

Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
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Oral History Interview
with
Sister Kay Burton
By James Chapnick and Ryan Koons
Durocher House, Jonestown, Mississippi, USA
November 5, 2008

Interview with Sister Kay Burton

Interviewed on November 5, 2008

Location: Durocher House, Jonestown, Mississippi, USA

Interviewers: James Chapnick and Ryan Koons

Transcriber: Ryan Koons

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Ryan Koons: Okay. This is the November 5 interview with Sister Kay Burton. Sister Kay, would you please say for the camera that we have your permission to record this interview?

Kay Burton: Yes, you have my permission.

Ryan Koons: Thank you very much.

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm.

Ryan Koons: Over the past week and a half, I've had the pleasure to spend a lot of time talking with you. Could you tell us a little bit about how you came to Jonestown?

Kay Burton: It starts way back in 1974. In 197- well, earlier than that, actually. I was teaching in Seattle at an inner-city school for, well, actually, I taught there a total of 17 years. And I had,

over the years, I had many students that had roots, their parents had roots in—am I supposed to looking at you [looking at Ryan]?

Ryan Koons: [Laughs]

Kay Burton: —had roots in the South. And, they were always afraid of the word "Mississippi". It just, whenever it came up, or anything, they were just, really afraid. And I can understand why, as time's gone on, and especially coming down here. So, anyway, in 1974, I did a tour of secondary schools in the United States, mostly the Eastern and then some in the South and kind of the Midwest. I did 56 schools to see how they, how these schools were able—Catholic schools—how they were able to take eighth graders going in to ninth graders that were undereducated and be able to prepare them for college and how did they do it, what was their curriculum, and how did they do it financially. So I did that for the year. And in the course of this, I went to Memphis, and was able through, at a workshop, I met a principle, a Sister, from Clarksdale who was in charge of the high school at IC—at Immaculate Conception—school in Clarksdale. So she invited me to come and to teach at their school, at their small school. And, I couldn't do that at that time, but anyway, we kept in contact, and four years later I asked permission and got it to come to Clarksdale and teach at that school for two years and to learn. Did a lot of learning. My idea at the time was to begin some sort of interaction between students in Seattle and the students in Clarksdale. Just kind of get something going. So I came, I spent two years there are teaching, and in my homeroom, there were two young ladies the first year. They were too young ladies from Jonestown. And they were undereducated, far beyond what a person would expect in a secondary school. One of them had a reading level of December of

first-grade. And the other one was , like, a third-grade level. And I had them in a class, too; they were not only in my homeroom but I was teaching them and I demanded or tried to demand as much as I did from, really, the students I had in Seattle. And they were, they tried really hard and it was very difficult. Anyway, I came out to Jonestown to visit their families and, at that time, there was no mandatory education in Mississippi. It didn't come about until 1984, so there are a lot of people on the street, a lot of children on the street. And, anyway, I thought to myself at that time that if there's anything that we Sisters of the Holy Names can do in Jonestown or in this area, we should do it, because we're educators, we're teachers, and they, the people here have been left out and in fact punished for trying to get educated. So I decided to do that. And when I went back then after the two years of teaching, I got actually called out of teaching to do a special program in Spokane, Washington, for the Sisters of the Holy Names and then I did that. And in the third year of the program—which was called Heritage and Horizons—in the third year of the program I was selected to become the provincial, or, in other words, the president of the Sisters of the Holy Names in Washington state. Which we had about 300 and some sisters at that time in Washington state. So, what I did then was sent four sisters to Jonestown. We bought a house, fixed it up the best we could, and those four sisters came in 1984. And Sister Teresa is still living here; the others have all died since then, they were older and they've all died. But, anyway, then I did my presidency for six years and at the end of that time I wanted to come back here because I wanted to come here in the first place. But in the meantime, the school in Seattle closed, as did IC, the high school in Clarksdale closed also. So—for lack of money. And, but, in Seattle, our students amalgamated with Holy Names Academy students, another Academy that our sisters run in Seattle, so they go to that now—students from Immaculate. So, at the end of the six years, I knew in my heart that it wasn't just enough to educate people

because there'll always be somebody coming behind and the need would be going on going on going on and we ourselves couldn't be doing here that forever because, I wasn't all the old time, but I knew we'd be getting older and we don't have sisters coming in behind us, we don't have young sisters coming in to take our places. So, I just thought it's a good idea to try to encourage people here, at least a few who have a bent toward service, to help, to do, especially in education, to help educate those coming behind them. So that's why I established the Service Development Program. And we do all kinds of volunteer things—not only in education, but that's the central point. And we do a lot of that. People from outside come in and volunteer and now over the past five years or so, young people from Jonestown that had been through our tutoring programs and so forth are also volunteer teachers for summer school, for example, or for other things like last night: we had this program of seventh and eighth graders teaching those little girls, you know, the little children. They were really cute! And they did a nice job. Anyway, and then, also promoting, or, not promoting so much, but enabling persons from outside who want to come in and volunteer in this area—especially in housing—to rehabilitate or to do, just help out in housing. I provide them a place to stay and I provide the work for them—I provide the place. And I choose the place, by the way, according, to, like, a family who has a member in it who is involved in trying to get themselves better educated, especially in GED and/or doing volunteer work in the community. Because there are a lot of places that need help, so that's the criteria I use. And I just spoke this morning with a young man from Gonzaga University, Spokane; they are making their arrangements. They're, like, the last one; everyone else is made them for the spring break period. Let's see, so how's that?

Ryan Koons: That's great! You mentioned that blacks in this area would be punished for trying to get education. Who...

Kay Burton: All over Mississippi.

Ryan Koons: Yeah. Who would punish them?

Kay Burton: Landowners sometimes would take them off the plantations. I'm talking about earlier; it was actually violent: very violent. But if they got "uppity," then they would take them off the plantations, their home might be burned, you know, just, things like that. They wouldn't be, they wouldn't be allowed to do certain things by the white majority, or white minority. Whatever it was. Anyhow, those in charge wouldn't allow them to do it.

Ryan Koons: Why?

Kay Burton: To get "uppity?" Because they would be the same, they would be educated.

Ryan Koons: No, why would the minority or majority come down upon the blacks...?

Kay Burton: For that reason, to keep them, to keep black people uneducated and working for nothing, really. That's what amounted to, working for very very very little wages, hardly anything. This, I'm talking about now in the recent past, you know, until, really until the casinos came in as far as a, the economy goes: wages. But prior to that, yeah. They had like, they didn't

have school, they didn't have mandatory school until 1984. It's not very long ago. And that came about because the NAACP in 1965 filed suit against the state of Mississippi in the way that voting lines were drawn because, even though hardly any black person had gotten voting rights at that time, still, the lines were drawn in a way that nobody could get elected, no black person could get elected to the state legislature. So, they filed suit, the NAACP filed suit in 1965 and they lost. And then they kept appealing. As time goes on, takes a long time for all this, they kept appealing, and they kept losing until 1982, I think it was, 1982, yeah, it was because we were teaching summer school here in the summer that the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of NAACP and against the state of Mississippi. So they had to redraw the lines. And when that was done, then blacks were in fact elected to the legislature. And one of the first things they did, along with Governor William Winter—who's a good guy—they established mandatory education. And when, you know, when that happened, well, prior to that, the federal government had ordered schools to be desegregated, and so that happened in the late 60s, around here I think early 70s. It's not that long ago either. But rather than desegregate, the white families pull their kids out of school, out of the public schools and set up private academies. So, we say we're desegregated but all the children in public schools around here are black.

