

Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Virginia May

Interviewer: Joe White

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An Oral History with Virginia May, Volume 1217, Part 15

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Biography

Virginia Abney Thompson May was born to Hezekiah Burton Thompson and Georgia Vashti Cassity in Gurley, LA in October 1917. She had a brother and a sister. Virginia's mother died in 1922, and her father later remarried to Lena Williamson – together they had three children. Virginia helped milk dairy cows on her father's farm. She graduated from Ethel High School in Ethel, LA in 1935. She then entered a three-year nursing program. After finishing nursing school in 1938, Virginia married Billy Wilson May in March 1939. The couple relocated from Centreville, LA to Mendenhall, MS, May's hometown, so that he could continue working for the highway department. During World War II, the couple moved to Mobile, AL, where Billy worked on the shipyards, and Virginia worked for the US Public Health Service. They later moved back to Mendenhall, where Virginia worked with the Simpson County Health Department. Starting in 1962, she was a nurse at the tuberculosis sanatorium between Mendenhall and Magee. There she worked with Dr. Jack Locke Herring, another interviewee. After the sanatorium closed in the mid-1970s, Virginia went to work at the Boswell Mental Retardation Center, where she worked until retiring in 1980.

Table of Contents

Early life and parents.....	1
Farm life.....	4
Education.....	4
Marriage.....	5
Married life/children.....	6
World War II and time in Mobile, AL.....	8
Mendenhall.....	10, 17, 23
Medical practice/Sanatorium.....	12, 18, 26
Husband's work with highway department.....	16
Boswell Mental Retardation Center.....	20
Church life.....	23

AN ORAL HISTORY
with
VIRGINIA MAY

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with Virginia May and is taking place on June 26, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.

White: —is Joe White. Today is Thursday, June 26, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council as a part of the oral history project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we are interviewing Mrs. Virginia May at her home in Mendenhall, Mississippi. Ms. May, could you state your full name, please ma'am?

May: Virginia Abney Thompson May.

White: You were a Thompson before you married.

May: Right.

White: Obviously. And when were you born?

May: Ten, fifteen, seventeen [October 15, 1917].

White: Nineteen seventeen.

May: Um-hm.

White: I believe you were born in Louisiana. Is that right?

May: Right.

White: What town?

May: Out in the country from Gurley, Louisiana.

White: G-U-R-L-E-Y, is that right?

May: Right.

White: Where is Gurley?

May: Gurley is about thirty miles north of Baton Rouge, close to Clinton, Jackson, Louisiana.

White: Right. Who was your father?

May: Hezekiah Burton Thompson.

White: OK. And who was your mother?

May: Georgia Vashti Cassity.

White: C-A-S-S-I-T-Y, is that right?

May: T-Y.

White: And the Vashti is V-A-S-H-T-I?

May: V-A-S-H-T-I.

White: That's a Louisiana name. What ethnic origin is Vashti? Do you know? Is it Italian?

May: Well, biblical is the only thing I know.

White: OK. I know there are a lot in Louisiana with that name. What did your dad do?

May: He was a dog trainer and a farmer.

White: A dog trainer? Farmer is interesting, but what kind of dogs did he train?

May: Hunting dogs.

White: Hunting dogs. What did he farm?

May: Well, he had cows. We had a dairy farm; had cotton, corn. There was a thousand acres of land.

White: Pretty big farm, then, wasn't it?

May: It was, uh-huh. We had about twelve families that lived on the farm.

White: And worked on the farm.

May: Uh-huh, black people.

White: Did you have brothers and sisters?

May: Well, my mother died when I was five years old, and there was three of us. And my daddy married a lady from Forest, Mississippi, and she had three. Then they had three of their own. My children and your children fighting our children.
(laughter)

White: But the three original children, you and your—was it two brothers or a brother—

May: A brother and a sister.

White: What were their names? We'll start with the—

May: John Burton was the boy, and then me, and then Mary, Mary Morton.

White: All right. And then your dad's second wife, what was her name?

May: Lena Williamson.

White: From Forest, she was a Williamson before they married.

