

**Narrator:** Ione Gorham

**Interviewer:** Carla Hilgert

**Date and Place:** Interviewed on November 17, 2001 at [REDACTED]

**Tape One - Side A**

**Carla Hilgert:** This is Carla Hilgert and I am interviewing Ione Gorham on October 17th year 2001 at her home at [REDACTED] in Alton IL. This is tape one of one side A. Ione can you say and spell your last name please?

**Ione Gorham:** Gorham, G-O-R-H-A-M. [Whispers], That first name is Ione.

**Hilgert:** Ione is your first name [I had mispronounced her first name when I first said it].

**Gorham:** Ione, yes.

**Hilgert:** Can you spell Ione for us?

**Gorham:** I-O-N-E.

**Hilgert:** Ione. Thank you. Ione, can you tell us where and when you were born?

**Gorham:** I was born in, right here in Alton. November 14th, 1916. And there was a little house at the, where the cem, the cemetery Upper, there was a, at the end, way down there, well almost down there to the Adams Hwy. because the little house was way down to the edge of the cemetery. Or down there where Halpins Music place, it was almost down that far because the cemetery ran that far. And that's where I was born, in a house there.

**Hilgert:** So you were born in a house and not a hospital?

**Gorham:** Oh no. They didn't take my mother, they wouldn't take my mother in a hospital when I was born that many years ago.

**Hilgert:** Why is that?

**Gorham:** Because [strokes her cheek with her finger] of race [laughs], made a difference.

**Hilgert:** Because of race.

**Gorham:** Yes. And unfortunately, and now it was, probably was a mistake, I didn't even have a birth certificate. I have a delayed birth certificate. There was no record of my having been born. When I got ready to check, check the City Hall, no record.

Checked in Edwardsville, no record. So I have a delayed birth certificate. I got a birth certificate in 76'. Fortunately when we were in Springfield my aunt was with me and she could vouch for my birthday. And then I got my high school records, so I have a delayed birth certificate. I was not registered no, no place. If I had done something they would have wondered where I came from.

**Hilgert:** Did your mom have anybody help her with the birth?

**Gorham:** Well I don't know, well no, yes, she had a doctor. A Caucasian doctor, I'm not blaming him. I don't know what happened. But now my cousin who is 2 months and 1 day younger than I, she was born January 15th, now her doctor was African-American, she was registered. Now I don't know what the difference, you know, I'm not saying it because the difference in race, but I just wasn't registered.

**Hilgert:** That's interesting.

**Gorham:** No didn't have a birth. See when I started school, whatever age your mother said you were they'd accept you, you didn't have to have a birth certificate or anything that many years ago. See after all I'm 85. And when I started school, whatever your mother said, they'd take you.

**Hilgert:** And you said you grew up as an only child.

**Gorham:** An only child. But I had many cousins, yes.

**Hilgert:** And where did you grow up at, what neighborhood?

**Gorham:** Out on Lincoln Ave., out there by the cemetery, Oakwood, I was on, let's see Lincoln and Oakwood all run out together. That's where my childhood home was. Three little, 3 room house.

**Hilgert:** Is that house still there or is it gone?

**Gorham:** It's still there, but I don't know what . . . and my mother, they had an addition, a porch added which made, extra, just a little extra space. But it was a 3 room house.

**Hilgert:** What was the neighborhood like that you grew up in?

**Gorham:** Oh nice because, see I didn't really miss being an only child because I talk about the families that were there and we were good friends then and those that are left now, we are still good friends. See there were the Bradshaws, the Lucas', Curtis', let's see who else? I think the, and they all had big families. So my friend that was with me Lucille Haines, we've been friends forever. Our mothers were friends, but I say we've been friends since our mothers were carrying babies because our mothers



were friends and we've been friends for 85 years. So when we come out, Lucille's an only child, so when we come out we weren't lonesome because we had all these children to play with [laughs].

**Hilgert:** What school did you go to?

**Gorham:** Dunbar School that was torn down, here on Washington Ave. Dunbar school that's just a block from, not quite a block, a half a block from, from Salu. Salu and, it's on Salu, I mean on Washington. Washington, there was a school there at one time.

**Hilgert:** Do you know what's there now?

**Gorham:** Nothing they tore it down. Nothing. Nothing at all there now.

**Hilgert:** Just a big empty lot?

**Gorham:** Just a big empty lot. And that's where I went to 1st grade, from 1st grade to 5th grade. And then you could either go to Delmar School, because all these were separate you know we didn't, to Delmar School out in, Delmar School's still, it's you know you can't use that as a school, but parts of it still are, you could go to Lovejoy School that's on Union St. and that's been torn down too. So my dad being protective, the kids who went to Delmar School would walk through this way to Delmar, my dad didn't want me walking to school so they paid with what little money, the paid for me to catch the streetcar up here and go to Lovejoy School. So I went to Lovejoy School from when it was time for me to go to the 6th grade. I went to Lovejoy School.

**Hilgert:** And where was Lovejoy School located?

**Gorham:** On Union St. Union and let's see, Union and Silver. See there's a big empty spot there.

**Hilgert:** Because now they have a new Lovejoy School don't they?

**Gorham:** Yes, yes they have, yes. Ours was Lovejoy but now they have the Lovejoy that's up on Tremont.

**Hilgert:** And you took the streetcar to school.

**Gorham:** Or walked, oh yes we took and it cost 4 cents to ride the streetcar. This is interesting, I have a little friend, we've, we're friends from 1st grade on and she was from, I like Laura's family, and so this friend and I, this was silly, we would walk, it was 4 cents, and you could get a Mr. Goodbar for 4 cents in Upper Alton. We would walk from Lovejoy School right on down Brown St. up to Brown St. to Washington Ave. up Washington Ave. until we got to the Kroger Store this is where theater and all these

little places were, and we'd buy our Mr. Goodbar every evening. Walk that, save our car fare and spend our car fare for a Mr. Goodbar.

