

2012.3.392 SusanWeissman Shields

Crystal Perez: This is Crystal Perez. Today is January 20th, 2012. I am interviewing Susan Weissman Shields in Sandy Springs, Georgia for the DeKalb History Center.

Mrs.Shields is the daughter of Harry Weissman, superintendent at the Honor Farm.

During which years did you and your family live on the farm?

Susan Weissman Shields: My parents moved down in the spring of 1941 with my brother, who was 2 years old, and daddy retired, I suppose, in the spring...he retired in '61. So, it was probably in the spring or earlier, after January 1st of '61.

CP: Ok. So, you were born here.

SWS: I was born here. My brother was born in Pennsylvania.

CP: And you were born while your parents were living on the Honor Farm?

SWS: Yes. Never lived anywhere else until I went to college. Well, we moved when daddy retired.

CP: OK. Please describe your living conditions on the farm.

SWS: OK. I would say they were better than average for that area of DeKalb County. We lived in 4 bedroom, 2 bathroom triple-deck brick house with a formal living room, fireplace, a formal dining room an eat-in kitchen, very large front porch that was

screened-in, and a beautiful foyer, very large foyer. And, 2 back porches, a screened-in back porch and then another open back porch. And, a full basement, a separate room if you wanted to have a maid. No bathroom down there. All the laundry facilities were in the basement. And then we had a 2-car, freestanding garage.

CP: OK.

SWS: There was, also, a formal flower garden in the back. I mean a formal one.

CP: MMHmm

SWS: Which is where, we put vegetables in it.

CP: OK. So, you did your own farming, as well.

SWS: Well, momma planted flowers, and we grew carrots and, you know, hot peppers and stuff like that.

CP: Right. Now, what status would you say your family occupied? For instance, would you say you were middle-class?

SWS: I would say we were middle-class. I have no idea how much money daddy made because it was on a G rating. We did have to pay rent to the government for the house. I

have no idea how much they had to pay. I don't know what daddy made from beginning to end. We...I'm assuming that water and electricity was included in that rent. I have no idea. I know, when the county power went out, ours did, too. No, it didn't. I don't remember. But anyway, it was a dirt road, and that was it. There were 5 other houses, four other houses around, and all of the people that were in those houses worked on the farm.

CP: OK. Would you say that middle-class would be...would characterize the whole community there at Panthersville?

SWS: No. Panthersville was a dairy community. I would say...I'm not going to go with class...I'm going to say low-income, except for a few people who were big property owners from way back in Panthersville. There were more dairy farms in Panthersville and that area of DeKalb County than anywhere in the southeast. I maybe wrong there. Jack Mathis knows the answer to all that. But, it was mainly people that had dairy farms or regular farms or had blue collar-type jobs. There were very few what we would call well-to-do people that lived in the area.

CP: OK. You went to Southwest DeKalb, correct?

SWS: I went to Southwest DeKalb, yes.

CP: OK. And, did the students there know that you lived on the Honor Farm?

SWS: Oh, yeah. Everybody knew we lived on the farm. There was no problem with kids coming to visit or this sort of thing. Mother had Easter Egg Hunts for my brother's classes for several years because we had the biggest yard. It was about an acre, if not more, with lots of trees. So, we'd have the Easter Egg Hunts at our house, and there was no problem with people coming and going back and forth because the public road went through the farm. So, it was no problem, at all.

CP: OK. What about other family members?

SWS: All of our family was from the north. Pennsylvania and New York. So, they would come if they were on vacation. They would come down and visit, you know, for a week or so and then they would go back. Or we would go up there. But, there was no back and forth family because it was too hard to drive, and it took 3 days to drive from New York to Atlanta.

CP: Too far.

SWS: No expressways.

CP: So, it seems like they didn't have a problem with coming to the Honor Farm and what it was about.

SWS: Oh, no, because most...all of daddy's family were New York City, like, New York City, Manhattan...

CP: Right

SWS: ...and that sort of thing. Well, it was mainly the Bronx and Brooklyn and Queens. They just thought it was cool, you know that they were...Daddy's brothers, two brothers, were pharmacists.

CP: Two brothers?

SWS: Yeah. Two brothers were pharmacists. One was an executive with a company, and his sister...one worked for the city as a secretary. The other one was a director of school curriculum in Manhattan or one of the boroughs. And, all of a sudden they have a brother who was a farmer. They thought it was cool.

CP: [laughs] How would you describe the layout of the farm?

SWS: Ok, the layout. There were, like, about 13-1400 acres. I thought it was 23, but I get the amount of acres we had mixed up with the amount of pigs that we had. You came through the gates to the farm on Panthersville Road and there were 2 houses on the left. Our house and the guy that was in charge...I remember the guy who was in charge of the beef herd. There were 3 houses on the right where the dairyman, the assistant farm

manager, and the dairyman who was in charge of the barns and the milk cows. And, then, there was the assistant farm manager with the middle house. And, then, the swine herdsman lived in the third house. As you went farther on down Panthersville Road on the right hand side, there was an officers quarters for the unmarried officers. Some of them who were at the main prison on McDonough and maybe one or two that worked on the farm. I've never been in that building, so I have no idea what it looked like. But it was Officer's Quarters is all I know. On the left hand side was a great, big dormitory-like building, where the prisoners lived. I was never in that building. As you went past the dormitory, there was daddy's office. There was a little complex of buildings, maybe one or two. Daddy's office was there. And, then, behind the office were, I think, 3 dairy barns for milking, with flowerbeds in between. And, then, across from that on the other side next to the officer's quarters, there was the dehydrator and the silos. Then, as you went down Panthersville Road...that was all of the buildings there. As you went farther down Panthersville Road, then turned right on Clifton Springs, went over the Dolittle Creek, which was fun to wade in, and there was a little road that veered off Clifton Springs Road, that led to the piggery, which was a beautiful structure. And, that's where all the pigs were. And, that was it, as far as I can remember. Now, if there were any buildings behind the buildings I've described, I don't know, because I never went back there.