May: Uh-huh.

White: And she brought three children into the marriage?

May: Um-hm.

White: What were their names?

May: Worth, Dorothy, and Cook.

White: And did they keep the name Williamson?

May: Yes, they kept their name.

White: And then she and your dad had three children together.

May: Had three boys.

White: Three boys. And what were there names?

May: Jack, Rupert, and Clyde.

White: Well, that was a pretty big family, together, even for a thousand acres. Wasn't it? (laughter) Did any of them help on the farm?

May: Well, one year we did so we could get money to go to the fair.

White: Is that right? Just a short time, huh? (laughter)

May: I helped milk cows. We had a dairy.

White: Did all of you go to school?

May: Yes. My daddy was a—drove a bus, school bus.

White: Oh, is that right?

May: Um-hm.

White: He kept pretty busy, then.

May: Yeah. He was busy.

White: Raised dogs and farmed. Did you have any connection with Mississippi, other than your stepmother being from Forest at that time, or did you only move to Mississippi later?

May: Later.

White: I'm just trying to get the stage set here. How did you end up in Mississippi?

May: Well, I went in training to be a nurse at the Fields Memorial Hospital in Centreville.

White: In Centreville?

May: Um-hm, Mississippi.

White: Mississippi.

May: Um-hm.

White: Well, that's way down south in Mississippi, isn't it?

May: That's right. It's right close to the Louisiana line.

White: How'd you get over there? Was it recommended to you by somebody?

May: Yes, by, uh-huh, a girl that I knew who was in training at the time.

White: Is this just after you got out of high school?

May: After I got out of high school, 1935.

White: What high school did you graduate from?

May: Ethel High School in Ethel, Louisiana.

White: And what was it like going to nursing school? Was that a two-year program?

May: No. It was a three-year program.

White: Three-year program?

May: Um-hm. And you had to take state board after that. You didn't get a BS degree. You just got a graduate nurse or an RN [registered nurse].

White: I remember my grandfather was a country doctor, and I met in later years a nurse to whom he gave a nursing kit when she graduated. Was there some sort of a—and I don't know what she meant by a nursing kit. Was there some sort of nursing kit that was issued or one that you had to buy? Do you remember when you graduated? I was curious because she was from Louisiana, and he worked in a hospital in Louisiana at the time, and in South Mississippi, somewhere just north of Bogalusa, back in there somewhere.

May: Um-hm. No, I don't remember.

White: What kind of—

May: Well, we had to have a blood pressure machine, you know, and stuff like that.

White: Where did you practice nursing right after you graduated?

May: Well, I was private duty, and I finished in [19]38, and then I married in [19]39.

White: And who did you marry?

May: Billy Wilson May from Mendenhall, Mississippi.

White: And that's how you ended up in Mendenhall, I guess, wasn't it?

May: That's right. (laughter) And he was working for the highway department at that time.

White: Was he working down that way?

May: Uh-huh.

White: Y'all were married in Gloster, I believe.

May: Gloster.

White: You had (inaudible).

May: Um-hm.

White: Do you remember the date on it? Am I putting you on a spot here?

May: No. It's March the seventeenth—

White: Oh, I see it. I didn't think it was filled out. I was looking at the wrong place. March the seventeenth, 1939.

May: Um-hm.

White: And where did you guys live right after you were married? Down that way?

May: Well, we lived in Centreville for, at the end of that year. And then we moved up to Mendenhall.

White: Who was he working for when you moved back up this way?

May: For the state, still. For the state.

White: Still working with them?

May: Uh-huh.

White: Did he change his working territory or anything like that?

May: Well, he worked a different—and then during the war he worked at the shipyards, and then he worked—

White: Oh, moved around a little then.

May: Uh-huh. And then when he went in the service, then when he got out, that's when we moved around, too.

White: Well, we going to get back to this later, but I'm trying to just set the stage here. How many children do you have?

May: Two.

White: Two. And their names are—I know you had a son.

May: James Dent(?) and then Billy.

White: Well, I knew James Dent. Billy must have been younger.

May: Yeah.