Ryan Koons: Could you tell us a little more about the Sisters of the Holy Names? What they do as an organization nationally, internationally, and in Jonestown?

Kay Burton: Okay. Well, we were founded in 1843 in Montréal, Canada, by Mother Marie Rose Durocher, that's what her religious name came to be—Eulalie Durocher was her name. And she started us, she and two other ladies. And the reason that they did is that at that time there was

not school for poor girls. There were very few schools for girls anyway, but some of them—the richer ones—could go to a boarding school in Canada, in the Montréal area. But, the poor children could not and there was a lot of abuse and—of all kinds—they weren't treated well, and so she and the other two started a school for girls like that, vulnerable girls, the poor girls. And then to help pay for that, she also established a boarding school for richer, actually, the richer children came to the boarding school to well, I don't know who was rich and who was poor and all this whole thing, but anyhow, some of the richer girls that were in school and they helped to, of course, to fund the whole thing. So, but the reason for it was for the poor—the little girls could not get into the school. So, gradually that expanded to little boys too, same thing, especially the poor. And so we have continued that to try to get to places for education that are where people are vulnerable or undereducated and so forth. So, now, how do we, we had schools in, we have schools and we had schools all over the west coast, in Washington state, both, all over the state really and organs, all of the state, and California, all over the state now, as times gone on. And, on the East Coast in New York, Albany, in Washington, DC area, and down to Florida including all the way to Key West, Florida. So, what's left of all that; we also taught in parish schools, so, they weren't owned by us, but we taught for the parish. But, the academies that we established were owned by us and they were for the poor and they got to be very good and the rich came, wanted to come to, so now we have very good mix in all those academies. We have academies left in Seattle; Portland; Oakland, California; Los Angeles; Tampa, Florida; and Albany, New York are our academies. Now, in Jonestown, we came to educate and so that's what we're trying to do.

Ryan Koons: What is your curriculum?

Kay Burton: My curriculum?

Ryan Koons: Specifically in Jonestown.

Kay Burton: Well, both Sister Teresa—she has younger children, so they have the Montessori school which Sister Deanna teaches, she's a BVM, she's trained in Montessori, so she teaches that. And then they have a toddler program for little children—babies really. And then, after school, both of us have after-school programs. Sister Teresa has its own grades one through five, no six, no five, because I have the six graders. And I take the six graders through, actually, through college, or whatever, whoever needs to come and get some help. I used to have sixth—like about 20 sixth graders in about the same number of seventh and eighth graders, and I used to have a lot. Maybe 50 children would come in here every day to get tutoring. But, in the last, how many years? Six years or so? All of the schools have their own, their own after-school program. So the elementary school has it, the junior high has it, the senior high has it. So, there's not the same need for after-school tutoring for me, that I do. But, what I do is help anybody who needs particular help to have them, and then get some help, so. Now our summer school, our curriculum there is academic. We have two parts: a first session and a second session because we have different groups of teachers. The first section is, it starts right after the children get out—sixth, seventh, and eighth grade children—get out of public school. And, we can't take everybody, we stop at 25, 25 children. And, but they take the first session taught by Jonestown volunteers, young Jonestown volunteers and myself and maybe one or two others. We have things such as chess, we do plays, poetry, some kind of vocabulary development. We

do algebra, geometry, I don't know what else we might do. And carpentry after school, and tennis, and softball all the way up into the evening. The second session, the academic portion of that is taught by different groups of people, different volunteers that come in, and some of them from Jonestown. But we have, but there we have typing skills, and math—individualized math—reading. Usually two different writing classes because that's a skill but lacking. We have science. We have usually Spanish. So, we try to take all of those areas. And, but you only take that for a month. Take that school for a month. The GED program is just the curriculum of the GED. It's the same across the country. It's the same program. So, it's a high school equivalency.

Ryan Koons: And how many students do you have?

Kay Burton: Right now I have 28 or 29 on the roll. But, there are, they have to be in class a certain number of hours and take a certain number of tests in order to be classified as a full GED student. And of that kind I have 13 right, well, I have more than that right now. But as the end of October I had 13 that met the criteria. In attendance on a daily basis, usually eight or nine, usually.

Ryan Koons: I noticed that you have quite a large number of books in your front room dealing with African-American themes in one way or another. Do you use is when you're teaching, or...?

Kay Burton: They're for checking out, and for teaching. When I used to have after-school on a regular basis, we had research—we did research papers during the month of February—the whole month. So the children would use those books for that. But mostly, actually, mostly,

probably for checking out. There's no other library in the city yet. I'm hoping that when it comes, if we get one, many of those books can go to that area.

Ryan Koons: Okay. Do you include civil rights philosophy, history in with your teaching?

Kay Burton: Well, with research I certainly do. In the Girls to Women II, our black history program, and even our Christmas program, we do a lot, we have a lot of plays, and some even that the girls have written, like about Fannie Lou Hamer. They wrote a play about her and they put that on every year. They wrote a play about Ruby Bridges and then, other than that, we'd do some plays that we got little books, like, I don't know, The Lunch Counter, and The Freedom Ride. We do those. I think we have about five plays on our program. And we're getting ready to do another one on Winston Hudson, that lady, we're probably going to write a play about her. So, we do that kind of thing. And that's a Girls to Women. In that program is every evening, different groups, and parts, except Wednesday and Saturday, well actually, Saturday too. Wednesday and Friday are the two nights we don't have it.

Ryan Koons: How did the Girls to Women class come about?

Kay Burton: Well, many years ago, Sister Teresa started a program for fourth and fifth grade girls to help them learn about sexual activity and their bodies and all that, and self-esteem—to help them to grow up with a lot of self-esteem and able to carry on their lives, go to school, and so on. When they finished that program, actually it was for fourth and fifth grade, well, anyhow, when some of those young ladies got finished with it, they were in the seventh grade and they

were coming here for tutoring. And so, they asked me if I would start a Girls to Women for them, for the older ones. So I said, "okay." So, we started; we called it Girls to Women II because it's, like, a carryover from the first one. So I don't know, let's see, how many years, I don't even know how many years ago that would be. Many; maybe that's enough? Because that group that were in the seventh grade at that time are now, like, third-year college and still come. So now we call them Girls Now Women. We just started calling them out. And they meet on Sunday afternoons. So that's how that started. Actually I was asked by the girls themselves to, you know, for program. So, we do it. But I don't... my programs and Sister Teresa's is different in many ways, but one of the ways is that theirs is structured, like, maybe seven to eight weeks and then they have a little graduation and so forth. But with mine, we start at the beginning and we just go and go and go every week every week every week to the end of the year. And then I ask them, usually ask them, "are any of you able to help me teach summer school this year?" The volunteers have come out of that group and some GED students, too, to help teach summer school. There are about 50 of them now, altogether.

Ryan Koons: Wow. That's great. You mentioned a Service Development Program. What is that?