**Hilgert:** Now did your mom and dad know you did this?

**Gorham:** Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, my mother controlled, controlled me. She would say "I can't see you, but the Lord can see you." That was enough for me [laughs]. See now days you can't control children by telling them that. And whenever she would say "I can't see you, but the Lord can." So the Lord was watching out for her, watching me for her, yes, no, no I could not, not tell a lie. My mother really educated my conscience, and I used to say "I wish, sometimes I wish my mother hadn't educated my conscience because I'd like to do so and so, but I can't do it." Always had a mind of my own, even though this Lucille is maybe about 1 year older than I. We never had a fuss and it wasn't because, when she, it wasn't, I don't do so and so, and I'd say "What do you want me to, no, no." I had a mind of my own and she had a mind of her own, and her husband used to say "You know, you and Lucille are just alike" [laughs]. But it is remarkable, we have never had a fuss, all these years that we been together. And one time I was saying this and she said "Let's have a fuss now" [laughs], because we never had one, you know.

**Hilgert:** So you went to Lovejoy School with her.

**Gorham:** Went to Lovejoy School. And then from Lovejoy School went to high school, but they used to go after 8th grade, they would go, but then they were going to have 9th grade graduate from 8th grade, then they had 9th grade, the 1st 9th grade graduation, so I graduated from the 9th grade. Then we went on over to Alton High.

**Hilgert:** So you went to Alton High at 10th grade.

**Gorham:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** And that's where the Alton High is now.

**Gorham:** That, oh yes, that's Alton High now. Do you know how old Lovejoy School is up on, on Tremont? As old as my, as my marriage. I would have been married 51 years because we were married in 50' and we went up to sign the guest book for Lovejoy School, it had just been finished.

**Hilgert:** Now I knew there was a different high school for Alton over on 6th.

**Gorham:** No that, see then, yes, . . . down over in that area, there was a, that was a high school at one time before they built this one here on College.

**Hilgert:** But you went to the one on College.



**Gorham:** Yes, I went to the one on College. Because by the time, it was time for me to go, Roosevelt was, I guess junior high or something else, like that.

**Hilbert:** And when you went to Alton High did it just had the Main building there, it didn't have the other buildings? The Annex or the Olin building?

**Gorham:** Just the Main, it was the Main building. Yes just the Main building because the cafeteria was under the part that's just the Main building, see all that other was added, I don't know when that other was added.

**Hilbert:** I think those were added in the 50's and 60's.

**Gorham:** Yes they were added. But it was just the cafe, because we used to go downstairs and go under the building the first part here that's on, if you're on College, it's the one part that's on the right hand side.

**Hilbert:** Now that's a pretty big building, there's 4 stories in it, isn't there?

**Gorham:** I can't remember, it's more than, you know, yes.

**Hilbert:** Was it hard to get up and down all the stairs for your classes?

**Gorham:** I didn't have many classes up, mine were down. I knew that there was an up, but there were some classes that they had that I didn't have to take, so I didn't have to go up, I usually spent most of my time on the first floor.

**Hilbert:** Did you go to many dances there?

**Gorham:** It wasn't integrated like I said the other night when they had the music festival. We couldn't even be part of the chorus. They had separate chorus then, you know, no.

**Hilbert:** That's just crazy.

**Gorham:** When you had graduation, you went in in alphabetical order, but all Caucasians, alphabetical. We went in alphabetical order but after all the Caucasians, we went in alphabetical order, you know at the end of the line.

**Hilbert:** What year did you graduate?

**Gorham:** What a minute, oh shoot, 34<sup>th</sup>. In 34<sup>th</sup> but see that didn't, whatever you . . . you couldn't change the thing. And someone commented, "But they came out," talking about, "But they came out first" and I said "I guess they did." They went in last, wasn't anything else . . . , they had to be first when they, when you'd came out. But all those things didn't bother me because as I said my mother trained me to like people and not by race because I had a number of friends who were Caucasians and you know it



never bothered me and I never still never looked, people are people and this is the way I've always felt you know. And I do have, for instance I have a friend who taught with me at Lincoln, I've known her, let's see I guess, her daughter, her daughter was 6 years old when we were friends at Lincoln school, and her daughter I think is in her 40's now. She's away from here and she called me on my birthday. Remembered the date. And all these, I mean I've had a lot of nice friends you know, so it didn't bother me. And I'm the type of person, if I can't change anything it doesn't bother, so I can't change it I let it alone. Now if you can change it, you change it right now. But if you can't, just let it alone. You can end up at the state hospital trying to change something you aren't supposed to be able to change.

**Hilgert:** Now what did you do after high school was finished with?

**Gorham:** I went to Shurtleff College for 2 years. And then, what did I do? Oh I didn't have, so I went to St. Louis and worked in private, took care, you know worked in a private family in a short, saving a little money so I could go to and went to Lincoln University one year.

