

5-5-2007

Williams, Veralyn

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Interviewer: Dr. Jane Edward
Interviewee: Veralyn Williams
Transcriber: Danielle Rowe
Date: May 5th 2007

Jane Edward: My name is Dr. Jane Kani Edward (inaudible) interviewer and researcher on interview for African immigrants, the Bronx African American History project. Today is Saturday May 5th, 2007 I am conducting an oral history interview with Veralyn Williams. The interview will last for about one to two hours. And the interview is taking place in a Lehman College classroom. So before I start asking you, could you spell your full name so the person here who is going to transcribe will bet your name right.

Veralyn Williams: (spells name)

JE: Would you mind to tell me about yourself? Like where you come from, your religion and where you live in the Bronx

VW: okay, I'm from Sierra Leone West Africa. I was born there. I have been here though since I was a baby. I think my parents brought me here when I was about six months old. I'm a Christian, I belong to a Methodist church but I just started going to a God and Christ church, which is more non denominational. I am going to Hunter College, currently. I am majoring in media studies.

JE: is it undergraduate or graduate studies?

VW: undergrad

JE: why did your parents move from Sierra Leone to the US?

VW: because there was a war. There was a big war in Sierra Leone so my parents left before the war. Like when the war was just getting started. Like there was signs of war before the war actually started. But my uncle was there during the war. He had to leave to go to Guinea during the war. For two years, peoples arms were getting cut off. It was terrible.

JE: So when was that? Do you know the date specifically?

VW: I don't know the date specifically; I know it was in the 90's like in the 95. Like around that time. And it went on for about two years. So that's when the war was going on. But when my parents left it had to be in 1985 because I am was born in 1985 so they left in like 85/86.

JE: so when your parents moved here, did they stay in another state? Or did they move from Sierra Leone to the US... to the Bronx area?

VW: Well they. My grandmother worked for the UN so they were already over here. I think they used to live in Queens like when they first got here, maybe for like a year and then they moved

to the Bronx. I only remember living in the Bronx. My sister was born in the Bronx. She was born in 87. So by the time my sister was born we were living in the Bronx

JE: So are you still living there?

VW: Well we're living in a building not too far from where I live now. And my parents and my grandmother they moved to a house where I live now between 180 and 181st. so I've lived there all my life since I was like three or four.

JE: So since you lived in the Bronx the whole of your life, can you describe your experience living the Bronx? Like your home, the neighborhood, nationalities that lived in the area?

VW: okay great, my best friends growing up, one was black and one was Spanish- Puerto Rican. So basically that's who I went to school with, black Puerto Rican, Jamaican. You know, I went to a public school around my area.

JE: Do you know the name of the public school you went to?

VW: I went to PS 9 first. Then I went to PS 187, which is now 381. They changed the name like every other week (laughs) and I went to Dewitt Clinton in the Bronx and now I am at Hunter College, which is in Manhattan so basically most of my school life was in the Bronx.

JE: are there other Africans living in the same area that you lived?

VW: yeah, my area there are African families that live in the building across the street from me. And then also down the block, an African family just bought a house down the block from where I am at now. But growing up, I definitely, now I am very proud to say that I am from Sierra Leone. But growing up it was something that I didn't associate myself with. Because there is always that stereotype of like African. Like when you are growing up you don't want to get teased. I remember one specific time, and I talk about this all the time. This girl, she was getting teased for being African. And like, at first I never used to say nothing. And then one day, one of my friends, quote end quote friend, not really my friend, just people I hung out with, were teasing her for being African. And like one day, I was just like "well I'm African too" and they were like "well you don't look African." And I was like "well what do you think an African looks like, you know?" and from that day on I think that's when I really became, you know we need to be more proud of where we come from and proud of your future because they are beautiful. So I think from that moment, very early in junior high school is when I really became conscious that I am African and that I have to be proud of the way I am and who I am. And I have to make other people around me feel the same way that are African. But it wasn't until then that I really started to recognize the other African students around me. Before then, I tried, not that I consciously tried to disassociate myself with them. Its just I didn't make a point to be like "we are both from Africa so we should have some kind of, maybe not friendship, but acknowledgement." You know, you're from African; I'm from Africa, so yeah.

JE: and what about your experiences at Hunter College? Do you have other students from other nationalities (inaudible) Africa? And how do you relate to them for example?