CP: Did your mother work outside of the home?

SWS: My mother worked part-time, just for fun. After we started school, after I was in high school, she worked at...she did some substitute teaching for DeKalb County, and she also worked in a dress shop, once a month, not all at once, but, you, know, a dress shop, and she worked at Board's Flowers basically, off and on until she was in her mid 80s.

CP: OK. Did you have any cats or dogs on the farm or any type of pet?

SWS: We had a cat. They didn't allow dogs because the emotional attachments that the prisoners could get to dogs. Cats weren't that social, and I think daddy had to get special permission for us to have a cat. And, we had a cat.

CP: And, where would you do your shopping for clothes or groceries?

SWS: OK. Clothes, I think, we would pick up if we needed something little, we would go to Decatur, to Belk's, but the big shopping for towels and real clothes and all that shopping, spring shopping and fall shopping for school, was all done in downtown Atlanta. Groceries were in downtown Decatur, which was about 6 or 7 miles, I guess. And, then, somewhere in the 50s, they built something at the intersection of Candler and Glenwood, and there was a grocery store there. But, mother went to the A&P in Decatur for groceries.

CP: OK. And, how often would you all go to the city?

SWS: Well, we went every Friday night for temple services at the temple on Peachtree Street. And, I would say...maybe we would go downtown shopping, maybe 4-5, at the most 6 times a year. It would be the sale...mother and I would be opening the doors at Rich's. And, maybe once a month we would go downtown to the movies during the day to one of the big theaters...the Fox, Paramount, Loews, the big ones. And then the regular movies like cowboy shoot-em-ups, daddy would take us to Little Five Points, Kirkwood. And, that was about it. Maybe we'd go out to dinner once or twice we'd go downtown, but very rarely did we ever go out to dinner. Usually, it was in conjunction with going to the movies. And, we'd go to some cool place afterward.

CP: Right. Did your family use farm products for personal consumption?

SWS: No. Nothing was used. It was totally for the government.

CP: OK.

SWS: The only thing that was ever used at the house was...since there were flowerbeds between the dairy barns, the farm...the guys would bring flowers to mother that they had picked from the flower garden. That is the only thing that ever came to the house.

CP: OK. So, the community members wouldn't purchase anything from the farm...

SWS: They couldn't because it was from the government. There wasn't any way. No.

CP: Right. OK. What types of crops do you remember were grown?

SWS: OK. Definitely alfalfa. Corn, for the cows. I think behind the piggery there was sweet potatoes. I'm not too sure. They were for the pigs, mainly, you know. And, I remember by, not by accident, but daddy planted kudzu, because that's when kudzu got really popular, and he would put the cows in the kudzu, and they loved it, but then he realized, you know, it's hard as the dickens to get rid of kudzu. But, I think he finally got rid of it. But, I don't remember...they might have raised soybeans. I'm not too sure about soybeans. I just remember corn and alfalfa.

CP: OK. Do you remember the type of livestock that were on the farm?

SWS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They had dairy cows when we first moved there. Dairy cows and pigs. And then, daddy hired a guy who worked...who was from out west, a real...I mean he was a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma. I was so excited. And, he came...daddy went when we were pretty young. I can't remember...I was, maybe, 7 or 8, something like that. He went to Chicago, and he bought Angus cows, because he wanted to have beef on the property. And, bless his heart, he rode with them in the cattle car, because he wanted to make sure they were ok.

[laughing]

SWS: I remember that. I mean, he smelled terrible when he got back. He rode with...he didn't ride on them very long. And, he had a herd of dairy cows. Then, they got a horse. Only because the guy from Oklahoma, his name was Joe Ben Palmer, I remember, just as Roy Rogers as they came, did not want to herd his, the cows with the truck.

CP: OK.

SWS: And, so, they let him keep a horse on the farm just for him to ride. He could ride, he could rope, he could lasso. In fact, when his son...they had a little boy when they moved in. His son looked at our cat, which he'd never seen a cat before, I guess his son was maybe 2, and he called...he thought it was a dogey. He called it a dogey, like a little cow. But, that was exciting to us, we had a real cowboy on the farm.

CP: That's cute.

SWS: No chickens. Nothing like that.

CP: Do you remember any types of farm equipment that was on the farm?

SWS: Oh, yeah. Everything. Well, you know, they had balers, when people were still baling their hay by hand. They used balers and combines. All the big stuff that you use on a farm. And, there were a lot of trucks. You know, pick up trucks, dumb trucks,

garbage trucks. Just the regular big farm machinery, like threshers or thrashers, whatever they're called. They didn't do any of that outside or hand stuff. It was all machinery.

CP: OK. So, it was a pretty modern farm.

SWS: Oh yeah. Because, no, I think...yeah, because daddy had his degree in that.

[laughs] Yeah, it was very modern.

CP: Was the farm isolated or was it visited often by members of the community?

SWS: Well, they had to go through it. You know, the road went right through it. There weren't tourists, if that's what you mean. There were no tourists. The only time I think there may have been a tourist was when somebody from Washington came down and wanted [coughs] excuse me, and wanted to go to the farm, but there were never any tourists. That would...I don't know what kind of rule they had, but knowing my daddy, he would have felt that it was going to affront the prisoners' dignity.

CP: Right. That makes sense. What surrounded the farm? Were there any community structures around the farm?

SWS: Around the farm? [laughs]

CP: Around the perimeter of the farm, that you could see from the farm?

SWS: No. No, because it was the country.

CP: OK.

SWS: Southwest DeKalb High School was up the street. No, there were dairy farms...there was one farm that adjoined the prison farm that was a dairy farm. That was a friend of ours, and we're still friends. The daughters, I still think...well one of the daughters died. And, but no, there was nothing adjoining. It was all country. There were no houses, that I remember, after...there were no houses on Panthersville. Does it run into Waldrop Road? Panthersville runs into Waldrop?

