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Ayers, R.L.

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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 9/21/05

Interviewee: RL Ayers

Interviewer: Mitch Jerald

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Ayers, R.L.

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[01:02]

[crew talk]

Jerald,M.: My name is Mitch Jerald and I am the interviewer. Today's date is September 21, 2005. I will be interviewing Miss R.L. Ayers for her recollection of activities associated with facilities associated with K-25 during the Manhattan Project and the Cold War era. Miss Ayers, I appreciate you doing this for me. Would you state your name and spell your name for me?

Ayers, R.L.: My name is R.L. Ayers. A-Y-E-R-S. The first name is initials only. I have no other name.

Jerald,M.: Okay. That's a little different, but then that's kind of common because L.C. Manley (phonetic sp.) is L.C. Manley and it's his initials.

Ayers, R.L.: Would you like to know how I got the name R.L.?

Jerald,M.: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Ayers, R.L.: Well, way back when I was born, they couldn't tell if they were going to have a boy or a girl, so my mother was wantin' a boy and she was going to name him Robert Lee. And after I show up, and they didn't have a name for me. So she took the R from the Robert and the L from Lee and gave it to me. And that was my name. R.L.

[2:29]

Jerald,M.: Now, right off the bat, I want us to make sure we get this straight. You came here to K-25 at what time? What year?

Ayers, R.L.: It was 1943, October the 19th, 1943.

Jerald,M.: Okay. All right. And we'll get to this other part later about what brought you here and all, but I wanted to make sure we got that in -

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald,M.: -- because I'm just elated to have you here.

Where were you born?

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Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

What year was I born?

Jerald, M.:

Where were you born?

[3:05]

Ayers, R.L.:

I was born in Carrollton (phonetic sp.), Mississippi, edge of the hills in the delta. A little town, a population of 500. It was -- a village is really what it was. But it was Carrollton, Mississippi.

Jerald, M.:

Is it still there?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, it's still there.

Jerald, M.:

Go on.

Ayers, R.L.:

It sits in the center, kinda, of Mississippi, because it's 109 miles from Memphis, 109 miles from Jackson, 109 miles from Columbus, 109 miles from Greensfield (phonetic sp.).

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

So it's in the center.

Jerald, M.:

Right in the center.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

All right. And that's where you were living prior to coming to K-25? Were you living there then?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yeah, I was living there.

[3:51]

Jerald, M.:

What age were you when you came here? You don't wanna answer that.

Ayers, R.L.:

No. Oh, yes, I don't mind answering that. I don't mind tellin' my age. I was 18 years old.

Jerald, M.:

You were 18 years old.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I was 18.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. What type of work were you doing at that time?

Ayers, R.L.:

I was a soda jerk at Camp McCain (phonetic sp.) and that, was -- Camp McCain was in Grenada. Well, out from Grenada and I was a soda jerk there.

Jerald, M.:

Explain what a soda jerk is. [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, you work behind the fountain. And they called them soda jerks 'cause they sold sodas, you know. Yup.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Can you lead me into -- there's gotta be a story behind that. You come up here when you were 18 years old. Where were you going and what was up with that?

[4:38]

Ayers, R.L.:

I came with a lady by the name of Francie Sharper (phonetic sp.). She came by Camp McCain one day, she said, "There's a place in Tennessee, girl, that you can make money -- good money," I wasn't making anything. I think I was makin' about \$5 a week at - - bein' a soda jerk. So she said, "Would you like to go?" I say, "Yes." She said, "I will get us some tickets and we will go." So about four days later, she came back and she had two tickets; one for me and one for her. And we caught the bus, headed out to Tennessee. We came to Kingston, Tennessee, that was down at the K-25 area, and a bus picked us up there and brought us over to the K-25 personnel. That's where we spent the whole day. And all we's done just told them our name age and address where we came from that's all. [laughing] But it took a whole day to do all that.

Jerald, M.:

[laughter] Took a whole day to do that?

[5:44]

Ayers, R.L.:

All day to do that.

Jerald, M.:

What you saw is what you expected?

Ayers, R.L.:

I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what to expect because at that time, I'd never been out of Mississippi. But I had an explorin' mind and I always wanted to go and find out what was goin' on, if the grass was greener on the other side of the mountain. And that was the reason I came. I came lookin' for a better job.

And I worked at the K-25 building. There was only one building that was there at that time, and that was the K-25 building. They was building the other buildings, J.A. Jones and Clinton Engineer, and all those different contractors was building. So I worked at the K-25 building for 'bout a year. And I left and went to work at the J.A. Jones Cafeteria 'cause I didn't have to pay for my food. [laughter] And so I went to work there. And that's where I worked until they build they -- this part over here, which was Clinton Engineer at that time, and I went to work at the hospital. That was really the kind of work that I like. And I worked at the hospital for 56 years.

[7:05]

Jerald,M.: Is that right?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald,M.: Was the hospital here in Oak Ridge?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, here. Oh, here.

Jerald,M.: Okay.

Ayers, R.L.: It was run by the army. The hospital was run by the army.

Jerald,M.: Well, let me ask you this because I'll forget. You came up here with a friend?

Ayers, R.L.: Right.

Jerald,M.: So where did she wind up?

Ayers, R.L.: She stayed at K-25.

Jerald,M.: Okay.

Ayers, R.L.: She stayed at K-25. She worked for some of the colonels there and all she did was fix the food, you know, and.... Well you just did whatever they told you to do.

[7:44]

Now, we didn't know what we was doin' at K-25, and if you were black, the only thing that you could be was a maid. So I was a

Ayers, R.L.:

maid. And if they had a spill, they would tell me to go clean it up and that's what I did. I didn't ask any questions or anything. They all had signs up said you to see nothin', you to say nothin', you hear nothin'.

Jerald, M.:

How did those signs read?

Ayers, R.L.:

It said, see nothin', say nothin', and you hear nothin'.

Jerald, M.:

Is that right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

And they had those water fountains there where it says "black", or they say "colored", really, not "black", but "colored". And this one over here would be for white. So we had separate water fountains, we had -- of course, the livin' was separate because at K-25 at that time, there was no white people there; they were all farther back this way.

[8:48]

Jerald, M.:

As far as living?

Ayers, R.L.:

As far as livin', yes.

Jerald, M.:

And when you speak in terms of living, where were you living?

