



Oral History Interview with Barbara Flythe, 08-14-2024

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Barbara Flythe and Azra Thomas conducted on August 14, 2024. The interview took place at the Princeton Public Library in Princeton, NJ as part of the Voices of Princeton Project.



Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Voices of Princeton

TRANSCRIPT

Cliff Robinson: [00:00:03] This is Cliff Robinson on August 14, 2024 at the Princeton Public Library as part of the Voices of Princeton project. I'm here today with Barbara Flythe and Azra Thomas.

Barbara Flythe: [00:00:19] I'm Barbara Flythe, interviewee, and grandmother of Azra.

Azra Thomas: [00:00:24] And I'm Azra Thomas and I'm an interviewer. To get started. When were you born?

Barbara Flythe: [00:00:31] 1933, in the middle of the Depression.

Azra Thomas: [00:00:36] And where are your parents and their families from?

Barbara Flythe: [00:00:38] My parents are from North Carolina, Clinton, North Carolina.

Azra Thomas: [00:00:43] And what are their names?

Barbara Flythe: [00:00:45] Seavy and Perry Fennell. They were raised together in the same little town, and actually was called Harold Store at the time. They, their community was so deep in the country that there was a highway. There was the back of the road. There was the road where the wheels, you could only see, wheels, fire, wheels, cartwheels, and then they were the walk at the path.

Azra Thomas: [00:01:19] And can you talk about their wedding and their subsequent move?

Barbara Flythe: [00:01:23] Their wedding was interesting. They had known each other for very little time, and as I said, they went to church together. They went to school together. And, um, the most interesting part for me, I was a snippy teenager, maybe 13 or 14 years old, asking my mother, “So, how'd you spend your wedding night”? And my mother said, “We spent our wedding night on the train from North Carolina to Philadelphia, because your father was not going to spend another night in North Carolina.” My father was very afraid of white people. He had seen lynchings, and he wanted to change his life.

Azra Thomas: [00:02:04] And so you were raised during the Great Depression. What was that like at your house?

Barbara Flythe: [00:02:09] I was one of the blessed people of the Great Depression. My parents were part of the Great Migration. They moved in 1923 and by the time I was born in 1933 they owned their own house. They had agency. My father had a job, my mother had a job, and in the middle of depression, that was significant. What I remember as a little girl is—maybe we had a three bedroom row house. I remember clearly all these people living with us, at least six, and that's because we were, we were housing our relatives who had no place to live. And I remember that, when World War II happened and African American folks could finally get jobs, suddenly, the house was empty. Somebody had a job at the Navy Yard and all the other

war-related industries. And I was walking around wondering where everybody went. It was there just my father, my mother, my brother and me.

Azra Thomas: [00:03:20] And what were your parents' jobs?

Barbara Flythe: [00:03:23] Oh, my mother was what was called a days' worker, a domestic worker. She didn't, wasn't a maid for one family, but she had about three families that she worked for. Interestingly enough, from when I knew her until the early 1980s she was in her 80s when she stopped working. And the reason she stopped working for the families because everybody died and she didn't want to break in any new people. Love that story about her.

Azra Thomas: [00:03:54] And what did your father do?

Barbara Flythe: [00:03:55] My father worked for the city incinerator, and he, um, he managed the trash that came in. More importantly, my father was what I thought was a—I thought my father was a union man because he talked about the union all the time. He was one of the founders of the Public Employees Union of Philadelphia, and that was the part of my life that I grew up with, not knowing about his job, but knowing more about the Union. And it's from the Union that I get my sense of social justice and reform.

Azra Thomas: [00:04:40] And can you talk a little bit about your summers in North Carolina?