**Hilgert:** Where is Lincoln University?

**Gorham:** In Jefferson City MO. yes. And see I didn't realize that you could lose credits, I didn't lose any credits. See all these things, I feel blessed because I didn't know you could lose credits until I found, went, and I was a friend to someone and she was a junior. And when they got through cutting her courses and not giving her credit, she was like a sophomore. I didn't lose any credit ok, the courses that I took at Jefferson City, when I came back to Alton, I didn't lose any credit. And I said "Oh that's nice," maybe if I had known that I would have lost some, I would've been worried. But I didn't know you could lose credit. You know, all the courses I took at Jefferson City, I got credit for them.

**Hilgert:** So then you came back to Alton?

**Gorham:** Alton. And let's see, I finished from Shurtleff College. And then, this is wasn't integration yet, the fact that things weren't integrated paid off a little bit for me. I was going to work with, I went, I was going to work with a partially seeing child. But it was going to have to be segregated and you had to have at least 10 pupils, but the school system sent me since you couldn't mix. They sent me to Ann Arbor so I could take the course, you know, so I could be certified to teach the partially seeing child. Well when I got to Ann Arbor I discovered that if they accepted me so that I could go on and work on my masters, and I wrote back and told them I'd pay the extra tuition so I could be enrolled in the school for the masters. And they said they would pay, so the 1st year was free for me. And then after that I went, let's see, I went 3 summers and I decided I know enough. I know how to read a cook book, I'm not going back anymore, so I missed a summer but I didn't get married. But I learned this, once you start something with me, go on and finish it, because you always regret it. When I went

back for the 4th I said "If I had come," no, yes, "If I hadn't missed, you know, I'd be through now." And each time I missed I said . . . I got my masters from Ann Arbor, I mean from University of Michigan.

**Hilgert:** So you majored in education, and got your masters.

**Gorham:** Special education.

**Hilgert:** Special education. You got your masters in education too.

**Gorham:** So that's the reason, that's the reason they couldn't fire me, I'm just saying that [laughs]. But if you're in special ed. they can't bring somebody in unless the person is certified, you know, that in special ed. You know somebody can't say "I'll take up," no you can't unless you're certified. So I tell anybody, if you like being in special ed. and my special, but I didn't end up, I never taught the partially seeing. I taught those who had, who were old but hadn't gone very far in school, you know, as academically they hadn't gone very far. And that's the type of child that I enjoyed working with. And my friends thought I was silly, they said "Why would you want to work with somebody that you have to," and I said "Purely a selfish reason. If they're smart they may do just as well if you aren't there. But if they are, they're slow and they learn, you can take full credit for having taught them. You know, they needed you. And it never bothered, I'd give, they'd say " . . . give them the answer," and I'd say "No I want them to have a chance to think through." You know, so it didn't bother me, I liked working with children so had to take it slowly. And the only criticism the supervisor ever made was he came to visit me when you had slow and some, you know, that were a little faster. He said, "You know the only criticism I have to offer, you spend too much time with those who ain't got it." I said, "Well those are the kind I want." So when my principal used to divide the 1st graders, you know, I'd say, "Now make sure you give me those who are going to have trouble. Be sure to give me all those that are going to have trouble and then we can, I can give them a chance to learn." I wouldn't have to, I spent time with others, but if he was saying you're giving too much time to those to the slow ones, so I thought, "Just give me all slow and we can work according to the way we can work." You know, give them a chance to learn.

**Hilgert:** So you worked here in Alton then?

**Gorham:** Oh I never been any place else.

**Hilgert:** What schools did you work at in Alton?

**Gorham:** Love, Lovejoy School and then they used Lowell School for a while it's off of where the Joesting project is down in that area, there's Lowell School there where they had to move a few of us over there for a while, I was there. Then I came back to Lovejoy and with total integration then I went to Lincoln School on, you know over in, what was Lincoln School? Oh Alton St. over in that area, that's where I, and when I



moved from Lincoln, my last year was at McKinley and I had no idea I was going to retire from there. I just happened to look at my records and discovered "Oh, I can retire" [laughs]. You know I'd just be putting these little sheets away. I said "I can retire." And so I started saying I was going to retire, but I started telling my friends, I'd say, "I have to get down to the office before one of my friends runs down to tell the superintendent I'm going to retire and won't give me a chance to tell." But what they were trying to do is make me stay. There were 2 of them at Lincoln School, one would come one morning, "Are you sure this is what you want to do?" I said, "Oh yes." Next time, next one would come in, "Are you sure this." I said, "Whenever I make up my mind," I might be wrong, but if it satisfies I can take full credit for any mistake that I ever made because I've never said "What would you do?" no. I think it through and whatever I decided on I have no one to blame. If I have a problem, I have no one to blame other than myself.

**Hilgert:** What year did you retire?

**Gorham:** June 1st, 1976. And Mr. Fritz came by to bring, he brought me something and he said, and I had, you couldn't have but 120 sick days. I had 119 and a half. And the reason I had a half was I had to take my husband to the hospital and any other nut would have said "I'll take the whole day." Because I had to take him to Jefferson Barracks. Not me, I rushed back so I could be back that afternoon. Then when I was going to retire, they were going to have a little reception and what's his, oh shoot, well as I know him, my principal said, "You can go home." I said, "That's all right, I brought all my things here so I can change in the teacher's lounge." Didn't even come home to get all dressed, I had brought, I had took all my dress-up things so I wouldn't even have to leave school.