Kay Burton: Well, it's like the foundation for this, for here. The development, I guess I could say that, well, I have a belief that everybody has, within them, or, not everybody, but most all people have within them the desire to help somebody else if they can, if they're able to do it and if the opportunities there and they feel comfortable doing it. So, and the need is here; there's need for people to help each other. So I guess the development would be that, to work with

people so they become educated for one thing, provide other opportunities like music, the piano lessons, concerts; sports: with their body; and gardening: the beauty of things. Just provide all of those opportunities so a person, well-rounded, has a better sense of themselves, I think, and feels able, that they're worthy of giving to somebody else, giving service to somebody else. So, and then, of course, the opportunity has to be there. What will they do? So I work with that, to provide the help, anyway. Either provide directly the recipient—the recipients—or promote it, kind of mentor, like, with the older ones, some of the older ones, it's a lot of mentoring and helping them because they don't have any experience with grant writing or, you know, a lot of things, so just to kind of mentor them through some of that. So they could experience and pretty soon they're mentoring me.

Ryan Koons: You mentioned music lessons and I know in the past two weeks we've seen Ms. Fields teach piano. How did that start?

Kay Burton: Well, that started in the very beginning because, before I ever arrived here, I said, "we're going to have a piano, were going to have lessons. It's going to be a part of it," because, for one thing Mother Marie Rose, in the first, when she, they had music from the start in our community. Music and it's been big in all of our schools everywhere, for all these years. So I wanted it here, too. But the other thing is that I know from scientific studies that music helps students, and the other thing is that the children here wouldn't have an opportunity to take piano lessons. So, it gives them an opportunity to do that and I have grants and some donations that pay for the teacher, so the children don't pay anything for that. But then I ask them, you know,

"you help somebody else now. You've got to help somebody else." Everyone who comes in gets help. They've got to help somebody else.

Ryan Koons: Creating a service network.

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm.

Ryan Koons: How does the community, members of the community who are learning piano, how they react to it?

Kay Burton: The community react to the children who are taking it? Well, like, "wow. They can read music, they can read notes." They like it. They like a lot. A lot of them want their sons or daughters to take lessons. A lot of children want to take lessons, especially when they hear somebody who's able to play. But then they get, you know, they thought it would be like that, and they've have there, to be able to play, and it's not like that, so, you know, we have to, first of all, make sure that they want to do it because it is expensive: to start somebody and have them stop right away. It's not good. So, but, we've had them since we started in 199— I think the first year we didn't even have a piano the first year. Well, there was one here, but it wasn't any good. But we did a little something with it. And then the second year, though, we had a teacher and we got a piano, so it would be in 1990 we started with lessons, and had them ever since. Now that we've had a lot of children go through the program and many of them are, like, in college now or that age and they took it for many years. But now we are at the point where we have to start some new ones. So, there are only a couple that are more advanced. The rest of

them are pretty well beginners. Either second year students or some are first—just getting started.

Ryan Koons: How have they reacted music especially those advanced ones who have been with a while?

Kay Burton: How have they reacted?

Ryan Koons: Sorry, not reacted: changed?

Kay Burton: How they changed? Well, I don't know whether it's my imagination or whether it would have happened anyway, but those students who took lessons all that time, they did very well in school. They are doing very well in school. So... but I have found over the years that like... we were going to go to the graduation at Aggie [Coahoma Community College and Agricultural High School] –the students are graduating from Aggie. We should have like 50 or 60 students from Jonestown that graduate. But there, like last year, there were 48 or so from the whole class. And that takes Friars Point, Coahoma, Lyon, some from Clarksdale, and Jonestown. So you know there's a lot of big huge dropout. They should be 60 from here if they all would go through—left sixth-grade and would go on through there should be that many. Then be some, normally there be some dropout, but that's way too many. But anyway, I found out the students that started here coming to after school in the sixth grade or did, or the boys, especially boys, but there are a lot of boys who came to after school too. Some of them did softball and other recreational things with me who didn't come to tutoring. But the majority of

those came to tutoring. Anyway, there were 25 this one year in 1995-96. There were 25 that graduated from Jonestown. And every single one of them had come here. Everyone of them had come through here. Now that started me thinking, "now is this, what is this, what's going on?" And so I kept track of years and that's what's happened. That's exactly what happened. But...

Ryan Koons: Those 25 who graduated in 1995?

Kay Burton: Yeah, 1995.

Ryan Koons: What are they doing now?

Kay Burton: Well, a lot of them finished college, some of them got a masters degree, some are still, you know, kind of working and trying to pick up a little college here and there. I think the majority of them went onto the community college afterwards and some went beyond that because they're in their, like, 30 now, 30 years old, I think. Aren't they? Wouldn't they be? If they were 18 in '95 or '96, that's 10, 12 years ago. They'd be 30 now.

Ryan Koons: I've also noticed that along with piano lessons there, Ms. Fields, is it just one night a week or several nights a week? Singing?

Kay Burton: One night a week. That's with the Girls to Women.

Ryan Koons: So did that develop a piano lessons or...?

Kay Burton: No. No, that developed out of the Girls to Women program. With so many of the youngsters coming every day, the girls coming every day, and so, the oldest ones, the Girls Now Women helped me develop a new program just this year. It's the first time we've done it, which is to have different activities on different nights. And one of the activities that any of them can come to is the singing. But usually it's the seventh and eighth graders, and there are plenty of them. I mean, if we got anymore than that it'd be chaotic.

Ryan Koons: No more room in the room!

Kay Burton: Yeah, no! So, anyway, it comes from Girls to Women and providing them... now there going to go down to our church next Sunday and sing, so we're excited about that. So, it helps them to stay focused and learn. I don't know. So, anyway. That's the first time we've ever done. Now Ms. Fields has over the years, for several years, just before we had our Christmas program just before we have our black history program, she takes them for singing for those two occasions and so they... So usually they're about 25 or 26 and the choir, in their choir. Which is really nice... a lot of these girls are in choirs or they do a lot of singing in their churches. But there aren't that many together, so, they like that too. They like getting together to sing.

Ryan Koons: What other types of music are there within the community?

Kay Burton: I don't know. The school doesn't have music in school anymore. I think just church choirs.

Ryan Koons: Is that "Gospel music?"

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm. That'd be what they use at church for their services.

Ryan Koons: How important is that in the church service in their daily lives?

Kay Burton: How important is...

Ryan Koons: How big a role does it play?

Kay Burton: Their gospel choir? Their gospel thing? Well, I think they couldn't have church without it. I don't think they could. And, they like singing. So, I don't know how to answer that any other way. Yeah, people like to sing.

Ryan Koons: How do they use it within the church service?

Kay Burton: Well, I think a majority of their service, as far as I know, is a lot of gospel singing and preaching, giving testimony, a lot of music. A lot. Offering—giving the offering.

Ryan Koons: You mentioned earlier grants, that you had written and you were helping others to write and train them to write. What grants have you written over the years?