Barbara Flythe: [00:04:43] Good question! Because my parents worked in the summer, by age five, they were sending my brother and I to North Carolina, to Clinton, North Carolina to live with my grandmother. And we stayed for two months, July and August. And as it happened, we were interesting, because we were raised in the north. We had northern accents, so children kind of tippy toed around us and would say, "Say something!" And we didn't know what that meant, "say something." But in a more interesting part of our life in North Carolina is the fact that all of the children in that community worked in tobacco. They worked either in tobacco farms, picking tobacco or in the large barns handing tobacco. And kids were doing this by age seven, so that I have memories of a truck picking us up early in the morning with a cold sandwich for my grandmother and a bottle of water. My brother and I were picked up on a truck. We were taken to a large floor. I was lucky. My brother, 15 months older than me, had to, um, work in the fields, picking tobacco. I just handed tobacco, which meant I would pick three tobacco leaves handed to this woman. And there were about four of us picking the leaves, and this was just stabbing, of stabbing and writing and putting them on a long pole, which then went up into the ceiling of the farm. The other part of my life in North Carolina that was interesting is that Clinton, then, was a racist town. I remember walking into town with my cousin and knocking me, and she would knock me off the street, off the pavement, into the street when white people were coming down the street. I remember that clearly. I also remember that the movies were that Blacks could only see the movies in the balcony and the balcony was not air-conditioned, but the downstairs was air-conditioned, where white people sat, and how they accomplished that I have no idea.

Azra Thomas: [00:07:15] Can you talk a little bit about your career?

Barbara Flythe: [00:07:24] My what?

Azra Thomas: [00:07:25] Your career?

Barbara Flythe: [00:07:27] Career?

Azra Thomas: [00:07:28] Starting you were a guidance counselor. How did you—

Barbara Flythe: [00:07:30] Yes, my career started. I went to college, by the way, four. I went to William State College in Baltimore, and I started in 1951 and graduated in 1955, majored in history and minored in English and, and also, I was getting a degree in secondary education. During my time as intern—like going into town and doing practice teaching—I had eighth grade in Baltimore City, and I felt like I was trapped in the jungle. And one of the things I recognized about myself very early—that I didn't want to be in one place, in the same room all the time. So by the time I graduated and went home to live, my mother, who was so happy to finally have a school teacher in the family. I said to her, I can't do that. I can't do it at all. She was very disappointed in me. I had a very strong mother. I was raised to be a teacher. My brother was going to be a doctor, a dentist. I ended up my first job was a public assistance case worker for the state of Pennsylvania, and I actually visited people who were on public assistance. I was like, 21 years old, so, age-dependent children was a big deal. The blind folks getting a pension was a big deal. This is what my caseload was made of, and I did that work. So one day, someone told me, you know, you could really get a job as a school social worker. They

also called it attendance officer. And that Job was good because you had summers off, you had to save hours as a teacher. And that sounded fine to me, and that was the job that challenged and changed who I would become and who I would be, and it was from that job of visiting parents in various communities by my caseloads were usually, white, Latino, African American, but mostly people before the poverty line and I had saw seeds that are still really buried in my mind. But what it did for me was challenge me, to want to change kids lives and family's lives and make it, make it more just. So I'm talking about starting this job at about 1958 and I worked from 1958 until your mother was born in 1962 and then I became a high school guidance counselor. And I was in one of the more difficult high schools in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin High School. All boys, really gangs, but in the middle of, middle of all of them some, some boys and and who were, by then, young men who needed support and help and guidance. It was also the early 60s. The Civil Rights Movement was just starting, and some of my best kids were were leaving school to go picket. So I had to hold them in the Civil Rights Movement to get them to college so they could really make an impact. And so I have fond memories of that, that time and that job

Azra Thomas: [00:11:11] You mentioned my mother. Would you like to talk a little bit about your family?

Barbara Flythe: [00:11:15] It's a good question. How about my first family? My parents, Seavy and Perry Fennell. I, I was probably a piece of work, because it's a good way to describe, between the time I graduated from high school and I, and I married. I mean, from college that I'm married, I think I've graduated maybe age 20, or what is appropriate and I married at 25

those three or four years were one of the most glorious times of my life. I went to clubs. I hung out in New York a lot in the jazz clubs. I had great friends. I played tennis. I had lots of boyfriends. It was just a really joyous time for me. I don't know what kids are doing now, but I had a real like, a really good time. And I met my husband in '58 and he always say, said that he saved me from Haight-Ashbury, becoming a full beatnik, that was his—what he contributed. My husband was like a guy from North Carolina, very serious. He could have been a preacher. And my friends were all amazed that I've married like a really square, nerdy person, I can, but there was a part of me that wanted to feel safe. I had a wonderful father, I had a wonderful brother, and I needed a person who I knew that I could depend on, and he was that.

