

# Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical  
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Rosie Weary

Interviewer: Joe White

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*An Oral History with Rosie Weary, Volume 1217, Part 30*

Interviewer: Joe White

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## Biography

Rosie Marie Camper Weary was born to Earnest and Rosie Lee Camper in Pinola, MS in February 1950. Rosie has six sisters and three brothers. She attended and graduated from New Hymn School. After graduation Rosie went to Los Angeles Baptist College, CA and majored in History. She married Dolphus Weary in 1970 while both of them were attending L.A. Baptist College. Rosie stayed in California after Dolphus completed his master's degree in Christian Education and returned to Mississippi. She spent her summers in Mississippi during this time, where she also took education classes at Jackson State – her intention was to transfer completely to Jackson State, but her credits would not be accepted. Starting in 1971 she served as the secretary for Voice of Calvary ministry, run by her husband. Rosie completed business course at Wesley College in Florence, MS when she realized that she did not want to teach, which was the goal for her degree in History. In her and her husband's ministry, which was later renamed Mendenhall Ministries, expanded to include a health clinic and a school, Genesis One Christian School. Rosie and Dolphus have continued their work with Mendenhall Ministries to present day.

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AN ORAL HISTORY  
with  
ROSIE WEARY

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with Rosie Weary and is taking place on May 6, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.*

**White:** My name is Joe White. Today is Tuesday, May 6, 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. Rosie Weary in her home in Richland, Mississippi. Ms. Weary, could you state your full name?

**Weary:** My name is Rosie Marie Camper Weary.

**White:** And when and where were you born?

**Weary:** I was born in Pinola, Mississippi, on February the twenty-sixth, 1950.

**White:** And who were your parents?

**Weary:** My parents are Earnest and Rosie Lee Camper(?).

**White:** They live near Pinola?

**Weary:** Yes. Both grew up, born and reared in Pinola.

**White:** Do you know when they were born and where they were married? Can you tell us a little bit about their life?

**Weary:** My dad was born August 1, 1911, in Pinola. There were, I think, twelve children, maybe thirteen children, but several of them were deceased before, that he didn't even know, before he was born. He grew up on a farm in Pinola, and both parents were (inaudible) till he was married.

**White:** That farm is close to where he lives now, is it not?

**Weary:** Actually the farm is on the property, somewhat (inaudible), where he lives now. That was the farm. Excuse me.

**White:** And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

**Weary:** I have six sisters and three brothers. So that's (inaudible).

**White:** That's funny. We talked to your dad Saturday, and he started the same way, "Seven," and then he backtracked (inaudible). (laughter)

**Weary:** I always include myself because there are seven girls and three boys, and all are still alive.

**White:** Could you name?

**Weary:** OK. Vera is the oldest; Earnest Jr.; W.C.; James Earl(?); Minnie Earline(?); Eula(?); Esther(?); Elizabeth, and Sandra.

**White:** And Rosie, of course, (inaudible). (laughter)

**Weary:** And Rosie last. (laughter)

**White:** Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like on the farm, growing up?

**Weary:** We lived, what we call, across the creek when I was real small. I guess I was born and reared across the creek, which meant that we had to cross the creek to get to our house. So we always had to cross the creek. We lived back in the woods, actually.

**White:** Back, off the road.

**Weary:** Yes, *way* off the road. (laughter)

**White:** And there was no driveway, as such.

**Weary:** No driveway or anything. It was only by a mule wagon or slide that we were to get to our house. So I remember my mom would take the children with her into the garden and to the field to pick vegetables and everything. And later on, she would send us. If she wanted turnip greens, she would send us to get turnips or collard greens; she would send us to the field, to the garden to get the collards. And then she sent us to pick okra, and I always remember that okra was so tall that it was over my head, but it was only about fifteen years ago I was thinking about that, and I realized the reason the okra seemed so tall was because I was only about four years old. And so she started us working when we were real small, and I had not started to school before we moved to where my dad is now, out on the road. And that's why I know that I was four or five years old because I started to school when I was six years old. And we went to, what they called then, preprimer, which is primary, and sort of kindergarten first, and you know, first grade.

**White:** Was that at New Hymn?

**Weary:** That was at New Hymn School. And that's when—but anyway. I'm sorry.

**White:** That's all right. You talk about the things you'd like to talk about.

**Weary:** OK. I hope you're going to edit it. OK.

**White:** No problem.

**Weary:** OK. And so when I started to school, I remember always being afraid. I don't know why I was afraid. I was always afraid. I was always fearful, and it was only later on in my life that I realized why I was so afraid because of all the stories that I heard my parent talk about, all the horror stories and things, the flavor of the country at that time, flavor of the county, flavor of the state at that time.

**White:** Racial violence.

**Weary:** Racial violence and things of those natures.

**White:** This would have been the 1950s.

**Weary:** It was in the—

**White:** Nineteen fifty-nine, eight, nine.

**Weary:** Well, even before then, when they were small, they would talk about things that had happened. It was before it was even in the media. You know, they was talking about things that—and I was always fearful and afraid, and that's a horrible way to (inaudible).

**White:** Oh, even as a very young child, then?

**Weary:** Yes, uh-huh. And when I started school, I started realizing that I was afraid, I was fearful, you know, and I was always afraid that something was going to happen because of the stories I'd heard talked about in the home and everything. But went to New Hymn School, excelled, was promoted, got a double promotion, and when I got into junior—even before junior high school, we would always have to miss school to work in the fields and everything. Not only did we work in our fields; we worked in other people fields as well.

**White:** Your dad said in his interview that school, for him, lasted about three or four months a year. By the time you came along, was it a nine-month-a-year school at New Hymn, or was it shorter?

**Weary:** It was nine months, but there was many of the children, many of the students did not start school, or if they started in the fall, then they had to drop out for a period of time till the fields were harvested and everything; then start back. And that was the same with us. We would start when school began, and then drop out and harvest the

fields, and then in the spring you'd drop out and get things planted and everything like that.

