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Interview with Ruby Rouse Thompson

Rudy Rouse Thompson

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Interview--
"Living Together"
African-American Community
Ruby Rouse Thompson
11/12/98
Interviewed by: Anne Smetak & Maggie Ahearn

Anne: We're here with Ruby Thompson in the Crozier Center at Kenyon, on November 12th, 1998.

Maggie: We'd like to start by asking you basic biographical information; if you were born here, how long you've lived here, that sort of thing.

Ms. Thompson: Yes, well I was born and raised in Mount Vernon. My maiden name is Rouse, so I'd like that to be noted. Ruby Rouse Thompson. I attended school at Forthboard Elementary School, and then the Mt. Vernon junior and senior high school. I did quit school in the eleventh grade and returned to adult education classes after I quit school and finished school by obtaining my GED after I had become a wife and a mother. So I did things a little backwards maybe. Raised my son until the age of five when departed Mt. Vernon without my husband. It was just one of those experiences you went through in the late 60's, early 70's. And that, when left Mt. Vernon it was 1969. And went to Columbus, lived with a girlfriend who was ten years older, she was also a Mount Vernon natural born, Mt. Vernomite I should say. The reason I knew her so well, she was like a big sister to me, was because she was ten years older and I babysat for her children, so she was like a mentor. She had already become established in Columbus and was working so that gave me someplace to go to get my start. I went there with my son, and started working just odd jobs, fast food, taking some training, I had a lot of secretarial jobs because that was my field, that was what I concentrated on when I was in school. I finally landed a job with the state of Ohio, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and stayed there about thirteen years.

And I came along at the time when women, we were really fighting for our equal rights, equal pay, or I don't know the word here, the same pay...men do different things but they couldn't get their job done without the support staff...comparable. That's the word I'm looking for, comparable pay. They were paid so much more and the secretaries worked so hard on their projects and keeping, just everything, they can't do their job without us. I came along at that time when you had all that contention. Also, I was, of course black is a minority where ever you go. But having been born and raised in Mt. Vernon was really a benefit and I think I can say that about a lot of the kids in my age group, the Afro-American kids that are in my age group, a lot of us left here because the job opportunities were not available in Mt. Vernon. The jobs, the low-paying jobs, or the service jobs, that's what they usually groomed you for here. They didn't pay a lot of attention to encouraging you towards the college prep courses in high school. Shop, home-ec, things that would prepare you for service jobs, and so that's why a lot of us did leave. A lot of them left and went to college, I did not. I did everything backwards. But I did work my way

up. I was hired by the state of Ohio like I'm repeating, the Environmental Protection Agency as a secretary. And I had had a lot of preliminary little secretarial jobs.

I can backtrack now that that's coming back to my mind. Before I left Mt. Vernon I did have a clerical experience here at the local Good-will. And I was the first Afro-American in the clerical section. In fact it wasn't that much, they just, they had a little workshop for people, handicapped people, and they did assembly work and they needed someone to do the bills of lading and to do the books and that type of thing. And you will not believe this antiquated typewriter that I had. It was one of those that was like heavy black cast iron, and the keys were totally round, they sat up real high and there was a lot of space between them so that to depress the keys you practically had to have a hammer. Because the keys, I don't know how anyone got any speed on those things. And then if you did two keys at one time of course they all locked up and had to unlock your jam. And that's before we had correctable ribbons. So that if you're making carbons you had to erase through all these carbons. So I was very careful and I typed slow and corrected. Which I can say now that the computers, they really spoil you on your, lost the word again, your accuracy. You've got your speed, but boy when you look up at that screen. Whoa, gotta take that out, take that out. So this was the typewriter that I started on. And my family was very proud, because, just because I was the clerical person there. And it was a little office and a guy that I've gone to Mt. Vernon high school with, he headed it up. And we got along just fine. I haven't looked him up since I've been back in town. But that was a nice experience. So that was a prep experience for secretarial work. And I like secretarial work. There were other little jobs that I did in Mt. Vernon. I did babysitting, I did housecleaning. My mother worked at the YMCA, my grandmother and then my mother. My mother wanted me to take over that, and that was making beds. That's when the local "Y" had men staying there. There were rooms there for men. My mother, my grandmother, my mother were the maids. And my mother...I would go with her when I was a teenager during the summer and help her so she'd get done quicker. I thought 'This is not for me'. Maid work, child service, taking care of children, food preparation, I had done all of that and I decided very early that's not what I was going to do for a lifetime.

