THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

GERALDINE ROBERTS

Domestic Workers of America

by

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VITAE

GERALDINE ROBERTS

Geraldine Roberts was born on March 8, 1924 in Pawausk, Oklahoma, but spent most of her childhood in Arkansas. Throughout her life, she has witnessed the victimization of certain classes and races. In the days of her youth she lived among sharecroppers, attending the "separate, but equal" black school which was only open three months of the year. She realizes how seriously the lack of education can impair one's chances for a advancement in the United States. Roberts also recognizes the lack of educational opportunities offered to blacks as a tool used by the white middle class to keep blacks down.

Her feelings concerning matters like these led Roberts into civil rights activities in the early 1960's. The ideas and support she developed through the civil rights movment sparked her decision to organize her sister domestic workers. In 1965 she founded the Domestic Workers of America [DWA] and was elected its president.

Roberts' life since 1965 has been dedicated to the DWA. Although the struggle is a slow and difficult one, Roberts is strengthened when she sees some employers showing more respect for domestic employees, and most importantly, when she sees domestic workers taking pride in themselves.

While the demands of the DWA take much of Roberts' time, she firmly believes in making time available to work with other community and women's issues in order to forge the struggle on all fronts.

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March 30 - June 29, 1977
Cleveland, Ohio

by Donna Van Raaphorst

INTERVIEWER: We will begin first with your family background, the family background of Miss Geraldine Roberts. Do you remember your grandparents?

ROBERTS: Yes, I do.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us something about them?

ROBERTS: Well, they were very simple, rural, country-living people. My grandmother, the mother of my mother, Vinnie, my grandmother, Eller, her name was Eller. My grandfather, my original grandfather, my mother's father, was deceased by the time I met my grandparents and I met my grandparents after the decease of my mother, which I went after the burial of my mother, my grandmother, meaning Eller, takin' myself and there were seven kids. So Eller takin' the two smallest children, myself, Geraldine and Elizabeth, to live with her cause we were livin' in a different state. We were living in the state of Oklahomer at the time of my mother's death and my grandmother, Eller, lived over in the state of Arkansas, and I met Eller for the first time when she came to the funeral of my mother. And after the funeralizing of my mother, Eller, takin' myself and Elizabeth, my youngest sister, back to the state of Arkansas.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember your mother having told you anything about her mother, your grandmother, before her death?

ROBERTS: I don't remember my mother telling me, as far as my remembrance, or that much about grandparents or her family life, or no more than we often heard her mention that she came out to Oklahomer

ROBERTS: from the state of Arkansas where she had met my father and was wedded to my father, John Harris. And there's very little remembrance I have of my grandparents until meeting them and I have no recollection of my grandparents on my father's side. I'm speaking of my mother's side.

INTERVIEWER: You don't recall anything that your father may have told you about his parents, then?

ROBERTS: No, I do not, no more than the point that they were Choctaw Indians. I met my father's mother or seen her and got to know her as a very young person. But her real life, I knew that she was real large lady and was a squaw Indian we were told. That they looked upon her and her tribe as Choctaw Indians and she was a squaw and some history lightly of how my father was born. Mainly, my grandmother gave, my father's mother, gave us some details. The chief accepted some children from the parents of some runaway slaves and she, the chief, raised the children, which one was my father, accordin' to the things that was told to us by my grandmother. And he grew up and he had a name that was called by the tribal natives there, but I don't really remember the name that they had mentioned that they had really called him. Anyhow, he was raised accordin' to them, by the American, by the Choctaw tribe, and was married off to the chief's daughter, which was my grandmother, and I often, seen her like on a Sunday as she'd stop by and they would come in from the reservation. She lived on the reservation and they would come down to visit, mainly myself, my mother's, or there were other children in the house, but by my mother's first marriage, before she came over into Oklahomer, and it seemed that my grandmother only visit me more than anybody else. She seemed to came only to see "John's daughter", meaning myself, and would spend time with me on the porch. She smoked a pipe and that sort of a thing, and hold me on her lap and I remember her hair bein' so very long and she'd let me pull on it and it was lyin' on the ground. My hair's the length of her hair. I always liked to pull on her hair like a horse tail or something. And it was her native hair and it was a lot of fun with me to play with her hair. She'd always let it down for me and let me play with it for some reason. And I enjoyed being around her and playing with her hair and it seemed to me that she was a very, very large person in weight.

INTERVIEWER: What state was this in?

ROBERTS: This was all in the state of Oklahomer.

INTERVIEWER: Originally in Oklahoma?

ROBERTS: Yes. My original birth spot.

INTERVIEWER: Did you father tell you anything about his boyhood that you can recall?

ROBERTS: It seemed that he didn't know any more than what there, the native American tribe, meaning the Choctaw tribe, had told him. That there seemed to him and his sister something was thrown from, or horses or wagon. Anyway, it seemed they were escaping from their slave masters or something, and they threw the children to the tribal Indians in the woods where the children were picked up, or which was himself. He was told all of this 'cause they were seemed to be very small children and they never seen their parents. The Indians said that as far as their knowledge, their parents were killed, and the children were raised by the tribe.

INTERVIEWER: So the Choctaws were the only parents that your father knew?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was he born in Oklahoma, that you remember?

ROBERTS: I'm not sure exactly the birthplace but it seemed that all he knew was the time from the period the tribal Indians found him, accepted him.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do as a young boy, or as a man, as far as making a living?

ROBERTS: Well, the information that I could have vaguely on what he did was, of course, after John and my mother, Vinnie, was married, or there was something about him building a barn and it seemed that he was working on this barn like for three years or more. The barn seemed to never gotten built and she happened to go down town one day and we lived in a town called Behaska, Oklahomer. Accordin' to my mother, she saw my father sittin' on the lawn of the post office lawn. There seemed to be a style of Indians sitting on federal government property. They were free as long as they seemed that they were on government property and the post office was seemed to be a place the native Americans sit around on and my father--or meantime it seemed that he was sitting around, you know, my mother wondered gosh where was the building of the barn and why was he sitting there and it seemed then he expressed his feeling of what he was used to doing--that the women did

ROBERTS: work and my mother wanted him to work and he really didn't do any work but fish and hunt and that sort of thing like the other tribal Indians who taught him how to live and their life style and there it all came out the kind of life he had had as a youngster. And he only gave her the reasons for building the barn so she wouldn't be angry seeing that he didn't have a job and we learned about this because my mother came back and told all the kids where she found my father and it seemed to be, it seemed to us, later in life we seemed to understand that that was the kind of life that he was used to, the same style life that the other tribal male Indians were used to.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Then let's go back a little bit to more about your mother because you did mention that she was previously married.

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You never knew her first husband?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, I met Esel Woods after my grandmother Eller taken Elizabeth and myself to Arkansas. Esel lived in Arkansas there, a town called Oler, Arkansas, and there my brothers and sisters, of which Esel was their father, my mother's first set of children, which was five of them, went to take residence with their father, which was no relation to me but, however, I met Esel and got to know him as I begin to grow up in that particular town there in Arkansas, which is my oldest sisters there they did have one parent livin'. Of course, I learned later that there was a letter from some friends that came to my grandmother that John Harris had died a few months after the death of my mother, maybe eight months or so later, so I didn't have any direct parents of my own any more except my grandparents but, however, my brothers and sisters--the five brothers and sisters--did have their own original father.

INTERVIEWER: So there were five of you of the seven from the original marriage and then two of you from the second marriage?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: To John Harris?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Good. Do you recall your mother telling you anything or much about her childhood?

ROBERTS: Well, yes. There were some things that she mentioned about her childhood life and, however, my grandmother often around the fireplace or in gatherin's in the evenings after everybody was home from work there in Arkansas. Eller often told many things that happened of the childhood of my mother, which was her daughter.

INTERVIEWER: So it was more from her mother rather than your mother?

ROBERTS: Yes, yes my grandmother mentioned more definite things.

INTERVIEWER: Was your mother born in Arkansas?

ROBERTS: Yes, Vinnie was born in Arkansas to John Stansill, was her father and Eller Stansill and--the grandfather I knew was my stepgrandfather that was married to my grandmother, the second marriage there, which was Mark C. Brady, Jr., and I always looked up on him as my grandfather.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if your mother had any or did any kind of work or had any kind of employment outside the home as a young child or as a child?

ROBERTS: Well, yes. They were farmers accordin' to Eller Brady. They were farmers there in the state of Arkansas, sharecroppers. Eller often, her and John Stansill, seemed to or did sharecropping with previous plantation owners whom after construction days, they. . . many blacks were asked to stay on the farm and work as sharecroppers and they were able to move from one farm to another. If they were dissatisfied with their boss, they could take residence on another farm as sharecroppers and there again, Eller told us about the experience as the children, her children, growing up as sharecroppers or on the farms and it was her great intention in life to own her own farm and not necessarily continue to work as a sharecropper and her moving to Oler, Arkansas, from another section of Arkansas, which she always referred to as something like they call the bottoms or lower land or seemed from out from a town called Dardanell, Arkansas, and out in the county where the farms were and she purchased herself and many other blacks purchased the land in the area of Ola and I think it was named accordin' to her. . . that they were really, that particular community was really organized by blacks who felt they wanted to find land and it seemed that land was sold to them, that land was being sold and was sold to the blacks that they could buy, supposed. . . . Accordin' to her knowledge of what happened, there was supposed to be an area with lots of water and not a good place to buy land and it seemed that she said later that they were supposed to be buying land

ROBERTS: that was going to be a bad place to live but, however, the blacks if they moved there along with Eller and many other blacks and I think she said land was like three or four dollars for a whole lot of land, very cheap.

And they were the first settlers, and whites came later to that area and I just remember how Ola was some particular woman's name. They named the town after, I think it was named first after some black person and finally Ola was named after some white person, accordin' to her. And they were seemed to be persons coming through, white persons wanting to buy the land and offering very good prices to the blacks if they would sell them the land. My grandmother refused to sell and a few other black families, she said they refused to sell their land. They were tempted to buy more land and blacks seemed they couldn't get things in that area that other areas had and many blacks were moving North at the particular time. And my grandmother decided to stay on there, her and a few other blacks in that area.

INTERVIEWER: So it was your grandmother that really owned the land, not your mother?

ROBERTS: My mother was a child growing up on the land.

INTERVIEWER: That your grandmother owned?

ROBERTS: Yes, that my grandmother owned. Also built a small two-room what they call, shotgun cottages, a little kitchen and one large front room, a well in the yard. However, there was another family next door, accordin' to my grandmother, that was called the Carters who built a very large beautiful home and soon left that area and my grandmother, Eller, purchased that home next door, which gave her two homes next door to each other.

INTERVIEWER: Was this after your mother had died?

ROBERTS: No, my grandmother, my mother, according to Eller, was still a young girl growing up there.

INTERVIEWER: So your mother then actually lived through being both a sharecropper's daughter and then the daughter of a land owner?

ROBERTS: Right. Of a black land owner and it seemed that my original grandfather, John Stansill, passed away and my grandmother was left alone with her daughters and I think she had a number of seven children or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember your grandmother or your mother ever telling you any of the specific responsibilities of things that she had to do around the house as a child?

ROBERTS: My grandmother or my mother?

INTERVIEWER: Your mother. The things that your mother had to do.

ROBERTS: Well, my mother was sort of chosen to do most of their cookin' in the house. It seemed that Eller felt Vinnie was a very good cook. She was small and seemed to be more frail than the other children there in the house and she seemed to kind of assign Vinnie to the chores in the home such as preparing the meals and looking after the laundry rather than to go into the fields, because she wasn't as strong, Eller, felt as the rest of the children so she seemed to, was assigned to doin' the pastries and the baking and all that sort of thing. Through that, she became a very good cook accordin' to the persons which she began to go out as a domestic worker and work in the homes of many of the plantation owners in the area.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Do you remember anything that you did as a child with your mother or father that you particularly liked? Do you remember any activities?

ROBERTS: Well, there was something like, one thing always seems to relate to me if I think back, how I first learned about religion. It seemed that there was a church there and it was a Baptist church. I don't remember the title of the Baptist church but I have it that there was a Baptist church there that seemed that my mother there in Arkansas, or rather this was over in Oklahomer and there was a large baptizin', where they were baptizin' people in a body of water like our river or something.

INTERVIEWER: Total submersion?

ROBERTS: Right, so they was submergin' which persons in the religious faith accordin' to the Bible of John the Baptist, or referred to as the baptism and I wanted to get baptized like everybody else and it seemed that I was so small the baptizing was over and nobody. . . it seemed that I was cryin' and everybody was all through and they said here's a child that was not baptized and I was taken out to the preacher and I was submerged. I was the last one. They forgot, I was so small, that I was even standing there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to church with both your parents?

ROBERTS: I don't remember my father ever goin' to church. I don't remember him every being involved around the church. It seemed it was my mother that was involved around religion. I can remember my mother not having enough to eat for the family. It seemed that she learned that my father was not a man to work. There was a type of welfare there so that she was receivin'; they gave beans. It seemed there were just loads of beans and lots of beans and often we had her pick the beans like little stones, little, somehow, little chalk-white stones was in the beans and we had to pick them out and seemed there was like a barrel, a large barrel of these beans, lots of beans. And it seemed that every meal we had beans, sometimes rice and beans and cornbread and my mother always said someday we're going to have everything. We won't be all, she'd always just say it won't be like this forever and often tellin' us to not feel bad because there was better things she had in mind for us.

INTERVIEWER: Let's expand a little bit on a couple of those points you made there. In the first place, let's go back to this idea about your father not working and your mother realizing that. Then did she find gainful employment or some kind of employment as a domestic?

ROBERTS: Yes, she was a domestic worker there in Behaska, Oklahomer, or she often mentioned families. I don't remember if we really seen these families that she worked for. It was a small town with no public transportation; in fact we never seen any. Everybody walked where they wanted to go. And she would often walk from there, the colored community at that time to the white community, and often she'd bring us a lot of pretty things that we hadn't seen around our house that was given to her as a domestic worker and it seems she was workin' every day 'cept Sunday.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about the traditional kind of discarded items?

ROBERTS: Yes, things that was hand-me-downs to her.

INTERVIEWER: So you've had a very long history of involvement with domestic workers including your own life, but then your mother's as well?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, my mother, my grandmother, myself.

INTERVIEWER: There's another interesting point there I'd like to expand on a little bit here. You say your mother would tell you, you can recall your mother saying things weren't always going to be that way. Things could get better. What kinds of hopes, dreams, or ambitions did she have for her children?

ROBERTS: Well, she would mention things like we were going to have a large house. We were very crowded. I slept under the table which was, it seemed, a table that someone made, the table, someone she knew made the table. We knew the table was made and we were proud of the table, and my pallet which was some quilts that I slept on under the table. There was no bedroom for myself and with all the children in the house it was pretty crowded. She had four of her children from a previous marriage with her in Oklahomer and there was one child she had left behind durin' the separation of her and Esel Woods, when she came to Oklahomer. So there was six children in the house and there was not enough bedrooms. It was a very small house and she often referred to us that we would have a real big house and she could really sit up and tell us all these nice things and we would all dream about a beautiful home and nice things and all us would have nice horses, everything everybody else had around us. And my mother often smiled; she always had the prettiest smile, and out of her smile I always got satisfaction that everything was goin' to be all right 'cause my mother said so and she seemed, in my opinion, so nice to all of us.

INTERVIEWER: Did she ever say anything about you or any of your other sisters becoming domestic workers? Did she want you not to do that?

ROBERTS: She always said we was going to go to college. She said we were all goin' to go to college; everybody was goin' to go to college and she mentioned one particular college she liked as a child called Fisk University in Tennessee and I often always kept in my mind about Fisk University but I never had seen the school but I had a dream that, accordin' to my mother I would go there and since my mother never went, someday I would actually be a student at Fisk University, which until this day I have never completed that one but it was always a dream about that particular school.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. How much schooling did your mother have? Do you know?

ROBERTS: Accordin' to my grandmother and mainly my grandmother tellin' about the lives of the children, I think my mother probably

ROBERTS: had somethin' like a seventh grade education, that she was very smart and that my grandmother had dreams for her and that they had given her a gift of a skating rink and they had plans for college. My mother married early in life and never got to go to college, all the things. It seemed there was a problem there of havin' schools open for the blacks in the area. There was very short terms like three months out of the year or somethin' that blacks had to attend school. So it was a long process; to get to the sixth grade you really went to school 'til you was practically grown.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think any of these experiences shaped your mother's views? You did mention, for example, that she was interested or active in church activities. Was she active or interested in other activities like politics or community concerns?

ROBERTS: No, it seemed that my mother was full time during the week as a domestic worker and on weekends she was often, or she felt tried to make the children pretty, like doin' the girls' hair and she did sewin'. She made our clothes and she was, on weekends she was doin' everything, seemed to make us very happy and proud of ourselves and there was no time to do anything else. Usually after church on Sundays we would come home and she'd make or fix some beans and cucumbers or often made, my brothers had gotten in the summer months, grapes and things out of the woods and made a pie or something and she often would be sleepin', dinner would be preparin' and she'd be sleepin' on a Sunday afternoon because she worked all the week on our behalves doin' something, helpin' us do better. And I don't remember any other activities besides all she could do as a widder there after the particular unpleasant situation concerning John Harris. My mother asked him to go back to his family and he was no longer livin' in the home with us. She was livin' alone with the children without John.

INTERVIEWER: So they separated, then?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So we could say in sum about that that your mother simply was too busy working and trying to provide for her children to really become involved in outside activity other than the church?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Was her activity in the church primarily that of a member?

ROBERTS: She was not a person who went to church regular. Often there was Sundays that she would send the children. There was sometimes that she said that her clothin', she was a woman who was always wantin' to look real nice and if her clothin' wasn't satisfactory she would send the children, made sure we had the things, that somethin' she made to wear to church and she would go when she could. Most important that all the time she wouldn't have the clothin' to go herself regular.

INTERVIEWER: Fine. Can you recall anything about your father's education? Formal.

ROBERTS: I can't really. I can't really decide. I know accordin' to him that he was raised with the tribal Indians.

INTERVIEWER: Did he go to a reservation school, or not that you know.

ROBERTS: Not that I know of. His culture was comin' from the tribal Indians on his mother's side and accordin' to his father or I don't know very much whatever happened there.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Did your father, if you can recall or anything, did he ever talk about any ambition or goals for you children like your mother did?

ROBERTS: No, it seems there, the activities of my father and seein' that he wanted my mother to believe that he was an ambitious man accordin' to now I can see of the doing that was the kind of impression he wanted her to have of him. That she mentioned that he would leave early every morning and she would pack his lunchbox because he was buildin' this barn and he was gone every day and he spent very little time around the home at all. He was always from home and she thought he was out workin' so we never really had a chance to get to know John that well around the home except we. . . I can remember arguments after she learned that he was spendin' his time on federal soil round on the grounds around the post office and there was unpleasantness. I can remember his settin' on the porch but I don't remember him ever havin' very much to say to anybody. More of a quiet person as far as we can notice.

INTERVIEWER: All right, then I think we could say that you were much closer to your mother. Your mother had a much greater impact on your life as a child than your father did?

ROBERTS: Females all the way.

INTERVIEWER: Females all the way. So you would also say that you admired your mother much more than you did your father?

ROBERTS: Yes. As leadership, she provided leadership for us and guidance for us.

INTERVIEWER: She was the example then, rather than your father?

ROBERTS: Right!

INTERVIEWER: Then you could say that you would want to live like one of your parents, it would be the mother? Rather than the father? Although not necessarily wanting to do the same thing?

ROBERTS: But my grandmother was progressive. She was quite different then my mother.

INTERVIEWER? How many years did you live in the original place of your birth?

ROBERTS? I was five goin' on six years old at the time of my mother's death accordin' to my grandparents, the time they came and got me. I was in kindergarten, beginning kindergarten.

INTERVIEWER: And that's when you moved to Arkansas?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in a house?

ROBERTS: There in Oklahoma?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

ROBERTS: Yes, a very small house. I slept on the table, there was no bedroom.

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't an apartment?

ROBERTS: No, it was a very small house with very high steps built high off the ground and a particular area there was lots of oil wells around the house. There was one right outside of the door and I might say that I happen to be one of those kinds of persons even though I was a very small person, I was quite aware of everybody around me and had very good remembrance of everybody at a very early age of life. And I really don't forget too many things that have happened to me.

INTERVIEWER: Was the house nice or, I mean, aside from the fact that it was small, was it a nice home? Did you think of it as home?

ROBERTS: It was the kind of place that people in that house I knew and I knew they was my sisters and I knew my mother lived there and it was a place that we looked forward to seein' my mother go out to work and come back there and for me it was the kind of place I hung around. However, there was a family a few doors down what we called a better street. More nicer homes and persons were with money. We were classed very poor people. There was another family I visited quite regular. This particular lady was very fond of me and even asked during the death of my mother whether she could adopt Geraldine, her favorite, and her and her husband asked Eller whether they could, meaning my grandmother, take me and adopt me and promised to educate me that I would go to the university, of Langston University there, it was a black university and they would see that I was properly educated and I would have a good life. And during the period of my mother's death, I slept in a real nice bed, the first, my remembrance of white sheets, a very soft bed in their home and she seemed to regret it that they couldn't take me and give me all the things they felt that they wanted to give me. They was very fond of me and they were a mixture of Indian and black themselves. They were a light skinned family and. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yellow?

ROBERTS: Well, what they call Indian, more of a reddish light tan people and they were. . . I had real long hair myself and they thought they could pass me off as their daughter. Most persons see them was always askin' is that your daughter? And they didn't have any children of their own. I always look back to feel perhaps if that all had happened, maybe I would have an entire different life.

INTERVIEWER: You would describe that as an Indian-black neighborhood?

ROBERTS: Yes, a heavily mixed area, that particular location in Behaska, blacks and Indians were quite a mixture in that particular area.

INTERVIEWER: Were the houses near your similar? Small in size and about the same worth, do you recall?

ROBERTS: No, most of the persons in that particular area, we were really classed one of the poorest families there. Everybody. the family that I was around, the Nelsons, the same ones that were going to adopt me, they had a large, big, beautiful home.

ROBERTS: They seemed to be owners of some of the oil wells around there. The people weren't that poor. We were the very poor family, on account of my father being not wanting to make the kind of livin' the other persons around there were earning money. It wasn't important to my father, havin' the culture of Indians all that was not important to him. So we lived poor accordin' to the other persons who were mainly black in that particular area.

INTERVIEWER: You can recall as a child then basically two households, your mother and your father and your mother's first children and your sister, and then your next household which would have been with your grandmother and your sister?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers, half-brother did you have?

ROBERTS: In my mother, had four boys.

INTERVIEWER: Four boys.

ROBERTS: Four boys. Let's see; there was William, Handy, and Tom, three boys. I never had the person livin' in the house with all of them at any time.

INTERVIEWER: At most there were six in the house. Six children.

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Or six people all together.

ROBERTS: Right. My sister was only, Elizabeth, my baby sister was only six months old when my mother passed so it appeared it was six months we all lived there, six kids in the house.

INTERVIEWER: Six kids and two adults?

ROBERTS: Six kids and one adult. This was all in Oklahoma.

INTERVIEWER: All right, did you ever have, at that point you didn't live with grandparents either, that was strictly your parents or one of your parents and your sisters and brothers?

ROBERTS: Yes, my mother and my sisters and brothers.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any, at any time did your family have boarders or outsiders that lived in the house with you?

ROBERTS: There was my grandmother, was a quite different life.

INTERVIEWER: All right, so we could make again that distinction between the two household?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: There were no boarders or outside people when you lived with your parents?

ROBERTS: No, except the kids perhaps comin' over spending the night with one of the kids, one of the next door neighbors, a pal of the kids.

INTERVIEWER: All right, do you recall any companions of significance when you were a child?

ROBERTS: Not that, not very well in Oklahomer; there in Arkansas, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Outside of your sisters and brothers, you really didn't associate with other children extensively?

ROBERTS: No, not in Arkansas, or rather in Oklahoma because we were very young yet. However, I can remember my older sister havin' friends but I was very young when I was, I stayed very close to my mother whenever she was home and I was not in school, usually close to her or not there with the Nelsons. It was two places, my home and the Nelson's home.

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship to your brothers and sisters?

ROBERTS: Well, the same mother and father, but our relationships, I was sort of young and [they] looked upon as like a baby in the house and sort of at times pushed around.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a significant age difference between the first set of children and the second set of children?

ROBERTS: Yes, there was.

INTERVIEWER: So that all the original children were a good deal older than you were?

ROBERTS: Yes, they were all older.

INTERVIEWER: So you would probably say, if I'm correct, that Elizabeth and you were the closest?

ROBERTS: Yes, we were.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have specific chores and responsibilities? Did you and Elizabeth have specific chores and responsibilities as children that you can recall?

ROBERTS: After the death of my mother in the home, my grandmother, yes, there was quite a bit of responsibility 'cause they were farmers. She had her own farm but they still did farmin' as well. Eller, meanin' my grandmother over in Arkansas, and once her what they call crops, referin' to gettin' in their hay and all this fruit and everything, and we would always go and work for other farms, mainly those persons who were still sharecropping on white farms. We were the largest black owners of farmers in that area who owned land and looked up on sort of as what they could call there the middle class blacks because we owned land. We were tax payers and that was very important. There weren't very many blacks who pay taxes.

INTERVIEWER: So it was an important distinction between your life as a child with your mother and father, with your mother versus with your grandmother?

ROBERTS: Right. Very early stages with my mother and growin' up.

INTERVIEWER: 'Cause you were known in that town as the poor?

ROBERTS: Right the very poorest in the town.

INTERVIEWER: Versus what you came to be known when you lived with your grandmother?

ROBERTS: Right. We was the so-called middle class.

INTERVIEWER: Can you recall any distinction having been made between the things the girls were made to do versus the things the boys were made to do?

ROBERTS: Well, there was my grandmother, her bein' a woman, head of the house, a very strong progressive person, in my opinion as I look back over my life. She, bein' a farm girl growin' up as a child, slavery began. . . At the end of slavery was her birth so like she spent her very early childhood life, meanin' Eller Brady, as a slave. She was a slave and as a slave she did very hard work. She didn't have extension about what girls couldn't do. Her point were you strong enough; if anybody in the house was weak, or what they would look upon as sickly or somethin',

ROBERTS: then you would get a lighter duty, but if you was strong as I was or husky type of person I was, my duties were the same as my brother or the same duties as well [as] a cousin that came to live with us after losin' his father, stretchin' barbed wire fence, this was nothin' unusual for me to do. My grandmother did that kind of work and everybody did. So we would dig holes, dig ditches, and milk cows or take cotton. Everything everybody else did if you were strong enough, it was about how strong you was.

INTERVIEWER: It had nothing really to do with sex?

ROBERTS: No, nothing about sex. Some of the things I notice now that women are doin', there at that time we did all those things.

INTERVIEWER: So you were really liberated in that sense?

ROBERTS: Right, we were doin' any chore that we could do as long as we were strong enough to handle it and many of us were very anxious or I didn't want my brother to tell me and I would meet him like on the farms 'cause we would go out, my grandmother and help my brothers or father to get what they call crops in down on Esel's place. And I didn't want my brothers to say you're too weak, you can't do it. That was a challenge; I had to do it. And usually, whether it was drivin' the wagon or whatever, was no problem.

INTERVIEWER: That's very interesting. Can you recall how important religion was to you or was it important to you as a child?