**White:** What kind of crops do you remember growing at home and harvesting?

**Weary:** OK. My dad grew cotton, corn, sugar cane. We made our own syrup and everything. We grew most of everything we ate. The only thing we bought at the store was things like sugar and flour. We took our own corn to the grist mill to be ground and everything, so that was very—we always had animals. So we always had cows and hogs, and we would always butcher hogs and sometime a beef, and my mom would can the beef. You know, she'd cook it and can it, and then we would always smoke the pork and everything like that.

**White:** What kind of memories do you have of the smokehouse? I know I grew up around a smokehouse.

**Weary:** Oh, those smoked sausages. (laughter) Oh, you know, I didn't enjoy taking the intestines and cleaning those, so we could stuff the sausage. I didn't enjoy it. But I sure enjoyed eating the sausage and the hams that we would hang up and smoke and everything like that.

**White:** Do you remember hog-killing time, or were you actually a part of that?

**Weary:** Oh, yes, I was part of that. When my dad would, they would have the boil, he'd boil the water in the big drum, and when they would butcher, I didn't want to see them butcher the hog. I didn't like to see that, but after that we would go out and have to, after they put it in the hot water, have to pull that hair off and everything like that. I remember all of that. And it was not something I enjoyed, but it was something we had to do, though (laughter) to survive.

**White:** You mentioned your mother would put up the meat. Did she also can vegetables?

**Weary:** Yes.

**White:** What do you remember from those?

**Weary:** OK. We had fruit trees, so, but she would can the beans. She would can the peas. She would can—she didn't can greens. I don't know. But she canned basically anything, I guess, that you could can, back then, that we had.

**White:** Not much freezing going on during the [19]50s, huh?

**Weary:** Actually we didn't have a refrigerator. We didn't have electricity until I was in fifth grade.



**White:** Is that right?

**Weary:** Yes. And we got electricity in the fifth grade, and it was much later that we got our refrigerator and then even much later that she got a freezer.

**White:** Did you have one of the old iceboxes?

**Weary:** Yes, we did. And the ice man would come by. I don't know if it was once or twice a week, and I never could understand why they would wrap the ice in a wool blanket. I thought that would cause it to thaw, but my mom would always wrap it in those wool blankets to keep it—

**White:** We wrapped ours in brown paper.

**Weary:** Oh, did you? I don't know—

**White:** I think everybody must have had a different tradition, some way to preserve the ice and still keep the cool. About your early school years, do you remember some of the teachers or principals that influenced you?

**Weary:** I certainly do. Mrs. Ola Beth Smith(?) was my first teacher. Mrs. Taylor was my first teacher, but Mrs. Ola Beth Smith was the one who had a greater influence on me in my elementary years. She didn't have children of her own, nor a husband, but she loved children, and you can see that, the way she related to the children, and she was an excellent teacher. So later on when I was in junior high school, she wanted to adopt me, but my mom would let me go spend nights with she and her husband, and along with, she took a lot of other kids home, as well, but she always wanted to adopt me. But my mom said, "No." (laughter) So, but she was really one who encouraged you. And then there was another teacher, Ms. Leaga Parker(?). She had no children, either, but she had kind of reared, brought some of her nieces and nephews up in her home. And so she was a real special teacher to me and very encouraging and always wanted you to do your best and had a real way about relating to the students. And Mrs. Gray was another teacher. She was the principal's wife. Mr. Lavell Gray was the principal. Mr. Gray was a good man, and Mr. Gray made sure that our school was the cleanest school in the county, I think. He wanted to make sure that that school was always clean because of the stereotypes and everything that you had about the blacks not being clean and everything. So any time you walked into the gym, when we finally got a gym, which was in the [19]60s we got a gym. I think it was in the [19]60s, after that board of education thing [*Brown v. Board of Education*]. I can't even think about the bill that we were—don't even quote that, but we were able to get a gym.

**White:** Well, I think that was during the "separate-but-equal" days. Wasn't it?

**Weary:** I think that's the one I'm thinking about.

**White:** And at that time a number of the black schools were improved considerably by the political powers. And you went to school at New Hymn up through what grade?

**Weary:** I graduated an associate from New Hymn.

**White:** You graduated from New Hymn. When did New Hymn close?

**Weary:** After 1970, when the schools integrated, they changed the name of New Hymn to West Union(?) and later on to Simpson Central. But I guess it was when they—I don't know exactly when they changed it to the junior high school. It was [19]73 or [19]74 some time (inaudible).

**White:** I think so; 1974 I believe it was.

**Weary:** I think it was that time, but (inaudible).

**White:** There's still a very vital New Hymn get-together, reunion every year. Do you participate in that?

**Weary:** Oh, yes. I have been to two. Our schedule is always that we don't get to go, but it's all over the country. And it has one of the largest gatherings. I don't remember how many, but the times that I've gone, you know, you've had 600, 400 people, 400. The numbers, I understand, goes up.

**White:** I think they met in Chicago a couple of times, all around the country.

**Weary:** Yeah. They've been all over, yes, and I've just been to the ones that have been here because we, traveling with my husband, there was always a conflict.

**White:** Even as a young child you realized that there were differences in the white schools and the black schools as far as the financial support goes? You indicated that.

**Weary:** Yeah. I used to wonder, when I was real small, when I got my books, when I was issued my books, and I would open the books up, and there were all these names in the book. And I didn't know any of the names of the people in those books, and later on we were to understand that we got the books that were handed down from the white schools, so we were always behind. From what I understood we'd get the books that, you know, so I'd—

**White:** Somewhat outdated and used.

**Weary:** Yeah, uh-huh. And then when we got our gym we needed curtains for the stage, and we finally got curtains for the stage, and we wondered why they weren't green and gold because that was our color, and later on we understood that someone else got the new curtains, and we got the hand-me-down (inaudible).

**White:** Came from another school, different colors, huh?

**Weary:** Yes, uh-huh, yeah, but they got the new ones, and we didn't have the band uniforms. If we got the uniforms, they were a different color than what ours were. And so we knew that there were—and I think the greatest thing that I noticed was that the school buses, you know. We rode the dilapidated school buses, that you could hear our bus coming from (laughter) miles away, and the other thing was I didn't understand why we could pass each other, going to separate schools, and we all were in school and everything, and the beautiful bus would pass me, and we were sitting on the ragged bus. We were cold, and I don't know if there was heat in those other buses. I never got on them enough, but I knew that the windows stayed up, (laughter) you know, and there were no—

**White:** Or if they were down, they stayed down.

**Weary:** Yeah, and everything. So our buses, our school buses, everything told us that, "You're inferior." And so, yes, I don't know of any of the kids who did not, might not have been talked about on a great, because people were afraid to talk about anything.

