

Introduction: This is an interview with Mrs. Lillian (A.) Walker, February 13, 1993. She is being interviewed by Theresa Harmon, a student at the University of Washington at Tacoma.

Question: Where were you born?

Answer: In Illinois.

Question: When?

Answer: In 1913.

Question: What part of Illinois?

Answer: Carrier Mills. It's about 70 miles from Carbondale. There's a college in Carbondale which is about 70 miles from my home [in] Carrier Mills. We lived out in the county but it was still Carrier Mills.

Question: Do you have any brother's and sisters?

Answer: Oh yes, I have a brother living in Seattle, and I have a brother back in Carrier Mills.

Question: So you grew up with two brothers?

Answer: [Yes] There's 7 [brothers and sisters] dead and none of them [lived to be] over 6 or 7 years old. One was born with a heart problem because she was blue and she lived about 4 hours. I sure hated to see her go because I wanted a sister so bad.

Question: Did you grow up back there?

Answer: Yes, I grew up back there. I came out here in '41.

Question: What were your family values, like religious values, and did they [your family] value education or volunteer work?

Answer: One thing my daddy insisted on that, we go to school. We didn't think about not going to school. When I hear, like I have one granddaughter that for two years or probably longer that skipped so much school sometimes and ran away from home till her mother (my daughter) didn't know where she was. I never even played hooky from school a day in my life. I never thought about it. Well, I asked my daughter one day when her daughter was gone I said, "I don't remember you ever thinking about even skipping school or at least you didn't say anything about it, or playing hooky". She said, "I was afraid to". I said, "Well that was a good thing that you heeded that". But I never ever thought about playing hooky from school. It's just something you just got up and got ready to go to school in the morning and a lot of times I had to walk half a mile, milk a cow, get the milk back home and then get ready to go to school.

I didn't even want to be late to school. And when I went to high school I had to walk about four miles. Now if it was a deep snow our dad would hitch up the team (we didn't have a car) and take us to school, and any of the other kids along the route. This was in the town of Carrier Mills.

Question: Did you also grow up with religious values?

Answer: Yes, oh yes, we went to church every Sunday and if there was activities during the week we went to that. We had socials at the church where we would have say hamburgers and hot dogs and play games and things like that. Our church was in probably a 3 or 4 acre lot and on this the church set, and the back of this was the cemetery where from counties around everybody came. Their folks were buried there. On the 30th of May, Memorial Day, we always had a Memorial program in the church. The night before Memorial Day the men of the community (this was a Baptist Church) whether they belonged to it or not, got hams and shoulders and barbecued them (stayed up all night) in an open pit. And then the ladies would make ice cream, homemade ice cream and pop to sell and barbecue, barbecue sandwiches or barbecue dinners.

Question: You do so much volunteer work, did your parents do volunteer work? Your mother?

Answer: Well she worked in the church. They didn't have volunteer work per se like they do now. We had a neighbor that was sick, well sure the women, different women, went in and helped take care of the family or take care of the kids and things like that. But we didn't have it then like we have now. There was no area agency on aging or Lutheran Social Services and things like that.

Question: How do you feel your family influenced you, your parents, did they influence you to be the kind of person you are now?

Answer: Well I think so. I guess they did. When you are raised a certain way I just never thought about anything else.

Question: You said your brothers, you thought, helped you to be an independent person. Do you still feel that way?

Answer: I feel like we are very close now, well we were close then. We had no alternative. We were in the same small house but, yes I think that was the reason. Of course, I've always been independent even when I was a kid. If I can remember right, I was always independent and I definitely never let anyone bully me, you know, any kids.

Question: So you have always been outspoken like you are now?

Answer: Yeah, I always have been, I never held it back. Nobody knows what you're thinking if you keep your mouth shut, nobody knows what you're thinking.

Question: You told me when you were in the first grade a little girl started to call you names. Tell me what happened?

Answer: It was the 4th grade. My dad was a farmer and we had moved to the farm and he farmed on the proportions you know. The owner of the land furnished all the seed and he took a portion of the crop and my dad got the rest of it and so whatever he raised was his and so forth. And now I forgot the question.

Question: About that little girl calling you names?