**Hilgert:** Where did you live when you were teaching but not yet married?

**Gorham:** With my parents over on Fletcher.

**Hilgert:** Is that over on?

**Gorham:** At first when I was teaching I lived on, I think they changed, no on Hampton and then we were just renting and then we bought a house on Fletcher, and I lived with my parents, probably with my parents the full length of time.

**Hilgert:** Now how has that neighborhood changed since?

**Gorham:** Oh houses are, let's see now, let me get, oh the house that lived in has been, you know, they tore it down. And a lot of the houses have been torn down in that area. I wouldn't want to be there now. I wouldn't even if the houses are up, I wouldn't, you know, want to be. And number of the houses have been torn down in that, all around that area.



**Hilgert:** Was that called a particular neighborhood or anything.

**Gorham:** Well when they said Mexico, they meant Highland and Fletcher and all in that area, and Gold. All that was called Mexico.

**Hilgert:** Was it called Mexico at the time that you lived there?

**Gorham:** Oh yes, it was called Mexico. And then the upper part around this way was called Middletown, you know where Middletown is up around, down on Highland and in that area. I don't know why they named it Mexico, but it was called, that section was called Mexico.

**Hilgert:** And now you live is what's called the Upper Alton neighborhood.

**Gorham:** Yes, this is Upper Alton, yes.

**Hilgert:** And how has Upper Alton the business area, on say College and Washington, how has that changed?

**Gorham:** See all those, these little businesses have come up, let's see what else was I going to tell you? Well you know for the CVS there was a filling station there.

**Hilgert:** And a fire house.

**Gorham:** Yes, and across the street there were . . . Fashion Lane and a few, and it was something else before Fashion Lane. And further down was a show, Gem theater, all down, you know things have changed.

**Hilgert:** Did you go to the Gem theater when you were younger?

**Gorham:** Yes, but I sat where they told me to sit, all the way in the back. And see this is crazy, they didn't realize you'd have to sit in the back. And I said, "Who'd want to sit in the front anyway?" This is where, they pushed you in the back, you know, and they thought. That's a better place, the back is a better place when you're looking at a movie.

**Hilgert:** They also had a theater called the Uptown. Was that was the Gem was later called?

**Gorham:** I guess so, yes.

**Hilgert:** Did you ever go to it when it was called the Uptown?

**Gorham:** Yes I went to that theater, I had my . . . . And then went to the, you know, the Grand theater downtown, you still had a place where they placed you, where they

placed you. You couldn't sit downstairs, you sit upstairs in a certain section.

**Hilgert:** They had a balcony upstairs at the Grand.

**Gorham:** Yes, and they placed you up there in a certain section.

**Hilgert:** And I know downtown they also had the Princess theater.

**Gorham:** Yes, and the, there was one down at the corner of Piasa, not Piasa. It's 1 block from, no it's Piasa and something. Hippodrome. This is a long time ago because my dad worked at one of the clothing stores, he worked at, it will come back to me. The clothing store was at the corner of Piasa and 3rd. Vogue, my dad worked at Vogue. And my dad used to, let's see is that the only clothing, yes I believe, and he had a little time off between for his dinner, he had time enough so he could go, he could always go to the show, to the Hippodrome. And when we would go Downtown, well would go, instead of doing the shopping, we'd go and he'd pay our fare and we'd go, get to go to the show, you know, instead of doing our shopping. And the stores Downtown then stayed open a long time, I think like 10 o'clock or something like that, you know.

**Hilgert:** Ten o'clock at night?

**Gorham:** Yes, because my mother, we would dress me and my grandparents, see there was a house, in fact 2 houses past it, there were 2 lots past this house right here and that belonged to the family. And my grandmother lived in one of the houses so when I get to my grandmother's, I wouldn't want to go Downtown with my mother because my grandmother was going to go to the grocery store and the grocer man was going to give her a bag of candy and she was going to buy crackers and I could eat all the crackers and butter that I wanted, so I would say, "I don't want to go Downtown with my mother." So she let me go to the store with my grandmother [laughs], after having dressed me. She put all my nice things on and I wouldn't go Downtown with her.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember what grocery store you usually shopped at?

**Gorham:** Yes, Hair's, it was called Hair's Grocery Store. George Hair, H-A-I-R. Oh yes. And then at the next corner was Hackett's Grocery Store. The grocery store was part of the house, it was 2 stories, you know where the filling, there's a filling station up there? That was a nice big house.

**Hilgert:** Up here in Upper Alton?

**Gorham:** Yes right up here at the corner of Washington and Salu. Where that filling station is, that was a house there, about a 2 story house. Because, and they had their little grocery store part was part of the house. And that's where the streetcar, the end



of the streetcar line. There was streetcars then.

**Hilgert:** Now did you take the streetcars to go Downtown shopping?

**Gorham:** Oh yes [laughs]. Oh they'd go straight Downtown. But when you went to Lovejoy School you had to transfer down on Broadway near the glass works, and catch the Union St. car, and the Union St. car went up that little side street, you know it would go around and go up that little side street by the cemetery and come on up for me to go to Lovejoy School.

**Hilgert:** Now I also know in Upper Alton here they had some restaurants that aren't there anymore, like Block's, did you ever eat there.

**Gorham:** Oh no [laughs], see you have to remember. We haven't been people too long to some people [laughs]. Do you know I went to the bus station, I'm going to show you, and I could be bitter but I couldn't because I know the Lord didn't make everybody the same. I was in the bus station one time and trying to use the telephone and I asked the person who was at the little lunch counter if she would give me change, she said she didn't have change. And some man that was sitting next to her said, "I'll give you change." And I said, "Thank you so much." It was so small of her, wouldn't give me change [hits the table with her fist], for a quarter or something like that, I don't know how much it costs to use the telephone. Oh you'd be surprised, if you wanted to be bitter you could, but I said everybody wasn't the same.