**White:** I've got to tell you this to get your response because you obviously were much more impressed with your teachers than your dad was in his interview Saturday. He said he dropped out of school in about the ninth grade because he realized the teachers were much poorer than he was as a farmer because his family was at least well fed, and he could work. And he said, "I didn't see any sense in getting any more education because those teachers had more education, and they were worse off than I was." (laughter)

**Weary:** And he would also say that those teachers were teachers. They were real, true teachers, and they taught, but he just saw that they were—

**White:** That he was economically—

**Weary:** Yeah. It was economics more than the quality of the teachers and everything. So that's what he told us several times.

**White:** Obviously he encouraged all of you kids to go ahead and finish school and get a good education, though.

**Weary:** Yes. He stressed getting a high school education. He didn't stress college education because he just didn't—I don't think he realized that that was a possibility because that's my assessment, but he—

**White:** But had I been him, and had I had ten children, I'm not sure I would have encouraged (laughter) them to go to college. In fact, I—

**Weary:** Yeah, because he knew that there was no way that he could send a child to school. During that time, there was not a lot of—I don't even know if there was financial aid and things like that, so he knew that he could not—but you had to graduate from high school. That was a—

**White:** And you did graduate. And what other kind of education did you go on and get?

**Weary:** OK. I graduated from high school, yes, and I was second in my class because I saw education as a way for me to get out of our poverty. I had Mom and Dad at home, but we didn't have a lot. We had the hogs and cattle. We had food. I remember one time when we didn't have anything in the house, only once that we didn't have anything in the house but some corn meal. And my brothers and sisters, we loved to fish, and we loved to do some things. We all got together, and we got our hooks. We dug us some baits, and we went down to the creek, and we took one of Mama's wash tubs. I don't know. I guess, you know those number two wash tubs.

**White:** I sure do.

**Weary:** And we took that with us, and we came back with that thing half full of fish, and we cleaned the fish, and we had fish and cornbread. That was the only time I remember that we didn't have anything in the house to eat but cornmeal, but some cornmeal. And so, but we had food to eat. Daddy, that was one thing; he made sure that we had food to eat.

**White:** Before we get on to education, you reminded me of one thing. I want to see if you washed clothes the same way we did when we were coming up. (Inaudible)

**Weary:** Oh, on a scrub board in the wash tubs, oh, yes. (laughter)

**White:** What do you remember about clothes and taking care of clothes when you were growing up?

**Weary:** OK. When we lived across the creek, we had a well. OK. And so it was easy to draw the water there and wash the clothes and hang them on the line and everything or hang them on the trees or wherever we hung the clothes.

**White:** Using the old wash board.

**Weary:** Old wash board when we washed the clothes with the wash board and put them to the next tub of water and everything to rinse, and everything, but when we moved to where my dad is now, we didn't have a well. So for—I've been trying to remember how long it was that we actually, back then they'd say, toted water. (laughter) But we actually carried water from across the creek to where my dad lives

now, and we would have buckets. We would have all kinds of things. We'd have to make two or three trips because that was the water, source of our water.

**White:** Did you heat it on the stove?

**Weary:** We heated it on the stove and took your bath in the number two tub and everything. We had the foot tubs if you want to take a wash off, or the wash pan if you just wanted to wash your face and hands.

**White:** Well, we went to my grandmother's house on the other side of Pinola, and we went down and used an old wash pot, put it over a fire, and we would wash clothes when I was little.

**Weary:** Oh, yeah. We had the fire.

**White:** Did you do that?

**Weary:** And we had to have a stick to keep stirring the clothes and pushing them down and then stirring them and washing them (inaudible).

**White:** Well, I wondered how you got by without doing—(laughter)

**Weary:** Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. It's not coming back. But actually I have my mom's wash pot now. He gave it to me. I told him I wanted it, and so I don't know what I'm going to do with it, but I have it, though. (laughter)

**White:** Don't know what you're going to do with it, but it's not going to be wash clothes with it.

**Weary:** No, definitely not.

**White:** I think we just called that a paddle, that stick that we used to—

**Weary:** Uh-huh, yes.

**White:** —push the clothes down in. OK. I'm sorry. We got off of education onto washing clothes.

**Weary:** Well, we had the cows. We milked the cows, and my mom made butter, and she sold butter. We had plenty chickens, and she sold the eggs, and we would put chickens in the coop, but she said to clean them out so that we can have chickens to eat and everything like that, so we did that (inaudible) work.

**White:** But you didn't wring their necks?

**Weary:** Oh, yeah, my sister did. (laughter) I didn't. My oldest sister would wring the neck, and she was so brave, too, that either she would put it on a chopping block, and just chop it off. Oh, I couldn't stand that, you know, but yeah, we did that. I didn't. (laughter)

**White:** You didn't mind eating chicken and dumplings, though, once it was done, did you?

**Weary:** Oh, it was good. I cleaned them and everything, but the other thing that I remember about our house, though, is that the house was always—it was a dilapidated house, but the one thing that my mama said to us is that, “No matter where you live, or what the condition of your house, it can be clean.” So anytime that you came to our house, it was spotless. And I always hated when spring came around, (laughter) spring or Thanksgiving.

**White:** Spring housecleaning?

**Weary:** Uh-huh. We had to take everything out of the house, and you had to take lye water, put lye in the water, throw it up on the walls, and she'd take sand on those and scrub the floors, and she made a broom out of shucks, and we had to scrub the floors with that.

