know there's another room. I can even read lips and maybe figure out what to do. But when there's a steel ceiling, I think I'm at the top, and I don't even know that I'm in the middle, or even at the bottom. I have no idea that there's another room up there, I don't know even who's *in* that room or the conversation they have." So when I entered politics, I entered that steel room. I mean, I went inside, I finally saw politics, I saw people, decision-makers, I got to meet an awful lot of people. And I learned why people make decisions that they make. And I think it's an eye-opener for people in our community that don't understand politics, don't understand why they don't get what they want out of it, because of the voting patterns, and all those other kinds of things that you don't think about in terms of politics. So it was an interesting experience for me to run a school board race, because San Diego Schools District, not only do you run *in* the district which you represent, but you run citywide. So no matter how well I did—I was running as two people in the primaries, and there were three of us. I got 60% of the vote and still had to run citywide, against the woman who got 19%.

So in the end, I ran citywide, I think I got more votes than the president—it may have been Ronald Reagan or whoever—I got more votes in the county than the *president* got, but I won by 80% of the vote. But it's always funny, I tell people, if you leave a campaign and you're riding high, because *nobody* gets 80% of the vote. I got 80% of the vote, and immediately somebody calls and tells you that they didn't vote for you, or something of that nature. So your

ego gets shot real quick. Or people come out and tell you they hate they voted for you, or whatever it is, and reality sets in real quick when you become a member of the school board.

But I became a member of the school board in 1988. I was sworn in, in 1988, and was the only African American on the board. They've never had more than one person of color on the board from the time that I've known. Now they may have two. But I was the only African American on the school board, and I think everything I learned as a student at the university, as a community servant, as all those kinds of things, really came to bear on my role in the school board. I had learned a lot about people, about the community, about how to work with individuals, how to get what you need when you're really in the minority. And I was very much into not crying the race story, but really talking about how to be successful as a school board member. So for me, it was very, very important when I became a member of the school board that I represent my district as well as children in the community, across the board, that my standards of excellence and expectations would basically permeate the district and people would know what I stood for.

So I immediately became involved in learning everything I could about San Diego City Schools. And I got to know, also, every board member quite well. Fortunately, I had campaigned with Susan Davis, who's now a congresswoman; and Ann Armstrong, who was running for the school board at the time from La Jolla. And because we were on the campaign trail together—Susan was up for reelection, and Ann Armstrong was running at the time—we got a chance to know each other really well, to form a relationship and a friendship, so that I got a chance to peep into their world, and to know what they were made of. Because I thought that was very important, to understand what people do. Ann and I became very good friends. It was really funny, I always tell people she's my only friend I've ever known who puts butter on her sandwiches. She would make a sandwich, she would butter the bread, then she'd put mayonnaise, then she'd put the meat. And I'm thinkin', "Why waste good butter on bread?" It was the weirdest thing. But then I learned Ann's father was a doctor, and she was somewhat affluent. I laugh, I tell her, "You're the only friend I have who wastes good butter on a sandwich. When I was a kid, we had butter, we made butter-and-sugar sandwiches," because that became a sandwich in itself. We were not about to waste good butter to hold together sandwiches. She said, "Well, it makes the sandwich hold together good." I said, "Well, if you're poor, that sandwich is not gonna drop anyway. You've got a good grip on this sandwich, so the last thing you need is some butter. You just need some mayonnaise and some meat, and you can hold that sandwich yourself." So we always had this running funny thing with her making these sandwiches.

But I learned a lot about Ann and Susan, and then eventually I learned a lot about the other members of the board, who were on the board with us. I was fortunate to be on [during] the time when Jim Roach was there, who eventually became sheriff. And I remember Jim called me one day and said, "I want to go to breakfast with you." I said fine, so we went to breakfast, and I got a chance to know who he was. Because, you know, you sit at a table with people, and if you don't really know where they've been or the shoes they've walked in and the journey they've had, you can't understand why they make decisions. And so the good thing for me was that in listening to him, I got a chance to know that he was a kid who basically almost dropped out of high school, stole a car, ran away. I mean, this is his life story that he tells everybody. And so I really got a chance to know that this was not just the guy who lived in the Scripps Ranch area, who is now a major player in the sheriff's department or what have you. But this is a person who understands young people, who understands them because he was one of them once upon a time. So he and I became very good friends.

So I had an opportunity to meet, on a personal level, the members of the school board, and made that a part of *my* role as a board member, so they would know *me*, and know where I

was coming from, and the kind of experience in life that I had, that was so very, very important, and why I made decisions based on my experience.

I remember once when we were debating something about employment with people who worked in cafeterias, and someone made a really disparaging comment about the competencies or the intellectual prowess of people who work in cafeterias. And I remember stopping the meeting and saying very clearly, “My mother was a cafeteria worker at my elementary school, and she was not a mindless individual. She was thoughtful, and sincere, and dedicated in everything she did.” And everybody stopped, because this was something that nobody else’s mother had done. But my mother was a cafeteria worker part-time at my school. So it becomes important for us to know where people come from.

But when I was on the school board, it was a real challenging and wonderful time, because I had the unique opportunity of working with Tom Payzant, who I consider to be one of the best superintendents. And his deputy superintendent was Bertha Pendleton, who also became, eventually, a superintendent. But Bertha was a woman of tremendous integrity. And I learned a lot from Tom, I think, as a leader. As I look at superintendents since then, Tom had certain qualities that were really important as a superintendent, that built a school board that could function. And one of the things he did was, he never gave you information that he didn’t give to everybody. He was not in the business of empowering one board member against another. So if I said, “Tom, I’d like to get some data on what the achievement level is for kids in a certain [unclear 32:29], he said, “No problem.” He’d tell you, “I’m gonna give everybody the same thing.” And he’d make sure we all had the information. So I wouldn’t walk into the room with a set of stuff to bang somebody across the head with. And so we knew that he was a very honest and open person. When he made mistakes, he let us know that. And no decision against him was ever grounds for him to hold it against you in the future. So if we were debating Issue A, and he wanted us to go a certain direction, and we rejected that direction and went another direction, when we got to Decision B, [it was a] totally different discussion. He was not about to get back at board members, he was not about to become vindictive, and so he really set an atmosphere for us as board members, as to how to operate. So that if I’m on a board.... Every now and then I remember once we were fighting about something really, really—and I was adamant about it, and I was upset with the members of the board who were going to go against this thing for poor kids. And I understand their position. And we fought, I argued, I argued hard, and I lost. Susan and I lost. That was fine. So Ann is sitting there, looking at me, scared, because we’re scheduled to go to lunch the next day. She goes, “Are we still going to lunch?” I said, “We’re going, and *you are paying*.” And we both fell out laughing. She said, “Gladly!” You know, it was one of those kind of things. But we operated at that level, that was a level of integrity, honesty, no underhandedness. We respected each other. And I think it came from the top, it came from Payzant, who respected board members. It came from Pendleton, who respected board members. And really gave us a way to operate as a board.

When I was a student at UCLA, one of the things in the speech department that I discovered became *very* valuable to me, is that I had to take an entire quarter on parliamentary law. And I learned parliamentary procedure backwards and forwards. I do workshops all over the nation, and I’ve trained the Local Leaders Program here, all the folks, in parliamentary procedure. And at the time when I took it, I thought, “What a waste of my time. What a waste!” But it turned out to be a very, very *significant* piece of my life, because being on boards, being able to understand parliamentary procedure, those kinds of things, is an invaluable tool to basically not only help people, but to move the agenda and to move things forward. And I’ve never operated on the premise that my knowledge of parliamentary procedure should alienate people, or to make people angry because I’m tying up the meetings in all these procedures. But *it is* designed, hopefully, to help things flow a lot easier, keep us focused, keep us on task and moving forward.

Because of my personal commitment to achievement with kids, and understanding that if you're poor—as I say to them, “You're gonna have to run faster and jump higher. You're gonna have to know a whole lot because your mother and father cannot will you the company. You're gonna have to build your own company”—I went on the board believing that [for] every kid we had to have high expectations, high achievement; that we had to bring the best that we had into children in the district.

One of the things that happened as soon as I got on the board, was that we got data concerning African-American males. And I think the first year I was on the board, about 30 African-American males in the whole—or less than 30, I guess—in the whole senior class in San Diego City Schools, which was about 130,000 kids, only 30—some of them had a “B” or better grade-point average. We had tremendous failure among African-American males. And it wasn't just us, it was nationwide. So one of the good things about this board is that Tom was forever having his staff do research to reveal our problems. You know, sometimes school boards cover up their underachievement and their failure and their dropout [rate] and all that other stuff. We were not into that. And oftentimes you'd get criticized, “You guys, the schools are failing.” But I mean, at least you know where you are.

So we then implemented a special program called “Improving the Achievement of African-American Males,” the IAAAM Program. And it became, really, a national program for how to work with African-American males. And one of the things that we did, which was really quite unique, we advertised for mentors to run this program—pupil advocates is what we called them—to work with these young people, this population. And we had some requirements, which was really quite unique, and it proved to be so wonderful. We wanted men who were successful academically, but who had not forgotten who they were. Because we didn't want kids to say, “Yeah, he might be smart, but who wants to be a nerd? Who wants to be like *him*?!” We had to have guys who were cool, who could walk and talk with the kids, but who had been academically successful, and who could relate to them. So we advertised for this job, and we had something like 180 applicants for these four positions. We were amazed, first of all, that there were so many men in San Diego who *wanted* to work with kids, who were police officers, social workers, who had gone into different careers—even some in banking—who had gone into different careers and all of a sudden decided they wanted to come back.

So we ended up selecting these four men who became our pupil advocates. The beauty is three of them were my former students, who were now back in the career. You know, it was kind of interesting, because as the board was praising these four men that we had hired—oh, these were the most fabulous four men they could ever find anywhere, who really developed a marvelous program, and really did wonderful works with our kids—it was interesting, because when they introduced them to the board, and we saw them all, it was kind of funny because they said, “Dr. Weber, do you know any of these men?” And I go, “Well, I've had him as a student, and him as a student, and him as a student, and *he* has been a mentor.” They go, “You *know* these people?” They said, “Oh yes, Dr. Weber taught us well.” It was really kind of funny. But as an educator, it's always very rewarding to have your own students come back in this capacity. But that organization, that [IAAAM] project still exists in city schools in many ways. They've unfortunately dismantled it and weakened it by trying to give them too much responsibility. But we saw with them, and then I worked with the Urban League to develop the Golden Pyramid Scholars. Because what we wanted to do was develop a culture that says, “Excellence is acceptable. Excellence is what is cool.” And so we then began to work with those pupil advocates at the four schools. They were at four different schools in the city that had large populations of black males. And looking at curriculum and working with teachers and working with kids and working with parents. And so we then ended up with the Urban League doing something called the Golden Pyramid Scholars, so that every year the number of black males who had a “B” or better average, began to grow. And these kids, if they had the grade point

average of “B” or better, and then accumulative the next year and the next year, they would come to a luncheon that was sponsored by the Urban League and Hewlett Packard. They would get a golden pyramid to hang around their neck. So these kids were proud that they could wear their golden pyramid. And then as they began to graduate, they were getting scholarships, and so we ended up, at the end, with several hundred kids at this luncheon, every year, celebrating the golden pyramids. A friend of mine, former student, too, Jackie Jackson, who is education director of the Urban League, she actually organized this program to complement our efforts in San Diego City Schools.