**Hilgert:** So you couldn't eat in some places?

**Gorham:** Oh no, you knew you couldn't. I worked for a lady and she had to be over in Edwardsville, and she had her, I took care of her 3 boys. I tried to tell her when she went into the drugstore, "We'll just eat in here." I said, "They won't let me eat in here."

## **Tape One - Side B**

**Hilgert:** Ok, so you were telling me about the lady you worked for.

**Gorham:** Over in Edwardsville, and she thought sure all she had to do was walk down the aisle and I said, "The aren't going to let me eat in here." So she found out, they didn't let us eat in there because I was with her.

**Hilgert:** Well were there some shops in Alton that you couldn't shop in?

**Gorham:** Oh no, no, they'd let you shop. You could shop, you know, there's never been a, there were some that when you go in they thought instead of coming to buy you might be coming to steal and they would follow you, you know. And one time I went into a furniture store and I asked, you know, to see, what I wanted was when they first had the freezer and the refrigerator parts separated. And I was over, I was over in



St. Louis, and he wanted to know why I wanted it. I said, "That's what I want." "My boss is so and so and so and so and he don't want." I said, "That's beside the point." In other words, why would you and you little pennies want certain things. No, it was interesting, really laughable now. It didn't bother me, I didn't let things bother me.

**Hilgert:** Here's a picture from the book, *The Best of Alton*, showing Downtown 3rd St. on a Saturday night. Do you remember it looking like that all busy?

**Gorham:** Oh, not, with cars, no I don't know, this was later, you know. Because when I was coming along, not many cars.

**Hilgert:** What about later when you got older, do you remember something like this?

**Gorham:** Oh yes, but I didn't go Downtown at night.

**Hilgert:** Do you remember some of these shops along here like Kresege's?

**Gorham:** Oh yes, Kresege's, Woolworth's, and as I say, Young's, Vogue, Shaffer. You see Shaffer there?

**Hilgert:** I don't see Shaffer's. I see Shiff's Big Shoe Store. There's Hartmann's, I don't.

**Gorham:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** What was Hartmann's?

**Gorham:** Men's store I think, yes.

**Hilgert:** And there's Young's.

**Gorham:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** That was a big clothing store.

**Gorham:** Yes. And then see Vogue was supposed to be exclusive. And this is, my dad said this is the way they'd do it. When you come to sell to Vogue, don't sell to anyone else in the clothing business in Alton. Ok, so that made Vogue had, was the one that had this dress, but if you go over into St. Louis it wasn't exclusive. What happened is they had a misunderstanding because somebody made a mistake. Sold Vogue some dresses, and sold Young's some of the same ones. And so there was a little, yes, and now my dad said that's the way they did it. You know, you can't sell to anyone else in Alton because we're going to be the store that, the high priced store. And I was fortunate because my dad worked there, but I didn't get that many clothes because my dad didn't have that much.

**Hilgert:** And I don't know what this is here, it says Sessel's.

**Gorham:** Oh yes, that's a men's clothing yes. Yes this was on, Sessel's was there on the corner. That's a men's clothing.

**Hilgert:** There's almost no just men's clothing stores left in Alton today, just Barleff's I believe.

**Gorham:** I guess not, no, but this was men's stores, Sessel's and, you know, and all.

**Hilgert:** And here's a picture of a traffic cop, do you remember seeing traffic cops?

**Gorham:** Oh yes, yes. One of my friends was married to a traffic cop. But when they 1st started, her husband said when they'd stop and say to him, "Do you know where so and so, and so and so is?" He said, "I'd give them directions even though I didn't know what I was saying because they expected me to know. So I told them something" [laughs]. I said, "Oh this is something else, giving them directions when you don't know what you're talking about."

**Hilgert:** And I know across the street down on 3rd St. there used to be a place called Snyder's.

**Gorham:** Oh yes. What's that now? Because this building's still there isn't it?

**Hilgert:** It's still there, it's called Tootie's Antiques.

**Gorham:** Oh, yes, yes, because I've bought, they had men's and women's clothing.

**Hilgert:** Right, and now we're looking in the book, *Alton Illinois Illustrated, 1912*.

**Gorham:** Yes, but they had, Snyder's had every, all the little things, you know, jeans and shoes and all this. And I have bought dresses there at Snyder's.

**Hilgert:** And I know also Downtown they had a place called H.K. Johnson's Hardware.

**Gorham:** Oh yes, that's where you bought all your kettles and your, all these things. Interesting part in Snyder's, I mean in H.K. Johnson's, there was a lady who worked in there who kept her hat on. We don't know why but she worked in her hat. You know, like a dress hat, she kept her hat. We used to talk about that, this hat, she'd have that hat on, she had, I don't know if she was a secretary or what she was, but she'd have that hat on all the time. Yes, I remember, H.K. Johnson's, everybody, and that was down there across from the mill.

**Hilgert:** What about this place here called the S. H. Wyess Drug Company, that was



on 2nd St. do you remember?