Ayers, R.L.:

Was living in a hut. It was just a boxlike, and it had four beds, one in each corner, and a big pot-bellied stove in the middle. And that's where you -- where we stayed, where the black women stayed. And it was called a pen because they had a fence around it. And they had a barbed wire, electric fence that you wouldn't be able to get out of there.

Jerald, M.:

How did you feel about that? I mean, when you think about it, I mean, it seems like some extreme protection.

[9:29]

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, yes, that was -- it was segregated to the max.

Jerald, M.:

It seems to me extreme protection from what?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

From mens. They didn't want the women and the men to get together. Even if you had a husband, you was not allowed to make no contact with your husband. And only on the weekends when you off and you didn't have to work, then you could catch a bus and go to Knoxville, you and your husband could go to Knoxville. But that was the only contact that you had with your husband.

So the mens lived in a pen and the women lived in a pen.

Jerald,M.:

Separate areas.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's right.

Jerald,M.:

We're going to talk about this because I know I can hit this subject, but now, here I am looking at you. You're a pretty lady. What age was it when you left Mississippi?

[10:25]

Ayers, R.L.:

18.

Jerald,M.:

18? What did your momma say to you?

Ayers, R.L.:

My mother was dead.

Jerald,M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

My mother was dead.

Jerald,M.:

All right. So you stayed there in Mississippi, you had some family there?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I had family there.

Jerald,M.:

Okay. Okay. All right. All right. Okay. I'm sorry to hear that.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

But I'm happy for you because I know when you come here, I think that was a good thing for you.

Ayers, R.L.:

It was.

Jerald,M.:

It was. And I can feel that because I can look at the person and tell.

[11:02]

Ayers, R.L.

You know, the huts are -- that's an interesting subject because, you know, everyone we've interviewed, the huts has been a subject. So, but you speak of the huts -- I didn't know -- see, when you came in, women were in one section and the men were in a section.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

Was there anything that you thought about that you really just didn't like or was it okay for you because you were making the money? Or what was it?

Ayers, R.L.:

I didn't like any of it. But there wasn't anything I could do about it. And all I learned is that you just accept things and you go on because I always felt like farther down the road, the thing were going to be better. And that's what I -- my belief was. That things would be better tomorrow. So I never griped, fussed about anything; I couldn't do anything about anything. There was no need to fuss and fall out with everybody, so I just went on.

Jerald,M.:

They were probably good people anyway.

[12:10]

Ayers, R.L.:

[laughing] Yes.

Jerald,M.:

Good, friendly people.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, yes, they was good and they were friendly. They just didn't understand. They just didn't understand.

Jerald,M.:

Didn't understand what?

Ayers, R.L.:

A life, I guess. Or shall I say life? Because most of them came from Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. And, well, all they had ever known was segregation. And you lived over here; you did what the white man told you to do, and that was it.

Jerald,M.:

Let me ask you something.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

Let me ask you something. You have a very historical way of putting things and from a good standpoint. Why do you think there were not a lot of people recruited north of here?

Ayers, R.L.

[12:59]

Ayers, R.L.:

They did not -- they wouldn't come this way. Uh-nuh (negative) They just wouldn't come.

Jerald, M.:

Do you think the mindset wouldn't have been right for this area?

Ayers, R.L.:

It probably would have been, but the thing of it was, they wasn't comin' because they knew the traits and they wasn't comin' this way. Because, you know, there was so many people. Even though (indiscernible) from Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, there was people with degrees, but they came here lookin' for a better life, so they came on and they took it. But 'cross the Mason-Dixon line, they would not accept it. Uh-nuh (negative). They would not accept it.

Jerald, M.:

So, the good life, was it a better life? I mean, money makes everything better. Is that what it was? Was it better because of the money? The family life was gone.

[13:56]

Ayers, R.L.:

It wasn't that much money, you know. It wasn't that much money, but it was just a new -- just a new area of life. So there was one way of getting out of the Mississippi Delta, out of the Mississippi hills and Georgia and Alabama. It was one way of getting away. So.

Jerald, M.:

Okay, okay. What education background, what did you do, what is it? You seem to be real smart.

Ayers, R.L.:

I finished high school.

Jerald, M.:

Finished high school?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Okay. Do you have any college behind you?

Ayers, R.L.:

No, I didn't. I had said that I was going to Harley Springs (phonetic sp.), Mississippi, to go to college, but I never made it. So.

Jerald, M.:

So when you come here, young girl, single girl, and you're just starting a new life.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

I started a new life. But I was off into everything that started here, though. I was off into everything that started. I don't care what it was, I wanted to have a part in it. I even went to Oak Ridge High School, although I had graduated high school, I had finished high school, but I went over there because they had this class, you know, of black people, and I thought, well, I'll just go and see what's goin' on. And I wasn't enrolled.

[15:18]

Jerald,M.:

You went anyway?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I did, and when they opened the Scarborough (phonetic sp.) school, over here, only went to -- I think it was 6th grade over here, and then they had to be transported to some other place because they couldn't go to high school here. And I went over there and enrolled over there!

Jerald,M.:

[laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

I was enrolling in everything that started; I wanted to -- that was the only way I could get into it and I wanted to get into it.

[15:51]

Jerald,M.:

In other words, because you cared --

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

-- because you cared --

Ayers, R.L.:

That was it.

Jerald,M.:

And you wanted things better.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's right.

Jerald,M.:

Okay. And I want that on there because that's what I know what it was.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

And I want you to think with me from a standpoint of education and the huts. So, how was it when the schools became available? Were there any kids? There weren't any kids around, if you were

Ayers, R.L.

living in huts and you were living away from your -- explain that to me.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, in '40 -- the last of '45 or maybe the first of '46, they opened the family huts. They began to let black families come in, and children came at that time.

Jerald,M.:

Was that something of a better structure, larger structure, more room or something to say hooray about?

[16:53]

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, yes, it was something like maybe a house. The family huts was kinda like a house because they did have a place where they could cook in there and, you know, it was better livin'.

Jerald,M.:

Better living.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.:

Oh, okay. Okay. When the families came, then there had to be schooling.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's exactly right.

Jerald,M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

They had to be schooling. They opened this old Scarborough school -- there was a Scarborough school over there -- because the man that owned all of this land down in here was Old Man Gamble (phonetic sp.), Old Man Scarborough, and Old Man Settle (phonetic sp.). They opened up -- they owned all of this valley over in here. And where the black people -- where they moved the black people to, it was Mr. Gamble's land. And women full didn't like it because nothing lived over here but black, and they associa - - he associated with gambling. Which there was a lot of gamblin' going on like that.