So we began to talk about achievement and what kids need to do. I remember going to—I think I may have been, at the point, vice-president of the board or something—and I went to a first meeting of the board where we give out awards and honors. And I stood there, and I noticed that all the honors.... At that time, any student with a 4.0 was valedictorian—we didn’t say just *one*—you had a 4.0, you could have five valedictorians at your school. We didn’t care, we were going to honor excellence. So we looked around, and I looked at this audience, and I’m handing out these wonderful awards and recognition, and not one is given to an African American, and not one is given to a Hispanic kid. So I’m devastated, I’m devastated. I said, “Okay....” So I went and started talking, at that moment, to my ninth-grade students. And we had this huge conference, and I said, “I need to see valedictorians, I need excellence, I need you people to get 4.0’s.” They go, “Oh, my God!” I said, “No, if you aim for a 4.0, you will get a 4.0. Take some AP classes that give you more than 4.0, they’ll give you 5.0.” I went through this whole thing. Everywhere, when I was talking, “I need to see valedictorians in the senior class.”

SUSAN RESNIK: Terrific.

SNW: I just went on and on and on. And in about four years, when I did the valedictorian things, there were black kids and Hispanic kids who were valedictorian: one at this school, two at this school. I said, “You have got to set your sights higher than what you have before. And so we began to see these students with some goals. Because I would go to the schools and talk to the ninth graders and I’d say, “This is what I need, this is what I want to see. I need to see that in you. Do you know how it feels to be an African American who stands up in front of this board? I’m president of the board, I’m passing out these awards, and I don’t give a one to anybody who looks like me. All the other kids are very deserving, and I’m happy to give it to ’em, but I gotta have *somebody*, you’ve gotta commit to me that you’re gonna do this.” And the kids were like, “What?! That’s too hard!” I said, “No, you have got to do this for me. If you don’t do it for yourself, do it for me.” And so I would go through this big thing. And so we ended up starting to see these kids really saying, “Okay, I think we can do it.” And two or three of them in a class getting 4.0’s or 4.1’s and 4.2’s, because I said, “If the other kids can do it, you can do it. We’ve got to have someone there.” And we began to see Hispanic and African-American kids aiming for high expectations, doing those kinds of things, wanting to be on teams such as the academic decathlon, and the constitution committee that went to Washington, D.C. We had kids who were Westinghouse Scholars. And sure we had kids who were struggling, but I’m saying to them, “We’ve also got to have examples of excellence in *every* community, so that kids know they can be successful, that they can achieve, that they can accomplish these particular goals, because it’s important that they do.”

Interestingly enough, when you’re on a board, and you’re the only African American on the board, almost every time something happened, it would be like *Ann* and Shirley, *Susan* and Shirley, *John* and Shirley. But it was always Shirley, because you’re an urban school district. You’re an urban school district with a population shifting from once where it was 75% white and 25% people of color back in the 1970s; that I’m faced with the reality in the 1990s that it’s now 25% white and 75% people of color—complete shift on the scale. So clearly the issues of urban education and kids of color is central. And when you begin to interact—at least San Diego City Schools—begin to interact on a national level, it has to have somebody.... You know, you’re

going to send a representative, you're going to send probably somebody of color. So I end up following, going to a number of things with Payzant, which led me into different directions in terms of a national level. Because we were involved in restructuring schools and trying to empower parents, and develop a parent involvement policy, and a curriculum for parent involvement organizations and those kinds of things, we began to look at our standards and what we do for kids. And so we got a call to come to New York to participate in something called the National Alliance for Restructuring Schools. It was part of the Rockefeller Foundation, and we were slated to get—which we did get—a \$4 million to \$5 million grant to talk about how to help schools to restructure. And it was interesting, because I went, and a couple of other board members went, and Tom. And then when they said to Tom, “You’ve got to have one of the members of your board—and preferably the one of color, because we want to diversify....” You know, around the table, too, were other school districts that had *no* African Americans on their boards, no people of color. And so when I went to the National Alliance for Restructuring Schools, I think I was the only person of color on the board. I mean, it was that kind of thing. And so I became the National Alliance Vice-President, and there were a number of school districts at the table.

Interestingly enough, who was also at the table was Arkansas. And who was representing Arkansas was Hillary Clinton. Hillary was on the National Alliance for Restructuring Schools. And Arkansas was undergoing a process of changing its schools because it had such poor schools. Teachers were paid—I met a woman who came to an alliance meeting who said something to the effect—she was a statewide, like an assistant superintendent or something—she might have made \$18,000 a year. Now, this was in like 1990. This is ridiculous. So she was saying when you come there, you have to have other consulting jobs and things like that. I thought, “I’ve never heard of such!” And of course I think the governor at the time made about \$20,000 or \$30,000—Bill, in 1990. I mean, it was really poverty in Arkansas. Arkansas did not pay their people. And of course, having been born in Hope, Arkansas, where Bill was born—and him knowing somewhat of my family, I discovered later on—Hillary was on our commission, and doing school reform.

And the interesting thing is, when we got ready to have one of our meetings, we were requested to come to Little Rock, because they were in the midst of some transformation of standards and expectations of kids and trying to standardize the curriculum throughout the state of Arkansas, because these little enclaves of little one-room schoolhouses or whatever they had, weren’t in synch. So they were trying to improve that curriculum for the farmers and everybody else that was in those very rural areas.

So we actually went to Little Rock and stayed at the Peabody Hotel, where the ducks walk every day. So we went to Little Rock, and had a chance to be there to meet with some of the people, to kind of lend support and lobby those efforts in Little Rock. But the beauty of it, we also went to the governor’s mansion and had a chance to meet with Bill at the time he was governor. It was funny, because Hillary had told him, “There is this woman from Hope. I’ve never met anybody from Hope on any national commission before! So here’s a woman born in Hope, that you have to meet.” So he came in. It was really an interesting thing. We went to the governor’s mansion, and it was weird to me, because Arkansas is still Arkansas. I mean, I’m from Arkansas, it’s still Arkansas. It had no gates around the mansion. We drive down the street, and at the end of the cul-de-sac is the governor’s mansion. I mean, it’s not like it’s guarded and armed. It had big grass, so that’s how we knew we were at the governor’s mansion. Nice house, swings or whatever in the back for Chelsea I guess, at the time. But it was really funny, because.... And the ex-convicts serve the food and work in the governor’s mansion. And one of Bill’s favorite foods, which was absolutely wonderful, was catfish. That’s the first time I’ve ever had catfish appetizers in any kind of uppity-uppity event. But these guys had the best

fresh catfish they had cut in tiny little nuggets, on toothpicks, that they had deep fried, cornmeal fried, catfish. It was absolutely wonderful. I mean, it was just delicious—that was delicious.

But I worked with the national alliance, and then eventually out of that we developed something called the New Standards Project, that got involved in the development of standards for how to assess schools and those kinds of things. So as a result of my involvement with the school board, I became involved at the national level with doing that.

One of the other things that we did on the school board that I considered to be important, that eventually carried over to other things, was that when I first got on the school board, we were talking about building new schools in areas, and that we were really overcrowded near Balboa—Balboa School, Hispanic school, we had all these multi-track schools which means you take a school for 900 and you put 1,200 kids in it. You put them on different tracks, and one teacher never had a classroom, so she roamed from room to room every track period, and then she'd be off on the fourth track. So it was really a crazy system that I didn't like. And I committed myself, when I got on the board, to eliminate multi-track schools, and I did. When we're talking about building schools, it was once again the view of the world based on politics, and people's perceptions of old politics. It was like, "Okay, we can't build new schools in poor neighborhoods, because people north of 8 won't vote for 'em, because of the fact that it's south of 8. And that's not a voting population, and they're not gonna increase their taxes." You know, the whole bit.

I operate under the premise that when you build schools anywhere where there's a need, and you improve the quality of education for children, you improve the quality of life for San Diego. So I got the board to agree to build schools in old neighborhoods with low voter populations. And we put a ballot measure together that won. And I think schools like Rosa Parks School, Kimbrough School, Balboa, the change at Balboa, the Cesar Chavez School—all those schools were slated to be built, and they were all being built in poor and old neighborhoods. And it was kind of groundbreaking in a way, because eventually when the board went out for a *new* initiative, a new ballot measure, they targeted those neighborhoods. And we built, of course, a school in Scripps Ranch, that was very needed, a middle school, Thurgood Marshall Middle School, those kinds of schools. But I said, "You can't just ignore the reality of what you need in the inner cities. And you're going to revitalize the community." I told them, "I believe I can sell this, so we can sell this to San Diego—that San Diego has to be bigger than its parochial view of the world, that it *has* to look [out] for all the children." I told 'em, "Kids nowadays, they don't just rob in their neighborhoods—they rob all over the city, because they can drive, and transportation allows that. So if you're gonna change your life, you'd better change all of San Diego. You'd better change it all." I told them, "I walked through Rancho Santa Fe, we went to a retreat up there. They've got more security in Rancho Santa Fe than they have in southeast San Diego. So *somebody's* robbin' somebody in Rancho Santa Fe." So they should be concerned about the quality of education for everyone. So we were able to get an initiative passed. The people didn't think we would. Overwhelmingly passed an initiative to build schools in old neighborhoods. And I think in many ways it clearly revitalized those old neighborhoods, but it also gave San Diego a sense of ownership about its children, because we owned all the children. And that was my position. I remember once there were an outbreak of some activity around the Rodney King incident, that happened at—I think it was Pershing, or one of the elementary schools north of 8. And my board member, Sue Braun, it was her school, and the parents were furious and they were upset. Sue had to go to that meeting that night. And I came to the meeting. She was kind of surprised to a certain extent, but I told her, "Sue, if something's happening to the children here in this community, it happens to all the children. And there are kids who ride the bus who come to this school from my neighborhood. So I feel a sense of ownership for *all* the children. And I'm not afraid of these parents, I'm not afraid of this community. So I'm not gonna let you stand here and take all the heat by yourself. I'm

willing to come.” So I actually showed up at the meeting. People were shocked that I came to the meeting. Because, you know, who wants to volunteer to jump in the fire? Hey, if there’s a fire goin’ on, let’s put it out together. And so I kind of operated with that premise that my kids in my community were bused all over the city, and other people’s kids were bused into my neighborhood for various reasons, and that you own it all. And the only way you can ensure the excellence of any one child is to ensure the excellence of everyone.

