

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Claude Grizzard

Fed 790
Winter Quarter, 1985

Joy W. Cutchin
9 Downshire Lane
Decatur, Ga., 30033

C: This is an interview with Helen Moore Grizzard on February 25, 1985, at the Grizzard residence, 6 Downshire Lane, Decatur, Georgia.

Helen, would you just start by telling me something about your childhood.

G: Well, I guess the first place to start in your childhood is to get born. I was born February 19, 1910 and I had the usual childhood. I had an older brother, 7 years older, and a mother and a father. I was the spoiled brat! I had... I guess you'd call her at that time...the ole timey Negro mammy. But she didn't look like one 'cause she was a bean pole, just tall and skinny. I loved her dearly and even as tall and skinny as she was, she'd hold me by the hour in her lap. We lived in a big house on Georgia Avenue in ~~the~~ Central and had lots of coming and going relatives. Then tragedy struck on October 3, 1916. My father was murdered! He was in the coal and wood business and he had Negro drivers of his wagons and mules where he delivered coal and wood. He dickered in real estate, too. This particular night was cool and he was working late. It was know~~n~~ among the drivers, that he had money on him that night. So two Negroes were going to rob him and they were

frightened by a man that lived next door to his office. This man was a friend of my father's. My father owned that property. He said, "That don't look right." So he started walking around and then, right after him, his wife was coming around. But, in doing that, he frightened the Negroes and they shot my Father. It hit the deadly so-called jugular vein and my Father died immediately. At that time, one of the horrors of the thing-- he was talking to my Mother on the telephone and they were making plans to go and call on some of the relatives in south Atlanta that had had a death in the family. My Mother heard the shot and knew that something awful had happened.

My Father, at that time, had a car, which was unusual in 1916. In fact, he had a car before 1910! I'll go back a little bit. My Mother was pregnant with me and they were going for a little ride on Stewart Avenue one Sunday. A horse and buggy came by and the horse became frightened and rared up. So my Father was trying to get over a little bit in the road and he turned over. So I've always said, "Didn't hurt my Mother, didn't hurt the car; they just got up and turned it back." But I've always said, "Anything wrong with me, that's

why!" Another interesting thing about this--my Mother claimed to be the first woman driver in Atlanta. By 1916, she was driving and people would stare with open mouths at this woman and little girl riding along.

To come back to this, this murder was a horrible thing. My Father was prominent in the community and his family was. He was a Mason and my family had been Methodists for years. We lived across the street from the church. The public just became, well, just furious at this thing. Everybody was afraid that there'd be a lynching. So the people in authority of Fulton county really got busy and they had those Negroes before the night was over. It happened at 7:00 or 8:00, dusk in October. At that time, women didn't live alone with two children, regardless of how many servants she had. So, my grandmother, grandfather, and an old maid aunt moved in with us. We had plenty of room, but it made a kind of, I guess you'd say, an unbalanced home---there were old folks, the grandparents, then my Mother and her sister, and then, children. But we were all happy and my Mother kept that house on an even keel. Now that I look back on it, I don't see how she did it. But, she

did! She had that kind of religion and faith. But, to continue with the Negroes--they were both hung. There was just a lot in the paper. This was the first case, I have been told, of the betterment of the Negroes race relations. I have also been told that Colgate sent money in here to help these Negroes with trials. 'Course now, it would be one of those organizations with letters.