ROBERTS: Religion, the style of my grandmother, it seemed there, what we would often hear her mention towards religion that she was very active not in the Baptist church but in the Methodist church there and often she mentioned the style of that particular African Methodist church. She often said that she was the mother of that church. We never really learnt what she meant by bein' the mother of the church. Often there was a lot of activities that she had spent. And my grandmother, Ella, bought a lot of land around the area, as the black area grew larger after the days that they first began there as early settlers, pioneer settlers in that area. She owned like eight houses in the whole area, the black area, was all her property. The church was exactly next door to her garden, so like she would walk out of her door and the next door was the church. And it seemed that she had a lot of things; she often mentioned how early she went to church and all her activities but there was somethin' like a domestic problem with her and some of the members. The period that we came, Elizabeth

ROBERTS: and myself, to live with Eller she was not that active with the church. And the very early beginning I do remember her takin' us to the church and we were introduced to the various members and they knew my mother about what had happened, and everybody was very nice to the little girls but, however, very soon after my grandmother was not goin' to church at all and on account of her way of not goin' to church, we were not exposed to religion that much any more. My stepgrandfather, Mark Brady, he attended a Baptist church perhaps a couple of miles away where most of the blacks from the sharecroppin' farms, which was called a place out on the ridge--everybody referred to the ridge that was where the main mass of the blacks lived, maybe three to five hundred blacks perhaps out there attended that particular Baptist church, and the Methodist church was more the blacks who owned property. The home owners and tax payers went to the church in the inner town and Mark attended that church and Eller attended the Methodist church but often Mark could never take us to church, to his church. She didn't want us to go to the Baptist church, however, my mother was a Baptist.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: I want to go back and pick up where we left off the last time with the subject of religion. You were relating to us your experiences as a child with relationship to your grandmother. Do you recall where we were?

ROBERTS: Yes, could you give me a brief noting on. . . .

INTERVIEWER: All right, you were saying how your grandmother had originally started out as a major force in the local church and then seemed to lose interest in the church and, in fact, didn't attend church at all any more.

ROBERTS: Right. Yes, she was acting mother of the African Methodist church in Arkansas, in Ola, Arkansas there.

INTERVIEWER: So you don't feel religion had much of an impact on your childhood?

ROBERTS: No, I was not exposed that much to the activities of religion as a young, very young or was secondary school along those lines.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I recall originally you had said something about feeling the need to belong or do things like other members of your family did and the example you set was baptism. Will you explain a little bit about why baptism was so important to you then?

ROBERTS: It seemed baptism, and this was at there during the period of my mother's lifetime and back in Oklahoma, Behaska, Oklahoma--it seemed that all the kids around there that I knew, meanin' the black kids, all were baptized through their Baptist church. My mother Vinnie was a Baptist and was sort of the thing to do. The kids wanted to do whatever anybody else did and that was to get baptized. And as I mentioned to you earlier, I went to one of the baptizin's which was on a creek or somethin' like that or a large body of water outdoors, baptism there and the baptism went on, the baptizing went on and I then was sort of small. They had baptized everyone and I was left off. No one had seen me and I was tryin' to let it be known I had not gotten baptized. And someone noticed that Miss Harris' daughter was not baptized, and she was there, so I was taken out into this body of water, which I'm not sure if it was a creek or a lake or what, just a large body of water and too the pastor of that particular church was doin' the baptizing there and I was submerged like everybody else which was great. I felt then that I had did what everybody else had did.

INTERVIEWER: So it really wasn't a desire to be baptized out of religious conviction but in order to be like everyone else.

ROBERTS: Yeah, to do what everybody else did.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there was if you can recall, a difference with regard to your mother's attitude about religion and your grandmother's?

ROBERTS: It seemed to, as far as my mother's concerned, she was often mentioned the word of prayer in the house and prayer around the dinner table and that sort of thing. Prayer was mentioned in her presence and always that the Lord was goin' to bless us and things was goin' to be better. That we wouldn't always have to live as poor as we were, and the things that we didn't have that other children had and she was always promisin' us a better life. We were goin' to have all these things one day. And that God would make it possible. There with my grandmother, who somehow had got disillusioned seemed to which her religious attitude in her church and all, she did not use a lot of religious expressions in the house, as her daughter did, my mother. My grandmother, who was Ella Brady, she had very little to say that much about religious activities in the home.

INTERVIEWER: So we might conclude from that then that had your mother lived and you stayed with her, your religious background, your religious upbringing might have been very different than what it was with your grandmother.

ROBERTS: It could have been.

INTERVIEWER: Fine. I'd like to move ahead for a minute then and get back to the family unit as a whole. Do you recall the kinds of issues or arguments that took place in your family say between the brothers and your sister or your mother and your father?

ROBERTS: My actual mother, Vinnie, I don't remember too many disturbed or arguments or confusion in the home except the deep distress of the things we didn't have and things she couldn't do for us. It seemed that we sort of went out with friends and neighbors of the community and each kid seemed to have their own friend. I had mine, a family who wanted to adopt me and was very fond of me, fond of, and I found it very comfortable to go there. There was always enough to eat there and they had. . . I thought the house was very pretty inside. It looked quite different than the one I lived in and there was lots of pretty things that looked awful pretty to me, in their home and I enjoyed bein' in their home and often I could go around and at any time I was always welcome with a big smile and usually I would find myself over to this particular neighbor's home until my mother perhaps came home. Our home was a place where I wanted to come because my mother was there. Our love for our mother. . . the house itself I don't think we enjoyed the home that much there in Oklahomer again with my mother.

INTERVIEWER: You have indicated then that you felt your family, your house, your home was different than that of your neighbors?

ROBERTS: Yes. It seemed that so many things we seen in other homes that we did not have and we knew that we couldn't have under the circumstances.

INTERVIEWER: How does that make you feel?

ROBERTS: Just that my mother didn't have the money.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't have any feelings one way or another about that? Did it make you resentful or. . . .

ROBERTS: At that particular period of my life, I'm not sure how my older sisters and brothers felt. I sort of seeked enjoyment out of places such as the home of the Nelsons that I was always around.

INTERVIEWER: So you came for the love of your mother in your home but for the other material things your neighbor's family.

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: If you found this material difference between yourself and your neighbors, is this a source of contention between your mother and father? Did they argue about that?

ROBERTS: It seemed to, from what I can vaguely remember of those times that by my father havin' the culture of the rest of the tribal Indians which he related to their style of huntin' and fishin' and sports and all, which was important to them and it wasn't seemed to be about economics, you could think of this term nowadays, of what he should have been interested in perhaps in helpin' her make money for the home. His style of livin' caused her in the style that she wanted to live quite difficult and there, it seems, there is where the separation came. She would rather he not live there if he wasn't going to help take care of the home when she was, seemed to be payin' the bills and attemptin' to work as a domestic worker as all the work that she could get was a cook in a home, a pastry cook. It seemed that she did a lot of pastry and persons enjoyed hirin' her to do pastry work for them and my father, John, not wantin' to do anything but go fishin' and associate with his relatives and friends, mainly his tribal friends of the Choctaw tribe.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember them having verbal argument over this?

ROBERTS: As far as I can remember, there was confusion in the house, and John finally left.

INTERVIEWER: So you really don't remember anything specific?

ROBERTS: Not that specific of her and John. No more than they was dislike and they was, she was angry at him. It seemed that he would not get a job and he had told her false things about buildin' a barn and there never was a barn to build. And that actually he had never went on a job as far as she could prove. Of knowing that he could not, the things that he told her seemed to be quite untrue, that he really hadn't did anything but he did go fishin' and that sort of thing and we had lots of fish and things like that around the home and he would go out and hunt. We had wild game but not necessarily money and he said he was a carpenter.

INTERVIEWER: Were you surprised when your father was gone?

ROBERTS: I missed him. Although it only seemed like mainly in the afternoon and mornings and evenings when he was supposed to be comin' home from work, going and comin' home. He never spent that much time around the home.

INTERVIEWER: But you do remember a feeling of missing him?

ROBERTS: Yes, but he wasn't going to be there. His mother continued to come and see us some, my squaw grandmother still came to see me.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother offer any explanation as to why your father was no longer there?

ROBERTS: Yes, but he was lazy. That he was lazy and he wasn't workin' and she'd often tell the story and laugh how he had her fooled up all those years. And he never was workin'. And she'd tell friends about it and laugh what John had did.

INTERVIEWER: So she didn't seem bitter about it?

ROBERTS: Well, she said, like she was not an Indian woman and her way of life was not fishin' and huntin'. She didn't intend to work like the tribal women and support the home. She didn't find it very comfortable to do it in that style.

INTERVIEWER: And that's the point at which she asked him to leave, when she realized what was actually going on.

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Recalling your childhood as much as you can, is there any kind of a, or a particular day dream that you had, something that you wanted to do, something that you wanted to become when you became an adult?

ROBERTS: Well, there in Arkansas after the death of my mother I began to learn about other values. My stepgrandfather, Mark Brady, often him then, he described himself as a school master, controlin' of the schools. He had been control of various schools, high schools as a teacher and he often mentioned how important it was that kids should go to school, how important education was and often he would talk about a particular university, in the state of Tennessee, of Fisk University and how wonderful it was and this was his favorite school. However, he had stated that he had went to school in Illinois. Mount Western University or somethin' like that, was the school that he had attended, himself. But, however, he was very fond of the school there in Nashville, Tennessee, and he often would tell tales of the kids goin' to school when he was a school master there and how difficult it was, was sort of bedtime discussions of what it was like and him bein' a son of a slave master, what his childhood was like and after we listened to our stepgrandfather and what his life was like as a slave and he was free

ROBERTS: in his home because the master was his father and he didn't suffer the oppression that the other slaves did. For him, and I think somethin' like four children of his family, they were all the master's children, Mark C. Brady, Sr. And these were his children and Mark went in his father's name, his sister and his three brothers all went in his father's name. And they were sort of their masters, or they were respected as their master's over the other. He said they had something like three hundred and some slaves on that plantation that his father owned. After the death of his father, which he said he was already a teenager, that he really learned somethin' different, a different life. Before they were rich and they had everything and he always, he referred to all the slaves as our slaves and what we had and there was an auction on the plantation after the death of his father. There weren't any relatives and everything was sold and auctioned off and there was money in the will for the children. They did get the money and they left the South and came North and went to college and all that.

INTERVIEWER: Then they came back South?

ROBERTS: Came back as teachers. My grandfather bein' the fair-skinned, mulatto black person with blue eyes, most of the time he did meet someone who really knew them on the streets and he said he spent a lot of time in Memphis, Tennessee. No one really knew that he was a black man. His mother was African descent and I don't remember what tribal Indians, but she was half tribal Indian and half African. Her parents, she said, was native Africans and one of the parents was African and the other was American Indian and Mark came out the complexion of his father and he was allowed to vote. They wasn't aware, he said, that blacks were votin' in the election because he was fair. He would register as Irish descent and they never knew because his father was Irish. And they never knew until later he began to tell. One of the brothers was darker and he had more difficult for what his activity was. Often he'd be cursin' what he was, was he black or white, because he was more of a tanner and not the clear fair skin like Mark was.

INTERVIEWER: So one of your ambitions then was to go to Fisk University?

ROBERTS: Oh, definitely. Definite so.

INTERVIEWER: What did you want to do after you went to Fisk University?

ROBERTS: I wanted to go to Fisk like I'd heard my grandfather mention about school and become a teacher and head a school like he said he did.

INTERVIEWER: A teacher and maybe a principal?

ROBERTS: A principal, yes. He was a school master and for a woman I would have been a principal of the school and because he always told us about his activities as heading up school systems, the black school systems. He finally said he felt he wanted to identify hisself as a black person and often political figures felt he was lyin' that he was not black, that he was really. . . he had difficult time provin' that he was black.

INTERVIEWER: So you were very much interested and favorable to the whole idea of school as a positive thing for you?

ROBERTS: Oh, it was very important to me, most important.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of any particular subjects in school when you did go that you liked?

ROBERTS: Yes, I was very eager to learn at that time arithmetic, and I could really take arithmetic classes with my older sisters and brothers.

INTERVIEWER: Actually, you went to school with them or you learned from them?

ROBERTS. No, there was a school there in Arkansas of a three-month period out of a year that blacks had a three-month schoolin' out of a year and everybody went to the one-room school. There was another school of about six rooms but that was the all-white school and we lived near, my grandmother lived near the all-white school, but then we weren't allowed there. She said we had to go to another school. When she walked us to school finally, when we finally got to school because after over in Arkansas there weren't any schools for a period there and then, finally, when there was or after I came there wasn't any school for awhile.

Then, finally, they did find money in the county there to open up a black school and there was a family there, the Wilsons, who built the school for the blacks, because it seemed the one they had was a house and it wasn't suitable and the courts said that buildin' as a school so there was a school built, and he built the school and a church, also. Now, this was a white person who felt he wanted to do somethin' for the blacks in that area and he had these two buildin's built for them and it was a one-room school with a bell and large playground and kids of all ages and all grades went to the one school.

ROBERTS: But, somehow, it always bothered me to walk that far because that school was not painted. It was natural wood and the other school was painted all being white with nice windows and our school had a door in back and I didn't see any windows in it and I really didn't like that buildin'.

INTERVIEWER: So you were very much aware of the difference between the white school versus the black school?

ROBERTS: Right. It was a terrible lookin' buildin' and the white school that we was past by had a nice playground and the grass was green and up around our buildin' was lots of leaves and often we were warned by the teacher that the snakes in the woods--the school set in the woods and you just go through the woods up on a clearin' where there was two buildin's, the church and the school--and there was always fear in the girls were not allowed to go to the outdoor john alone. The boys had to go in first and check the outside johns because often the teacher was afraid there could be snakes in the john so they would check by the boys before the girls would come in so they wouldn't get bit by snakes and there was a crisis at one period that there was a girl bitten by a snake who used the john outside. And that fear. . . It was the kind of place we like the teacher; we really come to see her but not necessarily the whole surroundin's. It was unpleasant and the kids, they weren't very happy there but what could they do, so they just sort of loved each other.

INTERVIEWER: But that didn't mean you liked school any less?

ROBERTS: Oh, not any less, just didn't want to go to that place.

INTERVIEWER: Just didn't want to go to that particular one. You jumped ahead of me a little here in terms of a couple of questions I want to ask so let's go back a moment. You said one of your favorite subjects was then called rithmetic, like the three r's. Were there any subjects you recall you liked?

ROBERTS: Yes, I liked readin'. I liked readin' very much and often wanted to read but the small children it seemed in that class couldn't have their chance because she'd often be workin', the teacher, with the older children because they were kids that was in like eighth and ninth grade. And the teacher we had, we had heard she was a third or fourth grade teacher and she was busy tryin' to help those children in higher grades, and the low ones, she didn't have very much time to spend with us. And often we would wait and wait a very long period hopin' that she'd finally get around and give us a chance to do some things such as readin' and rithmetic and since I was, she felt, good in it she let me have rithmetic class with the older senior children.

INTERVIEWER: So did you actually learn more arithmetic than reading?

ROBERTS: Yes, because I was faster on that one.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn from the teacher or did you learn from the other pupils that you were with?

ROBERTS: From the pupils and the things, the problems that she placed on the board and I was the sort of child that caught on real fast to whatever she was sayin'. I could understand it in the same form really that everybody else was understandin'.

INTERVIEWER: Is this the only teacher that you can recall?

ROBERTS: Yes, that I had. There was two teachers there. The first one was called Naomi. I didn't go too much under her but the second teacher came. I remember a lot about her, the last teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us a little bit about her?

ROBERTS: Yes, see she was a teacher that for a long period there, what I mean about a long period, maybe a year there was no teacher there because their, Naomi left that area and we didn't have a teacher and there was sort of through the churches and all there were lookin' for a black teacher to teach school in that particular real small country little town in Arkansas.

INTERVIEWER: Were both the teachers black?

ROBERTS: Yes. White teachers were not allowed to teach black kids any way in Arkansas. There was a white lady who wanted to volunteer and she was a school teacher but she was not workin' as a school teacher and she wanted to come up and help and there was somethin' about state law of Arkansas provided her rights to teach even though she wanted to. She even said that she would teach those children who could come to her livin' room so it would not be in the buildin' and, there again, they said she'd bring all the little colored children into the all-white neighborhoods and they didn't think that would be good and everything she tried to do there was someone opposed to it so it didn't happen.

INTERVIEWER: So you ended up with two, especially one black teacher?

ROBERTS: Yeah, we had to wait until finally there was a teacher found. And when that teacher was found, there was only a three-month period that she was goin' to teach there and other times of

ROBERTS: the year there wasn't any money for her that she might make a living because there wasn't anything for anybody else to do that was black--and course we referred to each other as colored and negro at that time--except work in the fields like everybody else and she was a school teacher, she had never really worked in the fields. She came from Carolina and she went to school a lot and she was an educator and she didn't want to pick cotton.

INTERVIEWER: Did she come from South or North Carolina?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Which one?

ROBERTS: I think it was Winston-Salem she was from and there was a lady there who wanted, who asked to visit our teacher and asked to help her and she was related, she was a distant aunt of the original Jesse James, the James family and she had a very large home that was painted white, a three-story buildin' with lots of horses and, the Jameses owned farm land with sharecroppers, owned their farm but not a real large one and she invited our teacher to stay in her home. She said she could have everything she wanted and we called this lady Miss Lela James; everybody known her as Miss Lela James and she was sort of a woman that was a friend to the people.

INTERVIEWER: Did your teacher stay there?

ROBERTS: She finally agreed to come and stay and once she moved in there was a lot of problems with the white neighbors of Miss James.

INTERVIEWER: Because a black woman was living there?

ROBERTS: Right, was living under, somethin' about the state law that blacks couldn't live under the same roof there. They dropped that same kind of law into focus that they did about the teachers and everythin', that the state law would not allow black persons to live under the same roof with whites and Miss Lela James defended her rights. She said it was her home and she'd do what she wanted to do there, only she said she'd do what she damn pleased. It was her home and no one would tell her what to do and she moved her in and they suggested, the neighbors, that she build an upstairs over the barn. She had a stable barn, to build livin' quarters because whites could have livin' quarters for servant help and have the teacher live as a servant. That would be okay; the law would allow that. She said, Miss James said, that she was not a servant

ROBERTS: she was her house guest and that was the problem, the word houseguest, not a servant, but a houseguest. And they wanted then to argue with the court of the cursin' of the title of the person, place them then under servant rather than houseguest. She refused to do that. And her home, Mrs. James, she was a Miss, she was an old maid, she had never been married. Her home was attacked and we felt that it was the Klans attackin' her home because she seen people with white sheets on their face and holes cut in the sheets in front of her door and they had torches and they burned her barn down. It was supposed to be a warning for the house, if she continued to let what they would call the nigger teacher live in the house.

INTERVIEWER: Did the teacher stay anyway?

ROBERTS: The teacher stayed anyway at Miss James's so there was a bullet fired through the front window. She had imported glass all in her front door and a beautiful slate walk up to her walkway so there was a, someone shot in her front window.

INTERVIEWER: Did this scare the teacher away?

ROBERTS: The teacher decided that she was causin' too much trouble and Miss James goin' out in the back where she had to rent a barn for her horses and things. They got the horses out before they burned and she decided that she was causin' too many problems and she slipped away 'cause Miss James didn't want her to go. She lived alone.

INTERVIEWER: And she left the community?

ROBERTS: Yes, she slipped away and went back to Carolina and left a nice note why she left, and how she loved us all and she did return about a year or so later and stayed with a very poor black family and just slept on a pallet. She didn't want to take beds from anybody. And then they claimed in the community that there wasn't any money to pay for two schools, that the county was broke and that there was a famine and was durin' the time that there was a depression and they didn't have any money.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever recall approximately what time this was, yearwise, would you?

ROBERTS: I'm assuming that it was probably in the early thirties. Something like '33, '34, '35, during the Depression period and

ROBERTS: she would go around and do crochet work at our homes and we would, my sister and I, would read the first grade book and she would visit our homes maybe once a week. She was at different ones homes and she tried to help that way.

INTERVIEWER: After the county said there was no money for the two schools?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: She tried to continue to educate you?

ROBERTS: Right. And she would take, she asked us to save our flour was bought in cloth bags rather than paper bags, way you get them now, and persons referred to them as flour sack bags, there was somethin', the material was like linen. You could wash it and bleach it out, it'd be pretty and white, but she would ask us to save those flour sack bags and she would show us how to pull thread through them and make like lunch clothes. Craft, she had us doin' a lot of craft, and to take various things and make things to hang on the walls and then we were doin' crocheting work. We, finally, the kids finally sold walnuts. In our case, we sold black walnuts to families and got enough money to get the crocheting needles and other things. She was helpin' us in craft and things at the home and attemptin' to get everybody at least to learn their ABC's for the younger children and how to tell time on the clock because the children could not tell time and she was tryin' to make sure while she was there before she left was to tell time and persons would take up money around the neighborhoods. We would sell walnuts and give her ten cents a bucket and save the money to give our teacher when she came and she wouldn't want to take it and we'd get upset if she didn't take it, so she'd have to take it to make the kids happy but there again, there was no schoolin'.

INTERVIEWER: Except what she could provide by going from house to house.

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Did she stay very long doing that?

ROBERTS: She stayed around, around two years just helpin' from house to house without pay and went on her own. She would prepare food for herself and on her own without askin' the people for anything, but just to help the kids.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what her name was?

ROBERTS: I've been tryin' to remember her name. I'm not sure her name at the moment but. . . .

INTERVIEWER: She was black. Do you remember anything else about her background? Did she ever tell you where she'd gone to school or how much schooling she'd had?

ROBERTS: Yes, we knew she'd been to college.

INTERVIEWER: North or south?

ROBERTS: Yes, in the South, she said she had attended southern colleges and had to show her certificate to the county officials there before they would let her teach. You had to be a certified teacher. And she was the only teacher that we had ever had who had a degree. Naomi didn't have a degree; she just had four years of college. That was the first teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Four years of college but had not officially graduated?

ROBERTS: No degree. Right, she didn't have a degree.

INTERVIEWER: So this lady did have one.

ROBERTS: Yes, she was a certified teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Certified certificate?

ROBERTS: Yes, and she had, she felt she had so much to offer us.

INTERVIEWER: Was her background similar to what you, what we could say perhaps was the background of most blacks or had she come from free parents?

ROBERTS: She seemed to be more cultured than any of us. She had words that we didn't use, the blacks or whites didn't actually talk like she did.

INTERVIEWER: She seemed more sophisticated?

ROBERTS: Yes, more cultured and a very sophisticated kind of a lady. We were all, the kids were always concerned. She walked different and she acted different than people in that area and it seemed that some of the whites envied her when she'd go down for soda at the drug store on the corner, they called her one of those educated negroes. She's one of them educated, and they'd say things to her but she said she didn't care about none of them; she just wanted to help some kids.

ROBERTS: Her concern was not to deal with the community but tryin' to help the kids. This particular county had been talked about, she had said, through the church that the kids in that area were not gettin' any schoolin' and that it was a poor county and didn't have any money and couldn't pay for two schools and the white school was only six month and my school was three months and my feelin's about the white school, that's when my little friend and I wanted to go there. I felt I should go where my little white friend Frances was. And that's how I got her into trouble. She tried to help me get into that school.

INTERVIEWER: You got Frances into trouble?

ROBERTS: Yes. Her father didn't agree; her mother did, but not her father.

INTERVIEWER: Who was Frances to you?

ROBERTS: Frances and I was the same age and we were even born on the same day and we both were chubby, heavy, kind of little fat girls and we thought we kind of looked alike. We were close together.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet one another?

ROBERTS: Through my grandmother doin' her mother's laundry. She'd go up for the laundry.

INTERVIEWER: You'd go along with your grandmother?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you became friends that way?

ROBERTS: Frances and I became friends. So we'd always play on the day that grandma had to go and get the laundry and we'd get to see each other. And she had a lot of pretty new toys, pretty dresses and she always wanted to show me everything she had and share with me.

INTERVIEWER: So Frances wasn't a classmate, she was a friend?

ROBERTS: We became friends.

INTERVIEWER: Although you tried to become her classmate?

ROBERTS: She wanted me and I wanted to be where she was. She wanted to be where I was. We didn't want to be apart; we always wanted to be together.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't able to do that?

ROBERTS: No, we didn't seem to want to play with anybody else after we met. We wanted just we two. 'Cause the things we did was we'd like the winter there was what we called icicletites hangin' outside the window. We'd both get those and we'd slip out the back and slide on the ice. Everything we did we had fun together. And I didn't have roller skates but she did and if I'd fall, she'd help me and we'd laugh. We had a lot of fun together. And I can remember she was eight years old and I was eight years old.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall for a moment going back to your teacher, whether or not she seemed particularly religious? You did mention the church in connection with her. Did she talk about religion?

ROBERTS: My grandmother?

INTERVIEWER: No, your teacher. This particular teacher that you liked so much.

ROBERTS: She went to church every Sunday. She went to church. She was a Baptist and she attended the Baptist church. The buildin' that was built by the Wilsons, the wealthy white man who died and left two buildings the blacks. He wanted to do this. Everybody wasn't agreeable, agreeing with him about what he wanted to do, but he did it anyway. He built these two buildin's, right next door to each other, on his land.

INTERVIEWER: And that's where your teacher went to church?

ROBERTS: Right. That was the main focus church.

INTERVIEWER: Did she seem to encourage children to go to church? Did she encourage you to be religious?

ROBERTS: No. She never discussed religion. She was not. . . she just went to church.

INTERVIEWER: And you knew that?

ROBERTS: Yes, we all knew because we didn't get to go, but from the other kids, they were there and would see her. And she meant a lot to all of us.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall if there was any difference in attitude with regard to boys and girls going to school? It was obvious you've indicated there's a difference between whites and blacks for education, what about between boys and girls? Was it more desirable, were black boys encouraged to go to school more than black girls?

ROBERTS: Well, in that situation there, most of the blacks lived on the sharecroppin' farms. My family happened to own their own property so we wasn't under the same guidelines for those who lived under white sharecroppin' farms. Those who lived on a white sharecroppin' farm, the owner of the farm decided who went to school and who didn't. And he would tell how long the boys had to be in school and how long the girls would go. He'd let the girls go what appeared longer than the boys. The girls would go three months and the boys would go two months 'cause it was time to start plantin' the fields.

INTERVIEWER: So actually the girls got, within the limitations of educational opportunity, more chance than the boys?

ROBERTS: Right, because there was nothin' the girls could do until time to chop cotton and the boys had to plow up the land and plant the cotton and the corn and once it was already grown up out of the ground then the girls would be ready to start chopping cotton.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a difference between what boys and girls were taught? For example, were you confined to learn things like crocheting versus the boys learning how to read or to do arithmetic?

ROBERTS: Mainly the ones who controlled the farms around there sort of say what they wanted the black kids to do. It was very important that the males learned arithmetic, how to count and figure, because they had to weigh cotton and they had to measure things and they had to sack up like corn and other grains so it was important that they knew how to figure. And girls, figgerin' was okay but they had to learn to read so they could do recipes and was some of the reasons that people, that was important for the girls to learn to read and boys know more and often I have heard the plantation owners say fourth grade was enough because the girls were only goin' to marry each other, the boys and girls were goin' to marry and they was goin' to be farmers, why waste your money, they'd tell the black parents.

INTERVIEWER: So as long as you knew how to do simple arithmetic and you knew how to read that was all that was necessary?

