Interview with Jessie Mae Finley

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Interviewer: Naarah Patton

Patton: This is Naarah Patton, interviewing Mrs. Jessie Mae Finley, on November 29, 2003. Right now, we're going to discuss more in depth, the work to get more African American teachers in the school systems.

Finley: I don't have the data concerning that, and I had it all in my boxes at my daughter's house. So I couldn't give you much information on it as to the dates and everything. I could refer you to someone who could tell you all about that, or you might be interviewing them on it, I don't know. So maybe I'd better not try it you know, because I remember that there were very few of our people that were teachers. They had a lawsuit here and they won their suit, and they later on had African Americans in the school system. So I don't know. I'm afraid to speak on that because I may get it all mixed up.

Patton: Okay, that's okay.

Finley: Now, I had another serious issue in Springfield on segregation. We were—it's from my hometown, in Danville. Of course we all, we were from Danville, so I guess we could talk about this. We had an encounter with the Ku Klux Klan. It seemed that we had a little country school we went to called Mount Pleasant. This must have been right about 1919, because I was just a youngster. My brother ran

for the school board of this little school, one room school, and the Ku Klux Klan didn't like it and didn't want it. So they burned a cross in front of our house, across the field, and so my older brothers and my father in-law got their guns and they went under the porch. You know, they had houses that are built up, and they stayed under the porch until they went on about their business. But of course I don't think he tried that again, because we had—most of those people were friends of ours, supposed to be friends of ours, but they—we were afraid of the tricks they might try. So anyhow, that was another fact about 1919.

Patton: Was that the only instance where you had to deal with the Klan specifically?

Finley: Mm hmm. I don't know if they knew that—they knew that they couldn't afford to play with us, not the Schultz family, so they went on about their business. I happened to think about that, that we had an experience with the Ku Klux Klan. Now you have to ask me what you want to.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: I was going to tell you something more about music and some musicians I'd known, tell some of that.

Patton: That would be great. We can do that right now.

Finley: Okay. Well, I had always said that there was great power in music, and that I started out, my mother taught us on an old pump organ and we had to pump the organ for her until we were nine years old, then she sent us to a teacher. It turned out that the teacher she sent us to was Mattie. We called her Mother Gaddie, and she was a very good person, in Danville, Illinois. I found out later on, her hometown was Springfield. So she was an Alexander here and Springfield, and all of the family were musicians. They had a German teacher they went to, all of them, to learn about music. Mother Gaddie was a very good teacher and not only a good teacher, she was a good role model for us. So my mother—I guess, I think I told you something about my father, didn't I?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: Well, my mother always said she didn't want another Jim Schultz in her family, so she took us to Mother Gaddie, because we had to learn the notes. She didn't want anybody come up, trying to do everything by ear again. Mother Gaddie was good at that. She was a very strict person, and you had to get your lessons. If you didn't get your lessons she wouldn't take your money. She only charged a dollar for a lesson, and she wouldn't take your money. Go back and tell your mother that you didn't have the lesson and I'm a Christian and I'm not going to take your money for nothing. I didn't know then that I would run into

her family here in Springfield, Illinois. They were as well, music in our church here and they—she had a brother by the name of Henry Alexander, here in Springfield. When my brother took over as the pastor at Zion Baptist Church for Clyde Schultz. And I had Clyde Schultz, then I had Calvin Schultz. Henry wanted to come up to this church because some of his relatives had really built the church. In fact, he was related to one of the relatives that built the church, a fellow by the name of Brent. This is a tree here, and this first was first done, this is on our 160th anniversary, and I did that, the history of the church for its 130th anniversary. I have a tree back there for that. It tells here, there's been some misunderstanding about—I'm getting on to another thing here. Springfield was, based on (inaudible), but it was. It was organized by colored people and it's the third oldest church after cessation. Organized and it was first organized as a colored Baptist church, and the name was changed in what is that?

Patton: 1894.

Finley: Okay, all right. Although it was organized—let's see now. The present church was built by the men of the church under the pastorage of Reverend Brent. Reverend Brent was related to Mother Gaddie and came over here because see, they were related. This information that I got here, on the organization of the church, is what they told me, what they gave me, the information they gave me back then. And also, I did

a title check on the property and everything and it turned out that this is true. So whoever tries to tell you, anybody else, that there was another church here first before this one, I don't know where they got that from. See, I did a title check on the church and this church, the property he had here was owned by the Portuguese. I had all that information and when they came over here and had a Presbyterian church, and they sold the property there to one of the members. The members donated the property and this is let's see, see if you can turn it over there. This is the first church that was built. Can you imagine that, way back then. Reverend Brent, he was a great guy and one of the people who learned how to do something; get his hammer and saw and come on, let's build you a house you know, and he said let's build a church. This was built by bricks, hand-firing, by the members of the church, who owned the brickyard at 9th and Jefferson I think it was, and they had a brickyard there and they hand-fired the bricks that built that. So this was that church there, that Brent... I'm going to again, try and get back to the music now. Anyhow, this shows here, all of the churches that came out from here. Pleasant Grove came out, there is a date here.

