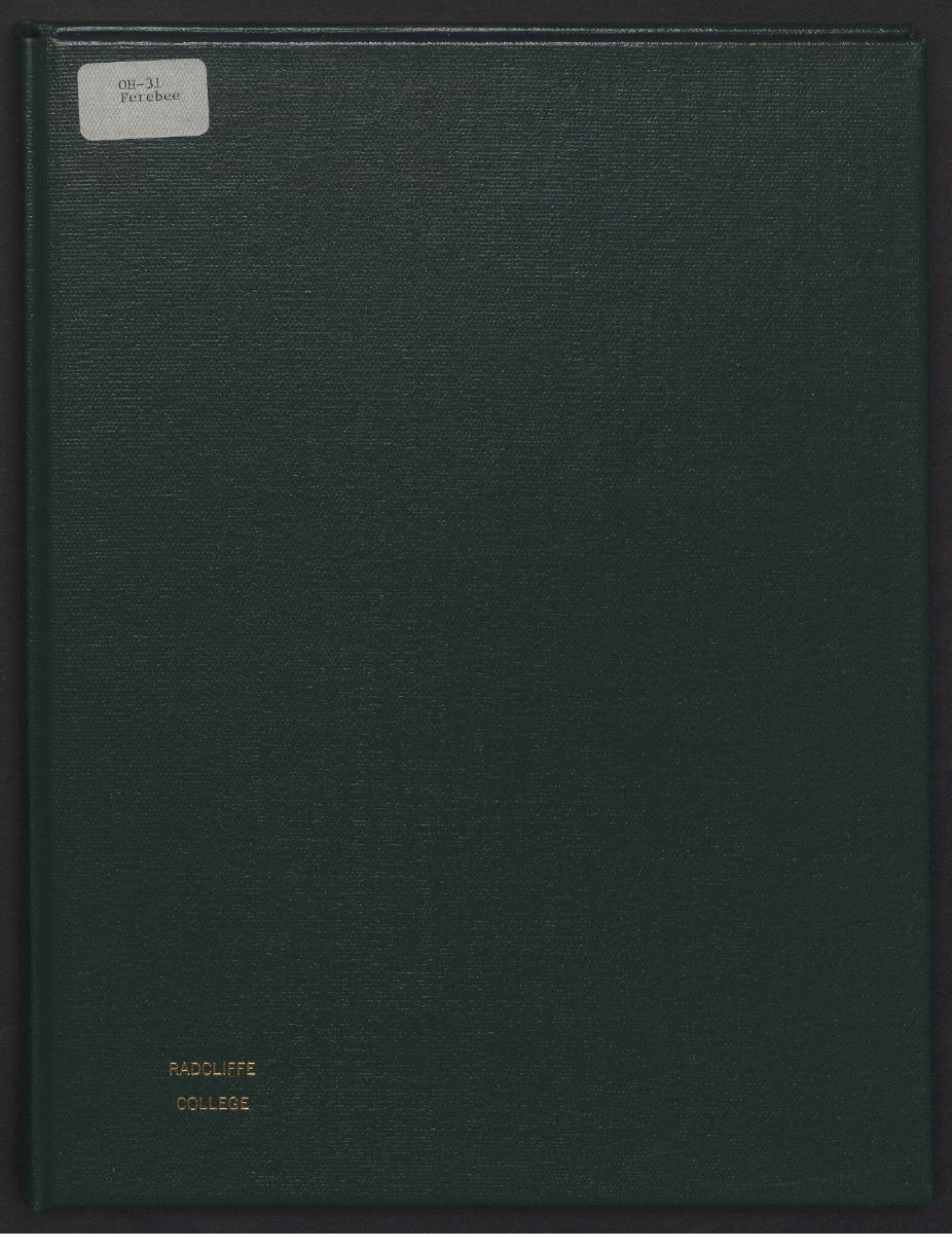

This project was funded by The Rockefeller Foundation, The Blanchard Foundation and the National Institute on Aging.

Black Women Oral History Project

Interview With

DOROTHY BOULDING FEREBEE

December 28 and 31, 1979

88-M84

The interviews in the Black Women Oral History Project
are dedicated to the memory of

Letitia Woods Brown

whose enthusiastic encouragement and wise counsel
made the project possible

This project was funded by

The Rockefeller Foundation
The Blanchard Foundation
The National Institute on Aging

The Schlesinger Library
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I have read the statement covering the uses of this manuscript at the beginning of this oral history memoir and I agree to abide by the restrictions stated therein:

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INTRODUCTION

Since July 1976 the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, with support from The Rockefeller Foundation, supplemented in 1980 by grants from The Blanchard Foundation of Boston and the National Institute on Aging, has been conducting a project to record and transcribe the autobiographical memoirs of a group of black American women 70 years of age or older. The purpose of the project is to develop a body of resources on the lives of black women in the twentieth century, especially in the years prior to the Civil Rights Movement, and to make this material available to researchers and students interested in the struggles of women and racial minorities in the United States. Many interviewees have had professional careers in such fields as education, government, the arts, business, medicine, law, and social work. Others have combined care for their families with voluntary service to their communities. All have made significant contributions toward the improvement of the lives of black people and to the development of American society.

In the past, the black woman often has not created a written record of her experiences, and when such a record has been created, it is not usually found in libraries or archives, the traditional repositories for historical documents. One means of attempting to capture and preserve such lives is the oral interview, which explores the influences and events that have shaped each woman's experience and gives her an opportunity to reflect on the past and to present her point of view on historical events. The interviews of the Black Women Oral History Project offer fres. source material that can add an important dimension to the study of the history of the United States. They supplement and comment on other sources as they examine the active participation of a group whose members were previously overlooked as being only shaped by and not shapers of historical events.

Dorothy Boulding Ferebee was a distinguished physician and humanitarian who served the Howard University community for over forty years, beginning in the late 1920s as an instructor in obstetrics, and continuing as medical director of the Howard University Health Service until her retirement. Her contributions, however, were limited neither by her location nor by her profession. A tireless worker committed to the improvement of living conditions for people around the globe, Dr. Ferebee was an active participant in dozens of organizations, most notably as founder of the Southeast Neighborhood House in Washington, D.C., and as medical director of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Mississippi Health Project.

The only daughter of Benjamin Richard and Florence Ruffin Boulding, Dorothy Celeste was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1898. Owing to her mother's illness, she lived for several years in Boston with her great-aunt, Emma Ruffin, a former schoolteacher. In Boston she went to the public schools before returning to Norfolk where for a time she attended the Samuel C. Armstrong High School, receiving two gold medals for general excellence. Breaking from a family custom of studying law--there were eight lawyers over several generations--Dorothy demonstrated an early interest in medicine, and at her aunt's urging, she returned to Boston to continue her education, finishing in 1915 with the best scholastic record of her class at Girls' High School. Following a post-graduate year of college preparatory courses, she entered Simmons College in Boston where she excelled in athletics and in her science courses, graduating in 1920 with honors.

Her study of medicine began that autumn at the Tufts University School of Medicine, and she continued her impressive academic career, completing her course work in 1924, again at the top of class. After an internship and a series

of postgraduate clinics in Boston and in Washington, D.C., at Freedmen's Hospital (the training hospital at Howard University), Ms. Boulding was appointed clinician in obstetrics in 1927. She also taught nurse training and second-year medical students, and in 1929 was asked to assume the position of medical physician to women. It was during this period that she became aware of the desperate circumstances facing so many black people in the southeast area of Washington, and it was at her instigation that the South East Settlement House was founded in 1929, providing day care for infants and toddlers of working mothers, and recreational facilities for young children. This was the forerunner of the present Southeast Neighborhood House, a voluntary social service agency which today operates a comprehensive community development program serving over 12,000 people of all ages.

In 1930 she married Claude Ferebee, a dentist, and instructor in the Howard University College of Dentistry. Their twins, a son and a daughter, were born the following year. In the mid-thirties, Dr. Ferebee came to play an essential role in a project which for years had been under consideration by the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority--the Mississippi Health Project. An innovative plan to bring health care to the tenant farming families in Mississippi's Holmes and Bolivar Counties, the project initiated the first mobile health clinics in the United States as a workable way of teaching the rudimentary principles of health care and nutrition. During the summers of 1935 to 1941, Dr. Ferebee served as the medical director of the project's health service which continued with great success until the onset of the Second World War.

In the meantime her exceptional work at Howard University came to be recognized, and she gradually assumed more and more of the responsibility for overseeing the university's health service. Dr. Ferebee was appointed medical director of the Howard University Health Services, a post which she held until 1968; she also during this period served as visiting lecturer in preventive

medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine, and as assistant professor of preventive medicine at Howard University Medical School. Dr. Ferebee died on September 14, 1980.

To a life marked by a remarkable and productive congruence between her professional and voluntary activities, Dr. Ferebee brought an unceasing energy and commitment. The national president of Alpha Kappa Alpha and the National Council of Negro Women, she served on the boards of directors of the National Girl Scouts of America, the national YWCA, the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods, and the National Welfare Assembly. She was the chairperson of the District of Columbia's Commission on the Status of Women from 1971 until 1974, and the following year was named head of the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area for International Women's Year.

Her interest in international affairs was reflected by her membership in the Pan-American Medical Women's Alliance, the United Nations Association of the U.S.A., UNICEF, and the Meridian House Foundation of International Visitors. Beginning in 1961 Dr. Ferebee served as medical consultant to the Peace Corps and the Department of State, lecturing on health measures and preventive medicine in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South America, and the islands of the Caribbean.

Dr. Ferebee was a member of the National Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the American College Health Association from which she received the Edward Hitchcock Award in 1971. She also was honored by the Hadassah Myrtle Wreath Award in 1966, and the Distinguished Alumna Award from Simmons College in 1959.

Dorothy Ferebee
September 1980

INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY BOULDING FEREBEE

Merze Tate:

[This is an interview with Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, M.D. The interviewer is Merze Tate, and the date is December 30, 1979. The location is the residence of Dr. Ferebee at 2960 Thirteenth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017.

This community in northeast Washington, often referred to as Brookland, is located roughly between Rhode Island Avenue and a section of Michigan Avenue and Quincy Street, N.E., on one side, and Fourth and Eighteenth Streets, N.E. Within this are the Catholic Shrine of America, the Catholic University of America, and the Franciscan Monastery. In the 1930s and after, Brookland became integrated as middle and upper class colored professional people either bought or built expensive brick homes in the area. Several Howard University professors or administrators located here, among whom were Ralph Bunche; William Banner, a philosopher and chairman of the philosophy department; Herman Branson, a distinguished physicist and now president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania; Simeon Carson, M.D., and his son, Clark Carson, M.D.; Frank Coleman, a scientist; Paul B. Cornely, M.D., head, Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health; William Leo Hansberry, the distinguished professor of African history; Martin David Jenkins, professor of education and later president of Morgan State University in Baltimore; Rayford W. Logan, historian; Frank M. Snowden, classicist and chairman of the classics department; and Colonel Lucias F. Young, to mention only a few of the colored professionals who moved to Brookland, some of whom built the finest brick homes in the community. Several, after they became more affluent, moved to northwest Washington, on the east side of Rock Creek Park; a few yearned to dwell west of that park and are doing so, as is the case with Frank M. Snowden. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee was among the last to build in Brookland--a charming split level brick house with a deep rear garden graced with large trees.

Dr. Ferebee, the director of the Schlesinger

[Material in brackets was added after the interview was recorded.]

MT: (cont.) Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College, Dr. Patricia King, and Mrs. Ruth Edmonds Hill, coordinator of the Black Women Oral History Project, are indeed pleased that you now feel physically able to proceed with this interview, which you agreed to some two years ago. We generally begin by referring to the interviewee's roots--her grandparents and parents, as well as her brothers and sisters. Where would you like to start?

DF: Perhaps I should begin with my maternal grandfather.

MT: Yes, please do.

DF: My maternal grandfather, Richard Gault Leslie Paige, was the son of Thomas Paige, governor of Virginia. While the latter did not recognize or claim his offspring as a son, he did everything possible to give him a superior education. He sent him out of Virginia to Massachusetts, where he received all of his training, and finished the Harvard Law School in the graduating class of 1869--the first colored man to receive a degree there. While at Harvard he met George L. Ruffin who became his brother-in-law, through marriage to Ruffin's sister, Lily. Ruffin, trained in law, became the first black judge of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1898.

My grandmother, Lily Ruffin Paige, was active in church affairs. She was a staunch Baptist and worked diligently with the auxiliaries of Baptist women throughout Virginia, and even labored in Massachusetts helping to organize church women.

MT: And your parents.