**Gorham:** No, I don't know anything about it. No.

**Hilgert:** Maybe that was before your time.

**Gorham:** Well even if it was, it was that far away, we didn't have a car, we had to depend on the streetcar.

**Hilgert:** What would you say was maybe your favorite place to go shopping in Alton?

**Gorham:** I didn't do that much shopping. My dad, when I was a teenager there was some things, no when I was little, my dad could buy my things. But I used to buy things at Young's, we bought at Young's. And then of course, I worked as a stock girl for Vogue for, on Saturdays for a while, and then I didn't buy many things there, you know, because their things were expensive. But I bought, we bought at Young's, and let's see there were other, wherever the cheapest place was we'd have to go [laughs], you know. So I didn't have any favorite, wherever you had something and I had the pennies to pay for it. But I worked for a lady that had these 3 boys and I got 3 dollars a week.

**Hilgert:** Was that the lady from Edwardsville?

**Gorham:** No that was the lady that had taken me to Edwardsville. She lived in Alton. And 3 dollars a week, took care of 3 boys.

**Hilgert:** That must of been a handful.

**Gorham:** Well I didn't let it become a handful. And she went to the hair, now see there's some things you don't do. She went to the hairdresser one time and had the hairdresser to call and tell me something. But the hairdresser talked to one of the boys and he gave me the message. And he said, "Mother said peel the potatoes," they had potatoes every day, "Peel the potatoes and then you can go home." Well, I hadn't talked to her, I went home. And they were by themselves. Oh, she was really angry. She said, "How come you?" And I said, "Because you said so." "No I didn't, I had her to." I said, "She didn't talk to me." And she kept on talking and she said, "Well I don't feel I'm to blame." And I put my hands on my little hips and I said, "And I don't feel that I'm to blame, I don't know whose to blame, but I wasn't to blame." In the first place she should have called me, and the hairdresser lied and she talked to me, you know, it wasn't my fault. I said, "That's strange, but that's the message the child gave me" [laughs]. Yes, peel the potatoes and then go home.

**Hilgert:** Was this in high school that you worked for her?

**Gorham:** No this was in between college, you know. Yes, in between college, 3



dollars a week. But that's 3 dollars a week, I went one time with that 3 dollars, I bought a hat and a dress. And they were nice, and I didn't have but 3 dollars.

**Hilgert:** What did you do for fun when you were in high school?

**Gorham:** You didn't do much, I lived out past the cemetery, you know out there on Lincoln Ave. There weren't any lights. When we'd come in we'd have to have a flashlight. Oh, all these lights weren't out there, it was a long time before lights were out there. We had, when we'd come in this way, we'd have to have flashlights going home. And of course, I didn't get to go out, you know, how was I going to go out? My dad didn't have a car and I didn't know anybody. I know one time I thought I was being slick, I wanted to go to a party and I was all dressed when my parents weren't home, when they came home, I said, "I'll be dressed and then I'll tell them I'm invited to a party and I'll be ready." I was just dressed for nothing. My dad said, "You aren't going to that party" [laughs]. And the only time my dad and I had a misunderstanding was, I was trying, you know, you couldn't buy whipped cream like you buy and you push the little button. You had to whip the cream. I was whipping slowly. Dad said, "Hurry up and whip it." I did, so I had a little bowl of butter. And what did I do, I learned this lesson, what did I do? I went to bed without my dinner to make him angry because he told me to whip it and it turned to butter. But I found out I was the hungry one, didn't bother him, when I said, "No you can't." I wasn't punishing him, I was punishing myself, went on to bed without my dinner. Because he said, "Whip the, go on whip it fast."

**Hilgert:** Now what about when you were in college, did you get to go out much then?

**Gorham:** Oh where was I going to go [laughs]? There was no place to go [laughs]?

**Hilgert:** So, going to the movies, you didn't do that?

**Gorham:** Oh we'd go to the movies in the daytime.

**Hilgert:** Oh in the daytime.

**Gorham:** We'd go to the movies in the daytime. Couldn't go at nighttime, because you wouldn't have a, how was you going to get back home? The streetcars only run to a certain time and after you got off the streetcar you had a long distance to walk.

**Hilgert:** Oh ok.

**Gorham:** People I knew didn't have cars.

**Hilgert:** So you spent a lot of time.

**Gorham:** You'd get to go to the movies in the afternoon, you know like that, so you

could ride the, or maybe we could walk from up here all the way down. We'd walk from up here on Lincoln Ave. all the way Downtown. We used to enjoy, there was friends, the Browns that lived next door, a big family, and some of us used to walk from Lincoln Ave. all the way Downtown.

**Hilgert:** Down to Broadway?

**Gorham:** Oh sure.

**Hilgert:** What would you do down on Broadway then?

**Gorham:** I mean if you were going to go to something. All the way on Broadway we could walk if we wanted, or we wanted to do a little shopping and we just decided we would walk.

**Hilgert:** Must have taken a while.

**Gorham:** Well when you're young it doesn't take that long. And see where Lovejoy School, that used to be a playground. It was a playground before they used the ground to build Lovejoy School.

**Hilgert:** Over on Tremont?

**Gorham:** On Tremont.

**Hilgert:** And you would go there?

**Gorham:** I would go there for the 4th of July picnic that they would have on those grounds. See wasn't any school or anything and they'd use those grounds for picnics. And one of my cousins and I, we were supposed to come back before it got dark, and we were trying to make it back, and here came her father coming after us.