Kay Burton: Well, I've written a lot. Especially to get started here. I don't know if you want to know about all those because some of them got refused, of course. And every once in a while I still write for one here and there. But the majority of funding for me comes from donations and a few grants here and there. But the grants that I've helped the students with, especially were the Dreyfus Foundation for Health. And then there are some individual people who like to, who want to help out the programs here. And so they ask, like if there are the kids program activities, they ask if they can be, if they will write a grant. So I teach them how to write a grant and they, they don't have any forms, but they follow a form that I know and write for that.

Ryan Koons: What kinds of things have come out of the grants in recent years?

Kay Burton: The track, track and field; the tennis court; the basketball court; the playground equipment over here, that whole section, the playground area for children. The Spot of Serenity up here. Those are all the ones I've helped out with. In recent years too, it hasn't been that long, the last four years, I think? The last four years.

Ryan Koons: Would you talk a little bit about each, the story, the back story of each one, please?

Kay Burton: [Laughs] Okay. Well, let's start with the first one which is the track. That was really the first one. Well, I'll have to back it up to our softball games. I started having the girls come and play softball. We had that for maybe about a year and then the boys wanted to come and play too so then we started having the boys and the boys would come. At first we played down at the school, down at the old elementary school back on their field. We played down

there. Which was a little distance and especially when I had to take everyone there, you know, in that little Toyota van and bring them back. It was, you know... So then back here before this project area was built, that was just a jungle, a field. It belonged to somebody that lived in Memphis and that was just a field. So I asked a family member, a cousin, of the person who owned it if, permission to clean it and use it for baseball. They said, "fine." So I did. So the kids and I, really, we did it. We just cleaned and cleaned and cleaned. Then the sisters in Spokane knew that this was happening and they did a little fundraiser so that I could get a little riding lawnmower. And that was like '91 or something like that. '92? I still have. Still works out there, and it's in the shed. So then we cleaned back here for several years. But then they came with this project that here. So we lost that field. Then we saw a place that the city owned, over behind the projects in the area next to the water tower. And so we cleaned that the same way. We had to clean it from the beginning. Except that was worse because it had a lot of rocks in it. A lot of rocks because it used to be, had some homes, some mobile homes and had some gravel. But anyhow we cleaned that. And Mr. Burnett helped. We had fundraisers and we got a fence. And then he helped by—we had a carpentry class, too. We have a carpentry class. But anyway, he helped the carpenters, taught them how to do some welding, and they will do together some benches, four dugout benches. We got the fence up, benches. So we used that field, which was very nice, and it worked well, for maybe, I don't know, four or five years? And then, guess what? There's another program that came in with housing, so we had together there because they put those houses there. So then we looked around and found behind the school, which by that time, the elementary school, the primary school, which is located there, had closed and they had built onto the elementary school down here, so the children are all down there now. So it was empty and the county gave that, the County School District gave that property to the

town of Johnstown. So we went over there and we started cleaning. We cleaned the whole thing again. Cleaned, and cleaned, and cleaned that space to play softball. Because softball is a big thing around here. We start it around March and play every weekend until school gets out. And when school is out its every night, every night from 6:30 or 6 until it gets dark. And just, really, hundreds of people who are involved in it. So it's a big thing. So anyway, Jason Jones and a whole bunch of other kids, Marcus Burnett, a lot of them who came and who have been coming since they were in the sixth grade and by this time they were, like, 18, 19 years old. We were talking one night, getting things all put away—I keep all the equipment, all the equipment's back there in the shed. And, so, we were saying, I was saying to them, "it'd be so nice if we had a place to walk. If we could walk around here to be very nice because it's so busy on the street and the streets are full of dogs and potholes and cars and everything. And it's kind of difficult." But I had tried to walk down there and it was soggy because it was a bad situation. Plus it was filthy and junky. So, anyway, so they thought, "yeah, that be really good. We could do this and this and this." Then, so a couple lawyers from Nike came to Memphis to do some work up in Memphis and one of these lawyers was the daughter of a person who works in our development office in Spokane. So she told her daughter about here. So this daughter called me and asked if she could come down here and visit. So I said, "sure." So they came down and then Jason and I took them around in the van. We went all around everywhere including the field. And Jason talked about his dream about having a track around there. Nike does really rehabilitate tracks but they don't build them from scratch. But anyway, so, we talked to her about that. And the more that we talked, you know, it's just like, it got firmer idea, like: "maybe we could do something." And so then, Sister Manette came one day and she said that she had had a grant from the Dreyfus Foundation for Health, because she had the clinic up here. And they had asked her to get

involved in small little grants that would help the community build up a health. So she'd been involved in that. So she asked me, and they told her, "it's got to get bigger than that, it can't just be this small little thing, so ask other people to apply for grants." So she came to me and told me to apply, she told a whole bunch of people to apply. So, I said, "oh my goodness." And just about the time Jason came over here and so I said, "Jason, do you want to go to a meeting about Dreyfus Foundation for Health?" And he said, "sure." So I told him a little bit about it and he was 18 at the time or 19—I guess 19—so then he said, "well maybe I can get Jeremy to come with me." Jeremy was like a senior in high school, or a junior in high school. So I said, "okay." So it's on this Friday night we went down to Madidi's [Restaurant in Clarksdale], that's where the meeting was being held, and, actually, they went down, because I had a meeting in Rosedale that night, so I couldn't go. I was going to go the next day. So they went, and they had, we'd already done a lot of talking and preparation about it, so when they went in there with all these other people to learn how to, to do this, what is all about, then they made such a big impression that pretty soon they were, like, little stars, these two kids, really these two young men. And so then, the next day, it was my turn to go, I could no longer be on this committee. I couldn't be on it because I'd miss the first day and you can't miss the first day. So, I thought that was the best thing that ever happened. I went anyway, I was there, but I wasn't on the committee, so these kids did it. And so we wrote the grant, they were the grant with my help. And then we got it, and it was for about \$500, that's all. And then they started; Jason's part of it was to clean the area which was a jungle down there, you [indicating James] haven't seen it, I don't think, but you [indicating Ryan] have seen it, many times, and I pointed out to you the place where, what it looked like before. So they started with their bare hands. The \$500 bought them no equipment, they used the money for cookies and cool drinks. And he had volunteers, every Saturday for two

months down there on a Saturday afternoon and they just, with their muscles, and I mean, these kids would jump up into, up and grab a limb that was dead and hang on it and hang on it until it fall down and others would call it away and that's how they cleaned. Plus all the junk that was on the ground. They just cleaned and cleaned and cleaned, we all did. But mostly kids. And so then, at the end of the two months, Jeremy's part was—and Jeremy helped clean, too—but Jeremy's part was to organize a walk to show the town of Jonestown, who had already received a grant for a nature trail, but hadn't gotten the money for it. They got the permission but not the mind because they didn't have a good plan. So, to tell the city of Jonestown to get that grant, do what you need to do and get us something here, because we want it. And we're proving it to you by walking. So, he did all, they did the work; we had meeting after meeting here and all kinds of people helped out making signs and doing all kinds of stuff. And then they have the walk and over a hundred people were there, about 120. And it was enough to wake up the town, they went to the town hall down there, where you [indicating Ryan] were, and they said, "well, what we need is a plan and we can use this plan the you have outlined, and we also need matching funds." So we worked out that, because that's what was holding them back, so we worked out that the in-kind volunteer service that they had given for the two months—all the Saturdays—could count for the in-kind money that was matching. So they did that. And so it came. So there came the track. And then, after that, the second year, Jason reapplied, because his idea was, even though there was a lot done, there was a lot yet left to do. And so the second year's grant was to have it so that we could take a mower all the way to the cotton field. And now that happened. I mean it is amazing, it's like a miracle. I wouldn't ever believe that that could happen. It's just totally amazing. So, anyway, that was the first one. And then, Jason's brother, Rodney, loved tennis, even though he didn't know how to play, he still loved it. He taught himself, really, he used a