DF: My father was Benjamin R. Boulding and my mother Florence (Flossie) Ruffin Boulding. I had two brothers, the older being Ruffin Paige Boulding. He was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1896. Early in his education he became inspired, in fact, captivated, with the idea of becoming a lawyer, since there were seven lawyers in the Ruffin, Paige, and Boulding families, whose names he bore. He was educated in the public schools of Norfolk, was graduated from the Norfolk Mission College, and from the law school of Howard University. His career was interrupted by three years' service in the U.S. Army during World War I. After completing his army duties he began legal practice in Wewoka, Oklahoma, assisting Indians in the 1930s and 1940s on a nearby reservation in the management of their growing wealth in oil wells. He married Julia Wyche of Charlotte, North Carolina, and a graduate of Howard University. Eventually, they settled in Charlotte where he practiced law for several years. Both were active in social and fraternal affairs and the Howard University Alumni Club. He died in June 1976.

My second brother, Benjamin Richard Boulding, was educated in the public schools of Norfolk and graduated from Hampton Institute. Although he taught chemistry for a few years in a high school in Norfolk, he spent most of his professional life in the postal service of northern Virginia.

My Great-Aunt Emma Ruffin helped mother me as an infant, and played a significant part in my schooling and education in Boston. Although she was born in Salem, Massachusetts, after marrying she came to Virginia and attended Hampton Institute for teacher training. She taught school for two years, but

DF: (cont.) thereafter dedicated herself to her family in Virginia and in Boston. She was a strong-willed individual, determined but kind, absolutely dependable, and she expected others to be the same.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, what is the date of your birth?

DF: I don't know.]

MT: That's interesting. You are the first person I've interviewed who didn't know the exact date of her birth.

DF: I don't have a birth certificate because I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, and as it so happens, black people at the time were not registered. The doctors that delivered the colored children never provided a certificate, and I don't really know with certainty what my actual birth date is. My mother was very ill following my birth. Her illness was quite extended and my Great-Aunt Emma was really the one who took charge.

MT: You have to have a date. You had to have a legal date when you entered school, and you had to have a date for Social Security.

DF: Well, my father provided the year 1898. Whether or not that's correct, I do not know.

MT: But you had to have a special date--a day.

DF: Eighteen-ninety-eight, October the tenth.

MT: All right. Then that's your legal birthday.

DF: Thursday, the tenth of October, 1898.

MT: Then that's your official birthday.

DF: But my mother always said that that was not the right date.

MT: But that is what we will have to use, and you've had to use, obviously, professionally.

DF: Yes, we will have to use that date.

MT: About when did you start your primary schooling in Boston... No, the first was in Virginia.

DF: No, my early schooling was in Boston.

MT: The very first?

DF: Yes. The very first.

MT: All right. About what time? It doesn't have to be exact.

DF: My early schooling was under the name of Dorothy Celeste Boulding, and it was in the primary school in the West End section of Boston, where my great aunt--Aunt Emma--had taken me because my mother was very ill. I was in

DF: (cont.) the primary school from 1904 to 1906. Then I moved from the primary school in the West End to what was called the grammar school in the West End, which was the Bowdoin School I was there from 1906 to 1908. At that time my mother was considerably improved, and she and my father thought that I should be brought home to Norfolk. So I returned home in 1908 and entered the Samuel C. Armstrong High School[1] in which I remained until I was graduated in 1911. Incidentally, I think you will be interested to know that while there I won two gold medals for general excellence--one in 1910 and the other in 1911.

MT: And then what did you do?

DF: In 1911, my Aunt Emma insisted that I return to Boston. She thought that there was no other place in the United States that had schools comparable to those in Boston. So I was there from 1911 until I finished all of my formal education.

MT: Which would be through medical school?

DF: Yes, through medical school. In Boston, I entered the Girls' High School on West Newton Street and pursued four years of high school education. The newspapers--and I have some clippings--record, and these are the words from one journal, that "the best scholastic record of any student in the class of 1915, in a class of 341 students, was that of Dorothy Celeste Boulding." However, when I finished high school, I still had in mind that I wanted to go to college. But I had not taken enough college entrance subjects in those four years from 1911 to 1915. So, along with my aunt, I decided to do a post-graduate course, which I did in the Girls' High School from 1915 to 1916. And let me tell you what the curriculum was for me: in that one year, I earned credits in Algebra I, Algebra II, Trigonometry, Ancient History, and English III and IV. The principal of the school said that in all of his service in the educational system of Boston, no student had taken in any one year all of the subjects that were necessary to enter a college. Never before had this been attempted or permitted by the school. So that after finishing the high school postgraduate course, I was now ready to enter the college of my choice, which was Simmons College, on the Fenway.

MT: And you were there how many years?

DF: I entered Simmons College in 1916, and graduated in 1920, <u>cum laude</u>. While at Simmons, although it was practically a school for science and secretarial services, I always had in mind that I wanted to be a doctor. I talked this over with several of the professors at Simmons College during the four years that I was there, and I got inspiring encouragement from many who said, "If you want to go to medical school, you have the background for it because Simmons has the courses." Simmons's science was taught by professors from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and you know the quality of that institute's courses in science.

Perhaps I should record my activities and participation in athletics and in the field of sports at Simmons. I earned my letters and my numerals, most of them, in 1920. In that year I was a member of the championship team in basketball, and I earned my patch in track as one of the best and fastest runners. I was a member of the hockey team which was the champion in 1918

DF: (cont.) and 1919. I was also a broad jumper, a high jumper, and a javelin thrower. In short, I was on the championship teams of 1918, 1919, and 1920.

I finished Simmons and took the special board examination for Tufts University College of Medicine and entered in 1920. From that year until 1924 I was registered at Tufts University, and finished as the number one graduate in a class of 137. Following my graduation in '24, I did an internship, and some postgraduate clinics from '24 to '27.

MT: Where?

DF: Here in Washington.

MT: At Howard?

DF: At Howard and elsewhere. Not all were in Washington, but some were. Most of them were at Freedmen's Hospital under Dr. William Rothfield. But I had some Boston clinics under Dr. Paul Dudley White. I had prenatal clinics here in Washington at Freedmen's under Dr. Julian Ross. Ross was excellent in the field of obstetrics, and he wanted me very much to go into that field. In fact, he encouraged me to stay, stating that he would make me one of the clinicians, which he did. So I was clinician in obstetrics from '27 to '29. And following my interest in obstetrics, I taught the university second-year medical students and nurse-training students during those years. After that assignment I was appointed in 1929 by the Board of Trustees of Howard University to be a medical physician to women, in which position I served for five years. In 1935, with the help, encouragement, and direction of President Johnson, I was named medical director of the Howard University Health Service for all students, not just for women, and served in that post until 1968. During that period I was visiting lecturer of preventive medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine. I served as medical associate to the dean of the college of medicine from '68 to '72.

MT: Is 1972 the date you retired?

DF: Yes.

MT: Well, now we have a synopsis of your medical professional life. Have you other dates you would like to mention? It is not important that you recall exact dates--only approximate ones.

Now that we have briefly sketched your professional medical career until your retirement from Howard University, should we not turn to your extra-curricular activities in Washington, across the nation and around the world, extending even beyond retirement? From my reading and observations, you are the most involved professional woman whom it has been my pleasure to know. Since you have been a member of and president of numerous organizations, and have carried health service to Mississippi and many foreign countries, we shall have some difficulty in covering all these activities either chronologically or geographically.

Should we begin with the local scene? Were you not the founder or organizer of Southeast Neighborhood House here in Washington?

DF: Yes, I organized Southeast House. This was in the late twenties during my internship at Freedmen's Hospital. I did a greal deal of ambulance work, service which primarily took me to fights and to disruptive family life down in southeast Washington. I learned a great deal about the needs of Negro people here, because most of them were concentrated in that area. Almost every Saturday night there was a big explosion or some kind of fight, and I came to know where the difficulties were. It was there that I learned that there was very little opportunity for the children; even though they were in school, they weren't learning much. We read in the papers now that education is at a low ebb--well, it was at the lowest ebb back there in the late twenties. I made up my mind while riding these ambulances and seeing all these disruptive explosions and explosive behavior that we ought to do something about this.

Then it came to me that there was something else that needed to be done. What about these little children whose mothers would go to work at five, six, and seven o'clock in the morning and leave them at home, probably with an elderly grandmother or with an older sister or older child? I can remember distinctly in the street where I lived, there was a woman who would take care of some of the children who lived in that block. It just so happened that on one day when I was in my office, my telephone rang, and the caller said, "This is the police department; this is precinct five over on Fifth Street, S.E. We have a little boy down here, we've arrested him and he says you know him." I said, "What about this little boy?" The policeman said, "Well, you come over here if you can."

So I jumped in my little roadster that my uncle had given me when I graduated, and I went over to the jail there at the fifth precinct, and walked up to the desk and said, "What is this? What is this?" There was a little boy behind the counter. "You know, Dr. Ferebee, they're going to put me in jail." I said to the police, "What about this?" He said, "Well, he's been stealing." I asked, "Stealing what?" He replied, "We caught him stealing a bottle of milk from a neighbor's step." I rejoined, "Where?" "Right out there on Third Street where you live, in the next block, above it." The boy said, "I wasn't stealing, I was getting some milk for my baby brother. He was crying, we had no food, and Mama had gone to work." So I asked, "Well, does Mother go to work and leave the baby?" He said, "No, I take him down to my neighbor down two or three houses, but this morning she couldn't take him, because she's sick, and she spoke at the window, opened the window and said, 'I can't take your brother today, I'm sick. Go home.'"

So he turned on his heel and took this little two-year-old by the hand and went back to his home where there was nothing in the icebox. They didn't call them refrigerators in those days. Nothing in the icebox, no food, no ice, no milk, there was nothing. So he began to cry, the baby was already crying. He went out of his front door, and he saw that the milkman had been delivering milk to some of the neighbors in the block. Across the street, directly in front of him, there was one white family, and the milkman had just put a quart of milk--it was in bottles in those days--on the step. The milkman left and turned the corner; this little fellow ran across the street, took the quart of milk, intending to bring it back to feed his little brother who was crying and hungry. Just as he was running across the street, a policeman turned the corner and stopped and said,

DF: (cont.) "Hey, you there. Hey, you there." This little fellow didn't know what to say, so "Caught you stealing, huh? Caught you stealing." So the boy said, "No, I'm not stealing. My little brother is hungry." The man replied, "I don't care if he is hungry, you can't steal milk."

Without allowing him to go in the house to feed this little boy, he took him by the nape of his neck and walked him to the next block--this was Third Street--walked him up to the corner of Fourth Street, and into the police station. They had told the story to the booking agent, the booking officer. So when I got there, and I said, "Johhny, is that so?" He says, "Yes, Dr. Ferebee, that policeman wouldn't let me feed my baby brother, and he's crying, he's hungry, and there's nothing in the icebox." So I said to the policeman, "Do you mean to tell me that you would arrest a little boy who's trying to help his baby brother who's hungry, and there isn't anything in the icebox?" He said, "Well, I don't care whether or not there's anything in the house. He can't steal people's milk." He was very hostile. Well, the man who was at the registry felt a little bit better. He says, "Oh, he's going to be all right. We'll let him out, we'll let him out." So I said, "I wish you would, and I will take him home, and the milk home with me. And I'll pay for it, if you say so." So I think it was seventeen cents a quart, and I put the seventeen cents on the desk, and took the little fellow and the milk home.

When we got there, the baby was crying and tearing up his bed, so we fed him, and it was a very disturbing situation. So I said, "Johnny, is the baby home every day?" Then he told me the story, that he took the baby down to the neighbor's house every day before he went to school, and she kept him until he came from school; then he'd bring him back, and the mother didn't get home until about seven or eight o'clock--leaving at six in the morning, and not home until about seven or eight o'clock at night. Of course, when she came, she brought a little food because where she worked, they let her have some...whatever was left over from dinner. I talked to this lad. And then it occurred to me, there's something wrong with this town. Any time a child goes hungry, and the mother has to work and leave a child home like this, we need some place for children. We need a day care center. So it was there, the beginning of the nursery, of the day care center.