**Hilgert:** Did you ever go to any of the parades in town?

**Gorham:** No. Not really because see the parade comes right on down here and we didn't have sense enough, see I lived out on Lincoln Ave. and we didn't realize that the parade, we just go to the cemetery and watch for the people to come in the cemetery and listen to the speaker. We didn't have sense enough to know they had a parade that already come up here, come through to the cemetery. See those of us that lived out on Lincoln Ave. we just, when we'd hear the music and they were coming in the cemetery, that's when we would rush to the cemetery. Because it was just a short walking distance from our houses to the cemetery. There are so many things we didn't know. And I'll tell you something else we didn't know, see when you don't know you're happy. Each spring we used to have a day off from school. Well we didn't know everybody didn't have a day off from school. Unless some of them could choose. But



they gave us a day off because there was going to be a boat ride for the high school students, and we weren't included. You had to pay, but even if you could pay, you weren't included. So that was our holiday and we were so glad we got the holiday and then finally we found out what, [laughs] I guess you did. They had to have free time for those who were going to ride the boat, and you couldn't ride the boat so you had a holiday that day.

**Hilgert:** So they only let the white kids ride the boat and told everybody else.

**Gorham:** Well no we didn't question, this was going to be a day off. And we didn't find out till one of our friends wanted to pay to ride the boat, and they told her, you know, she couldn't. And then when they used to have a party, see all these things there, and those things did not bother me either, see like I'd really be bitter [laughs, I wasn't bitter. Ok, when they told us, when we were teachers, they had a party for teachers. And when they sent the slip around we signed it saying we were going to attend the party. And somebody had to be the goat, there was this nice nurse that all of us liked, a Caucasian nurse, and she had to say, "They, they invited you but they hoped you wouldn't come."

**Hilgert:** That's just mean isn't it.

**Gorham:** The invite, you know [laughs], but they were sure we wouldn't come and when we decided we'd come they didn't want us. And for some people integration was hard, see I was among the last ones, 1st grade on down. The ice had been broken, it wasn't hard for me. I wasn't going to let it be hard for me because I told somebody, "There's no one I dislike and if somebody dislike me, it sure is awful to have to work all day with somebody you didn't like."

**Hilgert:** That's true.

**Gorham:** [Laughs], Yes.

**Hilgert:** And you were telling me before the interview started that you and your husband had this house built that you're still living in now.

**Gorham:** Oh yes, had it built. First we had to buy the lot. And had it built.

**Hilgert:** Was there not many houses around here when you started to do that?

**Gorham:** The Baily's were already in there, he, Baily built his. Let's see that little house across the street wasn't, but there was a house on the corner that they've torn down. And all the rest of these back here were back here, and they were Caucasians lived in the houses back here, back here they did you know. Yes all these houses I think were back here.

**Hilgert:** Unfortunately it seems now in Alton that lot of the houses are just rental property.

**Gorham:** We don't have, see we don't have, oh and there was a house on the corner that burned right here, you know, and there used to be houses further down the line. No but we don't have any rental property on this, on our block.

**Hilgert:** Well that's good, because I think when people own their home they tend to take care of it better. Don't you?

**Gorham:** Yes, this is true.

**Hilgert:** As opposed to renting.

**Gorham:** And some people don't want to own a house do you know that? Some say, "I don't want to own a house. You have to pay taxes, you have to do so and so." So they don't want to own one. But one of my little cousins said, I was saying, I said I do not want anyone to stay with me, and she said, and I said, certainly not my grandson that's the triplet. She said, "You will let him though." And then she starts talking about your godson, and I have 2 relatives and a godson that have to work together as far as when something happens, but they, he, my godson . . . he should be a relative. I thought, "Now how am I going to get a relative from Chicago, they know me, they love me, but they can't take care of my business." And you can know your relatives and just being related does not mean you want them to stay. I said, "I want to be able to control my . . . surroundings, I don't want somebody coming in and telling me what to do."

**Hilgert:** That's true.

**Gorham:** And I will be, I supposed, and when I'm too sick to take care, put me in the nicest nursing home, use up every 25 cents I have. Don't leave, don't try to leave anything for anybody, I want good care. I don't have to worry about it because Duane will see that I have good care. And so will my, I have 2 cousins, well really 2 cousins and Duane and all of them know how to talk and ask for the things they need. And it's legal, and like I tried to tell her, "You don't have to worry, it's all legal."

**Hilgert:** Now has this neighborhood you're living in now, because you've lived here, you said how many years?

**Gorham:** Forty-four.

**Hilgert:** Has it changed much over those 44 years?

**Gorham:** Yes because there were houses, a house, as far as the houses being removed. Two houses across the street, they've changed. We've never had a lot of children in our block. The house that's across that says for sale there were children,



and just one in the Baily house. And then never been many children in the block, so and we got along beautifully, you know, no problem.

**Hilgert:** And I know up at the end of your street there, there's a park.

**Gorham:** Yes, Salu Park.

**Hilgert:** And I know in the summertime you drive by and you always see kids out.

**Gorham:** Oh yes, the 100 Man, Man, I don't know if he's president or not. The 100 Black Men, they take charge of the basketball games and things like that. But all I know is they're having a basketball game when I see the cars. I don't go up to check on the basketball games [laughs]. Not that I'm afraid, I just don't go up.

**Hilgert:** Have they always played basketball through the years?

**Gorham:** Oh no, no, they hadn't always had lights and everything in the park see. It was just park when I was coming up.

**Hilgert:** So it's only been recently that they've.

**Gorham:** Well not just recently, but you know, yes. See a lot of things that you took, for instance, when you say no lights, streetlights, no lights down this way, no lights. But I wasn't afraid. I'd take a little flashlight and go and you, I wasn't afraid to go by myself or what have you.