**White:** Corn shucks?

**Weary:** Yeah, corn.

**White:** We used sage brush, sage grass.

**Weary:** Oh, OK, (inaudible) corn shucks, but she said—and the house was up off the ground a little bit. My mom would have us—we had to go under there with a straw broom and sweep underneath the house. We had to get up in the loft, up in it, and sweep down dust and everything like that out of the loft, and everything like that. I hated those times. We did that twice a year. It was cold at Thanksgiving time when we had to do it. But she said, “No matter where you are and what condition you're in, you don't have to live like—it can be clean, no matter what condition you're in.” So—

**White:** And you said y'all came up without electricity for a number of those years. You probably used a wood stove (inaudible).

**Weary:** We had the wood stove. My brothers had to cut the wood. We had to bring it in. They would get the wood and cut it in, and then they'd get the splinters, as we call them, to start the fire, the kindlings and everything, and we had the wood stove. She would cook on that wood stove. She could bake cakes that were out of this world on that wood stove. I don't know how she did it in that oven, but it was wonderful. And we had the wood heater.

**White:** What kind of cakes did she make?

**Weary:** Oh, my mom made chocolate cakes, coconut cakes, jelly cakes, pound cakes. You name it, she made them. But it was a wonder she could make them in that oven. And so my dad still has his wood heater in the house, but we got him, just a few years ago, we got him a gas [heater] because he's getting old, and we don't want him to make too many fires, now.

**White:** What do you remember about Christmas? You're bound to have some good memories of Christmas in that house.

**Weary:** I'm just now realizing what the real meaning—"just now," meaning over the last twenty years—the real meaning of Christmas because back then Christmas, to us, was getting gifts and things like that, and we didn't get them. When we would go back to school after the Christmas holidays, some of the kids would talk about they got a doll, or they got that, or they got that. And we didn't get that. And so I developed a bad taste about Christmas because I just didn't realize the real meaning of Christmas. It wasn't about the gifts. It wasn't about all these things about Christ who came into this world, so Christmas was not a good feeling, but we had the apples, the oranges, the nuts. We had the raisins, and we had, what we called it, the orange-sliced candy, I guess.

**White:** Oh, yes. (laughter)

**Weary:** Yeah. And then we had some of those chocolate, you know, the things—

**White:** Cherries, chocolate-covered cherries?

**Weary:** Well, it's not the cherries, but it has a white filling in it. I don't know. Chocolate drops or something.

**White:** Drops I think they call them.

**Weary:** Yeah. And that was our Christmas, but boy, did Mama fix a feast, though. She always—

**White:** That's what I was talking about, the food in memories.

**Weary:** Yeah, she would always fix a feast at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

**White:** Did a number of family members come in for the holidays?

**Weary:** OK. The family, and we still do. The family would always get together at Christmas and Thanksgiving and Fourth of July, but at those times, that's when she would always fix the feast. Fourth of July, we didn't do that much. You know, it's

another birthday. We didn't take off or anything, but yes, it was—she would fix the dressing and the dumplings and the pies and the cakes and the whole works, yes.

**White:** What was Sunday like back then? Did you go to church nearby?

**Weary:** Yes, we did. We went to New Zion Baptist Church, and when you was talking about the wagons earlier, it make me sound ancient, but that was the only way we had to get to church is on the wagon. So we would go to church on the wagon when we were small, when I was real small.

**White:** With mules pulling it?

**Weary:** Yes, mules pulling it. And later on my daddy got an old Ford that his brother had given to him. I guess his brother lived in, had moved to Chicago, and so he gave him this old Ford car, and we would use that, but my mama didn't go to church that much, back then. She didn't get—I don't know what the problem was.

**White:** Ten children, I imagine. (laughter)

**Weary:** I don't know, but she didn't go much of anywhere. I don't know. I think it was a complex. I don't know what it was. It wasn't until after I went to college and came back home that she would start getting out more and going more and everything, but even though she cooked and did things like that, later on, she got ill. My mom got ill, and so she developed heart trouble and a whole bunch of things, and so when we were in junior high and high school, she was always sickly. And so—

**White:** How old were you when she died?

**Weary:** I don't know. My oldest son, she died on his third birthday, which was in [19]79, and, I don't know how old I was then, but she (inaudible)—(laughter)

**White:** Well, actually I didn't mean how old were you. I meant (inaudible).

**Weary:** (Inaudible). Uh-huh, yeah. (laughter) I'm fifty-three now, but I don't (inaudible).

**White:** Sometimes I don't phrase things just right. (laughter)

**Weary:** Yeah. I can't remember it exactly, but I know she died July 16, 1979, but she died of colon cancer, and that was one of the things that really, really, really bothered me because she had gone to the doctors over and over and over for hemorrhoid. And I know I'm digressing right now.

**White:** That's fine.



**Weary:** And they said, “It was hemorrhoids. It was hemorrhoids.” She was bleeding; they said it was hemorrhoids, and so finally when we got our health clinic, a doctor checked her, and he sent her to a specialist in Jackson, and it had turned to cancer already. So—

**White:** Before that, had she gone to the white doctors?

**Weary:** Oh, those were the doctors—

**White:** Those were the only doctors there?

**Weary:** Those were the only doctors to go to, and they kept saying it was hemorrhoids.

**White:** And when you say your clinic, I know what it is, but can you (inaudible)?

**Weary:** OK. Mendenhall, Voice of Calvary, Mendenhall Ministries started a health clinic, and if you would like me to, I’d love to talk about that.

**White:** Yeah.

**Weary:** It’s not in Pinola, but if you would like to—

**White:** We will do that at the appropriate time because you’ve obviously—we’ve talked about church and early influences and family, and I think a lot of this, you’ll be able to bring up with your and your husband’s ministry later in life. We haven’t got you married or anything else yet. (laughter) (End of digital file named tape one, side one. Interview continues on digital file named tape one, side two.)

**White:** You graduated from New Hymn. And where did you go to school after that?

**Weary:** OK. After I graduated from New Hymn, I went to college at Los Angeles Baptist College in New (inaudible), California.

**White:** How did you get out to California?

**Weary:** OK. I had a scholarship to go to Alcorn State University, and that’s where I was headed to college, but then summer of [19]68, after graduation, I heard about this Christian college in California. It’s a liberal, Christian, liberal arts school, and I wanted to study the word of God, but I also wanted to get a degree in teaching. I wanted to teach. And so two young men that we knew, Dolphus Weary and Jimmy Walker was attending school in California, and they told us about this school. And they were recruiting students to go out there because they were the only two blacks there. And so they recruited Carolyn Albritton Fletcher(?), who is my pastor’s wife now. And they also recruited myself and four other blacks that year.