Across the street from where this little boy lived, there was a vacant house, right on the corner, Third and G. It was six rooms--two rooms on a floor, three floors, and two rooms. So I said, "Wouldn't that be a fine place for a day nursery. People could come in on the way to work, and leave the child in there. But we've got to find someone..." So I began to canvass the neighborhood--we were right next door to Giddings School, where Mrs. Sarah Grays was the principal. I told Mrs. Grays the story of this little boy, and the baby that had no food, and what we needed was a day care center, what we need is to set it up. "Will you help?" So she let me talk to her teachers one day in open session in one of the teachers meetings, and all became vitally interested. They all said that they would help; they would give a dollar or two to get this thing started. I said, "Well, a dollar or two won't start it, but it'll be a good beginning. I want to find out how much this next-door house rents for." From the sign, I was able to talk with the agent, and he said that he'd rent it for seventeen dollars a month, and he would sell it for $2000, a six-room house. I said, "We don't have that money." He said, "Well, when do you expect to get it? Do

DF: (cont.) you expect to be given it?" I said, "No, but we expect you to come down." But he said, "No, we can't do that." It was at just that time, in late '29, that Washington was starting its first Community Chest, which was organized under a man who came from Ohio--his name was... [Elwood P. Street].

At any rate, I went to see this director of the Community Chest, and he was very much impressed. He said he had no idea that in a city like Washington there'd be no place for a child. I said, "No, there's no place for a child, there's no place for any of the Negro children, because they're playing in the streets, and they're stealing people's hubcaps, and people say they're wild and ignorant, and they can't have any chance to develop." So he replied, "Well, I can't say whether we'll do anything or not, but I like what you say and the way you say it. I want you to come to the board meeting of the Community Chest." So I said, "When does it meet?" He said, "Tomorrow afternoon." I said, "I'll be there." I was just getting started in my own practice, and I didn't have any patients, so that afternoon was quite all right. I went over to the Chamber of Commerce--I think it was at the corner of Sixteenth and H Street, N.W.--somewhere over there, and here was this assembly of very distinguished men, businessmen, like Mr. Jelleff of Jelleff's Women's Apparel, and the Underwood people who had...the photographic shop, all of those people were there, including Mr. Elwood P. Street, the director who had come from Ohio.

Mr. Street invited me to speak to the group. I told them the story of the little boy, and stated that we needed some money to get started. I said, "We have the teachers' interests, and we have the neighbors' interests, and we have possibly the interest of the man who owns the house that we'd like to purchase." "How much money do you think you need?" I said, "I don't really know how much we need, but we have to have at least $5000." So the businessmen said, "Oh, that's nothing. We'll let her have the $5000." So they gave us that amount, and I called together these women in the Giddings School, Mrs. Grays, and two of the teachers who were most interested; I called Captain Campbell Johnson, director of the Twelfth Street YMCA, and I called Mrs.--I think it was Gadson, who was then there at the Phillis Wheatley YWCA under Mrs. Julia West Hamilton. But at any rate, we had eleven people, and we organized ourselves into a board of directors of Southeast House. That board was able to accept in writing the $5000, and we made Campbell Johnson the treasurer. He knew how to handle money; he had worked in the Twelfth Street Y for many years. Inasmuch as we had a board, we got started in no time.

There was a settlement house right around the corner on Virginia Avenue at 324, called Friendship House. So I knocked on the door of Friendship House, and said to the director, "We want to have a day care center and I understand you have one here. May I bring my Negro children?" "Oh," she hesitated, she got excited, she got red behind the gills, and replied, "this house is for white children only." I said, "You mean to tell me that you have a settlement house with special care for children, and you can't let a child in because of its color? I've been for many years in my early school days in Boston where they have day care centers and where they do marvelous things, and no one ever thinks about colored. They think about need." So Miss [Lydia] Berklin said, "Well, I can't say anything. I'll have to present it to my board of directors." I asked, "When do they meet?" She

DF: (cont.) answered, "At seven o'clock in the evening." I responded, "I'll be there."

The next Friday at seven o'clock I went to Friendship House, rang the doorbell, and the staff person who was on duty was a little excited to see me there at the door, and I said, "Oh, I have an appointment with the board of directors, and they're going to see me." "Oh," she said, "Well, come in." So she took me down the corridor, and there was a long bench in front of the door, and all the doors were closed, and she said, "Just have a seat. They'll see you shortly." Well, I sat on that bench for about an hour, and it was just as if I were not there, because nobody paid me any attention. So at the end of an hour, the door opened, and Miss Berklin, the director, came up and said, "Well, Dr. Ferebee, the board doesn't have much time, but they'll see you if you'll come in and speak briefly." I went in and they were all very formal, you know, sort of regal in their appearance, and looked at me as if I were a spot on the wall, but that didn't disturb me. The president of the board was an army officer, and he was wearing his regalia, his insignia or whatever it is that officers pin on their epaulet. He said, "I understand you have something to say." I said, "Yes, sir," calling him by name, "I do."

I related the story of the little boy, and said, "We are anxious, since I've learned from Miss Berklin that you do not have any day care for black children in this white house, I was wondering if you would allow us to come in for a few days." Oh my, it was as if I had thrown a bomb into the room. Everybody began to speak. "Oh no, we couldn't do that. We couldn't do that. We'll have to try to find something else." So I said, "Well, will you help us? We are thinking of trying to get a house right around the corner from you, and we are maneuvering, and operating now on the premise that the Community Chest of Washington will help us." That made them feel a little bit better. But I could hear them talking among themselves and see them looking at each other out of the corner of their eyes. And they weren't quite sure of what they were going to say.

But at any rate, there was one woman, her name was Mrs. King. She had married a distinguished lawyer here in Washington, and he had lots of money and...but she had even more. Mrs. King stood up and said, "Well, I think that what the young doctor says is a very much needed program, and I want to help." She continued, "I want to give the first $1000 to this project." So when Mrs. King made her contribution, all the rest gave a little something--fifteen, twenty, twenty-five dollars--and I had Miss Berklin collect the money. I explained, "I don't want to handle the money. I'll allow Miss Berklin to do it, and when she has collected it, she can turn it over to my treasurer who is Captain Campbell Johnson, the director of the Twelfth Street YMCA." Then Mrs. King said, "Oh, you're all organized." I replied, "Yes, no one does anything alone these days. One helps people to help others to help others to help others," including about four "others."

Well, that night I think we got a nice pledge contribution, and the next day Mrs. King called... Miss Berklin telephoned Campbell Johnson, and he was delighted, since here was some extra money added to the $5000 from the Community Chest; in short time, we were able to persuade the man who owned this six-room building to charge us less for rent. What did I say, seventeen dollars a month?--he rented it to us for almost nothing. I think we paid

DF: (cont.) something like twelve dollars a month.

So here we were with this empty house, and a little bit of money in the treasury. So we said, "What will we do, what'll we do?" I said, "You need blankets, you need sheets, you need dishes, you need chairs, you need little beds for children to sleep on." They said, "Oh, we can't afford all that." I said, "All right, then we'll buy little rugs. We'll put a rug on the floor, and place a blanket over the child, so that the children can take a rest." In short order we had twelve rugs and blankets, and we were able to set up the second floor for the sleeping quarters, the first floor for the eating quarters, and the top floor for the office of the administrator, and for the board meetings. We were able to furnish the house by visiting the neighbors, and got chairs and tables--everybody was eager to give something--spoons and knives and forks and plates, and soon we had six little children in the day nursery. Then gradually we were able to bring the number up to twelve, since that was all we could handle.

We didn't have a leader--we called them directors of the house. And I said, "I know a young woman in Boston who has worked with day care centers, and I think that she wants to come to Washington for school to take some... Although she's a graduate in social work, she wants to take extra courses at Howard University." She was Marian Cooper. I said, "I'll write to Marian." Captain Johnson said, "Don't write to her, telephone her tonight." So I telephoned Marian Cooper, who replied, "I'm thrilled. I'd love to come. Will your board accept me?" I said, "I don't know. You'll have to come and present yourself to the board." She said, "When will that be?" I said, "We'll call a special meeting. When can you come?" She responded, "Next week," and we set the time for her. She came and made an excellent impression--she was a good talker, could sell anybody anything--and we asked her if she would accept the job of head worker. We inquired, "What are you going to call the house?" She responded, "We're going to call it Southeast House." So we called it Southeast House. And that was the beginning. Marian Cooper became the first head worker, we had the board, we had the Community Chest's $5000 and we had the other contributions. I think Campbell Johnson said that when we got started, we had about $9000, which was excellent, for people who began with nothing. So that was the beginning of Southeast Neighborhood House.

MT: And did you get on the Community Chest list?

DF: Yes, we did.

MT: And that helped.

DF: We got on the Community Chest list, and the following year, the board of directors that had volunteered the $5000 elected me as a member of the trustee board of the Community Chest, on which I served for a number of years. This was a very fine contact, and I think one of the real reasons why I was able to continue was that I learned very quickly that if you make a request with a positive attitude, not subservient, not cringing, acting forthright, and looking your prospective benefactor straight in the eye, you can get almost anything that you want.

MT: But you had had your educational experience in Boston, in New England?

DF: That's right.

MT: And you had lived in an integrated and primarily a white socity, and you acted and reacted in a different manner from people reared in a segregated community.

DF: Yes, one does.

MT: I was brought up in Michigan in a quite different atmosphere from that of Washington, D.C.

DF: Yes. When you take dignity and independence on, you don't really know you're acquiring them.

MT: Quite, and you act like a human being.

DF: That's right. So working in Southeast House, gradually we were able to offer classes to other boys and girls. When the children were asleep, or when they were able to play outside, we'd bring in some other boys and girls. We had after-school programs for them. We'd take them off the street. However, right across the street there was a big District of Columbia playground with barbed wire around it to keep the Negro children from getting in. There was a swimming pool, and they had seesaws, swings and everything for recreation, but no black child ever went through that gate, right across the street from Southeast House.

MT: And you weren't able to get the gate open to your children?

DF: Never able to, because the barbed wire was still there, and the man who was the director of the athletics and recreational program in Washington simply would not consider it. He never gave me an interview, never allowed it.

MT: I understand.

DF: So I was never able to open the playground to our black children. But eventually, we decided that we would ask Miss Berklin and the Friendship House people if they would allow us to use their back yard. They had so much land, and, after lengthy persuasion, I was able to convince them that we should have a playground out there, which we provided with some seesaws and swings, and in that way we were able to expand the recreational program.

[By the way, I should add that after a year at 301 G. Street, S.E., which was far too small for our purposes, after a year, that is in 1930, we acquired the lily-white Friendship House at 324 Virginia Avenue, S.E., and Marian Cooper was able to offer a still more expanded program.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, you have provided a fascinating narrative. I understand that Southeast House is still in existence and administering a challenging program to many groups.

DF: Yes, that is true. But it's not in the same location on Virginia Avenue, S.E. The construction of an expressway forced us to move. On the sites of the first two houses there is an expressway which traverses Washington from the southwest to the southeast and beyond the city limits. The present Southeast Neighborhood House operates a comprehensive development program in southeast Anacostia for all age groups--children, youth, and senior citizens--living in an area bounded by South Capitol Street and the Anacostia River. The administrative offices are at 1225 Maple View Place, S.E., but parts of four nearby buildings on Maple View are used for various services. The youth services division is on Mount View Place, S.E. A developmental day care operates at Bethlehem Baptist Church on Howard Avenue, S.E. Six nutritional sites and one satellite nutritional site are also operated by Southeast House.

The services include developmental day care for children, youth counseling, youth diversion, youth employment training, youth community conservation improvement, juvenile restitution, cultural arts, tutorial program, housing, adult leisure time, aging, geriatric day care, and community outreach for people living in an area bounded by South Capitol Street and the Anacostia River. More than 12,000 people received direct services in 1979. The board of directors is now comprised of twenty-two citizens representing a cross-section of Washington, including two members elected from the Neighborhood Advisory Council. The proposed budget for 1980 is $2,100,000.

MT: What! Where does Southeast House find that much money?

DF: It comes from three principal sources: United Way--the former Community Chest which provided the first $5,000--11 percent; United Planning Organization, 22 percent; and various components of the District of Columbia government, 67 percent.

MT: Good. The District of Columbia recognizes its responsibility. Now I will feel a little better when I pay my D.C. income tax. In fifty years Southeast Neighborhood House has come a long way from its opening in the small six-room house on G Street, S.E., with $9000 in the treasury.

DF: Yes, it has. It will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in April next.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, during your internships, the two-year period as clinician in obstetrics and later as a medical physician for women, the first year of your appointment to the Howard University Health Service and your involvement in establishing Southeast House on a firm basis, did you find time for socializing and consideration of marriage?

DF: Yes. During that entire period I was associated with physicians. My friends and associates were physicians, dentists, and professional men and women. Even though I worked hard, I did have an opportunity to meet and know many of them. This was especially true after I was appointed to the Howard University Health Service in 1929. Thereafter I appeared at the--not teachers' staff meetings...

MT: Faculty meetings?