[18:03]

But anyway, he ask if it could be changed, if the name could be changed. So they changed the name from Gamble and gave it to Scarborough, which that was Mr. Scarborough owned a part of this valley over in here. So they had Scarborough school over there. Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Ayers, R.L.

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So I didn't have any children or anything then and as I said, I went to school over there. I went over there, I think I went into the 5th grade or 6th grade one, whichever one was there, that's the one that I went into. And I just wanted to get in there and find out what was goin' on.

Well, then, we started tryin' to get the black children in the schools here in Oak Ridge. But it took years before we could do that, though.

[18:55]

Jerald,M.:

I know I can get --.

Ayers, R.L.:

We -- it was five families of us went together, and we wrote to Mr. Farrelly (phonetic sp.).

Jerald,M.:

Who was he?

Ayers, R.L.:

He was head of Health, Education, and Welfare in Clint -- I mean in Washington, D.C. Head of the school systems. And so we wrote him a letter and then we got his telephone number. We called him and he said he thought everything was goin' well here in Oak Ridge. So we told him to sit down because we was goin' to tell him something, and we told him what was goin' on here and how the black children had to be bussed out of here to Alston East (phonetic sp.), to Clinton schools.

Jerald,M.:

Can I ask you --

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure!

Jerald,M.:

What did you tell him? What did you tell him was going on here?

Ayers, R.L.:

Told him that the children we had, the black kids here, they could not go to school here, and they was not allowed to go certain places here, you know, and especially if anything going on with the school, ballgame, and everything like that. The black kids couldn't go.

[20:09]

Jerald,M.:

Let me ask you something. Why would you think he would think that everything was okay here? Did he not know that the government has set up a segregated community?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Evidently, he didn't.

Jerald, M.:

And he was Secretary of Education?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. He didn't. If he did, he didn't own it. But when we told him this, he said he thought that everything was goin' well here, so he was goin' to look into it. He did. He looked into it.

Jerald, M.:

Did you feel that he -- could you tell that he looked into it?

Ayers, R.L.:

Sent somebody here.

Jerald, M.:

Oh, he did?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. He sent somebody here. So evidently, he didn't know, otherwise he wouldn't have sent somebody here to investigate it. And the Superintendent of Schools was taking a vacation, and he was going to Florida. By the time that his plane landed, there was a message waiting for him, if he wanted his job, he better get back here. [laughing] And he didn't have a vacation. He came back, had meetings with us, and he was angry, but that didn't make any difference.

[21:22]

Jerald, M.:

There was nothing he could do about it.

Ayers, R.L.:

Nothin' he could do about it. Uh-nuh (negative)

Jerald, M.:

Right.

Ayers, R.L.:

And so we finally got the school system straightened out. In '51, there was two graduations held here in Oak Ridge. Two graduations; a black one and a white one. They were still couldn't come to the idea that blacks was [laughing] goin' to walk across the stage with the whites. But anyway, they had -- we had one on Mondays and one on Friday. And we had three black kids that graduated here.

Jerald, M.:

Was that from Oak Ridge High?

[22:00]

Ayers, R.L.:

No, they was not from Oak Ridge High.

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

They went to school at Alston.

Jerald, M.:

Alston in Knoxville.

Ayers, R.L.:

Alston East in Knoxville.

Jerald, M.:

In Knoxville.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) But they did let 'em graduate here.

Jerald, M.:

Is that right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

At the school here in Oak Ridge?

Ayers, R.L.:

At the school here in Oak Ridge.

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

I don't want to move progress too far because I can remember conversations of problems that happened at Clinton High School --

[22:27]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

-- and I know that was some touchy stuff for you because you were involved in the community --

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

-- and is there something you want to share now, or is it -- can you bring us in your conversation, or would it?

Ayers, R.L.:

I really didn't know too much about the Clinton; it was only the Alston East and Oak Ridge. And I know that this went on, but this was somebody out of New York that came down and started all of the animosity over in Clinton about the blacks and the whites.

Jerald, M.:

Was it because of just, plainly integration?

Ayers, R.L.:

Just what it was. That's exactly --

Ayers, R.L.

[23:16]

Jerald, M.: Somebody got hurt, too. Wasn't it a bombing?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, they did.

Jerald, M.: Were there lives lost?

Ayers, R.L.: No. No, there wasn't lives lost. Uh-hunh. (negative)

Jerald, M.: Okay.

Ayers, R.L.: But I was in the emergency room when they started bringin' all of 'em in there. They was bringin' 'em in. I was working in there; I worked in the emergency room. I was emergency room technician. And they was bringin' all of those kids and adults in there.

Jerald, M.: That had been wounded?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: That were wounded?

Ayers, R.L.: They was -- had smoke inhalation and all that stuff, you know. So.

Jerald, M.: That was kind of a sad time.

[23:52]

Ayers, R.L.: It was. It really was.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. That wasn't happy times at all. The thing that gets me is, and when I think about the whole situation, it just baffles me that, you know, the government would establish or found -- it's like founding -- well, it is because it's the secret city --

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: -- so they founded this city.

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: Okay, they established this city --

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Ayers, R.L.:

Jerald,M.:

-- and to me, this city was established -- it was established based on what was totally wrong from the beginning.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's right. You are so right.

Jerald,M.:

And I don't need to be speaking through your interview. I'm just angry and it's like you interviewing me. I'm sorry --

[24:42]

Ayers, R.L.:

[laughing]

Jerald,M.:

-- but it just blows my mind. So, but I can understand, and I picture in my mind the things that went on at that time and then I can see how that mentality can roll right off into the surrounding communities because it's all right because the government has already set up a community, or a little city, just like the way the people in the outside want it to be.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, yes, yes.

Jerald,M.:

And I know, knowing you, you thought you got real ahead of me on that.

Ayers, R.L.:

I really did. I went to jail, also. [laughing]

Jerald,M.:

What -- talk to me. Talk to me.

Ayers, R.L.:

I went to jail after my son, Terrell (phonetic sp.) -- I said that I was not going to start him here in -- in a segregated school, and next year be transferred to a school across town 'cause that's where most of the problems was because the black children all bein' over here among themselves, and when they went across town, it was always fightin' and everything goin' on, you know? So I said, well, he's not going to start in a segregated school and then transfer to integrated school next year. So since he would be going to Linden School (phonetic sp.), I will start him out over there. So I took him over there to register him and the principal said, "Well, I'm afraid you can't register him here." I says, "Why?" I said, "He'll be goin' to school here next year." She said, "But you have to wait." And I said, "No, I'm not goin' to wait." And so she said, "Well, then I'm goin' to ask you to leave." And I took my son by the hand -- we went out sit on the steps. We sit there until they call the police. And the police came [laughter], they took -- got me,

Ayers, R.L.

said that I was -- goin' to take me to jail, which they did take me to jail. [laughter] But they had to let me go 'cause I had my child.