White: I didn't know him.

May: Um-hm. They're seven years apart.

White: James Dent was born when?

May: Forty [1940].

White: Nineteen forty.

May: Um-hm.

White: I was born in [19]43. That's the reason I (inaudible). I believe he lived—
doesn't he live—

May: He lives in Jackson.

White: —in Jackson? Up around the reservoir, I believe, somewhere (inaudible).

May: No. He lives right, one block from Belhaven College. (laughter)

White: Oh, is that right? (laughter)

May: Um-hm.

White: Belhaven Heights area.

May: Yeah. He works for AmSouth now, but he finished Ole Miss with a law degree
and then worked for the law school for several years.

White: Right. I remember that. And your other son was born when? Billy was
born—

May: In [19]47.

White: Forty-seven.

May: In Jackson, he was born in Jackson.

White: You were living up there then, or was—

May: No.

White: —he just born in Ja[ckson], went to the hospital up there.

May: Uh-huh.

White: What hospital was he born in?

May: St. Dominic's.

White: St. Dominic's. Were both your boys born at St. Dominic's?

May: No. James Dent was born in Magee.

White: OK. So Magee Hospital—

May: Um-hm.

White: —was going strong then.

May: Yeah.

White: As it is today. What hospital did you work for first when you were up here, or what doctor? Putting you on the spot here.

May: Well, you know. (laughter) Well, really the first real place I worked was for Dr. A.C. Miller in his office.

White: Medical clinic here.

May: Uh-huh. But then before that, though—that's (inaudible). But I worked for the U.S. Public Health Service during the war, and we lived in Mobile.

White: I believe I saw a mention on this on your career record (inaudible).

May: Yeah. I worked for the U.S. Public Health Service.

White: Oh, down in Mobile during the war.

May: That's right. They sent a dentist and a doctor, and I worked for the doctor. And I worked there two years.

White: Did y'all live in Mobile at the time?

May: Uh-huh. We lived in Mobile.

White: And what was your husband doing down that way?

May: Working for the shipyard, Alabama Dry Docks or either the—there was two of them he worked for, and I—

White: One over in Pascagoula.

May: No.

White: But he didn't work over in Pascagoula.

May: No.

White: In Mobile (inaudible).

May: In Mobile.

White: Right. Right about where that big tunnel is now. I think the dry docks are still down there, aren't they? Or have you been down that way in the last few years?

May: I haven't been down there.

White: There's a big tunnel on I-10 there now, right about where that big shipyard, dry dock is, that's been set up there whole time. Did you like Mobile?

May: Yeah.

White: It was a town, huh?

May: It was. (laughter) Well, we really lived out—let me see. What was the name? It was Chickasaw.

White: Chickasaw?

May: Yeah.

White: Close to Mobile somewhere.

May: Well, it was town all the way, you know.

White: Right next to (inaudible). So then was it when the war ended that you moved up this way, or was the war still going on?

May: He moved; he transferred from one shipyard to the other, and he didn't notify the board, security board, no, the—

White: Boy, they were tough on them during the war.

May: Uh-huh. And they called him in. And he joined the, it was a part of the Navy. What was—

White: CBs [Naval Construction Battalion, Seabees]?

May: Yeah, CBs.

White: He joined the CBs then, huh?

May: Um-hm.

White: Was he sent overseas, or did he (inaudible)?

May: No, he did not go overseas, but he—

White: Stayed in the States with the CBs.

May: Uh-huh. But he had his—he was packed, ready to get on a ship, and they took him off. I don't know. But about that time the war ended, though.

White: And then y'all moved back to Mendenhall, and that's when you worked as a nurse for Dr. Miller here.

May: That's right.

White: And I think you also worked for Dr. Bates(?) (inaudible), didn't you?

May: I did.

White: What, John Bates?

May: John Bates.

White: Is that his name? And also you worked, I believe according to the sheet here, with the Simpson County Health Department.

May: That's right.

White: At one time.

May: That's right.

White: And another interesting aspect of your health career was as a nurse at the Sanatorium—we call it here—

May: Right.