book—an encyclopedia—to learn how to play. And he would go to the tennis court and he would, you know, he would play, and he would clean. First he'd have to clean because there's a lot of broken bottles on the tennis court, and the tennis court itself was broken up, it wasn't in good condition. And so then, but he did his best. He did that for a full year. And once in a while somebody else would come and play with him. And then the person who helped me with other, with some other funding, called and asked if there was a project that somebody was doing that could use some help. So I told him about the tennis court. And he came and he met Rodney and he was so taken by him that he not only funded the renovation of the tennis court but also the basketball court. But anyhow, but to start with, Rodney did a Dreyfus Grant. He also went to meetings and did a grant proposal and got \$600, something like that, to do his thing. So, then after that, it was the girls down here with the Spot of Serenity. And they said, "well, if Jason can do that, we can too." So their project—but that wasn't Dreyfus, that was part of Girls to Women. When they were studying stress and how to deal with stress, they learned that, in a book, a little boat, that if they did something for somebody else, it helps stress. So they talked about different projects that they could use to lift some stress. And they chose that spot down there which was another I couldn't believe it! I did not believe that they'd, for one thing, choose it, because it was so bad, and secondly, that, could they ever do anything or would they ever do anything. I just couldn't believe it. But...

Ryan Koons: Sorry, where was the land? The Spot of Serenity?

Kay Burton: The Spot of Serenity? It's down on 2nd St, across from...

Ryan Koons: What was it before it became...

Kay Burton: It was a broken down buildings; brick buildings that had fallen in on the main street side and lofted jungley, you know, trees had grown up in it and poison ivy and everything. And on this and it was, like, a garbage dump. I mean, a big garbage dump. Huge. The size of this room. Garbage all over. Terrible! And the whole place was just full of beer bottles and whiskey bottles and every kind of thing you can think of in that place. And those girls, they chose that. I couldn't believe it! And then, you know, the long and the short of it is that it's done. It got done through their going to the City Council to ask permission to do it, and then they had to find to whom the place belonged and go ask that person permission and then go back the City Council and ask them for a little help in getting a dumpster. And they got a lot of help, they got a dumpster free from the county. So that promoted everything. And they set a date and they started cleaning, and even though it was a minor cleaning, it made such a big difference. Everyone can see it was such a big difference. And they got a lot of help, too. People came to help them. It was amazing. So that was very encouraging. So we just kept setting different dates and cleaning. And then they wrote for a grant, because this man who, another man, who wanted to help, asked me to tell them to write a grant, a grant proposal. So they did, for about \$2000, \$2200, I think. And they got the money and they used it for what they asked for, which was a cement picnic table and bench and then a trash can after that. And, just gradually, it's gotten better and better. So now, that's it.

Ryan Koons: Where did Lizzie come from?

Kay Burton: Who?

Ryan Koons: Lizzie.

Kay Burton: Oh, Lizzie? Lizzie the Dragon? Lizzie the Dragon, Lizzie the Dragon of Serenity is made of junk, metal junk from the community. And it was put together, welded together, by our sister who's a noted—worldwide practically—noted artist who does all kinds of art, that one of her specialties is welding art. And Mr. Burnett did that, helped her with it, to set it up.

Ryan Koons: If I can stop you there for a moment while we change tapes.

[Tape change]

Ryan Koons: You were saying about Lizzie.

Kay Burton: Oh yes, Lizzie is totally made from scrap metal in the area and the girls named it "Lizzie, the Dragon of Serenity." They named the Spot of Serenity because one of the things that they, when they were working at why they wanted to do this, was they wanted to have a place where it was peaceful and quiet and serene. So, and that's why. And then we had to name it to ask somebody for something—I think we had to have a name or we thought we did—so they came up with "The Spot," because one of them said, "well, let's have it called "the Spot"—"Da Spot." And so I said [phone rings], "well, how come ? Why?" and they said, "because when

people will hang out there at night and then when they... you want to just answer that thing? Just say "hello."

Flosha Tejada: [speaking on the phone] Hello? No... [speaking to Sister Kay] Burnett... Lauren Burnett?

Kay Burton: Lavern. Lavern Burnett. Okay...

[Tape paused]

Ryan Koons: You were talking about "Da Spot."

Kay Burton: This girl who proposed that name explained to everybody else, "well, we go to school on a day and we say, 'well, where were you last night?' And suddenly everyone else will say, 'we were at Da Spot!'" And so, we made it the "The Spot of Serenity." We put those two things together, and made it the Spot of Serenity. So Lizzie is the Dragon of Serenity. And one of the good things about that, is that, you know, her, that sculpture, is Mr. Burnett's part in it. Because right afterwards, then, and even today now, he starts building and welding, and he's an artist actually. He's a very good artist. You know, he could be. He doesn't have, had no training, but he's done some things in welding, even little art pieces that he's done. So, that's good.

Ryan Koons: You also mentioned the park and the play area. Could you talk a little bit about the back stories?

Kay Burton: Okay. All right. Well, in the city park is where the tennis court is and the basketball court and it used to have some swings that were working in other kinds of things to over there, years ago. Okay, well, one time when I went to the bank, where we [referring to Ryan] were this morning, Tanya [Campbell] said, she said, "there are lots of things now, I mean, the older children can play ball and they can play tennis. But there's nothing for the little kids. Nothing for the little children." And so, I said, "well, why don't you get a committee? And you can start something." And so over the course of the year, it was a whole year of thinking about that and talking about that and she got a few magazines, something off the Internet and so forth, about playgrounds. So, at the end of the year, she and Mary Smith, they went to a Dreyfus meeting, and they proposed getting some playground equipment for the children, having a little program of exercise for the children. And so they actually got accepted, but they've actually never gotten any money from them. And in the meantime, I don't know what happened to Dreyfus. I don't know. Anyway, they didn't get any money. But in the meantime they just started working. And so they did fundraising, they did some fundraising. They had a lot of meetings and working at it and getting the place, you know, they did all the groundwork they had to do to get permission from the city and all that. They did all those things and so, once again, the gentleman who helped with the tennis court or did the tennis court and the basketball court asked me if there was another project. And so I told him about this and he helped with it. He did some matching things with some of the other fundraising events that were going on. And so they got it. They got enough to get the equipment that's over there and also some young people and

adults from St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Seattle, they have come here every June for a week, a week's worth of work for the past four or five years. And so they installed the equipment. So that's saved a lot of money to do the installation so that's how it got done.

Ryan Koons: You also mentioned, I think, you were just finishing or just starting—I can't remember which—to write a grant to get a chipper for the community? What's that for?