Azra Thomas: [00:12:57] And what did he do?

Barbara Flythe: [00:12:59] He was when I married him. He was, he was working for, oh, I married him, I was already working in the schools, that he became a public assistance caseworker, what I formerly was. But that's when he kept looking for jobs that he ended up working for the Boy Scouts of America and becoming very successful.

Azra Thomas: [00:13:26] And what did that mean for your family?

Barbara Flythe: [00:13:28] That meant for my family good things and bad things. By the—we bought a house in 1961 in Philadelphia, in what is called now University City. I love the house. We were near our friends. We were there a church. Everything was great. So, but my husband, because of the nature of his job, it was during the time when black folks were moving into

"corporate" kinds of jobs. And I say that kind of in quotes. However, Boy Scouts leadership really like my husband for a variety of reasons. So the point is that we moved, we moved from Philadelphia to East Windsor, New Jersey to Downers Grove, Chicago to Bethesda, Maryland, and then back to New Jersey in 1985, when he was made director of the northeast region for the Boy Scouts of America. Really big deal.

Azra Thomas: [00:14:36] So you kind of had to put your own career on hold for that.

[inaudible]

Barbara Flythe: [00: 14:39] I put my career on hold. Every time we moved my career went on hold. So that meant my career went on hold a lot. And because it was the 60s, I had to decide the race stuff was going on, women were finally being recognized. And so. I had, as he moved, I had to make a decision, personally, to let my career go on hold, so that I could be available for him. And it was a decision that I made, a conscious decision I made to—that he would be the person with the career, and I would just pick up the pieces when I could.

Azra Thomas: [00:15:20] And you two also had a little bit of issues about being a Black star in a white world.

Barbara Flythe: [00:15:24] Not a Black star, but certainly our world, from 1968, when Mark was born, until, maybe, when he died in 96, the career part and—of my world was predominantly white. So we traveled with Boy Scouts. We did a variety of things. His, his final job covered Puerto Rico, Northeast region of the United States, and Europe very interesting

enough. So that meant we got ourselves to Germany. We went to France. We went to lots of places, but I always went as the wife of the scout executive.

Azra Thomas: [00:16:12] So when did you first come to Princeton?

Barbara Flythe: [00:16:14] We came to Princeton in 1985 because he was, that was his last big promotion, to be Scout Executive of the Northeast region. And interesting enough, we were going to move to Princeton, and I knew about it from our time in the 60s, when we lived in East Windsor, New Jersey, and we were at a cocktail party in Los Angeles, and I was telling people that really had this promotion that we were going to be covid to Princeton. And the person said, Do you have children? I said, Yeah, we have three. We have a daughter, Lisa, son, Mark and Stephen, my youngest son, and I said, my daughter's already in college. I said, but we're going to settle the boys in junior high or high school at Princeton. And someone said, "Don't go to Princeton with black boys," because they labeled them and put them in special classes. And the woman said, unless they're academic stars. I said, "No, not necessarily." However, that—um, we consciously move to West Windsor. The person who spoke to me said that West Windsor has great schools. You won't have those kinds of problems with the placement of your sons, they will get a better education. So, that's how we ended up in West Windsor. The person was right. In fact, my kids were in good schools in Bethesda, and when we moved the same language arts program and the same social studies program, the same books were used in both places.

Azra Thomas: [00:18:03] But you did end up coming to Princeton pretty regularly.

Barbara Flythe: [00:18:05] So, I came to Princeton very regularly because I'm Presbyterian, a very active Presbyterian. My last church in Bethesda, Maryland had been predominantly white, and I really wanted to be with Black people desperately, so I joined Witherspoon street Presbyterian Church in 1985.

Azra Thomas: [00:18:35] And how did Witherspoon lead to you becoming more involved in Princeton?