I used to always tell kids when I would talk to them, it was always kind of funny—I said, “You know one of the reasons why I work so hard to give excellence to every kid and make sure all you guys can read is because for some strange reason my daughter is very, very brilliant, but she loves men who can’t read. She loves you guys with these saggy pants, with this illiterate behavior, and so the only way that I can guarantee that I will have a son-in-law who can read is that I have to make sure that all of y’all can read, because you will not come to live with me.” And they would all laugh. But the reality is, that’s real. You can’t save one child—save your own, and not save every child. I mean, that’s reality. I used to tell that to all the kids. “That’s why I work so hard, because some of you might think you’re gonna marry my daughter, and then think you can live with me. And that’s not gonna happen. So I gotta make sure all you knuckleheads can read and are independent, so that when you decide you *think* you’re gonna marry my daughter, you can take care of her, and y’all can take care of each other.” So it was that kind of thing.

But clearly the time I was on the school board was an exciting time, and *funny*, because people still talk about the good ol’ days of ’88 to ’96. It was interesting because we also—Susan had been trying, before I got on the board, to get health clinics in San Diego City Schools, and never could. And so when I and Ann Armstrong came on the board, one of the first things we did was to open a health clinic at Hoover High School. We had over 1,200 kids at Hoover going to the nurse every month with ear infections, eye problems, colds. Kids wake up in the morning, don’t feel well, Mom says, “Go to school, go to the nurse.” And I can understand that, because being a poor kid in the projects, we didn’t have health care. We had major medical, which meant if you just about got killed and got into a hospital *maybe* my daddy’s health insurance would pay for it. But I didn’t have a pediatrician, never saw a pediatrician. I went to the clinic a couple of times to get shots, but I never had a doctor’s name that I *knew* until I became an adult. So I didn’t have that. So for me, a Kaiser card is like gold, you can go to the doctor for anything. And so I didn’t have that luxury, so I could understand kids going into that inner city nursing office and needing healthcare. So people thought, “Oh, you’re gonna start a Planned Parenthood, you’re gonna have birth control.” I mean, a kid’s gonna get whatever they’re gonna get, but *our* concern was healthcare. So we basically implemented a healthcare program at Hoover High School—*highly* controversial. I’m telling you, people who did not live in San Diego at all, rode all night to get here from East County, North County—you name it, we had people comin’ in, screamin’ and hollerin’ about birth control and healthcare and the right of parents. I mean, parents had a right not to have their kids [treated] there. And it was interesting that the people in that community that was going to be affected, that school community, the Hoover community, was *very* much in favor of this health clinic. We had partnered with the Children’s Hospital, so the kids who normally would get Medicare, Medicaid, it was going to be paid for. We had dental care there. We had eye care there. And it’s still there. There’s a clinic that we took an old auto shop, and we got a grant from, I think, Children’s Hospital, basically to redevelop that whole area, and made a wonderful clinic that’s still there at Hoover High School, for kids. And we wanted to do that, because that was a growing thing, that kids were going to school for healthcare. But it was *highly*, highly controversial.

SR: I don’t understand. What were they protesting about? I mean, it sounds like it’s a great thing.

SNW: San Diego's very conservative [as far as? 55:44] communities. What happened is.... The idea that kids would go to a health clinic, because there are some clinics that do dispense condoms and birth control.

SR: Okay.

SNW: So the issue was *that*. Plus the issue was is this really the role of a school, to have healthcare? And they thought that kids might be getting advice about healthcare. Part of it also was the people who were into the abstinence-only curriculum for sex education. And so you have this corps of individuals who are opposed to anything that they think may be in conflict with their own personal or religious views. That was clear. But it was interesting to me because I could understand if parents coming from that community, protesting. But it was not, it was coming from outside. And I guess the thought was, "Well, if San Diego does one, they'll do two, they'll do three, and before you know it, it'll be in our neighborhood." But the Hoover community, Susan's school, was very much in need of it, because it was a very poor community, lots of immigrants in that neighborhood—still is—and their access to healthcare was very limited. There were very few clinics in the neighborhood that they could access. And then at the same time, they were familiar with schools. Schools are the friendly place for people. Schools are places that people go for everything. I mean, you have people come to school asking all kinds of questions about how do I get this, or how do I get that? So we were in the business of trying to make schools kind of.... You know, if you're going to deal with the academic, you can't ignore the health issues, you can't always ignore the social issues. You don't want to deal with 'em, but you can't ignore 'em. Because even at one of my schools, at Hamilton Elementary School, we implemented a program that brought in about ten different social service agencies, into the school—developed a facility, a set of bungalows—because what we discovered is that one mother's dealing with the housing authorities, probation, child protective services, and she's runnin' like a chicken with her head cut off, hitting all these agencies, where if they were located at the school, one, she could get better service, but also the agencies could coordinate what's goin' on. Because if we've got a kid who's losing their housing, it's going to affect them in school because they're going to be in this school this month, and three months later they're in another school and another school. If mom and dad are dealing with issues of probation or child protective services, that's going to affect the kid and whether they're in school and what they're doing. So we just discovered that trying to coordinate these agencies, and we put them in one school, and it worked out well for that particular school. So the school then could focus on the academic, and not find the teachers and others frustrated with dealing with issues that they weren't qualified to deal with. And too, they didn't even know they exist, half the time. They didn't even know this kid's brother just got killed, unless somebody comes and tells them that. And then they may not have had the resources to deal with it. Or if they're lookin' at kids and wonderin' why our kids are goin' from this school to that school, they discover that this kid moves a lot because of housing issues. And so how do you intervene to make sure they stay in one school? So that was a part. We got heavily involved in a number of those things.

Probably one of the most controversial issues I was in at the school board was the issue of the Boy Scouts, and the whole issue of discrimination against Boy Scout leaders. *That* was really quite an interesting experience. What we had was.... It was difficult to communicate the message to people, but it wasn't so much that we were putting Boy Scouts out of the school. What happened was, we allowed the Boy Scouts to come into our schools during the daytime and run a curriculum for kids in the school. And so there was instructional time being taken up by the scouts at certain schools—not so much the after-school Boy Scout meetings. Well, the Boy Scouts of America said that no gay person could basically be a leader in the Boy Scouts. So this issue was brought to us as an issue of discrimination, and that was highly controversial, because it's like, "You guys hate the Boy Scouts," this and that. To me, it was fairly simple: we were a school that embraced the whole issue of diversity and equal opportunity. We were a

school that had a policy of nondiscrimination. We could not allow anyone to have access to our children who participated in discrimination, period. And like I told them.... Different ones would say, "Well, you know...." I said, "It has nothing to do with one's religion or one's point of view; whether you favor or are against homosexuality; or anything like that. It has to do with discrimination and equal opportunity. You can have meetings after school, you can do whatever you want with your organization, but you can't work in San Diego City Schools and participate in discrimination." So it was a major, major issue in the San Diego community. I met a lot of my friends who didn't understand. "Are you in favor of homosexuality?" I said, "Well, it really has nothing to do with that. It has nothing to do with that. I'm in favor of nondiscrimination. And keep in mind, there was a time, particularly in Utah, when African Americans could not be scout leaders. And that was not that long ago, in terms of Utah and the Mormons, that they did not allow African Americans to be scout leaders, and they did not allow the integration of scout troops." So I recognize the value in the work of the Boy Scouts, but I also recognize some of the bugaboos in the history of the Boy Scouts—like everybody else's history. So I said, "You have to make up your mind. Either you're in favor of discrimination, or you're not. And when you're doing public policy, you have to have a public policy of nondiscrimination." Now what people do with their personal organization, their private time, their whatever, it's their business. And what they choose to do, if they want their kids involved or not involved, is something else. But that became a major issue. And it was kind of interesting, because as a result of that, I think I became the grand marshal in the gay parade, I think it was, one year, and got their Friends of the Gay and Lesbian Community Award for my standing up for what I knew was right. And I told 'em, "You don't have to give me an award. I'm not an advocate for one group or the other. I'm just saying that you can't discriminate, period. There are a lot of things in America that I disagree with, but I recognize the fact that I live in America, and everything doesn't have to fit into my world. And simply would I accept it or reject it, it has nothing to do with that. It has everything to do with I live in America, and I want to always be free to either accept or reject something of my own, without having others do it for me. And that's part of it. One of the positives and negatives of living in a democracy is that you have to tolerate a whole lot of stuff that *you* don't accept, or that may not fit in your world." And somebody was talking to me, I said, "When I was a kid, you learned these philosophies that are strange. I learned, when we were talking about freedom once, and where does my freedom end, a teacher said, 'My freedom ends where your nose begins.' And so as long as you're not at my nose, you've got your freedom. So I'm not gonna *make* you do things, and so forth and so on." So it was kind of interesting.

But like I said, I served my eight years on the school board. I found it to be eight exciting and productive years. But I had said that I was going to do eight years, and that was it. People said, "Oh no, we're in the midst of it." I said, "But you know what, it happened in eight years." When I first got on the school board, it's like you look at ten doors of opportunity. And that first year, you hit every door there is, you bang it as hard as you can. Every now and then, one will open, but most of them don't. The next year you go back and you bang those doors again. But after about five or six years, you say, "Number 1, 2, 3, and 4 ain't *never* gonna open." Maybe they're ready, but by now you've decided that's not gonna happen, and your enthusiasm, your energy, your drive, your determination is tainted by negative experiences, or you know too much. You can no longer be the wide-eyed optimist that can change the world." And when you get to that point—and I see board members like that now, who've been on the board for long periods of time—whose usefulness is past, and they would be better doing something else. So I decided eight years, that's it, I'm outta here. And I left, with no regrets.

I've continued to work with the schools. I work as the executive director for the Association of African-American Educators, and we run a program here at San Diego State, an

academy for effectively teaching African-American children, where we attempt to retrain teachers on how to educate African-American children.

SR: Tell me more about that, because I know you've written about that, and I'd like you to elaborate more.

SNW: Well, what we did was, we decided.... After we had gotten in a situation with.... The Association of African-American Educators does lots of conferences and seminars, but I had said to them one time, because we had gotten to a point where we were, you know, bangin' our heads against the wall. We changed superintendents [from one who was] not always open and receptive to new things and you find yourself always asking for stuff. I said, "You know what, we need to take our own destiny into our own hands. And instead of, once again, complaining, we need to basically become more proactive." So we said what we were going to do was we were going to basically put together an organization, and institute an academy that focused on teaching teachers how to work with African-American children. So we got together, and Wendell Bass basically gave us the structure for the curriculum at the time. And John Brown, who was a member of the Board of the Association of African-American Educators, and we put this proposal together to run this institute. We decided we would try to do it at San Diego State. Initially the extended studies was not real enthused about it, because if it doesn't look like it's gonna make a whole lot of money, they're not that enthused. So they weren't *that* enthused about it, initially. But then what happened was, they did become excited about the possibility of it, once the school of education became excited.

At the time, Dean Menos was here, and he was a former superintendent of schools, and he also recognized that the college of education did very little in the area of education focused on educating African-American children—and other kids of color. I had, once again, a former student, who was working in the school of ed and had gotten her doctorate and she was running a teacher prep kind of program. And so she came to me, Yvette said, when I told her about what was going on, she said, "I think you should meet with Dean Menos. I know he would be very interested." I said, "Aw...." She said, "No, I'm serious." So she met with him, and soon enough she organized a meeting. We met with him, he was *very* enthused about it. He said, "I want you to meet with the heads of all of my departments about it, because I'd like some of our teachers to take advantage of it."