Patton: 1895.

Finley: This is another church here. What is that?

Patton: Calvary.

Finley: It came when?

Patton: 1919.

Finley: I was going to let you take this, so you can make a copy of this. Will it help you?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: The Union Baptist Church here, someone who was doing some of his oral history, made a remark to somebody who was taking it, that Union Baptist Church left Zion and organized their own church, because they said these people here were all light complexion people, you know there was a lot of differences in the colored people. They had problems among themselves. The dark complexion people didn't like the light ones and the light ones didn't like the dark ones. So they had that, and they said they left here because all they had was light. But see they were all wrong there, and so if you hear that again they are wrong, because Union Baptist Church, one of the main ministers they had there was Reverend Manuel; Reverend Manuel at Union Baptist Church and Sister Manuel, and they're just as white as you are. Why would they leave here, because they say they're too light over here and then they would hire a minister and his wife for a long period of time. They stayed there longer than any other minister ever stayed there. So I couldn't be that you know, and it couldn't be that because

in my family, there are light people and dark people, and we were not allowed to even mention the differences in the colors. In fact, we just could not do it and so it was... Now there is one thing I'll say that's a nice thing. This right here is sort of a high-class man. He tried to get everybody else to be high class, and he was even dark complexion. So therefore, would not have went through because he was dark, and then there were others that were there, other dark people. I don't know what light people they had in Zion that would cause them to say things like that. Somebody made that report in one of their oral reports, I don't know. Have you been doing some of the other?

Patton: I've looked over some of them. I haven't encountered that one.

Finley: Well anyhow, that's all wrong. I wanted you to see this so you know that it's all wrong, because there were light and dark people. My father was dark and my mother is as light as you are, and she had light, and my father was dark complexion. These are different churches. This is not up-to-date because there has been some other branches out from these, but this was actually done first on the 130th anniversary. This is on the 160th, 30 years ago, so they used this here. Does that give you some idea about this?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: So you can take it. There was one thing about Zion. Did I tell you it was anxious to get everybody to try to be somebody and do something, the family, Alexander family and the Brents branched off from that. And then they all tried to be somebody and do something, and he was jumping over puddles of water and everything and boards and everything else, trying to have the people build a little house or a shack and so forth and so on, trying to do something and trying to get a little education. They were just like that and I was lucky to have Mother Gaddie as my role model. There were several members here, there was a Noble. She had a brother called Noble, Noble Alexander. Let's see, she had a sister by the name of Viola Alexander. They all were very smart people and they were all dark complexion people too. So you could see here, you would never know that people were that concerned about the color, but that they were. Noble Alexander has a son living in Springfield now, and his name is George Alexander. George Alexander. He can tell you more about the Brent family and the Alexander family than I can. Of course I had occasion to be the power of attorney for his auntie, who was in the nursing home, when she was there, and I had to work with her and I had to work with him too. He lives right here out on 16th or 14th Street, someplace like that. He can tell you—here, and he's a dark complexion person. So can you imagine this about dark complexion people, and why they would leave to go to Union because they go around here and get on the Union

and then one of the ministers is just as white as any other minister. See, that's the kind of things that were going on. But anyhow, Reverend Manual and his wife, that was another role model for me. They were connected with the Wood River Baptist Association and I was too. She was just wonderful to all the young people in the Wood River Association. Now let's see, I told you about this stuff. I'm just going to let you take it, but I want it back by next Saturday.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: I just happened to get this here.

Patton: Thank you.

Finley: Henry Alexander was head of the music at Grace United Methodist Church, and he wanted to come back because he wanted to come over to Zion, where his roots were, and he would come over there to handle the music. My brother told him fine, that he could not help him unless he become a Christian. So the man was grown. He's the only one I heard of in that whole family that was not a Christian. As a grown man, he got baptized so he could come to Zion and handle the music. (laughs) So when I came to Zion, my brother was there. He came in 1930, the same time that I came. They were very fond of him. I think I told you that he was—and told him to come and see about this church. Of course, I had come here with Dr. Kenniebrew and I knew