White: —which was the tuberculosis sanatorium between Mendenhall and Magee.

May: Right.

White: And you worked there during the 1940s. Is that right, or was it later than that?

May: I went to work there in 1962.

White: Oh, sixty-two.

May: Um-hm.

White: I'm sorry. I misread a comma here.

May: Because I worked for Dr. Miller for about thirteen or fourteen years, and then Dr. Bates for about two years. And then I worked for Dr. Hutchens(?) then, for a while here in town.

White: You stayed pretty busy, too, then, didn't you?

May: Yeah.

White: The hospital was founded here early 1960s, too, wasn't it? Right around 1962 or [196]3?

May: You know, I cannot remember that. But I never did like that [whispers] (inaudible). (laughter)

White: It must have been. I graduated from high school in 1961, and I think the hospital was here then, so it must have been 1960 or something like that.

May: Uh-huh.

White: Fifty-nine or [19]60, when it was founded. But you never did, you didn't work out at the hospital.

May: Because I was still working for Dr. Miller when they built the hospital.

White: Worked for individual doctors then.

May: Um-hm.

White: What was it like, being a nurse in Simpson County during the [19]50s and [19]60s? Has medical practice changed much since then?

May: Has it! (laughter)

White: It must have, huh?

May: Yeah. Well, I loved it. I've always wanted to be a nurse. I had an aunt who was a nurse, and she kind of taught me to be a nurse. And that's all I ever wanted to be. And I liked where they would come and go, and come and go, you know. And for the doctors, I did blood work. I did x-rays and gave shots.

White: A little bit of everything then, huh? (laughter)

May: That's right.

White: You didn't deliver babies, did you?

May: I certainly did help. (laughter) And we had babies that were born in the Ponder(?) Building because our clinic was not big enough to deliver. Well, first, now.

White: Was that when you worked for Dr. Miller?

May: Yeah, at first. That was behind Mr. Mehaffrey's(?) drug store.

White: He had a small clinic there.

May: That's right. That's where we went to work. And there were a lot of people here in Mendenhall that Dr. Miller delivered babies up there.

White: Well, what was in the Ponder Building? Was that—

May: Just a room, it was a room for delivery.

White: Oh, really? Just set up in the—

May: Um-hm.

White: —office building there (inaudible).

May: That's right. It was upstairs. Poor folks had to work upstairs to—and walk down.

White: You know, I hadn't thought of that. (laughter) That might be kind of [tough]. You didn't ever have to carry anybody up the stairs? (laughter)

May: No. Seem like to me at that time that wasn't—I didn't do that until we moved in the clinic.

White: That's some pretty tough, country women. You just asked them to walk up two flights of stairs to have the baby, huh? (laughter)

May: That was something.

White: Well, tell me a little bit about working at Sanatorium. When did you work down there, in the 1960s?

May: Uh-huh, until it closed, in [19]62 until it closed. I worked in the operating room for a while, and then I wasn't there too many months, I don't think, before I was made a supervisor.

White: What kind of surgery were they doing in the [19]60s? I know earlier they had compressed the lungs.

May: Uh-huh. They would—

White: We interviewed Dr. Herring(?). He told us what they used to use to compress a diseased lung, to collapse it and keep it collapsed so they could treat it. Were they still doing that in the 1960s?

May: Well, they were removing some stuff, some lobes of the lungs.

White: They weren't collapsing them, treating the lung as much as they were removing parts of the lungs in the [19]60s.

May: Well, they were going to do that before, to do some removing, but they would do that collapse. I didn't work in there too long.

White: Dr. Herring had mentioned to us that they would use, in some cases—

May: A sponge.

White: —oil to compress the lungs. They used a sponge for the same thing?

May: I want to say they used some type of sponge.

White: And he mentioned that they used ping-pong balls in the chest cavity. You don't remember.

May: No, I didn't.

White: I suspect that that was earlier.

May: Must have been.

White: I think Dr. Herring had left there about that time or shortly thereafter. I think he was talking about the earlier surgery. (Inaudible)

May: Well, now, he didn't leave there until the sanatorium closed in [19]75.