So we then met with him and heads of his departments, and we put together this institute to basically train teachers. And we've had a number of teachers who've finished the institute. And what it was, it was nine classes the students had to take, and three field experiences. And they had classes on special education, they had classes on teaching reading to African-American children, materials that could be used to be incorporated. They had classes on attitudes and perspective of high expectations. So we had nine different classes, and it's still listed in our extended studies program. We had nine different classes that people took. They were one-unit classes. And then we had three classes that were experimental classes that they then would take the material and apply it and write a paper. We worked with charter schools, we worked with people in city schools, we worked with folks in Spring Valley and the various districts around. And their teachers would sign up for these classes that are offered. And we tried to make them teacher friendly so that the classes would be offered on like Friday night and all day on Saturday. They would come back in another week or so and do another eight hours, get those sixteen hours in for one unit of credit. And focus and do a couple of them during the year for teachers. So that was our focus at the time.

We're currently now doing a little bit of that, but we're also now involved in working with the current institute on campus that is talking about transforming schools—urban school transformation—that is run by Joe Johnson here on San Diego State. And so we're on a committee with him, and our dean is involved in it, because what we're looking at is how we can, in Africana Studies, enhance our curriculum to focus on schools as well.

It was the institute of the academy that we run here on campus, is really the only academy that is really run, that is in conjunction with a community group, so that the Association of African-American Educators actually own the academy, and Africana Studies works with them, so that it becomes a collaboration between the educators in the community, Africana Studies, the school of education, and San Diego State. So it's kind of a unique relationship.

SR: That's an interesting model.

SNW: Very interesting model, very different kind of model. And sometimes it's cumbersome, because it makes decision-making long, but in the end you get people to buy-into it who were actively involved in it. And we've done some good work with it, we've celebrated some teachers who've been a part of it, and have graduated some teachers who've done well and seen transformation.

Interestingly enough, the Diamonds in the Rough that I work with at Crawford High School, it came out of this academy, because one of the persons in the academy was Deborah Brown, a counselor at Crawford High School. And when she had to do a project based on how you're going to change and uplift kids and intervene, as a counselor, she wasn't in the classroom. She began to ask herself, "What can I do?" So she then developed this organization called Diamonds in the Rough. And she began, as a result of the class, to work with the formation of this group. So now she has these kids at Crawford, some who were fighters—one young lady, if she had one more fight, she was out of school, period. Since then, she recently graduated, and I think she's going to go to community college in the fall. She had another one doing the same thing. This girl is graduating. She's going to be a student at San Diego State come September. So we've gotten several of the kids from Diamonds in the Rough who come here. They go with us to South Africa, then they come here to the university. And she serves as a mentor and a support to the kids and their parents, and meets with them regularly, so that the kids know they have to pass classes, they get good grades, but in addition to that, they volunteer. Like during the Katrina incident, they volunteered and went down to package stuff up to give. They also attend our library class that we offer for the library. They have to come to that class so they have information. They volunteer at activities around the city, so that if a group is doing something and they need help, the Diamonds in the Rough will come and help set up and help organize and help prepare for it. So she's teaching in the sense that you have to give back, you have to contribute back to the community that you live in, you have to be a good citizen on campus: the kids stop fighting, they start intervening for other kids, they start being this good role model because she taught them strategies of what they needed to deal with, and how they needed to see the world *differently* than what they currently have. So she's trying to open up the world for them, that they didn't see before.

In fact, one of the young ladies came to my house. It was funny, because I have this new bowl in my bathroom—looks like a punch bowl, but it's a sink, the new glass sink that's real up-scale, beautiful bowl. When I built this house [I said], "I gotta have me a glass bowl like everybody else." So in the powder room, here's this glass bowl. This young lady came to visit us once for a Kwanzaa celebration, because Deborah brings them to this celebration. So they came to my house. And it was funny, she must have gone to the bathroom like five times. Every time I looked up, she was going into this bathroom. And when she left, she goes, "I am gonna git me a glass bowl! I'm gonna go to school so I can git me a glass bowl." I thought, "Cool." It didn't cost that much, but great, get yourself.... So it was that kind of motivation she continued to try to provide the kids with. You know, look at the world, look at the whole world. See beyond your personal situation, your personal challenge with your family and those issues, and see the *whole* world. There's a whole world out there that can be yours if you just spend your time focused on getting it. So I thought it was so funny when she said she was "gonna git her a glass bowl." She was goin' to school because she was gonna *git* her one of those glass bowls. I said, "Wonderful, wonderful!"

SR: That's great.

SNW: Like I said, I think my driving force, and I'm known in the community as a person who's really into education—and politics as well. You know, my political world has led me to all kinds of things, so that now we're in the process of organizing for Obama, and trying to hopefully see this as a transforming experience for not only San Diego, but help young people to understand politics. One of the things that happened when I ran for office the first time in '88, I had lots of students working on my campaign. Those people are still strong advocates for politics. They tell me now, "Oh, I went and phone banked," because they came and they did it, and they had no idea there was this world of politics that they could get involved in. So all of them now still do phone banking, they walk precincts, they see how hard it is to get a vote, and so they said, "Once you work to get *a* vote from a person, you never ever take for granted *your* vote. You go to the polls and vote because you understand the process and all the work that goes into getting you there." So it's one of those things that I've tried to continue to educate our community, that politics is important. I try to give them real specific examples of the value of it, because [before] you work in politics, you don't understand certain things, like I try to educate them about what a "5 out of 5" voter is. That's important to them to understand. And they don't understand that. I said, "You know, when you have to make decisions about who you're going to call, you always call your 5 out of 5." That's the person who in the last five elections voted five times. That says they vote in presidentials, they vote in locals, they vote in primaries, they're going to vote, they're going to the polls. Now, if you're 1 out of 5, you're going to be the last person I call, because if something happens, if it rains, if you stump your toe, if you get mad at your boyfriend, you're not going to the polls. You're one of those kind of people who [say], "Aw, it's not that important." But when you're 5 out of 5, the whole world calls you, the whole world knocks on your door, and the whole world wants to hear you, so your goal in life is to be a 5 out of 5. "What if I don't like the people?" "Be a 5 out of 5. Go anyway. Vote for yourself. But be registered at that poll that says 'this is a person that's gonna go,' because in the end, when the politician has decided who they're gonna listen to, they're gonna listen to 5 out of 5, because they know no matter what, you will be there for them. The other person might not." And so I try to help them to understand the nature of politics, because without understanding that, you sit there and wonder why the politicians don't listen to you. You're not a 5 out of 5. You're not a person who's gonna go to the polls *no matter what*. You have to have a track record of that. So it's that kind of thing that becomes important in trying to educate communities about registration, about involvement, about empowerment, and how you take yourself and make yourself—you know, maximize your power base in terms of achievement.

So I've had a very, I think, wonderful relationship with my community in terms of serving on boards and commissions and still continue to serve on an awful lot of things that sometimes I'm not interested in. Oftentimes I'll tell people, "I can't serve on your board, but if you have something very specific that you'd like for me to do, I will do that. I will help you in whatever that is." And that helps a lot of people. You know, I'm on too many boards, I can't go to another meeting. I just recently got appointed, though, to the City's Commission on Equal Opportunity. It took a lot for them to convince me to be on this board. But it's a very necessary board because it handles all contracts, whether vendors or construction in the City of San Diego. And it's equal opportunity, and right now in San Diego women and people of color almost get no contracts. And it's amazing, and there doesn't appear to be equal opportunity or even an interest in it. So we're fighting on this commission.

I just recently got them to approve something, and it was really, once again, my parliamentary procedure paid off, because it was one of those situations where the industry did not want us to vote on this particular issue, because it was dominated by men, and they already had their contracts. And so we pitter-pattered around for the longest, and finally—because we had a majority in the room—but the chair didn't know how to bring it to a conclusion. And so

he was saying, “Well, next time we come with this....” And I raised my hand and said, “Mr. Chair, are you assuming that we’re not prepared to vote today?” He said, “Oh, are you? I didn’t know.” I said, “What you need is a motion.” And he goes, “Yes! That’s what I need!” So I made this motion, and it passed. Then the guy who was opposed to it decided he was.... He was complaining about it, then he said, “You know what, I think you guys have done this, but I think I would like to move that even though you passed this, that they need [unclear 77:22] to understand that number 1, 2, and 3 are not....” He went on with this thing. In other words, he was trying to weaken the motion. And I let him make his wonderful motion. At the end of it I said, “You know, I spent a grueling quarter at UCLA studying parliamentary procedure, and I’ve been a national officer, national parliamentarian of many organizations, and if my memory serves me correctly, you can’t make a motion concerning this matter, because you were not on the prevailing side, and therefore you cannot tie us up in motions that will invalidate this motion.” And he was dumbfounded. And the attorneys behind me said, “I think she’s right.” And I said, “I know I’m right.” And it was the funniest thing.

The woman next to me was so funny. This woman, who was part of the organization, because they have good-hearted people, but they don’t understand parliamentary procedure, she wrote me this note, “I love you!” But it was an effort. And I was telling my son, “You know, you don’t know where your knowledge is coming from, and when you study stuff, you have no idea you’ll ever use it again. When I studied all that stuff and all those rules and regulations, I thought, “Oh, God, I’ll *never* use this stuff!” I’ve used it almost every day of my life. But it’s one of those kinds of things.

So I’m on the commission, and it’s an interesting commission because it has such a tremendous challenge in the wake of Prop. 209, where you can’t do things specifically to help people of color. You’re trying to structure programs that create opportunity, and it’s not an easy task to do in Southern California and in San Diego. So we’re struggling with that, and I agreed—a friend of mine, who’s a long-time advocate talked to me forever, and so I’m the mayor’s representative on the commission. And it’s a unique position, because I don’t have, unlike some of the others in the room, I don’t have a vested interest, I’m not a contractor, I don’t do work with the City, I’m not a builder, I’m not any of that stuff, so I can pretty much be open about my feelings about the policies and the issues that are there, and try to create opportunity for people. But like I say, there’s always something in San Diego, whether I’m working with the CHUM program....

SR: What is that?

SNW: That’s the Community Health and University and Medicine, is what it is. And what that is, it’s a program out of UCSD that supposedly works with children, trying to get them into the sciences. And we’ve worked over the years with them. We run sometimes a summer institute and a spring institute. I got involved with it. A friend of mine, Park Treffs [phonetic] is the coordinator, one of the most committed individuals I know—white male scientist—who’s dedicated his whole life to making opportunities for kids of color. He gets a lot of flack. He’s not the easiest person to work with. People always ask me, “How do you work with Park?” Well, you know, I think I could work with the devil if they’re doin’ somethin’ good. That was my attitude. I don’t get into it. And he’s a good person. I try to look beyond whatever flaws I have, you have, and everybody else has, and say, “In the end, it’s gonna do something good. It’s gonna help some kids.” And he’s *totally* committed.