they needed someone there. He was in Ohio and I had heard that he had preached, did preaching. So he was ordained and was installed at the same time. He had never been there but they took him as a minister. There's a little article I have in the church anniversary book, about how—the most exciting things happened when he was ordained and installed at the same time. He was there and the increase in the congregation was greater than it had ever been, it was down to nothing. So you see, it wasn't because of the color. When Clyde came here, they liked him so well. But he passed away early. He had only been there about five years and passed; appendicitis first set in and he died suddenly. So my other brother was there and they wanted to know if he would take the church and of course he was not the person Clyde was and he never could get in line with the people. So he left and went to a church in Centralia, Illinois. So that tells you about the Schultz brothers and Henry Alexander got baptized so he could do the music. He was the first one to introduce music of that kind. We just were using mostly hymns and things at church, but he introduced classical music like the Hallelujah Chorus, The Heavens are Telling and things like that, and he made me play them. He was rough. You can do it, you can do it. Well, there was another girl there that was playing, her name was Allie Hopkins, and the Hopkins family, they were dark complexion too and they were as white as I am. So Allie could not handle the classical music and I had to work my

fingers off to get that music down that he wanted down. He was sort of rough on you but we had to do it. We had quite a nice choir, and I got the music together too. My mother was so pleased because I was reading all those notes. Well, that comes along to there. I think I told you that I had some sort of singing—worked with some sort of a singing group or something.

Patton: You mentioned it.

Finley: Okay. The first group, other than my church, that I worked with was the Lincoln Liberty Chorus. That's where we had a choir and it was directed by O. Jerome Singleton. He liked the classical music too, so he made me learn some things he wanted to do by Rachmaninoff and a number of other things. I had a lot of years but I had not had any of that. So he had told me, "You can do it, you can do it. I know you can do it." And Lord have mercy, I worked with him and he got me to do it. He was the director of the Douglas Community Center here, and that was a recreational place. Somebody had donated a building that they could have for recreation and activities and things like that. I heard of this concert here. Reverend Lasley got up and said do you know what? I heard someone say the other day that they only had to pay fifty cents for their music lesson. And he said you know? I told him what another person said; I didn't have to pay anything. I got mine free at the Douglas Community Center with Jessie Mae Finley. I

had my music studio there and got free... Of course it's in the city and they gave us a little grant to help us along, but it was very, very little. I worked at the Douglas Center, that was my studio and we had chorus. I also worked in the homes. I remember having a family, I taught the whole family for fifty cents a piece, you know? It was four or five children. There was one boy, he wouldn't play any piano and his father said, "He doesn't want to play anything but the guitar." And I said well you get him a guitar and I'll teach him. "You'll teach him?" I said yes, I said, "Get the guitar and the books he's supposed to have and I'll teach him." I said, "I may not be able to play but I can teach him." And don't you know, he was able to play that guitar and the last time I heard him—he's gone now. There's not very many people who live as long as I have. But he had a condo up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and all the kids had music. So that's what I was teaching there at the Douglas Community Center and in the homes and whatnot. I know one lady who wanted her grandson and her, and then they challenged him to learn music. She was an older woman too but see, she took lessons from me in order to get him to take them. She happened to be the custodian at our church, her name was Lytie Bridgewater. She was one of the first, one of our people to travel abroad. She went to the Holy Land way back, and her people were not traveling. She played that piano and she made those kids practice and everything. Those two kids in the family, they were taking from me at

the same time she was taking. She said her lessons, her regular adult lessons cost twenty-five cents. One of the boys went to Millikin University and finished in music. We presented him, Love Joy and Peace presented him at the commissary. So, you'd be surprised to hear her tell her stories about her trip, by ship. She was very, very—she was quite an inspiration to everybody. She was pretty loving but don't try to cross her path. But anyhow, Lytie Bridgewater was somebody. I have to mention her. At the same time, see that I get all the Alexanders in there. I want to get them all in there.

Patton: You mentioned Henry Alexander, Noble Alexander, Viola Alexander, George Alexander.

Finley: They all were musically inclined. Ms. Gaddie had a connection with her studio, a choir, and I had to be one of the singers and be a part of that you know. That's music coming along. Then I had the Douglas Community Center with my sister, who was a musician too, Rose Marie. She was a minister, Reverend Rose Marie Ashford. Turn it over there and see if there's a point in there. No, turn it over. I think this is it.

Patton: Does Rose Marie end with a "Y" or "I-E?"

Finley: I don't know. It's a poem. There we are. Rose Marie was the smart one in our family. It's R-O-S-E M-A-R-I-E. When I was doing the

130th anniversary, I had her help me in doing the anniversary book, and she did a poem. This is the history of the Zion right here, and it's to the tune of what?

Patton: Variations of Sweet Hour of Prayer.