Answer: Oh, the school was probably about a quarter mile away and when I went to school it was a one room school house. My brother and I, this was the brother that was close to me, there was about 6 or 7 girls in my class and that was all that was in my class in 3rd grade and they just would not study and didn't know their lessons or anything and so the teacher put me up in the 4th grade. And so then one evening after school, after we walked out of the school grounds and this little girl called me a bad name and I proceeded to hand my books to another girl and cleaned her butt with my fist. So we became closest friends after that. We didn't have any more problems after that and she'd come to my house and play. I'd go to her house and play. We did not have any more problems after that and we became the best of friends.

Question: Do you have any children?

Answer: Yes, I have Jimmy Jr. that was born in 1945 and I have a daughter, June Marie that we adopted in 1950. She was born in 1950 and we adopted her when she was about 8 months old. And I lost 3 girls prior to that and we didn't want to raise our son alone. And so that's why we adopted a girl.

Question: What is your social background as far as clubs, or volunteer work or?

Answer: Well I guess my first social I think it was in the church I worked in when I came to Bremerton. Well at home too, back in Illinois, I worked in the Sunday School and I worked in the BYPU, in the Baptist Young Peoples Union. And we met every Sunday afternoon and we had programs and we discussed the Bible and we discussed the community affairs and the everyday life and things like that. I remember one teacher said "You don't have to go out and spend money on magazines, you can find any story you want to read in the Bible. Murder, sex, anything you want to read you can find it in the Bible". Now I think he is right you know. When I came to Bremerton well I worked in Sunday school. We joined church and I joined the missionaries. When my brother came to live with us I joined the PTA. When Jim came along (our son) [and] he went to kindergarten well I joined the PTA. I stayed in the PTA but joined at another school because my brother was going to high school. And then I went from that and joined social clubs like the Carter Civic Club which is a part of the Washington State Association of Colored Women's Club which is a division of the Regional Association of Colored Women's Clubs which is part of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc. And I have worked and I have been in committees from the National on down. On National I worked in the election committee because every two years we have an election and I

worked on the polls and helped run the machines and things like that. So, I've worked and later on I got started in the help with the Y. So I worked in the divisions of that and in the later years, in the last ten, twelve years, something like that, I've worked on the Area Agency on Aging. I worked 6 years on that and then I worked on the Senior Citizen's for Legislative Action and then the Lutheran Social Services [LSS]. They have the respite program here in Bremerton and, I can't think of the name of it, the people they send out into the community to help with a terminally ill patient. We are trying to raise money for that. The program [is] coming up a few weeks from now, it's going to be held at the high school, called the Oregon Tea, I believe. They put on a play and there's charges for it and the LSS gets a certain percentage of the money. I think that about covers all. And then I work in my church; I make the bulletins. I been doing that for 4 or 5 years or more.

Question: So have you ever been employed outside the house then?

Answer: Yes, I was a bookkeeper for Kitsap Community Action Program for a couple of years. Then I left there and went to the People's Federal Credit Union and worked in their office until I got sick in 1980 when I had Cancer. Well then I quit, I quit everything. I joined a garden club about 12 years ago and I have been in that and been the treasurer of that I guess for 10 years or so. I think that about covers my career.

Question: So were you active at all during the Civil Right Movement when it was going on in the 60's?

Answer: Oh yeah, the NAACP. I didn't mention that I joined. I helped start the NAACP here in Bremerton. And we helped get a law on the books, because when we first came to Bremerton, colored people couldn't go and eat in any of the restaurants. They didn't want you to eat. They wouldn't feed you. They wouldn't serve you, and they said they couldn't serve. Well the waitress would come and say "I'm sorry you have waited but I can't serve you, my boss will not let me wait on colored people", and so that's why the NAACP was formed in Bremerton, to help fight discrimination.

Question: And you got that law passed in Bremerton?

Answer: Yes, we got it passed on the State Law [level] and then, of course, Bremerton had to comply. They had to comply.

Question: Oh, so you got it passed on the State Level? That's great!