ROBERTS: Yeah, why worry yourself, you know. They'd make examples of other kids who grew up and got married to the boy up the field at the next farm and for the black parents not to be too concerned, because it was sort of a trend that blacks were slippin' away overnight and takin' their kids to northern areas where their kids could go to school and from that area they went up into Illinois to Chicago, not so much into Ohio

ROBERTS: but to Chicago and Kansas, parts of the state of Illinois because they felt school opportunity was in, opportunity was important for their kids. [They left] when the house was empty because otherwise if they left in the day, the boss would say, "You owe me money and you can't go," and they'd be forced to unload the truck, place their things back in the house, and the sheriff would stop you.

INTERVIEWER: Prevent you from leaving?

ROBERTS: Ya. Because you owed money and you was runnin' away from a debt.

INTERVIEWER: This was your contractual agreement as a sharecropper?

ROBERTS: Right and he would try to make friends with you, give you extra things, extra clothing.

INTERVIEWER: To get you to stay?

ROBERTS: Right, do some extra nice things for you.

INTERVIEWER: When all the while saying that education wasn't important?

ROBERTS: No more than fourth or fifth grade.

INTERVIEWER: In that way perhaps trying to discourage you from going North to where you could get an education?

ROBERTS: Yes and then my grandmother not bein' a resident on one of those farms, she used to live on. . . She had her own. . . however, we would go out and work on their farms for pay but we didn't have to go under that kind of a condition that my half-sisters and brothers did because their father Esel was one of the sharecroppers and he always said we should break even and then he would help him to go away even, the boss.

INTERVIEWER: This was your. . . .

ROBERTS: My half-sisters and brothers. This guy, this family, Mr. Ken Nomrin, he owned more land than anybody around there. The James family never oppressed their workers like that. They were different.

INTERVIEWER: They were sharecroppers?

ROBERTS: Yes, they had no more than perhaps six or seven families. They had a small farm but they were nice to their people and they

ROBERTS: would give things, like holidays. They would give things to you and everybody loved the Jameses and felt that he was something like Jesse James; they were rich, too. They helped the poor people.

INTERVIEWER: They robbed the rich to give to the poor?

ROBERTS: Well, they didn't rob. Her prices was very moderate for anybody and she helped black and white. She had black and white sharecroppers on her farm, and she was nice to all the people and her brother run a store and they were very nice to the people and everybody loved the Jameses, everybody, black and white, loved the Jameses. Even American Indians passed through there once--a medicine man--and the people in that area, mainly we felt the Klans, they wanted to kill him and she let him sleep in her barn overnight and protected him so no one could hurt him.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: Continuing with our line of questioning about education, do you recall the nature of the classmates that you went to school with, for example, were they of the same background as you, ethnic, social economic, religious?

ROBERTS: Yes, about the time that I managed to go school I was very late in enrollin' in school. There was a question in that particular area there in Arkansas if my sister and I were ever goin' to get into school, and when I was able to go to school I was probably somethin' like six and a half, seven years old, before I was able to enter school there. Yes, the kids were, we were all farm kids. It was a segregated school, it was a all-black segregated rural-type school and the children who attended that school, the children of the sharecroppers or mainly the black sharecroppers and, of course, a couple of families were so-called home owners such as my grandparents were known to be families who owned their own property sort of looked upon as the more freer blacks who owned their own property, the big shots in a way. They would own land. Everybody else was sharecroppers. However, I had five brothers and sisters in that same class, one-room school.

The majority of all the black kids came from what we called the ridge. It was out on the sharecroppin' farm. It was a farm that the highway went through and there was the little cottages, the little farm shack cottages on each side of the highway there and these kids, the majority of the blacks came

ROBERTS: from that area on the ridge and kids livin' in town like myself, maybe four, five or six families of us, referred to that area as out on the ridge and that's where the majority of the blacks--then we referred to each other as Negroes--lived. And there were the children who attended that school, so I would say we did all have equally the same kind of background.

INTERVIEWER: Except your particular situation where your grandmother and stepgrandfather made you better off than them economically?

ROBERTS: So called economically because we owned property and such as our own home and our own stock, livestock, cows and pigs and all that kind of things.

INTERVIEWER: Nevertheless, you still had, that didn't enable you to achieve any educational benefits?

ROBERTS: Oh no, not at all. Mainly the kids on the ridge who really was sponsored through a family there who owned most of that land, the Normans, these kids really had a better chance in some degree than people like our family who owned property. Things were pretty hard on the blacks who owned somethin'. You were sort of excluded from various things because the boss could get everything and we didn't have that kind of boss. We were independent on our own.

INTERVIEWER: When did you stop going to formal school?

ROBERTS: Well, the time I entered school at the very late date, many of the black kids were in school before myself and my sister since we were sort of newcomers to that area after the death of my parents. I would say perhaps around the age of seven, and there was a period there where there wasn't any school there, maybe a couple of years or so without school and all together with the three months schoolin', ninety days schoolin' for kids and most of us really didn't attend the whole solid ninety days. There was very little schoolin' there in my behalf or my sister's behalf. Black males even got less.

INTERVIEWER: So if you started school when you were about six and a half or seven, and you went for that first three-month period, you weren't able to go again for approximately another two years?

ROBERTS: Another couple of years or so or, I believe that we were out of school. There wasn't a teacher and we were told there wasn't funds to pay your teacher and that sort of thing, so we were there and then we were out and we were there and it

ROBERTS: was a very bad terrible system in that particular county for schoolin' for many of the black kids in that area. Almost no schoolin', you might say, to any degree at all and many blacks found reasons to begin to slip away, they couldn't really volunteer and leave the area. They would have to find ways to slip away at night because they was supposed to owe money to their boss of the sharecroppin' farm and went North and other parts of the country where they could find a better school system for their children. We weren't able to do that then, myself and my sister Elizabeth, on account of my parents owned property then, my grandparents were property owners. It wasn't that easy to leave at all if you owned property as it was for the sharecroppers who really didn't own anything, but just sharin' a livin' in a house who belonged, that home belonged to the farm and everything they had belonged to the farm and the farm was owned by the sharecroppin' bosses.

INTERVIEWER: So if you started back to school when you were approximately nine years old, eight and a half, nine years old, do you remember approximately how long you went to school again when you started up?

ROBERTS: Yes, I returned to school but then there was a personal problem in my family about goin' to school. There was my grandparents, I wasn't able to attend school regular because she needed me mainly to help with the laundry and help with chores around the home there and this again delayed my returning to school. My younger sister, the last two kids of Vinnie that my grandmother, Eller had taken, or rather Elizabeth was able to go more than myself. I sort of really got it because gettin' to school like 12:30 in the day and school was out at four o'clock in the evening and maybe couple days a week and some days I wasn't able to go at all because I had to do the chores around the house. My grandmother did laundry for the families in that particular town there in Oler and I had to help her with families to get their laundry out and get it back to them so we could get paid and earn some money and all of these kinds of delays was a terrible thing and I was terribly dissatisfied because I did want to go to school at the same period that the other children were goin' but then I could not because my grandmother said I could not go and if I got all the work done, maybe I could go in the afternoon sometime and many times I would arrive already after the dinner bell had rung at the school. I would be walkin' in already after one o'clock and maybe quarter to two, walkin' like five miles to school when I finally had a chance to leave my home to arrive at the school which was

ROBERTS: quite a ways away and school was already in session and other classes were available and it was in session for the afternoon and there my class there in kindergarten. Usually she'd help those classes in the mornin', our teacher, and it weren't really any classes for me in the afternoon. I'd just sit around and fall asleep on the bench from bein' so terribly tired after workin' all the morning and helpin' with the laundry and often I had already did a couple of orders of clothes from families and completed them before going to school, so there wasn't very much learning there in my behalf or for me to get.

INTERVIEWER: Can you estimate approximately how many years that kind of situation continued?

ROBERTS: I would say perhaps, right off the top my head, four or five years like that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, you were about thirteen.

ROBERTS: About, I ran away from home about the age of twelve when I decided to leave that place after visitin' of my aunt, and I decided to leave that place and try and find somewhere that I could go to school like the other children and hearin' the girls and my older sister how she wanted to attend school and go to college. I wanted that chance, too, and my chances was not even havin' a chance to even really read like the children.

INTERVIEWER: So you clearly did wish you could have continued?

ROBERTS: Oh, yes, nothin' I wanted more. There was a great desire, too, and there was just no chance.

INTERVIEWER: It was basically the reason why you ran away from home, then?

ROBERTS: Yes, basically the reason of runnin' away to go to school and to get away from my grandmother because she didn't seem to understand that education could be that important to me and she didn't feel it was and the people in the town told her it was not that important, meanin' the white persons of the city when she'd talk about her grand little girls, her granddaughters and often they would, "Oh, Ella, it doesn't matter, you know. You're doin' the best you can and if they reached third or fourth grade, so what; you did a good job." And I wanted more than that. I wanted the same cravin' that my sister, my older sister, Vanilla, had. She wanted to go away to school and I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn to read, to write, to tell time and do all the things that I knew that my little girlfriend, Frances could do.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever attended any other or did you ever become involved in any other kinds of school situations? YMCA, or adult education or union education, union schools?

ROBERTS: Not in that community. There weren't any kinds of those places available and if there were, they wouldn't have been available to us. We couldn't have went to the YMCA or none of those kind of public places. There was no place for the blacks to go except their own little colored school.

INTERVIEWER: What about later on, were there any of those kinds of institutions? Did any of those kinds of institutions enter your life as far as education is concerned?

ROBERTS: Oh, once I was away from Arkansas, growing up later and had already, well I did run into a situation there in the state of Illinois in a town called Peoria, Illinois, and another town called Kewanee, Illinois, that I had friends. This was on my plight of leaving home, running away, that I was offered chances to go to school with families if I wanted to stay with them when they learned that I was a runaway, that I could stay with their families and go to school. But my running away with a musical carnival and had accepted a job on that carnival. I was afraid to leave the carnival and stay with these people who I made friends with in the various towns that the carnival was appearin' in in the various towns. There was offers along the way that, oh you can stay here and often I would meet kids who would introduce me to their parents and black and white kids who would hear my story. I was always very anxious to tell my story to the little boys and girls that I met, that I felt was around my size I wanted to tell them that I had ran away from home and I was on this musical carnival and I had no place to really go and I was afraid that the police might want to take me back and often persons, young girls like myself, would seem to protect me and often they would bring me food out and things like that and I was on this carnival and I was usually helpin' in the kitchen with the chore of feedin' those other persons who were on this musical carnival. They had what they called a black minstrel show and there was a cook house and all where they, the boss of the carnival was responsible for, takin' on the responsibility of feedin' the company, the black company, the musical vaudeville type of show and I wasn't able to do any performin' but the boss would have chorus girls too, on the show to teach me the routine steps and things that I could learn and he said if I learned to dance well enough, he would give me a job on the show but otherwise I worked in the kitchen, settin' the table and washin' the dishes was my job.

INTERVIEWER: When you did attend any of these other kinds of educational institutions as an adult, did they had any kind of a profound impact on your life or on your education?

ROBERTS: Once I managed to begin to go to class, I attended a class in a library and of course that was later in life after I had already met James Roberts and became a girl wife and he had promised to help me get an education if I became his wife. And I did attend a library class in Cleveland, Ohio. What I mean by a library class was a class held in the buildin' of the library; they had an adult readin' class there which James learned about, takin' me into the library and I attended the adult education which I was very proud and over anxious. I just felt I was goin' to learn everything in the books overnight in there. I was really enthused to be in that class and I wanted to go every night and learn and see that all my dreams of education was goin' to come true and I was attendin' these classes even though I had became a mother already and it was difficult until one night somethin' terrible happened.

I was on my way to school and there was a man at the bus stop where I waited for the bus to go to school and school was located on a street called Woodland Avenue in Cleveland, Ohio, and this man asked me not to get on the bus, asked me to come go with him and I ran, attempted to run from him and I felt somethin' in my coat bein' as if it was ripped and I realized my coat had been cut, and I realized he was attemptin' to cut me in my back and I became horrified. After I got to school, I told the teachers what had happened to me and I built up such a fear and I told James about it and I was afraid really to go school any more so there I was out again and I stayed home with the children and more children were born. There were two other children born later and later I began to try enroll in a school called East Technical High Adult Education classes and James would walk me up with the babies in the evenin' and I would have to come home by myself at night. I tried to get over the fear and began to attend those classes two nights a week and that's where I really began to learn more there at the East Technical Adult Education classes at night how to formulate letters and how to get into spellin' and rithmetic and I was very anxious and very enthused to get into more education because this was my goal and somehow James felt the babies were, he couldn't control them very well. He got up and go to work the next morning and he asked me would I stay home with the children, that I couldn't go any more. Then I was out again, I couldn't go again.

INTERVIEWER: But while you were there at East Tech, you found these experiences worthwhile?

ROBERTS: Oh, very exciting, very exciting and I wanted more than anything in the world to continue those classes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember any teachers or any impact a single teacher or single teachers had at East Tech?

ROBERTS: The teachers that I met at East Tech were very nice. It was a beginning reading class that I was in and they seemed to be very anxious to try and help us, those persons like myself in there who wanted to try and get an education and I felt that here I was in the North and in Cleveland, Ohio. It wasn't goin' to be like it was down South. And I would have a chance to do somethin' I always wanted to do, to go, to try and go through school and perhaps I still at the period was still dreamin' about I would go to college and do all those things and I was very interested to try and learn and I felt that teachers were very anxious to help us there and it was quite enjoyable and I was terribly disappointed that I ever married and that I had children. Somehow, the family and all there, I couldn't really go again because there was other problems that I had such as bein' a wife to James and a mother to the three children which interfered and there I was cut off and became fightful and I tried to not even think about it after a while since I couldn't go any more and that sort of thing went on for quite a while and there was not schoolin' perhaps for another six or seven, eight years in married life and even my returnin' back to school was after there was problems in the marriage and James and myself were no longer together and I had children growin' up and yet I felt I couldn't really help them with their homework when the kids were given assignments. I couldn't help them very much because I couldn't read very well myself. From there, I began to leave my children with neighbors and try to go back to East Technical High and enter those classes. Then many of the teachers weren't there any more. There were different teachers but I came in with the determination again to try to improve my education because it had always been a real obsession to me to really get an education because there was things I felt I wanted to do. I couldn't do them because I couldn't read very well and there I tried again and often I would have to come out of school for reasons of the children and I became, was told about a job that after bein' on welfare, I didn't like welfare and I attempted to get employment and I realized by not havin' an education when I went to look for jobs, I was told after fillin' out the

ROBERTS: application I couldn't do very well, that I would, could be hired as a domestic worker and this meant doin' housework and someone told me who was doin' housework that they would help me find some jobs as a maid and there as a maid I was terribly tired and at that particular time I had to take my two smaller children with me and leave the oldest one in school and bring the children home with me in the evenings. Often I was too tired even to get out of the house to try and go to school but there were times I would go and take the children with me in the classroom and they'd go in the back seats and I would set in front. They would set behind me and try to discipline the kids while I attempted to learn in class and often this wouldn't work. The kids would make noise and there was still problems and there was just all sort of interference that I could never really accomplish what I wanted to accomplish. That was a background of education that I could still go on to some things I wanted to do like go on to Fisk University was my long dream, and I was not doin' none of these things. I became very disappointed and I began to feel that no one really knew how much education I had and I was sort of embarrassed to let anyone know and seein' that I was accepted without anyone really knowin' and I just sort of began to sweep it under the rug, you might say, began to hide my true feelin's of not goin' to school and I began to realize no one was goin' to ask anyway and there I huddled this feelin' being frightened or often leavin' out of places because I couldn't read like other persons like such as Sunday school class. I was very shy of ever gettin' into Sunday school class 'cause I was always embarrassed they would know in there I wouldn't be able to read the Sunday school books like the other kids and often I avoided joinin' groups if I felt there was any readin'. There was always this fear that someone would know that I couldn't read and I lived with that through the period of my children growin' up.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think any of these experiences as a child or as an adult contributed to your union activism later?

ROBERTS: My union activism? Do you mean like doin' something about persons that in the labor market and that sort of thing?

INTERVIEWER: Right. Did your lack of early education somehow, did you recall that part of the stimulus for unionizing, moving in the direction of unionization?

ROBERTS: Well, all of those things did contribute to such things as gettin' involved with the labor force but mainly before I got so involved with the labor force, the civil rights movement was more attractive to me and became quite, I became

ROBERTS: quite aware of what persons meant by civil rights but continued to listen to people who was talkin' about civil rights and the meanings of civil rights seemed to mean more to me before I really got involved in activities like labor struggle because the civil rights reminded me of all the terrible things I learned about in the South, why I couldn't go to school, there was a school so near by, my dear friend Frances, why I wasn't able to attend the all-white school that Frances went to, Frances Anderson who attended all-white school because she was white and my awareness of findin' that I was a colored girl and could not attend that particular school. It seemed to contribute, all of those things seemed to contribute to the cause as I learnt about civil rights and I became quite aware of Dr. Martin Luther King and the things that I was listenin' to him in the South as he spoke on radio and all those things seemed to be a part of my life that I had experienced the things he was talkin' about such as Negro children and white children goin' to school gettin' their education. He was deeply concerned about the school desegregation. All of those things seemed to, seemed to be things that I had to get involved with, sort of a shadow of conscience, my old life of past experience meant that maybe there was a chance I could do somethin' about 'em. I wanted to get involved, not knowin' I'd never have a chance to see Dr. King while livin' in Cleveland, Ohio, but I felt it was a part of my fear of not having an education, bein' embarrassed, all the things had happened to me was some of the things seemed I was hearin' Dr. King mentioning and I wanted to do something and hearin' of persons in Cleveland talkin' about civil rights in this particular city such as a group called Freedom Fighters and a gentleman by the call of Louis G. Robinson, things I heard him say and I was not an activist in anything until I began to hear all of these things, not really understandin' all of these things but listenin' and becoming aware of the things they talked about and attended to, attempted to go out and find the meetings, the addresses that was given on the radio and came into these meetin's to listen to them because maybe this was some of my conditions and maybe there was somethin' that I could do in behalf of those persons who was trapped like me. Such as education, segregation, and I felt if I could have went to the school, attended the school that Frances attended maybe I wouldn't have had all this embarrassment in life that I experienced. And there I was with a picket sign for the first time and not really knowin' that meanin' of even carrying a picket sign. I had a sign that someone gave me in my hands "Down with Segregation" talkin' about, some of the signs was talkin' "Discrimination in Employment". I wasn't too aware not even bein' able to read

ROBERTS: the signs that I seen. I could read some of the signs but not all of the signs, but it seemed to be whatever they were sayin', they was sayin' things that I had experienced and I wanted to be a part of them and was willin' to even sacrifice, persons talked about the danger, that one could get terribly injured, the nonviolent way of, not fighting back but the same meanings would be the same, better schools, all kids gettin' their right of a fair education, not sayin' that it would affect me but I wanted to fight for other little boys and girls who had experienced the same thing I had experienced as a child. And if it meant me carryin' a picket sign, if it also meant that I could get injured or die, I didn't think it meant much difference because I had already mentally, or I was dead. I couldn't read; I was sort of trapped in society; the best I could do was to help someone else.

INTERVIEWER: If you'd let me, I'd like to try and summarize what I think you said in that you didn't go directly into organizing the Domestic Workers as a direct result of your lack of education but by hearing about civil rights activities, that made you, should we say, unsweep your fear about lack of education from under the rug and make you recall a lot of those experiences and from that direction, the civil rights direction, you became aware and saw this as an avenue for making possible, or increasing the possibility of people in the future, black people in the future to achieve the education you didn't have. Would that be correct?

ROBERTS: Yes. I have to say that what really involved me in getting into the labor market and lookin' at persons who were involved in employment, low employment and that those persons, okay, even though I had got involved in the struggle, I had been, I had taken a job which was a domestic job and I wasn't aware that persons looked upon household employment as dumb people or people who didn't get an education, that there was somethin' wrong with us, why we were doin' housework and hearin' other persons saying I don't do it, I used to do it, I don't do it anymore, before I went back to school and learned to do other things there seemed to be somethin' wrong, my doing housework. I accepted the job, as I said. It was the only kind of job they would have for me after I filled out an application for employment. It seemed that I didn't go very far in school and I would write down the fourth grade education and it didn't mean very much to people and they'd tell me about housework but then realizing that I was a person who did housework because it was supposed to be done, something the employers attitudes I had towards those persons

ROBERTS: who was like myself as a cleanin' person. The work "girl", "gal", "you seem to be a pretty good gal" and it seemed that wealthy families, we had to hang our clothes in the basement and all that sort of thing. There was something, I realized more and more, that there was something wrong with me, what was I? Why was I treated like this? And often it was very natural to give us the old clothes. I was very proud to get the things because really I needed things. They helped me with the children. Then, there again, it seemed that they were givin' me these clothes not on the same basis I was acceptin' them, that it was something that they would mention--the maid before, the gal that worked before, she used to take all of our old clothes, this is a box where I'm going to save the clothes, all of our old clothes for you. You can come here and get them out of this box. It sounded like a good deal but then there was something about the whole thing and as long as I learned, the more that I learned about household workers that we was sort of really the dumb minority persons who didn't know very much; wages were unimportant to the employers, anything, five dollars or whatever, there was no set wages. The old food, there was nothin' unusual about left over food given to us.

The biggest shock I had was when I was working in a home in Cleveland, Ohio, and the lady was always so nice, I felt. When I would get to her home in the morning and began to clean her home, there was always a place on the table with a small glass of milk a settin' by the plate and immediately she was ready to pour the soup or oatmeal or whatever and prepare my breakfast and she was always one that smiles and very happy and one day she explained, one morning she said, "You know", she said, "that glass of milk that you get every morning. . ." She told me about her kid only takes a couple of sips out of it, that she can't get him to drink milk and I began to look at the glass, that someone had drank out of the glass of milk before I had and okay, a couple of sips out of it were left for me every day and I got real sick over that she didn't tell me before and I was drinkin' what you call left over milk from her kid. He had drink out of the glass and the glass was left for me and just a clean plate on the table and I had to drink the left over milk. It made me sick, it was something I never forgot. All of that I began to realize something I had never realized before, that hey, I wasn't very much of anything, drinkin' left over milk, piece of steak that my husband had last night and he couldn't eat all, he saved it for you. Don' worry, we cut off the part where he was eatin'. He could never eat it all, and it had been sliced off and warmed over from the supper before and the very idea

ROBERTS: to tell me that meat was on her husband's plate made me sick. I began to think he could have coughed on it and all sorts of things went through, but I didn't dare tell her because she could tell me not to come back any more and I needed the money so I couldn't dare tell her but it made me sick and to talk to other workers and I would tell them about my experiences and they would tell me about theirs.

All these kinds of things I began to get really upset. Another employer that I got to know through seekin' for more employment as a household worker. The lady hired me. She told me to open my mouth and I opened my mouth and she looked at my teeth. She said any girl that brushes her teeth with a mouth this clean and pretty clean teeth was a pretty clean gal 'cause I don't like dirty help in the house, so she says her way was checkin' our mouths. If my teeth was fresh and brushed, then she felt I really cleaned myself up to come to work and on those basis she hired me and I was told where to hang my clothes, what bathroom I would use, not the regular bathroom but there was a back room that was the bathroom, that would be the bathroom for myself and there was other household employees in the house, all black, we were all told to use that bathroom, and to never use the family bathroom. Or silverware. She said her deceased mother's silverware, with a design of a bunch grapes, was the silverware we had to use. All these things began, I began to look at what I was doing, what others were doing and I got pretty upset over the whole thing. I've somehow always been concerned about what happens to me and to others and I began to think by noticing or on the radio listenin' to strikes and persons talkin' about agreements. All of these things that Dr. King I had heard mention and this Louis Robinson and other persons in civil rights, I began to think a new way, new ideas and many things I felt ought to be said, maybe I began to say things.

I wasn't afraid to talk out, you know, and I would tell workers why don't we organize and maybe get us a union, do something, why should we let them treat us like this? And there was my beginning. And other workers said, "Well, Geraldine, why don't you do it?" And I said, "Well, why don't you do it?" "Well, we can't do it. Why don't you do it?" And it went like that. I talked to some persons in the civil rights movement, members of the Cleveland CORE Chapter, members of the NAACP and just people, black and white persons. I told them how I felt and everybody said well, maybe you're the one to do it and persons kept sayin' that when finally there was a meeting and the Cleveland CORE Chapter ran off the literature that they felt that we wanted to do, the things I said, they'd take notes

ROBERTS: on them and get the flyers, hand leaflets and pass them out. There was a meeting; there was twenty-one at and all the testimonies of things. Mine was terrible and theirs was even worse and there we felt everybody wanted to continue to do something and all at once I was being called Miss Roberts, Miss Roberts, rather than Geraldine and persons was talkin' to me that had never talked to me before. We would be talking to persons like Mr. Robinson that was the head of the Freedom Fighters, persons such as the newspaper people wanted to talk to Miss Roberts and I had to get used to being called Miss Roberts and I mentioned that our employers never called us "Miss", by our last names, we was always known as just whatever our names, Mary, Geraldine, Annie, Suzie, whatever. I began to talk about the milk and the things that other women talked about things happened to them and they always was in the daily papers and people said why don't you get a union up? I got calls from such places as the Wall Street Journal and a local office in Cleveland called and talkin' about things that we ought to do, how we felt about things and here I was involved in a whole big issue and my picture in the paper and all this was kind of frightening. I had a fear after I got into it. I seemed like I wanted to run from the whole thing. I felt how could I do all this when I couldn't even read very well and there was the one problem again, the education. I couldn't really do a lot of things that I wanted to do because I didn't have enough formal education to help myself and there I realized I was going to have to go back to school again and began to learn ways and means that I could help the domestic workers, the things I needed to do and I got back in night school all over again at East Tech.

INTERVIEWER: About when was this?

ROBERTS: This was around the period of 1965. Sixty-four to Sixty-five. In Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio, here.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to stay in longer this time when you went back in 1965?

ROBERTS: Yes, I went back and all at once I seen in the papers someone even had the rumor, a classroom that I was attending was at East Tech that I was there and I'd see persons lookin' through the window of the room I was in and wavin' at me and persons said, "Well, you know you're a popular person now. You're a special kind of person now. You're doin' something for domestic workers." And it wasn't the idea about bein' special, just I felt that a lot of terrible things happening to me and some people like myself and that we wanted to do something about it and we were talking amongst ourselves, you

ROBERTS: realize I was on the six o'clock news and I was on national hook up. Persons called me all the way from Hollywood, Florida. Employers that I had worked for tellin' me that they had just saw me on television in Florida in their hometown and there was a call from London, England, from a young lady who I knew here in the civil rights movement who was goin' to school in England, in Oxford, she said, "Geraldine, I just seen you on Telestar," and wow, all these things were happening. I began to smile a little bit and, all of this, we got kind of excited and began to smile. My kids were all happy seein' that their mother was on television.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: Last time we were talking about your experiences in that Shaker Heights penthouse and you were talking about Lena and Letha and yourself and then the new domestic that came. Did you actually become personal friends with these women?

ROBERTS: Yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER: Did you socialize with them outside of work?

ROBERTS: With the new lady that joined the group there, the union employee that our employer hired, we did become very good friends. Not that well with Lether or even Lener but this third domestic worker that was employed there, I got to know her children and she was just from the South and she was a very friendly person and wanted to make friends in Cleveland and she began to call me and tell me about her family and her daughters and her sons and their names and all that sort of thing. She was a Mrs. Scott who came to Cleveland from Alabama from a large family, maybe eight or ten kids.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall what eventually happened to her?