[26:50]

Jerald,M.: [laughing] Man!

[crew talk]

[End Tape 1]

[crew talk]

Jerald,M.: Are we recording?

[crew talk]

[00:14]

Jerald,M.: Okay, Miss Ayers, I would like to get back to K-25. You came in to K-25 facility rather early. You made a statement that it was a one-building structure at that time, so naturally, there were others being constructed.

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald,M.: Can you tell me about some of the things as you watched the plant grow with the signage of see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing? Tell me how did it grow because you watched it expand.

Ayers, R.L.: I watched it, but there wasn't very much that you could see simply because everything was behind closed doors. And of course, the maids all was over there so that you were ready to clean up whatever was messed up. And that was just about it. You didn't see anything, no. Uh-hunh. (negative) All of the scientists and everybody was behind closed doors.

[1:23]

Jerald,M.: It was really a secret, wasn't it?

Ayers, R.L.: It really was. It really was.

Jerald,M.: Did you have any idea what was going on?

Ayers, R.L.: I did, but it was just all was just an idea.

Ayers, R.L.:

Jerald, M.:

Oh, really? I mean, because I know it's kind of like a water fountain conversation.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

I mean, I know people talked, so it was [laughing].

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, the one that you talked to didn't know any more than you did? That was the thing. Because, see, you didn't talk to no white person; you only talked to another black one. Now, the other black one just a maid like you, so.

[1:58]

Jerald, M.:

You know, and I don't mean to harp on this, but it's kind of strange where -- when people mingle, it kind of breaks down barriers because we have a tendency of having, say we have white friends and we've got black friends. That's kind of like putting it like we say it. But in those days, that segregation really segregated you from the standpoint that whites stayed here, didn't talk to you --

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

-- blacks stayed here and you didn't talk to them.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's exactly right.

Jerald, M.:

And you could tell that it was driven to be that way?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes. Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

What do you think they were protecting?

Ayers, R.L.:

I really don't know. You know, like I said in the beginning, that most of the people from Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. There wasn't just black people from there; it was white people from there, also. And, see, they was already used to this stuff, you know, that blacks over here and whites over there. They had here -- we laughed about that so many times -- there was a railroad track, and the blacks didn't cross the railroad track 'cause the whites lived over there and you never want to cross the railroad tracks.

[3:18]

Jerald, M.:

It was always kind of tabooish?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes.

Jerald, M.:

Didn't go there.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-hunh. (negative) Uh-hunh. (negative)

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Yeah.

Ayers, R.L.:

So you'd never come in contact with any white people.

Jerald, M.:

Where there any white maids?

Ayers, R.L.:

No. No. Only black. Only black maids.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Now, now, you had a chance for a transition, promotion, to a better job; you went into the hospital.

[3:48]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

Tell me about that transition. How did that happen? You had to have a colonel or somebody that saw Miss Ayers and said, "This woman is a good worker and I like her," and what? What happened?

Ayers, R.L.:

No. At that time, all you had to do was apply for a job and nine times out of ten, you would get it. So what I did was I applied for the job at the hospital, and without any questions at all, they hired me.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

So.

Jerald, M.:

In the hospital -- I can see you being that technically inclined being in the hospital versus, I mean, when I say you being very much of a caring person. So that was okay with you. That was a betterment, right?

[4:35]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes.

Jerald, M.:

Did your friend transition with you?

Ayers, R.L.

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Ayers, R.L.:

No. As I said, she stayed on at K-25. That's where she stayed until everybody started movin' over this way, out of the huts and everything, they started movin' this way, and that's when she came this way. Then she got married, and. Yup.

Jerald,M.:

What about eating? What about eating on the reservation? Tell me about how segregated that was, cafeterias and stuff like that.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, okay, then, you just set a place over here [laughing] by where the blacks eat and at the restaurants and things, you know, they would hand a black a sandwich out the window. You didn't go in there, sit down. You got -- if you wanted a sandwich, a hamburger, whatever you wanted, you just ordered it and you paid for it through the window. They handed it to you out the window and you went on with it.

[5:38]

Jerald,M.:

Well, who did the cooking?

Ayers, R.L.:

They had blacks.

Jerald,M.:

They had blacks doing the cooking?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.:

So it probably in some cases, if I'm at the window, I had a buddy that was passing me my food, right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). They didn't have any of those though.

Jerald,M.:

[laughs]

Ayers, R.L.:

Naw, they didn't take that chance. They didn't take that chance. Most of 'em, I guess, was afraid to try to reach out. So they just went by the rules.

Jerald,M.:

Gosh. Afraid. All right. So same thing about the water fountains, everything was just -- it was colored here --

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.:

-- and white there.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

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[6:21]

Jerald, M.: Restaurant, colored here, white there?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: Now, working environment. Everything was just as easy -- once you went to the hospital, then you were working around whites?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, I was working around whites then when I went to the hospital.

Jerald, M.: Things were a little different.

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, it was. It really was. And --

'cause I was -- I loved people and I was interested in everything that went on, and I paid attention to everything that the doctor said, and -- 'cause I didn't say anything; I would listen, you know. And they didn't mind talkin' around me. I don't know whether they felt that I was so dumb that I couldn't catch all of what they was sayin'.
[laughter]

Jerald, M.: It was because they liked you, too.

Ayers, R.L.: Well, maybe so.

[7:11]

Jerald, M.: [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.: But anyway, I remember that we had this lady that came in from the plant, they brought in from the plant. She'd gotten into something hot. And so they didn't want the R.N. in there, I was a technician and we had an R.N. there. And so one of the doctors told me he wanted me to set up a tray, and he told me what kind, and I set it up because I -- I knew everything that they wanted, whether it was medication or what. And I set up that tray for them, and when they brought this patient in, she came in from X-10, so when the nurse started in, they told her, said, "We don't want you." Said, "We're going to keep R.L. in here." So she really got uptight because, see, she was white, too. And all the doctors was white, and I was black. So they kept me and in -- and would not let her come in there. So I asked -- I told one of the doctors, I said, "Now, you know she's my supervisor." I said, "So she's angry with me now." He says, "She ain't got any business bein' angry with you,

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Ayers, R.L.