Answer: Yes, we went, all the units of the NAACP, from all the chapters, from Spokane, Seattle and all. We all worked on it and got it passed. They had one on the books but it didn't have any teeth in it. You couldn't do anything with it so we got teeth put in it. Then to prove that it had teeth in it, a few years later at a drug store down on the corner of 4th and Park [we challenged it]. There was this school, a middle school, up by the Land Title Company. The kids went down to this drugstore, which was a block away, down on the corner of 4th and Park, to buy snacks and eat [there]. The druggist would not let the little colored kids stay in the store. No matter what kind of weather it was, he would not let them stay in the store and eat. They had

to go outside in the cold. And so, we had the NAACP [which] is made up of all races of people. Some of the caucasian's that belonged brought this to the [attention of the] NAACP. My husband and another Negro man decided that they would go in there provided we had backup that was at the counter or in the store that could hear what was going on so they could have witnesses that this man definitely refused to serve them. They went in and sat down at the counter and ordered a milk shake. The druggist told them "I didn't serve Niggers in Texas and I will die and go to hell before I serve them here". Well he has died since. [Laughing] I don't know whether he went to hell or not. My husband took him to court and he won the judgement against him. He had to either close up or serve anybody that came in, so we have been active.

Question: So did he close up or did he?

Answer: No, he served people. And the first sit-in that the NAACP had [occurred like this]. We had been meeting at the YMCA, you know where the old building was on the corner of 2nd and Washington. Sammy's Cafe used to be there and so several of us came out of that meeting that night, white and colored together, and went in to have a piece of pie, doughnut, cup of coffee or something. And one of the waitresses came to the white lady that was with me and asked her what she wanted and she said, " Well, I'm with Mrs. Walker so I'll have whatever she is having", and I said "Well I'll have a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. [And the waitress said] "Well, I've only got two hands and their busy" and she went around on the other side of the counter. I took my book, I was secretary at that time, and went around there and said "What's your name because we are going to sue you"? She came back around and went out the back door and went to the phone. There was a phone booth there. The reason I know what she said is because my brother worked at the YM[CA] and he had just got off work and was standing there. And she called the mayor and police department and said that there's about to be a race riot down here and I think you better get down here now. Later on Ulysses [my brother] told us [what she had said]. He [Ulysses] said "What was she talking about"? and we told him. And the Sheriff came down there and said "What's going on"? Well my husband and another old timer here, Art Morgan said "We just went in here to get a cup of coffee and piece of pie and the waitress refused to serve us and ran out to the telephone and called you and told you that. So he and the Sheriff and the owner, Sammy, and our minister and Mr. Simmons had a meeting the next day and Sammy decided to serve instead of being sued. That was another star in our crown or whatever you want. So that is how we broke the discrimination in eating places. The barbers would not cut your hair. My husband and I went to a barber shop on Callow one day and he said, "You come back after 5:00 p.m. and I'll close the drapes. I'll cut your hair". I said "You won't cut his hair. I said that I'll go home and cut it myself because my dad had trained me to be a barber. I'll get myself a set of hair cutting tools and cut it myself because it was such a hassle to go to Seattle and look up a barber you know. We have had a lot of interesting experiences.

Question: When did you actually move here to Bremerton? What year was that?

Answer: June 20, 1941, and we moved here (3801 6th Street) May 3, 1943.

Question: And why did you come to Bremerton?

Answer: My husband had applied to the Navy Yard for a job. He was from Cairo, Illinois and he had read in the paper where they had these promotions all over the country about the work in the Navy Yard. How much work there was. How jobs were going lacking. They couldn't find enough people to work. And so he applied and it took at least 6 months before he even got an answer. And when he got the answer he came over that day and he had to be at work the next morning. We had to move over here that night so we had to find a place for us to live and find a way to get to work because it was out where Jackson Park is now. That was their old Ammunition Depot (AD) for the Navy. When we came over we had one room in a rooming house and so that was the 20th of June in 1941.

Question: So you came over here from Seattle then?

Answer: Yes, his mother lived in Seattle, and had written to her and told her that he had heard about this and wanted to know if he could stay there until [he could find work]. While we were staying there he was trying to find work because he did not know whether this would come through or not. We took a couple of jobs working down in Longview, Washington where I was the housekeeper and cook and he was the yardman and the chauffeur. And we were there for about 3 months and then we came back to Seattle. And I did housework and he did odd jobs and then we got this call from Bremerton and have been here ever since.