VW: Now because I am very aware of the biases when people think that you are from African, you are an immigrant. Now I am very conscious of it, I actively go out. There is an African student union in my school, so I visited them I've just been so busy, I don't have time to actively be around them. But I have visited the room. I am conscious of it. But as far as my classes, it obviously comes up. I know a lot of people share the same experience as I have "oh you don't look African" or "you don't sound African" "you're African?!" a lot of people share the same experiences as I have, I've had conversations like that but if your question is do I hang around other Africans in school, then no, not really.

JE: what do the African students do? Like the African student union?

VW: that's another thing. Nothing really, they bring awareness and they have documentaries here and there but I feel like there is no student base organization that enlightens people about what's going on in Africa. Like the different things. And even myself. I used being busy as excuse but sometimes it's that they didn't have an excuse. Because we really need to be aware of the stuff that's going on there. Its sad to say that its mostly American idols that are doing stuff fro Africa and we are all like sitting here just talking about the issue but not really doing anything. There's a thing called (inaudible) a program, I don't know if you've heard of it.

JE: what is that?

VW: (inaudible), it's for Sierra Leone. Originally it was for Sierra Leone when the refugees started coming here, especially the children, to make them more comfortable. To adapt them to American life. Now, what it has become is like a meeting place for people to get work, to get housing like when they first come here. And they have a camp every year for young people. And that's where I really get to meet other people from West Africa. Mostly it's West Africa but they have other areas of Africa, but I can't really think right now. Mostly it's like Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone. And they come together. It's really great because that's the one place I can meet girls my age that are from Sierra Leone or West Africa and I could talk to them. Most of them just came here so I could also talk to them about what my life probably would have been had I stayed. (Inaudible) is the one place where I can see them actively doing grassroots stuff within America, for people who just came or people who have been here all this time but still want to be connected in some kind of way. I think they are in the Bronx too, so you might want to... (Laughs)

JE: Okay so, when is it from? If you can give me the address later?

VW: yeah, yeah. When was it formed or established? Well it obviously had to have been after the war when literally everyone, I remember going to the first meeting and seeing young kids. Like maybe I was 15. But like seeing kids that were like 9 or 8 with arms cut off. And you know it was one of those things that I will always have in my memory. It was one of those things where you have to know that that could have been me had my parents stayed. Definitely and eye opener

JE: so what kind of help do they offer to these people? They just create awareness? Or do they do other activities?

VW: they do activities like get, well now they give housing to people. Like do you have a room available? This person just came. So getting people housing, helping with employment. They will learn English, stuff like that. But before I remember it was really about, because it was a lot of kids that was coming here, so getting the kids used to American life and getting them socialized. Because it got to be hard to come from one place and then go through that and then come to America. So it was a lot about that, but now I heard one, she's about to go to college. So stuff like that is good to hear. So, now they educate people, get them employment, get them housing. Not just for Sierra Leone now. Now it is spread out. I think its still mostly West Africa. I'm sure anybody that comes to them they help.

JE: so they have funding from the government?

VW: that's a big problem because they were in Harlem since their creation. But now, Harlem is so expensive so they just recently moved to the Bronx. Their organization. And how are they funded? I think through grants. I know black-eyed peas gave them \$10,000 last summer. Again this year, they are having problems with funding, so we may not do the big camps. Usually we go to Manhattan Ville College and we live n the campus and everything and they provide food, entertainment and all this other stuff. This summer it might just be a day camp where they just go fro one day instead of staying for the weekend.

JE: so there camps, they are only for students and young children? Or for the parents as well?

VW: the camp is only for the kinds, starting from 5 years old until about 16. And after 16, since a lot of them grew up in the camp, so now that they are getting older, now they have this thing called camp pre counselors. I went last year as a counselor for the first time. I'm like 21 now (laughs) I can't be a kid, so now I'm a counselor. As you get older you can still be involved, you just have a different role.

JE: Okay, I know I have to ask you about your job. You are studying but at the same time (inaudible) can you tell me about how you go the job?

VW: yeah, well I have a very interesting.. Even though I've been here since I was a kid, I didn't get my green card until last year.

JE: ohhh

VW: yeah, so last year September. I've been going to school; my parents have been paying for me. They have to pay cash because I couldn't get financial.

JE: and even your parents, they don't have their green card?