And he was very committed to my children. My daughter, when she was in middle school, Park Treffs was her science mentor, and he got her into all kinds of science fairs and science awards, and he helped her structure her science fair projects. He got kids of color winning awards at the county science fair, and all those kinds of things. And Park is such a humble person. I always tell stories of me holding my daughter by the back of her pants, as she’s hangin’ off the Bay of San Diego, scoopin’ up the water, because she’s doing this research

on sea urchins. I don't know what the heck a sea urchin is. I have *no* idea what these sea urchins are, but these kids have a zillion projects on sea urchins and sex life of this, that, and whatever in the bay. And here I am, holding her with one hand, and holding onto the thing so we don't *both* fall in, and she's reachin' in the bay, scoopin' up this water. She had to get a jug of water that had sea urchins in it. I don't know. And that kind of stuff. But nonetheless, it was an opening experience for her, and all the fellowships and internships she's gotten. So he's a great guy. I mean, he has kids all over the world now who are into science because he took the time to work with them on their science fair projects, when their teachers didn't want to work with them on science fair projects. They just wanted to teach classes and go home. They didn't want to do hands-on science, they didn't want to make science interesting in inner-city schools. And Park has always worked in inner-city schools, making that difference, working after school with kids, making sure they had the equipment they needed, the material they needed, to produce excellence.

SR: That's wonderful.

SNW: And he does, he does a wonderful job. So we continue to work with the CHUM program. We're looking now at how to bring a CHUM program into the Somali community off of University and 54th Street. He's been working there with a number of groups, working with parent involvement. The parent institute, how we can help the parent institute develop a science curriculum to help parents understand the importance of science while we then work with the kids to help them, so there's a marriage between the parents encouraging the kids and the kids doing the work.

So Park has committed his life to this. And I really became, because he worked at the university and what have you, and I knew a lot of people at the university, I really became his hammer. I was the person, when all hell breaks loose, I'm gonna go in and tell fifteen people off and get him two more dollars or somethin'. So I became the person who didn't really care, because I was already tenured, didn't care whether it was a provost or whomever at UCSD or anywhere, that I was gonna go in there and advocate for children, where he couldn't or whatever. But I was gonna be the person to get the stuff done. So I became the heavy, basically, in this project. And I didn't mind, because you have to have somebody who's gonna do this for kids. And so I may not have been popular with people, and I didn't get invited to all the parties, but that's okay, they weren't serving good food anyway—just crackers and cheese. (laughs) So to that extent, I became that. And so I continue to work with those particular issues in those areas of San Diego that are important to me.

SR: Have you found over the years, as you were describing when you first came here, San Diego is such a kind of "small town" city. Has it changed very much, or do you still have that feeling?

SNW: It is still a small city. It's amazing to me, some woman came up to my son the other day and asked him, "Did you know your mother's famous?" And he laughed and said, "What am I supposed to say, Mom? 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Whatever?'" [He said he told the woman], "I do know one thing, we can't go anywhere where everybody doesn't know her." It is a very small city. And when you do things in San Diego, the good thing is that you are embraced by people. They know you, they embrace you, and in the San Diego black community in particular, it's still a very small community.

It's quite interesting, my brother used to own a service station in Los Angeles, in Long Beach, and it would always be funny, somebody would come to the service station from San Diego and they'd pull in, and he would get to talking. "Oh, you're from San Diego?" because he loved to chit chat and he would say to them, "I know you know my sister." And they go, "Yeah, right." And he keeps serving gas, and he keeps saying, "I know you know my sister." And finally they'd go, "So who *is* your sister?" (laughter) And then he'd say, "Shirley Weber," and they go, "Oh yeah! We all know Shirley. Yeah!" And I tell him, "This is a very small town. If

you do a few things in San Diego, people will know you, they will recognize you somewhere, and they will know you because....” But the interesting thing over the years is even not only do they know you, but like I said, they appreciate you. This weekend I was at a couple of things that were political, and I guess two or three people eventually came to me and said, in so many ways, “I’ve never really met you, but I just want to let you know I appreciate you. Because every time I look up, you’re on television, at the school board, you’re advocating for something for kids, you’re taking our kids to South Africa, you’re doing these things in Ghana, you’ve got schools that you’ve adopted there. You’re always doing something.” So people come and say that, and I say, “Well, thank you. It’s my responsibility.” “Yeah, I know that, but we really appreciate it.” So there’s a community that does appreciate what people do, that they feel like somebody who does it on the long distance, that it’s not just you did it today because you wanted to be seen, but you do it because it’s a part of who you are, it’s a part of the culture that you came out of, it’s a part of your personality that you’re going to give, and you’re going to give regularly to that.

But it’s a very small community, very small. Some years ago, it was funny, I was telling someone when my husband passed away in 2002, I told someone, “I’m sure I’ll never marry again.” They go, “Why?!” I said, “Because everybody in San Diego knows me. Who would I marry? It’d be the funniest thing. I don’t think there’s anybody new comin’ in the city.” Not that I’m interested in marriage ever again, I don’t think. But it was kind of funny, because they would say, “Yeah, that would be strange. Who would[n’t] you know in San Diego?” Because I think I probably know just about everybody in San Diego, at some point, or in the black community, and a significant number in the Hispanic community. But it is a small, small world—San Diego continues to be, even in the political world, whether it’s the mayor and supervisors and all those kinds of people, you get to know them on a very personal level. Where you could live in Los Angeles forever and never really see an elected official, or never even know a school board member, or any of those kinds of things, and know who they are. You have to be really in the know, to meet people in Los Angeles. And yet here, they’re everywhere, they’re everyday people.

SR: Right. Well, you raised your children in this community. Tell me a little bit about them.
SNW: You know, my kids are very interesting people. I always say that. My kids, first of all, I got married in 1973, as I said earlier. I didn’t have children until 1978, five years. I was trying to figure out am I going to *stay* married or not. Oh yeah, what they heck, let’s have some kids. So we decided to have two kids. My first one was my daughter, who was born in 1978—in fact, today, July 2, is her birthday, she’s thirty years old. And Akilah, her name means “intelligent.” Akilah Faizah, intelligent and victorious—says, “one who is intelligent will be victorious.” And so the unique thing with my kids is they were really raised here at the university, because when I had Akilah, I was a professor here at the university. In fact, I think the student newspaper—there was a black newspaper through the Black Communication Center that used to exist on campus—“Dr. Weber Learns Baby Talk.” A little picture of her and me. So she was basically raised right here at the university. I think other than her normal babysitter, who kept her every day during the day, all of her other sitters in the evenings were all former students, who were part of my life, who were in and out of my homes, and interacted with the kids. And so they had a unique experience of being here at the university. And I always thought that was such a rich experience because I had friends who worked in corporate America.... I think my sister once tried to get me to leave to go work for Bank of America in some corporation communication area. And I always took working at the university as a real blessing and privilege because not only did I have a chance to do what I loved, but also I got a chance to expose my children to education, and I got a chance to not be stressed as a parent. So that if my kid was sick and I needed to bring her to school, she came to school. If she needed to sit in the back of the classroom and color while I taught my class, she did. And if I needed to go to meetings, my daughter’s been to the academic

senate when she was two years old, because we had a very important agenda going on, and her babysitter was sick, and so she came to academic senate and sat through four hours of the academic senate, fell asleep in *somebody's* lap, one of the faculty members, because I needed to be in that senate meeting that particular day. So they really walked this university backwards and forwards. That's probably why, as they got older, they didn't want to come to university here, because they'd *been* to this school, they needed to go to another one.

Having kids really got me the *most* involved in schools, because my daughter went to Montessori school as a preschooler, but once she got into elementary school at Encanto, that's when I became very involved in understanding how schools operate. I wanted my kids to go to public schools, I wanted them to go to public schools in black communities, I wanted them to be in the neighborhood. And I wanted them to do that for a number of reasons. One, I wanted them to love the neighborhood that they lived in, to love the people who looked like them. But I also felt very strongly that what Malcolm had said, "If you keep taking the richness out of the milk, you end up with skim milk. If you keep, as people who know what to do, who have education and training, if you keep running away from your community, your community becomes bankrupt." And what you contribute, you contribute to other people. And even though you can come *work* in a community, *living* in the community, you're going to make that community better, because you know how to write to the mayor, you know how to write to city council.

So when I got Akilah into Encanto, first of all, it was a school of 1,200 kids. Here's a little kid who's five years old, and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, my baby's in a school of 1,200!" Well, she adapted to it better than I did, because all she knew was her teacher and the other twenty kids, twenty-five kids, in the classroom. She didn't know about 1,200, she didn't know about anything. She knew about her kindergarten teacher and her classroom, and she loved it, so it was fine with me.

But I also got involved in the politics of the school. One of the things I discovered at her elementary school was that they had parent meetings at twelve o'clock on Thursdays. Now, this was a working-class community, so who's coming to a parent meeting at 12:00? Well, who was coming were the parents of kids who were bused in from affluent communities who didn't work. So the parent committee, even though the school was predominantly people of color and poor, was basically populated by people who were from somewhere else. So when I first found that out, I became very upset, and the principal said, "Well, that's what the parents decided." I said, "Okay, I'll fix this." So the next semester I organized my classes so that on Thursdays at twelve o'clock I didn't have class, so that I could go to the parent meeting and then move the parent meetings to night. You know, one of those kind of things. And I got really involved in trying to help the school set standards beyond what they had accepted, getting the school involved in other kinds of activities. And that's when I discovered this whole thing of multi-tracking and all these kids being stuffed in one school. And *my* school fought it, and we won. I organized the parents, we went to the school board, we fought it, and Encanto never went multi-track. I fought it. And I became a board member while I was at Encanto. But the interesting thing is, my daughter, who went to all these meetings with me—it's kind of interesting—she became president of her school. She was president when she was a senior, but she became president of the sixth-grade class too.

So it was funny, her principal had me laughing, because Akilah had gone upstairs, and she'd done something that evening on the computer, typed some stuff, her little typing, got some things done. So she went to school the next morning, and she went into the principal's office and she said, "Can I get copies made?" The principal said, "Yes." She said, "Here's my agenda." So she had an agenda for her board meeting of associated little students in sixth grade. The principal said, "I was totally dumbfounded. I have *never* had a sixth-grader bring me an agenda for her meeting." I said, "Oh, most definitely." She said, "Because normally I would put together two or three things on a piece of paper and pass it out at the meeting. This young lady

walks in *with an agenda*.” And we laughed [unclear 93:18]. [Akilah] said, “Well, Mom, every time you go to meetings *you* have an agenda.”

SR: That’s right! That’s what she’s heard.

SNW: Exactly. And she then took one of my agendas off my desk, from some meeting, and put down the things it had, that they need “old business,” “new business,” whatever it was. But it was the funniest thing that she wrote her own agenda, typed it up, and took it to campus the next morning, because she had a board meeting that day, to get her principal to duplicate copies for her board. So she was the student body president. She became a speaker, and very much—because she followed me around. Great speaker, does excellent presentations. And then went on to high school and became the valedictorian. She was one of those ninth graders I was talkin’ to. Became the valedictorian of her high school, and won a number of awards, science awards, those kinds of things. Never had a job, always worked as an intern, because of Park Treffs’ work. So she had great skills in research and lab work. All of her life she’s had some internship that has been beneficial to her.