CP: I don't remember.

SWS: I mean we're talking everybody... it was all country. It was all farms and country. You couldn't, well unless you were a good walker, you couldn't walk from one place to the other, and the only structures that I remember was the high school, and the fairgrounds behind it, and the dairies.

CP: OK. Now, there's a couple of landfills in the area. Were they in existence while you were there, or did you notice?

SWS: No.

CP: No? OK. And, what is your perception of life on the farm for the inmates?

SWS: Well, considering that they were in prison, you know, I don't think they were

____They knew that it was a major honor to be able to work there or to go there.

Because, remember, this was federal prison, not state. So, they had done federal crimes, and you had to be more than a trustee before you could come to the farm. You had to be just...it was a major honor to be able to come to the farm. There were no guards, as far as guards are concerned. There were no guns on the farm. The only fences were for the animals, and the prisoners could, basically, come and go as they pleased, and they were trustees. They were trusted, and I think that they...considering that they were in jail, that they considered it such an honor that [isn't it cute] they considered it an honor to be able to work up there because they did have so much freedom.

CP: Right. Now, I know that you were not allowed in their area, or in the dorms, or anything. Were you able to get any type of a feel for their conditions just by looking? Do you think that they had pretty comfortable conditions.

SWS: Yeah, I didn't even know if they...if the dorms were open or...I know they didn't have cells.

CP: OK.

SWS: This is going to sound smart-alecky. Daddy wouldn't have allowed any conditions to be substandard.

CP: OK.

SWS: You know, they still...I know they slept on prison cots, and knew that they had bunk beds. We had a set of bunk beds in our basement that were made out of metal. I hear it's the same thing, with real mattresses. I would say the conditions were very good. The food, I know, was very good. I never saw anybody starving to death. And, the milk that came from the farm, they didn't just serve it there. It had to be pasteurized and all of that. And, then it was sent to the prison downtown, and you know all that. So, they were well fed. And, they were clean. I never saw anybody without. When the weather got cold, they all had on coats, and hats, and mittens, and gloves. If it was raining, daddy didn't have them out there working in the rain. The only time that I remember daddy really rushing around was when he knew rain was coming, and he had to get the hay in. And, wanted to get it in before the hay got wet, because then it ruined.

CP: Right. Were you able to see the visiting area that the inmates had or could you view them while they were visiting with family and friends?

SWS: No. I know that they were around in the sum...you know, and when nice weather came, the families would come. Whenever the families would come to visit, I was totally off limits to them. I would see children, occasionally, playing in the front yard of the

dormitory. I was never allowed off Panthersville Road. It never even dawned on me. It was...that messed up...that infringed on their privacy and their dignity. It was their family time.

CP: Right.

SWS: I wasn't allowed.

CP: Do you know some of the activities that they performed during the day, like what they're typical workday consisted of?

SWS: Oh, I know they got up and had breakfast, and they all had their assignments, some probably worked in the dairy, and some worked in the piggery, and some worked on the farm machinery to plant, and plow, and all that stuff. You know, I don't know what they did while all, with all of them during the day.

CP: Right.

SWS: Yeah.

CP: And, you said earlier, that your father wouldn't have allowed them to have substandard living conditions.

SWS: No, he wouldn't.

CP: So, I assume that means that they were treated pretty fairly.

SWS: They were treated more than fairly. Really, truly, more than fairly. Daddy believed in the dignity of other people. And, since they were, they would do anything to get on the farm, because they knew that...they wanted to go to the farm.

CP: Right.

SWS: And, daddy didn't cause that feeling that they had, so they were happy with that...and, they liked him. If they didn't like him because he was the manager, at least they respected him, tremendously.

CP: Right. Do you think the farm was an appropriate alternative to the main penitentiary?

SWS: Oh, yeah. At that time, we had a different...they had a different kind of prisoner. You know, we didn't have, they didn't have, you know, these gangsters and child molesters, and that sort of thing. There were bootleggers and racketeer guys, and people that...a tremendous amount of bootleggers, just a tremendous amount...as daddy said, they could make booze out of a table leg. It was just...I forgot what your question was.

CP: [laughs] I was asking if you thought it was an appropriate alternative to the main penitentiary.

SWS: Oh, I do. For some people.

CP: Right.

SWS: You know, it was an area that needed to have people there. And, these people knew what an honor it was to be able to go onto the farm.

CP: So, you think that the people who chose the inmates that were going to the honor farm did a good job of choosing the appropriate inmates?

SWS: Yeah. And, they didn't, necessarily, have to be farmers to be chosen to go, because they learned how to do things.

CP: Right. Now, I know that you didn't, you weren't allowed to have contact with them, but did you...were you able to see if there was a change in some of them between when they got there and when they left?

SWS: No. Now, I did have some contact with them. The people that cut the grass and did the yard work were all prisoners. The people that picked up our garbage were prisoners. If the house needed painting or repair, needed something done, they were

there. And, there was...you know, so it wasn't like I didn't have any contact with them. As far as rehabilitation, I only can think of a couple that came back, you know, came back into the prison system.

CP: Right. So, in general, would you say that the Honor Farm was a successful rehabilitation program?

SWS: Yeah. More than in general, 100%. I don't know how it was after daddy left, because daddy was special. I mean, he really was, really special...I called all the prisoners "Mr," except one, who was our yardman. His name was Sandy, and I think Sandy like to write bad checks. And, Sandy had been in prison so many times, apparently, that when he got out, he would do something to get back in.

CP: Oh.

SWS: And, then he would immediately say, "I want to go to the Farm," and daddy would send him on back," you know. Because I remember we had Sandy at least twice...twice - -----because a lot of prisoners can't make it on the outside.

SWS: Yeah. But, I remember Sandy. But, everything else, it was "Mr, this." And, Daddy called them "Mr." He never called them by their first name.

CP: Right.

