

Please state your name and today's date.

Janice Johnson Ratliff. November 10th, 2020.

The records Elon has preserved about Andrew Morgan tell his story from the perspective of white observers in the Jim Crow South. I'm grateful for your willingness to share some of your own memories to help provide a different perspective about the man and the times in which he lived.

How did you know Andrew Morgan?

Andrew Morgan was my great uncle. He was married to my mother's aunt, Hattie, and he served as a surrogate grandfather to me because he raised my mother, Nannie Burton. He was more of a grandfather than he was an uncle.

I have heard that he was like a father to many people, but I don't remember exactly how many.

The two of them raised nine children that were not their biological children. They were Nannie Burton, Russell Burton, Brittie Burton, Cyrus Burton, Garland Burton, Lewis Burton, Olivia Burton, Catherine Burton, and Lottie Mae Burton.

Did they have biological children?

She lost one child through miscarriage, but they never had any children of their own.

What are your strongest memories of Andrew Morgan?

My mother as well as her entire family belonged to Archers Grove [United Church of Christ], and one of my earliest memories of him is being a little girl and riding in his big Buick. He was a big man, but he had a great big Buick. Back then the seats went all the way across, so you could get more people in. I was a little girl and I could stand and look out the windows...

He was just a big man everywhere, and he laughed a lot. He had a big laugh, and it would just come from his stomach. He would just laugh and everybody in the house would laugh with him. I think that's what made my Aunt love him so much. He was a big man, but he was kind and gentle. He would tickle you and call it rubbing your ribs. And all of us kids loved it. He was our grandad; they were our grandparents.

I've seen photographs of him with what must be that Buick. I wonder why white observers made such a big deal about Morgan owning a big car?

Probably because not a lot of people had cars back then. Not a lot of Black people had cars, because they couldn't afford them. I don't know about the income. I know both of them worked and then the children after they became certain ages, they worked. Lottie Mae worked at the college; she was one of the ones he raised. Cyrus Burton worked at the college. I think Olivia worked there. So I know at least three of the kids they raised worked at the college. You know how at a certain age you start working and then everybody chips in? I don't know whether they did that or not... I don't know where the money came from to buy the car. I don't know whether it was his farming or somebody gave him the car, but he always had a car. From the time I knew him, he had a car and he

would just drive people around in the community if somebody needed to go somewhere. And the people who didn't have a car, he was always accessible to them. ...

It was a different world.

It's a completely different world. After early church, we went to our grandmother's. Everybody, all the children and parents, came to grandmother's house to eat. And then we all went back to church at six o'clock every Sunday. ... But things were so different, and I remember walking around Elon, just free, never thought about anybody touching me. Never thought about anybody harming me, ever. I just didn't have a fear of people. [Now,] I wouldn't let my granddaughter, who's 19, go out walking around here.

But didn't Morgan attend Archers Grove United Church of Christ, which is not in town?

Correct. Archers Grove is out Graham-Hopedale Road. That's where they came from; that's where they moved from to Elon. But Arches Grove is where they belonged, and they never changed churches.

So when you would go into town, to church, it would be with your folks to a different church?

Correct. We went to Elon First Baptist. My dad's family belonged to Elon First Baptist. My mother's family belonged to Archers Grove. Elon First Baptist met on the first and third Sundays. Archers Grove met on the second and fourth.

What was Morgan's role at Archers Grove?

He was a trustee, which meant he helped take care of the grounds. They didn't have money to pay for stuff back then like they do now. Now, they have staff that takes care of stuff. Then, everything was volunteer in the church. Skeeter Miles, who worked at Elon, was the musician. And he never got paid. They would do a special program for him on Christmas and give him some money. And Skeeter had 12 kids but was never paid for anything that he did at church. Nobody got paid but the minister, and he got paid minimal... The first minister that I remember as a child at Elon, was Rev. Gilmer. He drove from Greensboro and would come and spend the night with one of the members so that he wouldn't have to get up so early to come to service in the morning. And then they would feed him and his wife and children, breakfast and lunch. And then they would stay over until the six o'clock service and then they would go back to Greensboro. So they spent the whole day at the church...