White: Is that right? Seventy-five. I think he was referring to earlier surgery there—

May: Yeah.

White: —when he was talking about that.

May: And Dr. Boswell(?), Dr.—

White: Who were the doctors who were there when you were?

May: Well, Dr. Boswell was still living, and then there was a Dr. Hardy, Dr. Stouse(?), doctors from the university would go—

White: From University Medical Center in Jackson?

May: Uh-huh, would come and serve a term. I say a term. I don't know; ever how long the university wanted them to—if they wanted to be—

White: That was part of their service for training to be doctors?

May: Uh-huh, especially chest surgery, if they wanted to be—you know, a lot of them didn't know what they wanted to be.

White: Right. Sort of like the rest of us who get a degree and don't know what we want to be sometimes. You always knew you wanted to be a nurse.

May: Uh-huh, always did.

White: Somebody else had mentioned a Dr. Cade(?) was working down there—

May: Right.

White: —at that time, too.

May: Yes.

White: Who were some of the nurses that you worked with? Do you remember their names?

May: Well, Kathleen Miller worked there.

White: Right. Was there much nursing care of the patients in the rooms? Did they live in wards, or were they individual rooms?

May: They were individual rooms, but they were on wards, a wing.

White: Yeah, they were probably trying to prevent spread.

May: And all the women would be on one ward, and all the men on the opposite.

White: About how long did the patients stay down there during the [19]60s? I know at one point—

May: Sometimes it was a long time, five and six years.

White: Oh, they were still staying for years in the [19]60s?

May: Yeah.

White: I knew Dr. Herring had said earlier that some of the patients would stay for years until they got modern medicines in, and that helped them to start leaving earlier than those long years that they had spent there. What year did your husband die?

May: In [19]80.

White: Nineteen eighty.

May: Um-hm.

White: Who was he working for then?

May: Still working with the highway department.

White: He spent his whole life working for the highway department.

May: Um-hm.

White: What did he do for the highway department during those years?

May: He was an assistant engineer.

White: Did he work on road projects or bridge projects or anything in particular or just whatever they had?

May: If they were going to survey, he would do the surveying, do that part. Now, it was all in the engineering department. He didn't actually do anything. He would tell them what to do and how to do it.

White: And they would do it. They would probably mark out the right-of-way and the elevations and grades and things like that.

May: Right, uh-huh. And then they had to check to see that they did what they were supposed to do.

White: Did he work as an engineer on any of the project when they changed Old Highway 49 to [Highway] 149, which it is now (inaudible) here?

May: Yeah.

White: And then put in the four-lane during the 1960s?

May: Yeah.

White: How big an area did he work in then? All up and down the highway from Jackson down toward the Coast, or did he work mostly around here?

May: Well, it was mostly around here because he never did have to go off.

White: He was home every night then, huh?

May: Uh-huh.

White: That made it a lot easier, (laughter) I'm sure.

May: That's right. And I think [Highway] 18, he would do—

White: Highway 18?

May: Um-hm, state projects.

White: What was it like in Mendenhall during the—let's see. You moved back up here in the 1940s, didn't you?

May: Um-hm.

White: What was it like right after the war when people were coming back? Were there a lot of changes coming in?

May: Well, when you worked, you didn't look for the changes too much, but we was always glad when they had a new restaurant had opened up.

White: I bet you. (laughter) Who were some of the restaurants other than Miss Gerdy(?)? I remember Miss Gerdy had a restaurant here.

May: Yes, uh-huh. And then there was, on the south, close to the drugstore down there, it was Charlotte Everett's(?) mother.

White: Her mother.

May: Uh-huh.

White: That's on the same side as McGuffy's(?) Drugs now?

May: Right, uh-huh.

White: There was also an old dining car, at one point, I vaguely remember, on the other side of the road there, about where Sullivan's Hardware, Frank Merritt's(?) Drugs.

May: Yeah.