Barbara Flythe [00:18:41] That's interesting and a good question. The pastor at the time was Reverend Adrian, Adrian McFarland. He was an interesting guy, a great preacher and a great scholar, and he wanted very much for Witherspoon as a church to be represented in the community. So he couldn't go everywhere. So he started asking me to go to Board of Education committee meetings, Human Relations committee meetings, and any kind of meeting where, where in Princeton that was official, where church people were going, because he couldn't do it all. And it was out of that experience that I started meeting people on the Human Relations Board and also expanding my network of people I knew in Princeton. This was followed fairly quickly. This experience—my being invited to join something then, and this would have been in the late 80s, called the Princeton ethics, Racial Ethics Task Force. And it was composed. Host of predominantly white people who were "liberal" in quotes Princeton, liberal white people in Princeton and a couple of black folks, including the former principal Bill Johnson of the middle school and the task force, in addition to talking about race and issues at Princeton all the time, the main thing that they did for three years that was kind of exciting was that they sponsored

with the Princeton YWCA and other organizations an event for a month in the fall called Stand for Racism. And every church, every organization, all the schools, it was a very special time, and they did special events all through the whole one whole month, and it was called Stand for Racism.

Azra Thomas: [00:21:01] You started a couple groups in Princeton and you gone and joined a couple groups. I don't know which one you want to start with, and maybe the Campaign to End The New Jim Crow?

Barbara Flythe: [00:21:12] I'm just thinking that—how to think about this—because I started to, after I did the Racial Ethics Task Force, I was going to other kinds of meetings at Princeton, usually connected to issues related to social justice. I remember there was a concern about a number of gangs and the impact they were having in the community, the problems—oh, always the problems for kids in school and the gaps between the education of African American kids and white kids at Princeton. So there was a lot of racism. One of the things I joined was I became a mentor for something called the Upward Bound program, and a group had come together, and the purpose was to mentor a particular group. I had a child that I mentored for about three or four years. What I remember very significantly about that, because I had been in public schools, I would go into school to wait for her, and because, just because I was doing my mentoring and picking her up or going someplace with her, and—every—I would sit there and I would just see this little line of Black boys be brought in hand to the principal's office, and that because they were acting out and they were doing whatever they were doing, and what it—that was the same experience I had at Montgomery County Public Schools. Was this, this

intolerance for acting out Black boys, they weren't acting out, they would just be themselves. No, some, there were problems. I don't want to say that there weren't, because I was a professional educator. But how they were perceived and how they were treated, what happened to that as a result of that, I saw the same thing in McLuhan County, and I saw it in Princeton, just sitting in that school, waiting for my kid watching them pass.

Azra Thomas: [00:23:29] Do you want to start with The Campaign to End The New Jim Crow?

Barbara Flythe: [00:23:32] No, I have other stuff before then, so I'll just think about that. The Racial Ethics Task Force. I also did after my mentoring—oh, before The New Jim Crow, Not In Our Town with—Not In Our Town, probably started sometime the 90s. I can't remember all the dates, it was certainly or maybe early, 2000s but it came into being because the pastor of the Unitarian Church and the pastor of Witherspoon, by then it was John White, became good friends. And John White said he became good friends. The pastor was Paul Johnson at the Unitarian Church. The reason they became good friends is because when John came to Witherspoon as pastor, this Paul Johnson was the first fellow pastor to reach out to them and they started having breakfast every month. Then they started talking about our two congregations doing doing some things together. So we shared a couple of worship services, and then the two ministers said we think we need to do more. So John White asked me, and Paul Johnson asked Ted Feder of the Unitarian Church to come together and see if we could get an organization going, and that was the beginnings of Not In Our Town.

Barbara Flythe: [00:25:05] And what does that do?

Barbara Flythe 25:06 Excuse me?

Azra Thomas: [00:25:07] What does Not In Our Town Do?

Barbara Flythe: [00:25:08] Oh, you have a whole mission statement. I don't even remember it now, so just don't.

Barbara Flythe: [00:25:13] And what's up next?

Barbara Flythe: [00:25:14] So, after Not In Our Town—you're really pushing hard [laughter]—I was also during this time, facilitating a book discussion group, African American Interest Group at the Library, Barnes Noble store, Barnes Noble store on US 1 in Princeton and most of the people who came to, and we had a very active, very wonderful group, were Princetonians.