The one good thing I can say about being educated in the Mt. Vernon school system, is you acquire a great vocabulary, you acquire a great rapport with all people because we really didn't have segregated groups of black people in Mt. Vernon. It was just like you were integrated, you just never knew segregation, you knew prejudice. It existed then, some exists now. But for the most part we were just well integrated into the community, and into the neighborhoods. If you go into Mt. Vernon you won't find clusters. You may find two or three black families in a mixed neighborhood, all throughout town. Right now I'm thinking we are the only ones in our neighborhood right now, East Chestnut Street, within several several blocks. I can't even think of another black family. But they have dissipated. There are not as many as when I was coming up. There were probably four, maybe five-hundred, I remember my mother saying the census was. Now, I would venture to say, of the original Mt. Vernonites, there are a lot of new people that have come in and live in Apple Valley. So we don't, the locals don't, we don't know who they are. We see them in stores and we go, "There's a new black family in town". Because you notice those things when you're a minority. But now there are just so few, I think, maybe a hundred and fifty to two-hundred of the original Mt. Vernonites. And so many of

our older people are just dying off. That would be the generation ahead of me. So I am the next generation of black Americans in Mt. Vernon. Our children, my child is not in Mt. Vernon. So a lot of them have left, you know my generation after me.

I left but I came back after finishing up two careers: one as a secretary, one career in broadcasting. And I returned because my mother is elderly and widowed and she and my sister needed me there to kind of look after family things. So I returned a year ago, a year ago this month. It's been quite an adjustment. It's very difficult to be out on your own for like thirty-five years and then return to live with your mother. Be careful what you print about this because she'll be reading it. To return to live with your mother at the age of, I was fifty-two when I came back home, it's tough, it's really tough. Because you're still mommy's little girl and she wants to still boss you, and you don't have the freedom to come and go. 'Where are you going this time of night, it's dark out there!' 'Is that what you're wearing?' 'Are you warm enough? You better put this on.' You get to the point where you just say, I don't really understand how I was able to take care of myself for thirty-five years without all this input! This whole year has been a really big adjustment coming back to my mother's house with my sister there. She's always lived at home with mom. She has to be dependent upon mom because of some medical problems. So that's tough, I'll tell you. If you ever can avoid that, it would be very good. If I just had, you know if the garage was just big enough I could live out there in the garage. But I don't know what else I can tell you about my bio that's basically it.

I raised my son in Columbus, Ohio after my divorce. And I went through all the things that mothers go through with raising a child alone, he was a latch-key child. I taught him how to cook over the telephone. One of these things like 'You call me when you get home from school you call me and check in', so he'd call the office and say 'Mom, I'm home. Mom, how do I make a hot dog?'. This is like, you know leaving your children, he didn't want a babysitter after he reached the age of nine or ten. And I thought, well, ok, maybe he can be trusted and that would save me money. So I had to raise him over the telephone. And you'd do all of these instructions, you know, how to fix a hot dog in the microwave over the telephone. And you'd have bosses that are waiting on you to type a project and their just sitting in the other room. So I guess I'm very grateful because I had some that were very understanding because they had children of their own. But it was still a tough time working and being a minority on the job and being a single-mother. And having to miss a lot of work and the stress that you have, the kid's not always doing what he's supposed to be doing, so you have to go to school, 'cause the teacher wants to talk to you. I spent a lot of time in elementary and junior high school for my son, and having teacher conferences and things like that. Because we were in a larger community, as compared to Mt. Vernon, it was all very new to me because Mt. Vernon is a small community and I was born and raised here so the city was a big experience for me and also for my son. So there was a lot of adjustments to do and a lot of stress, a lot of worry, because you have more things to worry about. This was in the, this would have been in the, well, in the 70's, when he went through his elementary and then junior high years, and that type of thing. So I look back now and I think, 'Well, I guess I did ok', but when I was going through it it was like hurricane, what's the recent one, hurricane Mitch, or El Nino, you never knew what it was going to bring.