SR: So she was interested in science from early on?

SNW: Early on. She went to the Elementary Institute of Science, which is a great science program in the southeast community, a little house where kids study science. They would go out in the canyon and find dead dogs and cats and bring ’em back and dissect ’em, and oh, Jesus, all kinds of crazy things! But she got into it. And I remember when she was in sixth grade, when she first went to Gompers, because Gompers was a sixth-through-twelfth-grade school focused on math and science. And I remember her going—her first trip to UCSD, they went to the morgue. And she came home, she said that was the best trip. She thoroughly enjoyed the morgue and all those kinds of things. Her daddy had decided when she was little, she was going to be a doctor, because he at some point wanted to be a doctor—became a lawyer. But he decided that was the best profession, and he programmed her to be a doctor. He *programmed* her from Day One to be a doctor. But she loved science, she loved math. And I remember little things that were done as a kid, who’s a kid of color—a female, too, at the same time. I remember her coming home and saying, “You know, I’m not really good at math, Mom.” This was when she was about third or fourth grade or whatever. I said, “Why?” “Oh, I’m just not. I’m not good at it.” And I thought that was funny, because I said, “Well, you don’t have to be good—just keep gettin’ ‘A’s’.” She said, “Okay.” I mean, it was one of those kind of things. So she’s always gotten “A’s” in math and science. But someone was telling her girls don’t do well in math, girls don’t do well in science. “You should be a singer,” that kind of stuff. And she couldn’t sing a lick, you know. But I thought it was kind of funny, because she came home one day and told me, “You know, I’m really not very good at math, Mom.” And I go, “Oh really?” This was revelation to me. She said, “I’m just not good at it, I just know I’m not.” I said, “Well, you know, you keep getting ‘A’s’.” I know, but I’m not really good at it. I said, “I’ll tell you what, as long as you keep gettin’ ‘A’s,’ you don’t have to be good at it, okay?” She said, “Okay!” Third grade, she figured, “Fine, I’ll get ‘A’s,’ I just won’t be good at it.” And so she proceeded to do her thing. But she graduated from high school with honors and was student body president, and all those kinds of things.

One of the things she did was really quite remarkable in high school—and I understand they’ve never done it since. She decided when she was in eleventh grade that she was going to put on a multi-cultural fair. I think she was the director of, at the high school, of some kind of.... I forgot what her position was, whether she was a program director on student government or something. And her teachers and her vice-principal said, “We could not have conceptualized this ourselves.” This kid decided that instead of doing the typical food [fair] where you have some Mexican food, some Chinese, whatever—you know, these little food fairs—she actually did a whole-day conference at her school. She had over seventy-five workshops, run by people in the various diverse communities, coordinated at her school. She had a reception for them before

school. She had every teacher organized to go to certain places to hear different lectures at different times of day. This kid had this spreadsheet that was *amazing* to me. Had invited all these people, wrote letters to them, they showed up at the school, they did these workshops for kids, and then at the end of the day they had this huge food festival. But she had workshops on Indians and Indian culture. She had workshops on Vietnamese culture, Jewish culture, you name it, she had tapped into seventy-five different kinds of workshops that was held at this school. I was amazed, an eleventh-grader doing this. Her principal was dumbfounded. And she did this for two years. They didn't do it again. In fact, when she left, the teachers said they wouldn't do it, because it was too much work. They didn't want to do it, but here was this high schooler, this ninth-grader. So she's always been an organized person—very, very organized.

So when she went off to college, she went to Xavier University in New Orleans and became, obviously, their program director and something else, won their volunteer award because she volunteered in schools. And then left Xavier and went to med school in Rochester, and currently just graduated last week in her residency program as OB-GYN. She's won a number of awards for research. She's very focused on community, much more than my son is, who is much more business. But she picks it up from me, obviously, because much of the work she did in med school had to do with women and healthcare for poor women and homeless women, did research on homeless women and the kinds of things that impact their lives; and then went with me to South Africa, where she had a chance to work in the clinics of South Africa and in the hospitals to see what was going on with women and AIDS and those kinds of things, when we went on our first trip to South Africa. So she's always been very community-minded.

Most recently, as she graduated from her residency, she won the research award, because she's doing research on young women and their knowledge of this new virus, papilloma virus, or whatever it is, and whether or not poor kids are getting the information and getting the inoculation against this to prevent cervical cancer. So that's been her passion. She says in her life at some point she'll probably be a surgeon general. But now she's decided she's also going to do, because she's really interested in young people and loves surgery, so she's into adolescent gynecology, and she will be one of the *few* adolescent gynecologists in the nation. She's in a program she'll be going to at Cincinnati's Children's Hospital. And she'll get a master's in public health at the same time. So she is forever going to school. I'm amazed, because I don't think I could study as much and as hard as she does all the time. But she can, and she doesn't mind it. I was telling someone one time, when she was an undergraduate she went to a fellowship program in the summer at Rochester where she eventually decided to go to med school when she was in her sophomore year. Her principal at the time, who still follows her around, we went to see her presentation in this competition of all the students who were doing a fellowship that interned that summer at Rochester Medical School, from all the different colleges. And she got up and did this wonderful presentation. Of course I didn't understand a word of it, I didn't understand the terminology, I didn't even know what we were talkin' about. And at the end I asked her, "Do you really know what you talked about?" She said, "Of course." I said, "Then it must be wonderful." And I asked the doctor there, "Was it good?" She said, "It was great!" I said, "Wonderful!" I mean, I knew the oral part, I knew she made good presence, but to know exactly, I have no idea.

She's also done research on women who've been raped. She won an award at the National Medical Convention in her first year of residency, where she looked at whether or not the hospitals in Illinois actually give women everything they're supposed to get when they've been raped. Do they actually follow all of the protocol? And she discovered that a vast majority of them don't. Like 60%-70% of them do not actually care for women as they should, who've been raped. Do they give them the HIV test? Do they tell them about counseling? She said there's a protocol that they're supposed to follow, and I think it was 70%-80% of them do not follow protocol. So she did research in all the hospitals in Illinois as an advocate for women as

to what is going on. Most of these OB-GYNs are males. Most of the people who are doing that are looking at it differently than a woman who's been abused, and not really caring for her and being able to make sure that all of the things are done that should be done. And it's kind of shocking that it's not happening today, after so many years of concern about women and sexual assault, that it's still not happening. So Akilah's kind of one of these doctors who's a strong advocate for the poor, for women, for people who are traditionally not being served well.

And she recognizes that the medical profession is very, very biased. I remember one of her greatest revelations and concerns was when there was a twenty-seven-year-old woman who had been given a complete hysterectomy at twenty-seven, and all the woman had was some cancer on her cervix, that could have simply been scraped off and cauterized, but yet they gave her the most extreme procedure, which was a total hysterectomy at twenty-seven. And when she inquired of that, the person who did it couldn't explain why they did it, and in the end said, "Well, she already has three kids." So we're doing social engineering at this point. And so she was very concerned about that. So she said, "You know, women need information. People who are poor, people of color, need good healthcare." She also realized—it was funny to me when she was in med school, she said, "I realized how paranoid black people are of the medical profession and the need for doctors, given the Tuskegee Experiment and all those kinds of things.

SR: Absolutely.

SNW: When she was a med student, she said she'd be in there with the doctor who was doing this wonderful stuff and giving this person that advice, and then the patient would turn to her, "Little girl, what do you think?" because she's the African American, and this is an African-American patient. They don't give a care *what* this white doctor's tellin' 'em. After he's told them all this, "You need to do this, you need to do that," they would stop, and the patient would turn to her, and she said, "I'm like a med student, I'm learning!" and they go, "Little girl, what do you think about this?" And said she'd have to think like, "Oh yeah, that's a good thing to do." [unclear 103:46] She was saying to herself, "He's the doctor! I'm not the doctor yet!" But they trusted her opinion about what was going on. So that was very important for her.

But my daughter continues, she's a scientist, she's married now, she just married an year ago to an engineer.

SR: That's wonderful!

SNW: She's from Chicago, on her way to Cincinnati for the next phase of her life. Her goal, obviously, is to eventually return to San Diego—that's what she says. She wants to be near her mommy.

SR: Isn't that great?

SNW: So we will see. But she's a great kid, took me on a cruise. I told someone, "I knew I had arrived when..." You know, you're constantly caring for your kids. When I went to Chicago one time, and we were getting ready, and she was in her residency, and making some money, and she said she was going to the grocery store. And I was there to visit, and I go, "Okay, here we go again. I've bought groceries in every apartment she's ever lived in since freshman year." And so she said, "Come go with me." I said, "I don't know." She said, "Oh no, come go with me, come go with me." I said, "Oh-kay, here we go." So I go to the grocery store with her, and we go through this process, get groceries, and then she gets to the end of the line, and she's going through her purse, kind of fumbling, looking for her wallet, and I said, "You need something? You need help with anything?" "No." I said, "Oh, okay." So I stood there, and she swiped her thing, and we went on out the store." And I said, "You didn't need anything?" She said, "No. Did you think I brought you to the store so you could buy my groceries?!" I said, "Well ... I have in the past." She said, "Oh, Mom!" And I told someone, "I think I have died and gone to heaven, to visit a kid who buys her own groceries and feeds *me*!" And then this year she took me on this cruise for Mother's Day, so I *knew* I had died and gone to heaven. You know, those

kind of things. So I said, “Well, you know, I guess if you live long enough....” I was telling a faculty member the other day, who’s struggling with his twelve-year-old and ten-year-old, and a fourteen-year-old with attitude, I said, “The key is to live long enough. That’s the key. Don’t die now. Whatever you do, do not die now, because you have to live long enough for them to buy you something of significance, take you somewhere you want to go, and then for them to have children so they could see what it was like to be a parent. So you just gotta hang in here and stay alive.”

SR: That’s right.

SNW: That’s all you gotta do. So it was kind of funny. But she’s a good kid.

My son is totally different than my daughter.

SR: Now, his name is?