Finley: And they have used it. Since 1930 they have used it all the time. She was good at that sort of thing. My mother always wanted to be a minister herself, but of course the Baptist church didn't have women as ministers. When it came to family, she preached a good sermon sometimes, and so she was really happy to know that she had—I think she had passed before Rose Marie started preaching. I don't know. Then I had two nieces who were preaching and I had the two brothers, and I had, I think three nephews preaching and I said, mother would have been happy and she could rejoice in having to know that there are that many preachers in our family. Anyhow, this was a beautiful thing here. I'm going to have to have them put down her, put her full name in there, Reverend Rose Marie Ashford. They just put on there Ashford. She was very good. She was one among our first that ever went to college. She went to the University of Illinois. She was a great person. I don't know, it's kind of hard to explain it. She was just I don't know. I won't try to explain it. Anyhow, she could do this, she was helping me. She helped me a lot when I was doing the 130th. She did certain things. She would say, I'm going to do this for

you, now you finish it up. I'll do this for you and you finish it up. (laughs) Anyhow, she was a good person and I wanted to say something about her. She finally went out to Chicago first and had her own church, and then she went out to Los Angeles and she had her own church out there. So, there was a lot of music in our family and preachers and religion going on in our family. So that was really good. Just make what parts you want out of that. As a matter of fact, let's just put it on here, I'm giving that to you to take with you. Now we'll go back to segregation, discrimination and my brother Clyde, the first minister at Zion. They had a big rally here because they wanted to started a municipal band in Springfield, and so he opened the doors of the church, open for them to have the rally at the church. He said, "I'm only having this here at the church because I want to be sure that you have some of our boys and girls as part of the band." They said, oh sure that's going to happen, yes, yes. He said, "Now if you have any trouble getting a person to play that clarinet, let me know, I'll pull mine out." This goes back to the beginning of our music. When my brother came back from the service—he joined the service just for the movement. The education he got from learning on the organ. He came back playing saxophone and clarinet and all those things. World War I, isn't that something? He told all the people on the street where we lived there, we were all related, to get an instrument. He told them what instruments to get, for any of them, he'd teach them. So we had

a band, it was called the Roy Schultz Band. That's when he told them—when Clyde said, "I'll get my horn out and play for you if you don't have somebody to play the clarinet." Well, when it came time to organize the band, they were not going to have any colored fellows in the band, no Afro Americans. We just called them colored people then. And it was mainly because they didn't think they'd had enough education, and that could have been true because we had a hard time getting education back then. So they raised so much sand(??) on it. Clyde told them about what they promised, the promises they made and all that then. He said well, "Don't worry about it. We're going to give you a whole band for yourself that you can have for yourself." So can you imagine? Rather than take two or three people in a regular band, there's people that didn't want it and so they were going to give us a whole band to ourselves. It was called the First Municipal Band, and that's just with colored people. That was racism, segregation wasn't it? About the same time, they had a lake that was built out here, Lake Springfield, and they wouldn't let any colored go into the lake to swim. I was among the ones that took notes. I took shorthand. Of course, I had been a medical stenographer and legal stenographer, and I went along and took notes on everything that was said and done. They would not sell us any chickens or go into the lake. So, the bus came by and do you know what they did? They gave us a whole lake for us, a whole lake, what's called Bridgeview Beach. They gave us a

whole beach to ourselves, and of course we were glad to get that. We had some good times out on that beach, and we enjoyed it and we had a good time. Finally, it happened that they did let us go and swim in the main place, and so they saw the fun we were having at Bridgeview Beach, and they wanted to fix it so everybody could use it. So anyhow, Bridgeview Beach was something. (laughs) That had been our place for nearly every function they had out in Bridgeview Beach, and I sang, I was the first soloist they had. So I sang at every function they had. They had let's see, boxing and everything, things like that, and I always had to sing the Star Spangled Banner. Interestingly, they had the fairgrounds and things like that and I had to sing for it. So that's the history that takes us back to history always. So I'd sing and finally, they combined the bands, and I had an opportunity to sing for one of their concerts. That was a day that I was glad to get. They said, we're going to have her as our soloist. They had combined the bands. So anyhow, I had a chance to sing for the combined bands, and they had concerts every summer out at Douglas Park. So I enjoyed that very much, I got that done. You know, trying to outdo myself in order to show them that it can be done. Well, let me see now. I told you about the Lincoln Liberty Chorus. We sang at every function in town. I told you I would sing and I was in charge. We were called—we called them trailblazers. There was a fellow in town who was an

artist, his name was John Crisp. John Crisp did a mural at Lincoln School. Do you know where Lincoln School is?

Patton: No.

Finley: It's across from our old school.

Patton: Oh, okay.

Finley: Anyhow, it's on the wall there now. He has four trailblazers, and can you imagine that I was one of them, along with Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln was the first one, then Dr. Edwin Lee was the second. Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Edwin Lee, and then Winfred Helm. Winfred put it in print as "Doc", they called him Doc, and Jessie Mae Finley. That mural is on the wall now. My students say, "Oh, I saw your picture on our wall at school." Isn't that something? That was really exciting. Now, Dr. Edwin Lee was one of our outstanding doctors here, and he was my doctor for years. He did so much. He was the first school board members. One of the schools is named for him here in Springfield. It's called the Lee School. I don't know which one it is but it's sort of a new school, I don't know. And then "Doc" Helm, who worked for the state for us for so many years. He was a photographer and he has pictures of everything under the sun, so that he was one of the trailblazers. Of course I had been working with the senior citizens and with my music and so forth and so on, and all

that kind of stuff, and then he had me in there as the other trailblazer. I thought that was really something. (laughs) So in my church, I was a historian and so I had exhibits and things like that and I usually—I had a picture of that as one of mine to show to our exhibits. I got off track someplace didn't I?