DF: No. The administrators. Consequently I met professors and instructors

DF: (cont.) in different areas of the university. One was Dr. Claude Ferebee, an instructor in the Howard University College of Dentistry. He appeared to be impressed with what I was trying to do, not only in the Health Service, but at Southeast House. We became good friends, interested in each other's professional activities and spent more and more time together.

Claude Ferebee was a skillful dentist--if I do say so.] He was one of the best dentists that Howard University College of Dentistry had. He knew he was good, and unfortunately, he wanted the world to know he was good. He didn't have the kind of disposition that allowed people to accept him on a basis that would make them admire him. So that he and Dr. Arnold B. Donawa, the first academic dean of the College of Dentistry, were very soon at odds, and Donawa dismissed him, dropped him from the staff of the College of Dentistry.

MT: Some deans are like that, they don't want any rivalry.

DF: Claude gradually decided that he would establish a private dental office, and at the same time became more interested in me, since I was at the University Health Service and doing well, and he had heard that the Community Chest was assisting Southeast House. We saw a great deal of each other and one evening he said, "You know, I think we ought to open up offices together." So that was the nature of the courtship of Ferebee and Boulding.

MT: Where did you have your joint office?

DF: Dental office?

MT: Well, he was in dentistry, and you were in medicine.

DF: On Second Street, N.W., near the corner of Rhode Island Avenue.

MT: Oh yes. That was a good location.

DF: Yes. Very good location. We lived in the house that belonged to a Mr. Jesse Powell, who was the leading and most affluent colored florist, operating under the name Flowers by Powell.[2] So when we opened the office, Powell sent beautiful flowers, and we were able to invite our friends and the neighbors in, and that was the beginning of the Ferebee-Boulding combination.

MT: Open house, beautified with flowers!

DF: Yes, the Ferebee-Boulding office combination. I was in the front of the house, the medical office, and Claude was on the same floor, at the back of the house in the dental office. He had beautiful equipment, because he had fine ideas of having only the best. I was able to get along almost with a stethoscope and a blood pressure machine, without fancy medical equipment and material. But he had the most modern dental equipment, with all the instruments that he required, and everything was precise, had to be precise. This was in 1930, and we were able to establish ourselves in this good office.

MT: You had married in the meantime?

DF: Oh yes. We married when we went--just before we went--into the dental office. We married on July 2, 1930, which was about six years after I was graduated from Tufts College of Medicine in 1924. Less than six months later I became pregnant with twins.

MT: Now, I want to inquire about your maternal schedule. You mentioned you married before you went into the joint office, and a little over a year you had twins. Was that part of your professional arrangement, that you would have two babies on one occasion, so that you would have more time to proceed with your professional work? [laughter]

DF: I was as surprised as anybody could be when the obstetrician said, "I hear two heartbeats, and I think I feel four feet kicking around." I was as surprised as he was.

MT: I thought perhaps you had planned twins so you would have a proper family and your professional career.

DF: Oh no, I hadn't planned that. No, my planning and my hopes didn't carry me in that direction at all. But I knew I was pregnant, and I was hoping that the babe would be a boy, because that would please my husband. You see, he was becoming more and more resentful of everything that I was doing as a woman, because what I attempted seemed to turn to gold, and his effort was turning to mud, you understand. After the first year or so, I knew what was on his mind. The fact that I became busier and had perhaps a larger group of patients, that didn't set too well with him. And for that reason, he became very, shall I say, not disgruntled, but unhappy and uncooperative, and insisted that I give up my work. Of course, I wasn't going to do that.

MT: Did he establish an adequate practice?

DF: Yes, he had a very good practice, but not the kind of practice that he desired. He wanted to be able to show Dean Donawa that he didn't need the College of Dentistry, he didn't need Howard University. Yet, I was at Howard, and he wanted to know why I would remain at the university after he had been dropped. I said, "Well, I'm not in the dental area, I'm in medicine." So, there again, was another source of irritation.

MT: [What a pity! How unfortunate, especially when you should have been rejoicing over the prospect of heirs. What is the birth date of your twins?

DF: My twins were born on August 8, 1931, a boy and a girl.

MT: What names did you and your husband agree to for the babes?

DF: Claude Thurston Ferebee and Dorothy Boulding Ferebee.

MT: One for the father and one for the mother. Interesting! There was no attempt to provide twin names?

DF: No. No such an attempt. No controversy.

MT: Did you continue to work until almost the time of the twins' birth?

DF: Yes, I was then in the directorship of the Howard University Health Service, and I worked there and in my office, oh, I should think within a month of the delivery of my babies.]

MT: Dr. Lena Edwards reported that she was in her office treating patients the day of the night when one of her sons was born. [laughs]

DF: Yes. I worked hard and regularly up until a month before the babies were expected, but I didn't completely give up until I was ready to go to the hospital.

MT: That was about the case with Dr. Edwards. And she feels that this probably was all right, in terms of keeping her and the baby healthy and having a normal child.

DF: I was very fortunate in that I had a young housekeeper who was devoted to me, devoted to my children, and did everything she could to make life happier and easier for me. She not only cooked and did the housework, but she looked after the children. I was very lucky to get an efficient housekeeper and a children's nurse.

MT: Yes, I wondered about your assistance.

DF: Her name was Green, and the children called her "Geen"--they, Claude, calls her Geen to this day. Geen loved them, and she never allowed them to miss or call for me.

They were lovely children and I gave them a great deal of time, as much as I possibly could between seeing people in my office and the requirements at Howard University. After they were about two years old I never put them to bed without telling them a bedtime story. But, if I was extremely busy with my office, I would simply say to my patients, "You'll have to wait a short time. I'm not quite ready to open the office." So they would sit there and read a magazine or listen to music. I would go upstairs, we would jump on the bed and I would read a bedtime story, or narrate a familiar fairy-tale to my children. I had to repeat it entirely and not shorten or summarize it in any way. Otherwise, I was called to time on it. "Oh, Mommy, you forgot..." so and so. "Oh, he didn't say it that way." I would have to go back and pick up the story where the omission or error had occurred.

MT: Clever children! So they grew in wisdom and knowledge, as expected.

DF: Yes. They were alert. They would look for the hour of the day when "Mommy will be here. Mommy will be here." My children and I were very close.

MT: I'm interested in your experience with twins. I have taught in high school and college, about seven sets of twins. They were interesting, and they were intelligent--I mean, they weren't mentally retarded or handicapped in any way. But usually, with twins, one is a leader and the other is a follower.

DF: I'm very happy to say that these twins were almost on a par.

MT: One being male and the other female, obviously they were not identical.

DF: No. They were not identical.

MT: When they're identical, there seems to be a leader. If one buttons his shirt, the other will look and button his. If one straightens his tie, the other will do likewise.

DF: Yes, yes. Well, you see from this picture, the girl buttoned her clothes to the right, and the boy buttoned his to the left.

MT: They wore different yet similar clothes?

DF: I bought their clothes at the Twin Shop here in Washington, but they were sufficiently different to be identified. Maybe I ought to lend you the twins' pictures?

MT: Oh, definitely. I want them. But for the period when we get to the supplementary material.

DF: Yes, but I mean, they're not in these pictures. I have them in a frame upstairs.

MT: Yes, I should like them very much, and I did see one here, the picture of the little girl, which was separate, but I did not know whether you had one of Claude. But definitely I will reproduce them for the supplementary material. Were they enrolled in the Garden of Children when it was time for them to go to school--you know the famous private Garden of Children? Many of my friends' children attended it.

DF: Yes, they went to Dorothy...

MT: Howard, Dorothy Howard...

DF: Dorothy Howard's School, yes.

MT: The Garden of Children School

DF: She had a car that came to the neighborhoods to pick up the children, and they loved Mrs. Howard. They were delighted to go to the school, and she was efficient with them.

MT: I recall that physicians, dentists, attorneys, professors at Howard and at Teachers College and some teachers in Dunbar High School, as well as high level government employees, sent their precious offspring to the Garden of Children and they were a class apart.

DF: Yes. One of the little girls who was in the classroom with the twins is now principal of the Brookland School over here. They've all done well. Many attended leading private schools, colleges, and universities of New England.

MT: And usually, when the children finished, they were prepared for the second grade. Didn't Mrs. Howard give them a start in the primary grades?

DF: Yes, before they left, they were ready for the second grade.

MT: Yes. So it was like kindergarten plus preschool. Did they both attend the same school later?

DF: Yes, the same school. They went first to the Lucretia Mott School, and later attended an elementary school up on Euclid Street, and graduated from the grammar school there. I think the training ended at the sixth grade, or something like that, at that time.

MT: Yes, a little less than junior high. Did they then go to Banneker?

DF: Yes, they attended for a period Banneker Junior High School But their father was eager for them to go elsewhere for senior high school. Although he was in New York, he was interested in their education. He said, "I don't want them to stay down there in that Washington." We were both anxious to get them out of this city. I studied all the educational material that I could gather and found a school to my liking--an early prep school--Avalon School in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. From there Dorothy entered Mount Hermon School in Northfield, Massachusetts, and Thurston enrolled at a boys' school in Tilton, New Hampshire.

MT: Northfield is renowned. Drs. Gertrude and Napoleon Rivers's daughters were there, and I have other friends whose daughters studied at Mount Hermon. That was in the forties after I came to Howard.

DF: Yes, the middle and late forties. They both did very well. Dorothy was graduated from Northfield, and Claude--we call him Thurston--graduated from the Tilton boys' school in New Hampshire, and in that way they had a very good foundation. Before they graduated, I left Washington. I would have liked to have been in New England closer to these children. But I pulled up stakes on Second Street, even though I was doing well in my office, I pulled up stakes and set up an office in New York at St. Albans on Long Island.

MT: Yes, yes, I remember that.

DF: But I commuted on weekends, because I was still at Howard University, and had an assistant director. On weekends I would work with her, and at other times I would be in St. Albans. So I was able to be nearer my children. There was something unusual about me. I was able to fluctuate and yet bring to a successful conclusion different things in different parts of the country.

[After Dorothy had been graduated from Northfield and Claude from Tilton, since I had moved to Long Island and their father was in New York City, the children enrolled in Champlain College, in Burlington, Vermont, across the lake from Plattsburgh, New York. It was, 1949 to 1950, one of the coldest winters we have ever had, and Dorothy contracted a dreadful cold and pneumonia. She was ill for about five days before I knew it. In

DF: (cont.) short order, before I could get to her or could bring her to me, she died an untimely death, February 6, 1950. It was on one of the occasions when I was in Washington, dividing my time between that city and New York.]

MT: I think during this period you were president of the National Council of Negro Women? You had an office there, didn't you, on Vermont Avenue, N.W.?

DF: Yes.

MT: Well, I did want to include your children in this interview. Although I didn't know them, I had heard that they were brilliant.

[Should we complete the narrative for your son Claude or Thurston?

DF: Yes, let's do so. He did not remain at Champlain for a degree, but came to Howard University. His undergraduate career was interrupted by military service requirement during the Korean war. But he returned, married, took his B.S. degree in 1962, and registered in the Howard University College of Dentistry, from which he was graduated in 1966. Since then he has practiced dentistry here in Washington.

MT: Did his father influence him in this choice of profession?

DF: I think not. In this case I believe that my son arrived at his decision alone.

MT: I know you are proud of him.

DF: Yes, he and his family mean a great deal to me. They are my pride and joy.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, is there more concerning your family that you would care to record?]

DF: Yes. I think that the very fact that my husband Claude was dismissed from the College of Dentistry, and I was still in the College of Medicine worried him. He felt that this gave me more prestige than he enjoyed. He had lost his university status when Dean Donawa put him out. You understand?

MT: Yes, and that hurts.

DF: It hurt, and it was something that he kept bound up inside of him, and that made him very unhappy. So he began to say that he didn't see why I wanted to remain at Howard University; he wasn't there, why should I continue? I said, "Well, apparently Dr. Johnson believes I'm doing a good job. And the men at the College of Medicine think I'm doing well. I don't think I should give up." So gradually those irritations grew, and in a short time, I began to do more work with the sorority--you see, this was the popular sorority time. It was during this period that I went to Mississippi on the health project. It was in the 1930s, '35 or '36. I think he resented greatly the fact that I was successful, and we were able to conquer even those hostile plantation owners in Mississippi. It

DF: (cont.) gnawed him, and...

MT: It's hard, that's hard. It's tragic.

DF: ...and it cut in on him. He was unable to control it. So life became very miserable and very cruel for both of us. He resented the fact that everything I did seemed to turn out all right, while that which he attempted did not. So in a short time, oh, in the late 1930s...

MT: Thirties?