Kay Burton: Well, that has been submitted, that grant. And that is to the State Farm... State Farm. I don't know what else it might be called. But anyway, what happened with that was, the background of that, is that Lance Burnett, well, for many, a few years, Mr. Burnett and I have talked about how nice it would be to have a chipper in this area because there's so much burning of downed limbs and everything, you know. It would just be nice to have a chipper. But, you know, it's expensive and so forth. But we had a catalog and we looked at the price and all that stuff and nothing ever came of it. And then Lance came home from Alabama where he spent the last several years. He came back over here and he's been doing some work for me here. And he was, just in talking, he say that, because I told him, I bury all my organic matter, you know, so it goes back into the ground. And he likes that idea. And he said, "I've learned about compost and how things are because I worked for MiracleGro, or something like that, over in Alabama." And he worked for them and he knew what they did in order to get something that's sellable. And so he said, "it's not hard." He said, you know, "just use organic things around. It's all here, instead of wasting it." So we were talking about it. Then, in the meantime amidst all kinds of very very busy time, especially me here with the robbery that had gone on, and trying to get that all fixed up and we had sisters that came in from all over the country, really, to be here for a while.

It was very busy and somebody popped in with this grant application and said that someone had recommended me, that they give this grant application to me. And it had to be in about three days. Maybe four. I think three or four days, that was it. And, but, the reason that they were kind of insistent on trying to do something—it was a 21 page application, by the way—to do something was, her brother, this young lady's brother, and, I think he's in Philadelphia, his good friend works for State Farm. And he's on the youth board that does something with grant applications. Every year they give grants around the United States in different regions. And he said that they had never received one from Mississippi. So, he said, as long as his sister was done here, you know, this year—she's from up there, too—as long as she's here for a couple years, then to see if we could get somebody to write the grant. Well, here it was due. Well anyway, so I said, "oh my goodness." So, anyway, I said, "well, we'll see what we can do and it may be rough but we can try it. If we can't do it, we'll at least start. And next year we'll know better and we can do something." So, the Girls to Women II, I mean the Girls Now Women, at the meeting on Sunday, on a Sunday, and I and another sister who was visiting here, we just went through this thing line by line and worked out the whole thing and got Lance—I had already talked to Lance and Mr. Burnett about a chipper, which we had all talked about for years, and composting, which we also talked about with him, and he's very interested in all that. So, we rode out of grant that says in essence that the Girls Now Women would be the, they would be the recipients of the grant and that they would hire, but they wouldn't buy a chipper, and they would buy a little pickup, and then they would hire a machine operator who would be Lance for \$5,000 a year and Lance would donate the rest of his salary which we put down as being, like, \$20,000—he'd donate the rest of that. So, anyway, we did 21 page thing and it's a good request, I think. And we got help from the young lady who gave it to us in the first place plus another

man who does grant writing—a young man—grant writing in Clarksdale. We did all the rough work and they took at it, asked us about various things, and then they did a really good write up of that thing. 21 pages and sent it in, on time. So we think we might get it. If we do, I think it's written for \$65,000 which I have never done anything like that before. Usually we get \$500 grants. So, [Laughs].

Ryan Koons: [Laughs] I know that at one point you and I think at least one other member, person from Jonestown went to South Africa.

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm.

Ryan Koons: What was that experience like?

Kay Burton: Well, it was really wonderful.

Ryan Koons: What did you do in South Africa?

Kay Burton: Two from Jonestown went with me. We went to Lesotho because our sister, we have sisters there, Lesotho sisters; about 100 and some sisters that are there. That's their province. And I am very good friends with one of them who is, like, my age. And we were presidents of our various provinces; she of Lesotho and I of Washington at the same time. So we'd have general meetings; we would meet together and so forth and we became very good friends. And she stayed in office for four years; I stayed for six and, while she was still in office,

she stayed in the United States long enough to travel with me down here to Jonestown and the sisters were already here. And so she was here and she was, like, amazed, you know, at the situation here and we, we would just always talk about, wish we could do something together, you know, between our sisters in Lesotho and the people here, wish we could do something, you know. Something to help both. And, so then, I went out of office, she was out of office, so neither of us had any power. But we stayed friends for all these years and then, like how many years later? 22 years later, or so. We're both getting older and she, one letter she wrote to me said, "I think we're never going to get, we're never going to be able to see each other again. You're never going to get to Lesotho and I'm never going to get to the United States again." So, at that time I thought, "I think maybe I will do this." So I used scholarship funds. I asked permission of people who had given because, a lot of people are interested in, well I talk to them, and then they become interested, and then they become committed to, like, people from here, getting educated, but be able to come back and do something here. And it takes money to do that, you know, it's not easy to do that because there's not the work here. But be able to come back and do something, anyway. So, several, about three people had contributed to, like, a scholarship for college students from here, kids from here, who've been involved for ever, do, you know, do a lot of volunteer work, and so forth, and are good students, have provided scholarships for them to go. So I asked permission if I can use some of that money, that scholarship money, to take two people from Jonestown to Lesotho. So I wanted, I wanted to go, because my friend's there, but we were not going to set up anything because we're just old people know doing our thing in our own countries. We have no ability to start anything together like that. So, but I thought, "now these two from Jonestown, they'll be able to do something. I don't know what, but they'll be able to do something, I think." I know both of them very well

and they're wonderful. So, that's how I justify the expense of the whole thing. So, we went in May. We didn't have a very long time. So we went on May 12 and returned on May 26, I think. We started summer school, actually, the next day. So while we were there, we stayed overnight in Johannesburg and then we went up to Lesotho in a little plane. The sisters met us, we went to one of their missions and stayed there for a couple days and visited all of the missions in that area, in that particular area. There's a lot of them which I had heard about for years, but of course didn't know anything about. I mean, I knew about them, I didn't, I'd never been there. So we visited those and we also took some money over for the AIDS, the HIV-AIDS project, because there is so much need over there and the young sisters are working against that and they have many projects that they're doing. And so we took a little money. We already had sent over some, we took a little bit more over when we went. And then we went, Sister Mary Agnes is the name of my friend, and so she lives in QwaQwa which is in South Africa. So we spent the majority of time in South Africa and QwaQwa, [obscured] and visited many many places and just, you know, with people and so forth and so on. The experience was wonderful for all of us, especially though because those two people from Jonestown were there. And they were just like, "hmmm." Especially with Patricey. Patricey is now at Southern Illinois University. She's a fourth-year College student. And they kept saying to her, she said, "you..." Well, for one thing, for both of them, the sisters would say, "what is your first language?" And they said, "English. It's the only language we have." And they said, "no. What is your first language?" And they just couldn't believe that they came from the United Stat, actually. They couldn't believe that. And all the visitors they ever had over there were white. But anyway. And then they kept saying to Patricey, they kept asking her, they said, "are you sure you're not Lesotho?" And she said, "well, I don't know. I have no idea." [Laughs] And she heard that so many times that she's,

and everybody says, "yeah, you are. You're Lesotho. Your facial, you know, everything. Your color. Everything. The shape, everything. You, your..." So she loved that. And they ended up giving us all, but especially them, names—Sesotho names. And they made dresses for everybody. The people there were very crazy about those two. So then, I don't know. We said our, said goodbye. And since then both of them are very committed to doing what they can to, especially to continue this project that we have of raising some funds for their HIV-AIDS work that they're doing there. We saw a lot, we saw a lot of projects over there that they were working on. Anyway, they're very committed. So I think it was a good thing to do. As for me, it was great, because I got to see, you know, something I've wanted to, you know, I wanted to do with us for many years, so that was really great. But the better thing was that they went.