Question: At that time in the Navy Yard they weren't discriminating because they needed the workers so bad?

Answer: Yeah, they weren't discriminating per se, but they did not upgrade you and so that is a story in itself what he went through. We had, one Sunday, taken the bus and ridden all around where the bus went and seen this property for sale and took the telephone number down and called the people. This man [Mr. Olson] happened to be in charge of a shop in the Navy Yard, Electrical Shop. And he called us and he and his wife came and picked us up and showed us all over Bremerton and said "I can't sell you that property because it is [zoned for] a business and I can't sell it to you for a home." And he took us all around Bremerton showing us different spots and here we were, two young kids, and we didn't know A from B hardly. And he asked James [her husband] where he worked and James told him and he said if you ever want to change your trade and want to go into electricity well give me a call. Well, that was in 1941. A couple years later, in 1943, he had been mistreated out there in AD. He called Mr. Olson and told him I'm walking off the job out here because of discrimination and he said does your offer still hold? And Mr. Olson said, "Yes, come to the gate and tell them who you want and I'll have an escort there to escort you tomorrow". So he got hired in the Navy Yard just like that. There are some good Black people. There are some good White people. There is good and bad in everything. That's how he started in the Navy Yard and he was there for 30 years.

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Question: How did you get interested in the YWCA?

Answer: When Ulysses was going to West High and they were starting a PTA, one of the girls in the class, her mother was in PTA. And so she called me and I asked to her send home, by Jimmy, information about joining. And so I met her and we were friends until she died. I don't know where she got the bug about starting YWCA, but she asked me would I help her and I went and helped her.

Question: Do you remember what her name was?

Answer: Dotsy Fine.

Question: Were you familiar with the YWCA before that?

Answer: No I wasn't. I knew about the Phyllis Wheatley House in Chicago and I think it was a branch of the YWCA but I am not sure.

Question: What did you see as a need for the YWCA Chapter here? Why did we need a YWCA here?

Answer: Well, I guess one of the first things we did there was, if you didn't belong to the Elks or the Eagles, there was no other outlet for women or the church. There was no other outlet for a social activity for women.

Question: And how did you see the YWCA filling this need? What could you see the YWCA doing for them?

Answer: We first had a lounge down on Second and Washington in a building that Mr. Bremer owned and he let us have it. We didn't have to pay rent because it was vacant. We met in there and we opened it up for women of the community for the women who worked in the different stores; some of them worked in the shipyard. They could come in there and get a cup of coffee for a nickel and we had a big lounge where they could get a cup of coffee and sit down and relax. Where you could eat your lunch, read a magazine or read a paper or just sit down and relax. And we did that for several years and that fulfilled me.

Question: We were talking about how Bremerton, back in 1948, was when you started. It wouldn't serve Black people and so on. How do you see Bremerton changing over the years?

Answer: Oh, it has changed, I don't know of any place you can't go and eat. They didn't have many hotels then, but now you can go any place and eat. And there were no Black people employed in the surrounding [community]. They had them in the Navy Yard but they didn't have any out in the community to my knowledge unless they were working in a private family or private nightclub or something like that [was the only place you would find them].

Question: So you didn't see any Blacks in the stores or in the restaurants or anything?

Answer: No, no.

Question: While you were getting the Y started in 1948, did you see being Black as a help or a hinderance or did it seem to make any difference?

Answer: It didn't. The people I was working with it didn't seem to make any difference and, of course, you had to work for the National [YWCA] which was back East and they didn't have the same problem we had here.

Question: You mean being racially prejudiced?

Answer: Right, because they were trying to eradicate that.

Question: Did you see that the YWCA mainly as a place for Blacks or Whites or for everyone?

Answer: No, for women who needed a place, especially after we got the house. If some woman was in Bremerton and her son was in the Naval Hospital and had been hurt in the war or something and she didn't have any place to stay, well she couldn't very well stay at the police station. We got lots of calls from [the] police and we had room set aside at the headquarters where she could spend a night or two nights or three nights. We didn't rent it out on a week to week basis. We rented it out on a night to night basis. And we didn't always charge for it because some of them didn't have any money. And it was whoever came whether they were White or Black, it did not matter.