Barbara Flythe: [00:25:50]

And then probably we come to the Campaign to End The New Jim Crow. This would have been in the mid 2000s. Oh, the book was written in 2010, so let's say we're starting The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander was written in 2010. And a group of people, including me, we were reading that book in the book discussion group at the time. And a group of people from Nassau, Nassau Presbyterian Church and Trinity Episcopal Church came together to start talking about what they could do, and what they felt charged to do, at working with formerly incarcerated folks or working with justice reform issues. And they were many, and we started

meeting in Princeton at the Public Library, and then I'm sitting there, there's Larry Spruill, and I think we're the two African Americans. So I'm thinking to myself, this should be happening in Trenton. So I started a Trenton and then they met separately, and then all of the Princeton people started coming to the Trenton meeting, and we did a lot of stuff. We did presentations. We did—

Azra Thomas: [00:27:31] —solitary confinement.

Barbara Flythe: [00:27:32] Oh yes, solitary confinement. Thank you for reminding you of that. That was a really big deal, and we made an impact with that. We had a person who actually built, these are guys Trenton from I can't remember the name the project, but they actually built a solitary confinement cell. And we carried that around, particularly Patrick Hall, who was the president of the Campaign to End The New Jim Crow, and we carried that around from town to towns to fairs. We even had it at Communiversity. It was like a big deal for people to go in. We had the noises. We had the little bucket where they went to the bathroom, everything. And it made quite an impact. And we also did, like movie presentations, certainly documentaries. We were well received by churches in Trenton as well as Princeton, and that's where we did most of our education about mass incarceration.

Azra Thomas: [00:28:40] I know you joined People and Stories. [inaudible]

Barbara Flythe: [00:28:51] Okay, people—Trenton Literacy Movement came first. And that was an organization which looked at the grades and the literacy issues for children in the

Trenton Public Schools. And we developed—I was not exactly a founding member, but came on early in that—and we developed a program after school, program focused on second grade students reading below grade level, and that was 70% of the students at the time. So that program continues, and we provided teachers at two- to three-day after school tutoring, and that was important. Then People and Stories is a group which—all of these groups that I'm talking about, my more recent groups, which would include the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow, The Trenton Literacy Movement and People and Stories, I came very late to them. I would only say in the last five years. I really like the group, because what they do is offer literacy and reading opportunities to marginalized populations. They could be in, some in jail or prisons or in communities and in groups where they've not done classical reading or stories have not been a part of who they are. My experience it with People and Stories was wonderful. I actually was a facilitator for a group at the Correctional Center. I can't remember which one, but it was what I do remember. It was a group of women. It was an eight-week program, and we did classical reading. Hemingway, Alice Walker, I can't think of all of the titles, but we would take a chapter, the women would read it, and then come back and discuss the universal themes in it. And what I really liked about it is the fact that our group were there. There were about maybe forty women—and I had a co-facilitator, I wasn't alone—and they came in the first day like tense, isolated, looking lonely, not even talking to each other. By the end of the eight weeks because they were reading and because they found commonality in universal themes and stories. They were smiling, they were laughing, they were talking and they were reading. So I really like People and Stories. It still continues, and folks should really support it. And I as when I turned 90, which was in December, I left all my groups. I resigned from everything because I'm old and I wanted to do other stuff. And however, one of the most recent exciting things I did was

the history project for Witherspoon Church and Nassau. And what we did with that was we didn't do the history, we did the history of the relationship between the two churches from 1762 from the Presbyterian meeting house until now, and we developed a video. We also wrote a little manual. We, we based it on events that both churches have. Both congregations had in common through the years, and there was one other piece that we did that people may or may not be aware of. And we also—I can't think of her name, I'm so embarrassed—we also developed a wall—a piece of wall art. And in the wall art there all of the events that we discuss of the relationship between the two Churches. And I, if I can remember her name, because she did such a great job, and it's not coming to me. No, you can't help me.

Azra Thomas: [00:33:39] Okay, well, you also did something else with Nassau recently.

Barbara Flythe: [00:33:51] In the effort of moving the relationship between Witherspoon and Nassau closer, in addition to a grant from Witherspoon—from Nassau to Witherspoon, there was also an organization created of members from Witherspoon and Nassau called The Witherspoon-Nassau Joint Committee, and our job was to plan activities and programs and relationships that we could develop between the two Churches. And one—we've done other things, book, discussion groups, shared worship—but one of the most meaningful things to me, that we developed came as a result of the George Floyd murder. We happened to be meeting the day after the event. Dave Davis, who is our leader and our light and has been through the years and promoting the relationship between the two congregations was we were all just kind of stunned that we were really sitting for the one of the first times not knowing what to do just there because you're supposed to be there. And Dave says, I remember he said, I have no words.