Being a single mom, it's no different, I can't say that the African-American experience is any different in that respect because I've worked and met a lot of women of all ethnicities over

my two careers and we all went through the very same things. And the adjustment periods, and the unfair treatment on the job, and having to educate bosses on what sexual harassment was. They set up special classes just to tell, to teach bosses that, for the state of Ohio. Because they didn't understand what that was, they didn't understand why secretaries were upset that they were standing around telling dirty and off-color jokes, and embarrassing things. They were, the guys I worked with were a bunch of really nice guys. And still they didn't understand that if they didn't give us our accolades, you know recognize that we're doing a good job, be appreciative and all that. And saying little demeaning things like, 'Well, you know, you're just a secretary' or 'Did you bring any coffee in?'. And in my mind I don't drink coffee, I'm thinking, I don't drink coffee, I don't have a husband, now why should I worry about him having coffee? So when I switched from one office to another, you had different openings and you could put a bid on a job, and get moved. I made sure when I went, I had that experience once, I went to another one, right away I said, 'I don't drink coffee, and I don't make coffee.' So that took care of that. We're going to get this, you know it's not in the job position description, and we're not going to have to come under "and other things". If you've ever seen a position description they tell you, they outline everything very specifically, and then they said "and other things as needed". A whole lot of stuff comes under that heading that you don't know and coffee making was one of them, nip that in the bud. But it wasn't because I was black it was because I was a female. So I think my experience in Mt. Vernon has been wonderful because it has really served me well throughout my life when I left here. Just never had a problem getting along with anyone or everyone, making friends, feeling very comfortable and relaxed. And I could tell that other people would feel uncomfortable.

And when I went into my broadcasting career, I did that in a small community in Indiana. And it was very similar to Mt. Vernon, but they were, the population county wide was 35,000, and in that whole county in the 1990 census there were only 52 African-Americans and a lot of them were college students that were there just for the college season because there was a college there, similar to Kenyon, it was a church school. And I, the reason I know that, is 'cause I went for months and didn't see any black people and I asked the guy who ran the station who happened to be black, I said, 'You know, where', and he was playing music that was a lot of black music. And I said, why are you playing this music, you know we're in a community where, how many black people are in this community? He says, 'Well, you know this station does go into Fort Wayne, Indiana.' He said, not only that, he said the local kids in this community like this music. So that was an education for me. And he was right, the kids, the Caucasian kids that come into the station or that call up, and request music, they like the black music. So I thought, oh well, ok, this is something good for me to know. The older people in that community, or when you would go out into the community, that's the first time that I can remember really feeling self-conscious because they would stare at you. You'd go to the grocery store and people would stare. And you're pushing your cart along and you feel some eyes and you turn to look and they turn their head real quick. Or their kids are standing there in the checkout line, and the mother is facing forwards and the kids are facing you, 'cause they're facing backwards and they're standing there with their fingers in their mouths and they're staring. And you go, "Hi", and they turn away real quick, like, 'Aah, she speaks'. So I did, and then I had several experiences there. I was going to the post office one time and there was an older Caucasian guy walking in from of me. Now he

did not know who was behind him. So when he got to the door, he knew someone was there he just didn't know who. He stopped, he opened to door and stepped back and I stepped past him into the door and I said, "Thank you.". And he gave me such a, like a...he resented the fact that he had held the door open for me. And if he had seen who it was I'm sure that door would not have been held open for me. And I'm a friendly person, so I'm walking done the street and I encounter someone who's coming in your space and you look into their eyes, you usually just acknowledge them. You say, Good day, hello, and many times there I would do that and older people, older men, older white men would not acknowledge me. Now, when you got to the younger people I would say, the forty-ish, forty-five, forty-ish, thirty group, and then all the young kids it was totally different. So you could tell the people who had grown up with the "old rules", and the people who had come into the 90's. And that was really an eye-opener for me. And then I had to look back and compare it to Mt. Vernon, I thought well, I evidently was just too young to notice. But when I would talk to my family on my visits home they would say, yeah well, it's like that here, it's always been like that here, you just never noticed because you were young. So it was the old rules as opposed to the way we do things now. And people show it in their attitudes.