VW: my dad has had it for a while. I did a radio documentary, for a while, I couldn't even sit here and talk to you about this. Because immigration, no one talked about it. So I was very much

in the dark, I really didn't know. Because I did the radio story, I can actually sit here and tell you what happened. So what happened was, my dad had filed for everybody and it was denied. He filed for asylum when he first got here and it was denied. So he did suspension of deportation and the lawyer told him that he shouldn't. He advised him not to put my mom and me because if he got it and was deported, then we would get deported too. So when he got it, then obviously we didn't get it because we were not on the file. It was one of those things 50/50

JE: yeah

VW: so then he filed for my mom, and I guess because I was young they thought, "Oh we'll have time to file for her" right? So then they didn't file, they filed for me like 5 years ago. So then they filed for me. It takes along time to get a green card especially if the person filing for you is not a citizen. Because he was a green card holder, so then I just got mine. It was very frustrating because I wanted to work. I wanted to go away fro college and all that stuff.

JE: but you cannot do it because you didn't have...

VW: I didn't have my status. Yes.

JE: didn't they, the time that you are studying for your grammar school, your parents pay for your school or did you go for free.

VW: it's public school!

JE: Oh public school

VW: it's public school, so you didn't have to pay to go to public school.

JE: what about the health issues because here you have to have health insurance to cover for your health needs.

VW: my mom was a teacher, so I was just always under them that's why it was so weird because it was like I was like everybody else. You know what I mean? You're growing up, you're getting insurance, and you're going to the doctor. You didn't think. it wasn't until I started filing for financial aid because I was going to college.. That was the first. And you know I always wanted to work but my parents... not because I couldn't work. They didn't want me to work. You know how Africans...?

JE: yes

VW: when you're in school, you're not supposed to work, just focus on our studies. So it really wasn't until I started filing for financial aid that I realized that I don't have a social security number, I don't... Because I didn't need any of that stuff before because... I'm a new york resident, eve thug him not a permanent resident with my green card, I'm a resident. So I was able to go to school, I was into college but I wasn't able to get any aid.

JE: Oh, because you didn't have citizenship.

VW: yeah

JE: and what about the job, when did you get the job?

VW: (inaudible, program mentioned earlier) hooked me up with this guy to a record store in Harlem. So I was working for him just to get money in my pocket. Once I got my green card.. Then I got surgery on my foot (laughs) I got surgery and I stopped working for him. Because I had my surgery and I had to be off my feet. And that's that summer when I got my green card. And when I was going back to school and everything my first job was at Barnes and noble which I am about to, Sunday will be my last day there. But my first job was at Barnes and noble and it took me through Christmas, this past Christmas.

JE: Where is that? In the Bronx?

VW: that's in the Bronx. The one in (inaudible) actually Sunday tomorrow will be my last day there.

JE: so what do you do there?

VW: at Barnes and noble? Cashier, restocking. I have interest in media, I did moderating events. And I also have a book club there that I'm going to continue doing even though I'm not going to be working there. It's like a teen book club where we pick a book every month and the teens read it and we come together once a month and we talk about the book. So I'm still going to be doing that, but I'm not going to be officially working there. And WYNC, which is a radio program, that's where I did the radio documentary on my legal status. I also did a story on the N Word. So I was working with them. I was finally able to get paid for the work that I was doing. I have a lot of stuff that I am doing. I work at Bronx net. I also...

JE: And what is the Bronx net? What are they doing?

VW: Bronx net is a public action station in the Bronx which I very important to me because I feel like all this commercial stuff is great but people need to have an outlet to put there own thing on TV. Even if they don't have the money to do it, they should have some kind of avenue to have there own things on TV for their community. So that's what Bronx net does. And with them I do outreach for their show open, which is like a morning talk show kind of thing. I designed the layout for the website and just getting people to know about it. My veronica, my coworker here, she is now producing the Friday segments of the show so I help her get guests and stuff like that.

JE: So you study at the same time?

VW: huh?

JE: you study?

VW: yeah and I go to school (laughs)

JE: can you tell me about the... I don't know, I cannot ask you because you came here very young. I don't know the gender relations. Like in Africa there is a respect. Children should respect their parents. Can you explain the gender relations and the generational differences between your parents? Because you grew up here, you have a different way of thinking than your parents.