Question: Well, when you had the lounge downtown.....?

Answer: We didn't have any place for anybody to stay and that was intended for anybody who wanted to come in.

Question: Was there many black women working in the Navy Yard that you would see?

Answer: There were some, a few, but not a whole lot because it had to be close enough to the main gate for them to get and get back in on time. And by that time, we had pretty well eradicated them going into restaurants. [The restaurants were mostly integrated] There was a restaurant right there at the gate when they came out, but it could only serve so many and it seems like there was one up the street. The main thing was that they could have some place where they could go to sit down and relax and maybe read a book while they ate their lunch for 30 minutes and coffee was only a nickel a cup.

Question: Over the years, especially, the YWCA here in town has had different names. Do you know what some of them were?

Answer: It's always been the Kitsap County YWCA. We had different units. We had a unit in Port Orchard, and we had a unit in Poulsbo. We had a unit in Kingston [and] we had what was called the Bremerton Unit. I think we had 5 or 7 different units that made up the whole county, and then you had the board from the whole county.

Question: Did each of these separate units have their own activities?

Answer: Yes, they had their own meetings. They had their own officers and they would appoint their own representatives that would come to the meetings. Their president or somebody from that club would come to the [county] meetings. The whole general board would meet in different places.

Question: How did you get people interested when you first got this going?

Answer: By going to churches and going to meetings and [making] announcements and getting memberships.

Question: After the first meeting did you elect officers?

Answer: [Laughing] I can't remember that.

Question: Where did your money come from at first when you first started. Did you get it from National?

Answer: I really don't know whether we got a grant from the city. I thought about that but I really don't know. Being young I guess I wasn't as aggressive in that as I.....

Question: One thing I read said that they formed the United Way and they gave you some money.

Answer: Well, that was later on. I don't think the YWCA was helpful in getting the United Way started, I know that.

Question: Did you charge dues?

Answer: Oh yes, we had to pay dues.

Question: Did you have fund-raisers?

Answer: Yes, we had fund-raisers and did different things to raise money.

Question: At the first did you have a staff, and a Director, like they have now, when you first started?

Answer: Mrs. Fine was our Director and I don't remember where we had to call on [the] National field worker that was going to be in this area. They would come in and give us directions and see if we were doing things right and give us guidance and guidelines and we had to report to National.

Question: And Mrs. Fine was paid a salary?

Answer: Yes, we paid her, but not very much.

Question: She was the only staff to start with when you said one staff member?

Answer: Yes, I don't remember us ever having more than one because the rest of us were volunteers. After we got the house and we had cooking classes and Yoga and regular exercise...we had a lot of classes because when we got the house we fixed up the downstairs, the basement so we could have lunches.....

Question: You didn't get the house until 1962 [1964]. Where were your first meetings held?

Answer: I really don't know. Probably in some church I would imagine. I really don't know, I had forgotten. Maybe in the YM[CA] because they had the social hall where other organizations could have meetings. That's where the NAACP met, in the social hall of the YMCA, and I don't think you had to pay for that...it was for the community.

Question: What else do you remember about the first activities when you got started?

Answer: Traveler's Aide, that was a large organization and I think the YWCA worked with them because if women got stranded you could go to them and get assistance. I remember attending a meeting about that. I am not sure whether we helped get them startedI really don't know.

Question: So before you got the house, the Kimball House, started did you have Tea's and other things before that?

Answer: Yes, and we had annual meetings where we would come out ahead on dinner meetings and fund-raisers. If the dinners would cost you \$4.50 well then you would charge \$6 or \$8 for the dinners and then you would have surplus. And we used to give lunches and luncheons.

Question: Did you work with the young girls?

Answers: We had one young lady, Marge Donald that worked with the girls and we had classes to teach them, grooming and so forth. We had classes at the high school called Y-Teen. I didn't work with that a lot. I don't know why. My daughter started in with the Bluebirds. They started at 8 or something like that.