SWS: He gave them respect and in turn, they gave him respect. I know one guy came to the house after he'd been let go, like 3 or 4 years later, and knocked on the front door and wanted to see daddy and thank him for everything he had done for him when he was in jail and in prison. And, Daddy went out, he was really nice to him, never let him in the house, and just told him he appreciated it, but it was a no-no. He could not come back. Christmas cards were sent to daddy, and he never answered them, because you just didn't communicate...

CP: Right.

SWS: ...on a personal or social level like that. He was very good at keeping the...the mountains were real tall, and there wasn't a lot of space between them, but it was real deep.

CP: Right. Were you ever concerned about your safety on the farm?

SWS: No. No. I felt really safe.

CP: What about the other staff members of the farm, like the foreman, the veterinarian, and the physician?

SWS: There were no veterinarians.

CP: There were no veterinarians.

SWS: Daddy knew the vet, he would call the vet.

CP: OK.

SWS: He didn't have a vet that lived on the property.

CP: Now, was there a physician on the property?

SWS: No. If somebody got sick, daddy would[...]

CP: So, there were just other foremen on the property.

SWS: Yeah. Did you interact with them and their families? Oh, yeah. Because some of them had kids. There weren't that many kids. The assistant, you know, periodically, whoever was the assistant at the time had children. There weren't a lot. I don't think there were more than 3 to 7. That was altogether. So, we'd ride bikes and play cowboys and Indians, and that sort of thing.

CP: Right.

SWS: Play all the games that kids don't even know what they are now. May I, and Red Light and ...

CP: Oh, I know those games. [laughs]

SWS: Yeah, yeah.

CP: How did the...you've done a good job of telling us how your father interacted with the inmates. How did the other staff interact with the inmates? Was it about the same?

SWS: I would say it was about the same. I never really saw the interaction that much. I mean, we had been to the dairy a couple of times, with daddy, and the dairy herdsman, the dairyman was there. And, he was a doll, you know, I just adored him. I figure they probably all interacted the same way. I think daddy, if they had staff meetings, which I'm sure they did, really impressed it upon everybody who was working there that these men were to be treated with dignity, they were doing a job, they were working for them. And, I think that was instilled in me when I became a nurse.

CP: Right.

SWS: I never told people what to do. I would ask them to do it for me, because it was my job, and not just tell them.

CP: Right.

SWS: This is the way daddy was, too. And, there were never any, you know, fights or prison uprisings...

CP: OK.

SWS: Or anything like that. Not on the Farm.

CP: OK. Would you please describe race relations on the farm?

SWS: I have no...I'm assuming that they were segregated in the dorm. Though, I don't know what the percentage of blacks and whites...there were no Hispanics back then [...] Italians or Cubans, or something. They just didn't have it. This was in the 40s and 50s. I don't...I really don't know if they were segregated. I doubt it, because the main prison was segregated, I believe, at this time, and none of the people who worked there were black, as far as on the farm.

CP: OK.

SWS: So, it wasn't a problem, back in those days.

CP: What about within the community. Was there any issues with race relations?

SWS: No. Remember, this was the 50s.

CP: Right. There were no problems, as far...I mean, you know, they had black schools and we had white schools. It never dawned on me that when I would see the black school bus go down Flat Shoals, it never dawned on me that it was going to a school.

CP: Right.

SWS: Ignorance is bliss, you know, and the black people who lived in the Panthersville area...there were so few that...really, there were no race relations problems.

CP: Right.

SWS: You know, I mean, it was...there were some people who lived off Flat Shoals Road that babysat for mother a couple of times a week [...] one lady and mother ironed clothes together when they were both pregnant. Mother was pregnant with me, and the lady came over and she said she was pregnant and she couldn't get a job and did mother need her to do anything. Mother said, "if you'll bring your ironing board, we'll iron together." And, so, Alberta and mother set the ironing board up, and bless Alberta's heart, mother had me, and then about 2 weeks before that, or a week before, Alberta had twins, and she brought the twins over, and they laid all three of us on the bed and mother

and Alberta would iron together. That's the only kind of race relations I know of. There was no...there was no problem because there was no problem.

CP: Now, did you have any other interaction with the twins as you were growing up, or was that just something that timed out?

SWS: That was just something that happened then. But, mother was from Pennsylvania...because I remember... I think mother told me, and you know, I wouldn't want to be quoted on this, even though I'm talking on a tape recorder, that a couple of people couldn't believe that she had all three of us on the bed together.

CP: Mmhmm.

SWS: And, this...mother wasn't used to segregation at all, and she said, "well, where would you want me to put Susan? On the floor?" You know?

CP: [laughs]

SWS: So, but, no. No, there was nothing.

CP: What about life on the farm as a Jewish family or in the community?

SWS: In the community, we were the only Jews...now, the lady whose farm adjoined ours, the husband was...she was Jewish and he wasn't. The girls were raised Jewish. They went to Southwest DeKalb. I don't know their feelings...well, I do, but I wouldn't express it. I had no problem. I was a geek. I was a nerd. I wouldn't date, except maybe...I could count them...everybody laughs when I say, "well, I had a date with so-and-so-and-so. And, then they'd go, "Didn't you date more than that?" And, I went, "no, I had a date with this guy..." But, I didn't feel any kind of anti-semitism. I do know that there was one friend of mine...I mean, we're still all friends, who told me that he had two dates with me. I only remember one...

CP: [laughs]

SWS: ...He said two, and he said the second time he came home, and his mother was standing on the front porch with a bible in her hand talking in tongues. [laughs] And, daddy...and, so, we didn't have no more dates. Daddy did not like the idea of my dating anybody who was not Jewish.

CP: Right.

SWS: Consequently, since I didn't know any Jewish kids and since Sunday school was once a week, and they all went to either Westminster, Grady, or Northside, which were the top schools back then, [...] and so, I really didn't know anybody.

CP: Right.