Life went on. I graduated from Georgia Avenue Primary School and I guess the main thing I remember there was one historical thing in 1918. I remember the ending of the war and the whistles. They took all the children out on the yard and we kinda' danced and yelled and hurrayed and all that. I think I'm right that we got a half-day holiday. Another thing I remember about grammar school. I looked up one day and here was this Negro mammy. Her name was Josie. She went over and whispered to the teacher and the teacher said, "Helen, you're to go with this woman". Anyway, we go down to the girls restroom and she had failed to put on my top bloomers over my long underwear! In that day, you wore layers on layers on layers of clothes. Then my Mother moved to Morningside. My brother, being older, finished from Georgia Tech and left

to work with Generla Electric. He really got a Masters from what he did at General Electric. Then I graduated from Girls High. I don't remember anything so special about high school except I did all the things. I guess I did so many of those things, I wasn't really interested in the books and the classes. I got through, mainly. I wanted to go to Brenau College and, there was no discussion about it. My Mother wanted me to go to college and , so I went to Brenau. I loved it the first day--now, this was 1928--and I loved it my last day there too, because it was just a great school. I loved everybody there and everything that went on. But, again, I wasn't too bothered about making good grades. I attended two years. Oh, I guess back in high school I found out there was something wonderful---Boys!

C: I had a feeling that's what it was.

G: I met Claude very early in my--I was a senior in high school. So we courted for two years off and on.

C: Tell me some of the things you did in your courting days.

G: Oh, well, we went mostly out--our courting was mostly religiously orientéd. We were both Methodist and I met him at Haygood Methodist Church. There was

here 3 years. I had a man that worked for me for 48 years, one day a week. It was just marvelous. He could do anything from cook, serve the meal, clean and keep the yard. He always said he wouldn't nurse the children, but I've left them with him plenty a time----'cause he had more children than I did. He also left me, so I have no help now. I used to take them to the lake and we'd go up there, change the beds, clean up, and get ready for the next weekend. Of course, that's gone. But, they were a part of my family, both these Negroes and the maid I had before when my children were teenagers. I had her 26 years and she was just great. So, I've been very fortunate. I've worked hard in lots of respects, but I've had the kind of help that, if I didn't want to do it, I could shove it off. (chuckle)

C: That sounds wonderful. Tell me more about your Mother and what happened to her.

G: She lived til '69. She was 89 and she had a horror of living in a nursing home. Do you know that I had a date with her to pick her up to go vote and I found her dead in bed. She had had her lunch, walked around her yard, which she did on pretty days....she lived in Morningside.

She always had a nap. My aunt, this same aunt, lived with her. They lived together all those years. But I just thought my Mother, at 89, was hale and hearty, and would live any number of years more. And I go up there and that's what.... that was another tragedy now. But it was great for her. That had been her prayer, oh, that had been her prayer. So I kept this aunt; I moved her in with me on Morningside. We had plenty of room and I gave her a little sitting room, a bedroom, and a bath. She lived 13 months, and do you know, she was sick really just 2 days. Now Claude's parents---that was the opposite! His Mother was in homes for 6 and a half years. Nobody could keep her; she was unhappy and ~~and~~ just what you hear all the time. Course my Mother, I would have to say, that the minute my Father was killed, she took over his affairs. She never went to work. He had property, mostly Negro rental property. She collected the money; she had the steps built where they fell down, or the chimney, or that kind of thing. We had a good living until she died and then, I was the executress of her will, and I had no need. The one brother had died in 1942 with

kidney problems. He had two children and I had the three. His widow had married again and had no need. She was from a wealthy, better than average fixed, family in Mississippi---old Mississippi. So my Mother had, in my idea, left what she had to her five grandchildren. They all got a real, real nice nestegg. So, see, in 1916 now to 1969, nobody worked. She knew how to manage and, gosh, I had everything any girl would ever want. In fact, so much more than most of my friends, that, at times, it didn't work out so good.

C: Can you think of some other things to tell me about high school or college?

G: Well, course Girls High was Girls High. Anybody that's been around Atlanta very long knows about Girls High. They had a Miss Jessie ^{more} ~~Mews~~ and a Miss Martha Moore, the principal and vice-principal, and there was only one way to do it---the right way, and, most cases, it was their way. Boy, that thing was run. You know, not like today. As far as....why a girl would no more thought of going to school in a pair of pants than anything in the world. It would'a been horrible, you know. Girls High was the school within the city schools that prepared girls for college. There was a