**White:** This is Reverend Artis Fletcher's wife?

**Weary:** Reverend Artis Fletcher's wife, Carolyn Fletcher. And so five of us in August, loaded up, got into a little Volkswagen, VW Volkswagen, one with six, five, then Dolphus—

**White:** In the little Beetle?

**Weary:** In the little Beetle.

**White:** Oh, me. (laughter)

**Weary:** Dolphus is five [feet], eleven [inches]. One of the young ladies was about six feet, and then Pastor Fletcher's wife and I. Five of us got into this little VW, dragging, and drove out to California. And we drove straight through, stopping only for gas and went to school there. And Dolphus and I started dating. My husband and I started dating there. And in 1970 we got married, and we went back to school because he was in the seminary there then. He got his Master's Degree in Christian Education, and I was just a junior in college. And so after I completed my junior year, we moved back to Mississippi, and I was going to transfer to Jackson State University and found out that they would not accept my credits from California. I would have had to start over. And then I checked with the school in California and found out that they would accept—I have to go back. Every summer when I came home, I would take classes at Jackson State, and they would accept my courses from Jackson State. So I went back to California my senior year, and Dolphus stayed in Mississippi. I was determined to graduate because earlier I stated that I saw that education was my way out of the poverty and everything, so I was determined that I was going to graduate, and I didn't want to lose all those courses, those hours that I had accumulated at L.A. Baptist College.

**White:** And you had planned to teach at the time? Is that right?

**Weary:** Yes. I majored in history. And so teaching, I planned to teach. And so after graduating from L.A. Baptist College—well, let me back up a minute. I'm sorry. After the first semester that last year I was at L.A. Baptist College, they had mercy on me, and they told me that my Christian theology teacher would waive my second semester of Christian theology, and I only needed three more units to graduate. So I could take some education classes at Jackson State to graduate because I had all of my essential courses out of the way. So the second semester I moved back home, took some courses at Jackson State, and that's how I finished up my degree in history. But once I got my degree, realized that I was needed in the ministry. My husband was in ministry in Mendenhall at the time.

**White:** What was he doing?

**Weary:** He was the youth director at the Voice of Calvary, and he also assisted John Perkins who was the president of Voice of Calvary. And so John Perkins needed a secretary, and I had the skills because I had taken typing and everything in high school, and I was good at it. And so John Perkins was traveling all over, raising funds for the ministry. Dolphus was sort of running the ministry back here, and John Perkins' wife, Vera Mae(?) was the bookkeeper. And so I was the secretary, and so I was keeping up with everybody and everything. (laughter)

**White:** This was in 1970, right?

**Weary:** This was in 1971.

**White:** Seventy-one. That's the year after the schools integrated in Simpson County, I think.

**Weary:** Right, um-hm. Yes, uh-huh. Yes. And so it just, I don't know. Every time I got ready to take the teacher's exam, there was another need in the ministry, so I never taught. So I always worked in the ministry in the areas that I was needed. So I was kind of versatile and could kind of fit in there.

**White:** You also took some classes at Wesley College in Florence, I think.

**Weary:** Yes, I did. I took some business courses since I realized that I wasn't going to teach and that I was going to be doing that type of work in some of the areas. I felt like I needed a little more training.

**White:** Business background?

**Weary:** Yeah.

**White:** Somehow along the way you managed to have a couple of children, too, didn't you? (laughter) Can you tell us their names and when and where they were born?

**Weary:** Yes. We have three beautiful children. My daughter Danita Rodeeke Weary(?) was born in 1974, right after, one week after the flood of 1974, when my house had three feet of water in it.

**White:** In Mendenhall?

**Weary:** In Mendenhall, yes. And so I knew that I was due really soon, so I asked the health department if they could come in maybe and get it sanitized, but they couldn't do that. So some of the neighbors whose houses also were flooded came in, and they really cleaned the house and got it ready for Danita. She was born—the flood was April 12. She was born April 19.

**White:** You needed your mother there with that lye soap then, didn't you? (laughter)

**Weary:** Oh, yes. I did. I really did. She was not able to, but we could have used that lye soap, then. (laughter) Yes. And so Danita was born April 19, 1974. Danita graduated as valedictorian from Mendenhall High School. She attended Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, University of Tennessee, Memphis, Medical School. She will complete her residency at the University of South Alabama Women and Children's Hospital in June. And so she will be joining a practice in Natchez, Mississippi in August. So we're very proud of her. Then our second, we have a son, Reginald, who was born in 1976. Reggie graduated from Mendenhall High School, attended Tougaloo College, and graduated in 1999 from Tougaloo and is now working with Mass Mutual Financial Group, insurance, investment in Jackson, Mississippi. And then we had a caboose. (laughter) We have a fifteen-year-old son whose name is Ryan, and Ryan is a sophomore at Richland High School.

**White:** I met him getting on the school bus, or waiting for the school bus, out front this morning.

**Weary:** Yes, uh-huh. So those are our children.

**White:** And since 1971, when you sort of started helping in the ministry, you've done a number of things, I think, in the ministry. What have you and your husband done together since then? You are not in Mendenhall Ministries anymore, I notice.

**Weary:** No. We left Mendenhall Ministries after twenty-seven and a half years; felt that we had brought the ministry about as far as we could take it, and it was time for new leadership, new vision to take the ministry. And so my husband is now working with a ministry called Mission Mississippi. It's a racial reconciliation ministry within the body of Christ, calling the church to be reconciled, not trying to integrate churches or such, but just trying to say to the body of Christ, "Let's look like the body of Christ. Let's let the world see us, acting like the body of Christ, and we can come together periodically for fellowship, for prayer, and so let the world see us."

**White:** That was not the sort of thing that was going on in Mendenhall, Mississippi, when you returned in 1970, was it? Can you tell us a little bit—without naming names—what some of the early experiences in the ministry were in Mendenhall?

