

ELON'S BLACK HISTORY

A STORY TO BE TOLD

L'TANYA RICHMOND

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L'Tanya B. Richmond". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the printed name.

FINAL PROJECT
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES, DUKE UNIVERSITY
JULY, 2005



Mary Carroll, class of 1981

The first black person crowned Homecoming Queen in 1979

Mary Carroll Robertson Pt2
December 7, 2004
 By
L'Tanya Richmond

NB - "Pt2 in the original was accidentally inserted as Part One; the pagination is incorrect here, but the sequence is accurate."

LR: Was race an issue or were there, let me put it this way, how were race relations on campus?

MR: You know what you have to think back in 1977 and I don't think that Elon was different from any other predominantly white college at that time who were beginning to get African American students on their campus. You know the same way living next door or living in the same room was new to African Americans it was probably new to some of the white students thinking back on that. So for me you know like I said my parents would never let me use race or anything racist that would happen as an excuse because I was to achieve against all the odds. There was no coming home. You know they were working hard and working 2 jobs frequently, there was no coming home. And so if something racist happened, you didn't quit or give up. No, we didn't get invited to a lot of the frat parties. I mean some of us did because of who we were on campus. I was dating a very popular basketball player, he had a lot of white friends and yeah we got invited to a lot of events. But I got invited to no sorority parties. You know, though I don't remember an incidence where somebody just like blatantly treated me bad because I was black, professors included. I mean but my thing is, the grades I got, I earned them. You know, like I said I sat right there on front and if a professor was going to give you an extra five points for never missing a class, I was getting those five points. No, there was no cutting class because my parents were working too hard to send me to Elon College. So there was no wasting their money. So I couldn't even let a racist incidence if I could recall one that was worse than the homecoming incident, I couldn't even let something like that keep me from achieving. The prize was the degree and I was to get it against anything that could possibly happen. So I can't say that Elon University was unlike any other predominantly white university, I mean college or university at that time. I mean it is what it is. You know and we, I have to be honest with you I went to college with some white kids who had never gone to a regular high school, they went to boarding school. And the richer the white kids, I found, the friendlier they were and more accepting they were of black students. It was just the weirdest thing and with racism being taught and carried on, there were some white students who really weren't racist and who really embraced, who really, what I'm saying ok we get together and we can study for that sociology test or and like I said there were some who went with me home on the weekend. I'm not saying that it was wonderful or glorious and the relationship was wonderful I mean but for that time you know it was what it was.

LR: Ok, ok you've often said that you know your parents were professionals you know. They had college degrees.

MR: My father did my mother didn't complete.

LR: Ok, ok. And you have siblings, older siblings that went to college.

- MR:** Yes.
- LR:** Umm how many, how many children were in your family, your immediate family?
- MR:** Six. My parents had six children; two girls and four boys.
- LR:** And did all of you go to college.
- MR:** All but one and the one who didn't go went into the military.
- LR:** Ok, ok. So obviously your parents were great role models for you and your siblings.
- MR:** Uh huh and they understood the power of an education.
- LR:** Ok, ok. So you had a very strong family support system.
- MR:** Yes.
- LR:** Ok, Ok. And when you were at Elon thinking about your support system there, did you come across students who did not have that kind of support system.
- MR:** Yes, yes. There were students who came to Elon who were not middle class, who were really lower than lower class but were determined to get an education and they didn't have parents who were college educated but they were determined to achieve.
- LR:** That's wonderful. And when you look back on your memories at Elon you know what would you say are some of your fondest and most strongest memories that you still you know hold true to your heart when you think about...?
- MR:** I remember when I got my, my T-shirt Delta Sigma Theta with my line name and number on it and you know you get your line name based on something unique you did or something unique about you where they assign a name to you that goes on your shirt. I remember wearing that T-shirt; I remember sleeping in that. I remember walking across campus with Delta Sigma Theta on a T-shirt looking at one of the girls that was a Phi Mu going yeah, what we're here. No really, I really remember because I think their colors are red and white too. I don't even remember vividly but somehow or other I just remember looking at a girl who had a Phi Mu T-shirt on and there I was with my Delta Sigma Theta T-shirt on going what and all of my sisters with theirs on as well. That was just, that was good for me that was a good time. Another good time was in the south when it snow, I mean, I remember a big, big blizzard I believe in 1979 or maybe '80, I believe it was '79. It was such a blizzard that it closed the campus down but there was a A&P that the college students used to walk down to that store. And I remember the blizzard being so bad that all the students on campus whether they were black or white; the cafeteria was closed. We all just got together in that blizzard was outside playing in the snow. We had kids from Florida who had never seen snow and I mean it was just not a black or white thing, it was just a bunch of crazy kids on campus having a good time. Now why that sticks out in my mind right now I don't know but maybe that was a good memory. I remember traveling and having the Black Cultural, I mean having the Gospel Choir to come to my hometown and my parents like fed them and, the entire choir and they went to my, my church and as I indicated to you, I'm Methodist. Now we never had drums and guitars in my church because I grew up Methodist. But to bring to the Gospel Choir in and they had drums and they had tambourines and they were shouting and clapping their hands, it just changed the whole church let me tell you, just took it to a