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R.L.” He said, “If she wanna be angry with somebody, tell her to be angry with us,” said, “because we didn’t want anybody in there that was goin’ out and tell anything that went on in that room.” So they knew that I wasn’t going to tell it, although I did know what was goin’ on, you know. So.

[8:39]

Jerald,M.: How many, being in the hospital situation like that, accidents and stuff? I guess you witnessed some stuff.

Ayers, R.L.: Oh, yes! Yes, yes, yes. Not only from Tennessee, but from Kentucky, too.

Jerald,M.: What’s in Kentucky? What do you mean?

Ayers, R.L.: They used to bring them from Kentucky. If anybody was hurt or anything, they would bring them from Kentucky to Oak Ridge hospital.

Jerald,M.: Now, but if we think, if we talk about the reservation and people being hurt out here for whatever it was, was chemical burns or some stuff that was top secret. You were in the areas where you kind of witnessed some of this stuff --

[9:17]

Ayers, R.L.: Sure.

Jerald,M.: -- like this case you were just talking about there, right?

Ayers, R.L.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.: Some bad accidents?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Jerald,M.: Yeah?

Ayers, R.L.: We lost some people.

Jerald,M.: That right?

Ayers, R.L.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.: Well, and that’s to be expected on a large project --

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure.

Jerald, M.:

-- because a percentage of life loss is always figured in to -- from a casualty standpoint on the size or largeness of certain projects. I guess when you look at a facility like K-25, something like that being constructed, it's going to happen.

[9:51]

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure.

Jerald, M.:

And even from the standpoint of maybe being in the wrong areas at times or too much of this in your system at times. I know how things would probably happen in that -- from that standpoint. But, man, that's just amazing! It's just amazing.

So communication wise, it was evident, then, in the hospital, people communicated with you?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, they did. But I know when to speak and what to speak about. I did.

Jerald, M.:

You were too wise! [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

I tried to be anyway. Yeah.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah, you were really wise.

Ayers, R.L.:

And you know where, even since I have retired, I went to see my doctor and he was talkin' to me and so he was -- I have an enlarged heart. And so he was tellin' me what he wanted me to do. And I looked at him and I said, "Uh-huh, uh-huh." He said, "You ain't gonna do it." He said, "Because your head is hard."

[10:57]

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

He said, "It has always been hard."

Jerald, M.:

[laughing] But now, hey, but that was a compliment.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I guess so. [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.

Jerald, M.:

It is. That was a compliment. That's all he was doing, and I compliment that on you, too. I just want to ask you a simple question. What did you like most about working out there? Could you tell me what you liked most about working out there?

Ayers, R.L.:

All right.

Jerald, M.:

When I say out there K-25.

Ayers, R.L.:

K-25?

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Hospital or both of them.

[11:26]

Ayers, R.L.:

I like, as I say, I like to deal with people. I like to help somebody. My motto was if I could help somebody along the way, my livin' wouldn't be in vain. And that's what I always tried to do was help somebody. And I can't remember anything that I could tell you that I really liked at K-25. The only thing was I liked my payday on Friday and that was just about it. So. And when I went to J.A. Jones to work, I liked the cafeteria because I was getting my food. But that was it. But when I went to the hospital, I really liked that. Because I felt like I was doing something --.

Jerald, M.:

For people.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

Did you have a lot of friends at the huts?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I had a lot of friends at the huts. I had a lot of friends, I sure did!

Jerald, M.:

Lot of friends at the hospital, too?

[12:19]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yeah, lots of 'em at the hospital, too. [laughing]

Jerald, M.:

Your acquaintances there, do you still keep in contact with some of them?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, you know, most of them are dead.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah, well.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Most of them are dead. I sometimes sit back and just think about people. Once, I was keeping a record on -- in the beginning, of how many people died, and the other day when I was lookin' for something about my church, I ran across this. And I had this whole stack. And I said, "Oh, Lord, I don't wanna look at this," [laughing], you know? Some -- number one on down to about three or four hundred.

Jerald, M.:

Is that right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) Because I finally stopped doing that. So.

Jerald, M.:

There's always something good, and there is a reason for everything. See, you recognize your mission.

[13:22]

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

Tell -- I can tell; you recognize your mission. What did you dislike about the reservation?

Ayers, R.L.:

What did I dislike about it? I can't say I really disliked anything. That was one thing that I always tried my best, you know. If anything start botherin' me, I'd leave it alone. But I can't say that I disliked anything.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Well, now, when you guys had to report, when you reported to the hospital, reported to K-25, you caught the bus?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, you had -- well, when I was at K-25, I could walk from the huts across to the building.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. It was that close to K-25 building?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yes.

[14:13]

Jerald, M.:

Okay, so, within walking distance and then to, what I guess, the hospital, you took the bus there?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I took the bus, and then of course, I had a little car. [laughing] And I would drive to work. So.

Ayers, R.L.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Can you -- I'll get to that one because I have a specific subject I want to ask you about anyway. Your supervisors, people that you were under and stuff, how were they to you? Were they good people?

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, yes.

Jerald, M.:

Were they just? [laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I would think so because this one lady was my supervisor. She did not speak to me for almost a year. She'd carry --.

Jerald, M.:

Was she black or white?

Ayers, R.L.:

She was white. I had upset her some way, somewhere, somehow.

Jerald, M.:

What in the world could she be jealous about?

[15:14]

Ayers, R.L.:

I don't know. I have no idea, and I'm tellin' you the truth; I don't know. But I had my own way of doin' things, you know. I don't care what you told me to do; I would get what you said done, but I did it in my own way, not really your way. And she couldn't stand that, you know. As the doctor told, my head were hard. But anyway, Mrs. Greene (phonetic sp.), her name was Julia Greene, and she did not speak to me for nearly a year, and her husband came in the hospital. He was dyin' of cancer. And I would go to see him just about every day. I would go by his room and speak to him and pass off a few words with him, you know. And so she came in there one day and I was in there. So I told him, I said, "Well, here's your wife, now," so I said, "I'll just move on." But I already told him that she was not speaking to me although she was my supervisor and I don't know what I'd done to her. And I said, "But, whatever it is," I said, "God will work it out." And so I left and she said -- he said to her, "Well, what's wrong that you don't speak to R.L.?" Say, "She's the nicest person I've ever met." And said, "She's so kind; she drop by every day and she see me and she talk to me." She came back to her office and she called for me to come to her office. And I said, "Oh, I guess she's gonna fire me for bein' up in her husband's room." [laughing] But anyway, she started cryin' and she told me she was really sorry. She said, "You ain't done nothin' to me." She said, "I just didn't like you." That's what she said. She just didn't like me; I hadn't done anything to her. And I said, "Well, that's all right." I said, "That's alright."