DF: Yes, in the late thirties he decided that he wasn't going to stay in Washington, he was moving to New York, where his father was--his father was an excellent dentist, too. He just wasn't going to stay here. So he pulled up stakes, moved his furniture and equipment--moved everything--to New York, and left me there in the house on Second Street with the empty area where his dental office had been. But I didn't allow this to disturb me, because the children were here and required my attention and spare time.

After my daughter died, and I was still traveling between New York and Washington, my husband decided he wanted to be free. Since this was his desire, I said, "It is my pleasure to give you your freedom." Thus, in a very calm fashion, we were divorced.

MT: Is this the appropriate time for you to discuss in more detail your Howard University Health Service assignment, since you more or less organized and established it on a permanent basis, isn't that correct?

DF: I did not establish it, because Dr. Paul B. Cornely was the part-time medical director when the Health Service was started. But in 1929, when Dr. Cornely induced me--not induced, but persuaded me--to come to the Health Service, I was just finishing my internships and doing community work in Washington. He said, "You remain at Howard University. I think you will find here almost as many needs as those that you talk about for Mississippi, that although you haven't done it yet, we hear you talk a great deal about it." We had been considering the Mississippi Health Project since 1923, but we did not get around to it till quite some time later.

So I remained at Howard University and served under Dr. Cornely. He became the full-time director, and I was second in command. He still, although he was busy in the College of Medicine, came to the Health Service, and was responsible for establishing the budget, outlining the program, and describing what should be done each year. Gradually I was able to assume more and more responsibility, and he said, "Now you know what Howard University Health Service can do, we want you to take over." So he withdrew completely to serve the College of Medicine as professor and head of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, and I became the examiner.

MT: Yes. Well, that was your status when I came to Howard University in 1942, and I thought that you were the head of the Health Service. I know from

MT: (cont.) what I heard unofficially that you did a tremendously fine job.

DF: Well, I tried hard. Unfortunately, the board of directors and some of the instructors of Howard University really were not terribly impressed with the needs of the Health Service. They didn't know what it meant. Because we had never had a comprehensive one. So we were able to state that every student who matriculated at Howard University should have a health examination. Every student who entered Howard had been sent a health form at home, where the family doctor would indicate what had been the history, the medical history of this student. And that was the beginning of really the outstanding work, we think, of the Howard University Health Service.

MT: Well, I had heard about the records, and how complete they were. Dr. Ferebee, I think I would like to have you comment on where the Health Service was located.

DF: Yes. The Health Service was located on the campus, in the gymnasium building. We didn't have a building; we were assigned three large rooms on the second floor of the women's gymnasium.[3]

MT: I know. That's what I wanted you to mention. Rosemary Allen was then chairman of the Department of Physical Education for Women. I have always said, "Those two ladies took charge of a building--and it was one of the older buildings, not the oldest--and made it the cleanest building on the campus." You two kept that building straight and tidy.

DF: Yes. We worked very hard, both Mrs. Allen and I worked diligently to see if we could, with what little money we had, make it the finest Health Service possible. I think that the Health Service afforded very good grounding and a good sense of appreciation of the health needs of people, and that it was not enough to get an education, but an education in a sound body. So that we felt that we did a good job.

MT: Which you did. After two or three decades of labor, did you not receive a national award?

DF: Yes, I did. On the basis of the appraisal and the assessment of national medical examiners, I was nominated, along with the directors of six other college health services, to receive a special award, and I'm happy to report that I won the nomination for the Edward Hitchcock Award. I should like to read it to you.

MT: Yes, do. Please.

DF: "This award is presented to Dorothy B. Ferebee, M.D., in recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of college health, presented by the American College Health Association, presented at the forty-ninth annual meeting, April 30, 1971, San Francisco, California." Signed by the president, Dr. Franklin Kilpatrick, and the executive director, Mr. James Dilley. I'm very proud of that award, as it was presented in a beautifully framed certificate carrying the citation.

DF: (cont.) On the basis of the work that I was doing in the University Health Service and in the community, especially at Southeast House--the only day care center for colored children in that area of Washington--and the Mississippi Health Project, Dr. Mordecai Johnson was eager to have his faculties know what I was accomplishing. Thus, it was through him that the health division of the State Department learned of my interest and dedication to health for young people. Due to the initiative of the physicians in that division I was invited to go and was sent by the State Department five times to countries round the world, to work with students, with mothers and small children, in eighteen countries in Africa, in Germany, in France and Italy, even in the Far East, over in the Philippine Islands.

MT: And I read in your material this morning an article concerning your being in Israel.

DF: Yes.

MT: You received an award for your work there. The First Hadassah Myrtle Wreath Award to Distinguished American Women, presented by the ambassador of Israel here in Washington in February 1966.

DF: Yes, I went to Israel and also to Lebanon, and had a chance to work with people in both countries.

MT: So that's in the Middle East, you were practically halfway around the world.

DF: Yes. In the Middle East. I had an unusually broad and very rewarding contact, in terms of serving people, in terms of listening to their difficulties, and in terms of trying to help them, to inspire young people to help each other, to inspire mothers to help each other.

In Africa, although I had much to do, I was able to work with the Girl Scout units, and help the mothers in the semi-arid regions who had to go miles and miles to get water, and who had no one to leave with the children. The Girl Scout units in those areas, with their bicycles, would help to bring water to the homes of these mothers. It was most rewarding, and a very helpful innovation.

MT: Do you remember some of the countries in Africa--of course, at that time they might have different names, if they were under the British or French--but do you recall some of the special countries?

DF: Yes, we went in the French area, Mali...

MT: Oh, yes. That was French Central Africa. Then French West Africa.

DF: Mali and... I'm trying to think of some of the areas where we stayed the longest, but at any rate, we went to French West Africa.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, how many times did you visit Africa for the State Department?

DF: I visited Africa five times, covering eighteen countries, beginning in

DF: (cont.) French North Africa, down the west coast, and then into the southern tip and up on the east side. So I almost circled Africa, that is, its boundaries.

MT: In the several different trips?

DF: Yes, on different trips.

MT: Yes. In what years, or about what years?

DF: Well, I'd say, '52, '59, '63, '64, and '66.

MT: Yes. Then you were there when the French administered that territory, and before self-government. Of course, they didn't initially grant their former colonies what would be called complete independence. They became members of the French Community. I think I heard you once mention Mali, which of course is in the interior, on one of your visits. Then there was French West Africa, which is now Guinea, it's a republic. French Equatorial Africa, at the period you were there, is now Côte d'Ivoire, or the Ivory Coast.

DF: Ivory Coast and Togo. Then from there, I went south as far as South Africa itself. It was there that I had some interesting experiences; my passport was confiscated, and I was not permitted to enter South Africa. But fortunately, I was helped by some South African people, who were a part of the strong South African group that really wanted to be more liberal--the British. They were not the Afrikaners who hated everybody except themselves.

MT: They're in power now. That's most interesting.

DF: And I stayed for a while in South Africa, and was helped, as I said, by those individuals who were conscious of the need for people around the world to get along together. From there, I went up the east coast as far as where they are having trouble now and are changing the names. I'm trying to think of the place where the prime ministers were so hostile to the African people--north and south...

MT: Rhodesia?

DF: Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

MT: Yes, Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

DF: Yes. But Southern Rhodesia kept its name until recently. It had prime ministers very hostile to the Africans, although the Africans outnumbered the whites five to one.

MT: Yes, and in some places more.

DF: But they had no power.

MT: And of course, Northern Rhodesia is now independent Zambia. Southern Rhodesia is now black-ruled Zimbabwe struggling with internal strife.

MT: (cont.) Well, that's interesting that you were there in the period before liberation. Now most of those countries are independent, except South Africa that remains practically the same.

Also, you went to the Philippines, I noticed in going through your material, for the United States Health Department, and also the Caribbean. Do you remember some of the countries in the Caribbean? Were they primarily where United States' interests prevail, or the others? British? French?

DF: No, it was Puerto Rico, and the French islands. There was Haiti, of course...

MT: Oh, yes. Independent, the first to fight for independence.

DF: Independent Haiti, and there were other countries...

MT: The French have Martinique and Guadeloupe, those are the only ones still French.

DF: We visited all of those islands.

MT: And the British...

DF: I reported what the women of those countries were doing and what the children needed--I worked primarily with the children. I think that I was able to stimulate the needs of people, lifting the health needs, recognizing the health needs of the children...

MT: Yes, that's important.

DF: ...the children and the mothers. The mothers worked very hard in the Caribbean countries, especially in the rural areas attempting to raise a little food. They worked hard because the food was hard to get and there was practically no water. The mothers had to go miles and miles for water, both for food, for cleansing, for washing, for clothes washing, all of that. And whenever a drought came, they suffered greatly.

MT: Yes, that's so in Africa too. You mentioned that, for Africa. You were also in some South American countries. Were they in the northern part or down below the equator?

DF: They were in the northwest. I was in Peru, and I was also in the north.

MT: Were you in Ecuador? Were you in Colombia... Of course, Colombia's just south of Panama.

DF: I was in Colombia and Peru, principally. I spent a very short time in Chile.

MT: Yes, that's on the southwest coast.

DF: I also got to the big country of Brazil, and had a chance to meet some physicians and others who were working there, and they welcomed me.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, I read in a League of Women Voters publication that you, a Washington branch member, had been sworn in on April 13, 1964, as consultant in preventive medicine to the State Department's medical division. You would "design brochures, films, and other materials on new methods of disease prevention, especially those pertinent for Americans assigned to developing countries. They will be used abroad and at the Foreign Service Institute." The item further stated that during your assignment, for which you had been chosenby Secretary of State Dean Rusk, you would "make field trips to various posts in Africa and Latin America to lecture on health measures and preventive medicine." Therefore, in your later trips you lectured primarily to physicians and health officers on preventive medicine. On the earlier assignments you worked directly with mothers and children on general health procedures. Did you encounter many health difficulties on your part? I know you had all the immunizations, but did you lose any time from illness?

DF: I was fortunate in that my treatment for malaria was successful. I had no difficulty with any of the Caribbean countries, for instance, with bugs, bees, and birds. My immunizations against those creatures were successful.

MT: You must have been in fairly good health.

DF: Yes, I was. I worked hard, because I enjoyed it. And the women enjoyed helping me, since here was somebody willing to accept their difficulties and to work right along with them without complaining. I can remember distinctly, on one of my foreign trips, particularly, over in Iran--everybody's talking about Iran now--I had a chance to meet with some of the professors and students of the University of Iran. I told them that Howard University had the largest percentage of students from Iran of our entire foreign student body.

MT: Yes. There was a period for five or six years, when our large foreign student body was primarily from the Middle East. Many people not connected with Howard University thought that mostof our foreign students would be from Africa, but it was the Middle East and Asia that had the largest per capita enrollment.

DF: Africa was the second in numerical appearance. The Middle East was higher than Africa, which was followed by other countries.

MT: Yes, and people were often amazed when I would tell them the facts. I'm glad that you mentioned it, because I recall that period. It has changed, of course. It changed after World War II. During the war, we had many students from the Caribbean, who would have gone to England or Canada. The ones that can't get in British universities turn to Canada, and if they are not accepted in Canadian universities, they come to Howard. [laughs]

Now, spanning all the years at Howard, I know there will be some sidelines, but in terms of your professional achievements, there were some things--when you referred to Iran--which you did not mention earlier in reference to the Middle East. I know you were in Israel, with the health service from the United States State Department. When you journeyed on those assignments for the State Department, were you on leave? You were absent

MT: (cont.) from the Howard University Health Service?

DF: Oh yes, I was away each of those times. Dr. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, who was then the president, was very helpful in that he encouraged me to do the work. I can remember very distinctly, he said, "I want you to go, I want you to serve these countries. But there's one other thing, don't forget Howard University."

MT: I figure that you were representing Howard University, in a sense. Not that Howard was sending you, but you represented what Howard could do, and the type of persons employed there.

DF: President Johnson's confidence in me and his encouragement were a great help. And, of course, I informed many people in those countries, and they thought very highly of Dr. Johnson.

MT: In addition to this United States health service, in fact before it, but during the time that you were at Howard University, did you not take on a health project in Mississippi?

DF: Yes. A long time ago I was really giving my vacation time when I went to Mississippi to do the health job down there. I was in Mississippi each summer from 1935 to 1941.

MT: Just summers? For how long?

DF: In the summer, from two to three months each time...and the fraternal order of Alpha Kappa Alpha allowed me to have volunteers to assist, who were sorors of Alpha Kappa Alpha. We had nurses, we had other physicians, we had teachers who served as our recording secretaries--amanuenses, we called them--it was a successful project. We would have gone on for a long time, but the war intervened in '41, and we were forced to stop.