After having returned to Mt. Vernon, of course I had to network and get things going, I was sitting around bored and thought, well what am I going to do with myself. So I joined a little diet club. And there were a lot of older women in there. Now I could tell that they were, not afraid of me, not...they just didn't know me when I first went. So I made up my mind, well you know, I'm going to get to know these ladies. They're going to be so glad that they know me. And the first two times I was there, within two meetings I had remembered everybody's name. And I would go in and I'd greet everyone, say, 'How'd you do this week?'. Just start a conversation to put them at ease. And then they started calling me up and saying, 'We're so glad you joined our club, you're just so much fun.'. And now here I am, I joined in March and now it's November. And I'm a participator, so now they look to me to do everything. We have such great times together, we go to lunch together. One of the requirements of the club is to have a partner, tops pall, or something like that each week. So I'm in contact with them and I just, I mean they're just, wonderful, we have a great time and a lot of laughs together. And I think that's good because they need to know that there's nothing to be afraid of, and you can tell when someone is being very careful, they don't know what to say, don't want to hurt your feelings. They don't know whether you want to be called African-American, colored, Negro, black and I know that that's a problem I feel really bad. So anyone that I've ever encountered with that problem I just tell them, it's ok, I don't have a preference anyway, I don't make the difference, so it's ok. I don't know how I can't speak for others, but with me, it's ok.

You recognize that there are differences in the races, but just the color of the skin, there's not that much difference when you're raised in a community you don't have different habits, as opposed to like people in the south. They have things they do differently than those who were raised in central Ohio. And I have dated men coming from the South and their attitude is different because they do things different. I noticed that they have closer family ties, and they are more aware of their history, and their more adamant about their education. They, most of them have gone to college, where I know a lot of, like I said, I quit, I quit and started my family then went back and just got my GED. No college degrees just took a lot of non-credit courses, or

creative activities programs at Ohio State when I lived in Columbus, things like that. Just business college. So there's a difference. I haven't been around a lot, I mean Indiana that's just the next state over. But when you're born and raised in Mt. Vernon and you live a sheltered life and then you leave and you go to a big city like Columbus, Ohio, and you get comfortable there and you cut your teeth. You learn a lot about life and living 'cause you don't have anyone to tell you, you don't have your mom saying 'Is that what you're going to wear?'. And then you leave there and go out of state, I don't know where you girls are from, but I've lived a very sheltered life. And most of the kids that I went, black kids that grew up with here, did the same, and some of them are still here. And I don't know how they did it, I don't know how they stayed, I don't know why they stayed, because, but their still, you know their wonderful, and church-going, most of them are church-going.

And the churches becomes a central nucleus when you're in a small town like this, and for black families it usually is, and there are three black churches in Mt. Vernon: one for the Baptists, one for the Methodists and one for the Apostolics. But there are so few of us is each one of those that we all just go to each other's church. I mean if one church is having a function, then they invite the other two, and we do our best, the best we can to always have a representative from the other churches at anyone's function. Our church, the Weymen Chapel AME, is the first black church here in this town, and from it the other two sprung as members left and formed the other churches. And my family are the one's that started this particular church, Weymen Chapel AME. You must come, on Sunday mornings, we're very small congregation we'd love to have you there. I'll give you the address, we've had many students there. We've had many students from Kenyon come to visit our church. Karen, you know Karen [Sheffield], she was born and raised in the Baptist. Well see I went to the Baptist too, my father was Baptist, my mother was Methodist so we went to both and that's why...and just about every kid in town did that. And when they had Christmas programs you had to say a piece at the Baptist church at the morning program and then at the Methodist church at the afternoon program. And the next year it would be vise-versa, the Baptists would have it in the afternoon, the Methodists in the morning and you did that for Christmas, Easter and Mother's day. And every kid in town usually had two pieces to say, and so it's just, we're very close community, we're all...the original Mt. Vernonites, you keep up with one another but you don't, your not in touch with each other all the time.