whole 'nother level. And it was just wonderful. So you know don't cry for me. There were some bad things that happened but I also had some wonderful experiences at Elon. You know and I met some really, really good people that I knew were going places.

LR: Wow! Wow! What was your line name?

MR: (Laughter) Chic.

LR: C-h-e-e-k?

MR: No, Chic, C-h-i-c

LR: Chic, Chic

MR: Only because I, you know, regardless, if they called us at 2:00 in the morning, whatever time they called us to do something I was not going out with rollers in my hair, you know. I was like; ok I've got to take these curlers out my hair. I don't care what we had to do I was always going to be dressed, I had to be neat. You know even if it was just blue jeans, they had to be ironed and ...

LR: So you were always in style.

MR: So my line name was Chic. I remember getting in trouble because I was taking the curlers out my hair, rollers the pink, big.. I was just, I was not going to be a black girl that walked around campus with big rollers in my hair and a scarf on top. I just could not be that person.

LR: Good for you.

MR: I just, I just, I don't know, in my mind you just never got a second chance to make a first impression.

LR: Oh got you

MR: So I was not going to be that person and I ended up paying a price for that. So that ended up being my line name.

LR: Chic. (Laughter) Well it sounds like it was very appropriate for you.

MR: Well it wasn't a bad thing because designer Chic jeans came out much later.

LR: You're exactly right. Did you own a pair of those?

MR: Yeah because you know they, I think they must have made them for us because they fit so nicely at the bottom.

LR: Ahh

MR: You know where the Calvin Klein's did, the Chic jeans did.

LR: ok, ok.

MR: kind of made for us or whatever. You get the picture?

LR: Yeah I do, I do, I do.

LR: Now, now what kind of advice would you give to the students that are enrolled here in particular the African American students, you know? Looking back on your experiences at Elon you know, what kind of advice would you give to students that are here today?

MR: Umm, I would say to African American students to get involved in every facet of college life. Not even just the black sororities, the Black Cultural Society do what some of the past leaders did, run for class president. It's possible, I mean walk, walk around that wall and know that it's possible. You know everything I've done in my life even after Elon and with the promotions with, with my job, and

government and even with the latest job I got, I have said at every promotion party that I have been given that everything I've done, I've done it for a couple of reasons. Not so much because I'm so driven. I would like to think that I am driven and would like to do this for myself but that is not the truth. The truth is giving birth to my daughter totally changed my life. My daughter is a black female who I need for her to be able to look at me and see possibilities and to know that the same things are totally possible for her. I need for the black students on Elon's campus to know that they could be dean one day, they could be president, they can be Director of Multicultural Affairs.

LR: Yes.

MR: Hello, you know that this is a possibility but at the same time understand what it took to get there.

LR: Yes, Yes. Oh excellent advice, excellent advice. Having said that what do you think of the new Elon now?