Going to Mississippi was quite an ordeal, probably as bad as travel in Africa, because when I had selected the team of seventeen women to go to Mississippi, the very next summer... They were from different parts of the country, from New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Louisiana, and the District of Columbia. We arranged to have the seventeen women meet here in Washington, and planned to travel by train from here to Mississippi via West Virginia and Tennessee, and at the border of Tennessee and Mississippi we actually enter the state of Mississippi.

But I must say that the District of Columbia was almost as hostile and as discriminating as some foreign countries we had visited, because not one of the seventeen women who came to meet us in Washington, not one of them was able to ride in the train from Washington to Mississippi, except in the Jim Crow car, and that car was just a hot dirty coach, directly behind the steam engine and the coal pit, where the workers were shoveling soft coal all day, and the dust and soot drifted back into the coach. When I went to the railway station in Washington to buy seventeen tickets, the officer at the window--I don't know whether he was a supervisor or special agent--would not sell me seventeen tickets. He said, "Seventeen

DF: (cont.) tickets will take up all the space we have in those special cars"--he wouldn't say Jim Crow cars, you know, the special cars--"because they carry only twenty-four people. And going up and down the line, if you take seventeen, we'll have no space for our other niggers"--he forgot himself there and called them niggers.

MT: And when they didn't forget, they would say something that was so near nigger, nigras.

DF: Yes, nigras. When they were off guard, they simply said niggers. Well, when I learned that the seventeen people could not have seats together and we'd have to be in this Jim Crow area, behind the steam engine and the coal pit, I decided that we just could not travel that way. Then we revamped our plans and said that we'll go by car. To the women who had not yet reached Washington, I said, "Drive your car, if you have a car, drive it to Washington, and we'll go down as a team, as a caravan." We used the five cars belonging to the sorors; we drove from Washington all the way to Mississippi, and became the first mobile health clinic in America. Dr. Thomas Parran, who was United State Public Health administrator, said it was the finest traveling health service he had ever seen.

MT: That's how I first heard so much about you, with the Mississippi Health Project.

DF: Mississippi Health...

MT: When you started your statement, and I think most people would understand but some might not, you said, "the fraternal organization of Alpha Kappa Alpha." Yes, that's using fraternal in a broad sense, but I would like for people who might not realize, that this is a sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha...

DF: Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

MT: ...the first of the colored sororities.

DF: And no men were in it, but men did help us in our efforts. It certainly points to the fact that Alpha Kappa Alpha wanted to do something more than just give prizes for oratory or scholarships to schools. Education, of course, was one of our goals, but we also wanted to have a project that would help people who were less fortunate, and it seemed to me that the less fortunate people, more than anyone else, needed help. So Ida Jackson, who was at that time the national sorority head--we called them the supreme basileus--Soror Jackson appointed me at the sorority's convention in Richmond, Virginia, to be the director of the health service. She said, "I want you to go to Mississippi, because I know the state of Mississippi, I was born there, and I know its needs, and it would please me greatly if you would set up a clinic there."

MT: And about what year was that?

DF: That was in 1936.

MT: Yes. I had just returned from Oxford and Europe in September 1935. I

MT: (cont.) knew it had started my first year home when I heard so much about it. Your name was always associated with it. And now, that project is discontinued; because of World War II, it was shelved. But has it been picked up in some way, and is the sorority contributing?

DF: Yes, they've had several revivals of the project, but not exactly in the way that we had originally intended. We were fortunate in that we were able to interest an order--what we call the fraternal orders among men and women--and it was the fraternal order of Sons and Daughters of Tabor in Mississippi that had considerable money, and they were going to build an office building. When we heard of their plans, we--I say "we," the officers of Alpha Kappa Alpha--we met with the head of the fraternal order, and asked him if, instead of an office building, would they consider building a hospital, a clinic first. After much concentration and pleading and, shall I say, after much persuasion, those men and women in the Sons and Daughters of Tabor said that they would erect a clinic. So the clinic was called the Clinic of the Sons and Daughters of Tabor, the Taborian Clinic.

MT: Yes, I've heard of that. I'm glad that this is in your record.

DF: And it was a very unusual thing, because those fraternal orders...the people that belonged didn't consider having any special project; they simply joined an order because they could say, "We want 'shonce' to bury me." They only paid their twenty-five cents or fifteen cents a month so that they could have "shonce"--their insurance--to bury them.

MT: Yes. Those would be laboring people?

DF: Yes.

MT: Yes, I've heard that about a large group in Baltimore, their greatest concern is their funeral.

DF: So, in working in Mississippi, we went to the town where most of the influential Negroes in Mississippi, and that's in Mound Bayou--where the men and women were really in good financial condition. They themselves had large cotton fields, and they were eager, after they had heard our story, to help us. They invited our seventeen women to come and live in Mound Bayou, in various homes. And we were able to stay there because we had very, very great difficulty in finding a place. I must say that the very first place we served was in Holmes County.

MT: I've heard that.

DF: There Arenia Mallory, Dr. Arenia Mallory, was the president of a school. She had little buildings, little dormitories--there was really no space--but we relied on her, and she was very helpful. We worked for a short time, and then after we had accomplished what we could in Holmes County, Dr. Mallory helped us to get into Mound Bayou. So that was the way we started. We had two very successful clinics there and in Holmes County.

From there we set up a roving clinic, as we found that in all other counties, the influential people were the white plantation owners. They were the ones

DF: (cont.) who decided what could be done and what could not be done. When they ascertained in our writing to the health officers that a group of Negro women wanted to come into their county to do a health job, well, they were very hostile. I can remember at our very first meeting with them, the health officer said, "Thirteen plantation owners want to hear what you have to say." So we went to the plantation health service, operated by a very fine young white doctor and nurses, and we explained what we wanted to do with some money we had, materials we would buy, vaccines and immunizations, and certain things for children, and that we had planned to set up five clinics in the five places of Holmes County, or in Mound Bayou County. We'd have one in the middle, and one clinic in each of the four adjoining areas. But when these plantation owners realized that we wanted to come into their county, they were hostile, they didn't want us at all. So they turned us down, we couldn't do it. But just one among the thirteen said, "Well, I think this is a good idea. We ought to let them come in and try."

So reluctantly, they allowed us to start a clinic. But they would never allow the blacks on the plantation to leave their job of picking cotton and hoeing weeds, would not allow them to come to any of the five clinics that we had proposed. So here we were, in Mississippi, with all the materials and drugs that we had bought, all of the things necessary for the health of young children, and couldn't use them because the plantation owners would not allow the Negroes to come to us. So we had a consultation, and agreed, "Well, if they can't come to us, we'll go to them."

It was then that we initiated the first mobile health clinic in the country. One plantation owner wanted us to start with him, so that the others could see that we were not there to exploit, we were there to help. So we started with him, and every morning at five o'clock these five cars that had brought us from Washington were lined in a row. We became the Health Mobile Clinic. They carried our draperies, our white uniforms, our medicines, our ice--we had to stop at the ice house to get ice, to preserve the vaccines. It was a great job, and a hard job.

Those at home who thought we were down in Mississippi having a big time should have been there to see what difficulties we experienced. This was before the days that the WPA [Works Progress Administration] built decent roads in Mississippi. The roads were nothing but mud or shale and sand and rock--little rocks and gravel. And when we traveled we encountered nothing but dust. One couldn't see the car in front. No routes were marked, you didn't know where you were. But fortunately, there's something about me that I can always come back from where I've been. So when the members of the team noticed that even without markings or signs, I could always get home, they made me the leader of the procession; my car was the leader of the group. Because they said, "Wherever we've been, she can bring us home." It was because I have a knack of recognizing a certain tree stump, or a certain rock, or a certain object that stands out, assuring me, "This is the way I came." So I became the leader of the group going into the plantation.

We'd start at five o'clock in the morning; we would go to the ice house, and eventually arrive at the plantation, and there, with no place to set up--the very first clinic we had was in a little church, because there was

DF: (cont.) no other place. The church was too small and was not at all conducive to the work we intended to do, so we decided we would have outdoor clinics. We had brought a rope, some clothespins, and posters, since we planned to display the posters, this arrangement was ideal. We would string the rope from tree to tree, pin the health posters with a clothespin on the rope, and we were able to help the mothers and teach the children, "This is what you're going to look like when you get good food." And, "This is how you're going to act when your mother gives you the kind of medicine that you need." It was an educational teaching job as well as a health job.

So we started with that little church, and we stayed in that area probably for a week. Then we'd move to another area of that plantation. And then we'd move to still another area. So that, little by little, we didn't care whether we found a building in which to set up or not, we conducted outdoor clinics. It was very helpful and beautiful, because we had colorful posters that were pinned on the clothesline, and we were able to do a teaching job.

Also, it was good to have an outdoor clinic since we had what we called "dietal therapy." Soror Ella Moran, who was a dietician, set up a dietal therapy clinic, because the secretary of agriculture, Mr. Henry A. Wallace, was cooperative.

MT: Yes. Great man, Wallace, a distinguished agriculturist who learned much in his youth from his mentor, George Washington Carver.

DF: Soror Moran was able to persuade him to help us to have food. He sent us dried apples and rice, and dried potatoes--the things that he felt that we could use. Mrs. Moran was able to have an outdoor fireplace and a big pot that she hung up over the fire, and in that way she was able to teach the mothers that they shouldn't eat the food that they didn't know whether it was contaminated or not, but if they boiled it, everything would be safe. She had the outdoor clinic, and when she had finished cooking the apples or the potatoes, or whatever Mr. Wallace had given us, we would set the food before these people on a long table and allow them to come over and take what they wanted. At first they were very reticent because they'd never before seen that kind of food, and they didn't know whether they should eat it or not. But after sitting there all day and walking all the distances from the plantation up to this corner of the county, they were eager indeed to eat the food. So we decided that we would not feed them until late afternoon, because they were then so hungry, they would eat most anything. This was a very good teaching idea, and I think that we started the mothers on the road to seeing that their children got a better opportunity for food. Because even though they had chickens on the plantation, they were never allowed to cook a chicken. Although there were eggs that they took to the market for the plantation owners, there were some children who had never tasted an egg. Some children who had never tasted a banana or an orange, because the plantation owner allowed them to have only what they could buy in the commissary, meaning a little flour, but mostly cornmeal, and salt, and fatback, that's all.

MT: Yes. Well, that's an intersting description. I have heard much about the Mississippi Health Project of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and how you've

MT: (cont.) enlarged upon it. That was extracurricular, in a sense, in terms of your work at your health clinic at Howard University. It was like coming home to heaven when you returned to Washington from Mississippi.

DF: It was... I think the sorority was greatly impressed and very pleased with the work that we had done. Some thought that it was like going on a vacation, but it was far from a vacation. It was the hardest five summers that we had put into anything, and those who had worked learned a great deal about the needs of people everywhere. We were able, I think, to do an educational job for the plantation owners, because after we labored on one plantation, the other plantation owners began to relent, and then the next year we were able to go to those who were formerly hostile to us. So that gradually we not only educated our own people, but we educated the hostile plantation owners who never sold anything but fatback and cornbread and cornmeal in their commissaries.

MT: Sold, at their price, their figures, which they kept in their books, showing that tenant farmers were always in debt and not free to leave the plantation. There was a special project in 1975 that you directed here in Washington that was of significance to women.

DF: Oh yes, the International Women's Year--1975. I was appointed by Mayor Walter E. Washington to be the United Nations Association chairperson for the metropolitan Washington area, which included northern Virginia and adjoining Maryland, for International Women's Year. We started in '75 with an opening meeting at the Departmental Building down at Fourteenth Street and Constitution Avenue. That opening meeting was crowded to the gills, not only the international areas, but all of the auditorial space in the building. Some of the people employed in that area, as well as the janitorial help, said, "This is the biggest crowd that has ever been in the interdepartmental area." We were able to announce what we wanted to do for women in the International Year.

We wanted women to be recognized for their ability; we wanted equality--equality with men--not that we wanted to be better than men, but we wanted to be equal to them. Not every man is equal to every other man, not every woman is equal to every other woman, but those women who have the ability, who have the urge, who have the inspiration to become outstanding, should be given the opportunity. We didn't want a woman appointed to a position, we didn't want a woman to become a schoolteacher or a school principal, or an administrator of any kind--just because she was a woman. But if she were a woman with ability, with credentials, with inspiration, and with the determination to perform a job well, she should be allowed to do it. She should be equal--not that she should be better than a man, that's not the idea. It's not a question of being better, it's a question of being equal. If she has all the qualifications and all the credentials and all of the necessary educational background, then she should be given a chance. So it was equality that we were requesting. Just what they are talking about now, the ERA. So that 1975 became a very significant milestone. I organized IWY lectures and exhibits, and was able to travel to many cities around the country. From January '75 to December of '75, I made ninety-three speeches, in New England, in the Midwest, in the Far West, in the South, and along the Atlantic seaboard.