Because every person here has so many Caucasian friends, I mean you were just so few and were just well integrated into the community and its just, it's wonderful. Growing up in Mt. Vernon has been very very good for all of us, I can say that for all kids who have grown up there. Because when you leave and you go away you don't have any problem with fitting in, with getting along with people, with succeeding. Even my own son commented, he started off here, but I raised him, he went to school the majority of his life in Columbus. But I insisted on him talking correctly and being able to read and that kind of thing. So when he went to Florida to live, he commented, 'Mom, it's incredible, I can get a job anywhere, it's all these people that want jobs, I always get hired. Because I graduated, and because I can read, and because I can talk.' And I said well there, see, thank your mom, 'cause that's what I made you do. I knew it was going to be good for you. I don't know what else you'd like to ask me, I've just kind of rambled on, you're going to have fun editing this tape.

Maggie: I'm curious, when you were in Indiana, was that recently, was that where you moved back from?

Ms. Thompson: Correct. I went there in '90 and returned in '97.

Anne: And what town were you in?

Ms. Thompson: Huntington, it's Dan Quayle's home time. Huntington, Indiana, it's about thirty-five miles southwest of Fort Wayne. Fort Wayne's the biggest city nearby. Indianapolis is further south and it's about two hours away, which is the big city in Indiana.

Maggie: I don't think I've ever been to Indiana before.

Ms. Thompson: You don't really recognize it when you cross over, it just kind of blends in. The first time I went there it was during the summer when all the corn was up and cornfields and everything, and it looked like Kansas. The girl that I went out there with, we were driving for, it seemed like forever, all we could see was these corn fields, and we're going 'Auntie Em, Auntie Em, have you seen Toto?'. It's just flat and when the corn's growing it's just fields and fields, the route we were taking at that time. Do you have another question for me?

Anne: I actually have a question about how has the church community changed from when you were growing up?

Ms. Thompson: Oh, there's not enough. It has changed in the fact that the same older people are there, those who have not passed on, but my generation, we left. And the churches, the three black churches are struggling to stay in existence. And that's the saddest thing. We had a wonderful, it was, attendance, and there were Sunday schools. But that's what happens when we don't raise the next generation...[part of answer lost while tape is flipped]...a lot of industry, and so if you were hoping to have a future, and you looked around, you thought, well, there's a lot of factory work. Now I'm not going to say that there weren't any that did not progress here. There was one who went to work at the bank, at a bank in town, and not all the blacks had factory jobs that stayed. But there were just not enough. You knew back in 1960 that there were not, late '60's, you had to leave town if you wanted to do something else other than service jobs or factory jobs, especially for women.

Anne: Do you think that's changed?

Ms. Thompson: Do I think that's changed. Perhaps a little bit. But I think the availability of jobs now it effects everyone, I don't think it's limited by color. You don't have a lot of new industry coming in, in fact you have industry going out. So if you want to work in a factory you probably can, I don't think there's any discrimination, but who wants to? They have a lot of retail jobs, there are a lot of retail jobs in town. Secretarial, I haven't been back long enough to know. But

my mother knows just about everybody and there's still not a lot of professional jobs in Mt. Vernon for blacks. I don't know if that's because they don't apply for them, or really I could truthfully say this, there's not that many people here to apply for them. The black population has decreased so much and the influx of new blacks that aren't original Mt. Vernonites, I don't know them well enough. A lot of them are in Apple Valley. I don't know them well enough to know what they do, or where they are. You just see them in the grocery stores and you know that they're strangers in town. And we know that they're strangers because the locals, the ones that were born and raised here, when they encounter someone they will smile and speak, or they will wait to catch your eye. You know, well we all know one another, but we know that they're strange. But they don't acknowledge us so they don't know that your new in town, we've been here our whole lives. You don't need to be smug or anything, it's not that they're smug, it's just you can tell that they're...they haven't had the same kind of upbringing here, because Mt. Vernon black people usually speak even to strangers, and want to get to know you.

Anne: Do you see any kind of interaction between the new population and the older population?

Ms. Thompson: Of blacks?

Anne: Yes.