Question: Now the Kimball house you got in 1962 [1964]; do you remember how you acquired it? I know it was given to you.

Answer: Mrs. Kimball gave it to us. It was a beautiful place, oriental rugs, player piano, and china. It was beautiful.

Question: What kind of activities did you have when you got the Kimball house?

Answer: Like if you were having a bridal party and you wanted to have it there or you wanted to have a Tea to celebrate something, you could rent the front part of the house out because it was an ideal place for something like that.

And the Bremerton Unit we really used to have nice luncheons then and the general public could come in and have lunch and things like that.

Question: They had bedrooms upstairs in this house didn't they? Did you rent them out?

Answer: Yes, we kept one room special for these ladies that came to Bremerton and didn't have a place to stay. They could stay in this room, say if their husbands or, mostly, sons were in the Naval hospital or something like that. That's mostly what it was for.

Question: How did you feel about the activities sponsored by the YWCA such as the ALIVE [Alternate to Living in a Violent Environment] [Domestic Violence] Shelter?

Answer: That was a late comer and I did not like the fact that the main building was turned over to the ALIVE [program]. I felt that the YWCA should have been a place for the community, for anybody in the community to come and go and apply for help or whatever. And the ALIVE should have been some place away from that because to me, when you go to the YWCA you should not have to knock on the door and maybe get aid or maybe not get aid.

Question: So you're in favor of the shelter, you just wanted it somewhere else?

Answer: Oh, yes. I was very much in favor of the shelter. It was needed. It was needed.

Question: Giving this generalization, over the years, how it's changed, do you think they have been positive changes?

Answer: The only objection I have and I don't know whether it's for the better or what.....is that they used the main building for the shelter. It seems like there should be a better purpose for.... These people need help and if they're battered and they want to get away and I can't imagine people staying with somebody that is going to half kill them. I just can't. It's not my nature, I couldn't do it [we should help them]. I know that everybody is not alike, there are tender people. I admire greatly what the young women there are doing. I just think that the headquarters is not a housing for it. It's too bad that they can't find some place else that is just as good if not better for that purpose.

Question: Well they have moved the headquarters into the church; what do you think about that?

Answer: Well, that's okay, as long as they didn't do away with it [shelter] completely, that's fine. It's too bad that they can't find a better place, and I don't know where they would find it, that is as close to transportation and police as it is. But I just think that the main building should be for the general public, the whole public. All the women, like our unit, used to meet there, and if some of the county units wanted to come there and meet they could but now you can't do that. That's the only objection I have to it,

otherwise I think it is wonderful the work they are doing. I just admire these young women that are brave enough to do that; I just think it's wonderful. I don't know who thought it up, but it's a real good move. It's a real good move to have the shelter; to have the ALIVE program. I think there are other good programs the YWCA could have but they would have to have another place to have them because they can't have them both together, I don't believe.

Question: What kind of programs do you think would benefit?

Answer: Well we used to have a lot of different classes for young women and we used to have places for baby-sitting. They could have cooking classes of their choice and if they had children there would be baby-sitters available for them while they are in class. They had different classes such as exercise classes and it didn't cost an arm and leg like these exercise programs like Jenny Craig and the health club out there on the highway.

Question: What kind of classes do you see as being useful to the modern women?

Answer: Well like I say, I still think cooking is good and exercise is good. We used to have crochet classes and knitting classes. Now if you want to learn how to knit you have to go to the shop and buy your yarn there and stay there. I guess I am social minded.....and I'm sure there are a lot more.

Question: Where can you see the YWCA going in the future?

Answer: Oh my goodness, I hadn't thought about that. I guess I always thought there would be a YWCA and I'd hate to think there wouldn't be.

Question: I'm sorry, I didn't phrase that right. What do you see them doing in the future years?

Answer: I think the YWCA should meet the needs. If you've got a call or a person that came to your door and said, "Do you have an outlet for this or do you have a way that I can learn this?", they should be able to meet the call. I still think we need the YWCA, and I think the Young Women's Christian Union. I still think we need that. It answers a special purpose.

Comment: Well, thank you very much for your time Mrs. Walker, I certainly really enjoyed talking to you.

Mrs. Walker: Well, I hope I have been some help.