SWS: But, there was no anti-semitism, except little pockets here or there. And, I will not talk about that.

CP: No problem.

SWS: Yeah.

CP: What about any issues that your father or mother may have had, having been “Yankees” coming down to the South?

SWS: Mother had one...oh, “Yankees” coming to the South? Mother was scared to death. She had never been farther than Philadelphia, and she lived in...she lived...she was raised on a farm, too, but it was Pennsylvania Dutch country. So, it was...everything was pristine, and farm row...the rows of corn were straight...

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: ...no matter what the shape of the land. And, I remember that daddy was driving her down here, and here it is 1941, and he would point to some tobacco shack...I don't know if you know what a tobacco shack is...where they dr...like an old house that's falling apart, they hung tobacco in it to dry.

CP: OK.

SWS: He would point to a tobacco shack, no doors, [...] windows [...], and he'd say, "our house is just a little bit better than that one." And, mother was just freaking out. You know?

CP: [laughs]

SWS: Because, she had never seen a house that had not been painted before, because everything in Pennsylvania is pristine.

CP: Right.

SWS: And...but, mother was very nervous, and...but, daddy had already been here for a few months. And, then she was pleasantly...

CP: [laughs]

SWS: ...happy when she got here.

CP: Did you experience any events associated with the Civil Rights Movement, being so close to Atlanta?

SWS: No.

CP: No?

SWS: The only thing that I know, since I graduated in 1961, is there were a couple of my classmates whose parents, really one and then I know a couple of them, whose parents pulled them out of school and sent them to private prep schools because of integration. But, since I graduated in '61, it was all...this was all before Civil Rights stuff occurred. And, that's terrible to say, but I mean, I just never experienced gangs or marches or anything. You know, I did meet Mr. King, and I did meet Mrs. King because they were both in St. Joseph's. And, I met him when he was nominated...he was in the hospital when he found out about his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. And then, I met...I met Mrs. King a couple of times, and I don't want to discuss it...

CP: No problem.

SWS: Yeah, she was extremely snobby.

CP: OK.

SWS: ...would not speak to me.

CP: Is there anything that stood out about your meeting Mr. King?

SWS: Oh, I remember he was in his pajamas in bed. [laughs] No, it's just...he wasn't as big, then.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: I do know...you know, I mean, really, he was Martin Luther King from Atlanta, Georgia.

CP: Right.

SWS: I know that our Rabbi was very involved with Civil Rights. Rabbi Rothchild. And, he and Mr. King, Reverend King, and a few of the other ones who are real old and decrepit now, were really big on civil rights. But, here I was in tenth grade, and we didn't have anything going.

CP: Right.

SWS: I'm sorry. You know, it's really a shame because I went...I went...I went and saw the movie 'The Help.' And, I thought it was beautiful, and it was well acted, and I was so embarrassed, especially about...you've seen it?

CP: No, I haven't.

SWS: You have to see it.

CP: OK.

SWS: Especially about living in the South. I mean, this was exaggerated. It was in Mississippi or something, and it was exaggerated with stuff, but it was embarrassing because that's the way it was...

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: ...as far as the people that owned the houses and people that worked in the houses. But, we didn't have anybody working in the house, you know, and I had the prisoners around, and so I didn't experienced that. And, I think I experienced less of the black-white problem, if that's called a problem, living on the farm than if I lived in the community, because I wasn't raised with parents and grandparents and great-grandparents...

CP: Right.

SWS: ...who used the "n" word. I never used it. I was taught to say "colored," you know, that's what it was back then. And so...and, my parents all went to school with

blacks, and mother would have...there were Indians in her class, American Indians. So, I didn't experience it as much as the people who lived in the surrounding area.

CP: Right. That makes sense.

SWS: And, there was definitely no difference between black and white on the farm, as far as...as far as I know, and I know as far as daddy was concerned.

CP: OK. When did your family leave the farm?

SWS: Daddy retired in 1961. And, so, he was there for twenty years, and we actually moved...I don't know exactly when we moved, but I remember we moved to a house on Glenwood Road, on Cindy Drive. And, it was before I graduated. And, I know that he...graduated, and then he retired in '61.

CP: OK.

SWS: ...big difference between '41 and '61.

CP: I would say, so. [laughs] How do you feel about growing up on a farm rather than a more urban environment.

SWS: Oh, gosh. I loved it. You know, I mean...well, I don't know if I did things because I was just there on the farm or because it was the '40s and the '50s.

CP: Right.

SWS: But, you know, we didn't tell...we didn't have a television until the early 50s. So, you did things outside. I...my brother had, [...], he wasn't into animal stuff, and daddy...sometimes daddy would take me to the piggery, which he had...he designed that piggery.

CP: OK.

SWS: It didn't work out the way he wanted to, but he decided...and he...it would be late at night and he knew that a sow was going into labor and I remember he would always have somebody there when they were in labor. But, of course, during the day you could have the prisoners there. But, at night, that didn't really work out. So, he and I would go.

CP: MmmHmm.

SWS: And, we would deliver the pigs. Now, I wouldn't be inside with the pigs, they were big. But, the pigs would come out like little sausages, you know, maybe 12, 13, 14. And, Daddy would, you know, separate it, like you're pull the hotdog links apart, and I

would clean it off and put it in another area, because daddy devised a system where the...once the babies were born, you couldn't...it was real easy for the mother pig to turn over, and that would kill them.

CP: OK.

SWS: So, what daddy would do is, he...he built this little thing where he would put the babies in this little thing, and they could actually get to the mother...get the warmth, get the milk...but, she couldn't turn over on them.

CP: OK.

SWS: So, that's what he did. So, I delivered pigs.

CP: [laughs] Is that why you became a nurse?

SWS: I don't know why I became a nurse. [laughs]

CP: [laughs] Have you been back to the farm since you left?