Ryan Koons: Has your experience in South Africa and Lesotho compare to what you're experienced and do here in Jonestown?

Kay Burton: Well, the sisters there have schools. And their school system, of course, is so different. It's the Cambridge model. And so, there would be, like, hundreds of children, and high school students, whatever, in the schools. And there wouldn't be a sound. Something that's different than what we have in our schools! There were many many many hundreds of orphans in our schools, too. Many of them stay, they board with sisters because they don't have a place to go. Others stay with, there's a whole bunch that stay in, in like, several together in one of the homes. Their parents are all gone but they stay together. So, you know, all that sort of thing is very different from around here—totally different. The... Of course the area, the geographic area is very different, too. It's dry, dry there. And of course they have big ant piles like that. We

saw zebra and monkeys out in the wild, and all kinds of things, you know, in the wild, not in the park, just out there. You know, coming between QwaQwa and going back into Lesotho areas there we saw the area. We saw big dams taking the water from Lesotho way down to South Africa, or up to South Africa. I don't know; it's kind of hard to compare, really.

Ryan Koons: What about the situations at people in both places?

Kay Burton: Well, there, the people, come after water every day. The sisters, all the places where the sisters are, they have a... it's like, a well, and it's open for people to come and get water. There's a constant flow of people coming in for water. So you know that. Now we didn't going to very many homes. We went into a couple, but not very many. So, I don't know what that was. I could see the places that weren't, just little shacks, barely. We saw many of those. So, I don't know. When we were there too, electricity was off more than it was on, I think. So we had dinner by candlelight every night. And, of course, the water didn't work because the waters by well, I mean, by motor pump. So, we didn't get any water either. And that was with the sisters. So I don't, with people, they had to struggle along with that. And the children coming to school. That's different, because you see them all walking, everywhere. For miles and miles, walking. But when Sister Mary Agnes came here she was shocked. She was really shocked.

Ryan Koons: By what?

Kay Burton: The poverty. The situation here.

Ryan Koons: She did not experience that poverty was she was working?

Kay Burton: I guess, well, there is that, but it's different. It's just different. I think she just thought that, like everybody does, people from Seattle are shocked when they come here. I don't know if you were shocked when you came, but a lot of people are shocked. It's like, how can this be in the US, to have such a situation as this?

Ryan Koons: Why is Jonestown so poor?

Kay Burton: Well, there's not, until recently, there's not much tax base because of white people moved out when the mandatory desegregation of schools occurred in the early 70s. So the tax base is, there's not much here. I don't know how many landowners there are, but there aren't too many people who own their own place. Housing is very, most of the houses came in off the plantation after the plantations were, you know, mechanized and no longer needed the hundreds of people—sharecroppers. Then, I think all, especially the park, and some areas around, every house just came off the plantation. And they, you know, pieced together, fixed up a little bit and terrible lighting, terrible... there's some people who have to do it themselves. There are a lot of fires get started on account of gas problems and electric problems. But, until, really until the casinos came in, there really was not a wage or anything. Men who were able to work, they left and they worked in other places just like in South Africa, actually, and Lesotho. Those men had to leave. That's why the AIDS thing is so bad when they came back Christmas time once a year or so. And here too, there wasn't work here. The few jobs on the farms driving those tractors

after, you know, after the sharecropping stopped and then the ladies would do, the women would do domestic work in the area in the spring. They don't do this anymore because they used the herbicide spray, but until a few years ago there would be people who would be out in the fields chopping, they call it "chopping cotton," chopping the weeds out of the field. So that was work. That was high school kids and women were out doing. So, but now when the casinos came in it provided some work. So a few people have bought some trailers, some mobile homes, and maybe some homes, even; I'm not sure. I don't know how many have been able to buy property. Unless a person owns property, their own property, like, some of the houses of the volunteers who come here that they work on, if they work on a house that doesn't belong to them, it is very quick that the owners will start charging those people a higher rent for it, even though they had nothing to do its betterment and the only reason it got improved was because of the people who are living there because they were dealing with, you know, they were with me, especially with GT—taking that. So, it's, I don't know any more than that, I guess.

Ryan Koons: You mentioned with desegregation, the white population in the area left.

Kay Burton: It did, yes.

Ryan Koons: How did that affect education?

Kay Burton: Well, they would not, there weren't levy's passed for years to improve the schools or to improve anything. So, I don't know. I really don't know what the educational level was before that for black people and what may have changed exactly afterwards. But it, by '84,

everybody had to go to school. The children all had to go to school, the first grade. And the next year they had to go to the second grade. So there had to be some change there. But, the whites, they just set up their academy systems in Clarksville and every place throughout, really throughout the state. Yeah, their own system. And their parents are not interested in funding, paying the tuition for that and keeping those schools going and having them be pretty high-class and at the same time pay for public schools. It just didn't happen until very recently and there were some... One of the superintendence kind of shamed the County, together with the state, because the state was going to take over the school system, take over the County school system unless they got the buildings in better condition. So that's what promulgated the renovation and building on of the elementary school now, down here, they left down here and went on over there because the state would have taken them over. And the people in the county didn't like that idea, that the state would take over their school system. So they agreed to pay some taxes.

Ryan Koons: How has the curriculum, or the quality of education changed since desegregation?

Kay Burton: I don't know how to answer that exactly because I think the quality of the education has been changed with the testing, the mandatory testing that's been going on both by the state and by No Child Left Behind. It's changed the way the teachers teach and all that. So I don't know what's what: what's from desegregation, so-called desegregation and what's No Child Left Behind, difference. But they're struggling. They're really struggling. You could look in the, you could look in the, you know, the Internet, and get, I think, results in educational proficiency. I haven't done that, but I hear that it's not good here.

Ryan Koons: How you see the legacy of Jim Crow and segregation laws in daily life here in Jonestown?

Kay Burton: Ask that question again?

Ryan Koons: Sorry. How do you see manifestations of Jim Crow in daily life here in Jonestown?

Kay Burton: I really think you would need to ask somebody else about that. I'm not sure. I really don't know, but I do know this: when I have taken some adult GED students—especially a few years ago, to... or even other people, adults, older adults—to, well, first of all, to a museum or, like, for example, the museum in Memphis, the Civil Rights Museum. When, you know, the bus [exhibit]. When they got on the bus and heard the driver say, "move to the back." I mean, they were so afraid. They were so afraid and got off of there so fast and terrified. Now kids don't do that. But they did. That meant a lot to them because that's what they had to live through. Now, I don't know how many opportunities around here the people had to even ride in a bus, because there wasn't a bus system, there's no bus around here to be riding in. The little children that went to school, black children went to school two or three months out of the year, they walked. They didn't have a bus to take them. And there was no black child in a white schools. So, but anyhow, I saw that effect. And the other thing that I've experienced is that to take some people to, well some adults, I took, my brother came and we took some people to, down to Jackson on little field trip. And we stopped in some place to get something to eat. And they said, "are you sure we can go in there? are you sure we can go in there?" That was, caught

us aback. It was hard, hard to deal with that. And we said, "yeah, you can go in there. Come on, we'll all go in." So we went in, and they were served and everything, but they didn't feel comfortable. Not was an uncomfortable feeling for them. I also, that's making me remember a park. The park, Sardis: the Lake which is about 50 miles from here. When I first came to Clarksdale in 1978, we, another sister and I took, took a lady that was good friends, an older lady is good friend of ours over there to see it and she could see that it was pretty but she was so uncomfortable because they could never go there. That was not a place where they were supposed to go. And so she was so uncomfortable she couldn't enjoy it. So, that effect. The first time I took the kids, the girls, bowling in Clarksdale, the first group that went, they asked me, too, they said, "are you sure? Can we go in here? And now we do it all the time and it's very integrated now. But the beginning it really wasn't.