ROBERTS: It seemed to me that she wasn't feeling good and soon her children called me and told me that she was in the hospital and I went to see her in the hospital and she said she worked so hard on that job until she really got sick out there. This was after I was no longer employed and she said she was just over worked and so tired and she'd even stay home and this employer would call her to come back to work because she needed her and she'd leave home when she said she still wasn't feelin' good and she mentioned that she went to, out to vote early one morning, her and one of her son-in-laws and she'd taken very ill and he had to rush her to emergency and that's why she was in the hospital at that time. Of course, maybe two or three days later, something like that, after my visit at the hospital to see her, to all of our surprise, she died.

INTERVIEWER: What did she die of, do you know?

ROBERTS: It seemed exhaustion, high blood pressure, and low resistance. She just didn't seem to have anything to live on.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you stop working at this particular penthouse in Shaker Heights?

ROBERTS: Well, I didn't necessarily stop working there. It seemed that the employer wanted me no longer around there. She preferred that I was, that she didn't employ me any more after my change about talkin' about organizin' domestics and speakin' out in the newspaper about workin' conditions and all like that. Soon after, I was let go. The employer didn't tell me herself but the other ladies there said that she would rather not have someone around who was saying all those things about employers in the paper. She felt that we were pretty well off there at her place, that she felt she fed us and we had an air-conditioned home to work in, the place to work was nice and air-conditioned and well, she was good to us and she couldn't quite understand the kind of things that Geraldine was out saying about employers and she wasn't really sure what I was talking about her home or not. So I was fired by one of the workers calling me in and telling me that the employer said not to come back.

INTERVIEWER: That was after the various other times where she'd fired you and then asked you to come back?

ROBERTS: Ya, this time she never asked me to return.

INTERVIEWER: What was in your mind if you recall, the worst thing about that particular job?

ROBERTS: Oh my, there was several things I felt was real terrible. Number one, I found in my opinion the employer not a very comfortable person to be around but she seemed to have a real strict way about her that she was more like--I never knew really what a mistress was like over their slaves but I got kind of an opinion that she was like a white mistress or something over black workers. She seemed like a mistress. Like a master. She was a woman, so what do you call her? The mistress of the slave home. We felt prison-like there. The restrictions are you couldn't use the telephone unlessin' you was, it had to be an extreme emergency and then it still wasn't too pleasant about you usin' the phone. You certainly couldn't stay on very long. The old food that was re-given to the workers, the hard work in the house which was really we felt unnecessary

ROBERTS: work; you were actually polishing and goin' over things in the home that really was unnecessary to do. Her restriction of not talking to each other in the home--the workers could not sit down and communicate even at the lunch period; we couldn't do very much talkin'. The intercom system in the house was over there and any sounds of what we did. I felt it an unusual and terrible place to work. I couldn't imagine what it must have been like in construction days when persons really had tough masters. It couldn't have been much different except maybe gettin' hit and then we weren't sure there for a while that she wasn't really wantin' to hit the cook there one day. There was sort of an attitude that we felt that she was a very violent lady towards this cook. That I myself wanted to defend the cook if necessary; we were going to push her off of Lena if she did hurt her or attempted to hit her and it was a terrible place. I never had that experience before of workin' in any home of that sort with that kind of an employer, a very unusual place. There were several bad experiences, unpleasant experiences, you could say, that myself and Lena and Letha and then finally Miss Scott had in that home. It was a very unpleasant place. God forbid those kinds of work sites that any domestic worker would have to work in and maybe, maybe it's good that I had the experience because I think out of that very home grew the idea, a very strong idea to do something about workin' conditions for household employees. I think it inspired the whole idea out of that particular penthouse that somethin' had to be did and I began to talk to the persons that seemed to be involved in community problems about domestic workers and to expose some of the things that went on there. Persons said, "Well, why don't you girls get together and get your union and do somethin' about your workin' conditions. Nobody can do it better than you and why don't you do it, Geraldine?" I think really DWA* grew out of the conditions and attitudes of that particular employer here in Cleveland, which brought about the great change all over the country from anything that I advocated, from this town and from other domestic workers of this area, really came out of that particular penthouse.

INTERVIEWER: Did you plan for or did you have any idea about a future employment at that point, after you were fired?

ROBERTS: Well, yes, when I learned that I was not going to be able to return to that job site again, I began to wonder where was I going to work. Well, my main concern I was let go right during the period where I should have been paying my apartment and I didn't have the money and I wasn't sure what I was goin' to do. I was a little frightened of not bein' able to

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*Domestic Workers of America

ROBERTS: pay my rent but then, nevertheless, I began to tell other women what happened to me and I said maybe everybody's goin' to have to pay, help me pay my rent, then I can continue because she no longer wants me to come back there any more and it even got into the papers, or to some of the new reporters about I didn't have a job, that Geraldine Roberts who's organizing Domestic Workers, at that particular time DWA really didn't have a name. It was just Domestic Workers as a group meeting together and that I had been fired and I was not longer employed and I had a particular employer, a particular potential employer call me and wanted to know did I want a job and I said yes.

INTERVIEWER: So that's how you got your next job?

ROBERTS: The second she said, "Well, by God, you can work for me because I was involved in organizing the nurses." She was a nurse, a surgical nurse, and she said that she had all sorts of problems many years ago when the nurses began to organize themselves so she supported the Domestic Workers being organized and she said I certainly could come and work in her home and for me to name my own price because we certainly had a right to better wages and better workin' conditions and it was just the opposite to what was going on there, a strong woman who was willin' to hire me, that want me like that. I only had that one call. She really wanted to hire me. Other places there was two days a week at that home and I did seek a third day that I would have like to have and a couple of places I went and they said, "All right, are you the Geraldine that's been in the papers, are you that woman?" I sort of inherited the name of "that woman". "Well, we'd rather not have you here. My husband says that he'd rather not have you; he's read about you," and there was usually a very unpleasant look on their faces without any smiles and a look that they didn't like me around there. There was something wrong with me, with my attitude about household workers.

Someone said I was doing a bad thing because they should let it stay like it is. The domestics didn't have to pay any income tax and that I was going to get the rest of the girls in a lot of trouble with what I was advocatin' and many employers condemned what I was doing. I was, there was some retaliation in the papers from suburban groups that had things to say concerning the domestic workers being organized in the Greater Cleveland area. Some said we were lazy, that we went to work lookin' tired of all, and that some of us would steal and that some needed a bath and there were just all sorts of remarks concerning domestic workers. Some said they wouldn't hire

ROBERTS: colored ones anyway and are there any white domestic workers in the Greater Cleveland area. There were just all sorts of things. There was calls like on my phone two o'clock in the morning, "Hey, nigger, why don't you get out of town. We don't need your kind around here. I've seen the time that we would derail you out of the city," and when she said derail I seen what she meant. By coming from the South that was their style of kicking any person out of town that the town people didn't want, not necessarily blacks but ones that had been condemned by the community. They was somethin' like a raft built and they would take the person, certain citizens to the borderline of the town and dump you off the raft and you were told to not come back to that city any more and they would carry the person. You didn't have to walk out. They would carry you; dump you at the city limits. That's what they meant by derailing you out of the city and I never knew about it any other place besides the South but it was a style of a bad politician or a person they felt. . . I can remember one situation: in the particular town where I was growin' up, there was a young lady that the ladies of the town felt she was, they looked upon her as a prostitute and was havin' affairs with their husbands, so she was, they taken her by force and she was thrown on this rails with her hands tied behind her and she was taken to the city border and kicked out of the town and can never return to that town again.

INTERVIEWER: An interesting question occured to me while you were talking about these women saying, my husband has read about you and therefore, so forth and so on, did it ever occur to you that maybe, did you ever wonder if maybe it wasn't the husband and it was, in fact, the woman herself?

ROBERTS: At the beginning, I began to 'lieve that it was their husbands. I had no other reasons but to believe that this is what their husbands said that they didn't want me around. They were opposed to activities and was I tryin' to build a union. I sort of assumed since the families were suburban families and many very wealthy families that perhaps the husbands was the bosses of companies and perhaps was anti-union and would rather not certainly have union workers in his home and perhaps could have had union workers at their businesses and maybe that was the reason they were opposed with the idea of a union because the media advocated very strongly of a domestic union seemed to be growing in the Cleveland area, that Geraldine Roberts was speakin' of organizin', unionizing the women and it was sort of a shock, a fear or somethin' that seemed that suburbans did not want in this particular area, was household workers being unionized. And I sort of assumed, not actually knowin' real reasons, I

ROBERTS: began to wonder why couldn't she make this decision herself about a household worker usually a female all the time, couldn't she decide whether she wanted me to work there or not. Why did it have to be her husband? I never was ever hired by the husbands. I was always hired by the wives, so why all was the sudden feeling that she had to abide by her husband's rules that that particular domestic worker should not be at his home and I began to wonder was all these things true? Were they, the wives, themselves gettin', gettin' rid of me and began to stop my activities so the other workers would not follow me and get involved with me. They were domestic workers who told me that their employers said, "Well, if you go and get involved with that Miss Roberts, don't come back here any more. We don't want you around here if you get involved with Miss Roberts." And many began to change from "that woman" and give me a title since I had mentioned that domestics were never called by their last names and very few employers ever even knew their domestics' last name and we began to somehow refer to me as "that Miss Roberts" and many of the workers accordin' to the employers, [said] "Well, my girl doesn't want to be called by her last name." There again, often I attacked the employer on the attitude of callin' her girl, was she twelve, or was she ten, or was she twenty-one or is she fifty or you called her a girl. So they said, "Well, I call my best girlfriends, I call them girls." I said, "Well, she's not your best girlfriend. She's your employee," and they really got uptight about that idear and called domestics by their last names, as Mrs. or Miss or whatever and give them a respective title. And also the different chores. They did not have her bein' a secretary in the house or bein' counselor to the employer that she could crowd on her domestic workers shoulder and pour out all her problems and get all her things off concerning her husband or whoever and then expect that same domestic worker to fill the same amount of duties within the same period of time and with no extra pay. So I began to say that domestic workers was a secretary and she was a counselor and many other professions when she was told she had no profession, that she was a non-professional. And I had said that she was a professional, that they could look upon themselves as a professional worker; they could look upon themselves as counselors and I didn't find myself as a counselor and a secretary and anything that around the house that had to be did, I could do that as well as other chores. So I considered myself as a professional and I said, other domestics, look upon yourselves as professional technicians.

INTERVIEWER: Have you stopped working since you began?

ROBERTS: Yes, I did stop workin' for a period there. I went into the office through the Counsel for Economic Opportunities into the Domestic Workers Placement Office, information and other kinds of services that through opening up an office we were doin' and I was chosen by an executive board of DWA to run the office. And for eighteen months, I did run the office as the director of the office. And I worked no more than one or two days a week out of the office.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mean in domestic work?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Housecleaning?

ROBERTS: Yes, one or two days a week and other times I was director of the office. And worked in behalf of the women out in the field and community work and particularly with employers that I was working for were more friends of mine. If I had something to do I didn't have to come. If there was a busy day, I could just come whenever I had time to come. They didn't care. They were very liberal towards my cause.

INTERVIEWER: So they were sympathetic to the cause of DWA?

ROBERTS: Yes, and they were supporters of union activities.

INTERVIEWER: What did you usually do when you were a domestic and even when you ran the domestic worker's office when you came home from work? What responsibilities did you have there?

ROBERTS: Well, what did I do as a domestic? I scrubbed floors on my hands and knees. I washed walls and everything.

INTERVIEWER: No, when you came home after you were through.

ROBERTS: Well, at the end of a day during the period of my children growin' up, there was the kids to pick up from the baby sitter; there was meals to be planned, some mornings leavin' out of the house so very early, I didn't have time to make the beds. Usually, even though I was already in unions. I was still goin' in to make the beds because the children would be around the house prepare dinner for the children, do laundry and plan a day for the followin' day by, in many cases, stayin' up in the middle of the night ironing and gettin' necessary things did around the children that was goin' to school every day, mainly during school periods and prepare the dinner for the next day and storin' it away in the refrigerator so they could

ROBERTS: have lunch when the babysitter would bring them in and feed them. So I'd have like a half a night at home and usually on the job by at least nine o'clock the next morning and the full at that particular time until I called a halt to an eight-hour day, domestics worked eight hours and sometimes over.

INTERVIEWER: So you really had in a half evening to do all your responsibilities?

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Of raising your family?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have a job where it was possible for you to advance from one type of domestic work to another type of domestic work, where perhaps you could move from one type of work that might be more interesting to another?

ROBERTS: That, relating to myself or any domestic worker, is one of the unfairness, one of the unfair things about being a domestic worker. There isn't any advancement. For thirty years a domestic worker's still the same cook in the kitchen. For thirty years she's still the same lady who runs the vacuum cleaner and for thirty years she's the same laundry woman. The first chore she had upon acceptin' that job thirty years before usually is her same task thirty years later and, in most cases, not very much advancement in pay, no promotions, no scholarships offered, no fringe benefits. Thirty years of hard labor and in some cases even longer, nothin' but told to go home and the employers have said they have paid into Social Security in behalf of their household employees and many cases through the Social Security Department domestic workers have learned that no one has really paid in Social Security on them. That their checks were going to be very low because they haven't really paid any Social Security from their jobs since the period of Social Security becoming effective for law in the forties. And this is one of the terrible things, even now, there isn't any advancement here. There's nowhere to go but do the general cleaning there or if you want to call something better then maybe the children when they're all grown up out of the house or something like that, there's maybe not heads to comb, there's not children to feed at twelve noon, so usually there's a break there. There's some less things to do when the employer's family have grown up out of the home and maybe they can get off a couple of hours earlier but real advancement, bringing in educational wise or any grants given and many cases these

ROBERTS: are executive employers, what I mean by executive, they are executives of companies and businesses, could offer a lot and, in many cases, the domestic worker could have been written up as an employee of the company and could have received some fringe benefits of that company that other workers were receivin' from that employer or workers in his shop or a company business. But the household worker in many cases were not included as one of the shop workers or one of the company workers or if it's a bank president, having her down as one of the employees from the bank that working one day a week there, but include her. There are isolated cases where employers have did that for them but somehow the domestic worker has been the kind of worker that has been overlooked and ignored--what I refer as a invisible worker. No one really sees that worker in the labor market and whatever benefits other workers are thinking of or attemptin' to get or are gettin', the domestic worker has not been included in any kind of style of a better way of life for her until the late years of here organizin' her in the sixties.

INTERVIEWER: So I think we might say since you were treated something like an old horse, when you got too old, you were told to go out to pasture, that was it.

ROBERTS: Right. Just the common old thing that you threw out the back door when you didn't want to use her. And this has been a fact. Many domestics has been told over the telephone that, "Mary, you're tired and you're not feeling good. Why don't you stay home and rest," with no preparations to help her rest. For Mary to rest and just an anonymous name, Mary not meanin' any particular one, but usually called by their first name, you know, "Geraldine, stay home and rest because you're old now or you're not feelin' good so what we did was set up a benefit for you." We're not goin' to hear that in most cases. That you're going to get a pension from our company. We're not going to hear that or that we're going to give you so much money per year and we're going to pay all your benefits, your medical expenses for you. We're not going to hear that one in most cases. I have the privilege at one particular home that I received medical care from a family, Mrs. Sally Godfrey. She was married to Larry Godfrey of the Godfrey Corporation. Sally would make appointments with her doctor and ask if I needed medical care or whatever my medical expense was was put on the tab and the Godfrey's paid my medical expense, which was very nice. It was absolutely incredible that this was not being carried out with other employers. I never had that coverage again to have that happen to me. If I was ill or whatever,

ROBERTS: it was to my own expense I'd go to a clinic or something, but Mrs. Godfrey did pay for my medical expense which was a nice thing and should be the kind of attitude any employer ought to have towards their domestic worker because a domestic worker just happens to be a human being and a domestic worker happens to be a citizen who votes and happens to do all of the things normally that other citizens do as so-called law-abiding citizens and there is that discrimination against household workers in the field of employment almost everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: In all the experiences you've had as a household domestic, in hotel work, maintenance and so forth, what would you consider to be the best place you ever worked?

ROBERTS: One of the best that I would consider that I ever worked was Sally, she was a Sally Schaeffer, in her mother's home, Mrs. Schaeffer's home. Ollie Schaeffer, I felt, was a fantastic person to know, to be around. She was helpful to me. She knew that I had small children and that my husband and I were not on, were not livin' together and that I had very serious financial problems and Mrs. Ollie Schaeffer, the late Mrs. Ollie Schaeffer, was most kind in helpin' me financially. She didn't shop for me but she was always willing to give extra money, not just a couple of dollars but and many times very large bills like maybe twenty-five, thirty dollars or even more to go out and do things for my children such as find clothing or shoes or necessary things that I was having a difficult time with and she paid me well. At that particular time, it was nothing unusual for her to give me twenty-five dollars then and this is in the fifties that all this, that I was employed with her and under those circumstances. I actually made as much money as women here in the seventies since we got organized. Mrs. Schaeffer was very kind to me and I sort of began to depend upon her. She was really a counselor to me. Her profession was a nurse before the marriage of her and Mr. Schaeffer and her experience, she told me that she had one uniform that she had to rinse out at night and prepare for work the next day as a nurse in the hospital when she met her husband; that she was out of school from a small town down in Ohio and didn't have very much and was classed a poor person and was workin' very hard to try and earn a living as a nurse. She met her husband as a patient and they started out in business with hardly anything, so she understood, there was a sense of understanding, that was not so in any other cases. And she was very kind to me and I shall always miss her and I shall always admire her.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like to work in her house?

ROBERTS: It was absolutely wonderful. I was on my own. She never pushed me around; she never ordered me around. She had a very gorgeous, beautiful home. It was a very expensive place, her husband being in the financial loaning business, money was no problem there. If, she'd even give me permission to bring my children out if I wanted and she would be away in Florida during the winter months. I got a key for the home and if I wanted to bring my children out for the weekend for rest out there, whatever, turn the television on, it was just like our home and often my children, I would bring my daughters and my son out with me on a Saturday I used to go and water the flowers. My check was always mailed to me and her son, James, would always see that I got my money and if there was any messages I could tell, leave the message with her son, James Schaeffer, which we called him Jim, and I never had to, she never introduced her sons as Mr., she'd just by their first names, "Geraldine, this is Jim, this is James," and it was a very casual thing in the house, very comfortable and very human-like.

INTERVIEWER: What was the worst job you ever had?

ROBERTS: One of the worst is back at the first home, the home I mentioned in the penthouse apartment. It was absolutely unbelievable.

INTERVIEWER: It would be the worst?

ROBERTS: One of the worst. I worked in homes where, I have worked in places where the family was poor and it was absolutely necessary, a need to, cases where the employer was ill, there was sickness in the home and the employer had to have some things did and was not able to do them themselves and I have worked places where I didn't even get paid because in some cases maybe she'd pay a couple times and there was a case where a husband walked off and never came back and she couldn't pay me. She didn't have any money. And, in fact, I've even went out and spent my money and bought food to help a home when she couldn't pay me and yet I even was willing whatever I could do to help her. There were homes that I have worked like on a temporary basis. There was one place I was employed for six weeks there, here since we organized, and it was a very expensive home in Beechwood, Ohio, one of the most wealthy neighborhoods in the country, and this was a practically new home. These people were very concerned about how much money I wanted to be paid and I said, "Twenty-five dollars a day." I had really to kind of watch my time on the clock around there because I seen the

ROBERTS: clock was one time would say one time and another seemed to have another time and I wasn't sure if they were trying to cheat me on my time and I had to really watch the time that I was getting off and seeing to get out of the house. It seemed like she left a half-hour ago and it was a half hour later. The clocks said something else. And that particular situation, six weeks the house really had been gone over very well with very, a very large rooms and the house was pretty well organized, so I was told that I should shine the chandelier, polish up the chandelier and clean the very huge chandelier that hung in the foyer and go outside and do windows on the outside. And I refused to do it and immediately from nine in the morning 'til around noon, I was told to get out of the house and I was thrown ten dollars that I wouldn't accept because I said that that was not my pay, that I had worked there six weeks before, they had been pleased with my work, and I was asked what I wanted, asked to do the chandeliers, I was not asked since the first time beginning there of doing any particular thing, my routine was accepted and this particular morning she had asked me to do the chandeliers and I had refused, she had asked me to do windows on the outside and I said I would not do windows on the outside and I said I had a right to say that because I was like a self-employee and if I didn't want to do windows on the outside or do that chandelier I didn't think I had to and furthermore, she had engaged me for the whole day and I wanted my whole twenty-five dollars, not ten dollars. They refused to pay any more than ten dollars. She goed to the basement, where her husband's working in the basement. They had their own private drapery business in their home, and gets her husband, brings her husband back on me and I says, "Oh, you mean to tell me you had to get a big strong man for a lady, when you and I were havin' a discussion concerning my job here and you weren't woman enough to talk woman-to-woman to another woman but you got to get this strong big man to throw this female out of your home, because you're not woman enough to talk to me and to talk to an employee that you employed?" And she got terribly upset and I said, "Well, this is the problem of weak suburban women like you, going to get your big, bad husband," and I sort of made a little mockery of her attitude and her calling her big strong husband on me. She became terribly upset and her husband told me to get out, get out now and I said, "Why don't you call the police and have me put out; maybe they'll help me get my money." He said he was going to call my office and report down there to DWA office how one of their employees was carrying on in their home, that I was acting all hysterical and they didn't understand me and they were going to call Mr. Burton, which was

ROBERTS: my assistant to talk to me to see if he could get me to leave this home. Leave their home. And I said, "No, don't call the DWA office, call the police. If I'm being out of order in your house, then you call your police out here and tell them to throw me out." They refused to call the police. He still handed me the ten dollars that I wouldn't take the money, pushed it towards my bosom and the money fell on the floor and I wouldn't pick it up and the money laid on the floor and I changed my clothes and I said, "Weak housewives who employ women to clean their house up really employ slaves to clean up their house and then call their big bully husbands to throw the women out," and I said all kinds of things like that and he said, "You're going to cause my wife to be sick. Shut up; leave her alone. My wife is already ill; I don't need any more problems with her." And I said, "Well, you're good and strong, what are you going to do with me? Are you going to really throw me out?" He says, "No, you're going to walk out. You're going to leave out of here." I said, "What if I don't go, you going to call the police? Why don't you call the police?" He refused to call the police. So I said, "Well, I haven't been paid." So I decided to cry real loud on that beautiful quiet street, gorgeous homes, gorgeous lawns, and no one around except some very tiny little children playing around their front. So I cryed real loud in the street and I stopped the mailman; I pointed back at their house and I said they didn't pay me. I cleaned their house up for six weeks, I'm being thrown out on my head and I haven't gotten paid and her big tough husband is standing back there in the door and she called the mailman and I told everybody on the street, I told them, guess what happened at that house, and I made a scene all the way to the bus stop and I had to--they usually drive me up--I had to walk like a mile or so to the bus. They refused to take me to the bus stop and I haven't been paid. I give them a whole half day's work, and I told the bus driver I rode and I was very upset and I called myself a slave. I says, "This the way you do." She says, "Listen here; I don't only throw out black girls. I thrown out white girls, too. You're not the first one I threw out of my house." She says, "It's not because you're black body; we don't have that racial stuff in here. If you don't do what we tell you to do then you get the hell out of here."

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get paid?

ROBERTS: No, never. 'Til this day I haven't got paid. They called the office and we sent her a letter and everything and he said, "We'll never pay her," he says. "It cost me sixty dollars

ROBERTS: medical, I had to take my wife to the doctor after that woman left here. My wife was sick for two days. I don't want to see her again and I'll never pay her." Those were some of the unusual experiences.

INTERVIEWER: They're some unusual ones, all right. Do you think any of your work experiences in you life as a domestic would have been different if you had been a man?

ROBERTS: Perhaps so. I don't think men would take to this. I think men would have unionized themselves. I don't think they would. Even today, men began to get involved in as large numbers into household services. I think it would be a lot different. There would be contracts and I think there would be a whole different attitude towards males in the field of maintenance services around homes than the very easy no force or nothing from the workers who happen to be the majority females and have done very little of anything about their working conditions. I don't really believe any group of men, over a million men in this country, would dare take the things, take their kinds of attitudes and the kind of low pay and no benefits. I think employers would pay a great deal more for their maintenance services once the field ever becomes organized by males, rather than females in the household employment. And I really feel that it is a sort of a maintenance service really. Persons are really doin' manual labor in many cases. So I really look upon it as maintenance services and that it oughtn't be a male or female thing. It ought to be organized people doin' a service and I think the wages, I'm really appalled of one doing so much work in a home for one general price when if there's five chairs it seems to me that each individual chair there should have been a price to give any type of cleaning to those chairs; if there was a table, we should have really taken the number of each items in the house and charged accordingly to clean each item rather than to give a general price, a whole day's cleanin' for ten dollars, a whole day's cleaning for eight dollars, a whole day's cleaning for twenty-five dollars when you, in many cases, cleaned over a hundred thousand dollars worth of valuables in the house.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: What was the most exciting part of your life?

ROBERTS: What was the most exciting part of my life? Should I think in terms of when I was very young. . . ?

INTERVIEWER: It doesn't matter. You could start from wherever you can remember up to the present.

ROBERTS: Well, for an exciting experience, perhaps during the civil rights struggle, my involvement in the civil rights movement I had several exciting experiences. One mainly particular exciting experience that I had was on the Meredith March in the city of Jackson, Mississippi. I considered one of the most exciting points in my life in that particular demonstration with Dr. King and the thousands upon thousands of demonstrators and the planes overhead and the fear like hung over that area as if no one knew what would happen or might happen on the circumstances there and the conditions that we came in on was quite an exciting experience, sort of with fear and not a very pleasant but a very exciting one. We weren't sure whether we should feel so happy over the occasion. There was dedication and a great anxiety to continue to do what we came to do and support the Dr. King on that particular march, knowin' that many of us had read newspapers of terrible experiences that the Reverend Dr. King had had a day or so before our comin' into the city and joining the mass demonstration that Dr. King had called upon all Americans and the people throughout the world to join him in Mississippi on the Meredith March and at that particular time Mr. Meredith had been shot on a walk that he was on and the walk was being finished by many million Americans as well as persons throughout the world, meaning famous persons, movie stars, and all sort of wonderful people were on that march and persons with bloody heals who had marched . . . I came myself on the last day of the march. Many persons had walked for many days before I joined the march. Those of us from Cleveland, Ohio, who went down with a local Cleveland branch of the NAACP and a terrible experience that we felt we were sharin' those who had just before joinin' them and their long endural before comin' on the march and black and white persons with bloody feet and tired and worn and old persons and children and hearin' of the baby that had died from gas and Dr. King, gas had been shot on him, I think they called it tear gas or something like that. The people had went through a terrible experience just before entering the city. I recall that particular trial situation as one of my greatest experiences.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say overall that your involvement in the civil rights movement was probably the most exciting part of you life?

ROBERTS: I would say yes. It was a very exciting experience, a very human experience. I think it would seem to me that I never realized what life meant to one and what it meant to be a human being as the experience that I had with the demonstrations that I was involved in under Dr. King as well as the war movement, the crisis concerning Vietnam and those demonstrations.

INTERVIEWER: If you could relive any part of your life, when would it be? Would it be that time period or would it be another time period?