SNW: His name is Akil Khalfani. And Akil is the male part of Akilah. Akil also means intelligent. Khalfani means “destined to rule.” And my son, when he was born, was a big kid. He was like eight pounds some odd ounces. But he’s been tall all of his life. He was as tall as his second-grade teacher. Okay? No, she wasn’t a real tall woman. So he’s been big. He’s been a teddy bear his whole life, really tall kid. I mean, he’s six-seven, six-eight now, okay? He’s a tall kid. But it’s funny, he was always this independent spirit. He’s always been a kind of laid-back kid. My daughter was like the neurotic one that says, (frantically) “Hurry up, Mom, we gotta get to school because I’ll be late, I’ll be late, I’ll be late! We’re gonna be late, we’re gonna be late, we’re gonna be late! I don’t want to be late! I don’t want to be late!” And my son is chillin’ in the back seat. He says to her, (calmly) “What are you worried about? We’re with Mama. What can they do, tell our mother?” So when you think about it, that is so true. I mean, he can’t get in trouble, because I’m the one bringin’ ’em to school late. And so he always had this laid-back attitude, indifferent toward everything. This is a kid who barely graduates from high school, until he decides he wants to graduate. He does well when he wants to. He’s not sure if college is for him. It was funny, because he was in an algebra class, and he didn’t do well the first semester, because he really didn’t want to do algebra—geometry I guess it was. Second semester we said, “Okay, I’ll tell you what, you don’t do well in geometry, you can’t get a driver’s license because no idiot should ever be on the streets driving at *any* point. So that semester he gets an “A” in geometry. The teacher is furious, because she says, “No one takes Geometry II and gets an ‘A’ who didn’t get at least a ‘B’ in Geometry I.” I think he got a “D” in Geometry I. And he got an “A” in Geometry II! He didn’t want to do it. He was totally bored with school. School didn’t have a relevance to him. He didn’t have an interest in it, totally bored, so he went to school because we made him go. He didn’t get in trouble, he wasn’t a bad kid or anything like that. He just did the minimum. So we’d take things from him, which was always interesting. He would always take kids out to the garage, open up the trunk of his dad’s car and say, “See, I have a Play Station, I have....” All these things in the trunk of his dad’s car, because he had lost all his privileges. His room would be bare until he finished his work. But he’d rebound and do his work somewhat and go on.

So he went off to school for a while. He didn’t like it very much, came home, and then went to school here. And then he decided he didn’t want to go to school. And my position is college is not for everyone. If it’s for you, it’ll be there. So at that point he decided he was going to go into real estate, and he did. He passed his real estate license, the whole bit. But then more recently he decided he was going to go to college. At twenty-six, he’s decided he’s going to go back to school, and is doing extremely well. I think he’s a 4.0. It’s amazing, he’s knockin’ out like 35-40 credits in one semester. And what motivated him to go to school—it’s really kind of interesting—was his sister. You see, my son is really into business and politics, although now he’s *highly* motivated on Obama. And I think what happened in *his* case is that he sees, “My God,” he says, “Mom, this guy went to Harvard, Yale, he’s still cool. He walks like a brother.

He can do the handshake like a brother. He's smart, he's brilliant...." And so he's like become his role model in some sense.

SR: That's wonderful.

SNW: It's wonderful. I mean, he's motivated. He gets up every morning and reads the newspaper now and listens to CNN. I told him, "Your dad would be shocked to know that you're doin' CNN, because you wouldn't even look at the news with him." But it was funny, his sister—he's decided his sister's going to be very famous and very wealthy. My son has decided that. So she says to him that she wants to open a bunch of clinics for kids and stuff like that, and the stuff that she's doing in working with families. And so he says, "Well, God, Akilah, we could be partners." He's really into business and real estate. "I could help do this and do that for you." And she says, "You really can't, because you don't have a degree. And I would never turn my money over to someone who is not well prepared." He decides to go to school. So he has a plan now. He says, "*Now* I know what I want to do!" So now he knows what he wants to do. So he has a plan, so I said fine. So he's back in school. Fortunately he doesn't have.... I told him, "You're very fortunate in some sense." And he recognizes that he doesn't have children, he doesn't have a lot of drama, he doesn't have those things in his life. He doesn't have a prison record, all those kinds of things—he's just a kid who is going through different things.

He also, however, was delayed significantly, because in 2001 he had cancer. That was a traumatic experience of my life. In 2001 he was in school, he fell and injured himself, initially. And so he went through this process of—it think it was the perineal nerve, or whatever it was, snapped, and so he injured his leg. They had to do two surgeries, starting in May. It went all the way to October and almost November. And he had one surgery here, then went to UCLA and had to have another surgery done to lift his foot so that he—he walks with a slight limp. So this is a kid who's always been athletic and everything, all of a sudden has this happen. Then as he's coming out of the final surgery and we're just about ready to take off the cast, he develops a lump, I think on his throat. And we think it's a cold, it's the flu, it's this or that—and discovered it's lymphoma.

SR: Whoa!

SNW: Exactly. So we go through a process with lymphoma. The day he gets his cast off, it's right before Thanksgiving, he gets his cast off on that Monday or Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and Wednesday he goes to take his first chemo. So here's a twenty-year-old kid with lymphoma. Like I say, he was in school, and he was out of school now, obviously, with the leg and now with lymphoma, with the chemo treatments. In the process of all this, my husband becomes ill. And my husband and I had separated by then. We'd been separated maybe less than a year. He ends up with a very rare cancer. We didn't know that he had multiple myeloma initially. We didn't know what it was, but he had this ameledosis [phonetic]. He was having difficulty breathing. He and I were caring for my son, and I realized, "Oh my God, he's dying." I'm looking at this, because my daughter had said to me, "Dad has something that if he has what I think he has, Mom, it's not going to be long." And he didn't want to tell me, he didn't want to tell my son, he didn't want to tell any of us. He thought he was going to have to have a heart transplant, all kinds of things. And this is a man who'd been very healthy, very conscious of his health. And so here I have my son in chemo, and then they tell me he has a 20% chance to live with the chemo. We're looking at doing stem cell transplant. And I've got that going on. At the same time, I've got my husband, who is pretending to be well, but is very ill, and eventually goes into the hospital in March, and basically comes out a month later, but then goes back in and dies in June.

SR: What year was this?

SNW: This was in 2002, when all this is happening in my life. And my son is given a 20% chance, unless he has a stem cell. Stem cell has to have a match by a sibling. He only has one sibling, his sister. She turns out to be a perfect match. But then he decides he doesn't want to do

that. He decides he doesn't want to do stem cell. And we're devastated that he doesn't want to do it. But we'd gone to UCLA for different tests, and they had recommended different kinds of things and what have you. Because we tried to do stem cell with him, but by then he'd had so much chemo that his stem cell was destroyed, and nobody had told us that maybe he should have a stem cell harvested before he had a lot of chemo. They don't tell you that, because that's an expensive process. So by the time he goes through a whole lot of chemo that they don't think is working, we then have to—we go through stem cells for several days up at City of Hope, and that doesn't work—trying to harvest stem cells. So then we bring in his sister, who gets tested. By this time my husband is in intensive care, then he's in definitive care, and he stays in the hospital as he's dying and struggling with it. And the week before he dies, though, I'd gone to UCLA for a second opinion, and they had said basically everything we were doing was what we needed to do for my son.

It was at that point that they said, "But have a PET scan done," because a PET scan is something different. So [Kaji? 114:55] said, "Okay, we'll do a PET scan, no big deal." PET scan gets into—because he had a mass in his chest—gets into the mass in his chest to see whether there is any cancer in that mass. So we go through this process I think the week before his father decided to stop all the treatments on him, and to really die. We discovered my son was cancer-free. After all this stuff, we don't know why—just cancer-free. And so the doctor said, "Well, we won't do any more chemo, we'll just wait," because he hadn't had chemo in a couple of months. "We'll wait and see." So he went through this process. Then of course his dad dies that week, and he decides that he'd had enough, and he had them to stop the treatment and he passes away in 2002.

But now my son has been cancer-free since then. He never had another treatment. He's had no relapse, nothing. He has gone through it, and he's well. So it's been over six years. And after five years, supposedly, you're cured. So we went through this traumatic experience. Like I told my son, it was interesting, because I remember my mother talked about the open-hand philosophy. I don't know how I made it through the process, because I was chairing the department.

SR: I was wondering what you were doing at that time.

SNW: I was chairing the department, I was on a zillion boards that I eventually go off of. I was doing all these things, I was president of the National Council for Black Studies, I'd just become president. I was running a national conference here at the time. All these things were happening. But I had, surrounding me, the most wonderful people in my students and my colleagues, former students, people who just did things, who made sure things took place. That [unclear 116:44] happened. My sisters and my brothers—in fact, my kids, being raised in San Diego, not in Los Angeles, with [my] other nieces and nephews, had good relationships with their relatives, but didn't have the depth of relationship that they had until my son became ill. When my son became ill, his cousins in L.A.—one of his cousins in particular—several of them came down for his first chemo treatment, to sit in the chemo room with him. One cousin told the people—she worked for the County of Los Angeles—she said, "I'm going to be taking a vacation day every day that my cousin is in chemo." And she has two kids. She made a commitment to come to San Diego to basically be at his chemo treatment every time he had chemo. When I was at City of Hope and I had to leave City of Hope because it was graduation, and they were trying to harvest a stem cell from my son, and one thing and another, I had to leave, and my daughter hadn't gotten here, because she was still in med school, and she wasn't coming in for another week or so. My sister and my niece who does the chemo thing with him, she took off work and they came and stayed with him at City of Hope, to care for him while he was at City of Hope. So he was always surrounded by his aunts and his uncles and his cousins, who cared for him and who were always there for him. And that really created such a bond for him with his cousins: I mean even to this day. It was a tremendous bond. He recognized the

depth of our family. I knew it was there, and I knew they would always be there. But *he* didn't know it, because we had never been in a crisis, we never had to really rely upon the family. We were fairly self-contained, financially and otherwise. But he saw the value of our family, the strength of our family, the strength of his cousins, and those who were there for him through the illness, through all the difficulty he had, with the various surgeries. They were there for him. Then when he went through chemo, they were there for him again. And so it really strengthened his bond and his respect for his cousins, his aunts, his uncles, all those individuals. There's nothing they can ask Akil to do, that he would not do, because he feels that close to them as a family. So he went through that. And coming out of it, you know, it was a coming-out period for him, of finding [one? 118:57] himself. But also a sense of urgency that if you're going to enjoy life, enjoy it now. And I think part of that was why he said, "I don't think I'm gonna do school." And I said, "Okay. You've had a different experience in life." And I knew at some point he'd eventually come back to school. But he needed to, you know, not knowing for five years if this thing is going to raise its ugly head again, you want to live life, you want to enjoy it, you want to go to New York, you want to do those kinds of things that are fun. You want to go to the Laker games. He wanted to do those things that you shouldn't do, that you can't afford, but you do 'em anyway, because life is short. And so his view of the world is sometimes shorter than my daughter's, who has the long view. And he has the shorter view that you do things now, because you *have* to do 'em, because you don't know what's gonna happen. And she can plan her life for twenty years in advance. He plans for what's gonna happen now, how he's gonna live and what he's gonna do, and those kinds of things.

SR: I understand.

SNW: Yeah, totally different perspective. But I have two great kids. I mean, my kids are wonderful to the extent they don't give me a whole lot of drama. You know, they take very good care of me. My daughter's probably much more neurotic than my son. She calls me in the most remote areas of Africa. When we were in South Africa, it was funny, this year we were in South Africa, and I'd bought a calling card in case I needed to call somebody. Everybody that night was trying to call their relatives to say they'd landed in Capetown, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said, "Well, you guys can use my card." They said, "Oh, well, you might need it." I said, "Aw, I probably won't." They said, "Why?" I said, "Akilah's gonna call." And we were having dinner, and I hadn't paid any attention, and sure enough, soon as I went upstairs, the light is blinkin', "Mom? Are you in Capetown? Have you arrived yet?" She's gonna find me. So eventually, "I'll call you back later." So sure enough, about three in the morning she wakes me up with a call. She's calling to make sure I landed in Capetown. And then when I get to Johannesburg, like clockwork, come two o'clock in the morning or whenever, because she has my itinerary.... And it was funny, when I landed in D.C., she called me. Then when I landed in San Diego, because I could see my house from the plane, and I saw my son's truck sittin' in the driveway, I called him and said, "Akil, we just landed, come get me, okay?" As soon as I hung up the phone, the special ring went off, and it was Akilah. I said, "Oh, Akilah, we just landed in San Diego, we haven't got to the gate yet," dah, dah, dah. She said, "I know, I saw it on the internet." So this kid tracks me down! I mean, she knows everywhere I am. And whenever I travel, I send her the itinerary, because if I don't, I'm gonna get grief wherever she is.