Were there other communities that were important to Morgan?

Yes, Morgantown, which is right off Sharpe Road, in Burlington... If I'm not mistaken, his home place is still there.

Where did Morgan live after he moved to Elon?

He lived on Ball Park near Mill Point, down by Elon's fire [practice facility]. Right across the street.... It's a vacant lot now, but the house was right there on the corner. It's right down the corner when you turn to go down Neal Street. The house is long gone, because they had to tear it down.

Was this the house that burned down and that Elon helped rebuild in the 1950s?

Yes. I was in the house when it burned down, along with my Aunt Brittie. I don't remember how old I was, but we lived across the street and my sister, Edna, ran across the road and told us the house was on fire. As soon as we stepped off of the back porch, the roof caved in.

Do you remember Morgan ever talking about civil rights?

No. Never.

That was such an interesting time, because there were all of these things happening in the country, but there were many communities, like Elon College, where I don't know if people would be talking about the movement.

No. Never... In the case of Aunt Hattie, I think it made a difference that she was working in a cafeteria, because she was serving people and had a relationship with the students. And they adored her. She was happy, jolly, and smiled all the time. ... She had a great relationship with the students. And so did Miss Mary Covington, who was the cafeteria manager, or head cook. She had a great relationship with them. They had a sister, Callie Miles, who is grandmother of John and Timmy Miles who work at Elon now. She was the other person who worked in there. And they all had great relationships with the kids. It was just different, to be in a role feeding somebody and to be right there with them every meal and seeing them every single day. And I remember Sunday mornings. They would prep their own food on Saturday for Sunday dinner because they always had people eating [with them]. They would prep and cook what they could on Saturday because they had to get up on Sunday morning and go fix breakfast for the students and then fix a bag for students to have later in the day. Then they would go to church, come back, and eat. It was just what it was. I've never heard them complain. Never heard them say a word about it. They were just happy people.

And it sounds like they were with family, too, because so much of this seems like it was a family affair.

Oh, absolutely. [But of all the children raised by the Morgans,] six of them went to New York; only three of them stayed in Elon. And back then, in July, everybody took off the week of Fourth of July. The mills shut down; the stores shut; everything shut down the Fourth of July week—and everybody celebrated. So everybody came from New York; and nobody was in a hotel room, everybody stayed with relatives. ... we would have food, barbecues, and I could not wait for them to get here. ... And it was just it; it was wonderful! Aunt Hattie would cook for days, and she did specialty pies and cakes and stuff. And they would cook for days and they would put those cakes and pies and things in the drawers of a buffet in the dining room--and it didn't go bad. And then on Sunday the table would be full of food. And it would stay all day, all day long, and [now] I can't leave something out fifteen minutes without being afraid it's going to go bad. But it was, it was great.

Those sound like beautiful memories, and they were centered around the...

Around the family.

And around the Morgan household?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Did he ever talk about the treatment he received at Elon?

No.

That seems incredible.

I think because it was so normal. It wasn't anything that he hadn't experienced. Especially because he was a very dark-skinned individual, and when you were very dark-skinned, you were treated differently. Not that anybody my color was treated a lot better, but much, much better when you think about it. And when you are used to it and you've got a job and, you know, income is coming in. You're not worried about being laid off and that kind of thing. You're so thankful that you're able to take care of yourself and you're not in the fields, you're not on somebody's plantation (because there were still plantations back then), you're not in the mills (at one time, Black people, especially Black women, couldn't even work in a mill). [You're thankful that you] have a job that was paying a halfway decent salary. And I remember some of my relatives working for people a whole week and making \$20 a week. Twenty dollars was a lot of money back then. So when you think about somebody working, and I mean from six or seven, easily seven, in the morning to sometimes six or seven at night. And then you have to go home and prepare for your own family.