ROBERTS: That time period I would say that if I had to relive my life, I went with the attitude that I was willing to give my life for the lives of others, for a better world, for people to find themselves so we could attempt to live in peace. I can imagine any patriotic soldier goin' to the military war front feeling that he was going to do something for his country couldn't have had any stronger feeling than I had when I. . . particularly the Meredith March that I had felt that I was leaving Ohio, going into the state of Mississippi to give my life as something that I felt was right, that every man, every woman, every child on earth had a right to freedom and the pursuit of happiness without being interfered with from another feller human being and my dedication through upon leaving Cleveland, Ohio, and goin' into Mississippi was that kind of dedication. However I managed to live through that terrible experience, which was an exciting and a terrible experience, because no one really knew whether we would ever leave that particular area. From the past known experience and publicized experience of others who had went in previous to ourselves and had lost their lives on the same cause, we were willing to die for a cause and what more can one do in behalf of your fellow man and behalf of yourself, in behalf of young people who were the unborn that they would not have to do some of the things that we were willing to do to make a better world. And since I am a person who believes in human rights, who believes in freedom of all people, and believe that one should not infringe on the rights of others in such as education and such as the freedom of this country to live equally as any other American, I feel I couldn't have done nothing any greater and would proudly live the experience and even now would be glad to involve myself if necessary like I did in such struggle for mankind, for us as a person, as people of this world.

INTERVIEWER: You have a daughter, right?

ROBERTS: Yes, I do. I have two daughters.

INTERVIEWER: Two daughter and one son.

ROBERTS: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Would you want your daughters to go through these experiences?

ROBERTS: I would feel that it would be right to always be willing any person, my daughters or any other person, we must be ready to fight for what we believe in. We were not fighting in a violent war but we were fighting. We were fighting as the disciples of Christ fought. We were fighting for those persons who believe in human rights, human cause, a humanitarian cause. I would be terribly disappointed to feel that my daughters would not involve themselves in some degree and in a style of human rights. This is a part of being alive and doin' something while we are alive for each other, or life isn't worth living in my opinion.

INTERVIEWER: So you weren't objecting yourself, or putting yourself through those experiences, to say that your daughters wouldn't have to go through those experiences?

ROBERTS: Yes, I was. I certainly would be in hopes that they would never have to experience that kind of experience but then, nevertheless, the struggle isn't over. There is still so much meanness in the world. There are people who are still opposed to the rights of others on the basis of education and other forms of life. I certainly hope the things that we did, that they would not have to walk on that town or the demonstration in an American city. I certainly would certainly hope that the future and through organizing I certainly feel a new America that those persons who would be involved in the new style of America will never have to do those kinds of things. I certainly hope they can solve the problems in this world such as education, the right to an education, the right to freedom of speech, and the rights of women and yes, the rights of children.

INTERVIEWER: So you're, in a sense, I think you're saying that you would want your daughters to be socially active in conscience and that they would move on to different problems, not necessarily have to go back over the same ones that you had fought for?

ROBERTS: Right. I certainly would hope that perhaps around conference tables, involvement in politics which they ought to be, all young people should be involved, many of them in politics and in the discussion in making decisions and all persons of this country not in one group but all Americans, black, white, Chicano or who, ought to be able to make the kind of decisions that would be pleasin' to all persons in this country.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Will you, or have you, participated in at any point in time in getting women to vote? Union vote or political vote?

ROBERTS: Yes. I, one of my struggles at this time is mainly around the struggle of women. A whole revolution of change for women. I'm very much in support of women involving themselves into politics or into decision-making positions such as serving on the various power boards in this country, institutional boards or medical boards, community boards, decision-making policies. I think women now ought to involve themselves. I think we ought to be about through the field of education, preparing ourselves in the style that we would be able to serve in a constructive way. I don't think as a woman, I don't think we need to isolate ourselves any more and say we're not going to make decisions, that someone else is going to make them for us. I think we're going to have to be a part of those decisions. I think men and women together, women and men together must be able to sit down and look upon one's ideas and thought and not necessarily feel in many cases that there's no women on this board, we don't need any women on this board. It seems to be the attitude of many males that this should not be. I think that we have just as much right to be a part of any power group, any decision group, any advancement in politics as any other person in this country, in the world as far as that's concerned. Women throughout the world ought to be about in the new revolution where that we will make the same decisions as any other person regardless of our sex.

INTERVIEWER: And you've actively encouraged women to do those kind of things?

ROBERTS: Definitely. And mainly young women. This is a motto of mine that I encourage young women, I have daughters that's in their thirties. I am a grandmother and I certainly encourage young women to move forward towards the kind of victories that we need to have. I don't feel that if women get more involved in politics that we would have to have a Meredith March. I sort of feel that women will somehow bring more peace to the world, less violence, and a better attitude towards mankind, meaning womenkind as well.

INTERVIEWER: Do you support the ERA?

ROBERTS: I certainly do.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give some reasons why?

ROBERTS: I think ERA provides the style of freedom for all people and it seems to be, in my opinion, quite a piece of legislation, a new style of life--that if women have the privilege to speak out, to involved themselves and have the freedom and rights

ROBERTS: of themselves, I do feel that we definitely, women, ERA is certainly, I do believe with this involvement throughout the world will encourage women across this world that we will not have the wars and the violence that we had in the past and I feel the bill, a piece of legislation like ERA, the ratification of ERA, will make a better world. I certainly support or have supported since I learned the contents of ERA, in my opinion a very, very good idear of those who put such a bill together.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it will have an effect on organized labor?

ROBERTS: I think it should.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it's necessary?

ROBERTS: I think it's necessary because women are a part of labor. We are one of the largest work forces in the country. Whatever organized groups, whether it's labor, politics, or whatever, I think we need whatever we do, has an effect on everything and I think ERA will provide that kind of freedom and outlet that we'll be able to involve ourselves more. I don't feel that the immediate labor movement has been that free in accepting women in their policy-making boards and committees throughout, the national committees as well as local committees. I think it's sort of in a bias sort of attitude towards organized labor that seemed that only males has control of organized labor. I think that it should be open for whoever wants to be president of a large major union. It shouldn't be looked upon that we will not support a woman, that we will support the best candidate even if it might be a woman.

INTERVIEWER: Even below the organizational level in organized labor, do you think the way it is now that it responds to the needs of women?

ROBERTS: To some degree yes and to some degree no. I don't think that, I don't think that men can really speak out well enough in behalf of women. I think we need be there ourselves on those national committees, on the national boards and say what we want. Within the labor family, that one segment of labor, organized labor, hence can not be one-sided--just men only making those decisions although they may make a very fine one--but I think once everybody's involved in making those decisions and meaning women, that we could say that a national union's answers to definite needs for women not telling someone to do something for them but we're there also voting and making those decisions.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think women's labor needs are different than men's?

ROBERTS: Some degree. It could be different than men. There's a national general need for everyone in the labor movement. A regular general needs. But then there are some special reasons that women needs to look at, such as pregnancy. I think a decision on a woman, a pregnant woman, some different, has been respected different [to a] male who would happen to be sick with a hernia or something. It's handled different. I don't think at this time that the needs of women are being expressed in the best interest, the total best interest of women. There are some interests yes, fine. But then, nevertheless, there are certain personal problems that women have and I think that one of the ways that we can get the kind of support that we're there to negotiate and to work out agreements along with everyone else and once the doors are open throughout the labor movement, I think everyone--including men as well as women--will certainly fare and live more comfortable under the guidelines of the labor unions in this country or anywhere in the world.

INTERVIEWER: Do you also think that there might be specific occupations and problems that women encounter, that because men aren't used or employed in those ways, they don't understand, and I'm referring specifically to the domestic worker?

ROBERTS: Could you rephrase that question again?

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Do you think that since the majority of domestic workers are women, that their needs are ignored by traditional labor unions dominated by men?

ROBERTS: There could be a very good reason that labor unions has not really spoke out in behalf, that much. There's been something said, but not in a big way, concerning domestic workers. However, there's a whole new ball game, you might say, in that direction of household workers. Okay, number one: many household workers happen to be black at this time in this country. In the early frontier days, many domestic workers were Irish and immigrants in this country, were new and poor and were doing housework. Blacks began to get involved in domestic workers, in domestic work when there was no longer need in the fields on the plantations for minorities such as blacks to work the fields. The new change in blacks being integrated into the big cities brought on a new style of employment for many minority persons, mainly black females, who began and many Americans seen a need. . . What are you going to do with

ROBERTS: all these people in our town; what are they going to do while they can do housework. And it was sort of a planned chosen thing by a society where to place these people and there they went into the kitchen rather than into the cotton fields and began to work in the kitchen and became so-called, so-called nannies and all that by taking care of wealthy white children in America, and preparing the meals for wealthy, upper-class, middle-class white Americans in many cases. On the scene of unions being organizing in this country such as steel mills and coal mines and all, there were very little attention given to women, period, and certainly not to household workers. At this late date, with many, many millions of women, thousands and into millions, over half million, two million women in this country is involved in household employment now. Certainly through my efforts here in Cleveland, Ohio, to organize and find ways and means to point out the conditions of household workers, I can certainly say that I haven't had very much support at all from the labor unions. There's been some talk, some discussion and many persons have said, why don't you contact labor. I have contacted labor unions and they haven't shown a great interest. Okay, on the basis of who we are, yes 90 percent are females, but then 89 percent are black. It seems that we have not been able to attract the leadership of unions, which are mainly males, to our cause and there could be a very good point there. Maybe it's because we have not had women in the position of organizers on local and national levels that we could take our agreements to and attempt to find out why the labor unions has not gotten in really organizing household workers.

I certainly have talked, tell the AFL leaders here in the Cleveland area and certainly, I have been informed that since on the basic reasons they gave me, we had a number of employers to deal with and there goes now in mainly nursing homes and other kinds of institutions rather than a variety of employers and individual domestic, mainly suburban, homes. I certainly hope this attitude would change and I certainly would look upon union groups with women now at some degree are getting more involved and I happen to win some elections around the country where it really should be had by women. That they certainly would take a strong look at household workers as women and other women who worked, unorganized women, that would be a great effort and I certainly would like to see a national organizer of a woman in the field of national organizing such as household workers. I think the big unions need to, to have that kind of person as a woman that would be a national organizer, that we could turn to and invite her to come in and get involved in organizing women throughout this country that's not organized, and one of our goals would be household workers.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say the inability to get organized labor to recognize your needs as a domestic worker are very frustrating, perhaps the most frustrating thing in your union work?

ROBERTS: Well, we've been sort of getting what we would call the silent treatment--or say very little and do nothing--such as on the federal minimum wage. We did get support from labor groups who felt that domestic workers ought to be included in the minimum wage. Certainly, we thank the union groups for that effort. Workmen Compensation. There were many labor groups who supported that domestic workers ought to be covered by a piece of legislation as an amendment to the Workmen's Compensation Law that would include household workers as well as an amendment to. . . the amendment ways that included domestic workers finally. But I do feel that the labor groups are far from, are not allowing themselves to get involved with the thousands of women in this country that's not organized and mainly household workers who work very hard, who certainly needs to be organized in the style where we will be able to bargain in a very constructive way and be able to call strikes, that household workers ought to be recognized through the regular kinds of benefits and fringe benefits that other workers get.

We ought to certainly be entitled to paid vacations and we certainly ought to be entitled to the various raises when other groups are asking for raises year by year. We ought to be able to have a national strike where all of the household workers will not go to work one morning and it certainly ought to be called by one of the national unions. Until such time, I think they're dragging their feet, meaning the national unions, such as the AFL-CIO and other large unions who have not spoke out or encouraged and give support and financial support for those groups such as the groups here in Ohio, the National Committee of Household Employees. I'm sure that we would be proud if the large unions would support us financially with some of the things that we have tried to do over the period of years that we've been struggling. At least twelve years I struggled and until the large unions really come forward to organize domestic workers and other unorganized persons and mainly unorganized women who work at a very cheap pay throughout this country, there's quite a lull in their organizing.

INTERVIEWER: They've never really recognized you officially, have they? You are Domestic Workers of America as an organization but not a union, is that correct?

ROBERTS: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: If you could think back on your union involvement and your involvement in the Domestic Workers, what might be the most satisfying accomplishment or satisfying thing you did?

ROBERTS: Respect and dignity and pride was, we felt, a great strike in our struggle. Household workers being poor, women, and a minority, mainly blacks, Chicanos, and other persons who's in the field of servant work. The disrespect we got from our employer, the attitude of the American people towards household employees, as if we were the dumbest thing and we were a bunch of illiterates and we were nothing. We were no more than, you might say, the cuff of a low shoe, the attitude that household employees, servant workers got in this country from their employers was absolutely terrible. You were eating on the table in the back room or you were treated in many cases to separate toilets even though we cleaned all of the toilets in the house. We were told to use certain ones. Certain bathrooms were available to the maid, or eating last, not sitting down and having dinner when food was warm even though they prepared it, the last one even though in some cases you didn't even serve it, you still didn't have a chance to eat, sit down and have dinner with everyone else. Or called us by first names and our last names were unimportant because we were just common things so who cares about our last name, who cares where we live, or whether we had a birthday, a terrible attitude that Americans had and still has to some extent. We've changed some of that, attitudes towards you. Mainly the middle class looked down upon their servant help in such a very unpleasant way, a possessive sort of thing that they owned and we were their things. It was "my Mary" and "my Annie" and "my Gerry" and we were a part of the family. We were often, "Oh, what could we do without you or what would we do without you," but nevertheless, I was not in the family will or if there was any illness and I could no longer work all at once I was not a part of that family any more because I was dismissed. "Stay home and get you some rest and when you get to feelin' better, we'll call you," and the call never came in many cases. In many cases, the relatives of domestic workers even though their mother was told that she was a member of the family upon her death, there was nothing left for her children. Upon the death of many employers there was nothing in their will that in many cases included the domestic worker. If so, well I was told once that she left her coat to me and if she died that I would get her fur coat and her house dresses. They would all go to me because we were near the same size. Anything of value, any property or anything, was not even mentioned.

ROBERTS: So, I think this particular thing has meant a lot to domestic workers. Now we meet our new employer and we are respected as Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Thomas, and this is all new to us and they always said that we didn't want to be called by our last names. "They don't want to be called. . . they're satisfied bein' called by their first name." We were not satisfied; we were afraid we may not have the job, that we might get fired, so we was submissive to the boss lady to some degree as we were to our mistresses in slavery time, the fear of the employer, the fear of not being able to get another job, no references being given if she got angry. We had to pretend and smile when we didn't want to smile and show our teeth and laugh loud and like stupid to make her feel that we were quite humble to her, that she really, when she said "my girl", I didn't do anything about it. I went along even though I could be thirty, forty, fifty years old accepted the idea that I was her "girl". So our pride, dignity, and respect has meant a lot to household workers--the women really [de]plored that one.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever felt in some of these experiences and some of the struggles that you've had with the work with the domestic workers that it really wasn't worth it?

ROBERTS: It really wasn't worth the struggle? Oh no, it was worth everything that I could put in it, anyone to help to do. Human dignity is one's total pride of life. Without dignity, one is nothing.

INTERVIEWER: You never felt defeated or that you weren't going to be able to accomplish anything. That it was worthless?

ROBERTS: No, I've never felt it was worthless. It was always great to be able to do, to be able to have the guts, number one, to speak out. Taking a lot of guts to do what I did and what many other persons have tried to do and when you're going to speak up to the big boss with all the money and you have nothing, and going to tell them the way you feel and they kick you out, and I did get kicked out but I said it anyway. And what I said, I said for the sake of others and I proudly spoke out for human dignity for household workers--pride, dignity and respect, the rights of additional wage, better working hours, all of the things that other workers were getting. We were working any hours we were told to work and it was always worthwhile to say that we worked too hard. To work eight hours and seven hours is enough of it and we can't clean the house and take care of the children at the same time. It was maddening and was terrible and I can't stand it and I'm no longer going to

ROBERTS: do it and to be able to say all of that and say it in behalf of everybody. It was a pretty great thing and I shall always cherish the things that I did in this field. Will always mean one of the finest things in my opinion that I ever could have did as a person and I pray for those others who spoke out the same way. Nothing we could have did greater, the same attitude that I have now about the struggle of women. We must continue to speak out, whether it's the maid speaking out for her rights or it's the secretary speaking out for her rights, or the nurse or even the woman who's an executive under the boss and can never be the boss in the company. We all must continue to speak out for human rights, pride and dignity.

INTERVIEWER: So you'd do it all over again?

ROBERTS: All over again. I have never quit.

INTERVIEWER: In all your experience with working, would you say you've worked with men or women most?

ROBERTS: Mainly towards organizing?

INTERVIEWER: No, in terms of working partners. Someone you worked along side of or with.

ROBERTS: In the civil rights movement, the majority of leadership was males in that particular struggle.

INTERVIEWER: How about as a domestic?

ROBERTS: As a domestic, domestic workers usually work for female employers. As far as talking to leadership in the unions, it has been men that I have talked over agreements of household workers, the need to be unionized, has been males.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever worked with a male domestic?

ROBERTS: Yes, yes, many times I've worked with male domestics.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say you worked more times with male domestics or female domestics?

ROBERTS: No more with male domestics. There's not a great need at this time for male domestics. However, I feel that the field ought to be open to all persons. It should not be a struggle. . . domestic services shouldn't just be a woman. What's wrong with a man using a vacuum, dusting, cleaning. So I feel the field, in the field of domestics, it should be males as well as females, in the field of household employees. I think, perhaps

ROBERTS: or in time, we will have more male domestic workers than we have at the present. And, certainly, Domestic Workers of America if the service we did. . . I don't think necessarily that she [the employer] should expect all the time a woman at her door. I might send out a male for according to service that is needed there it shouldn't matter whether male or females comes to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been more comfortable with working with men or with women?

ROBERTS: In my experience, both.

INTERVIEWER: It didn't really matter to you.

ROBERTS: It didn't really matter. I encourage men to come in, come over in the field of household employment.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember ever reading anything or seeing a movie or meeting a person that had a very special influence on your life? Really moved you in one direction?

ROBERTS: A movie?

INTERVIEWER: A movie perhaps or a book or a person? Any or all of them?

ROBERTS: Well, I know many very interesting persons that certainly had an effect on my life and many persons that I've admired. For one, you, Donna Van Raaphorst, has been very impressive to me. Persons like a young lady by the name of Ruth Turner, chairman of CORE and the Cleveland Chapter. She's a very strong young woman in her early twenties.

INTERVIEWER: She helped you a lot in your civil rights activities, didn't she?

ROBERTS: Yes, she did. She was a very strong person. Do you think she influenced your civil rights involvement? She was a teacher in the Cleveland school system before taking her position as an executive director of CORE. I feel she was a great influence with many persons in a very constructive way and certainly encouraged me and was willing to, through designing literature for me, giving me directions on some things that I ought to do if we wanted to do what we felt we wanted to do such as getting organized. She sat down and give me some guidelines that I should follow and encouraged me to be the leadership, because I certainly at that particular time wasn't trying to be any leader. I only was talking about a problem and, through her influence, she certainly said why didn't I, saying, "Geraldine, why didn't you take the leadership?"

ROBERTS: Another young lady, Miss Marcella Johnson, also a member of CORE, had a lot to do. In fact, she had actually named the organization. We was trying to find names. We talked about various things, Cleveland Domestic Workers, American Domestic Workers. She said, "How about Domestic Workers of America?" That we agreed on the telephone through speakin' with Miss Marcella Johnson who now is our, is a student at Wayne University and she, at that particular time, was attemptin' to try and finish high school and go on to higher education which I encouraged her to do. These are some persons that have been very impressive to me and I have a lot of respect for these women.

Miss Turner had a lot to do with my ability of organizing household workers. The things she said she did in my behalf and I was always able to call her, call upon her and talk with her about various problems and she always wanted to know. She was one of our first speakers at our first meeting who spoke to the ladies who came and encouraged them, encouraged us all. And I said we will always have a great admiration for her.

INTERVIEWER: This was the first twenty women that came at that very first organizational meeting?

ROBERTS: Yes, Miss Turner was one of the speakers there. Another young lady, Mrs. Mary Holt who was a disc jockey on one of the radio stations was another lady who came by and emceed the show and I think through the struggle at the beginning of the domestic workers, there were many fine women who came out to encourage endurance towards organizing household workers. Miss Turner did play a great role.

INTERVIEWER: Any men?

ROBERTS: Yes, another gentleman at that particular time by the name of Mr. Lewis G. Robinson , the president at that time of the Freedom Fighters, certainly was very encouraging and he was known as a civil rights leader there in Cleveland and organizer of the Freedom Fighters, one of the organizers, Freedom Fighters of Ohio. He was very encouraging. There were things he said and he said, "You got to do it 'cause it's a great thing. It's already late if you're going to do it. And you must move forward," otherwise perhaps maybe I would have not continued. I was something new. I was really afraid of the whole idea, but out of being pretty upset with the employer that I was employed under give me encouragement to even want to call me and I went to these people such as Ms. Turner of CORE and some people. I went to the NAACP office and to Mr. Harold Williams,

ROBERTS: the executive secretary of the NAACP. We got a lot of encouragement but mainly it was women there at my side and worked very hard with me and helpin' put together an organization. Mr. Stan Toliver, attorney Stan Toliver, played a great role in getting the charter, and writing up the charter and beginning to have enough money to even give me the twenty-five dollars to send away for the charter.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get your first job?

ROBERTS: How'd I get my first job. Well, as far as work experience, I think I would have to tell you about what happened when I was a very young kid, maybe six or seven years old. I really experienced my first job going out with my grandmother, Eller, workin' in their fields, the cotton fields. I went out with her and including my sister 'cause there were, my sister and myself, after the loss of my mother in death, we lived with Ella who came to Oklahoma and taking us, me and my sister back to Arkansas and there she was a farmer. She owned quite a bit of land and plus she worked on the farms for pay for a neighboring farmers and mainly they grew cotton and corn and things like sweet potatoes, peanuts and all that sort of thing and everybody's kids worked in the farms, worked in the fields and we were no different. My grandmother taking us and I remember, in those days flour for baking and that sort of thing came in sacks rather than paper sacks what they called flour sacks, some material resemblin' some linen kind of material. She'd place one of those flour sacks around our neck. And she tied a string around my neck and all to this cloth bag and we were to pull the cotton out of the bolls, the cotton bolls, and put the cotton over in the sack and I got my first experience as how to pluck that cotton out and place it in this bag. So I began something like six or seven years old working, we went out every day at this. We were pulling cotton in the fields and placing in this bag and dump all our cotton from the bags we had over into my grandmother, Ella, had a twelve or fourteen foot what she called cottonpickin' sack and this long thing all of her kids around her, myself and my sister and an uncle would all place this cotton in this bag and she would have it weighed up when she'd have maybe at one weighing a couple hundred pounds of cotton. That was my first work experience workin' on the farm in Arkansas after the death of my mother and takin' resident with my grandmother, Ella Brady, who was my mother Vinnie Harris' mother.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't you do some early domestic work too as a child?

ROBERTS: Yes, Ella also had some places there in Olla, that families she would go durin' the holiday period when the crops would gathered

ROBERTS: in for the winter from the farm and she'd do some servin' in party works like preparin' the Christmas dinners or various holiday dinners and she asked me to go with her. And I don't know, maybe I was eight years old or so and I was very small. I wasn't a kid that grew very fast, I was pretty short for my age and I remember she taking a box in this kitchen of this white suburban family there and turning it on its side and I stood on it to make my height reachable to the sink and I washed dishes, which I was already assigned to at home to do, and then she showed me how to rinse up the vegetables for the salads and all and here I was helpin' her and not realizin' that I was gettin' into the field of domestic work by working in that kitchen with her and it was a regular routine thing. Every year, I would go with her and help set the table for the families and afterwards they would give her the turkey and the leftovers from the dinner. We'd get to take all of the leftovers home. The turkeys that we cut and the hams that we cut was given to Ella and we'd usually get my grandfather to help us take the food home. There wasn't very much money they paid but they'd give you all the leftover foods from the dinner.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't paid anything for this?

ROBERTS: No, I wasn't paid anything, I could just have all I wanted to eat there. Usually the families I was workin' for they met me and Ella told them who I was, that I was Geraldine, her granddaughter, and that I was her deceased daughter's, Vinnie's daughter. And some of the people in that town knew Eller's kids. They knew who Vinnie was durin' her childhood days growin' up in that particular town and it was really fun to get all this fruit and food that I wanted there and all the things that we didn't have we could see at this home and I always sort of looked forward to going. So I really got my first experience as a domestic worker really at around eight years old.

INTERVIEWER: Let's move ahead in time then until when you got your first job as an adult and the circumstances involved in that.

ROBERTS: Well, there's some more experiences along that line. At the age of twelve years old I ran away from Ella's home and decided that I wanted to go where an aunt lived in Salem, Washington. So there was a show in town called a carnival. It was an amusement show with rides and a colored minstrel show and I met these people, the ones who were working with the minstrel show, the singers and dancers and comedians and all that sort of thing, really a black show there. And these people stayed at Ella's home 'cause we had like the boarding house. And there was

ROBERTS: another work experience when I ran away from home with the show. The ladies on the show began to show me how to dance and I earned three dollars a week as a dancer. I wasn't dancing very good but they began to teach me more and more and the guy who owned the show, the manager, he said give her three dollars a week. So I would serve in the kitchen. They had a cook house where they fed this colored minstrel show, all the performers, and I served the table and cleared, helped clear the dishes and I was just twelve years old and that was my job for three dollars for a whole week for workin' on the stage and working in this kitchen there on that carnival, amusement carnival show.

And I did that and that's how I met James Roberts and later married James. I was still just a kid. We stayed together for a year and we married after a year. It was difficult to get anyone to want to marry, to get us married, because James was a mature man and I was a youth really and everybody said, "Who is this, your daughter?" and we could never ask them to marry. And, finally, in Minnesoter he met a prosecutor and the prosecutor sort of said he thought he seen something but he waived it. He wouldn't really deal with it; he married us. And I left my age at twenty-one and got married. And there I was workin' on the show and for twelve and a half years we were married and then, after that, the marriage was dissolved. I was alone and livin' in the state of Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio, and not knowin' very much. Anything to do I remembered about the domestic work as a kid and that I helped my grandmother. And speakin' to some of my neighbors in the Metropolitan Projects where we was a resident, the Carla Park Projects, she mentioned that she did domestic work, this particular lady, Mrs. Dixon, and she said she knew where I could get a job at five dollars a day plus the car fare and I taken that job and I was told to scrub with a brush on my hands and knees and all the things that this family wanted me to do. And Mrs. Dixon had been doing the same kind of work there and I taken that job and I was told that I was a terrible domestic worker, that I didn't wash the windows and the corners clean and the particular lady, Mrs. Goldwyn, she was sort of disappointed in my work so she began to show me how to really wash windows to her standards and really scrub her floors real clean and rinse them and everything. It was very hard work and I had the three children already and I would take the smallest child with me, my son, and sort of babysit for him while I did domestic work and I was told to wash kitchen walls and all sorts of things for her. Mrs. Goldwyn introduced me to some other families around there and I was workin' for two or three families at five dollars a day each and like eight hours a day and food because it was pretty hard without a husband.

ROBERTS: We didn't have much food and no money and I didn't want to get on relief and I decided that I wanted to work as a domestic worker. I was on relief and I asked the social worker to stop my check. I wanted to work 'cause I didn't like the idear of being on relief. It sounded very degrading and I worked until I became ill and she didn't really take me off. She sent me like a dollar a month and it still kept me as a welfare recipient by receivin' that dollar a month and medical care. I could receive medical care. And there I was again as a domestic worker as an adult, a young lady around twenty-three years old.

INTERVIEWER: Did you expect to keep this first job for a very long time?