Patton: It was interesting stuff though.

Finley: Well, I had a group called—a singing group, the Voices of Cheer, and when it was organized, there was one of the Journal-Register writers, whoever you're going to call them, heard about my Voices of Cheer, she liked the Cheer. She did a whole page on me. You know, I said, what are you talking about, but she did a whole page on what I had done with the senior citizens and helping people and all their family, and also we like that you've been working for them, that's why you're here you know? She did a whole page on that and I told her a lot of these things here I told you here right now. It went over big, and that's the first big thing I have, where I got some sort of award. Then I went on to work for Voices of Love, Joy and Peace, because I had moved on from Voices of Cheer, it was going down, and so I started Love, Joy and Peace, and I wanted to use Voice of Cheer for me. They said no, they're still working on it. They didn't want me to do that, so then I got the Voices of Love, Joy and Peace.

Patton: I'm going to stop this now and turn it over.

End of Tape 3, Side A; Begin Tape 3, Side B

Finley: Do you have one of these books here?

Patton: Yes. You gave me one of those already.

Finley: This is all about the Voices of Cheer. I had a lot of very fine, beautiful, beautiful singers. It lists them here. She just passed away last month. Marjorie was one of my best singers. You have a book that you can take her picture from, and it tells all about her. Marjorie Jones. She never said no if I called her for a big singing group or anything on the side. She was asked and was right there, said yes on the spot, and she just passed away. Marjorie Jones. You can get Marjorie Jones out of this book here. Now, this is pointing out some of the people here. This was in memory here, this here page was. This was the first concert we had. She was a great singer and she sang for municipal bands and municipal operas and everything. She took part in all of their operas.

Patton: Beverly Ann Bowman did?

Finley: Yeah. She died early. She was a schoolteacher. She got married and she wanted a baby, and something happened to the baby. Of course, she was not a young person then. She was not too old but past the age which you usually would be having children. Something happened to her and she died, and the baby died too. So that killed me, I'll tell you.

When she came out to practice with me, her uncle was there and I had given him a part to sing on first a song. He said, I wish you would try my niece. He said, oh you've got to hear her and I said honey, the whole wide world is going to have to know about you. And she done (??) know the whole wide world. She was in many operas and did all of the heavy work, and then Tom, they had—no matter what it was, she had... Now this man here, he's who is responsible for this book lasting. This was the first concert we had, way back when. Does it give any dates on there?

Patton: 1977.

Finley: They did our first concert, and she has a beautiful voice, she had a beautiful voice. His wife just died about three years ago, something like that, and it was quite a shock to everybody. Helen Lasley. Then the next concert we had was a niece of mine, in Seattle, Washington. I presented her in concert at Springfield High School. I had a young man by the name of Tubal Holmes, to accompany her, and he graduated from Millikin University.

Patton: What was the first name?

Finley: Tubal, T-U-B-A-L. I'll tell you about that family in a minute. Tubal Holmes was a great piano player. We had presented him in some of our concerts, in two piano numbers. One of his friends from Millikin

University, they had two families. We were at the Ursuline Academy, out here, that's where we had—not Ursuline, [but] Springfield College. It was a Catholic school and the two graduate pianists playing, we presented them. He was very good. So he practiced with her, she stopped, and he was already teaching then, in the college there. So, Crystal came all the way from Seattle, Washington and stopped there to practice with him, and she came on down and gave the concert. That was really something. That was one of my private joys you know, and I've been trying to get her to come again but I can't. It's too much. Well you know, they're really pretty good. She's now in charge of a singing group of her own up there in Seattle, Washington, and she's quite a good singer. But then that's that concert that she gave here and then went from there. So anyhow, that takes on some of the other musicians. My daughter Charlotte, when she graduated from Fisk—I had better go back to Tubal Holmes for a second. He was part of the Hayden family, H-A-Y-D-E-N. They were all musicians. He was one of the first Afro Americans to be hired by the state for messenger. I told you about when I went to—that time I got tired of seeing all they had for women was washing or elevators, and all they had for men was janitors or messengers, and he was one of the messengers. He was a violin player. It's interesting that in that family, there were so many of them that were good musicians. He presented a concert here and I directed most of it, and