What else should we know about Andrew Morgan?

I think the biggest thing that I can think of is the kind of man that he was: and that was a kind, generous, happy-go-lucky man. Whatever came [his way] he just did, it didn't bother him. It didn't seem to bother him, at least, but we all have feelings inside that we don't sometimes express. And then sometimes people think, because you don't express something, it doesn't hurt or you don't have any feelings about it. But, if he had any complaints, I never heard them, about anything. And when you take a person whose wife's brothers, both of their wives died, and he takes their children, nine children that aren't biologically related to him, and treats them as if they were his biological children: that takes a big heart. A big heart. And he opened his home to anybody, I don't care what race, I don't care what gender, I don't care what. If you needed him, you went to him and you could get anything you wanted. I mean, that's just the way he was, that's the way both of them were.

... But they took those kids, because their moms died. But people did that back then. They took them and kept them, every one of them, until they were grown, and each one of them got married, went on, and moved away or whatever. They took those kids and treated them better than some people treat their biological kids. And I mean, when those kids would come back and all of them would get together, they loved those two people. My mother adored them. It was like they were her parents. That's who she had; she didn't have anybody else. So that's who they were, that's who they both were. They were just genuinely good people, good Christian people, who thought about somebody else before they thought about themselves.

That is a powerful testimony. Every time that you mention a memory of Andrew Morgan, you also mention Hattie Morgan. Can you tell me more about her?

She was just a little thing, and he's way up here. I'm thinking, "how in the world did they get together, because they're just so mis-matched?" But anyway, she loved, she adored him, too. They adored each other, and they were good to each other. And when I think about relationships, I think about how she worked *in* the house and he worked *around* the house and did things. You didn't see him doing much inside the house, but he could do anything. He could do the electrical work; he could do all kinds of stuff. And he was always at somebody else's house, helping. And she was always in the house cleaning or fixing something to eat and inviting somebody in. Or if somebody was sick ... the ladies would go to the house and clean the house, and fix the food, and do those kinds of things, because that's who she was.

Aunt Sallie Bett, another one of her sisters who worked for two Elon Presidents, Dr. Smith and Dr. Danieley, lived right in back of her. She raised the Smith and Danieley children. And then two doors down from her lived their other sister, Callie, who worked in the kitchen with her (that's Skeeter's mom). And they were just always together. I don't think I ever heard them fuss. I mean they disagreed, but I don't really think I ever heard them fuss or be ugly to each other, or talk about each other's kids. I know it probably happened and I just didn't see it, but they had to have been raised by somebody who really cared. I remember their mother, my mother's grandmother. Her name was Martha and they called her Granny Marzeen. That's what we called her. And she was blind, and she lived with them too, for a while. ... And they helped take care of her, because her husband was dead. I can't tell you how their love was. I can't tell you a thing but love, that's all.

I mean, don't get me wrong, she corrected me, and she would make me do what I was supposed to do when I was in her presence. And we respected them, we totally respected them and when they said [not to do] something, we didn't do it. It was just that factual.

But she was a strong lady, just a sweet character. She was quiet, laughed a lot but quiet in her spirit. And she didn't speak unless she meant it. And when she said it, you did it, period. It wasn't any question; it was not a conversation; it was a fact that you were going to do what she said. But she was one of the kindest people I've ever known. The kindest women, I just miss them all, and I'm just so thankful. We were poor as we could be, but I didn't even know we were poor until I was grown. There was so much love and so much family and so much connection to each other, I don't think I missed anything.

It doesn't sound like it.

No, I just didn't miss anything. ... I don't even remember being hungry. I don't remember ever not having a place to stay. I don't remember any of that. I never had that, thank God. But there was so much love in that whole community, and basically everybody in that community at that time was related biologically or by marriage...

Thank you.

Oh, you're more than welcome. I mean I'm just telling you what I know. ... I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Charles Irons interviewed Janice Ratliff on November 10, 2020. The transcript has been edited and abridged for clarity.