ROBERTS: Well, I wasn't really decidin' whether I was going to keep it. I needed it; I needed the money for the children and as a survival and I worked at that one until finally someone told me about a job at a hotel and this was maid services and I'd taken that job at the hotel. And I would also attend evening adult education classes because I was still concerned that I hadn't had any chance to really go to school and do anything with my education. Through the marriage hardly very much activities as far as schoolin'. It was still one of my first goals at the time that I ran away from home and all to go to school. And I worked as a hotel maid for nineteen dollars a week and even worked Sundays makin' beds and cleanin' empty check outs and there was some permanent residents rooms. I even cleaned those all for nineteen dollars and I was very careful how I spent the nineteen dollars. Often I would walk to work rather than just spending the money for transportation because I wanted the money to help provide a living standard for my three kids and I refused to accept a full welfare check again.

INTERVIEWER: Could you elaborate a little bit more on how you spent your money. Approximately how was it divided up, can you recall?

ROBERTS: Yes, I bought Mothers Oats quite a bit for my kids, seein' that they could get real filled up on Mothers Oats so they eat a lot of oatmeal. I fed them oatmeal and from the South bein' from Arkansas around sugarcane, I knew quite a bit about molasses. So I bought like allager syrup and gave them that and I made biscuits. I'd buy bags of flour and make biscuits for the kids and they often had hot biscuits for breakfast and allager syrup and I was still bein' from Arkansas where pork was a great thing. Everybody raised their own meats. I would buy like bacon, unsliced bacon, and slice it for the children and give them like what we called salt pork from Arkansas and I found salt pork in Cleveland. You soak the meat and fry it like bacon for the kids. It was a cheap way. That was my main

ROBERTS: purpose, to see if they had enough to eat. In many cases, I remember that I would say that I had enough 'cause I was afraid to take too much 'cause nineteen dollars didn't go very far. And I did most of my tradin', like buying clothes. . . our clothing was bought at the Goodwill or either a neighborhood rummage sale. I did all my shoppin' there at the rummage sales or the Goodwill Industry and buyin' old clothes and at the hotel I could not go out and do household domestic work because I worked every day including Sunday, Saturdays and Sunday.

INTERVIEWER: Was the majority of your money spent on food and clothing then?

ROBERTS: Yes, mainly on food and savin' up for my rent. I lived in Metropolitan Projects. Savin' up for rent and food and there wasn't anything else to buy. Mainly, I concentrated on food for the children.

INTERVIEWER: Was the rent very much?

ROBERTS: No, the rent wasn't very much, according to what I was making.

INTERVIEWER: Was that how they charged you, according to your income?

ROBERTS: Yes, according to your budget, your financial budget.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work in any of these early jobs, let's say, as a domestic or in a hotel in mixed sexes, both men and women?

ROBERTS: Yes. I had some work experience workin' for. . . I remember once I got taken ill and could really no longer work at the hotel. It seemed that I had sort of a nervous collapse. It seemed the experience came from the previous marriage according to my doctor. There was a lot of things that I was pressed and it seemed all came down on me and I wasn't able to work very well, so I was asked by my welfare worker to accept a check again. I should stay home and take care of myself and look after the children. During my period of work with the hotel there was just neighbors that I would give a few dollars to, maybe two or three dollars, to watch the children after school and that sort of thing. I'd get them off in the mornings and then she would keep them 'til I was home from work.

I was home and I began to feel better and I went out to try and find employment and I was told that you could run ads, position wanted, classified ads in newspapers and I did that and charged it to my telephone, my own personal telephone. And through that experience, running that ad, there were a lot of, all kind of wild calls on the phone. Some calls sounded

ROBERTS: legitimate and I learned to not really take male calls serious, asking someone to come to work for them. They were lots of obscene things were said from these fellows who would call in and said they wanted me, they wanted a girl to do some cleaning and then they would talk about a lot of other things; yet I was embarrassed and often hang up on them. There was one call, I remember, that came through sound very legitimate. He said he had lost his wife from gettin' some teeth pulled and he said she had died in the dental chair and he wanted to get the house organized. It sounded very legitimate and I talked it over with my neighbor and she said she would go out with me because I wasn't sure. I said it sounded okay and once we were there at this home which was like, we were on the east side of Cleveland, like this was on the far west side of Cleveland, or southwest, and upon arrivin' there he said, "Oh, there's two of you," and he still seemed to be all right and he said he'd go out and shop for us and he went out and bought just loads of food like I was three people or four people going to eat rather than two. He had just lots of pork chops and everything, and he said you girls prepare dinner because he said he couldn't cook. He hadn't been eating well since the loss of his wife and Leona and myself prepared dinner and he came out and had dinner and everything with us and he still, everything seemed to be very fine. We begin to feel okay, that there was nothing wrong here. Oh well in the afternoon he called us to come downstairs and upon coming downstairs, we were working upstairs, we noticed the downstairs looked kind of dark and we got, we headed down the stairs, her and I. There he was at the bottom of the bottom of the stairs completely nude, and we got awfully frightened. We didn't know what to do because we were upstairs and he's downstairs standing there with no clothes on and he said don't be afraid of him, just come on down and he wasn't going to, I'm not going to hurt you girls, he said and he said he lost his wife, he was kind of lonely, maybe us girls could make him happy. So we rushed for our street clothes to get changed and get out of there and he said he would drive us up to the bus stop. He's sorry that we got frightened 'cause he wasn't going to hurt us. He just wanted to have a little fun and he paid us and overpaid us and takin' us to the bus stop that was in our area, in the Parma Heights area, of suburb of Cleveland. And we were shocked and frightened and we thought we had really found a male employer that could be all right and we learned, no we still had made a wrong choice. So there is that kind of experience of domestic workers walking into situations like that.

INTERVIEWER: You worked in the hotel. Was your boss a woman or a man?

ROBERTS: Male. The night desk clerk was the, was not the owner, but he was the manager.

INTERVIEWER: How would you compare your experiences of working for a woman versus working for a man, aside from these rather strange characters?

ROBERTS: Well, I always felt like comparable. There was some women who had some unusual experiences that was told to us, who run into seemed to be some lesbians who were females. I didn't have that kind of experience. I have been told by other domestic workers that they had had that kind of experience yet employed in a home and the lady would attempt to kiss her and make love with her, to her as if she was a male. And I was very fortunate that didn't happen to me but there was domestic workers who's experience that kind of experience so it's sort of a fifty-fifty thing. We just don't really know.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make any friends in these first couple jobs, like with your co-workers? Did you have any co-workers?

ROBERTS: I remember bein' employed in a home where there was myself and two other domestic workers. I was like a part-time worker. There was two full-time workers in that particular home and it was on the fringe area of Shaker Heights in the Greater Cleveland area there, a street called North Marlin. I was employed in an apartment penthouse there where there was a lady there, her name was Lena, she was the cook. She did all the meals there, the pastry and everything and another lady by the name of Lether who was the full-time maid. She worked as the full-time maid and I was hired as a special cleaning woman. I was supposed to be the maid but then I wanted nine dollars a day and so my pay was kind of high for the amount she wanted to pay, so she just let me come there twice a week, sometimes three times a week and I did like special cleaning on marble or her interior decorating imported marble from Italy and other parts of the world. It was very expensive imported marble and expensive furniture in the house and she realized in her opinion I was a very good cleaning girl and she'd let me be her extra cleaning gal and I served as an extra cleaning girl for her and the other two women were full time and that was an exciting experience there with the three women.

We were, in this particular home, we were told that we could not use the family restroom, meanin' the commode in the bathroom, that particular bathroom. There was two bathrooms that we could not use in this penthouse, the one that the family used and the guest bathroom, and we were told to use a bath-

ROBERTS: room in the back that was. . . There was like three or four apartments when this buildin' was being built, all into one, into one large suite and the back rooms were for the servants and there was a door marked servants. This was for services, any packages or the hired help came in through that door entrance and this is all in the penthouse up on the second floor and the penthouse ran over the garage where there was a road out past the rose bushes growin' in gardenieres and that sort of thing and there was a patio and like a sun patio where there was glass and you could really take a sun bath out in that place. It was really magnificant and fantastic. I'd never seen anything like that of a home in my life, the kind of home that one was. It was quite a luxurious place in my opinion and the other ladies that worked felt the same way. It was really extra ordinary.

And we used the back and we had separate silverware that we used and we had our meals in the kitchen rather than at the breakfast table. We had our meals in the kitchen on a utility stand that you could. . . there was a board you could pull out and make your services there on that board. This is where the maids and girls and they had their lunch and we were called "girls" there. And the cook was something like Lena. She was much older than any of us. She was a senior citizen and we didn't know for sure, but we assumed that she was in her late sixties or early seventies and she did the meals there and she had to scrub on her hands and knees and her hands was twisted with arthritis so she said was causing her fingers to be twisted but she suffered a lot with arthritis. It seemed so hard that she had us try and wash up the kitchen floor and she was charged with keepin' the kitchen clean by herself. Her bein' a thin, delicate lookin' person, I had a lot of sympathy for her. And Lether, the other maid, did a lot of cleanin' through the house, that on Lether's off days, on Wednesdays usually I had to come in and do the special cleaning and make the beds and anything that she asked you to do you had to do it if you wanted to work there and of course then the pay was nine dollars and carfare, which was about thirty cents a day, about fifteen cents or so a ride.

There was an unusual experience and exciting experience because this particular employer once in a while would be having tantrums, meaning very nervous attitudes, you know, sometimes very upsetting attitudes toward us. And she felt there were certain things that she didn't like that we were doin'. We'd get it all sometimes at one time and her tone of voice and the way she would speak to us was frightening to us. We always felt that we may get fired and all that sort of thing and one parti-

ROBERTS: cular day, there was an arguing between Lena and this boss lady. We looked upon her like a Simon LeGree to us, meaning she had a very strong, conservative, cold mind towards us, her attitude, and the way she spoke to us. The food was usually. . . we always usually got the food that was left over and placed in a box and given to me. There was never first time cooking or anything; it was always usually something left over. Once in a while, it was something that they had like the night before, but I had some hamburgers that Lena said she had served a couple weeks before and, evidently, they had to be left out or something because they had already soured to some extent. They was, they got contaminated and I eat these hamburgers and became terribly sick. I had to even to lay down across Lena's bed because Lena lived in, and her room was the servant headquarters and I was very ill and very sick at the stomach and I stayed around 'til it was time, the ordinary time we should go and she paid me and sent me home. She acted like she didn't believe me that I was really sick, but I was terribly sick and I had to end up goin' to the hospital that night to get something for my stomach and Lena said she didn't want to tell me, I should never tell the boss lady that those hamburgers was cooked some time back and she was told to give them to me 'cause she said she said they didn't look good but she [the employer] said they were all right, give them to her, so she said she gave them to me and she said it wasn't surprising to her that I got sick on them. This was work experience there at that particular home.

So many number of things happened there that was exciting and unpleasant. Lether, the maid, got into it with the employer. It seemed that the employer thought that Lether was doin' some drinking or something, and it seemed Lether decided to come in one morning even though she had been drinking and got into it and on Saturday mornings once in a while I was asked to come in if the cook had to do Sunday dinner often I was asked to come in on Saturdays. I was, whenever she wanted me, and she would get upset if I was not available. I had to keep myself available. I had to always come to her and I'd say that I had something else to do, maybe one week there was two days, another week maybe three. Whenever she wanted me I had to be available and I have to admit I was really frightened of her. She was frightening. She seemed to be so rich, had so much. I felt I had so less. I always felt very small and my pride around her was very submissive. I felt I really didn't have anything to say but did what she said 'cause she really I had never seen one who was affluent and had so much. I really felt I was just nothin', and whatever she said I'd obey her because I had a fear and yet I felt it was kind of nice to work

ROBERTS: in a place like that because I'd never been around such lovely things seemed to me and her job was steady. I knew I'd have the nine dollars pay there and she would speak rude to me and I would never say anything back to her. It continued like that.

After going up there for a couple of years or so, I began to feel, I wasn't so afraid of her anymore. Tall; she was tall with lovely satin housecoats and the satin shoes she wore, who looked to me extremely expensive, no longer looked as a challenge to me and I just didn't feel frightened of her anymore. And she would say things; I would begin to say something back. She'd say what did you say and I would repeat them and I would stare and she'd look at me and it seemed that I was winning. She would walk away. She wouldn't challenge me. She'd walk away and after she did that a couple of times, I began to say more and it seemed she began to reason with me and this was surprising that she would reason with me. I began to. . . gosh, she must really like me and she sat down and told me one day how much she did like me and she said I was a very nice person; my attitude was not very nice, that I'm having a lot to say and I said, "Well, what I'm saying is right." Things that I would disagree on, that she wanted me to do, I had to get on a ladder and clean her walls, like her satin walls--some sort of cloth material--I had to clean them down and a lot of climbing up on ladders and doing things was very strenuous and I began to feel that my pay wasn't good and that really I was being taken advantage of. That everything around me with the beautiful home and everything was not really taking any money home and I. . . She worked me there hard. She always had so much for me to do; I was terribly tired at night, really too tired to even try and go to adult education classes once I left her home. There was nothin' else to do but try and. . . usually my children who was older would have to wait on me, hand me things. I was really too tired to do anything after spending a day in that house and my attitude was sort of changing and kind of unpleasant. I didn't realize I was bein' unpleasant. I didn't really care anymore. I wasn't sure where I could get another job but I was really tired of being there and I met her through running an ad, running one of those ads in the paper and she read my ad and called me and I began to learn that there had been many other girls, as we were looked upon at that time as "girls", and I wasn't aware that I should be called a lady, had been employed in my position at that same house and she began to mention different names of different ones who had worked for her and there was another woman, a fourth person who did her milliner work, made her hats and this was also a colored lady who made her hats and things. Practically all her employees I met was colored and it seems sort of be a way with her that all these people workin' around that apartment, that she was the big boss and we were all frightened of her.

ROBERTS: I began to make the change in the air with my attitude; even Lena began to kind of talk back. Lena began to say, answer her back and the way Lena felt and so we were all gettin' pretty smart around there and she got very upset with us and she was lettin' us know that she wasn't appreciating our new attitudes around there towards her. And once her and Lena got into a pretty serious argument and there was words flyin' around, Lena sayin' what she wasn't going to do and she said, "I help buy your house; I give you money." The employer told Lena she gave her money to help pay off her home and she threw a lot of things up to her that she had did for her and Lena was saying that she had worked here for fifty dollars a week wasn't enough money doin' the cookin' and when the other help was off, Lena had to go through the house and do all the dusting and still work in the kitchen and scrub the floors and I got upset about it and I didn't appreciate. I asked her to not speak to Lena that way. I began to take up for Lena and boy, did I get it, by speaking up for Lena and I went home and Lena was. . . She fired me. Lena called and said that she, that the employer said that I shouldn't come back anymore. Then she calls me up the next day or so and asks me to come back. She rehires me. She fired me and rehired me and I would go back.

But each time I went back I was less. . . there was no fear and I felt, I felt like I was mature, I felt like I would feel around other people at my church or somewhere. That I was somebody, that I was a person and I didn't feel like a little ant or something like I had felt around her, and that I was important to her and I began to do things like I wanted to do them and if there was something I didn't want to clean, I'd say I would do it next time, that I had enough to do and I wasn't going to take on anymore and she put up with all that. She'd usually walk away and there was periods I wouldn't see her all day. She'd just let me come in and work and she would stay up in her room all day, although she had the intercoms. We knew that everything we said in there that she could hear and intercoms was always on. We're not allowed to turn them off and knew that they were on and we knew that she could hear anything we said so we didn't talk to each other only by a very light whisper because she would interfere if she hear us, a social conversation going on or any kind of conversation between the help. She would speak through that intercom and say, "What's all that going on out there? What are you doing out there? You're here to work, not sit down and talk with each other," and immediately the conversation would stop and everybody would separate from each other and get from each other. We

ROBERTS: began to change when she'd say that, we'd begin to laugh and she felt that was being real smart. We'd laugh when she'd say that, that we shouldn't talk with each other and I don't know, seein' that I was sort of creatin' trouble around there in my sort of work.

I even told Lena why don't she quit and retire and get her social security and go home. Why should she continue to work, work there when she could get her pension and live at home and she said she had a few more payments to pay on her house she was going to quit when she paid for her house. Lena began to talk out more even though she was told about the money the employer had loaned her and she had paid that back and it had been deducted from her pay. Lena said that she had paid the money back and one day Lena goes home in a cab and quits and I was really sort of the reason that she went home, because I kept encouraging her to stand up for herself and she didn't say anything to me, the employer. She only had me coming in 'cause her and Lena had one of those arguments again and she realized that, in her opinion, that Letha was drinking and Letha said she wasn't. So she fired Letha and there was a new lady came to work there in Letha's place. That position that Letha had as a everyday maid, was a. . . seemed that many persons had worked in her place in that particular house.

The new lady came in from Alabama with lots of children and just in the city of Cleveland and needed work real bad, and had no other choice, was glad to get a job. The employer ran her own ad in the paper rather than to call an ad like she called mine and this maid seen the ad and taken the job and had reference from Alabama and she hired her and she was a very nice lady in my opinion. She was very fair skinned. She was what you would call a mulatto black and she was sort of proud of herself and she would hold long conversations with the employer. The employer would talk with her more so than she did the rest of us in the house. The rest of the help was more dark complected and it seemed that she had a different attitude toward this worker than she did the others there. The employer and her husband went over Lena's house and Lena said they talked with her and brought Lena back. She fired and rehired her. She'd go and talk with you and get you to come back. She never came to my house but Lena said she came to her house because her husband was dissatisfied with the other cookin' in the house. He liked the way Lena cooked, so for her sake Lena came back 'cause he was sort of nice to her. As usual, the female employer was the problem there. And so here was a new maid and

ROBERTS: Lena and myself there again. She never really wanted to get rid of me that difficult because she said I used kinds of special cleaning things and she was very much in my opinion in love with the things she had. She loved all those things very much and she was deeply concerned the way you taken care of those things and I gave the special kinds of care the way she showed me and directions on certain kind of expensive polishes. She didn't use the ordinary pat on things. It was special kinds of polishes that she would order to clean her furniture, certain kinds of cloths, you couldn't use any kind of cloth. It was special treated cloths that you had to use. All cloths had to be laundered there rather than to send out to the laundry because she didn't want detergents in them because she felt that strong detergents through washing cloths could have effect on some of her special interior furniture there and I did everything exactly, she felt she liked. She really wanted to hang on to me in spite of my new attitude with her and everything was okay. I began to talk with the new maid and the new maid sort of got excited over me. We had long talks together. We was exchanging telephone calls at home and there I again was interfering with the new maid because I was tellin' her about the place and about the maid before her and the attitude of that employer and Lena says, "Well. Gerry, we need to get a union or somethin'. You need to do something about it." And I says, "Well, if I got a union together, if I could get one together, would you come out to meetings?" They said, "Yes, we'll help you," and Lena the cook, she handed me a dollar bill. She said, "Well, here's my dollar. I'll make a donation now." She pulled out a dollar bill and gave me a dollar and the new maid, she gave me a dollar and she said anything she could do, she would help and I had went to the civil rights, civil rights organization, the Cleveland CORE chapter and had gotten involved with them after hearing 'em on radio and seeing 'em on television. I joined up with this groups because I was sort of pretty filled up with my life that I had to live and these people were sayin' they could do various things to help people and I went there.

INTERVIEWER: I have one more question that I wanted to ask you about your work experience, to wrap that up and I'd like you to, this is sort of an <u>if</u> type of question. If you had the choice of all the jobs in the world and you could get the right kind, the proper kind of training, what kind of work would you choose to do?

ROBERTS: Number one, I would never give up the idea in my opinion, the way I feel at this time the struggle of working with women, women in the labor market and mainly domestics and other kinds of grass roots women who, I feel, needs organizing, needs help, needs attention to their causes. I feel that I can give them

ROBERTS: that kind of attention that they need. I feel I have the background and expertise in the kinds of things that I did that I would make my first preference, if I have that choice, continuing to work with organizing, counseling, and the whole bit that I'm in now. I would probably broaden it, broaden my work to perhaps more wider experience of concern about women not only in the United States but women in other parts of the world. I feel I would want to know what's going on in Sweden, Norway and India and would perhaps involve myself in Warsaw with the national coalition group being able to make decisions, finding ways and means to help women throughout the world. I think this would be the kind of choice that I would make.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. I'd like to move on to the general topic of union activism and how you got started. First of all, where were you working when you first became involved in domestic activities?

ROBERTS: I was working as a domestic worker involved at that particular time with the civil rights struggle in America. At the time, I felt I wanted to do something about the kind of work that I was employed at and that was household maintenance service work here. My struggle was really involved around the kind of employment that I was involved in.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that the civil rights movement and other protest movements were not really directing themselves to the problems you had as a domestic?

ROBERTS: Yes, I think we were not directly but indirectly, we were still talking about the same kinds of things that included domestic workers. There were parts of the country, such as in Mississippi, that domestics weren't involved in strikes and walk-outs and that halted all services, all activities, many with blacks in those areas and this included the domestic workers such as the housekeeper, the babysitter, which meant a lot to person who controlled those areas by these domestics walkin' out. The homes that I understand that happened under the Christian, sort of the Christian leadership there that the whole town became deeply concerned because there was no babysitters, mainly they had to watch children and those persons who were holding better jobs in the power structure was certainly disturbed and caused a great confusion, so I think that was a tie in with poor people through the civil rights movement. It did include poor people, which domestics certainly would fall under the classification of poor people.

Education had a great effect on domestics. Domestics usually are the persons who were not properly trained through our educational system how to have skills and qualify themselves for employment in this country. Where do they fall and if they're doing whatever they could to make a living and sort of like they

ROBERTS: were programmed to be plain, grant you, domestic workers. The big change in employment gave those persons who was involved in the household employment another chance to go back to school, to not see their daughters become domestics like themselves, and to have some sort of skills and profession that certainly would help them economically. So indirectly the whole [civil rights] movement did also include domestics as a part of that movement.

INTERVIEWER: Can you elaborate just a little bit more on how you personally became involved?

ROBERTS: Well, I personally got involved, concerned about household employment of the attitudes that was coming from some of my employers towards me as an employee, as a household worker. Some of the families I worked for were very, very nice, but then there were others who were terribly unpleasant, in my opinion, cared less than a barrel of beans about poor people and had an attitude towards those women like myself that was working the field of domestics that we were just some sort of machine that you do something for them, they care not enough to even say thanks. A decent wage was immaterial to them; anything was good enough, you know. Some old clothes, they felt you needed everything, that you had no right to ask for anything, that you had nothing. So old clothes then ought to be satisfying to you. As a household worker like myself, I should have been willing to accept their old clothing. I should have been willing to eat their leftovers. I should have been willing to take a glass of milk that the child had left over from breakfast because who was I? It seems that evidently they felt that we weren't anything and as a domestic worker give them anything. They are the lowest paid; they have no skills; they're uneducated, so who cares about them? There were some persons with very wonderful attitudes and there were some cases where people really felt too sorry for us, "the poor little things," you know. That we weren't even recognized in that situation as a mature person, as an adult. We were some sort of poor little creatures that they were very careful. They wanted to always feed you; they felt that a domestic worker must be very hungry, poor, and there was cases like they were preparing a meal for three people all on one plate and they just could never stop asking you just take one more, just you ought to be able to eat more. I feel that if the employer wants to be kind to mainly their domestic help, I think really domestic workers want to be treated quite normal as another person, not treated as if you're poor, you're desperate, you've got to stuff your stomach 'cause you won't get this kind of food anymore.

All these kinds of things really brought about a change to do something different for ourselves to find that kind of respect

ROBERTS: and dignity that we wanted as people, as a group of people, as individuals. We could be somebody, be a person, a human. We're quite aware of our shortcomings, of our very little education, we know why. Most of us feel it wasn't our fault, that it was a programmed situation. The system somehow, we felt, denying masses of poor people equal education could certainly keep people poor, would keep them less educated and down and left at the choice of the middle class to do what they wanted to do with them. So as domestics, we are aware of our situation. We feel we are victims of the American society. We feel that we are not any different than anyone else. That we were not born deliberately illiterate and dumb, that we were just as equal as any other child. We were born in the world to be trained by our government providing the kind of education that it ought to provide for its people, for its nation, and there are people in our country that we don't do that for and there you find namely women who are household employees and many cases where the victim that was victimized by the system.

We feel that the civil rights movement was dealing with all those kinds of unfair attitudes towards some of the American people here. I feel that I was one of those victims that was no fault of my own. I was certainly a child born in the world ready for all opportunities that any other child ought to be ready to accept, a quite normal human being. Not being aware, certainly my family wasn't able to do anything about it. I fell the victim. When one is reared up in a town, the town doesn't even offer high school for its young people, meaning minorities of that community, in our situation, blacks where there weren't even proper schooling, even though it was during the so-called famine session of this country. If we had had an even chance of any other child in that area. . . There were children who were able to receive more time in the education events. Some of the other children. If I was denied the right to go six months to school and was only given half, just three months in school, certainly I'm going to fall short in front of other children in that area and some periods maybe no schooling at all, because we have separate, but not equal in the field of education. The schools were separate but certainly not equal. If I had of been, perhaps I could call it lucky, like some blacks who lived in northern cities, northern towns where they, in many instances around fifty years ago or more, the community couldn't afford one, or double standard of schools, they had one school system. Many of those blacks now are holding better jobs because they went to better schools. There was one school for all in a small, many small rural areas in the northern and eastern cities and states. Rather they had, at least they got equal type of education that allowed them the same equal chance. 'Cept then there, over, over half a million women in this country

ROBERTS: fell under the minorities and even some poor whites were still being poor, was caught in the situation mainly in the southern parts of America, the southern states. So what she was white but she was poor and she didn't have any money to stay home and with her family and go to school, or those children often went out as migrants working on farms and were not able to attend school. Mine was segregation and poor whites was too poor to attend school and not work. Either way, we were trapped and no fault of us. We were caught in the situation but mainly it seemed to be a deliberate plan that the blacks they must not go, so I feel the difference which destroyed millions, poor people who felt, you might, on the other side of the tracks on account of the basis of education they didn't have it, which made us different. But different. We came, we deviated from the main society. Domestics are sort of a deviation of people who were caught up in a situation and, nevertheless, my goals are to fight and continue to join forces with those persons who want to wipe out such evils, and you could call it a evil way of life in society when you do that, when our society does that to her child who has to grow up in its own country and in its own society. That equal education will be provided for all people. If I wanted to get into housekeeping, it would be at a choice that if I wanted to go and get a degree in housekeeping management and that sort of a thing, hotel management or whatever, I could make that choice on my own without being programmed that way.

Domestics usually are very innocent people who only want to make a decent living. They're not trying to do anything but survive. They're doing the best they can do in many cases and struggle very hard trying to please others that they may have a chance and, nevertheless, many persons take advantage of those poor women who try to please very hard and many instances are looked down upon as just a bunch of bums, a bunch of nothings. Some employers say they love their employees but they do hardly anything real nice for them. Very seldom you hear of any employer who wanted to pay their tuition for their maid to go on to school, to advance theirself. They take advantage of them being poor, not earning a decent salary from an employer and nothing she can do but continue to work there. I have learned about various different kinds of grants that can help domestic workers. I find myself passing out those forms, application forms, so domestic workers may fill them out, that will be a chance for her to go to school and try to come up with some sort of semi-skill to improve herself, to give her pride as any other person in this country.

INTERVIEWER: You talk a lot about other, you make reference to other domestics, other women. I'd like to know if, when you first got involved, there were many other women that were also active or involved?

ROBERTS: Active towards domestics? In 1965, there were not any women that much at all anywhere were concerned, concerned to the point of organizing household workers.

INTERVIEWER: There were not, you were saying?