SWS: I was...I went through the farm about 5, 6 years ago to go to the [...] to our neighbors who lived...whose farm adjoined. It was just...Is it still working? Good! It

was...since I was never...since I never wandered through the buildings before, there was no reason for me to do it, then. You know?

CP: Right.

SWS: It's like, if your mother says, "don't touch that," you don't ever touch it...

CP: Right.

SWS: ...you don't. But, I was never told I couldn't, because I did have interaction with the prisoners. You know, the garbage man would come over...

CP: Right.

SWS: He gave me a ride on the truck a few times.

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: One time, mother had to make a quick trip with either a sick animal or a sick brother or some sort of animal, and I couldn't go or something, and she asked the garbage man, you know, "will you watch Susan for an hour, while I'm gone?" And, I rode in the truck, and mother felt perfectly safe with him, and I did, too. So, I remember his name. He was from New York.

CP: OK. I know it's been a few years since you've been to the site, so you can't comment on the current state of the site, but how did you feel about the state of the site when you saw it 5 or 6 years ago?

SWS: Well, nothing ever stays the same, and it was disappointing that our house had been torn down and the other four were still up. And, you know, you always long for something that was there and isn't, including boyfriends. You know, I went back to my college, and they had paved all the little dirt paths, and my dorm had been burned down, and they rebuilt it and named it the same thing, and I went, "they can't name it the same thing."

CP: Right.

SWS: So, nothing ever stays the same, so there is that nostalgia.

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: But, that's change. You know, that's change. I think we had more fun back then.

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: Oh, I really do.

CP: I'm sure you did.

SWS: Oh, yeah.

CP: It sounds like you did. [laughs]

SWS: We had fun.

CP: Do you...Are you familiar with Scott Peterson?

SWS: The only Scott Peterson that I know of, is the one who was in California, who killed...

CP: Oh, no. Not that one. [laugh]

SWS: No. [laugh]

CP: So, you're not familiar with S-T-O-P-F? The Save The Old Prison Farm group?

SWS: No, I'm not.

CP: OK. Well, Scott Peterson has started a group called Save The Old Prison Farm.

SWS: Does he mean the Honor Farm or the County Farm?

CP: Well, see, that's the thing. Well, the way they describe, in the articles that I've read...

SWS: Uh-huh.

CP: ...the layout...it sounds like it would be the old one, because there was...

SWS: The [...] farm.

CP: Right. Because, when I drove past your site, there's not really much to save, from what I could see.

SWS: It could be...now, the one...the County Farm, I believe, is on Key Road.

CP: Right.

SWS: [coughs] Excuse me. And that's where...because it's city property, that's where they buried the elephants...the elephants that have died...from the zoo.

CP: Oh, ok. [laughs]

SWS: Yeah, we have elephants roaming around.

CP: [laughs]

SWS: I mean, this was a long time ago. No.

CP: [laughs]

SWS: Because, I remember when the ele...the first elephant died...his name, I can't remember. Cocoa, I believe. Anyway, and all the school kids raised money to buy another elephant.

CP: Mmhmm.

SWS: And then they...but, I remember when that elephant...But, I think that's the County....I think I've lost a [...].

CP: OK. You might be right.

SWS: I think that's the County.

CP: OK.

SWS: Because, I don't know what they could do, as far as the...well, the Federal has sold it, so I don't know.

CP: How did your father feel about the Farm? Did he continue to talk about it after he left the Farm? Can you...can you tell how he felt about it?

SWS: Daddy wasn't that type...I mean, he felt...did he feel nostalgic?

CP: Did he...when he left there, was it...did he consider it like, "well, that was my job, and now it's over or do you think that he continued to think about the farm?

SWS: Well, I don't think he continued to think about the farm. When daddy retired, he went to work for Alderman Foods. And, he was...since he had his degree in animal husbandry and was really, unbelievably smart...he developed food products for animals.

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: I don't think he missed getting up at 4 in the morning and all that sort of thing. He never talked about missing the farm.

CP: OK.

SWS: Just, like, I don't think he would talk about missing the city when he left New York. He went on to something else, but he always worked with food and animals and, you know, developed the dog food and the cat food that came out with Alderman Foods, when they first started making him work with Truett Cathy...you know who that is...

CP: Yeah, Chick-Fil-A.

SWS: Yeah, Chick-Fil-A. And, they helped...they were working together and making some sort of machine that would rip the chicken off chicken bone...of chicken necks.

CP: Interesting.

SWS: Because, I mean, it's hard to get chicken.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: And, I know that he and Truett Cathy were pretty good friends, as far as working on things together.

CP: Right.

SWS: So, I don't think I could say he missed the farm.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: No.

CP: OK. Now, I know that you said, when you went to the site a few years ago and you saw that your house was gone...

SWS: Yeah, my house was gone.

CP: You were pretty saddened by that.

SWS: Yeah.

CP: When I went by there, I saw that there is still what seems to be the dairy barn.

SWS: Mmmhmm.

CP: I didn't see anything else. That doesn't mean nothing else is there. I couldn't see anything else. So, with your sentiments about your house having been demolished, what do you think should happen to that barn or anything else that might be on the site?

SWS: Oh, I think they should keep all of it up. The only reason I was disappointed the house had been taken down was that the other four were left, and I wanted to show my son...

CP: Oh, OK.

SWS: ...where I used to live.

CP: Oh, OK.

SWS: Now, this is what...no, I didn't live in that big apartment building. Well, the house that was next to it, you know, three on one side, two on the other. When I was born, mother and daddy originally lived in the house next to the house that we lived in. Because that was where the dairy man lived, at the time, which is what daddy was hired as.

CP: OK.

SWS: He was assistant farm manager, but was hired as the dairy. And then, before I was 3, probably when I was about 2 or something...something just bit me on my ankle...he moved into the manager's house because he became a manager. We've got pictures of me in front of the house that we lived in, but I was born in...but I wasn't born there. But,

I don't remember living there. So, the first house I ever lived in was still there, but I just wanted to show my son...