Ayers, R.L.

She said, "Could you forgive me?" I said, "Yes. You're already forgiven." And from then on, she was the nicest person to me.

[17:20]

Jerald, M.:

She had problems.

Ayers, R.L.:

She did. She really did, but.

Jerald, M.:

She just didn't like you.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huhn. (negative) She just didn't like me.

Jerald, M.:

Gosh almighty.

[17:27]

Ayers, R.L.:

But you know, I've had several people tell me that, "You ain't never done anything to me; I just didn't like you."

Jerald, M.:

Because, see, sometimes proud people just have to accept that for being proud.

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure. That's right.

Jerald, M.:

You know?

Ayers, R.L.:

That's exactly right.

Jerald, M.:

And that means you're doing something right.

Ayers, R.L.:

I guess.

Jerald, M.:

You know what I mean?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes. But it didn't bother me, though. If you liked me, it didn't bother me; if you didn't, it didn't bother me. I could still smile and go ahead.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah, yeah.

Ayers, R.L.:

So that was my lifestyle.

Jerald, M.:

Oh, yeah. You -- I've talked to you in the past and there are other things I want to ask you about. Because you had even mentioned you were pursuing writing a book.

Ayers, R.L.

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[18:17]

Ayers, R.L.:

Oh, yes. Yes. But I haven't done much with that since my husband died. It seem like I can't get back to it, get off into it. But I've got it all out on the couch and I'm on the floor and everywhere else, so I guess I'm going to get back into it. But right now, I'm tryin' to write the church history. So.

Jerald,M.:

Church history based on what? The history of the community back in the days or what?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes. Well, in August, Reverend Thomas (phonetic sp.) preached a sermon and he took it from Isaiah, the 6th chapter. And the first through eight verses. And that sermon just hit me on the top of the head, and I said, "Now, he's just talkin' about Oak Valley; Oak Valley in all of (indiscernible)."

Jerald,M.:

Talking about who?

Ayers, R.L.:

Oak, Valley Church, our church.

[19:06]

Jerald,M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

I said, so it look like I'm going to have to write up something. And I told him, he said, "Get it together." He said, "And we will use it when homecoming." So I said, "Well, okay." So I have -- I'm writin' up the history.

Jerald,M.:

For the church?

Ayers, R.L.:

Of Valley Church.

Jerald,M.:

Valley Church?

Ayers, R.L.:

And how they got started. It's really the church tree is what I guess I would call it because it's how it first got started and how the members came together and all of that. And I don't know why that sermon hit me like it did. So I told Reverend Thomas, I said, "Reverend Thomas," I said, "God used you to make me do what He wanted done, get what He wanted done."

Jerald,M.:

So that meaning the people of mainly Scarborough area? The Scarborough area? But I know it's anybody in the community of

Ayers, R.L.

Oak Ridge itself, but you were speaking from a historical standpoint --

[20:06]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

-- that church was put together --

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

-- based on the people that basically started in the secret city.

Ayers, R.L.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

That right?

Ayers, R.L.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

You were here.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I was here.

Jerald, M.:

So were you here with the beginning of that church?

Ayers, R.L.:

Oh, yes, I was. Before the church even started. We had a place we called it up in the woods. It was a big dormitory up there and that's where everybody had church, whether you was Methodist, Baptist, or Presbyterian, or what. Everybody had church there. And I -- me, I love to go to church. Sunday morning, I get up to go to Sunday school and I'm there all day long, you know. My neighbors tell me, say, "R.L., you outta stay at home," or "let's go to the nursing home, let's do this, let's do that." I said, "Okay, as long as I can get back, go back to church."

[20:56]

Jerald, M.:

[laughing]

Ayers, R.L.:

'Cause I wanna give God that one day. But anyway, I came out of the woods with Oak Valley, out of the woods with Oak Valley. I told Reverend Mims (phonetic sp.) who was at Mount Zion, I said, "Really, I belong to Oak Valley and Mount Zion, too." 'Cause wherever Mount Zion was, I was there; wherever Oak Valley was, I was there. So. And it's been like that.

Ayers, R.L.

Jerald, M.:

And now, let's talk about your family. Let's talk about your boys. I know you like to talk about them, I see you smilin'.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, yes, yes.

[21:31]

Jerald, M.:

They were in this community and I know they did okay, done well with you being around.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well.

Jerald, M.:

And getting them in school. You have two boys I understand.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I have two boys.

Jerald, M.:

And tell me about them.

Ayers, R.L.:

They had to do right. Because I was always there. I went to work - at the hospital, I changed my shift to midnights so that I could be there with them to see that they were doin' right and doin' what they was supposed to do. And so that's what I did. I went all the way from the boy's club, that was before they even got into school, all the way from there, I went on to Alston P. University with them.

Jerald, M.:

Is that right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, I did. I followed them all the way [laughing], and I told my youngest son, I said, "When you walked across that stage at Oak Ridge up there at Blankenship Field (phonetic sp.)," I said, "I started crying." He said, "For what, Mama?" I said, "Because you walked out of my life." I said, "I saw you walk right on out of my life, but I'm glad." And so they both are doin' fine. I followed them all the way and if anybody told me anything that they couldn't come home and fix it up the way they wanted to sound and tell it to me, I checked it out.

[22:58]

Jerald, M.:

Now, you were telling me one of them calls you every day.

Ayers, R.L.:

Every day. Every day.

Jerald, M.:

Every day. How long has he been away from home?

Ayers, R.L.:

Oh, he been away from home [laughing] about 10 years, I guess.

Ayers, R.L.

Jerald, M.: And he calls you every day.

Ayers, R.L.: And he calls me every day. If there's something on his mind. "Well, Mama, I just wanted to call you." I told him I was going to come for this interview today. He called me at 7:30 this morning. Yeah.

[23:25]

Jerald, M.: What message did he have to give you?

Ayers, R.L.: He said, "Mama, I just didn't want you to miss your interview." I said, "Michael, do you know what time it is?" I said, "The interview is not until this afternoon." He said, "Well, okay, then, I love you and I talk to you later." I said, "All right." [laughter]

Jerald, M.: Yeah, he's quite a character, I can tell.