**Weary:** OK. We were called Voice of Calvary at first, and we looked at some of the things that were happening in our state at that time. We could see that there were some things that needed to happen, some changes that needed to take place, so as a result Voice of Calvary, John Perkins, saw themselves as one who would lead out in the civil rights movement, and as a result began to ask some questions to the authorities, began to lead out in some marches and demonstrations, too, because when he saw that things were not happening, that didn't seem like they were going to happen, that needed to happen, that we began to stand up and to speak out. And as a result some things happened that were not too favorable, but we still felt like that we

should stand for justice and righteousness. And so as fearful as I was, and you know I felt like that this was right. It's biblical, you know.

**White:** The ministry worked basically in education and in health care and in developing a community economic base, and in a number of other ways. Could you tell us a little bit about the different aspects of the ministry?

**Weary:** Right. Someone told us one time, told John Perkins when he went out to ask for jobs for our youth. We would see young people working during the summer. We could work in the fields. There were not many options, so we went to one of the merchants and asked the merchant if they would give our young people a job during the summer, and the merchant said to him, "Why don't you-all create your own jobs?" And it was meant as a negative, but that merchant did not know that—

**White:** Turned to a positive.

**Weary:** —that it turned to a positive. So in 1969 when Dolphus, my husband, came back from California to Mendenhall, there were no jobs available. His brother asked him to come to Washington, DC. He would get him a job. So he went, but John Perkins said to Dolphus, "The problem with our communities is all of the good people are leaving the communities, and there are no leadership left in that community. The good leadership is gone." Because he knew that if Dolphus get up to Washington and start working, he's going to stay. And he said, "Let's create our own jobs." And that's the first year. The only thing, that first summer, the only thing they did was have vacation Bible schools in all the different churches around. They asked the churches, "Can we come in and teach the children vacation Bible schools?" And that was the first year. And then they realized that integration was coming to the county and realized that our children was not ready for integration academically. So the next summer we started a tutoring program. And then when we moved back to Mississippi, Dolphus and I moved back to Mississippi, we looked around and people were saying our kids were getting in trouble. They were bad. They were doing this and this. We realized that they didn't have anywhere to play. They didn't have any place to do this or that, so we said, "Let's start a gym recreation ministry and get these kids in here. We can teach them the word of God, but they'll also have a place where they can play ball, and they can do this and do this." The first thing we did, we bought a piece of land right there in the community, and it was called the baseball field. That's what everybody called it, the baseball field. That's where all our kids congregated to play and whatever, and we had organized sports for them even before organized sports for kids in the county was there. And then we built this—we got a grant from the Catholic Church, built that gymnasium, and that was where kids from all over the county was coming to play because that was the only place that was for our kids. And then there was two incidents from my own personal experience. I didn't start driving till 1970, so I know it was after 1970. I was trying to think in my mind, "When did (inaudible)?"

**White:** You didn't drive that Volkswagen to California? (laughter)

**Weary:** No, I didn't drive it to California, but I could drive it, though. But I didn't get my license till 1970. And I knew that it was after 1970 when these incidents took place. My mom was sick; I told you that. And so she needed to go to the doctor, and I took her to the doctor in Magee. That's all I'll say. And at the time they had the separate waiting rooms, and so we got there around eleven o'clock, and we were in the waiting room. So we kept sitting there, and I didn't have a watch because they don't run on my arm. So I knew we had been there a long time. Finally I asked my mom what time it was. And she said it was after two o'clock. And so went to the window and asked the lady about it. And so she said they were going to see us. And so we waited there and waited there, and I read magazines. We waited, and so later on I asked my mom what time it was. She said it was five o'clock, and so I went to the window. And they had forgotten that we were in there. And so the doctor asked my mom a couple of questions and sent her home, gave her a prescription, never touched her, never checked or anything. And so that had a profound impact on me. And then my sister was—

**White:** Did you know she was suffering from cancer?

**Weary:** We didn't know at the time that she was suffering (inaudible).

**White:** OK. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

**Weary:** No. I did not know. We just knew she was sick. My sister was pregnant, and when she got ready to have the baby, I took her to the hospital in Magee. I'll just say that. And at the time, and this was, I know it was after [19]70 because I could drive, (laughter) drive with a license. At the time they had so many rooms for the black, and the rest of the hospital for the white, and they didn't have a room for my sister, and when she had that baby, they put her in the hallway. And people were passing by, and she was there. That's where she was, in the hall.

**White:** In the hall, literally, huh?

**Weary:** And so she had to go to the bathroom, and so when they brought her a bedpan in that hallway, that was it for me. I go, "Something is wrong with this." And so we had had story after story of things happening like that to people, and we start to pray about it, and we start asking people, "If the body of Jesus Christ can go to Africa and Asia and Latin America and all these places and start hospitals and clinics, can we trust God for us to start a clinic here and treat people with dignity?" And I'm not saying everybody did that, but my experience from that perspective because people were staying at home, dying. They wouldn't go to the doctor. They were dying of things that could have been treated because of the way they were being treated, and I'm just talking from my experience, with those two experiences. And we start asking and questioning. About that time God sent a young couple down from Pennsylvania, and the wife was a nurse. And they worked with us in the ministry, and we saw that as

God saying, “It’s time to move.” So she began to go into the community and do surveys.

**White:** What were their names?

**Weary:** Joan and Irving Houston(?), OK, Joan and Irving Houson. She began to do surveys and everything, and we found a lot of things in that community that we weren’t even aware of right under our nose. We found a family who had about, I guess it must have been about seven or eight children, and these children had not been in school. They’d never been in school before, right there in the community. But we found a lot of things, and so we worked to get them into school, get them clothing, and get them things like that. Those were very smart kids, very smart kids. They excelled in school. They didn’t do anything afterwards; didn’t do too much afterwards, but that’s when we started our health clinic. And the great thing about all of this is we, negative/positive, we built a building there in the community and World Vision gave us an x-ray machine. World Vision usually won’t do anything in this country, but they did things abroad. And World Vision, they donated an x-ray machine.