CP: Right.

SWS: This was the house I lived in. That's the one they tore down.

CP: Right.

SWS: No, I don't feel bad about it. I could draw a blueprint of it right now, if I had to.

CP: Right.

SWS: With closets and everything. It was considered a real pretty house, at that time.

CP: Mhmm.

SWS: It...most of the houses...it was before any of the houses in Toney Valley were built, and the houses before that were the 40s-type houses. This house was built somewhere in the 30s. And, for that area, it was a very nice house. Nobody had two bathrooms.

CP: Right.

SWS: I think the Mathis's did, Mathis Dairy. Nobody had two bathrooms.

CP: Or a 2-car garage.

SWS: No.

CP: [laughs]

SWS: They didn't have a garage. They started the car out front.

CP: Right.

SWS: But, yeah. It was...I would consider them really nice, you know. It was probably at least...when I was a little girl, you know, [...] I would say the house was at least 2,000 square feet.

CP: Wow.

SWS: Well, it could have been smaller because everything looked bigger to me, then.

CP: Mmmhmm. Right.

SWS: We had chandeliers in the dining room, and in the living room, you know, there was some sort of...you didn't have it back then, you didn't have that back then.

CP: Right.

SWS: Especially the houses that were built in the 30s, out in the country.

CP: Mmmhmm. You're exactly right.

SWS: Yep.

CP: So, that concludes the questions that I have prepared for the interview. Is there anything more that you'd like to add?

SWS: I can't think of anything, you know, it was...in a summary, I would say it was a great place to live. I am sure, as far as anti-semitism, that there was some. Like I said, you know, there were a couple of instances, not on the farm, but in the area...

CP: Right.

SWS: ...that mother endured and that my brother endured. I'm sure I did, but I was too oblivious, you know. Like, "you can't date her because she's Jewish."

CP: Right.

SWS: I never felt that. As far as the farm was concerned, I interacted as much as I think my father let me interact. I remember when they would move the cows from one pasture to the other...from the pasture behind the house to the pasture on the side of the road. There was that cattle thing where you could run them through, and they...daddy would let me watch. And, there was always one of the managers there. The piggery was a work of art. I think it's in ruins, now. Daddy knew that...I think what was cute is daddy knew that...pigs are very clean. They really are. You know, the only way that can sweat is to roll in mud, you know, like elephants. But, they're very clean. They will only go use the bathroom in one particular place. So, daddy got the smart idea when he was building the piggery or having it built, that he would cordon off a section of each, whatever it was, area where the pigs were living with, like, an area where they could go.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: And, their attitude was, "we don't want that area." And, they picked the opposite corners.

CP: [laughs]

SWS: But, they were using the opposite corners...

CP: Right.

SWS: ...and daddy just cracked up with that.

CP; [laughs]

SWS: But, you know, he would go down certain times to feed, you know, what I'd call the babies...the younger pigs...the ones that were, you know couple feet...the weaned pigs.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: And, he would take me with him and would, you know, throw the food out to them. [...] and you know, when he...he was weaning pigs very early. That's another thing that daddy did that was innovative, at the time. And, he wanted to get them weaned as soon as possible. So, within 24 hours of being born, he would make some sort of formula concoction, and we would start...we'd poke their noses in it. You know, they'd lick their noses and whatnot. So, daddy could have pigs weaned within probably three days to a week.

CP: Wow.

SWS: So, they would be eating out of a little dish.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: And, I thought that was smart, you know.

CP: Yeah.

SWS: And, this was before the days of artificial insemination. So...well, they might have done it, but you know, it wasn't routine.

CP: Right.

SWS: I remember when daddy would throw a bull, occasionally, you know.

CP: Right.

SWS: ...adult. But, it was really nice, you know. I think it was funny when daddy was talking about, in this magazine article, about the farm...the prisoners would make booze out of anything, because I remember walking, going behind the garage one time and I thought what I'd found...I thought I found a rabbit hutch. And, I kept running in the house, and I said, "there is the coolest ra...well, I didn't say cool, but there is a neat rabbit hutch in the, we had a lot of bamboo behind the house, and daddy went back there, and it was apparently a still, and they had saved the peaches...

CP: [laughs]

SWS: They had saved their peaches from lunch..

CP: [laughs]

SWS:...or whatever, and they were making a still back there.

CP: Oh, wow.

SWS: But, like daddy said, they could make it out of a chair leg.

CP: [laughs] That is too funny.

SWS: Well, they knew how to do it.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: You know...knew how to do it.

CP: Very smart...just need to redirect their energies.

SWS: I think when daddy left, the prisoners were probably very disappointed, because he was very humane, and he was very cognizant of...of...of providing dignity and...to the other...to men. They knew that he was the boss and knew they were in prison, but he gave...they had as much dignity as they could get.

CP: OK. On behalf of the DeKalb History Center, I'd like to thank you for your time and your contribution...

SWS: You're welcome.

CP: ...to the preservation of DeKalb's history.

SWS: Well, you're quite welcome. Now, I feel like the old person who was interviewed
[laughs]

CP: [laughs]

SWS: Avery went...you know Avery White...you know him, don't you?

CP: No.

SWS: He is sort of like the unofficial historian of Panthersville.

CP: Oh. I have to write that down.

SWS: He's done all of this history...

SWS: You need to get on Facebook.

CP: I do need to do that, I hear.

SWS: Because, only thing you have to do...his name is Robert Avery...

CP: OK.

SWS: ...White. And, he is related to everybody in Panthersville. The stories he puts in about everything that's gone on down there are hysterical, you know. His daddy owned a barbecue joint there. I mean, we all know...we all know the same stuff. We are, like, intertwined...just a tremendous amount of genealogical work there.

CP: Hmm.