SR: What a wonderful bond to have.

SNW: As soon as I land! It was funny. I went to Florida to speak last year. As soon as I landed.... I didn't call her, because I was in the midst of getting luggage—you know, all that kind of stuff. And I had a driver who was picking me up, me and this other woman. So by the time I get into this car, the phone goes off, it's Akilah. "Why didn't you call? You've already landed!" "Okay, I'm here, life is cool," so on and so on. So we go on, and the people in the van are kind of laughing, because I said, "It's my daughter, I know it's her." That was that Friday night. That Sunday morning, as I'm getting back in the same van with these people to go to the

airport, the phone goes off again. Everybody goes, "That's your daughter!" I said, "Exactly!" (laughter) "Where are you now?" "I'm on my way to the airport." "Well, call me before you get on the plane." "Will do." So she's very.... And so Akil, my son, is like, "I don't call you, Mom, because I know Akilah's got it covered, and she's gonna let me know where you are anyway, and what's going on." When everybody's like, "Oh, I don't know if [unclear 122:32]." Girl, that's the last thing I'm worried about. Akilah is going to find her mother, no matter what, where, when. And she went off to school in 1996. She has called me every day since then, if not three, four times a day. So when people say to me, "I haven't talked to my daughter in months," I'm wondering, "Who are these people?!" And they said, "I haven't talked to my daughter in three months." I said, "Child, I talk to my child three times a day," because Akilah is going to call me. And that's fine, that's wonderful. We have a very close relationship because they were my kids who went everywhere with me, who went into all the meetings. And they talk about now their life in the back of the room, playing on the floor with each other, while I'm conducting business, or doing what I have to do, because I believe that wherever I go, they can go, and they can come go with me. And I tell people, "If you need me to come, I gotta bring my kids." They said, "Fine." They're well behaved, they know how to go to meetings, they know how to stay in meetings and be quiet, those kinds of things. But they were very much a part of my life, and still are a part of my life, in terms of direction and where I go. They're very protective of me, and I'm very protective of them in their lives, and we have a wonderful relationship.

SR: That's marvelous.

SNW: Like I said, my son is a great kid. He's here in San Diego, and he's in and out of my house all the time, barbecuing, taking care of the house. When I leave, he says he's my Super Shuttle. He drives me to the airport, back and forth, and does that kind of thing. And they seek advice from me too. I mean, that's one thing, I don't want to run their lives, and I respect the decisions that they make. But they seldom make a decision without calling me and saying, "Mom, what do you think about this?" Because I'm going to tell them what I think, very honestly, and then I'm leavin' it at that. But I always say, "In the end, you have to make that decision, you're an adult." And I *want* my kids to be very independent. Even though we have a close relationship, it is important to me that they are very independent of me in those kinds of things. (recording paused)

One of the things that always continued with me, even with my involvement with my children, and all those things have a tendency to kind of weave themselves together—I continue to remain professionally involved, as I was involved in the community, and tried to relate always my community involvement to my profession itself. When I began here at San Diego State, I was very involved in the speech association, because I had never really planned to be in black studies when I came here. I mean, as my career, early on in grad school, I was a speech person. So naturally my initial involvements were with the speech association. But once again, I was always trying to figure out how could I take this association and make it relevant to opportunities for African Americans, opportunities for others? And so I regularly attended those associations, but immediately became president of the black caucus and worked in that caucus for six years as the leader of the caucus, and then developed from that a national communication association, which became a black organization of professionals that did conferences. We did conferences in Kenya, we did conferences in Barbados. In fact, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis went with us to Barbados during the conference, and spent the week with us as we talked about issues affecting African-American professionals in the field of communication, and the theories and concepts of communication, and what those different theories were, and how they related to us as professionals.

But one of the things I learned when I had two kids was that it became impossible to be in two careers. I couldn't be in speech and black studies at the same time. The demands were too great, too many different organizations, I couldn't go to every conference of every group. I

couldn't focus as much on speech as I wanted to. And yet I realized that what was needed was for me to focus in black studies. And so I immediately began to take my energies and my professionalism and focus in the National Council for Black Studies. When I became a member of the national council, it was a struggling organization. I had been a member before, but when I really became active in it, in the late 1990s, it was a struggling organization that had been in existence for many years, but had never really gained the prominence that it should in the profession, because like so many other organizations, people had used it to get what they wanted. They used it to get tenure, they used it to get where they were going, but they didn't want to invest the kind of time and energy in the development of the organization. So I became the secretary of it, because a friend of mine, who's now deceased, Bill Little, wanted me to be involved. He said, "You've developed this great program in San Diego, you've done stuff regionally, and you do a lot of stuff. We *need* your expertise, your leadership, at this level. So he hooked me into being secretary of it, because our secretary was a former anti-apartheid leader in South Africa, and once Mandela came back into power in the mid 1990s, he was brought back to South Africa to be in charge of educational programs. Kaytel [phonetic] was his name. And so as a result, I took over Kaytel's position as secretary, and then became vice-president and eventually president.

I set for the organization, I think, some goals that it needed to have. And those goals were that one, we needed to have conferences annually that were significant. Because before, they were hit and miss conferences. And so in 2002 when I was going through all this drama, we took on the national conference in San Diego. And whenever I had a conference in San Diego, that was like the National Council for Black Studies, in the past we'd have maybe 150 people at the conference. In San Diego, we had close to 500 people at our conference. In one year, we went to 500 people. Because in addition to dealing with the university, we also dealt with the community college, and we dealt with K-12. I brought in teachers to say, "Hey, *you* need to know about black studies." And so they married their conference with ours, and we had this *great* conference that was from kindergarten through post-secondary, focused on African-American studies. We also did the same thing in 2000, and they were here in San Diego in 2007. And once again, *huge* conference, that brought in K-12 into the conference with the National Council for Black Studies.

We also ran a separate institute that, like the academy, we then had a special institute for teachers that brought all the scholars in to educate teachers on how to use black material in your classroom, how to incorporate in your literature, in your social studies, in your history classes. And so teachers got a free institute that the national council paid for through that. So as president of the national council, I ended up actually working to stabilize the organization, institute its journal, because I had been on the *Western Journal of Black Studies* editorial board. So then we basically stabilized the *International Journal of Africana Studies*, so that now it's a reputable journal that's really well respected around the world. And our national conference, national officers, are actually focused on promoting the discipline. We now have a tremendous number of our students. We started taking students from San Diego State to the National Council of Black Studies, to help them to network with other students, but also to network with professionals. So now we have students who are attending schools in black studies at Cornell, attending school at Ohio State. We've got students at Temple University, getting their master's—and now at Berkeley—getting their masters' and doctorates in black studies, because we've been able to network through the National Council of Black Studies, as president of the association, to stabilize the organization.

I continue to serve on the executive board of the national council as the past president, and we just received a quarter-million-dollar grant from Ford Foundation to work on the infrastructure of the organization. Because I'm an organization person, I believe very strongly that an organization is essential for any group of people to be strong, to move forward, whether

it's a profession or whether it's our community. So I continue to work with the national council, and I'm being asked now to be pulled back into the speech association, so I may attend their conference this year, now that I don't have little kids pulling at my ankle, or wanting my attention, in terms of my children. But I focused my involvement on the national council because of the need that's there.

You know, my life, as I try to sum up who is Shirley Weber, and how did she get to where she is, in terms of moving into areas, coming out of the projects of Los Angeles—really out of the country of Hope, Arkansas—and finding myself in a situation where I've worked with presidents and presidents' wives, and served on national commissions and boards locally, and interaction in an international sense with the embassies in South Africa, and working with Peace Corps in Ghana, and adopting schools around the world, and those kinds of things, I think it emanates from, as I said, my mother's philosophy about open hand, my daddy's philosophy about no love lost. He had this thing that told us always to do whatever we had to do, and if people were angry with us, or if people tried to hurt us, keep in mind that anyone who did that, didn't love you anyway, and that if you lose that friend, that was no love lost, he said, because they didn't love you in the first place. The people that love you don't hurt you. You name is your bond. You keep a good name, and a good name can take you anywhere in the world. And I've always respected that aspect, that people on campus who may agree with me or disagree.... Oftentimes I get a call from different presidents of the campus over the years who would ask me for my honest opinion on something, because they knew that no matter what, Shirley was going to tell the truth, whether they liked it or not. It was not an offensive thing, but it's one that I believe very strongly that I had to tell the truth.

But I can remember when I was a kid, living in the projects, or living, really, in Los Angeles as we moved from the projects, and I was walking to school one day, and I can see this just as vividly as if it were yesterday. It was on Vernon and Hooper, there was a storefront on the street. And I don't even know what was behind the storefront, but there was this big picture of Africa, and as a kid, I never thought of ever going to Africa, never thought of my relationship to Africa in my heritage, but it obviously was in me. And I looked at this sign that said, "Never forget from whence we've come." And I remember that sign to this day, "Never forget from whence we've come." And every day I walked by this sign. And here I am, forty years later, still remembering this sign that I saw when I was like fourteen, fifteen years old. And I always wondered, "Wow," what the sign meant. And then as I got older, it was still in me. And I think my whole life has been that I have been given wonderful things, great parents, strong family, that have been able to overcome tremendous obstacles in life, whether it was poverty, whether it was not having access to all the educational things that you want, but yet having a strong faith in God, a strong church, a strong family, a strong community, that it was so in me that I could never forget from whence I've come. I could never forget all of the individuals who had done so much for me over the years.

I remember I was in a speech contest I won, reading a Frederick Douglass speech. And Frederick Douglass said, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, if I forget the bleeding children of sorrow, then may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." I remember memorizing that to do a speech. And I was in a contest, and I was in the tenth grade. And I felt very strongly that Frederick Douglass understood that he had a responsibility to continue to remember those who were the "bleeding children of sorrow." And Maya Angelou has said, "You represent the hope and the dream of the slave. That through it all, you have a responsibility." And I take my personal responsibility, my professional responsibility, very seriously. Every day I breathe is a blessing from God, and that I have to give that blessing to somebody else. And that if anything I can do to make the world better, because I believe that I can, through the things that have been given to me, through the spirit that I have, that wherever I go, it has to change, and I never want to forget from whence I've come.

SR: Thank you. This has been just such a wonderful experience, sitting here with you while you shared your life journey and your philosophy. I'm sure that others will be enjoying listening to this in the future.

SNW: Well, thank you for inviting me. I feel very honored.

SR: Thank *you*. I do too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]