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, both of 'em is. Both of 'em.

Jerald, M.: Yeah, I know both of them are. That's -- calling you on a daily basis. That's great!

You know -- you've done such a great job on just talking, you know, and you've done a lot of things. There isn't much more I can ask you to talk about, but I know you can talk. What about your book? What is that subject going to be on?

Ayers, R.L.: The way it was.

[24:15]

Jerald, M.: The way it was. What do you mean?

Ayers, R.L.: How it was when I came here.

Jerald, M.: How it was. How was it when you came here?

Ayers, R.L.: [laughing] How was it?

Jerald, M.: That's all we've been talking about, isn't it?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, that's all we've been talking about.

Jerald, M.: [laughing] I wanted to make sure I wasn't missin' out on anything.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.: When you read that book, then you'll go back to the topic there, the way it was. People will say, "I know it couldn't have been like this," but it was.

Jerald, M.: I understand that they had recreation in the area. An outdoor theater down on the corner or something like that? Sky View or something like that?

Ayers, R.L.: The S -- Sky Way.

[24:49]

Jerald, M.: Sky Way.

Ayers, R.L.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.: Sky Way. So was that an outdoor theater?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes, it was.

Jerald, M.: So you had a what? All you can what -- be in an automobile or something? Was that the type it was?

Ayers, R.L.: Uh-huh. (affirmative) You could go sit on the ground, but see, didn't any of the blacks go to that.

Jerald, M.: Oh, oh really?

Ayers, R.L.: Uh-huhn. (negative) No, they didn't.

Jerald, M.: Why? Was that a white establishment or something?

Ayers, R.L.: Yes. Yes, it was.

Jerald, M.: Okay, so for recreation, you were mainly just among yourselves?

[25:18]

Ayers, R.L.: They just had that one recreation hall in Scarborough. They had a recreation hall where that you played -- if you wanted to play basketball, you could. If you wanted to play cards, you could. If you wanted to dance or listen to the music, they had a (indiscernible) in there. And they had a pool in there. So whatever they wanted to do, that's what they did. There was a curfew at 10:00, though.

Ayers, R.L.:

Jerald, M.:

Well, see, because I asked one of the other people about that and that was the curfew? Wow! Why would there be a curfew?

Ayers, R.L.:

Because you had to get -- you had to be where you supposed to be at 10:00 at night. The black --.

Jerald, M.:

Based on who's rules?

Ayers, R.L.:

I guess the Department of Energy.

Jerald, M.:

Did the white people have a curfew?

Ayers, R.L.:

We don't know. We didn't know whether they did or not because there was none over there. You had to be in that hut 'cause there was a hut check.

[26:22]

Jerald, M.:

A hut check. How long did that last?

Ayers, R.L.:

It last until -- well, until the gates came down.

Jerald, M.:

Until the gates came down?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

So, would you think that hut checks were checks to make sure that somebody else in there, too, that shouldn't be in there? Or what was this all about?

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, see, there wasn't supposed to be but four people in there.

Jerald, M.:

In there?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

So they were -- did they call by name or did they just look it up? I mean who did it were there men came in there?

Ayers, R.L.:

The -- the guards did that.

Jerald, M.:

The guards came in where the women were?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Ayers, R.L.

[26:58]

Jerald,M.:

And looked in to make sure that you were in there asleep or something?

Ayers, R.L.:

They came -- nobody would be in there asleep at 10:00, but make sure that you were there.

Jerald,M.:

Make sure you were there?

Ayers, R.L.:

And nobody else were in there because if you was, you wouldn't be able to get out of there because they had this fence and this strand of barbed wire was electrified so you couldn't get in our get out of it. Nobody wanted to do that. You could get electrocuted by trying [laughing], so. No. Uh-hunh. (negative)

Jerald,M.:

Man, my mind just doesn't accept the extremeness of what was called -- I don't even want to call it security. [laughter] Because I mean, what are they securing themselves from?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, that's true.

Jerald,M.:

You know, I mean, it's just the extreme. So if there's a --.

[27:46]

[crew talk]

[End Tape 2]

Jerald,M.:

Well, I know she got a lot of stuff.

Ayers, R.L.:

And the half will never be told. [laughter]

Jerald,M.:

What was that? Did that come off earlier?

[crew talk]

[00:34]

Jerald,M.:

Miss Ayers, along with your book, I understand that you've done other writings? You've done other things? Tell me about some of the things you've done in the past or you've got information? Where, the library or something?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

You know what I have always done if -- just like you and I are carrying on this conversation, you have a pad and a pencil and I'll write down what you said on whatever we talked about. And somewhere, something will be made of it. So, I have always liked history. Always. And I would always write up stuff that went on in church, stuff that went on in schools, something that went on in the streets and everywhere else. Yeah. So.

[1:40]

Jerald,M.:

You know, I'm going to ask you something here and I don't know - -I know you will get on the wavelength with me. You know. I still look at the Scarborough community right now as an established community parallel to the huts. Am I right or wrong?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, you're right.

Jerald,M.:

I'm right, right?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.:

I want, now, believe this or not, my voice is going to be cut out of this interview. I need -- you need to respond to me in sentences.

So the Scarborough community, tell me that the Scarborough community kind of parallels the huts.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, the Scarborough -- really, the Scarborough community is not a part of Oak Ridge. Now, you know that, don't you?

[2:33]

Jerald,M.:

No.

Ayers, R.L.:

It is not. The Scarborough community is a reservation. It's not Oak Ridge, and it wasn't Oak Ridge until we started trying to integrate the things and pull in -- the black people in to the ty -- into the city. See, we was not a part of Oak Ridge, really. We --.

Jerald,M.:

See, the problem that I have right now, because I feel part of the community because I was the project manager with the soil sampling, I got to know a lot of people. So here I am and I'm in the community to find you, Mr. Reed, and Mr. Steele (phonetic sp.), Henderson (phonetic sp.), and so on. But my -- through my travels, through the streets I'm looking at, some young men that they're in trouble.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald,M.:

And they're in trouble! Now, where can we go with this? Is this something? We're looking at a community that was kind of like established, you know, put over here's not even a finger of the hand. And it's stuck over here right below the foothill of this -- this ridge.

[4:21]

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

And I drive through this community and I see these young people and they're in trouble. I mean, now, see, I'm looking at an establishment that I still want to say that it was established by our government.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald,M.:

Okay.