White: Somewhere along in there. Do you remember that little, metal, railroad-type dining car that was there for a few years? I think it was there in the 1950s until they moved it. You must have eaten on the other side of the road. You don't look like you recognize. I'm looking at your eyes. (laughter)

May: I just really don't think—

White: Well, I know those servicemen, coming back, are bound to have created some kind of change in the health system because I would imagine there would be a lot more babies born right after the war (inaudible).

May: Yeah, uh-huh.

White: Did y'all stay pretty busy, delivering babies, or does that—

May: Yeah. I don't remember how many Dr. Miller actually delivered, but he was an excellent doctor.

White: Well, I had always heard that he was the main baby doctor around here.

May: Right.

White: Baby delivery doctor. Y'all must have stayed pretty busy doing that.

May: Um-hm.

White: Did folks returning from the war bring any unusual health problems back with them that you remember?

May: I don't really think so.

White: There was just more people back in the county, then, and more babies, basically.

May: That's right because there were a lot of young people back then. I don't know where all the young people are now. There's not too many babies being born. (laughter)

White: Not right around here anyway. (laughter)

May: No, unh-uh.

White: Well, I think the census figures show that Mendenhall's population is getting older. We have a larger number of people who are sixty years old and older in relation to the younger couples who are building either out of town or moving up toward Jackson.

May: Um-hm. And then Jackson likes to come down this way because there's plenty of houses in Mendenhall that will be available.

White: Right. The Universal Plant, major manufacturing plant that came in here in the [19]60s, around 1964 or 1965, brought a lot of changes and a lot of growth, too.

May: Right.

White: And it drew a number of workers that helped the Magee Hospital expand and grow two or three times.

May: They had a nurse there, too, at the Universal [Plant].

White: Oh, yeah. Right. And the same thing with Mendenhall Hospital, I think, too, was spurred by some of that growth. They used to have a public health nurse. You mentioned working in public—that's public health (inaudible).

May: Millie Lee(?).

White: Millie Lee for years who was a public health nurse here.

May: She was my boss when I did work.

White: Is that right?

May: Yeah.

White: How big a territory did you cover when you worked as public health nurse?

May: Well, mostly they would come to the clinic.

White: Come up to the office here? What type things did you do? Was it shots?

May: Yeah, that's right. Didn't do any x-rays that I can remember. It was just mostly shots.

White: Probably polio vaccine.

May: Yeah.

White: What other type vaccines were pretty common then?

May: Well, I know all the babies had to have diphtheria.

White: Whole series.

May: Diphtheria, whooping cough, and tetanus, that's right. And you had to see about all of those, and kind of encourage them. And I can't remember how we notified people to come in. Of course they had a secretary there, I know, so we didn't, but we must have kept up with who was due for shots and that type of thing.

White: Probably did. I seem to remember; didn't you guys go to the schools, too?

May: Right, uh-huh.

White: Weren't you the people who gave the shots at the schools—

May: Right.

White: —that were required?

May: And we gave the first polio, and it was a drop of that on a sugar pill.

White: Was that on a sugar pill or sugar cube?

May: The cube.

White: The cube?

May: Um-hm.

White: Were the first ones that, or were they shots? They were the sugar cubes, huh?

May: Right.

White: The first ones.

May: Um-hm.

White: Well, I vaguely remember those days, but I don't remember as much as you do about them. (End of digital file named tape one, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape one, side two.)—in, back in Simpson County, you bound to had a few memorable experiences. You said you had worked with Kathleen Miller, but did you work with her both in the clinic, in Dr. Miller's Clinic—

May: Um-hm.

White: And as a nurse down at—

May: Sanatorium.

White: —Sanatorium. You also mentioned, by the way—I don't mean to just change the subject—that you retired when they closed up down there, when they changed over.

May: I went to work for Boswell.

White: Boswell Mental Retardation Center.

May: Retardation Center, that's right.

White: And that came in where Sanatorium had been.

May: Right.

White: The same facilities and everything after it closed.

May: Um-hm.

White: How long did you work for Boswell?

May: Until I retired in about [19]80.

White: Nineteen eighty.

May: Yeah, uh-huh, because I was retired. I worked a lot after that, but I really retired when I was sixty-two there.