I've done everything I could do, we have all come together. Everything just keeps happening over and over again. For me, Black people keep getting killed over and over again. So that one of the people in the group, it was Pam Johnson, who said, why don't we have, why don't we start a discussion group between the two churches? So we ended up we have two groups who meet monthly there. Each group consists of membership from Witherspoon and Nassau, and we discuss issues of race and sometimes reconciliation, but it's more about racism and the awful results of racism and what it does to people and to their lives. We, interestingly, don't use books as much as we use magazine articles, current newspaper articles, Ted Talks. And I saw a great one this morning, in fact, from Eddie Glaude, a professor at Princeton. And we send those links to all the members. Everybody reads or looks at the video or whatever, and another piece, another good part of this is that one person from Nassau and one person from Witherspoon, they come together to introduce the topic and facilitate it. In fact, the topic for our group for September is Project 2025 and its impact, and who's developing it, and why.

Azra Thomas: [00:37:08] Do you think you want to talk about another relationship you have to Princeton. I have Gladys Taylor. If you want to talk about the Robeson House?

Barbara Flythe: [00:37:16] Oh, yeah, we can talk about Robeson House. I'm not on the Robeson House Committee, but I do remember the decision for Gladys Taylor, a member of Witherspoon, who has since died, owned The Robeson House and somewhere probably in the mid-90s, 1990s, it was decided that Witherspoon was going to try to buy the Robeson House. And Gladys, interesting enough, because it's property in Princeton, and everybody knows about property in Princeton, and she could have sold the house for up to \$700,000 but she,

Witherspoon was able to purchase it for \$400,000. But still a lot of money to us, and we had a very active Robeson Committee who was charged with developing funds, so that we could redo the house and give it what it needed. The big boost that we had was in, because of a person, Nancy Prince, I can't do all the details, but she was the person, she was the wife of one of with his friends, former intimate ministers, who was struck by Robeson's, Robeson's father's story of being dismissed from the presbytery of New Brunswick, which was the name of it, that Reverend wrote, Drew Robertson, and because he was working for racial justice since the early 1900s and he was not only working with African Americans, but he was working with European immigrants as well. The big presbytery—this was just like too much for them, so they let him go. And it was a very difficult time. He never fully got a job. He never fully recovered his agency. Paul and the family moved to Northern New Jersey, and Paul ended up going, Princeton wouldn't even look at him. So he ended up attending Rutgers, and he's a hero. His whole story would make another, there's another person in Princeton who could do this and tell us much more about Paul Robeson. But the great part that Nassau and Witherspoon would be involved is the fact that the coming together of Nancy Prince talking to Dave Davis and talking to John White, former member of the our presbytery, went with her husband to the Senate, which is the larger organization at the Presbyterian Church, and they agreed to give Witherspoon \$140,000 to pay off the mortgage of Wilson House, and both Nassau and Witherspoon were involved in this effort.

Azra Thomas: [00:40:56] I mean, on a lighter note, but you had a lot of connections through churches. There's one that's not as serious, but the Unitarian Church, if you want to talk about that a little bit.

Barbara Flythe: [00:41:06] Well, it's interesting that you'll bring that out. The Unitarian, Unitarian, Unitarian Church is very dear to me, and I have good friends there. And it happened and came in about because of the two pastors in the two churches, and the fact that we worship together. And in fact, at some point when Witherspoon was doing new construction, if we had any events or programs, we had them at the Unitarian Church. And my daughter, my granddaughter, Azra, is smiling because we started—it was the year my husband was dying, 1996. I had gone with a friend to the Unitarian Church Fair, which they have every day. And this Fair became a part of our lives, as her has been to everyone. And she's 22 years old, and my daughter, the three of us work the Fair. We have very good friends there, and they and they continue to be. And in addition to the fact that among congregations the Unitarians are, are really organized, not, organized around justice reform. And a lot of the work they do is that.