Ms. Thompson: Slowly, but surely. Because if we get an opportunity to approach them and talk to them we invite them to our churches. And Karen's here at the college so she has some contacts with people coming into town. And I don't see it changing a lot because there's not that many of us to go out there and make the change. And you just have...you don't know where to find people you just happen to see them and if you get an opportunity to talk to them they're usually very glad to talk to you. And say well, 'I didn't know there were any other black people in Mt. Vernon'. They don't know anything about the community either. So it's just by chance that you get an opportunity to meet them and make new friends and find out... So there are a few families that we've met and that are now coming to the church. And then the pastors of the churches usually, I can't remember one pastor is the past twenty years that has lived here. They all come out of the conference whether they are the Methodist, Baptist or apostolic. And they are sent here, and most of them have been from Columbus, the black pastors. Right now we're between pastors but the gentleman who served as our assistant pastor for a long time is pastoring our church, and he's Caucasian. And there's no difference, there's absolutely no difference, because he's Caucasian in a black church there's no difference. Next question?

Maggie: I think we've been getting to all of them without asking.

Ms. Thompson: Oh good. Well you know I used to interview people on the radio and I would hate the people that said, 'Yes'. We've got an hour to fill! I want to talk about you. So then I'd have to write a lot of questions. And I learned that, I heard Barbra Walters being interviewed one time and she said that that's what she did. She had so many questions, so I thought, good point Barb. My first experience with a person on the air that didn't talk a lot the next time there were a

lot of questions ready.

Anne: Does the community have any other central gathering places outside of the church?

Ms. Thompson: As blacks? No.

Maggie: Did there used to be?

Ms. Thompson: Oh, I'll take that back there is an Elks club. It's a Black Elks club. But it's...there are mostly Caucasians there now. I mean it's integrated. There's just not that much of a black population. There... when I was growing up my father was a black mason, well my father was a black and he was a mason. The masons had their, I don't know what you call it, their chapter was called Prince Hall. Because the masons, the original organization did not allow blacks into it. So the blacks formed their own, not just here. I don't know a lot of history about the masons but Prince Hall is usually a section of nothing but the black masons that was started because they weren't allowed to belong to white masons. When I was coming up...same with the Eastern Star. Eastern Star are the female counterparts to the masons. And there's Eastern Star Home out here on 229 somewhere. So my mother was an Eastern Star, and my father was a mason. They wanted me to become an Eastern Star and by the time I got old enough and started researching into religious beliefs I nixed that idea because it just wasn't something that I wanted to get into, it was all because of the religious beliefs that I had at that time. And so they used to gather there, the Elks club and there was a black American legion. And the people that were involved with that are gone, they're deceased. My father took part in, this came along at the time when you had civil defense. You guys, I can look at you and tell you're just to young. But maybe you've seen old movies where the kids, we had the air raid drills and you had to get under your desk. And there were local civil defense organizations where men who did not, were not at war, they would serve at home by joining this organization and then taking turns. They had a tower built up at Dan Emmet school, in Mt. Vernon and my father would have to serve his shifts staying in this tower and watching for airplanes or anything in case we came under attack and then to alert, whoever you alert, I don't know what kind of equipment he had there to alert, radio and then to alert the law enforcement agency or what, I don't know how it was set up. But he was one of those. Businesses, black businesses there have not been that many in town. We had one gentleman who had the local tire shop for ages, and then served on the...I want to say City Council, but don't quote me on that, I'm not sure what he served on. But you know, Mr. Chancellor, just very well respected business man and citizen. And then Mr. Fields, he's now deceased he had a dry cleaning business here. Mr. Gus Simmons, he had a sanitary collection, trash collection business years ago when I was just little. And since I'm fifty-three that was fifty years ago. So I can't think off the top of my head of any other black businesses. But the one's that were here were very successful. And there's none now that I can think of because none of us started it. There's a lot of us, well I can't say a lot, I know a couple of us are trying to start businesses working out of our homes.

Anne: What kind of business are you trying to start?