White: And it's still Boswell—

May: Yeah.

White: —Retardation Center there. Were they at that time treating (phone rings) certain-aged people, or were they older people or younger people?

May: You had to have a mentality at a certain—

White: But no specific age or anything like that?

May: You had to be, I think, twenty-one.

White: Oh, they didn't have younger patients there then.

May: No, unh-uh. They were—and they had all come from Ellisville State—

White: Oh, is that right?

May: That's right.

White: All the first patients came from the Ellisville State School.

May: Um-hm. And see, they had been institutionalized all of their lives, but they were high-functioning. They're IQ [intelligence quotient] was higher. I don't remember what you had to have. But I really saw a big change in the way they acted.

White: The medical care for them, you mean?

May: Yeah, that, and then their social—

White: Skills.

May: —skills, that's right.

White: I know they brought groups out into the community, and they let them shop and eat.

May: That's right. And they had to pay their way. Everybody had to do something there. You just couldn't sit in the house because (inaudible).

White: They were no longer just institutionalized.

May: That's right.

White: They were treated and developed as human beings—

May: That's right.

White: —to their capacity.

May: And trying to get back in society.

White: You sound like you enjoyed working there.

May: Well, I did in a lot of ways.

White: What was the most fun, if such can be said as fun? What part of nursing did you enjoy more than anything else? And you had said earlier just the clinical part of it.

May: Uh-huh.

White: If you had it all to do again as a young nurse starting over today, is that what you would do, clinical nursing?

May: Um-hm, yeah. I wouldn't be in an institution of any kind. I would be in a doctor's office and that type—

White: Why is that?

May: It was not tiring or boring. You saw all kinds of people.

White: Made your day pretty interesting, then?

May: Yeah, and it—

White: And you didn't have to treat the same illnesses over and over either, did you?

May: That's right. But I enjoyed working at Sanatorium and at Boswell, but now, at Boswell I had to work at night. And see, I was getting retirement age, and that was hard. And we had to go, at Boswell, from house to house, two and three times every night.

White: Oh, they moved the nurses from residential unit to residential unit.

May: You had your station, but then you had to go. And we'd have men to go with us.

White: Well, when you were working there earlier, and the facility was a tuberculosis sanatorium, did you work in one area as a surgical nurse, and they'd bring the patients in to you, or did you go from house to house then?

May: No. People lived in the houses when it was a TB [tuberculosis] place.

White: They were literally homes only then.

May: Yeah. But if you were a supervisor, you stayed—

White: Stayed right in your area then?

May: You stayed on that ward.

White: What kind of changes have you seen in Mendenhall over the years, as far as the schools, the churches? I know you're a Methodist.

May: Right.

White: I'm a Baptist, and I see you over there across the street at the Methodist Church sometimes. (laughter)

May: Yeah. And you know, I lived with Ms. May and them when we first moved to Mendenhall.

White: Is that right?

May: And I could walk to church whereas when I lived in Louisiana, we rode in our school bus—that was our only vehicle—nine miles to church.

White: That's when your dad was driving the school bus then, huh?

May: Right, uh-huh. Then my brothers or somebody would drive us to Sunday school, and that's one thing we did. We were taught, "You go to Sunday school and church, and you participate." I sang in the choir. Then when I came to Mendenhall, I sang in the choir for years and years and years. And then when I got crippled, I couldn't walk up and down the steps and stuff, couldn't stand long enough.

White: You quit singing in the choir, then, huh?

May: Yeah. I was a member of the United Methodist Women, where we do things.

White: You had mentioned—speaking of Methodists, you had mentioned your grandparents at one point, too.

May: Yeah. My grandfather was a circuit rider.

White: Methodist minister.

May: Right.

White: All right. Tell us what the circuit rider is. I know, but some people may not.

May: Well, they're the ones who don't have a church, like a Mendenhall church, but you just go around to the different churches.

White: You serve a number of churches and ride around that circuit.

May: And you have to ride, and there was no cars then, so you rode a horse or a buggy.