ROBERTS: Yes, there were not. They would like to see something happen when it usually was the opinion, opinions of the people but they weren't anything really going on like organizing domestics. There were areas that we heard about speaking of the women in the Ohio-Cleveland area. In the South there were, we heard something about domestics were talked about discussing about being organized down there but there were no large movement. There were no real efforts for organizing household workers until in 1965, when the group in Cleveland began to speak out and another group began to be pulled together by a report that household employers were concerned about they could not find qualified domestic workers to employ in their homes and there were a great effort to get out and train women how to do domestic work that they may be employed by the employer through that style. Domestics began to be organized training to work better, be able to know how to take care of the live plants in the homes and the new modern electric equipments in the homes and to handle new utility equipments, so this is on the basis of training. And in order to train people to get them interested, you had to do something else and it seemed that a group on a national level were employed, that particular group employed national organizers and opened up training programs to train domestics. At the same time, you had to have something to tell people, that you're giving no pride or dignity, that has been abused. On that point, this group on the national level, they organized, began to talk about pride and respect and dignity, a better way of life for the workers and on that point domestics were taught and trained in places like Kansas City, Missouri, and other parts of this country. They were in training programs, as I understand, through the National Committee for Employees, technicians, their names were changed from being just a day worker over to something like a household technician, which give a better kind of identification towards a worker. She was not known as a day cleaning woman. She was a household technician, which sound quite different than a "cleaning girl" or "gal" to clean my house. "I do day work." "I am a household technician."

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any help or suggestions from union people in traditional unions?

ROBERTS: Oh yes. They were many persons that was involved in union activities, the large local union there, organizers and represen-

ROBERTS: tatives and persons who had been involved themselves many years in union organizing did talk with the domestics who's involved in organizing such as myself and other staff persons that was working here in the Ohio area. Giving us ideas, sending us constitutional guidelines of various different union locals of how mainly males, how they did when they brought about a change for various workers such as the coal mining workers, such as the automobile workers, the whole industry finally where they reached goals, how many years in their struggles, the kinds of things they went through organizing the industrial workers. These kinds of people did talk with us. They still talk with us. They still give us ideas. They still send us literature of what they're doing, plans and ideas, which certainly was encouraging to us, to a group like household workers who had never had a contract to work under and now we had ideas about we ought to have contracts and what a contract could mean to a domestic, between her and her employer. We began to speak out in our goals and objectives, which some of these ideas do come from organized labor groups.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any particular union person, an individual that sticks out in your mind as very helpful?

ROBERTS: Well, one guy in the Greater Cleveland area. We talked to many, but one guy I can remember was very helpful. His name was Ted Dostall. I met him in the Greater Cleveland area here working on the defense committee for a particular situation. He was, at that time, a resident of Youngstown, Ohio. He met me and was telling me how we ought, the women ought to come together and get contracts and stand up to your employers and be proud and tell them what you want, don't let them tell you what you ought to do. You are offering a service. You should tell them what your wages are, the hours you're going to work and be concerned, stick to your goals. If you get fired, don't give up, continue to struggle. Ted was quite helpful in his advice towards the group. And there was a woman that was quite helpful, that she was a trade union organizer and she also offered ideas, things. We met many people that was involved deep in labor. I was not aware of that much of labor movements. I seen picket signs, but I never was really involved and I really didn't know that much about union activities at all. These people began to tell me things which we felt were a very good idea and some of the things they were saying, if we did them certainly would, we felt, would improve our working conditions and we felt very proud on the basis that we would stand up to our employers. We would tell them what we wanted and no matter how rich they looked in their fine homes and their big cars and everything, we would get. . .

ROBERTS: It was kind of frightful to me when I began to speak out. I felt as if I was probably the size of an ant or something. An ant, say, talking to a person who's standing in the door of a fifty or a hundred thousand dollar home and I had absolutely nothing, and to tell this person something was pretty hard to do. You'd get pretty choked up and get pretty frightened and try and say it. And then what really encourages the workers when they see these people begin to change their hard tough looks and begin to smile and begin to reason with us, saying the things are going to be different. You're shocked and you're surprised and amazed that they didn't kick you down the steps and throw you out, but they're not throwing you out. They're offering you something and they're not being real smart with you. They're hearing what you're have to saying. You begin to build an inward pride that you never had before. Poor people can say something; women can say something; a poor woman can say something and it will be meaningful and the lady who has everything, we learned for the first time, that they really needed us. We thought that we needed them and that was the only thing involved that we needed them to make a living, but we learned that they needed us, that we were important to them. And many of them said that we were important. You are important, Geraldine. I couldn't go and do a lot of things and leave my children if you weren't there. I can rely on you. You're going to look after my children. This means a lot to me and I learned for the first time that I was important to them. Many of us learned that we were important to them, which was amazing and surprising to us, and that's when we began to feel we didn't have to say "yes ma'am" anymore. We could say "yes". And the first time I said yes to her, I didn't know what she was going to say. What do you mean by "yes"? She didn't say anything; she let me say the word "yes". I answered her in that manner and I wasn't saying "yes, ma'am" and I wasn't calling her "Miss so and so". I begin to call her by her first name and she accepted that and wow, we learned we really are somebody.

INTERVIEWER: Were you encouraged in addition by say neighborhood people or newspapers, media? Were they supportive of you?

ROBERTS: The news media seemed to be on our side. In fact, many news reporters sort of give us loaded questions or ideas. Some of the things the news media was saying was really giving us some ideas that we ought to say those things. They would ask such questions like, "Well, Geraldine, are you really going to ask for more wages? Are you really going to tell her that you need better pay? Are you really going to tell her that you're going to want shorter hours?" and of course they would really write in the papers some of the things we said and some of the things

ROBERTS: we didn't mention that was added that we should have said and the articles would appear very favorable and some of the articles seemed to be quite frightening to some of the employers. It seemed that the employers. . . [there] was the time that the group talked about a Friday, a Friday weekend strike that the newspapers blew it up real big. The reporters were really saying to the employers that the girls are not going to be there Saturday and they said you wouldn't even go to the hairdressers there because you're not going to have a babysitter; you're not going to have anybody to get the house ready on the weekend and the bacon and eggs will not be prepared Monday morning for the big boss's breakfast. She going to get up for breakfast and she's not going to be in the kitchen and the women looked at the articles and really smiles. We didn't really say all those things but this was what we really wanted to say. We were in favor of the articles of what they read and the news media really gave us large coverage. They really really helped us a lot and sort of deep down the employers and some of the remarks towards the employers really sort of upset a lot of some organized house employers. Organized groups said somethings back to us that we were dirty and they said that we should be glad that they let us in their house or that they gave us old clothes 'cause we certainly came out looking terrible and all those sort of things. Remarks made back to us that we eat up all the food and we drink up the liquor and pour water in it, all this kinds of remarks was made in retaliation of the articles that was written up in the paper and, certainly, my expression back to those things [was] that [the] things they was mentioning was certainly isolated cases and if all these things were true, why were a lot of house employers employing their helps like, say we'd been working for them twenty-five or thirty years if she's drinking up all the liquor. What do you keep her around for and if she's pouring water in it or if they were feeding them too much food as some said, why did they keep them on; why didn't they dismiss them?

INTERVIEWER: Was your neighborhood supportive of union organization?

ROBERTS: Pardon.

INTERVIEWER: Was your neighborhood supportive of your activities?

ROBERTS: The Greater Cleveland area?

INTERVIEWER: Your own particular area where you lived.

ROBERTS: Well, being a very poor area, there were women saying everywhere, sock it to 'em, Miss Roberts. Tell 'em off, Miss Roberts.

ROBERTS: Even the children in the community. "We saw you on television. My mother does domestic work. My mother do day work." Smaller children usethe term that they hear their mothers say. "I'm going out to do some day work." The children were very proud. I really got salutes in the streets from the people in the community or at the church; the people were very proud there. And it was alarming how the males was the ones said it's absolutely great what you're doing. Men who were usually members of various local unions spoke out very strongly in the activities that I was involved with. "It seemed they fired you from you job? Well, just stick it out. Anything I can do? Here's a dollar; here's two dollars. If you need anything, call me. Anything." There was a restaurant in the community that said, "Well, Miss Roberts; you can always come up her and have a meal seein' where you don't have a job. They fired you, my restaurant doors are open to you any time. You can come here and eat." I was called and told by some middle-class upper blacks that I could stay in their homes. I was called by some middle-class whites who said that they had extra space in their homes, that if I needed a place to stay that I could live in their homes. I wouldn't have to pay anything. There were people who were going to Florida for vacation who said that the house would be empty all the fall and if I wanted to come there and live, I could take up space in their home. Don't stop; sock it to 'em; continue. So it was really a beautiful experience. I got the other hate calls who said I should get out of town. I should be derailed. Somebody ought to derail you out of this town. You're a trouble maker. I was called a communist. I was being inspired through persons who was of the Communist Party and I shouldn't let a lot of people tell me a lot of things. All kind of crazy things were told to me, that I was called a nigger, that we're not going to give you any jobs, nigger. You better not come out here. I was called by employers who said, "If you want to work, I'm white; I'm a doctor's wife. If you want a job you can work in our home." So there were pro and cons.

INTERVIEWER: You were active right from the very beginning, weren't you?

ROBERTS: Yes, I had to be. Once I did what I did, not even aware that anyone would be that concerned, all at once I was placed in the position that I kept fighting all the harder. I was frightened and I was encouraged and immediately it was like a mushroom thing. It just, like overnight, it was really exciting and I smiled. There was times I cried. It was a great experience to hear the other women cry, to see them cry about their conditions. Kissed by poor women, would walk up and just kiss my hand. So glad I did something. Said it should have been did a long time. "It's so very late. We're proud of you, Miss Roberts. Anything I can do, let me know. I'll try and help."

ROBERTS: They would give me experiences. "I worked with this woman all these years and she died and her husband told me that they were going to move away, going to another area, going to an apartment, and he said, 'I'm sorry, Mary doesn't have you down for anything.' They would say there was things in the house if I wanted to come and get." She'd be telling me her experience. There was a very sad way that women had grown old and went to work with these people when the family was a very young couple and the domestic worker was a very young woman and, in many cases, they both were, domestic was a newly married woman, the employers were newly married and all of those years, like thirty, forty, fifty years there were not real collateral in every house. Just step out on social security, a very small check because it had been poorly paid into. In some cases, not paid into at all. No security was made to establish that she had ever worked in her life after forty years of service.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first official position in the Domestic Workers?

ROBERTS: My first official position immediately in the Domestic Workers was the President.

INTERVIEWER: Was that appointed or elected?

ROBERTS: I insisted on holding an election for the group and let them choose themselves. I told them that I had pointed up the condition, was left to the workers who they wanted to lead the group and the election was held at the St. James Avenue Church, at 8401 Cedar and the women voted that they wanted me to continue the work I was doing and also as the President.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any one particular person that stands out in your mind that encouraged you to become active, more active, in your domestic work organization?

ROBERTS: Yes, there's a few people that I could always point out. One is Ruth Turner that time. She was a Miss; she was a young woman; she was the executive director of the Cleveland CORE Chapter who insisted and helped. Another lady, she was a personal, very close neighbor and a friend of mine, Mrs. Marcella Johnson, who called me almost every day and encouraged me, and tried to help me. Another lady, Miss Ginny Coles, a grass-root community worker, a civil rights worker, would give me a lot of encouragement and came out and helped with the meetings and helped make the punch and put the cookies out and helped pass out the literature. A gentleman, Mr. Lewis G. Robinson, president of the Cleveland Freedom Fighters, really the Freedom Fighters of Ohio, give a lot of encouragement, helped towards, we had interviews

ROBERTS: together on radio shows where he, being a lawyer, offered legal advice and that sort of a thing. These were people who worked very close encouraging me, such as literature, helping set up meetings, on the news media, or doing interview together, or any number of things like that was going on.

INTERVIEWER: What specific responsibilities did you have at the beginning as President?

ROBERTS: Mainly not being a speaker was very hard. I was certainly not a public speaker when I found myself doing a lot of public relations for the group immediately. Facing news media such as the United States Civil Rights Commission, on poverty. There was a seminar here at the Federal Building and I was asked to come out and testify on the basis of the conditions of the domestic workers for that administration President at that time, Mrs. Lyndon B., the late Mr. Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States. As I understand, a Mexican domestic worker had called his attention to my activities in Cleveland, Ohio, here and she returned to Texas and the gentleman who interviewed me said that President Johnson had asked him to make sure that he talked with Miss Roberts in Cleveland during their period. They was talking about housing, bad housing in the community, help and employment. I was scheduled for the, on the agenda to talk about the conditions of domestic workers and I was interviewed perhaps like an hour or so for early morning breakfast interviews. More than once, these people from the United States Civil Rights Commission was out to see me and talk with me and I gave 'em names of domestic workers to call.

INTERVIEWER: So you did go to other places like schools and conventions to take the word of the domestics? You found yourself very active in those kinds of things?

ROBERTS: Yes, in Cleveland, in Washington, in Mississippi, Baltimore, Maryland, many places.

INTERVIEWER: Did a lot of women come out and attend these meetings?

ROBERTS: Yes, the first meeting there was about twenty women there who'd taken some hand leaflets that was passed out to them. We passed out maybe five hundred leaflets and there was twenty women who came to the very first meeting. After that meeting was written up in the paper, a news release which Miss Ruth Turner was very active in helping along those lines. Mr. Lewis G. Robinson and other persons that was involved in the struggle came to that meeting to assist some help. The following meetings grew from twenty to ninety to two hundred, two hundred-forty people.

INTERVIEWER: All women?

ROBERTS: Mainly the majority of all women.

INTERVIEWER: Mostly domestics?

ROBERTS: Mostly domestics and a lot of spectators came by who heard about the group, a lot of union people, people from other parts of the country dropped in to visit the meetings and to see what we were doing, to shake our hands and tell all of the women to continue their struggle and what they were doing, so we had a list immediately of over three hundred registered women the very first year.

INTERVIEWER: How did this, how did all this affect your private life?

ROBERTS: It had a great affect on my private life. I was sort of, in a way engaged perhaps for my second marriage and all the activities that was going on there in the struggle with the household workers, like my fiance wasn't pleased and I had no time for him. In fact, I really forgot all about him. He never returned.

INTERVIEWER: So it completely turned your private life around?

ROBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it had a negative or positive affect on your children?

ROBERTS: The kids were very proud of the whole things, seeing their mother on television, reading about their mother in the papers. It was sort of a real exciting thing for the kids.

INTERVIEWER: So you think it was a positive thing for them?

ROBERTS: I think it was positive. They got a kick out of coming out to the meetings with us and standing in the back row looking up at their mother. Yes, my son telling me, "Right on, Mom. Sock it to 'em, Mom."

INTERVIEWER: Since one of your most important functions, at least if I understood you correctly, was an organizer, what kind of approaches did you use to get additional women involved?

ROBERTS: Just sort of telling the truth. Telling it like it is. My whole program was just to tell it like it is, explains the real conditions or to point out the awareness of even other labor groups that they had completely overlooked a whole group of workers in this country that was not even recognized by the labor union.

ROBERTS: People who was involved about bringing better working conditions for workers had completely overlooked a group of workers called domestic workers, that we were like an invisible group.

[INTERRUPTION]

I'd work regular and everyday and certainly handle chores that was over and above the average man in some cases doing the hard chores and babysit free. In fact, I called the style of work that we did, that we give more charity than charity groups towards very wealthy people, excepted charity by force.

INTERVIEWER: What major problems did you encounter in your efforts to include more people?

ROBERTS: One of the major problems that we encountered out of all the excitement and everything, out of all of the things they wanted to say they would do, we had very little money to work with. There weren't enough money to really pay the secretary with, which we hired at fifty dollars a week, five days a week. She answered our phone for ten dollars a day. It was difficult to pay that fifty dollars for five day's services. We felt we were really exploiting our own secretary because we worked her long hours in our behalf. She really donated a lot of her time because there wasn't enough money coming in. Even today, it's not a kind of group that the so-called do-gooders, the so-called donors, the foundations want to support. The foundations, labor unions, have not came to our rescue to really help us financially, to really say that we will pay for a national organizer to work with you, to help you, to really say that we'll pay for seminars in your behalf. We don't get that. We've given seminars with actually food brought from the kitchens, from our own kitchens, a church donating. . . with no money to even offer, a seminar without money. In many cases, the women had a walk or take a bus, no organized transportation to get them to the seminar, no babysitters services as other groups have that will take care of your children while you're gone. I even felt that many of the employers who had taken advantage of these workers certainly ought to have been willing to babysit for their help to keep those children, those children in the homes that these women had kept up all these years, to take those children in and babysit for her maid while she went to a seminar and express those kind of things. I even expressed that the employers ought to be willing to come down to the seminar and sit down and have lunch together besides a woman that has worked for her. We did have that kind of a seminar, weekend seminar. I think there were less than four employers came down to a large meeting of domestics.

INTERVIEWER: So you are really saying that people did a lot more talking than they did actual tangible giving.

ROBERTS: Yes, I would like to really try and. . . I would like to really get involved in a survey to see why middle-class America is so down on her domestic servants in her country. Why they do so less for them. What is it; what definition is it? Are they saying that these ignorant people, these poor people are here to serve us, that we don't want to do anything for them, that their life style if so different than ours, that there's a way of life that we want to keep them at that level. I have mentioned that employers ought to be willing to offer scholarships to their household servants. We don't find any great rush to do any of this stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Was this equally true of ministers and community leaders?

ROBERTS: Even ministers and community leaders somehow didn't find a very small percentage of ministers even when we went to them and asked them. At all times, we always had to ask. It wasn't a volunteer donation to say that we're going to give our Sunday offering in behalf of household workers' goals to their expense. We've even suggested that. Organization could pay the salary of the secretary or a church could be responsible for her salary. She's working in behalf of a group of women. These kinds of things has not happened. Small donations from a very small number, maybe no more than five different congregational churches and certainly not a large wealthy suburban churches who could do so much has not did anything for our group in Cleveland.

INTERVIEWER: Did you try to reach out and relate to women in other unions?

ROBERTS: The trade union, organized trade union women has been quite friendly towards us, which they're tightly gripped in a desperate struggle themselves for identity. And, certainly, I feel that a minority position amongst other union groups, I'm talking about the women, women in the trade union. Unions, I think in my opinion, my opinion is that they wanted to do more than they have did for us. I think they're in a lot of sympathy. We didn't become a union. I think if we had a really, become a really all-out union, maybe there were ways and means they could of helped more. I don't think for one minute that the women in trade unions ignored us. I think there was a desperate struggle themselves and still are to survive themselves, and are willing to help other women. And maybe, in the future, they are going to do more. I think maybe because many union groups are predominant males that they didn't really see that much of grass root group of women organizing to really step out and help those women.

ROBERTS: Mainly, 90 percent of the women are poor and black. Very few would dare have a degree and a lot of education. I think, more than ever now, domestics at this time, at this period, 1977, are beginning to go to school and seek out higher education for themselves rather than the average sixth grader, ninth grader, tenth grader and the majority not even carrying a high school diploma or not trying to do those things for themselves. It came about because there was people like myself and other groups around the country began to speak out. There were some legislators who said a lot of things. Some of the strong speeches, women all began to help themselves as individuals saying I'm going to go back to school, try to improve myself because I'm tired of being worked as a slave in this country without a decent wage, tired of being ignored. If it takes going back to school, we'll just have to do it. If it takes changing from being poor as we are, then it means that we're going to have to get in. Very often, grants are becoming more or less available to poor people to accept if a woman cannot afford to pay the tuitions, are going up in the schools. I think her goals that she'd like to reach are going to be, she's going to be quite disappointed because she's still not going to be able to reach her goals. She's not going to be able to pay her tuitions into the schools with the cutoffs of the various federal grants. But mainly through HEW, Health, Education and Welfare of this country, we're seeing no great support at this time. I don't know what President Carter will do in helping poor women such as domestics and other poor women, mainly women who's trapped with families. There are some males now in the field of household employment. I certainly hope they will not have the same terrible experience that many women like myself and others, women, have had to experience. I hope they will find it quite different. I hope males entering the struggle, that they will help change the style of household employment. I do welcome men into the field. Maybe we will find something different because the work is very hard and we've been doing our job and any job that any man could do as far as hard work at less pay.

INTERVIEWER: Did you expect to continue active union work?

ROBERTS: I certainly have no intentions at this time dropping the struggle at all, even though I am enrolled myself in a community college here in our neighborhood to try to improve my educational background on the basis that I was able to help others not necessarily to get a better job and change from the field of being with household employment. I would still continue as a domestic worker as I would continue my goals in the field of education. I would always want to know what it's like to be a household employee until a great drastic change begins to come about in behalf of poor people whether men are in the field or continue as it is, 90 percent women.

INTERVIEWER: How did you adjust the other activities of your life, for example, your social, your political, your religious with your union activities? Did all those things get shoved aside or did you incorporate them in any way?

ROBERTS: I think I incorporated them; I think I do incorporate them. I find church, I find reasons to go to neighborhood meetings. I'm concerned about young people in my community and in the total community. I'm concerned about child abuse. I'm concerned about abortions, with young girls becoming pregnant, trapped in society, being thrown on welfare and confused. I'm concerned about politics. I'm concerned about policy boards, who set policy standards for the community. I'm concerned about national politics and I'm not only concerned. I find some time, some time to take out and do something to some degree about all of these things. I get into the presidential campaign. I get into state and local official campaigns by giving my support by working in the election periods. I'm concerned about utilities. I'm very concerned about the utilities, cost of utilities that face this nation in the last past months. I am a candidate at this present for the Cleveland School Board in 1977, because I am concerned about school boards throughout this country. I'm concerned about educational curriculum in this country. If anything I can do by lending my support like speaking out on issues, like being delegate, being a delegate, whatever. I sort of enjoy working in behalf of my fellow man on the basis of a better way of life for people regardless of their race. I think I have a great influence on a lot of people who watch my activities and how I feel about various things and I think when I speak out on these things, it encourages others to speak out.

I think we must do away with the so-called guidelines of discrimination, who can, who can't, who's poor and who has it. I think we must say regardless of the upper class, that they no longer must ignore the so-called lower class if we intend to have a nation of people working together. We're going to have to work together regardless of who makes more money than the next person or who have a degree. I think that those who hold the masters are going to have to work with those who have no masters. The DD's are going to have to work with the no D's. Women at all level are going to have to relate together and separations that we have now between women must stop. I want to be a part of helping them make that change. Those are my real, inward, natural, inner natural goals as a person and the ways I feel about life.

INTERVIEWER: You see a great fusion of all these different areas of your life? Political, social, economic, religious. They all overlap to you?

ROBERTS: Yes, it's a very heavy schedule.

INTERVIEWER: The total commitment then?

ROBERTS: Yes, definitely so.

INTERVIEWER: When we talk about this kind of commitment, bringing different groups of the community together, could you single out a particular group that perhaps has been most effective in helping you achieve your goals?

ROBERTS: What particular group has been most effective?

INTERVIEWER: Would you say the church has been most helpful or would you say political leaders have been most helpful? Would you say the YWCA has been most helpful? Maybe there isn't one, I don't know. I was wondering if you could single out any particular area.

ROBERTS: I found more support through female oganizations, such as the council, the National Council of Negro Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, IWY, The National Organization for Women, the labor organized women. Women have said a lot to some degree of giving support. The church has helpin' in my opinion not near, I don't think the church has helped enough at all. On the basis that many poor people who are oppressed finding themselves going to church, lookin' for help, lookin' for someone to care and they looked upon the church as an organized body to help people, a humanity kind of organization and since the majority of these kind of workers are poor and do attend church, I feel the church has certainly drug its feet and has, has not give, as I would say, a very low percentage in their behalf of supporting such struggle. The only group I have, I could think of that did warrant, a religious organized group that involved religion, that is the Southern Christian Leadership Conference group. And those ministers, it seemed to me in the South, that particular organization has been more active in helping such as domestic workers in the South through that particular organization. Basing that idea on the literature that I have seen, the kind of support that I've noticed around the country, I would say Southern Christian Leadership played the greatest role in this country. Dr., the late Dr. Martin Luther King offered more direct help as a religious man than anyone I could really point out on a large nature basis.

INTERVIEWER: So the greatest camaraderie has really come between women, women, and women?

ROBERTS: Yes, women have given a lot of help. Men has spoke out, union men, but women, somehow, they would begin in our community say

ROBERTS: we want the domestic workers represented on our agenda, women from IWY have certainly asked for women to be represented even though this is known to be a middle-class organization. National Organization for Women, I still think they have drug their feet in getting down to grass roots support, grass root work in helping poor women in this nation. I think they do a great deal more than what they have did. Their recognition is good but not enough. We need money, to put out in this country to help create the kind of programs that will upgrade women such as domestics. We need to say to middle-class women that you will no longer exploit your domestic worker, that you, if you own a business or company, you will add that person to all the fringe benefits and in many cases your husband is offering workers in his company or in your company, that you will not look upon her as your servant and an under-the-rug attitude that she's my slave in the style of a whisper. This attitude must stop and I feel that the whole country must change its attitude toward namely poor people, poor women and many poor young people trying to advance theirselves in the field of education, that we look down upon our youths and we say that they cannot have food stamps to just survive as a student struggling through school. I think they ought to have food stamps 'cause they are certainly the future of tomorrow in this country. At least, we could feed them if we don't even give them anything else, decent jobs. That attitude is another that I think I'm deeply concerned about. I feel my fifty years of living on this earth it doesn't matter, but I am concerned the attitudes of the students in this country who's struggling that they will not become a domestic worker or a ditch digger if there's any ditches to dig, because they were denied an equal education and we should forget about separate but equal. There's no such thing in my opinion. I am a victim of so-called separate but equal education. We need a total education system that educates all of the people of this country at the same level. I don't think we'll have welfare, welfare lines where people are healthy and not sick on welfare. Many of these persons are on welfare because they don't have qualification in the field of education to get a good job. Those are the things that we have to stop doing. Those are the things that I will continue to fight, to try to educate in my opinion often to people that they will change this attitude towards the poor. A child is born equal but he becomes poor because he's denied the same right of an education.

INTERVIEWER: When all this began back in 1965 did you think you'd ever have a leadership role?

ROBERTS: At the beginning, no, there was nothing about leadership. There was nothing about leadership at all. I was only expressing a

ROBERTS: feelin', my expression was a feeling I had, was something happening to me and a few people around me that was working in one situation on the same job. I wanted my employer to stop giving out old, two-week sour food to me and the other women who worked there and talkin' to other workers, they had the same kind of experience. They wanted the women--very rich women they worked for who had steaks jammed into the freezer, everything you could imagine in the freezer, that we were never allowed to even eat and if it was served to us it was after the steak had been served for dinner and put away as left overs and given out to us the next day. Certainly, we didn't feel that our employers had to take care of us, but we felt that we ought to have a right to a decent meal 'cause we were earning very low money from these employers and we were doing so many different kinds of chores for them and they were paying so less for what they were paying for the labor that at least we could have got a decent meal and we really wanted to tell them, the employers, that we were not going to do this anymore. We were going to stop doing the stuff.