**White:** They were doing some missionary work at home, then, weren’t they?

**Weary:** Yeah. And so they did. But we tested the x-ray machine on my husband, and (inaudible) an older gentleman who had helped us a lot in the ministry, Mr. Robert A. Butler. We tested it on the two of them, and that night the flood of [19]74 came in and flooded our clinic, and it messed up our x-ray machine. So we knew that it was time to get out of the community and move our clinic up out of the community because it was a flood area.

**White:** Onto higher ground, huh?

**Weary:** Um-hm. And that’s when we were able to get our current building. Mrs. Rodenberry(?) sold us the health clinic.

**White:** That had been her former—

**Weary:** Her husband’s clinic. And Mrs. Rodenberry did something that a lot of people probably still is mad at her about doing, but she did something courageous. She sold us the clinic, and she had a lot of pressure on her not to do that, but she did it, and we will always be grateful to her for that.

**White:** That’s a building, which is located close to the courthouse.

**Weary:** Right, exactly.

**White:** In Mendenhall.

**Weary:** And it’s still our clinic.

**White:** Did you have a doctor there?

**Weary:** We didn't have a doctor when we opened the clinic, but we was praying that God would send us a doctor. We had Dr. Kevin Lake(?) from California, took his vacation and brought his family down from California, and they worked in our clinic. And then we had other doctors would come, missionary doctors, come for a short period of time. One came from Florida, and he was waiting for his visa and everything to get worked out, and he was headed to Tanzania. And my husband told him, "You're already in Africa. Why are you going (laughter) over there? So you can just stay here." But he went on over there anyway, (laughter) but we start praying, and God sent us a doctor from Colorado Springs, Colorado. And he was there until our present doctor came in 197(inaudible).

**White:** What was his name?

**Weary:** The one before?

**White:** From Colorado. Do you remember his name?

**Weary:** Oh, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. (laughter) I can't think of it. I'll think of it later.

**White:** That's all right.

**Weary:** But then Dr. Dennis Adam(?) came, and so he left, but Dr. Dennis Adam has been there ever since, so he moved his family from Newark, New Jersey down, and they've been there ever since.

**White:** The staff at the clinic, now, has about how many people working there? Do you know? I hate to put you on the spot about another—

**Weary:** There are at least seven people working there right now. Yeah. I don't know exactly how many since we are not there anymore, but I'm sure, I know there is about seven people.

**White:** I know it's very active.

**Weary:** Um-hm, yeah.

**White:** One thing that a lot of people in Simpson County don't know is that for a long, for a number of years Mendenhall Ministries, Voice of Calvary, or whatever division you want to speak of, has ministered to black and white people, and that made it somewhat of an unusual ministry the whole time.



**Weary:** Very much so. Our health clinic, we've seen a good percentage of our patients are white. We have a thrift store, and about 60 percent of the patrons in our thrift store are white.

**White:** And we do need to get around to the economic part of it. Oh, we talked about jobs for kids and everything. You also started a thrift store.

**Weary:** We had a thrift store. First, we had a leadership development program. We felt that we need to develop leaders because that's where—our leaders are our—we need to invest in young people and train them to be leaders.

**White:** In the community.

**Weary:** In the community, because our community will not survive if we don't have quality leadership in those communities and models that young kids can look up to in those communities. So we start working with the youth, and Dolphus and I were youth directors as well as our other responsibilities. And most of those young people that we work with now, we have nurses. We have one doctor. We have lawyers. They've left since then. They've left the community, but wherever they are, they're still walking with the Lord, and they're being productive, and that's one thing we can really be proud of. We were in Washington, DC, last week, and (inaudible) with the group of them up there. So you know that—

**White:** Sort of like a reunion, then, wasn't it?

**Weary:** Yeah, uh-huh. But over the years we developed jobs for the youth on our farm. We believe that our young folks need to work, and we had the farm so we can teach them to work on the farm.

**White:** Did you actually supervise any part of the farm, or work on the farm any? A lot of people in Simpson County don't know that exists.

**Weary:** Oh, yes. My—

**White:** Or what it does.

**Weary:** OK. Well, during the summer we have summer youth leadership development, and before nine o'clock my husband and I would take the youth to the farm, six o'clock in the morning. We'd pick peas. We'd do all that needed to be done in the springtime. He would have them after school to go out to help plant the vegetables and things like that. And we would get them a little stipend because we wanted them to know what work was worth. We wanted to teach the value of work, the ethic of work and everything. And then we would have these older kids to teach the young kids and tutor them and tutor them in math and English and all.

**White:** How big is the farm, and what do you do with the food that's raised there?

**Weary:** OK. We have 120-acre farm out there. Only about fifty acres are actually being utilized, and we grow all types of vegetable and grew at the time when we were there, crop vegetables, watermelon and all kinds of things. A lot of it we used to feed the kids in our Christian school. Others, we gave away some. Much we sold to different vendors and things like that, and people could come out and, they called, pick-your-own. Charging so much, you could pick your own and everything. So it was a real benefit to the community.

**White:** You mentioned the school, too. What type education have you provided over the years?

**Weary:** OK. We have a Christian school, which started out as a kindergarten, and later on we—

**White:** Was that Genesis One?

**Weary:** Genesis One Christian School. First of all, everything we did with Mendenhall Ministries, which it was Voice of Calvary, excuse me, and then later we changed the name to Mendenhall Ministries because John Perkins had Voice of Calvary also in Jackson, so we had to change our name to get our own identity. But everything we've done, every ministry we've started was with a felt need of the community. We didn't want to do anything that the community did not need. So at the time there was no public kindergarten or anything, and many of the white kids could go to their church kindergartens or nursery schools. We didn't have anything for our children, but when we got to the first grade in the public schools, they were supposed to compete, and the white kids were already—