MR: I think it's wonderful. I think to receive a phone call from you two years ago because you wanted to do an article about me and some other people and to tell me who you were in your position I was like boy we really have arrived on that campus you know. It's a wonderful thing. And I am very pleased to know that Elon like other colleges and universities have grown and have embraced us to a degree. And you know what as long as you put us in mixed populations and situations you're talking about human beings who come from different backgrounds, there's still going to be some racist incidence that occur, but for the most part to have these opportunities to see the different sororities. I understand that AKA is on campus and I won't hold that against them cause you know there's only two type of women Deltas and those who want to be but you know but anyway some of my best friends truly, truly are AKA. But I'm just saying, just to see that those other sororities are there, other groups are there and just to look back from where we started umm and to look at where Elon is now I'm very proud to say I'm an Elon College graduate. I think and as I said to you in my first interview it is not so much as what I did at Elon and I don't think that being the first black homecoming queen, I would like to be known for something different, but that's my reality. And that is the most important statement I'd like to come out of this interview as far as I'm concerned for me. I think that the most important in this first list is the first person who actually walked across that stage and received the degree, the first African American. I think that that is the person we should look at and if I knew then what I know now that is the person I would have kept my eyes on when I wanted to come home after that racist incident with homecoming queen. That person walked across that stage and got their degree. Coming home would have made the people who didn't want me to win, win. So my father was correct that person is the most important person on this whole list. Because they, it's not them, you know it's not that person. Everything else after they broke ground and became the first students to enroll and the first students to graduate honestly L'Tanya, you're intelligent you know that all this other stuff was going to happen eventually. I mean that's just, that's just the way it is and that's the reality. But those are the two most important people on this first list and that's my statement.

- LR:** Ok, alright well said, well said.
- MR:** Because everything else was going to happen. We were eventually going to have a black president or a black uhh, uhh, uhh homecoming queen. There's been another black homecoming queen since then I think.
- LR:** Yes, Yes there have been. From New Jersey.
- MR:** Goodman, I think her name is.
- LR:** Yes Gloria Good
- MR:** Yeah, Gloria Good I remember she was an underclassman when I was graduating a real pretty girl from Jersey.
- LR:** Yes, yes that was during my year. I was a freshman when Gloria was crowned homecoming queen. That was 1980, it was the fall of '83. Yes. So not too long after you had graduated.
- MR:** So my point in saying that, I don't even want to sound ungrateful it was a very humbling experience it has been for people to recognize it and to talk about it even after that. But you know it has its place on this list. That's my point. I think it's a wonderful thing. My daughter is floored by the whole thing. I just think that it has its place. Because once that first person, that first African American enrolled, the first African American received that degree all this other stuff was going to happen eventually regardless of how long it was going to take to make it happen, it was going to happen and that's my statement.
- LR:** Alright. Well now how would you like the Elon community to respond to the Wall of Fame?"
- MR:** I would like the, ooh. I would like the Elon community to uhh and I would like Elon to actually use this as a recruitment effort to uhh the black schools, to show the achievements of some of the black students on campus. I would like to use this in their recruitment efforts. Uhh and also I would like for the community to see how the university has grown and become more inclusive.
- LR:** Wonderful, wonderful. You've talked a little bit earlier about, you know changing jobs and a new position. What are you doing now?
- MR:** Oh God, I think that the whole world heard about one of the most infamous cases in human services ever. Well two of them, the S. Williams case where this kid's body was found and the worker was charged with negligence and the starvation case of the Collins, the Collinswood case, the kids who were starving the five kids who were in foster homes and adopted by this foster parent. I had a great opportunity to assist with the reform efforts in the state of New Jersey to reform the division of youth and family services. And I was the structured decision making coordinator wherein my job was to make sure that all of the investigators and professional staff understood our new decision making model. And this is a model that New Jersey took on as a result and was working on even before those cases but expedited the process. As a result of those two horrendous cases to make sure that investigators and social workers clearly understood how to make decisions throughout the life of a child abuse and neglect case. Not just initially when you go out but throughout the life of a case. So it's a decision making

model that we purchased. After I completed and worked on that program I have an opportunity now to work for the New Jersey Training Academy, New Jersey Child Welfare Training Academy. I am the confidential assistant to the director of that program.

LR: Congratulations.

MR: Yeah and she works directly for the commissioner for the department of human services. So it's been a long time getting there but it feels good. It feels good to be in a position to assist in the reform of child welfare agency and to know that some day I am going to retire and look back and say oh I was a party to that. And this is how New Jersey child abuse and neglect agency operates now and I was a real part of that.

LR: Well it sounds like you're obviously in a profession that you are very passionate about.

MR: I am.

LR: And that's wonderful and that says a lot about you as a person. It really does, you have a big heart.