There was certainly nothing about leadership. It was certainly nothing about getting into the newspapers. We were just talking amongst ourselves and gettin' mad about it and take some handbills that we drew our grievance to our employer and only certain ones were going to do that one because we didn't know who was going to get fired. I felt if I got fired, my kids were grown up and I, if someone had to be punished for it, I would take the punishment. I was willing to take the punishment by being kicked out and certainly I was the first to take the punishment but not on the basis of leadership. I tried to find women I felt that were school teachers, persons who had been to college and that sort of thing to take the leadership and help us and speak out. We wanted someone to even do the speaking out for us, to tell what we wanted, to say what we wanted but we were sort of disappointed. No one really wanted to do that. Everybody that we would ask to do that for us, keep saying that we had to do it. We were told over and over and we almost felt at times that maybe we should drop the whole idea at that point. No one would really say it; no one would speak out. They'd say you have to do it yourself. No one can do it but you women who are working at domestics. You have to do it and so who was going to do it. Everybody was afraid to say it and it seemed everybody that was involved in the group said, "Geraldine, you do it."

INTERVIEWER: Once in this position of leadership, did you then ever have any rivals or was there anyone who tried to keep you out of your leadership of the Domestic Workers?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, they were women who was doing, I insisted on an election being held and there were women who, there was some woman who became my vice. She was the vice-president of the group and she felt she had a lot of swell ideas. She felt she was very strong. She felt I was asking for pay for the workers, the rate was too low, that I was fighting for a dollar and a half an hour and she felt I should have said two dollars an hour. And she, in her opinion, she felt she could do more for the group than I could. That I was being soft on the employers, that my attitude was too lenient towards the employers, that I was not being militant enough in taking a stronger stand against the employers. And she felt that if she could take the leadership over, that she could lead a much stronger fight than I was exercising and, on these basis, supporters for Geraldine and supporters for my vice began to organize themselves about who should be the leader of the group and finally there was a special election to see what the workers, the membership, the rank and file members who they really wanted and I won.

INTERVIEWER: So you had a good old fashioned power struggle?

ROBERTS: Yes, an inward struggle within the group, of another group, another take over. They wanted to take over. I even decided that this group in here, the group, my vice was so determined 'cause she thought I wasn't offering the right kind of leadership. I did step down. In fact, I left the chair and set in the back of a particular meeting we had on one Sunday afternoon. I taken a seat from the back room, in the back of the room and set on the back seat and let her, I asked her to come up and preside our meeting and offer her leadership. If this was what the group wanted, then this is what they ought to have and I was not offering the kind of leadership that that particular group of women wanted, I would would certainly take the seat in back. And I did that. I taken the seat in the back and gave up the chair. I turned the gavel over to her and let her chair the meeting. The women became very upset. Her followers were less of them women who supported me. Other people in the community, other groups well, that women started to domineer. Who is that down here giving us all those problems. There were people began to interfere who said that Miss Roberts got the group together and what is the other woman doing causing problems in the group, and out of that election there was a split. A split came that her supporters never wanted to come back to the meeting again and those women who supported me came to meetings and went through an experience that they felt pretty bad over.

ROBERTS: My morale was quite down. I wasn't sure that I should continue. I didn't expect anything like that. I had never had that kind of an experience. It sort of did something to my morale. For over two years the organization really was, went along as a lame duck 'cause I really didn't, I didn't have the inspiration to continue. The women kept talking to me, various people in the community said, "How are you doing?" and I'd tell about my experience and they said don't let it get you down. "You're doing great. The whole nation now knows. There's people organizing all over the country from what you started here in 1965. Don't give up, continue, you already did a very good job. These things can happen." I heard about other power struggles in other groups. What had happened in other organizations, church struggles, power struggles in the church, struggles in union locals. They said this was a way of life. It does happen when people are dealing with organizing groups that this sort of thing can happen, that I should not get discouraged. I should continue and I began to hear and become aware of other power struggles and seen that it was really a way of life, the way attitudes of people, the life style of people. So I began to build my morale back mainly within myself. I began to ask of the needs of the people again. I never stopped negotiating with employers around the basis of jobs for the workers, but I lost a lot of the steam and the pressure that I had going on inside of me to say things. For over a year or so, I had very little to say.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of any other reason why women who were active dropped out of the domestic workers?

ROBERTS: Yes, there were very different kinds of reasons that women were active and dropped out. Some cases they were families that were moving to other cities, no longer residents of Cleveland. Many cases where women--I've always talked about domestics going back to the classroom even though they were mature adults that they should return to educational classes. I encouraged them to go into adult educational classes or those who could quality in colleges and universities should move on or those who were getting various kinds of training programs, they should involve themselves. There's reasons women left the organization because they were going to school and various kinds of different early childhood studies. Some women, domestics, were taking up. . . going into study of dieticians or dental assistants and various kinds of semiskills. They were getting into assistant teachers and someday going all the way into becoming RN nurses and some women I can point out now are qualified classroom teachers. They started out as teacher assistant in the classes. They no longer kept their membership. However, many women continue to join.

ROBERTS: The period that we were funded under the Council of Economic Opportunities, those grant funds ran out. There were no longer no secretary employed to set in the office and handle the needs of the domestics and register other domestics. That was a great hurt to the group that the out doors of the organization closed on a full-time basis, and on those points, all those kinds of things were the breakdown, the pull down, no funds to keep a full-time staff. The board became lax. They were never really meeting on a regular basis as they were when the group was funded. Persons being older saying they were going to retire from the field of domestics.

INTERVIEWER: How about fear?

ROBERTS: There was a great fear in the very beginning. Many of the members joined the group, we were asked to not expose their names. They didn't want it to be known that they were members of the group. Some accepted membership cards and they said they never showed them to their employers. There were periods where we had television coverage that many of the members and even non-members unless it was themselves who were not yet affiliated are sharing the idea of being in the spotlight mainly to be with us who would be under the camera on the basis they didn't want their employer to know. I was told that there was suburban organized groups, suburban housewives who said they would not employ anyone from the Domestic Workers of America, that they came from out group or connected with. As I understand, I was referred to as "that woman". Any involvement with her, "I don't want anybody working here having anything to do with her." They [employers] felt that she was a menace to the area, causing problems and disturbing. [Employers said] that the women always was satisfied. Many had thirty years of employment with their workers and there was no more complaints. All at once I was causing attitudes now where the workers were complaining and confused and they [employers] had helped them [their domestic employees] and gave them many things and they weren't concerned about a few dollars.

INTERVIEWER: Did they go beyond that ever and criticize your personal life or you personally?

ROBERTS: Well, they classed me a troublemaker.

INTERVIEWER: Just a troublemaker. They didn't try and make any kinds of scandals about you personally?

ROBERTS: Well, they really couldn't because I was only a cleaning lady and a very simple person in the community. Never had did anything but well, walking a picketline. They said that I was

ROBERTS: associating with communists and socialist people by being seen on picketlines. Some persons said that they realized that I wouldn't understand. "We know that you don't have very much education so really wouldn't understand communists. Communists is Communism so they could easily take advantage of people like you and influence your mind that you would be doing things that would benefit them." And we've had them said, "Why don't you just take a good job yourself and leave all that business alone; quit worrying about those other women." I've even been offered jobs, something else I could do, like employ women. They didn't want anyone else but me come and work on other kinds of jobs that would eliminate me from working with the DWA.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever do much traveling in your Domestic Workers?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, I've spoke with any number of colleges and some universities, conferences around the country, or organized organizations. I've been guest speaker at any number of affairs. My ticket was paid and expense to go and attend various kinds of seminars and coalition organized groups. That continues. I'm still, I still speak at class groups at different schools such as Cleveland State University, Western Campus of the Community College, classrooms at Western Campus, Western Reserve.

INTERVIEWER: Do you usually go alone? Do you ever go with groups or just usually you who represents the domestics?

ROBERTS: Usually, I'm asked to appear from my group speakin' and often times they'll ask for me. There are other speakers but mostly a request for the Geraldine Roberts to be the speaker. However, I have declined in various cases and have sent other speakers to represent me. I do that one quite often, have someone else to represent me.

INTERVIEWER: Is the position you held, and hold, I understand, of the President of Domestics, the highest position in the organization?

ROBERTS: The President at this time would be the executive person of the organization and makes the decisions. However, I'm a lifetime board member of the group for being the founder, in our constitution and by-laws, it was written in that the founder can serve on any committee, founder can be executive member, delegate-at-large, or whatever. However, we do plan, the group, to have perhaps a national president. I'm on the local affiliation in Ohio. There are other groups that have national presidents that serves as the national president of the national group. We only have the Ohio affiliation.

INTERVIEWER: Did you accept yourself in the beginning as an organizer with the intention of giving certain powers and responsibilities to the president and to the board?

ROBERTS: When the group was first set up, there was various different people sit down and drew up, we got a lot of help from the Legal Aid Service. In fact, they held the election for us, organized the election through Legal Aid, legal department.

INTERVIEWER: Give us some insights into how the Domestic Workers is structured?

ROBERTS: Well, it is structured by an executive board of seven panel executive board, which includes our president of the board.

INTERVIEWER: Is it different from the president of the organization?

ROBERTS: Yes, it's different from the president of the rank and file. This is the executive board, the power board. President of the board, treasurer of the board, and there's chaplain of the board, there are officers of the board, and there's a public relations on the board. All seven panelists have a position, things they do on the board. The rank-and-file membership has a president, recording secretary, financial secretary. They have different various committees, chairmans of various different committees of the rank and file.

INTERVIEWER: Were these created as you felt a need? These committees?

ROBERTS: Yes, the committees vary. They serve out a period and change, such as the educational committee and they have a committee on the health and welfare of the workers, transportation committee, like getting, there's members who happened to own cars who take members home. The educational committee deals such as scholarships and concerning children of domestic workers, whether they need scholarships for their children.

We have what we call the Domestic Workers Coalition Board. This is the son board of the board. That board has various groups and organization; representatives from various groups and organizations set on the coalition board. That's like a panel that the DWA has called the coalition. They can deal with anything. They can deal with major crisis, anything. They can give recommendations that the executive board can consider whether they want to accept them or not, but the coalition deals with any number of things. And groups that are in their own coalition, members of various other kinds of community organizations, like someone from the Cleveland Board of Education, can sit on that board or somebody could sit on

ROBERTS: that board from Cuyahoga County Community College. This is exposing that there's kinds of services in the community that the general community ought to know about. The employment would include domestics and other persons who were looking for employment or needs training and all that sort of thing so that's a very large group that sets on the board.

A lot of the decisions and things go only through their director. The president can be their director, the project director. They had like a project director and they have like the executive director, to serve on all projects and are concerned about publicity going out. If the president of the board is concerned about the director or concerned about the president and that other board is male-female, four members of that board according to our constitution has to be domestic workers and the other three are usually community people or other persons could hold a very high position in the community and serve on that board. But we do have that the majority of the votes on that board will be from household workers settin' on their own board and we have the three-type membership. There's a voting membership: she's a domestic worker herself or hisself, they can be male or female. The age limit begins at eighteen and over. There's an associate membership and this can be persons who want to work such as the sub-board. They can be members, associate members, through workin', helpin' to make decisions that would affect the entire community on various different issues. There's a friend membership, usually registers of organizations that will not perhaps involve themselves with any more than a donation or support a particular issue, if there's a political issue like three dollars an hour minimum. Those groups, company or whatever, could give, maybe sponsor persons to go as delegates. So there's a three-type membership plus the executive board and a coalition board.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that there is such a thing as informal lines of power versus formal lines of power?

ROBERTS: Could you give me direct point on what you mean?

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's hard to conceive that someone who has played such an important role in this organization as you might not posses more authority even though you may not hold the highest office any longer so that would be a form of informal power.

ROBERTS: Well, I think when I'm dealing with the masses as this organization was set up, I would feel that I would be selfish to try and continue to struggle for the highest position in the organization. I look upon this organization as the organization

ROBERTS: that ought to be around for a long, long time. I'm the founder of the group. I'm proud of being the founder. I certainly hope that the organization will continue to live as a part of this society and the work should continue. I have no selfish desires to be the highest person. I always want to be a part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Then, I think what you're really saying if I understand you is that, in essence, you are opposed to the concept of informal power because it sort of means that the organization couldn't function without a specific person.

ROBERTS: Yes, and it should not be that way. An individual should not be the life of an organization or be the life of the people, the people who need it, the people who want to continue it. I want to see the organization, the kind of organization that would be wanted by people and as it continues to move on into new people joining up whether Geraldine's there or not. If it was just Geraldine Roberts then the cease of my activities would mean the organization would be over and it should be around. I'd like to see and feel that it would be around for the next many decades.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe that's. . . .

ROBERTS: I think the people need such style of organization. I want to be a million ideas in the minds of the people.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe that's the true value of any organization, that it survives beyond its originators.

ROBERTS: Yes. I'd like to see a kind of a foundation set up to help poor people that's below economical level, to help them make that one big step they need to make with help, not necessarily giving them welfare, to help them through scholarships, encourage them, respect of others for each other.

INTERVIEWER: How was your union or I should say, how was the Domestics Workers affected by national issues, let's use price and wage controls for our example.

ROBERTS: Price and wage control certainly had a great affect on people economically and certainly domestic workers are no different than any other person in the country and certainly price control helped those persons who could not have very much money to spend such as domestic workers. Certainly, prices got too far out of control. Many poor persons like domestic workers would not be able to even pay for a place to even live because

ROBERTS: they would not be able to pay enormous rents they could be charged. To a person who isn't earning very much money, price control means that they wouldn't even be able to feed themselves because they certainly wouldn't be able to purchase food. They would not be earning enough money to go up from their wages to compare with higher wages. Employers who would be going through the same problem of higher wages more than likely would decide to do without a lot of services. They had to pay fifty, sixty dollars a day for maid services. It would mean domestics would not have employment. I think price and wage control certainly affects domestics. I would feel even more so in the price control than any other group of people in America, except some other poor groups like themselves.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a position has the domestic workers taken with regard to your members being laid off?

ROBERTS: Members being laid off, there again, came from behind the inflation that we had in this country, the higher wages and everything going up. So many employers have seemed to adopt the style that it is not that important anymore about how well the house is kept clean and that sort of a thing or on account of those feeling of everything costing so very much and the employers are worried about their own budget, has been quite hurting to domestics and many. Perhaps the employer would pay someone to come and offer services doing some maintenance cleaning, cleaning in her home. They'd feel they could do without that. That means that she doesn't have employment. Twenty-five dollars a day that our group asked as a day's wages doesn't seem to bother the employers much as it does that they feel they can do without the services. Many employers are not that concerned anymore, mainly the younger element of the married couples and persons who maintain their units. It's not that important how clean the place is anymore. No one really cares that much as the large percentage area, mainly the older families are still concerned about the spotless home and the real shiny windows and that sort of thing. The younger element, it's not that important to.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying then that there's actually less need?

ROBERTS: Yes, there is a growing sort of a less need of maintenance services, mainly with younger couples, younger people. Certainly, those persons who were employed as cooks are not needed that much anymore. There's so many chain outlet eating places that no one really has time to sit down in their own kitchen or their own dining room. Who really sits at the dining room table anymore or usually the dining room is a showplace now.

ROBERTS: No one really ever uses it except a few times a year usually on major holidays or on some special occasions like anniversaries and who stays home on anniversaries anymore. They usually go out for dinner. All these kinds of things has been a great hurt to household employees.

INTERVIEWER: Consequently, then, they've been laid off?

ROBERTS: Yes, they've been laid off and the need is not there on a permanent basis; it's really down. The homes where there are children growing up in the home, those kinds of homes are still requesting domestic services, but even in those cases, there's something like, do twice a month service like every other Thursday, might we say, or every other Friday. Not the old style of every week, four or five times a week. The babysitter is still important. That's pretty important. The cost that employers want to pay for babysitting is very low. Many of the sitters are students, such as college students who are doing a lot of sitting. For childcare, somehow, the employer feels that a sense of pride. . . they don't want to pay, might we say two dollars an hour to a student to babysit. They feel that's too much money to pay a student to keep a kid for three to four hours while they're attending a movie or go out for an evening. A babysitter, as much as two dollars an hour is too much money. That service is quite plentiful but the wages are low.

INTERVIEWER: Remember another kind of lay off that you and I discussed at another time and that was what happened to a domestic when a wealthy person went off to Florida or to Europe for their annual vacation. What kind of stand did, or do you take from that particular problem?

ROBERTS: Those are very serious times for domestics, during the winter seasons especially in those areas where the weather is very cold and the employers are taking that winter vacation. If they happen to live in areas where there are winter resorts, their services are boomed. Those areas where employers are leaving the area, those workers in those areas usually have a very serious problem and welfare, the welfare system is not that easy to employ or rather to give any assistance or even food stamps on a regular basis to those workers who are laid off.

Another very serious problem, usually domestics are like the one employee in the home. They are not able to draw unemployment compensation. There's three workers or more ought to be employed in order to receive unemployment compensation.

ROBERTS: There's another area that we want to continue to fight for and encouraging other groups all over the country that they ought to continue to fight for it, to change the style of three or more employees at a job to receive unemployment compensation. That if a person is employed regardless of one, two, they certainly ought to be able to draw unemployment compensation. That one we have not been able to accomplish any legislation around those kinds of issues, around unemployment compensation. So your question on the basis what do they do in the months in areas where the employers are vacating for a period of time, the workers fare very hard, very hardships on the workers. If it's the female and she is married to a guy who works in a shop or something then she's sort of protected. If she's a single individual she finds herself in a lot of trouble of even surviving. Perhaps her children or someone has to even offer her a meal or maybe if a guy, things that will change her whole life style happens to her. She usually can't support herself or, in some cases, she may be fortunate enough to follow the family, going along as a babysitter or something, doing a job here where the family leaves and taking that winter vacation. Those are very bad times.

INTERVIEWER: So there's very little that actually has been able to be done in that area, right?

ROBERTS: What we really need is a change, an amendment to the unemployment compensation there that even though she is the one or he the one employee on the job, whether she is the babysitter or whether she is the housekeeper, that if she's earned a certain amount of money and maybe fifty dollars in a quarter or the same kind of style that we have under social security, that if she's earned fifty dollars within a quarter that person, I would say, ought to be able to draw unemployment compensation whether they are domestics or any other person, mainly domestics.

INTERVIEWER: Did you develop a special camaraderie with your union domestic workers? Did you develop a special sense of closeness?

ROBERTS: Well, I have a strong love I feel of, a lot of attention I want to give to domestics because it is a part of my life and any attention I can give towards one who is involved in the field of household employment, to those persons who have a very limited skill or no skills at all, I enjoy giving special attention to those persons.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make real close friends with some of these people?

ROBERTS: Yes, I am concerned about who they are, what they do, their families, if they have one. If it's an individual, where was she born. I often question persons where did you come from? Is that area home? Do you have any other kind of income? Would you like to come and visit my church? Or you can always invite me if you're having an affair, a social affair or if the kids are graduating in her family, I want her to tell me about it. Usually, I call them, tell them hello. They call me. We usually have a chat. My involvement with so many persons, my only embarrassment. . . so many times I listen to a voice and I am not really sure of the name of the person who's talking to me and I dare not say, "What's your name?" However, I have really carried on a maybe thirty-minute conversation and really tried to find a way to find out who I was speaking to and often would say goodbye and I really didn't know.

INTERVIEWER: Have you stayed close to some of the original people that helped you in the very beginning?

ROBERTS: Some persons I've been able to stay, to keep in contact with. Many of the persons that was involved in helpin' us who weren't domestic workers such as Ruth Turner, and others who were not living in this area or persons that give some support such as CIO-OEO workers about long with that particular program anymore. But there are some individuals such as workers, I still after the whole twelve years, I'm very close. We socialize and go to seminars, especially those persons who had some of the same ideas, along the guidelines that I had. We still are involved in the same kinds of programs.

[INTERRUPTION]

They often want me to come out and, some cases, just enjoy the meal and just have a fun affair together.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that particularly hard times brought you closer together?

ROBERTS: Hard times? What do you mean hard times?

INTERVIEWER: Well, in terms of, let's say, bad economic times or lots of pressure on the organization. Would these people become closer?

ROBERTS: Hard times bring us together closer?

INTERVIEWER: When you had a goal, a specific crisis situation?

ROBERTS: Often, the kind of organization, an organization of this sort, the sort of turn-over of new people, our goals do change. I often addressed myself to their needs, being the organizer and working in, wearing sometimes two or three hats for the groups, the director, having to organize and finding the positions as president. For instance, like the energy crisis--those were new people that were working around working with, through and about organizing the coalition board, to address ourselves to the needs of the people. I don't know whether I'm answering your question in the same style you asked but, however, I meet new faces, new ideas, and new goals. We don't really hold the same group setting all the time. It changes a lot. Did that answer your question?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, do you think that the strikes and organizing campaigns have had a profound impact on women, on the women in domestic workers?

ROBERTS: Yes, I think it had an effect. You said you want to know did it have an effect on us?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, did if affect you, did you ever. . . ?

ROBERTS: Yes, it affected us in a way that since our new awareness of labor, we're more sensitive now to strikes when we hear about them.

INTERVIEWER: You've called strikes, haven't you?

ROBERTS: Yes, we did call for a strike at least once and it was cancelled at the last moment; it didn't really go through. The community sort of let us down in our opinion.

INTERVIEWER: I want you to elaborate on that a little bit because I wanted to follow up with the original question with were there special barriers to individual participation in so perhaps in a broader sense you could tell us why the strike didn't come off. Why it didn't materialize.

ROBERTS: I spent some time talking about and talking with workers concerning the strike. In fact, we had the idea in mind for maybe four or five years that we ought to have a strike and when we finally began to really say we were going to have one, we tried to organize a program around the kind of strike we needed to have. We wanted to have like an all-day seminar on a Friday afternoon. We felt that would be a good one when most domestics are very busy on that day. Although we were still aware of the financial conditions, the hardships that it would

ROBERTS: bring a worker to take off on a Friday and go to a workshop. We were counting on the greater community, which Greater Cleveland area was a great industrial area, where the working class in this area arethe majority that whatever we do here is certainly a, the upper middle class is certainly not the majority of an industrial area like this community. We felt there shouldn't be a problem for people being workers themselves to support another group of workers and we decided on a twenty-dollar donation for at least five hundred domestic workers to attend a workshop and felt that if five hundred working people sent a check for twenty dollars only five hundred certainly would pay for a well-attended seminar. Well we didn't, the workers didn't get twenty dollars. We were let down in the Greater Cleveland area and we did call on many persons and groups and organizations and called upon the churches to help sponsor domestics that they may attend their seminar. We even asked the employers to give their worker a day off with pay that she could be able to attend her seminar. We felt real let down. We were shocked to feel that we were that much of a minority. What other opinions could we have when we seen working women mainly, working men and the working class ignore a group of people that had been exploited more than any other group of workers in the country, except perhaps the farmers which fall in the same kind of class that household workers were in or classified. That all these people that happened to have a job to go to would ignore another group of workers who were on the bottom of the margin level trying to say down there please help us and our SOS went unheard. We had lesser than five donations and I myself cried. I fell across my bed and I was really. . . I stayed in like a whole day. I couldn't walk out of the house. I just couldn't believe it. I was so bewildered, so choked up. I went to bed crying. What kind of world do we live in, what kind of people are out there that could treat a group of people like that, to ignore a very simple thing, no more than a dinner, no more than a weekend meal for a family of four, twenty dollars could really feed, would ignore a poor woman who on being asked to attend a seminar so they could understand how to help themselves better and believe it or not, still classed of the working class even though they were on the bottom of the margin level, they were still a working class of people.

INTERVIEWER: So it really wasn't thedomestics themselves, it was the community that failed to participate?

ROBERTS: The community failed them.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any particular issues that the domestics were willing to strike over?

ROBERTS: Yes, we were concerned about legislators, the way they have not really spoke out strong enough to really fight that hard; the minimum wage that we were working under certainly were too low as a federal minimum wage; it was not a fair one for such workers as domestics. We were placed under the veryest low class of the minimum wage, the least one we were placed under. We certainly feel that the legislators have not given enough attention, we feel. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Is this the way to call your problems to their attention?

ROBERTS: We felt by having a strike that nobody would go into work, if everybody stayed home that day regardless of the problems that could be on the job. Some workers informed me that their employers said if they didn't come to work that they'd be fired. They wouldn't need to come back if they didn't show up for work on that Friday; they wouldn't have to come back anymore at all. There was a fear. A lot of women wanted to stay at home but were gettin' up, goin' to work and the twenty dollars was not there to compensate them. They were afraid. It was on the radio and the disc jockey, one main disc jockey, was speaking out. Very early, I was called like four o'clock or something in the morning to ask was the strike on. I said yes it was on and I just knew the phone was going to be ringing saying that here's my twenty dollars, here's my twenty dollars. I knew they had contacted through the committee a bank to accept all donations that would be sent to the group, all money would be sent to one of the community banks and be held in esquire for the group. The moneys did not come in. The women had to go to work because they were frightened of losing their job altogether. It seemed that the employers were saying if they listened to "that woman" you're going to lose your job. If you're going to be with her, you're going to lose your job. We felt that twenty dollars certainly, certainly ought to send five hundred domestic workers to their workshops. We had the location for the workshops. We had been donated space and all like that. I had even and others talked to discussion leaders and some of the workshops were going to be on like legislation workshops or training workshops for skills that women ought to go into the early childhood programs and convalescent care, like working with senior citizens, being able to assist and help senior citizens and companion, female chauffeurs or how to shop for older people, older families, older senior citizens mainly and working with shut-ins. We thought those skills were not that hard to get training around. I had discussed some training, how we could perhaps do some of the training on the campus ground of the community college, some of the classes that we could enroll the women in and how the classes

ROBERTS: would be paid for and that sort of thing, or how we could go into heavier manual labor, women becoming plumbers, have a workshop around more heavy maintenance skills or getting into the building trade, what was wrong with hiring or getting into the building trade and you could take it from this course and become painters and other kinds of skills then we wouldn't get hired anyway, what was the difference to get into some of their more heavy academical skills. These were the kinds of things we intended to discuss at the conference, or talk about day care centers, how the children were going to be taken care of while the mothers could go out and work on a full-time basis. We felt that we needed to get into that kind of workshop, that women were trapped here. They had to be shown a way out and we had contacted various persons to be able to attend the workshops and the discussions leaders for the workshops. All of these things failed and we didn't have any workshops 'cause we felt the community let us down. We felt our legislators did not support us as they should have, and we felt the strike could have been successful. It fell flat on its face because we wondered how many people. . . were they really mean? Did they forget us as if they didn't care? What was the real reason? We still wondered. We weren't able to even have a survey to see how the people really felt. Why they didn't support the strike. We still feel we need one. We have not ruled out the idea because the first one failed that we should not plan another and I certainly would be a part in helping to plan another or even calling another.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think your lifestyle is typical of the people that you represent in the Domestic Workers?

ROBERTS: Yes, I feel that I'm in front of the rank and file. I feel that I am a part of the struggle that I fight for.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that that is important?

ROBERTS: Yes, I feel that's a part of minorities, of what I live. I'm aware, alert of what's going on around me, and I feel someone has to speak out and I certainly join the coalition of people who wants to get out. I feel that many persons who have been silent, and have not said anything about many of these kinds of unfair attitudes towards each other ought to now begin to speak out more like myself and others--the so-called silent majority must begin to speak out more about these things regardless of the fears, regardless of politics. I think I encourage many persons who have been supporters of politics to become leaders themselves, not necessarily the same pro-politicians but persons from the rank and file ought to become more active, running for public offices. I encourage young people who are

ROBERTS: now doing studies in colleges and universities around the country to come up with a new kind of lifestyle in America, take over new leadership and perhaps help to drive out the old style of leadership and band all together and maybe the kinds of things like a strike will be unnecessary to call. That poor people, domestics, and other kinds of persons will become the leadership of tomorrow--that I support. I struggle to improve myself, that I can become more active in politics, in national decision-making, setting on power boards, and, I feel there are thousands of others ought to begin to look in that same direction.

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