did the organ on some of it. He played the violin. His wife's brother came from Flora, Illinois, he played the violin. His daughter from St. Louis came and she played violin. No, she played the cello and my daughter played the violin. That was a beautiful concert. That's the sort of things that we did you know? Now, the main thing here, Tubal was a [organist] – he played the organ at our church and his whole choir from the college in Peoria came down and sang for us one time. That was really good. I wanted to tell you about—I'm getting up to Carla Hayden. Her father, his name was Bruce Hayden. He was a top violin player, and I think he was in the concert that we had at that time. At least we presented him anyhow, and he was a in a combo, working out of Nassau, the Bahamas, islands and places like that, and he came back to Chicago and he went to teaching at the school up there. I believe when he passed away, they named the school for him, that's how prominent he was. I went to a show in Chicago. They had told me he was the lead violin player, the head man for—what was the name of that show? Anyhow, he was tops, he was tops with the violin. It is his daughter—now he passed away of course, but his daughter is in the *Ebony Magazine*, I think this past month. Her name is Carla Hayden. She is the first Negro, Afro-American to be named President of the International Library and something [American Library Association], I don't know what it is. It's really a big job. Well, she was very smart, because she had charge of the-Library here in

Washington, and in Chicago. She was there and then she went out to, I think Massachusetts someplace and she was in charge of something out there, and then she went to this here, it was held in Canada, and she was named International President. Isn't that something, that I had dealings with people like that? Anyhow, Carla is one of my sweethearts. Now I know she didn't go too much out for the music, but she was top in the library work, worldwide I think. Isn't that something? Well, it was international and you'll have to check and see if you can find it. It was either in *Ebony* or *JET*. Now I had the Haydens, and Marla Hayden, she played the piano for them and they all had their parts. I started out telling you something about my daughter. When she finished high school, our church presented her at a concert. I billed her, as she should have been, four, five, six or more in the concert, on the organ, the piano, voice, cello, violin, and not only that, she made her own gown for the occasion and made my gown. Not only that, she was happy to do that for us. She went on to college and finished at Fisk University, and she sang in the choir there the whole time she was there. They just finally moved to Alton, Illinois, she's retired now. Her husband was vice president with General Mills Corporation for about 30 years (Editor's Note: Vice president of General Mills for 19 years and Illinois Bell for 13 years), and she taught school in Minnesota at that time. Then he decided he wanted to go back to the farm and he went back to the farm in Alton.

It's interesting, that he's having a big sale today, of all his equipment. Can you imagine? He said when he got—when he got on the farm he was 75. He'd be 75 in December and then February, and he had all this farm equipment, that tractor thing he had, there's only about two of them in the country, and he almost had them to run out and give it to him. They have had it since the auctioneer. The auctioneer took the slips out to show him what was included, they're coming from far and wide to see Alton. So I said no, I'm not having any part of it at all, I'm just answering the telephone. (laughs) But it's very, very exciting because there are not very many Afro-Americans farming. Charlotte says mama, when he comes out the barn and they see all of this equipment everything and they see him, they wonder what's going on. You know, they can't believe it, they can't understand how he could have something like this, but he was a good, smart guy. They're having the sale today, all his various things. Isn't that something? I'd love to be there. Well anyhow, down in Alton they been, getting her to play and sing something at their church. She never did much of that. She was teaching and everything, so she didn't do too much of that. I always wanted her to do more of the music. Well anyhow, they got her doing that a little, and she would have some other thing she was doing, historical work. Do you want me to bring them all to you next time?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: I don't have your telephone number, do I?

Patton: Oh, I don't think so.

Finley: Now, what is that?

Patton: xxx-xxxx.

Finley: Okay. Now, I'll give you my daughter's telephone number. Do you have something with her on it, in case something should happen, that you would have to get in touch with her about something.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: I don't have it here, I don't think. Well, her name is Charlotte Johnson, Alton, Illinois. You can call her in case something happens and you couldn't get in touch with me, and she can tell you. I want to give that to you. Now, we were down to having concerts. I've had some very, very good people in my concerts, really, really exciting. I usually end up with my remarks, to carry on, carry on. I think I told you about that, carry on, carry on, that the world would be the better for you? At last when you die, that this will be your cry, carry on my soul, carry on. Well, I don't know what else. Oh, I want to talk about some of the musicians here. We have some very good musicians connected with our church. There's Dorothy Sims Winston. She was the music teacher, and she had her own private little studio, and she

was very good organ player. She was organ player at our church, and she was one of the few people who gave concerts on the big—the first Presbyterian church. Most everybody who ever took music in Springfield, took something from her. Her husband was the executive director of the Urban League for several years. He did a wonderful job there. Also, her daughter was quite a singer and when she was presented in a concert, at the time Dorothy was in the concert. There was another teacher here that we had, Mary Waters. She was sort of a high-class person and a little low key. Her brother was a Judge out in Chicago. She was from Decatur, Illinois and she had more students I guess, than anybody. She just devoted all her time to her students, and she furnished people for my concerts and things like that. Let's see now, Mary Waters and I'm trying to think of somebody else who might have been. Well I guess that takes care of that, the best musicians in our town. I wanted to say something about the Lincoln Colored Home.