Ryan Koons: When was the beginning?

Kay Burton: Well, that would've been in 1994, 93-94, when we first did that and they said that: "can we really go in here?" and I said, "yes, you can." And, you know, we had a good time and everything was fine. But the fact that they asked the question. I don't know what else to, because I don't know what all, but, you know, like Tanya [Campbell] said this morning; she'd be a good person to ask! [Laughs] And her mother and other people who really lived through that, you know, really experienced it. But, you know, when the white people moved out of here, just everyone who had child, left. This place was more than half white, Jonestown was. That's gone. They just left. And that didn't happen in, like, Tutwiler or Lyon or other places around; Friars

Point it didn't happen. I don't know why it happened here, but it did. Is that Jim Crow-ism? I don't know what it is. Don't really, don't know.

Ryan Koons: This morning you told me that, I think that, was it yesterday, you heard some girls in the back of the van talking about being made slaves again?

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm.

Ryan Koons: Could you contextualize that?

Kay Burton: Well, we were, the voting, hadn't, was still going on when I picked them up to take them to this program. And normally—these are seventh and eighth graders—normally it's not quite at all when they get in the bus, in the van. But they were quiet and I could hear this talking going on in the back. But I heard was, "they're going to make us slaves again." And somebody else even said, "we might as well kill ourselves."

Ryan Koons: Referring to Senator McCain's potential...

Kay Burton: If McCain, mmhmm; if Barack Obama didn't get elected or, I don't know what else. I didn't ask them what they meant, exactly. I think that's what it was. I don't know. Why would they become slaves again because he wouldn't get elected? I don't know. I don't know what was going on in their heads. But anyway it was serious. Very serious, because they were very quiet and talking that way. Then, later on, somebody mentioned that again and I said, "you're not ever

going to be slaves again. Don't say that. You're not going to be slaves." And, so, it wasn't completely over, but they were a lot livelier by the time we went home

Ryan Koons: Where do you see Jonestown in the future, especially now that Barack Obama will be the next president?

Kay Burton: Well, I would hope that some of the housing programs that have been started and then had to stop—they've in stopped the last eight years—public, public housing and help for housing could resume: it's kind of bad in this economy. It's just, those other programs just stopped in the last eight years. So that would be really good if that could happen. The school, I hope they do something with that No Child Left Behind program; change that. That would help a lot. Some, I don't know, I don't know. A lot of things depend on the economy. That might not, but a lot of things, I think depends on the economy. The infrastructure. We need some help with the infrastructure here. But, I myself, and this is just my own personal thing, I think this is not ever going to be a place where there's going to be, like, manufacturing, you know, or any big business coming in here. I just don't think that's going to happen. But, I think it could be a really nice, like, which it already is, a place where people feel so comfortable and live happily in here. If the housing could be better, and, like, the sewer system could be better. The water system's getting better but it could even be better than it is. The sewer system. In other parts, you know, just to make living a little more humane. And the housing situation. And if that could happen, I think that would be good, and then, you know, people could go to the jobs, go to their jobs, return, and have a nice place to live and be comfortable and all that. That's what I think. I don't know. We need recreation; if it could be some recreation facility in the town like a building of

some kind or something for kids to do because there really isn't any. So if any of those grants, again, once again, become available, that would be good, really good. Maybe it's possible. I think though, that from my experience of just talking with young people, not the seventh and eighth-graders, with the older ones, yesterday, that there's a lot of hope and seemed like a little commitment in their voices and in their eyes, that I never saw before, for the future. So, maybe that will happen. That'd be wonderful. Involvement. It'd make a lot of difference.

Ryan Koons: Yeah, I know that the town was very excited last night when they heard the news.

Kay Burton: Mmmhmm.

Ryan Koons: Up to this point I haven't spoken very much about religion, but as a sister, as a nun, how does religion play into your, what does it mean in your work?

Kay Burton: Well, it's the reason why I'm here. So it's pretty basic. And, I think to help other people is, not just for me, but that's what I've tried to encourage with everybody that I work with, so that's part of the whole thing, too. We do not, we do not try to proselytize—try to get anybody to become Catholic—at all. We don't even ever do that. And thank goodness we're not required to do that. [Laughs] It'd be difficult! But we're not required, and in fact, when we, we had to request to go to the bishop to come here, you know, to have our sisters here, and we were told to educate, not proselytize. So, because education was lacking. Faith in God is not lacking here. It's very strong. So... then, what else can I say? I guess... I kind of forget the origin of your question, where it goes, but I think, as far as other people, the effect of us on other people is

concerned, some people have told me and told us, I think, that they, really, I think, maybe not these words, but the idea's that they appreciate that we act and don't talk about religion. We act with Christian love and integrity and don't talk about it. So they kind of appreciate that. Mrs. Burnett was telling me that the other day, she said, "I notice you don't ever, you never preach about anything. You just do." Yeah. I'm glad I don't have to preach because I would not be comfortable with that at all. So I'm glad.

Ryan Koons: How do you see the role of religion in the civil rights movement?

Kay Burton: Well, how I see it? I just hear it. I just hear, you know, I've just read about it, you know, the great role that the church has played in organizing and having a place for people to meet and leadership and all that. I don't think the, healthy to happen without a. Schools couldn't do it at all. So, it had to be in churches.

Ryan Koons: Is that leadership and that place still existing right now? Here?

Kay Burton: Well, I don't know, I think that's, I think that I don't know about that. So I don't know. I think you'd have to ask other people that question.

Ryan Koons: Before we end, what do you think of the current Mississippi state flag?

Kay Burton: Oh I hate it. [Laughs]

Ryan Koons: Why do you hate it?

Kay Burton: Because it's racist. It's, to me it says, "we don't ever want to be together, you know, as equal. And as long as we can have this flag that shows that we have some power, we'd been the white people who care like that."

Ryan Koons: Is there anything that you want to talk about that I haven't asked or any the questions that you want to answer that I have not asked?

Kay Burton: You've asked a lot of questions. Let's see. I don't think so. I think that's plenty!
[Laughs]

Ryan Koons: [Laughs] Okay. Thank you so very much.

Kay Burton: You are welcome. Thank you. Thank you both. I hope you [referring to James] didn't get too bored.

Ryan Koons: [Laughs]

James Chapnick: No, it was great.

[End of Tape]