VW: oh yeah, definitely. My parents are always saying stuff like that. For example, my mom cooks or she'll cook a pot of soup. My sister, and me I guess they're not as strict as they would have been had they been in Sierra Leone. I will go eat before my dad eats. And that's a big.. We learned the hard way that we shouldn't do that. Because my dad was like "what?? You go and you eat, you get the best part of the soup, and I didn't eat yet? And I bought it?" you know, stuff like that. Defiantly, children are supposed to wait for their parents to eat. You're not supposed to talk back. You're supposed to be seen not heard. But being that we grew up here, especially my mom. My dad is a little bit older fashioned, but maybe because my mom worked in the school system here—she's a teacher. So she's a bit more understanding of how it is to grow up in America. She's not as strict on us when it comes to stuff like that, now especially.

JE: What kind of food do you prepare at home? Like do you cook American food or African food?

VW: My brother is 14 now, its so weird saying that he's 14. But he doesn't eat any African food. But my sister and me grew up on African food. Cassava leaves is my favorite. Peanut butter soup, (inaudible) (inaudible) my mom cooks everything.

JE: Is it Sierra Leonean food or just African food?

VW: well I know peanut butter soup is general. Cassava soup is not so general.

JE: yeah, mostly in West African like in Congo.

VW: Oh, Cassava leaves in Congo? Okay. I haven't met anybody who eats cassava leaves except for Sierra Leone. (Laughs) But (inaudible) soup, Okra. I don't know about (inaudible) I don't know many other Africans who eat it.

JE: Can you explain that?

VW: (inaudible)? The same way you but cassava leaves in the green packet, its like maybe more spinach-y thing that you buy. Then you make the pepper and onion thing and you put that in there. It's almost the same concept, just a different texture.

JE: do you have any idea about any African markets in the Bronx?

VW: There used to be one by Yankee Stadium, but they just tore that one down. Its not there anymore. Do you know which one I'm talking about? Underneath the terminal?

JE: the terminal, yeah.

VW: So that's not there anymore. So I don't know anywhere else. My parents are always saying they don't really have anywhere to go buy like hot pepper for cheap. Or sweet pepper for cheap, you know? Because there was really good. You could go and get a bag for like \$5 or whatever. But now they have to go to the supermarket. (Laughs) and its much more expensive there.

JE: Do you have relationships? Do you talk to people in Sierra Leone? Do you have relatives there?

VW: yeah my uncle is there. My dad's younger brother. And he has come to American tice, two years in a row. And I'm planning on going there, God willing, in December. Yeah, they are still there. They are living good lives, better than what we are living here in America. (Laughs) Everything you could want is over there. The only thing is that you don't know when the next war is coming. They are having an election. He (the uncle) isn't coming this year because once its times for election, it's really tense. You don't know if the people with guns don't like someone in office and then all of a sudden there is a coup and it could be another war. So they are not going to come to America this summer. But if everything goes well, I will be there in December. Just in case. (Laughs)

JE: just for a visit?

VW: yeah just for a visit. But I want to stay there for like three weeks or a month. Just to really get an experience. Not just for like a week. You know, its too much money to go there. So if you go, you have to spend a longer time.

JE: yeah. And what about your mom? Is she educated here?

VW: she's educated there as far as college. But she got her masters here. She's been talking about getting her doctorate. Are you going to ask about the different school systems or something?

JE: mhm

VW: So she always talks about how over there they pay for everything if you do well. How the school system here isn't great because even if you get good grades you're still not guaranteed to get a good education. So she said over there she went to school for free. She was. I forget what she calls it. The head girl or something like that. The head girl. That means that she got free room and board and free education. Free uniforms and free everything—food. And she said that was the life. She says the system over there is way better because if you study hard you are going to get an education. Here, there is no guarantee. Even if you study hard.

JE: why do you think she thinks that?

VW: I guess its because she has seen what I've been through. I got really good grade in high school. But because I didn't have my green card obviously, and a lot of the scholarships--- I couldn't get any government aid. A lot of the scholarships say you have to be a permanent resident. So basically, to me it didn't make sense. If you have good grades, you should be able to get a good education. I don't know. And another thing, the money situation. If you're parents make a certain amount of money, even though I have my green card now, I still don't get financial aid.

JE: because of your parents?

VW: yes, but at least now I can take out a loan. Before I couldn't even take a loan. So now I take a loan, but I still cant get any aid because of my parent's income.

JE: Do they have high income or low income?