MT: In the midst of all these activities, you found time to preside as the president or the supreme basileus of various organizations. Will you mention that? You're sort of modest, I mean, or at times you forget to refer to your status.

DF: Yes. Well, I tell you, there's one thing about being interested and active; it becomes relatively easy to move from one area to another, because you learn something at an early stage. You learn that you can't do everything. You simply inspire other people to carry on the work.

MT: And then administer and advise. Now, which position was first? Supreme basileus of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority or president of the National Council of Negro Women?

DF: Well, I think that going with the National Council of Negro Women was probably my first big recognition, because I was the second vice-president and the second president. Following Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, I was the second president of the National Council of Negro Women, and that was before I became the supreme basileus of Alpha Kappa Alpha. It was relatively--not relatively easy, but much easier than it would have been for me to transfer my knowledge and experience from one organization if I had not learned a lesson, which was that one should give the women who are there an opportunity to advance. One of the difficulties with most of us in organizations is that we want to be--shall I say, the top dog, and have others do what we say. That's not the best way to get things done. To be tops is to inspire others to want to get to the top, and give them a chance to get there. Many people will say that's not the way to operate. That is the way to operate. We should instill in others the need and the desire to do a good job.

MT: Mrs. Bethune was a legend in herself.

DF: Yes, she was. She was a magnificent woman, in that she had the secret of getting others to do what she wanted done. She never directed them, but she was able to throw out little ideas, and allow others to develop them so that they became eager to do the job on their own. She had a fascinating way of getting people to act. She not only worked with the women, but she involved the men of this country. She would always say to groups of young men, "Now I want you to help me, I want you to advise me." She knew all along what she planned to do, but she would let the men present their ideas of what ought to be done. And they were all eager to do it, because here they were advising Mrs. Bethune. I don't remember whether I said anything about my activities with the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority; I don't think I did.

MT: Do proceed. I know that you were the outstanding soror when I came to Washington in 1942, and became active with Xi Omega, the graduate chapter.

DF: I ought to say just a word about my sorority, because that was probably the first nonmedical organization to which I was attached. I was initiated into Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority in 1923 in Boston. Between that year and now, I've served as supreme basileus from 1940 to 1951; earlier I was elected as the basileus of Xi Omega chapter. I served as director and promoter of the Mississippi Health Project, and as its medical director from 1935 to 1941, working in Holmes County in the northern part of Mississippi, and in Bolivar in the south.

MT: Oh, Bolivar County, named for Simón Bolivar, the South American liberator. Dr. Ferebee, do you remember the dates when you were president of the National Council of Negro Women?

DF: Yes, I do. Next to the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, the National Council of Negro Women was probably the organization to which I devoted the greatest number of years of service. I was its national president from 1949 to 1953. During those four years and even before--the council was organized in 1934--from that year until now, 1979, I have served in many capacities. I was chairman of the Education Foundation from '53 to '75; I've been chairman of the District of Columbia Council; I've served on many committees, and lectured for the National Council of Negro Women on innumerable occasions from 1937 to 1979.

MT: This is a period of forty years. I recall that you established an organization at American University in the 1970s.

DF: Yes, in 1975. Even before that year I became involved in an organization that I founded because I was concerned with advancing the rights and the welfare of women, and we called this The Women's Institute. The Women's Institute had no home base; we were just a local organization working for the interests of women. American University's president heard about this organization, and we were invited to come to that university and to present a program, which we did, meaning the women who were a part of The Women's Institute. Apparently, we made the proper impression, as The Women's Institute is now an organ of American University. When we prepare our programs, we say, "The Women's Institute--American University," meaning that we are affiliated with that university, and we sponsor many programs, seminars, and conferences. The women and students of that group are anxious indeed to promote the welfare of women.

MT: I was present at the large initial meeting and reception. You were most impressive!

DF: Another group was organized during the Eisenhower administration, and we called it ACTION--American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods. It was established in 1951, and we were cited by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. We have an amusing joke about the first meeting. When President Eisenhower referred to us, he said, "I'm so delighted to know that there is an organization called ACTION--American Council to Improve Our Neighbors." And of course, there was laughter [laughter] for he had confused the neighbors with neighborhood. But I belonged to that board of directors from 1951 to 1961.

I had another very interesting assignment on the D.C. Commission on the Status of Women from 1972 to 1976, and it was during this particular time, specifically in 1975, that I directed the International Women's Year for southern Maryland, northern Virginia, and all of metropolitan Washington.

There were other organizations in which I was interested and to which I gave much time. For instance, there's the District of Columbia Community Chest. The Community Chest was organized quite a long while ago, in 1927, and became fully operational in 1929. There was a dynamic man by the name of Elwood P. Street, who came from Ohio to be the first executive director. Mr. Street gave me many fine ideas and leads on how to conduct a social welfare organization, and how to get on with social welfare boards. Mine was the board of Southeast House. The District of Columbia Community Chest was reorganized in 1942 as the United Way. I was on the board of directors of the former from 1936 to 1942. I was also a member of UNICEF, which is United Nations Children's Fund. I served on its board from 1968

DF: (cont.) to 1972. I was also on the board of the American Association for the U.N. from 1948 to 1952, and I especially valued that association since I served with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt on the full board.

MT: That's fine. Dr. Ferebee, is there any extra material or information, about your professional life and membership organizations, that you would like to add to this recording, this record of your life?

DF: Well, I really haven't said much about medicine.

MT: Would you care to mention your memberships, your activities in various medical organizations?

DF: There are many organizations related to my profession with which I worked. The American Public Health Association, which I served, beginning in 1940; the American College Health Association, called ACHA--I have been a member of the International Committee since 1950, and received the Edward Hitchcock Award in 1971; the National Medical Association; the District of Columbia Health and Welfare Council; board member of the Tuberculosis Association of the District of Columbia, 1950-56; the District of Columbia Public Health Advisory Council; and several others. I lectured in Planned Parenthood and for the Foreign Service Institute. Oh, in 1961 I was medical consultant to the U.S. Department of State and the Peace Corps.

I would also like to say that, for a number of years, really, since 1952 until now, and I still am, a member of the Pan-American Medical Women's Alliance, which is an organization of North and South American women physicians. They meet in alternate years in different cities of North America and of South America, so that the women physicians in the two continents know what is being done in their field. Very interesting, indeed.

MT: Yes, that's excellent.

DF: The organization's program is conducted simultaneously in English and Spanish.

MT: Not Portuguese? They do not accommodate Brazil?

DF: No.

MT: Most Spanish-speaking people will understand Portuguese.

DF: Yes, yes. The organizations are really too numerous to enumerate. But my participation shows that I didn't have a slack period, and I didn't have any time for saying, "I wish I had something to do." Even though I was active in outside fields, I worked diligently with my patients.

MT: Right. I can understand that. And you have not actually retired as yet. I know that you still treat some elderly Alpha Kappa Alpha sorors.

DF: Yes, I do, it's interesting to say. Let's return for a moment to a couple of organizations to which I have alluded. One is the national YWCA. Not

DF: (cont.) only have I been a member for eighteen years and a speaker for a long period, but I'm now honorary board member for life. The same is true with respect to the Girl Scouts. I'm now honorary board member for life, which means that somebody must have been impressed with the kind of work that I did, and the fact that I always accepted the assignments that the national president gave me, and attempted to complete them to the best of my ability.

[After fifteen years as a trustee of Simmons College, I was elected in 1978 as a lifetime member of the board of trustees. So that now I am a full member of the board of trustees of Simmons College for life. I might mention here that in 1958 Simmons bestowed on me the first Distinguished Alumna Award.]

MT: That's inspiring. Dr. Ferebee, I should like to ask you, in the course of your professional life, that is, in connection with Freedmen's Hospital and with Howard University, did you experience discrimination because of your sex? Do you feel that you were given the same status as men, even though perhaps you had superior training?

DF: Well, I think that sexism was a very common practice, and still is; that women are not recognized, regardless of their qualifications; they're not given the kind of acceptance and recognition to which they're entitled. I think that, even though I experienced discrimination and a great deal of jealousy on the part of many of the men physicians and the men directors, I had a very staunch ally at Howard University in the person of Dr. Mordecai Johnson, the president. He was absolutely superb in seeing that both men and women whose qualifications were recognizable received the kind of recognition to which they were entitled. So that for a long time, my service as medical director of Howard University Health Service largely was due to Dr. Mordecai Johnson's approval of me, and the fact that the physicians who were opposing me were a subterranean faction, were never able to reach me because of the citations and recognition given me by the university president. One does have to have a champion, regardless of a woman's qualifications, a champion. And I think that many women who are active and have achieved throughout the world find the same kind of thing. No matter what they're able to propose or able to accomplish, there is a thread of jealousy and discrimination that exists.

MT: Yes. That's true. And Dr. Mordecai Johnson called me to his office and asked me to chair a committee on the status of women at Howard University. What I revealed amazed him, and he attempted to make some rectification, but one man can't do everything he wishes. There are deans, heads of departments, colleagues, all men, who fight, and the treasurer--I couldn't even get the salary schedule from him. We had salary scales for professors, associates, instructors, and assistants, but the women were always at the lower level of the scale, seldom in the middle, and never at the top.

DF: Regardless of their qualification.

MT: Although I couldn't secure the exact salary from the treasurer's office, I could get it from the women. Also, summer school, which affords an addition to the annual salary, was an issue. The men would get the summer

MT: (cont.) school appointments from their chairman, and the women would be out. But this is your interview, and I'll now dwell on that, since it can be covered in mine. This is yours.

DF: The women are still working hard to accomplish certain goals with the help of some men. ERA is as much needed today as it was years ago, because women do not have the recognition or receive the appointments and salaries to which they are entitled.

MT: I noticed when I went through your material this morning, some of it for the second time, that you were also an officer in the American Association of University Women. You were a vice-president?

DF: I was also elected to the American Association of University Women Foundation.

MT: -[Any other organizations of which you were a member?

DF: Yes. The D.C. Commission on the Status of Women; United Nations Association chairperson for the metropolitan Washington area for International Women's Year, 1975; Volunteer Committee for International Visitors; State Department Advisory Council for Africa; United Nations Association of the U.S.A; and Policy Committee of the Washington International Center.

MT: That is an impressive list.] You were also president of the Howard University Faculty Women's Club.

DF: Yes, I was. I served the Howard University Faculty Women from 1960 to 1963, and it was during this period that we sponsored a beautiful West Indian play called Sun Over the West Indies. The cast was entirely West Indian. We brought these special actors and dancers here from their home and they presented an original West Indian production in the Crampton Auditorium of the Fine Arts Building at Howard. It was beautifully staged and well received. Mrs. Robert Kennedy heard about it and said she would like to work with us, and she became honorary president of the group that presented the case at Howard University in 1960.

MT: I well remember that event, as I sold the largest number of tickets. Have you any more activities that you'd like to add to those already mentioned?

DF: Yes. I ought to say something about the National Council of Administrative Women in Education. This is an American organization with which I have worked in many parts of the United States, and have advanced some of its causes and interests. This past year, in 1979, I was awarded a Distinguished Service Award by the council, and I have a bulletin that published what I said in response to the citation. This was it, "I'm heartened by the goals and I'm heartened by the work, and I'm heartened by the initiative of the Women in Education, because they have not always received the kind of recognition that they should."

For instance, in colleges, it's very difficult for a woman to become a full professor; it's very difficult for a woman to become head of a department--she can be an assistant. I don't know whether she'll even be that. She

DF: (cont.) is sometimes allowed the grade just below the assistant. It's very difficult for women to get anything beyond an assistant, or as a lecturer, or a post to just hold classes. So that this organization is particularly interested in pressing the universities around the country to recognize women. Not because they're women, but because they are competent, and they have not only the competence, the qualifications, and the credentials, but they have the ability.

MT: That's an interesting scrapbook that you have. I hope you don't let that out of your possession, considering all the other materials that you have lost.

DF: Borrowers would certainly tear out, wouldn't they?

MT: Yes. Any more activities that you'd like to add to those already mentioned?

DF: I think that's enough.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, perhaps now we should record statements concerning some of the supplementary material, particularly the pictures of your grandparents, your aunts, your immediate family, your children, and grandchildren. This picture that I'm showing you now is of whom?