Patton: I've heard a little bit about it in, and the organization that I'm working with right now has talked about it.

Finley: They're putting out some tales about the people. See, I knew her personally. Because she was sort of a high-class person, there were people in classes at that time. My first husband was in that high class and I was a country gal, so I didn't count myself high class. Eva

Monroe had, when she wasn't there, she had a person with the name of—what's her name now, oh Lord. She was in charge of the place when she wasn't there. They said something about Eva Monroe neglected the homeless. She always had a high class—this person that she had was a high-class teacher from Jacksonville, Illinois. Mallory, her name was Mallory, and the Mallorys came from Jacksonville, and they had seen, they had traveled. Of course the fact that she worked in the home, I had to make some connection there so far as Springfield was concerned. She is one of the few people that played the harp at that time. She was a harpist, Mallory was. You get that in there, that she was a harpist. That's the type of person they had working at the home, when Eva Monroe could not be there. They wanted to very much hear—I'm getting off the track, but I guess I'd better get this off my chest. They wanted very much to organize a separate program for the children, and they brought in some things against Eva Monroe, in order to get her to close her place up and come to the home. In order to get this here color, this colored girl home, something like that. And it seemed sad because she was a sad person. She was what you call a high-class person, and those high class people just did not fit in with other people. They were glad to have their learning and their help and all like that, but when it came to something that somebody wanted from them, they didn't turn in. She was very unhappy with the situation there. They discouraged her not tell anybody it wasn't fair,

and it's not fair now. They had some very good people in colored children. They had some very good children in that church. I think there was two people ahead of her. But you got along with her and she was an excellent person that worked out well, but they didn't treat Eva right, and not tell anybody, they didn't treat her right. I was not in her class or anything like that, but I just didn't think it was right, and I wanted to get something in there, talk about Mallory and how she was a harpist, very unusual. They have a monument in the cemetery where my first husband is buried, in Jacksonville, for the whole family. There was one lady that came to visit us at the hospital when we were there. She wanted to take me with her to bounce off, to open up a school down there. She insisted that you just had to go. Well, she chose to stay at the hospital and work. She really went overboard with her hospital work and everything, since they were sort of a private Springfield hospital. Let me see, now what else did I want to tell you? Maybe the thing you have up here, or maybe it's here, that gives my resume of all the places I—the different organizations when I decided that I was going to join a lot of organizations and was going to prove that it could be done. I left out one of them and I want to put it on there because it's very important. This is an award that was given to me. The Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority honored me just about three or four years ago, as an outstanding senior citizen. That was really a great thing. I'm going to put it on here, and you can put it on your

sheet that you... That takes care of that. Did I tell you I got that award for 30 years from the Retired Senior Citizens? And none of this could be possible without God, honey, I'm a firm believer of that. I would have been nothing without him. Are you a religious person?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: What church do you go to?

Patton: Right now I don't really go to a church, but I was raised much the same way. I also wanted to ask you about some of your work with the newspapers, the newspapers that you worked with. One of them was the *Illinois Informer* wasn't it?

Finley: The *Illinois State Informer*, a weekly newspaper. I was co-editor. I think they have copies of our paper in Chicago, the library there that started with the Negro History Month. Well anyhow, one of the libraries there, and I think I have some scraps of it at home in my boxes, I'm not sure. We did real well in it. We had organized a group that wanted to do this you know. One of them wanted to be the bookkeeper, one of them wanted to be the manager and one of them wanted to take care of circulation. That left me to get all the ads and all the money. So, I had them get out and get the news and my husband, Dr. Kenniebrew was the editor. So I don't know. How much more do you want to know about this?

Patton: What year did you start doing that, do you remember?

Finley: Well, let me see now. It was just before—we were moving around and he heard about a hospital in Evanston, Illinois, and they might need a surgeon, and so we moved to Evanston. There at Evanston, we had a what you call an Evanston *Informer* on the side. He got there and he found out that they really didn't want what he wanted. Both my children were born in Evanston. They were born in 1932 and 1933, so that's when we had the Evanston *Informer*. So he found out it wasn't what he wanted and we had to come back to Springfield, and then we did the *Illinois State Informer* here, so it must have been when my kids were little, yeah. They were born in 1932 and 1933, so I guess around in the '30s.

Patton: Was it pretty widely circulated throughout the state or did it stay mainly in central Illinois?

Finley: Well, we had it going so that I did take it to other states. In fact, I went to Peoria for advertising, and I went to Jacksonville for advertising. I went to Decatur and places like that, close by, but there wasn't any huge place like Evanston. We were just trying to make a living.