VW: Moderate. My mom is a teacher. They want you to be poor. No it's true. They want you to be struggling because then maybe you have other issues—maybe you're working. Well I'm working. But maybe you have a kid, and that's when they give you money. But then you have all these responsibilities that's not going to let you do good in school. Its kind of like they set you up to fail. That's my opinion about the whole school system. They really do. I mean there are opportunities out there. But they are very few in between. Even that, they want you to be the American dream. You came from nothing, and we gave you these opportunities, now look. When you could be a person that just studied hard and even though you have good parents, both parents in the house, you never really struggled. I need an education too. It doesn't mean my parents need to pay for me. That's my opinion.

JE: do you think this happened because you are an African?

VW: No, the population across the board. When I was doing my story I saw across the board that whether its Mexican immigrants or even people from the Dominican Republic. I mean, Puerto Rico, because they're American colony or whatever, they don't get it. A lot of my Puerto Rican friends don't get it. But Jamaican immigrants, all these different people tell me their stories and you would never know. I feel like there's no conversation on immigration that's outside of what people think about Mexicans crossing the border. That's like the only conversation we really talk about. So many people, like this one girl—and I would have never known. She was going to school but has no way of getting her green card. Like even for me, my dad was able to get me my green card. And even though it took a long time, I have it now. But she is form Jamaica and her mom's friend brought her here. She was going to file for her, but she has her working in her house—almost like a slave. So she left that situation, but that lady has all her traveling documents, everything. So you can't even file if you don't have that stuff. Even though she has a lawyer. Her lawyer is telling her “we can't file for you if you don't have your travel stuff. How did you come into the country” (laughs) you need documents, you know? So she has no way of getting her green card. She is working off the books and paying for school. But even if she gets her degree, what is she going to do with it?

JE: Okay. When you do these stories in the radio, do you take it to the people who deal with the immigration issues? Or do you just speak about it and that's it?

VW: it was a radio documentary. It was kind of like what you are doing. I was interviewing different people. I put it together, it aired on WNYC. I got a lot of response from people saying they went through the same thing. Actually, the story helped me get my green card since I didn't have my green card at the time. The lady that was doing the story with me directed me to my congressman. The Bronx congressman actually. Councilman, sorry. I forget his name. Cyrano or something like that. Somebody in his office put me on the right track to getting my green card. Another thing that happened with me with why it took so long is because they had me as a person in Sierra Leone that was trying to come into the country. So even though my thing was approved, they were sending me files that said, "Contact your sponsor". Then they said they were sending it to--- what's the place? The capital of Nigeria?

JE: Lagos?

VW: Lagos, they were sending me to the U.S. embassy in Lagos. All these other stuff. And I was like "well I'm in America" they were even saying that maybe I should go over there.

JE: Do you think the confusion was with the immigration office?

VW: yes, the immigration office. Again, maybe my dad too. After the first lawyer, my dad never went back to lawyers. He did everything by himself which is... which in a way you can do because obviously I have my green card now. But if I had had a lawyer, I probably would have gotten it a lot sooner. So, and then I know lawyers really take advantage of the situation when they charge people. Because people give them anything because they want the green card.

JE: So how much, like a lot of money?

VW: I don't know. My dad never did it. But I remember when I was talking to people while doing the story; people put thousands of dollars up front. "Please help me" they give all the money to the lawyer. A lot of the times, a situation that's impossible, they think that because they gave them the money it will happen a lot faster. But the lawyers really don't have a lot of control over the... especially after 9/11. Everything takes double the time. I'm lucky that it only took the amount of time that it did for me.

JE: let's go back again to this intergenerational (inaudible) I know that in Africa, the discipline is different than it is here.

VW: (laughs) yeah

JE: you can spank your child in Africa, you can punish. But here, if you do that, it's against the law. Did you go through that with your parents?

VW: Well my mom beat us regularly. (Laughs) there was no question. It wasn't until I got older—like through TV-- that you're not supposed to hit your children. I didn't see anything

wrong. My mom hit us. That's just the way that it was. It makes you have respect. Like I don't know if I will hit my kids. It depends. I don't know if I will hit my kids. But I feel like it made me a better person. My brother got beat when he was younger, but now he is 14. He is growing up way different than how we did. My mom especially is a lot softer. I remember, if my mom used to call, you had to say, "Yes mommy" you couldn't say "yes!" or "what!" or anything like that. You had to have that respect. Addressing her. Full title. Always. But now my brother will be like "yes!" or "what" or "I'm coming" and we couldn't do that but he does it. I think it's more, I guess since my parents have been here longer, they are using there...