Azra Thomas: [00:42:34]

You've lived in a couple—in Philadelphia, in a city—

Barbara Flythe: [42:38]

Excuse me?

Azra Thomas: [00:42:38] You've lived in the city in Philadelphia. You've lived in a lot of suburbs.

Barbara Flythe [00:42:42] Yeah, that's good. I could talk about—

Azra Thomas: [00:42:43] How does Princeton compare to those places?

Barbara Flythe: [00:42:48] When you get 90 years old. They all have their their up, their things that are really wonderful, and things are not so good. I now live in Ewing, New Jersey, with my adult son Mark and daughter Lisa, and my granddaughter Azra, who's interviewing me today. And I'm very happy that Princeton is a city with with rich cultural opportunities, music, theater, discussions, you can actually, I mean, I heard Toni Morrison speak because she was in Princeton. I have been a supporter, too, of the Coalition for Peace Action. I forgot about that. And their programs and activities. And so. Princeton, you can be in touch with the world. You also have these folks who have a lot in common with you. I am because of the Union, because of my early experiences. And I have one more I want to add, a social justice person, particularly concerned with what has happened to children. And the thing I'd like to talk about has to do with my own school experiences. I went to—uh, all-Black Elementary School. I lived in an all-Black community. The street that I grew up in, there was only one single-parent on the whole street. Everybody had a mother and a father. It was a it was like such a stable life I lived in. I was raised in a village with love and attention and people who cared about me and a sense of pride about being African American or Black. It was only when I went out into the larger community to shop or go to stores, which we could do in the North, so we could go in stores and try on clothes and all that kind of stuff. And the movies weren't segregated. But there are many ways that you still knew you were Black. One of the most interesting things about how I developed in my life, both my parents were very interested in education, and by the time I was three or four years old, I knew I was going to go to college. I knew that it was expected of me and that I would be a person who would be contributing to the world. That's what my family

was like. So we get to—and I was a good student, not as good as my brother, who was fifteen months older, and he was like the president the Safety Patrol. He was president of school, he did everything, to the extent that when people met me, they would say, "Are you sure you're Perry's sister?" So I had to live with the kind of—I was not a conformist, and my brother was, let's put it that way. However, when my mother, when, when they were at this time in Philadelphia, which would have been Junior High School. So it's in the late 40s. When you're deciding what course you're going to take—there was an academic course, there was a commercial courses with industrial arts. So, the counselor in the school put my brother in industrial arts. He was a year older. So my mother didn't know a lot, but she went up to school to ask. He brought the paper home to sign, and she went up to and spoke to the counselor and said, "Will this get him into college?" And my, the counselor said, "No, but he probably can't do the work." So my mother said, "No, he's always on the honor roll." So she said, "You just put him in the course. I'll do the rest at home." So, my brother goes into academic course so he could go to college. So the next year the paper comes out. It's me. I'm a year behind him in school, and the counselor, the same person, put me into the commercial course for Secretary. So this time, my mother went up, and she was—to the school—, and she was kind of mad, and my mom said, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm a days' worker, so if I don't work, I don't get paid." And she said, "I was up here last year about my son. I don't even know why I have to come up here about my daughter. Put her in the academic course." And my mother walked out.

Azra Thomas: [00:47:34] Why was your mother named Seavy?

Voices of Princeton

Barbara Flythe: [00:47:36] Oh, that's another interesting story. Asha has all the family history scattered but real. Seavy—S, E, A, V, Y—was the name of the plantation owner who owned our family as slaves, and he actually educated his slaves. He taught his slaves to read and write, and as they got older, freed them. So “Seavy” is an honored name in my family, and that's why my mother is named that. [inaudible] Oh, this is so connected to Princeton. I don't think...
[inaudible]

Azra Thomas: [00:48:31] I think we got through it.

Barbara Flythe: [00:48:33] I think we got through it too. We mentioned my personal life, aspects of my personal experiences, and really aspects of my work in Princeton. Most of the social justice work and things I've done have been in Princeton or then finally Trenton.

Cliff Robinson: [00:48:54] Okay, well, thank you both for your time. This is the end of the recording.

[END OF INTERVIEW]