SWS: And, in fact, I wrote him one time, and I said, "Avery," and I only know him through Facebook. I do remember him when he was, like, 2 years old. And, I said, "Avery, I mean, you've done all this genealogical work," I said, "have you ever found where people have married their cousins without realizing it?" And, he said, "yeah." He

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said, “After the fourth time, my daddy looked at me, and said, ‘son, it’s time to quit looking.’”

CP: [laughs]

SWS: But, his father was the bootlegger.

CP: Oh, OK.

SWS: And, he actually bootlegged until you could sell alcohol in DeKalb County, and he just...Avery writes the greatest stories. You know, he was in Vietnam. He’s the only person that took...that wrote a diary over there in Vietnam and chronicled it.

CP: Hmm.

SWS: And, he’s got a lot of time right now because he’s got five thousand diseases from Vietnam.

CP: Right.

SWS: He’s got chronic fatigue really badly and all of these other kinds of problems.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: So, he's basically an invalid, except if he saves up his energy to go out for a day.

CP: Aw.

SWS: I think he graduated in '64 or '65, something like that. But, Avery has just done all this...he interviewed...back in the 70s, when he came back from Vietnam, he...well, the early seventies, he went and started interviewing all the old people. And, plus, nobody could drive by that time because they were so old, so Avery would take them to the doctor, and take them here and take them there...

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: ...and, he got beaucoup of information.

CP: Informal interviews.

SWS: ...and he also worked a lot with Franklin Garrett. I know you've heard of Franklin Garrett.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: And, he worked with Franklin Garrett, and they talked...something just bit me on my ankle and I'm going to scratch it...

CP: I'm sorry.

SWS: And, so, he's a great one to talk about all of Panthersville.

CP: OK.

SWS: ...and that area of DeKalb County. And, I tell you who else knows a tremendous amount, is Jack Mathis. From Mathis Dairy?

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: Jack has a lot of old pictures, you know. So, he'll tell you, if somebody's doing the genealogy of that area, you know. When his father started the dairy, he actually...they didn't have a phone because the phone line hadn't run...been run out to the dairy, yet, or to that area off Rainbow Drive.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: ...which his father named, Rainbow Drive.

CP: Oh.

SWS: ...because, he said when he built the dairy it was the end of his Rainbow.

CP: Wow. I never knew that.

SWS: See. You never knew that, and that's why it was named Rainbow Drive. And, so, what he would do...there was a lady who lived off Glenwood. And, so, she would take all of the phone orders for milk and whatnot, and Mr. Mathis would get on a horse and ride from Mathis Dairy...you know where it was?

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: OK. He would ride over to Glenwood, a shortcut through the back way or whatever, down Columbia, or whatever, and get the order and then go back, and finally, he strung up...he put the poles up...and had...[...] well, Georgia Power string...Southern Bell or whoever, string up some lines. And, they did, and finally, that's how he got phone lines at Mathis Dairy.

CP: Unbelievable, when you look at Rainbow Drive, now.

SWS: I know. And, you forget...you forget there was stuff there before. Like, right by the river, South River...

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: ...at, you know, Panthersville Road. Right by the river, there was, you know, I'm sure it looks different now, there was this thing that we always called "the Indian mound." ...flat, round and this big...we said it was an Indian mound. Well, daddy one time told us that he had somebody come out and check it, and there was nothing in it.

CP: Hmm.

SWS: But, of course, back then, they didn't have the machinery.

CP: Right.

SWS: ...and, they didn't tear it down, and I'm sure that that big mound or whatever...I mean, it was big enough that you noticed it.

CP: Right.

SWS: And, you know, I was talking to Don about it last night, and I said...he said, "you know, tell her about the Indian mound," and I said, "but, daddy said there wasn't anything there," and he said," they didn't dig all the way into it." He said, "I am sure that either it was used on top for something. Because all that land was...

CP: Right.

SWS: That's bottomland.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: You know, nobody knows what bottomland is, now. But, that's all bottoms. And then, there was this big thing, and it was right by the river. I would say, maybe, as...I would think about a football field. So, that's a [...] measurement for a football field. I would say 50 yards, at the most. Off the road was this Indian mound. That's cool, but you've got...you know, there was a lot of the Creek Indians lived there.

CP: Right.

SWS: Don used to go around...he didn't have to dig down 2 feet. He would just push the leaves aside, and you could find Indian arrowheads.

CP: Oh.

SWS: It never dawned on us. We're finding arrowheads here because there were Indians here before, and all the Creeks lived there.

CP: Right.

SWS: I've heard two different stories about when they were moved off. And, that was either 1842, when the courthouse burned down, that sounds bad, or it was earlier, like 1819. So, I don't know. But, you forget that there were things underneath your feet.

CP: Right.

SWS: And, like when the...I went to Emory Hospital. It never occurred to me to go look at stuff.

CP: Right.

SWS: And, that's a phenomenal place.

CP: Mmmhmm.

SWS: ...and, we knew that this building was used as a hospital during the "War Between the States," and this one was, too. But, it didn't register with us.

CP: Right.

SWS: The only thing that registered was when I went back, and I went, “Oh.” They’ve partitioned all the rooms off, and they’ve plastered the walls, and I remember looking at wooden walls and wooden floors and the third floor was condemned, and now it’s a floor. And, how we used to drag things up there, like cows.

CP: [laughs]

SWS: ...and, they put a zebra up there. Did you hear? They put two zebras up there.

CP: No.

SWS: Yeah, somehow. Some guy had a farm with zebras, and the next thing you knew, they had...it’s a tradition at Oxford.

CP: Oh, I see.

SWS: ...put things at Halloween on the third floor of Seney Hall, which was built in 1834, or something, whenever the school was started, and it’s the administration building. And, it’s all historical stuff. And, I remember the guys dragging cows up there when I was a senior, you know, when I was a freshman...but, they put a zebra up there. And then, they put goats up there, too. Is that your daughter?

CP: No. OK, well, we’ll conclude the interview here.

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SWS: OK. I appreciate you letting me jabber.

CP: I appreciate you...