**White:** Had learned the alphabet, covered—

**Weary:** Yeah. Right. Well, there was Head Start, was in the county, but the thing people don't realize about Head Start: if you're one dollar over the—there is a—what is it? A limit of funds that you can make. Otherwise your kids don't get to go. So a lot of our kids was kind of lost, and then they had to wait till they got to the first grade, so we started out with a kindergarten because they needed to compete when they got to the first grade. And then later on, we had a lot of our parents saying, "Well, we need to go on because we like the Christian—we like our kids learning about the Lord. We need a Christian school." And so because of that felt need in the community, we started an elementary school. We felt that if we can take them from kindergarten to fifth grade, when they got into the public school, they'd be ready to compete, and they'd be ready to go on. And then after that, they said, "Well, you really need to keep them through junior high school to really give them the full benefit and everything." So we started a junior high school. (End of digital file named tape one, side two. Beginning of digital file named tape two, side one.) And at the junior high, after we started junior high school, we were under a lot of pressure to go further, but we just felt that the public schools were seemingly getting better, and also that our

kids, our young people needed to get into sports programs and things like that, and they couldn't do that at our school because we couldn't offer the same quality of sports program that the public school offered. So we stopped at junior high school. But our students do real well. They do fairly well in the public schools, so we know that we were doing something right with them in our school. A lot of people were skeptical at first, but we had quality teachers. We had quality leaders and everything, so our kids could compete in the public schools. So we were proud of that, and right now our kids go on through the public schools, and many of them excel. So that's a benefit. That's a real encouragement as well.

**White:** Well, the school has become an open and vital part of the community, not only in the black community, but all of the community, I know, who participate in the Christmas parades and everything else. The ministry overall was limited, basically, to the black churches, I'm sure, because it was not welcomed at first—I heard Reverend Perkins talk about this—in the white churches. Was there any overt opposition, or any help that came from any of the white churches over the years, schoolwise or educationwise?

**Weary:** There probably was, and I know that some of the merchants, if we would ask for a donation, would give a donation and things like that. I can't think of any specifics right now, but I'm sure there was some support, and we never got any overt opposition to what we were doing at our school.

**White:** Well, you're in a unique position to speak from the women's perspective of what it was like to start and work with a minister in Simpson County, Mississippi. Is there anything you can think of that you saw, maybe, that the men didn't see, or how the women helped and affected the ministry, and what part they played in it? I know you've mentioned the nurse, in particular. You said she was a female. (laughter)

**Weary:** Yeah. Well, I think they had a profound impact on the ministry, too, because we all saw the need. And we saw the need; we saw needs. And people just sort of got in there and did what needed to be done. Judy Adams, who was the head of our school, did an excellent job. She served as the principal at the school for many years, and then we had—the current principal is a female, and we had people to serve in many positions, in leadership positions as director of development or Evelyn Jeroby(?) did an excellent job as director of development in getting the ministry out there before the people. And as far as from the woman's perspective, I don't know if I could speak to that, but I just know that the women have had a profound impact on what has happened (inaudible).

**White:** Have you got any specific people who have come through the program that you think have got what it was all about and gone out into the world and done anything that would reflect what they learned, working through the program?

**Weary:** Most definitely. We have the Perkins; all the Perkins kids are working in ministry in various areas of the country now, in Jackson and California and

everything. We have Marlene Hardy(?) and Charlene Philips(?), Arthur Philips(?). I can just go on and name quite a—I can name, name, name, and the ones we were with in Washington, DC, each one, making an impact where they are. And one of the things that we wanted our young folks to see is that it's not about themselves, but it's about others who cannot help to come—once you make it, then it's not a selfish thing, but you reach down and help someone else to make it out and to make it up, too. And so whether you're here or whether you're in California or Washington, DC, that you don't forget community and that you don't forget the people in the community, and you see the need there, and you jump in and do what you can to help people in the community, too. And many times people make it. They want to just keep everything on themselves, but how do you reach down and help the other people to become better people? (inaudible)

**White:** Well, I think to sum this up to go forward, sometimes we have to look back when and where you became a Christian has grown since that time. I didn't ask you when you became a Christian or when you joined the church. Was that the New Zion Church?

**Weary:** OK. I joined the church at New Zion, but I didn't become a Christian until later on. That's one of the things about our ministry that we really try to deal with because in the historical black church, joining the church and being baptized is synonymous with salvation, and that's not salvation. Salvation—

**White:** I think a number of people come to that realization over the years.

**Weary:** Yeah. Salvation is when you personally recognize that you are lost, and you invite Jesus Christ to come into your life, and he becomes the Lord of your life and comes (inaudible) of your life. And I joined the church, and I was baptized at New Zion, but it wasn't until John Perkins and Billy Perkins came into the public schools, teaching child evangelism and sharing the love of Jesus Christ back in the [19]60s and [19]70s. When I was a senior in high school in 1968, when I personally invited Jesus Christ into my life, that's when I decided I wanted to—after I heard about the Christian college, I wanted to go to a Christian college and learn more about the word because I recognized I didn't know a lot about the word of God.

**White:** And your and your husband's work and ministry (phone rings) today still reflects that.

**Weary:** OK. Yes. We're still working in ministry, and we probably will until we die, but one of the other things I'd like to mention, that not only is he working with Mission Mississippi. My husband wrote a book in 19[91]. He'll probably say this. I'm sorry; 1991 his book came out. And we didn't take any of the proceeds, and when we left Mendenhall, we still had a heart for rural Mississippi because that's where we worked for so long, and we started a small foundation called Rural Education and Christian Leadership Foundation. We call it Real Christian Foundation, R-E-A-L, Real Christian Foundation, which is the acronym for that. And we use the proceeds

from the sale of the book, and we also raise funds to endow this foundation. I run the foundation. My office is upstairs, and I run the foundation. I'm executive director of it, and the primary goal of the foundation is to give small grants, but also technical assistance to rural ministries within the state of Mississippi. It has to be rural. It has to be Christian; has to work with kids and other things within the community, continuing the vision that we had with Mendenhall Ministries to empower young people and empower the community. So I do that.

**White:** Do you accept donations?

**Weary:** We certainly do. (laughter)

**White:** Would you like to give an address where somebody could send one?

**Weary:** OK. It's Real Christian Foundation, Post Office Box 180059, Richland, MS, 39218. And we are trying to endow the foundation with a million dollars by the end of 2004. And God has been really blessing the foundation. It's only five years old.

**White:** Sounds like you're continuing the ministry, then.

**Weary:** Trying to. Trying to.

**White:** I certainly enjoyed the conversation. Thank you very much.

**Weary:** Thank you so much.

(end of interview)