JE: their (inaudible)

VW: Yeah! (Laughs)

JE: How far is your father educationally? He went to college?

VW: yeah he went to college. Actually, I don't know? I don't know. I think he went to college. Maybe he didn't finish. I don't know.

JE: do you think your parent's education has influenced your own?

VW: Oh yeah, definitely.

JE: In what ways for example?

VW: it's not a question. Because with other people, I've noticed that once they've graduated high school they have the option of going to college or not. Or in their mind they think there is another avenue. For us, that was just a natural... because I have uncles. My mom's younger brothers and sisters are also here. I feel like I have big shoes to fill because they came here at high school age, they both went to high school here and then straight to college. Now they have really good jobs and they are supporting their families and stuff. I don't have an excuse you know how some people say they didn't grow up with a father or they saw that their sister got pregnant? Well I don't have any of those examples in my family. Everybody went to school, and now they have jobs and families.

JE: So you have to do the same thing?

VW: yes I have to do the same thing. (Laughs)

JE: That's better, that's good. The other thing, can you talk about the economic situation generally? Of African immigrants, especially in the Bronx. How did they fair in getting jobs, getting good housing and things like that.

VW: Well I can't really because... I feel like I'm not really educated as far as what.. I feel like even though I'm from Africa, I still have an American view. So I feel like I can't really... because a lot of people say they are cab drivers and they are this and they're bootleg man in the street... and even though you see a lot of African men doing that, I KNOW that's not all they do because

my family is the example. I feel like there isn't a community of Africans that are doing well and that come together and influence other people. There's no networking with that. All I know are my parents and their friends. Yeah, I guess I have an American view. I don't really know the ins and outs, but I know what the stereotypes are. I don't want to sit here and tell you the stereotypes because I know that's just what they are, a stereotype. And that's defiantly, because I have my family and my parents family are examples that go against the stereotypes.

JE: Do you visit? Does your family visit during holidays? Do your uncles visit?

VW: Yeah, even last Saturday we got together for my moms birthday. We are very much a close family. Now more because we had this whole other thing. My grandmother is very much, you know how they always talk about women as the busy bodies? They always want to have issues? Well my grandma is kind of like that. For a while there was a lot of tension in the family. But now, we are all coming back together, my grandmother included. And we are all getting close at every opportunity we have. And there are a lot of us, a lot of birthdays. (Laughs) we come together and it's really nice having that family. We can talk about our different experiences. Especially with me. I always ask them, "when you were in sierra Leone..." especially my uncles who grew up there into high school age. So everyone has a different experience and a different view. They all came to America at different time in their lives. So I will talk to them about how it was for them as compared to going to high school here versus there. So I try to keep that conversation going so we don't forget. Even though one of my uncles does not want to go back to Sierra Leone for nothing. He doesn't want to be a statistic. (Laughs) that's what he says. My other uncle is sick, he has sickle cell. So it wouldn't be smart for him to go to sierra Leone because god forbid anything happens, they don't have any... they have the... during the war they destroyed everything.

JE: Yeah

VW: Like the destroyed things that had nothing to do with the war. They destroyed machines and they told me something crazy. They don't have like an x ray. You know some of the most basic things in America that you would say.. You know they don't have... like my uncle's father recently died from.. Well he had diabetes. It was some kind of blood transfusion... something that happens in America every day. Hundreds, even thousands times a day... he died from that in Sierra Leone. Its really sad because what is this country really coming to? You can't even get a blood transfusion? That's why when I go back, I don't.. Well my cousins went and I think their mom got sick from brushing her teeth with the water. So I know I have to be really careful with not drinking the water and making sure I take a shot I think? You have to take a shot every day for Malaria.

JE: Every week I think.

VW: that's going to be fun. (Laughs) So it's really a sad situation when you think about it. As opposed to South Africa where they don't have that problem. Because I know that a lot of Americans go to South Africa, daily. It's become the new vacation spot. Going to South Africa. South Africa doesn't represent Africa.

JE: (inaudible) other parts of Africa, like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and countries like Sudan, Somalia. It's different. So do you have anything to add?

VW: I think we went through a lot! (Laughs)

JE: okay, I just want to thank you for being interviewed for this project. And this is history that maybe after 25 years or 50 years, people will be listening to this and they will know what people went through in this time. So thank you.