Patton: Was your intended audience really specific or did you just want as many people to read it as could?

Finley: What?

Patton: Did you have a specific intended audience or was it just a general paper for everyone?

Finley: It was for everyone.

Patton: The news topics you covered, it was just—

Finley: Dr. Kenniebrew was quite a writer. He did all the editorial work, things like that, and we had local news. The only time we had as much for the gossip column. So I asked about that because some girl had turned in some gossip on somebody, not calling it anything, like that thing we were talking about. So the man that was involved was one of my first steps to taking it to the street. He was really upset by it and then the girl's mother called me and said, "I don't know if anything might ever happen to your daughter." It wasn't so sincere at that time but at that time it was—so I said don't worry about the... I said we'll cut that out, but they still had it in the paper. The fellow who really wanted to go in with us on this and make it a big thing, they were trying, but they found out you had to do more than what they were doing, and to get out and get some advertisements in order to make the paper go. So one time they had a group style show (inaudible) people. It was really nice. They were doing a lot of things

with it. It was too much work for me and I didn't want to do that much work. That's just about everything.

Patton: Do you have any specific memories of what life was like during the Depression?

Finley: The Depression? What life was like?

Patton: Do you have—yeah, what life was like.

Finley: Well, it was rough for me. My husband had a stroke and I had two babies to take care of. When he had to give up his hospital, they condemned the place and it was torn down, and he never, he not even so far as the hospital is concerned. So anyhow, we were having a tough time, going to Chicago, he wanted to go to Chicago, and then Evanston and then back to Springfield. The money was running out and we were having a hard time making it. I went on to the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. Did you ever hear of the WPA?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: I went on to the WPA, and I ran into discrimination and segregation there. I should have told you about that before. They didn't want to give me anything in an office, a job. I was qualified as a medical stenographer and in town I had had some legal stenograph work. They didn't want to do it. They were not going to place me on any kind of

job like that. So they placed me on the housekeeping, that part of it. (unintelligible) So they placed me in some home, that was really outrageous. They didn't see why I should work. Dr. Kenniebrew, they said why isn't he working? So one day I was doing somebody's laundry, and they had an old, broken down washing machine, and it was out in the yard. Some of my friends drove all the way out there to see that I was really actually doing this. They couldn't imagine anybody, Dr. Kenniebrew's wife is doing that? Well, a hundred dollars to me was a hundred dollars, and I was happy to make it. Doctor still was doing practice and practicing, but the people didn't have money. They'd pay him off sometimes with a dozen eggs, maybe a couple of chickens, something like that. Things like that you know, and sometimes they had, there was a—they didn't have much to give and we had these correction books and things and all like that. Oh yes, it was rough honey, it was really rough. I said it was rough. I was making an honest dollar. So anyhow, the lady that was in charge of housekeeping at the project, I went to her one day and told her, I said, "I can't take any more of this." I said, people are coming all the way from out of town, here to this house, to see if Dr. Kenniebrew's wife is really out there doing washing and ironing. I enjoyed doing that. They'd dirty the house and I'd clean it up, you know? So I said, but I don't think I can try it any longer. If you can't place me in an office I don't know what I'm going to do. So she said, well I'm going

to let you work right in my office here until I can get something for you. That was a dear friend. So anyhow, she came up to me one day and she had a requisition for some people to work in the new state library, some research work on Carl Sandburg and somebody else. She said, that should be something good for me. So it was research on Carl Sandburg and on Vachel Lindsay and faces like that, and some material that I was placed on, doing research in newspapers and everything like that, any information concerning that. That's the first decent job I had with the WPA. So I just never got there after that. I think right after that, I went to work for the state and there, they even had an office job for me. So they gave me a job typing for, I think it was the court, in Joliet, Illinois, at an ammunition plant and the employment service there. I had to sign up for the state for a whole year, and I did because I needed the money. When I would come home every week to see about the kids, I had them placed with my sisters and my brothers. They were taking care of children for me so I can get it straightened out. It was rough. I have gone through some rough times and the Lord has taken care of me. He saw that I got through the rough times as well as the good times, and I can think of some good times. Does that help you?

Patton: Yes, thank you. How did the entire Springfield community react to the Depression? Was it hit harder than some places or did it—do you remember?

Finley: Well yes, they all had a hard time. You had to ration your food. We didn't have enough, not enough. You know about the ration books and all like that.

Patton: Mm hmm.

Finley: Yeah. Let's see now. I visited my daughter in Chicago, and she was taking me to a place where I could get some stockings. I was kind of afraid there, of getting into trouble there. (laughs) Springfield was having a time, they were having a time. I tried not to keep that on the mind.

Patton: Well I think for now, I think we've had a pretty good session. Would you like to end? Would you like to finish up now?

Finley: All right.

End of Tape Three, Side B