Ms. Thompson: Well, it's called Pre-paid Legal. And actually it's a multi-level marketing program for...it's really legal insurance. Just like you have insurance, health insurance, car insurance, it's having access to an attorney when ever you need one at a low monthly rate. It's a twenty-five year old company based in Aida, Oklahoma. And well, I'll have to talk to you about it sometime. I have been so busy taking care of my mother and sister and family paper work and that sort of thing. And just recently our church, Weymen Chapel was chosen to receive a computer. Now I can't explain to you how all this came about. But Epatha Brooks is a black lady who's married to one of our local...have you heard of him? Oh good. So she's married to Joe Brooks, her husband is a Mt. Vernonite and he and I and his two sisters we all grew up together. And so Epatha's associated with the Nazerene college multi-cultural blah blah blah. So I don't know, in connection with all of her work and everything she had the opportunity to...and she teaches computer courses as one of her other functions out there at the Nazerene college so she had the opportunity to offer a minority church or something, you can get the details from her. Anyway we were blessed and fortunate enough to receive the computer and she asked me if I would be the designated key operator. She wanted to train me. Which is probably, there are only about five or six people that attend our congregation, and I'm the youngest. So, and I had the experience with some equipment, so I said yes. I'm training on that so I'm not paying a lot of attention to my Pre-paid Legal business. But you know how it is, if I get all this taken care of and all of that taken care of, then I'll focus on my business. But it is something that is flexible so that's good. Now when I get so poor that I can't do anything I'll have to put everything aside and do nothing but Pre-paid.

Maggie: At this point I'm wondering if you have any other things that you think would be important for what we're doing that we haven't talked about?

Ms. Thompson: Refresh my mind as to what it is you're doing again. I've talked about so many things...

Anne: Basically we're looking at the contrasts between the older community and the newcomers into the community and the interactions and perceptions...

Ms. Thompson: We're glad to have them. It would be wonderful if they would participate. It's hard to know when you move into a community who's there and who's fine. They're new, we don't have an outreach, we don't have that many people to outreach. So they go into the businesses or the stores and see people working there and if the local people don't take the initiative to say, 'Hello, Hi, are you new in town?', then it just doesn't happen. Which is really a shame because I think that if we had that, we could have at least one church that was...that wouldn't have to struggle so hard to stay in existence. Or some other organization... But I can tell you this, that the local Mt. Vernon black people are very satisfied with their integrated community. They don't like, the older people don't even like to talk about the differences in the community.

[Section Deleted at Participant's Request]

But they get uncomfortable. The older black people get very uncomfortable when the younger

group talks about...they don't want the distinction made between the color. They don't like the term 'black'. They don't like the term 'African'. My mother will tell you very quickly, 'I am not African, we have Dutch blood and German blood and Indian blood and white blood...'. And I say, 'Yes, but you have black blood too.'. But that mind set is something that they were made to feel very ashamed of years ago. And the local blacks, they feel that they overcame. Of course the people on my mother's side. My mother's ancestors were free, they were free blacks, they were not enslaved. But on my father's side there was slavery. So they're proud of that. And those of us who grew up here we grew up with a great pride, very proud of ourselves and very proud...didn't talk a lot about the heritage, we talked about the things that we accomplished. We grew up in the Leave it to Beaver, Father Knows Best, I don't even know if you girls know that show. We had homes...that's the way our homes were, fathers went to work and mothers stayed home, took care of the children and the house. And fathers brought their paychecks home. We had middle income, we were all just middle income in this town. And you just kind of blended right in. And they're quite proud of the success that they've made, and they should be. Because they've done a great job. They've raised their children well, and their grandchildren...of course when the children left the grandchildren didn't grow up here either. My son doesn't care for Mt. Vernon, it's too small for his taste.

Maggie: And he's in Florida now?

Ms. Thompson: No, he's in Columbus. He's working in Columbus and he's continuing to pursue his musical career while he's holding down a full-time job. And living on his own. But when he needs money he still calls home. That's the only time he calls. And the loans are never paid back. So we say oh, you want...we know how this loan thing works.

Maggie: My theory when I do that is someday I'll pay you back, you'll be surprised.

Ms. Thompson: Grandma's still waiting and I know not to even expect it if grandma can't get it, I'll never get anything back. But that's part of being a parent.

Anne and Maggie: Thank you so much...

Ms. Thompson: Well, you know you have my number so if you need anything clarified just give me a call.