**Hilgert:** And where did you meet your husband at?

**Gorham:** Well I was working at Lovejoy School and his uncle was a custodian and he came from Marshall MO. to visit his uncle and I met him then. You know, and he remained until he had to go in service. But when he came, let's see we were, I waited until 50' to get married because of the fact, if you got married you would lose your tenure. And when I got to the place I said, "I don't care whether I lose my tenure or not, I'm going to get married." And that's the year they said you wouldn't lose your tenure if you got married, but that's not the reason I waited. And in the first place, I'm not the first, I wasn't the first, when he came back he didn't, we didn't get married. He married someone else and it didn't work out. And then he came to Alton to work, and then when I met, you know, then we got married in 50'.

**Hilgert:** Where did he work at in Alton?

**Gorham:** Duncan's Foundry. And then he worked, the school, he drove the bus for the school system.

**Hilgert:** What was your maiden name?

**Gorham:** Kaiser. K-A-I-S-E-R.

**Hilgert:** And when you were dating him where, did you do anything in Alton?

**Gorham:** Wasn't anything [laughs].

**Hilgert:** Am I asking you questions that don't make any sense?

**Gorham:** [Laughs], He didn't have a car. Let's see did they let him, no he didn't have a car. No he brought, he brought a car but it wasn't his altogether, so he had to take it back home. So he had to depend on riding with his uncle or when we, if there was something special, like I belonged to the sorority and if something was in East St. Louis we'd ride with other people, you know. We didn't do that, there wasn't that much to do. Didn't have that much money to do anything with [laughs].

**Hilgert:** And then maybe as you, after you got married?

**Gorham:** After I got married, then see, I was the person who, like I said to him, "I'll . . . you can't keep staying with my parents you have to have some place to stay, you know, after, if I should die." So I said we need a home and fortunately this lot was for sale. You know, but, how did, oh how was I fortunate? This honestly paid off for me, because a man owned this, a house and this property, and when he looked at the taxes one year, the taxes wasn't much less then they had been. And found out his daughter had taken a lot off, had it taken so that she was going to get one of these lots without, so he decided, she's going to do it that way, he wouldn't let her have it so he sold, he said he'd sell this to us. We were blessed again. I had told him I would buy the lot. We went on vacation, when we came back from vacation, he said, "There's a man, I'm waiting on this man to give me money." Told me how much the man was going to give him for the lot. I didn't know with my little meager salary, I said, and the lot was worth what the man was going, and I said, "I'll give it to you now and I'll give it to you cash." So that's the way we got this lot, because I was able to give him cash for the lot. Well then see we couldn't build right away. And I said to my husband I'll, teacher's salary now way back, "I'll save 3 hundred dollars." And whatever I said I would do, I could figure out a way, "I'll save 3 hundred dollars a month and when it's time we'll be able to build." And so when we got to the point and we talked, and we didn't have to pay anything the whole time they were building this house, we were ready with this little meager money I had saved [laughs]. And that's the way, but we moved and my husband was out of work for 9 months. Duncan's, you know, didn't have any use for him. Nine, and just moved. Just moved. A whole 9 months. So I said I was glad I knew how to add and subtract and divide and do all those steps because it was the only thing that kept up going.

**Hilgert:** Well that's good then that you knew that.

**Gorham:** Oh yes, and then I had a little plan. Even after we had been here for a



while I would say, now we've already paid for the whatever we're going to pay, if you're buying the refrigerator, no, the way I did the refrigerator is I said, "How much is the refrigerator?" And they told me so I went home and started saving the money so when it was time to buy the refrigerator I had my cash money didn't have to pay any interest. Ok, now, or whatever I was buying, when I finished paying, then I started saving the money that was a payment on something, you know, that's the way you accumulate. You save whatever whenever you finish paying for something and then start saving the money. And then for your pension, you know when you only pay pension for 9 months. Then I never bothered my pension in the summertime. I saved my pension and years ago when they paid you every, how do they pay you, I don't know every 2 weeks? I don't know what they did. But at Christmas time you got 2 checks, you got your December check and you got your January check. Somebody said, "What do you do with yours?" I said, "Save it until January." I don't, and by the time, I said, and when January a lot of them would spend their January check in December and not have any money in January. I said you can't, well see that didn't bother me, I didn't try to control, I said this works for me, whatever works for you. Yes, I'd hold mine until time for January. But here they were spending, you know, Christmas time you had 2 checks. And as far as Christmas was concerned the triplets, none of them have to like me because I didn't buy them off.

**Hilgert:** That's ok. Well Mrs. Gorham I think we're going wrap up now. Can you just tell me real briefly what is your favorite thing about living in Alton?

**Gorham:** I have nothing to compare it to. I just enjoy being part of, some people like, I wouldn't want to live in a big city. This is good for me, I like being because it's fairly small, you know when you say Chicago, St. Louis, I get scared. Or even East St. Louis I get scared.

**Hilgert:** Too big?

**Gorham:** Yes.

**Hilgert:** So Alton is just the right size for you?

**Gorham:** Yes, just the right size. And since I'm not, don't want to be . . . since you're buying cars. If you wanted to do you can, you know, and everything. So that's the reason, I mean I have never wanted to live any other place.

**Hilgert:** Ok, well thank you very much.

**Gorham:** I don't know what I told you [laughs].