Ayers, R.L.:

It was established by our government. But it seemed that nobody cared. You know, the young people, I guess maybe because the parents had been separated from their children, when their children did come, they was -- let them do everything that they wanted to do simply because -- I don't know whether they thought they was helpin' them or not, but they wasn't helpin' them. After a while, the children got out of hand; is nothing they can do with them. They're on the streets; I'm sure that you've seen them on the streets.

[5:20]

Jerald,M.:

I'm concerned about them!

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes, yes. They're on the street, they do not respect anybody, care nothin' about anybody, and --.

Jerald,M.:

And this is the Scarborough reservation.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Scarborough reservation.

Jerald,M.:

Scarborough reservation.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Ayers, R.L.

Jerald, M.:

Well -- I'm sorry.

Ayers, R.L.:

You cannot let your -- I don't care how much you love your child, you cannot let your child get out there and do what he want to do. You have got to keep a closed hand on your child. And that's what I did on my kids. And I have the respect for those boys that you see on the street today.

[6:06]

Jerald, M.:

I know. But let me ask you something. Did the people need the government to reestablish another community that was just like the one you were leaving from? Couldn't they just break down the fence and just say, "Hey, you guys got a job and go out and buy you a home"?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) They could have, but they didn't.

Jerald, M.:

Were they trying to protect somebody, or were they trying to hold onto something?

Ayers, R.L.:

I have no idea. I have no idea. Uh-huh. (negative) You know, when they had everybody barred up over in Scarborough, should I say, well, I shouldn't use the word barred up, but they were over there and couldn't go out. And the ones that was trying to break the barrier --.

Jerald, M.:

What do you mean?

Ayers, R.L.:

Fix it so that anybody out there could go across town, it would've been much better if it could've spreaded out. You know? Like --.

[7:12]

Jerald, M.:

Two or three different communities.

Ayers, R.L.:

Right. Exactly right. Not all blacks stuck off over here in Scarborough if they could've moved out across town and everywhere. But the white man didn't see that until it was really, really, well, almost too late. But after we started, we decided that we were going to break the barrier, they opened the doors for five, five black families. And that was the five black families that I was tellin' you about earlier.

Jerald, M.:

You don't have to call them names.

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, anyway, they offered us a house across town that we could move out. So three of the families accepted it. Two of them dropped out.

Jerald, M.:

And at that time?

Ayers, R.L.:

I -- when they came to me and told me that I could move over near the school where my kids would be going to school, which would've been Rulerbook School (phonetic sp.) and I asked them if anybody out in Scarborough wanted to move out, if they could move out. And they said no, said it's only offered to you five families, to the five families. I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I cannot accept that. So I'm going to stay here." So I stayed in Scarborough 'cause if I had left Scarborough, they would've had nobody to turn to.

[8:50]

Jerald, M.:

Who delivered this message of any five --choosing the five families? Who was doing this? Was this the city government, or who was that?

Ayers, R.L.:

The school board.

Jerald, M.:

The school board.

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes.

Jerald, M.:

The school board.

Ayers, R.L.:

But the school board got their orders from some -- from higher up. But it was the school board that told us that. Yup!

[9:12]

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh, uh-huh (affirmative). Let me ask you this and we'll get to a closing point. During your stay at K-25, did you see any famous people coming around since you were there at the beginning?

Ayers, R.L.:

No. No.

Jerald, M.:

You didn't see any presidents or anybody come through, senators and all that kind of stuff?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

No. When the gates came down, President Kennedy, he wasn't the President at that time, but he came here. But that's the only person that I saw.

Jerald, M.:

Is that right? You had a chance to see him?

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative) And that was over here at the Elza Gate (phonetic sp.). Was where he came in. At the Elza Gate. And that was when they say they was goin' to relocate the black people from the K-25 that was down there, they was movin' 'em all out. They was going to relocate them and put them over near the Elza Gate. And of course, the black people was at that meeting and I attended every meeting that was held, every meeting. Because they always had a change of heart or change of mind in the second meeting and I was always there to find out what it was. Well, after that meeting was, they decided that they would put the black people over here in Scarborough. They had a change of mind. So I came back and I was tellin' everybody, you better go back to the next meeting because they not going to put you at Elza Gate. They said, "Oh, R.L., you just run your mouth all the time." That's what they told me. I said, "Okay, then." So they found out [laughing] that what I was tellin' them was true. But it was too late then to do anything about it. It was too late.

[11:00]

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There were good things about people having the opportunity to travel from other states to come here and get a job making good money. But there were bad things about establishing a community within the guidelines that it lived and the main one being segregation and that area grow from the standpoint that you take down the fence, and it's just like what we read today in our history books. Indian reservations out in Oklahoma or reservations here and there and all -- we all know those are established by government rules.

[11:54]

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure.

Jerald, M.:

So that same term, terminology, so that same term is what was used for the creation of Scarborough?

Ayers, R.L.:

Yes. Yes.

Jerald, M.:

Reservation?

Ayers, R.L.

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

Man, I can't believe that!

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, believe it; it is true.

Jerald, M.:

Well, if you have anything else to say, that is, if you want to talk about something, that's fine. The floor is yours. I think you've done a great job. You delivered some good information. You've really opened my eyes about -- one of the things that I talked with L.C. about. There's got to be some kind of program, something established to help those young people on those streets over there. I don't know. Government wise, I don't know. I don't know what type of interest programs there would be, but there's got to be some kind of programs.

[12:56]

Ayers, R.L.:

Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Jerald, M.:

I told him I'd help him look into it, but we'll do something like that.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, good. That is good. You have got to have somebody that have patient with 'em. They already build up a complex. So unless you have the patient with 'em because what they'll say or what they're going to do is not going to be right all the time, but if you have patient with them, then they will come in to whatever, you know, your program is. They will come in and listen to you. But if you go and -- I'll guarantee you the first, second, or maybe the third meeting that you have, they're not going to pay you any attention at all. But if you keep after them, they will. I've dealt with 'em from. So.

[13:52]

Jerald, M.:

All right. Well, it's been a joy to talk to you. You've shared a lot of good information.

Ayers, R.L.:

Well, thank you. I don't --

Jerald, M.:

You know that you're a beautiful person. And I appreciate you. Okay?

Ayers, R.L.:

Sure.

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Ayers, R.L.

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Jerald, M.:

Okay. All right. We can shut it down.

Ayers, R.L.:

I appreciate you havin' me.

[End of Audio]

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