White: And they lived where in Louisiana?

May: In North Louisiana, around Rushton, Monroe, but Rushton there was my—

White: You lived with them for several years, I believe, didn't you? Or did you not?

May: No.

White: OK. You were just talking about them, about them being a Methodist minister then. Well, you pretty much stuck with the Methodists all your life then.

May: That's right. And when my mother was—we were little. There was a church about far as from here to the railroad, and we walked to church. I think we had a little car. I can remember when we were little, we had a car; Grandpaw had a car, but I don't know why we walked. I reckon it wasn't too far. Maybe didn't have enough gas. I don't (inaudible). (laughter)

White: Don't know why, huh? Maybe he just felt like y'all needed to walk to church. (laughter)

May: That's right. But I can remember Mama taking us to church. And we had a German lady who really came from Germany, and she was my Sunday school teacher, and I can remember her when I was a little, bitty thing. And you remember the little cards that we used to get when you went to church?

White: Yes, I do, as a matter of fact. My—

May: Instead of a Sunday school book, you had little cards when you were small.

White: Half of my family is Methodist, and half of them are Baptist, and I actually attended both churches, Methodist and Baptist when we lived in Pinola, growing up. And my mother became a Baptist when she married my father, the Baptist. But she really was still a Methodist the day she died. (laughter) I knew that; wasn't any doubt about it. What's the difference? I know that the Methodists still change preachers—

May: Yeah.

White: —much more often than a lot of the other Protestant denominations (inaudible). And they're still assigned by the church itself and moved around ever so many years.

May: That's right.

White: Over the years in the Methodist Church here in Mendenhall, have you had some really outstanding ministers that you liked?

May: Well, listen. They are all my preachers.

White: They all good, then.

May: And they don't run me away from my church. They will not be, but I will. (laughter)

White: That's a good attitude.

May: Yeah. So I like them all.

White: You don't have to agree with them. You can still like them because you know they'll be leaving (inaudible).

May: Because they're all preaching from the Bible, and I believe in the Bible. I believe what it says is it.

White: That's sounds like a real Methodist. (laughter) I can tell you right there. That's what my mother always said, almost with that same expression. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us on the record here while we're talking before we finish the interview?

May: Well, I don't think about the nursing part. The government has gotten into nursing so much. I asked them when they first started telling us what to do, I said, "Who's going to be seeing about these real sick patients we've got, if I've got to write and do all of this?" And what I think they going to—if I think they going to get better.

I can't think of what I'm trying to say. You know, some of them, the medicine wouldn't work with them.

White: Talking about Medicare and Medicaid requirements, that type (inaudible) paperwork?

May: Yes, all of that. So they've just taken away a lot of a good nurse's ability to take care of a patient. And that's what nursing is. It's not bookwork and all that other stuff that they've got us doing. So that part I didn't like in it at all, the government taking over for you. But the Medicare, I'm in it now, and I'm glad they do have something for me because you couldn't afford it. Now, there's one pill that a friend of mine takes now. She has to take it every night. Thirty pills cost \$140.

White: That's a lot of money.

May: That's ridiculous. So who's making all the money?

White: Well, I know you've seen some changes, too, in the care for the elderly. We were talking about that—

May: Yes, uh-huh.

White: —earlier in Simpson County. You never did work for any of the nursing homes or anything.

May: No. But I think it's a wonderful place for those who do not have anybody to take care of them to be there. And the people who work there have to be dedicated to be able to put up with what they have to put up with. And they have to be kind to them, but I've noticed a lot of lawsuits now.

White: Yes. There have been a number of them just this past year or so.

May: But there are people who work in one just because they can get them some meals, and they can get them a little money, but it's not that they really care for patients as much as—and I haven't been in that position, so I don't know what I would do because some of them can be mean. And when people are sick, they can be mean and sick.

White: And people with Alzheimer's can be both very easily, also.

May: That's right.

White: Well, I do thank you for talking with us, very much. We've got an interesting interview. Appreciate you talking to us.

May: Well, I've enjoyed it, myself.

White: Thank you.

(end of interview)