DF: This is a picture of my maternal grandmother and grandfather. The grandmother was Lily Ruffin Paige, and the grandfather was Richard Gault Leslie Paige, the first colored graduate of the Harvard School of Law, who was a very successful lawyer in Virginia. He was a legislator in the state of Virginia; he did international work by designation by the United States government, and was a very active man in much of the politics of his area. My grandmother was active in Baptist church work throughout Virginia, and even in Massachusetts.

MT: This is also one of your grandmother, isn't it, only full length?

DF: Yes, this is my grandmother. I think it's an unusual picture, for it shows a striking bit of costuming of those days--tightly drawn silk top, with very full silk skirts, and with wide sashes in front and back. Almost invariably there's a high-collared scarf around the neck, and usually a feathered fan. Very striking costume indeed.

MT: And it would have to be for people of substance.

DF: We, we think so.

MT: An ordinary person wouldn't have the money to spend for that expensive attire.

DF: As I just said, there's usually a scarf of some kind worn around the neck, but here, in addition to the scarf, there were necklaces and beads and long earrings. Very striking indeed.

MT: And this is the same person?

DF: This is also Grandmother.

MT: This is a picture of the same person?

DF: Yes, of the same person.

MT: Therefore we have three of her.

DF: Lily Ruffin Paige, that's right. This is a picture of my great-aunt--Aunt Emma Ruffin--the aunt with whom I lived when I was in Boston when my mother was ill, and again when I attended Simmons College and Tufts College of Medicine.

MT: Now this is your family group, isn't it?

DF: The family group shows my mother again with her three children, Benjamin Richard Boulding, Ruffin Paige Boulding, and Dorothy, sitting on her father's knee, and my father, Benjamin R. Boulding.

MT: You were about what age then? It's almost the age of another picture I Have.

DF: I think a little less than two, not quite two, about eighteen months.

MT: You must have been his favorite, after having two boys, you were quite the "apple of his eye," as you mentioned earlier.

DF: Yes, I was. And here's my mother later on in life, as you can see, very distinguished looking. She loved flowers, loved colorful costumes, and did hairdos that were very striking. Here I am, at the age of about eighteen months, standing on one of the family chairs; it shows that I am really quite up to the minute, with high-top buttoned shoes, and bangs, which were popular in those days.

MT: Now here you are later.

DF: Yes, this is my picture, I should say, around 1960. This was when I was practicing medicine in the District of Columbia, and in the Howard University Health Service. Now this is my daughter, my lovely daughter, Dorothy, at the time of her entry into Northfield School in Massachusetts.

MT: Oh yes, Sweet picture. It's a darling picture. [I reproduced other pictures of your twins: a charming one of them at about the age of three sitting together on a bench looking at a toy duck. They were wearing similar but different twin clothes. Also there is one of Thurston photographed at about the time he entered prep school in New Hampshire. These reproductions are with your supplementary material.]

DF: This is my brother, Ruffin Paige.

MT: That's another picture of your brother, with a little inset, apparently of your mother, the way that she is elegantly dressed.

DF: No, that's not my mother, that is my Aunt Emma.

MT: Oh, yes.

DF: This is my brother, Benjamin Richard Boulding, Jr. He also attended Hampton Institute, and taught for a while, but spent most of his life in the postal service of northern Virginia.

MT: And it was your other brother, Ruffin Paige, who distinguished himself in law.

DF: My oldest brother, Ruffin Paige Boulding, carried all the family names--Ruffin and Paige and Boulding. He was not a religious fanatic, but he loved the Bible and the Psalms, and could recite many of them and insisted that everybody should be familiar with the functioning of the body and life. When I graduated from medical school he gave me a very lovely petition and admonition called "A Physician's Prayer." And it reads:

> Lord, thou great physician,
> I kneel before Thee,
> Since every good and perfect gift must come from Thee
> I pray, give skill to my hands,
> Clear vision to my mind,
> Kindness and sympathy to my heart.
> Give me singleness of purpose,
> Strength to lift at least a part of the burden of my
> suffering fellow men,
> And a true realization of the rare privilege that is mine.
> Take from my heart all guile and worldliness
> That, with the simple faith of a child,
> I may rely on Thee. Amen.

A very beautiful physician's prayer.

MT: Yes, it is. Let's pass to the next generation.

DF: This is my first family--here's my son with his wife, and his four children: the daughter, Dorothy Boulding Ferebee...no, no She uses her maternal grandmother's name, Ruth. Dorothy Ruth Ferebee, and the three boys, Claude Thurston Ferebee, III, Carl Phillips Ferebee, and Todd Vaughn Ferebee. He is my youngest boy...

MT: Youngest grandson?

DF: Yes, my youngest grandson, and he's just recently married.

MT: Oh, these are recent pictures? He has married?

DF: Yes. We called him Buddy, but his real name is Todd, Todd Vaughn Ferebee. This is my granddaughter, Dorothy Ruth Ferebee, the only daughter of Thurston and Carol, wearing her grandmother's--my--christening dress, over fifty-five years old, bought by my mother, Flossie, at New York's great store, Lord and Taylor, for my christening when I was three months old. The costume consists of a long white batiste muslin dress with ruffles of hamburg at the bottom of the long skirt, with rows of tucks and insertion as wings at the shoulder.

MT: Yes. I see the wings.

DF: Under the dress there is a long batiste muslin skirt of the same material, and a cream-colored pure camel flannel slip with a wraparound bodice. The babe wore a white ruffled hamburg bonnet, white soft leather buttoned shoes extending above the ankles with white socks. You can't seem them in this picture, but that is what I had.[4] The picture was taken here in the living room--only a few feet from where we are recording--the day Dorothy Ruth was christened in November 1959.

MT: That was first worn by you in Januarry 1899 or thereabouts! Sixty years earlier![5]

DF: Yes. Dorothy Ruth was on a loveseat[6] brought from Virginia in 1848 by her great-great-grandfather, whose father in Virginia sent his illegitimate son to New England with a vanload of wonderful antique black walnut furniture, upholstered in rose velvet.

MT: And that's your grandfather's picture that we saw at the beginning of the ancestors. The first man of color to finish Harvard Law School?

DF: That's right.

MT: That's very interesting. Now this little blond, blondish boy, must have reached back to his great-great-grandfather in Virginia [laughter] The profile of your grandfather reminds me of pictures of Grover Cleveland. I mean, the head and its shape, if not the neck of Cleveland.

DF: Well, Carl reached back somewhere. I don't know exactly where.

MT: Reaching back, of course, is possible. His eyes, apparently, are brown, but he is slightly blond, you understand, for the family. His mother--your son's wife--is a light brunette, isn't she?

DF: Yes. She's a very handsome girl. She is the granddaughter on the paternal side of Dr. Walter Franklin Phillips, who was a well known physician in the city of Washington. Her maternal grandfather was Jonce Calhoun Vaughn Todd. Her father was employed in the federal government.

MT: Fine. This concludes the recording of your ancestors and your family. And it is, I think an interesting and valuable addition.

DF: I didn't realize that we had recorded so much. That's very good.

MT: It's good to have the record. Is there anything that you might wish to add to what we have already recorded?

DF: No, I think not.

MT: Dr. Ferebee, I should like at this time to express my appreciation to you for joining the oral history project, which I am certain Dr. Patricia King and Mrs. Ruth Edmonds Hill would expect me to do. Dr. King is the director of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, which is concerned with the history of women. Consequently this recording and the

MT: (cont.) copies of supplementary material will rest in the Schlesinger Library from 1980 onward for people who wish to do research on the history of women. This ends the recording, but I do have the legal forms for you to sign, dealing with the restriction on the use of the material, et cetera.

DF: I would like to thank Radcliffe very much for inviting me to be a part of this very fine project. It has been a pleasure, and Dr. Tate has been very calm, sympathetic, and helpful to me in presenting this material. I know that there is much that she has had to forgo in order to let me talk as long as I did. Thank you very much. I'll be very happy to sign the necessary papers of release.

MT: Now you understand, Dr. Ferebee, that this is not actually the end of our assignment. When these tapes have been transcribed, we will get the transcript. You will have a copy, I will have a copy, and it will be up to us to correct errors; you may make inserts, you may delete, and then the transcript will be retyped and bound in a volume that will be available for people doing research. You will receive a copy. So the work is not quite over, but the pleasure of the recording ends here. While examining your materials on your projects and activities, I came across a list of organizations, local and national, of which you had been president or a member. May we incorporate this list at the end of the interview?

DF: Yes, indeed. As I cannot always recall all, it will be good to know where to find the list.

The interviewer and interviewee were unable--due to the ill health of Dorothy Ferebee--to arrange a time during the summer of 1980 to read and revise the transcript. Dr. Ferebee died on September 14, 1980. Subsequently, the interviewer, Merze Tate, with the assistance of Carol Ferebee and Dr. Thurston Ferebee, corrected and extensively revised the transcript.

Notes

1. Samuel C. Armstrong was the son of Richard Armstrong, an American of Scotch-Irish extraction from Pennsylvania, who served the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands Mission for seventeen years before entering into the duties of minister of public instruction for the Hawaiian Kingdom. Samuel C. Armstrong served as director of Freedmen's Bureau after the Civil War, and later as principal of Hampton Institute. He was widely known in Presbyterian and Congregational circles, and had close connections with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The Samuel C. Armstrong High School no longer exists. It stood where is now located the P.B. Young Housing Project, named for the influential and distinguished publicist, P.B. Young, publisher of the Norfolk Journal and Guide, and a member of the board of education of the city of Norfolk

2. The original shop operated on U Street, near Florida Avenue, N.W. Today Powell Flower Shop, under different management, is located at 1308 Rhode Island Avenue, N.E., in the Rhode Island Avenue Plaza.

3. A large, beautifully equipped gymnasium, with an Olympic size swimming pool, had been constructed for the men. The women inherited the old gym, whose interior was brightened a bit with pastel paints. They are in 1981 still here. The Health Service, however, has a separate and especially designed building.

4. The photograph was taken in the living room of Dr. Ferebee's Thirteenth Street, N.E., home in Washington.

5. The christening outfit may be worn in 1981 by a great-great-grandchild of Florence Paige Boulding--eighty-two years after the purchase.

6. The loveseat now is in the home of her son, Dr. Claude Thurston Ferebee, II, in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

(Merze Tate)

Appendix

As an ardent worker for improved conditions in the socio-economic lives of women of all ages, and of youth--and for increased advancement of their positions and status--Dr. Ferebee has for many years been active in professional and civic organizations in Boston, Massachusetts, St. Albans, New York, and in Washington, D.C.

Her services on boards of directors, as president of many national organizations, as consultant to governmental agencies, and as medical director for institutions and national projects span a period of forty years of service. Among them:

Chairperson, District of Columbia International Women's Year (as proclaimed by Mayor Walter E. Washington)

Founder of the Southeast Neighborhood House, a settlement house for children in Washington, D.C.

Member, Board of Directors:

American College Health Association
American Public Health Association
Medical and Surgical Society of the District of Columbia
Meridian House, International
National Board of the YWCA
National Board of the Girl Scouts of America
American Association of University Women
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority--and national president
National Council of Negro Women--and national president, succeeding Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune
U.S. State Department, Advisory Council on Africa
United Nations Association of the USA
Administrative Council for Women in Education

Medical Director for twenty-seven years, Howard University Health Services, administering the medical program for 10,000 students annually

Assistant Professor of Preventive Medicine, Howard University Medical School

Visiting Lecturer in Preventive Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine

Medical Director for seven summers, Alpha Kappa Alpha Mississippi Health Project in Holmes and Bolivar Counties, Mississippi

Chairperson, District of Columbia Commission on the Status of Women (1971-74)

Medical Consultant to the U.S. State Department since 1961, serving in Europe, Middle East, Africa, South America, and islands of the Caribbean

Special Honors and Citations

American College Health Association; Howard University; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; Education Foundation of American Association of University Women; Women's Auxiliary of National Medical Association; National Council of Negro Women; Hadassah.

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A graduate of Western Michigan University with a Ph.D. from Radcliffe College, Merze Tate became Professor of History at Howard University in 1942. Her numerous fellowships, awards, and appointments have included being a Fulbright lecturer in India, receiving the Radcliffe College Graduate Chapter Medal for Distinguished Professional Service, and being awarded honorary doctorates by Western Michigan University and Morgan State College. The author of numerous books and articles, including The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907 (1942; reprinted 1970), The United States and the Hawaiian Kingdom (1965), and Diplomacy in the Pacific (1973), Dr. Tate is a member of the Advisory Committee of the Black Women Oral History Project.