MR: Thank you so much and I just want to use this opportunity also to thank you for understanding the importance of documenting this history and for choosing to use this. You know, you could have chosen anything else to write about. Really there is so much more out there that you really could have written about. But I just want to thank you and this is something that you are going to leave L'Tanya as your legacy to Elon. So I need you to understand what you're doing as well.

LR: Well thank you Mary and I honestly have to say you know when I got that call from you in my office I think chills went down my spin. And I am being very honest because when I can still recall that day and the secretary said Mary Carroll is on the line and I said it can't be the Mary Carroll. And I said by all means put her through. And that, when I heard your voice and we talked, I think we talked maybe 25 minutes that day. I felt like I had known you all my life. And that conversation and I have to tell you I started out in admissions and when I got off the phone with you I said thank you God. I said, I stay in this work for a reason and it's because I like working with young people. But then to hear from someone like you who has clearly opened up doors for students to walk through, it reaffirmed why I was here and why I needed to stay here because there was still a lot of work that needed to be done. And then also I am always reminded you know when things happen on campus how important it is to document your history and to educate the community about the significant events that have taken place. You know things still happen today and people just don't know, they don't have a book to open to get this information and so and I keep saying and I tried to pass this on to the students for years because I thought it would be a wonderful project for them because I wanted them to have an opportunity to talk with the pioneers like yourself. And it just never got done and so maybe it was meant for me to do for some reason or another. But I just want to make sure that this history is documented and that this does not go unnoticed. You know I think too many years have already gone by.

- MR:** I remember you concluding our conversation with, I remember, I remember specifically what you said to me. You were like thank you so much this is a story that must be told.
- LR:** Yes. Yes, yes, you're exactly right.
- MR:** And that's specifically; you know those were your words. You said this is a story that must be told. I was like whoa she's really, really passionate about it, I really believe in you. And now it's one of the reasons why I responded the second go around it was because I believed in you so much from the beginning.
- LR:** Well thank you so much, I tell you. I'm just, I'm just looking forward to meeting you in person. The other thing that I'm going to be doing with this project because it's not going to end here; this is an ongoing project and I hope you know it will never be put to rest. But one of the things that I want to do once I get all the stories and compile them together and get them submitted to the archives who knows maybe some type of book or something will come out of this. But I really want to get all of the trailblazers back to campus. That's, that is my ultimate goal. Everybody in the same room together. And I shared this with a colleague and they said oh that's great. Are you going to do it during Black History Month? And I said no I'm not and they said why not. And I said that's another reason why I want to do this because often times when you talk about this kind of accomplishment people tend to categorize it.
- MR:** It loses its significance kind of if you did that and I can not believe that you had the foresight to understand that.
- LR:** And I said no, I said this is not just black history this is Elon history and I said and everyone needs to meet these trailblazers they need to hear their story.
- MR:** Right and the white kids on campus and the administrators on campus and the president...
- LR:** Exactly and the community
- MR:** ...they're not just attending a black history event. It needs to be in May or October where they understand that this is something that significantly changed Elon for the better.
- LR:** Exactly. And I told them I said that I wanted it in the largest facility on campus. I want it to be treated like convocation.
- MR:** Oh my God! You go girl.
- LR:** And you know and I'm always reminded of, you remember "Little Rock Arkansas Nine", you know and all those individuals...
- MR:** Yes that's what I think of every time I talk to you because of the passion in your voice and the seriousness you have and the commitment you have to this story it's just and I'm just telling you it's just so amazing.
- LR:** Well you know it's good to hear that because my advisor she says to me when I talk to her. She'll say, "gosh, she says, you have to do this, you know you have to do this." And she gets so fired up about it and then she says and she'll tell me she said when you write you write so nice and you're just so sincere. She's says now what I want you to do is I want you to put some fire behind that writing. She said forget about being nice she said tell it like it is. She was appalled when I gave her the Elon History book by Derek T. Stokes, Elon's history what is it Traditions, Elon's History and Traditions. And you know that book is 500 plus some pages

and only two pages speak to African American history here at the university. It was, it was just appalling.

- MR:** Wow. Just now I felt the same way I did when I picked up the 1981 Elon College Yearbook and it was as if I didn't even exist on campus. And it was as if look we ain't never telling nobody this school is 100 years old and we finally let a black girl win homecoming. What is this world coming to? We don't have to document it in a book. It will just go away quietly.
- LR:** And you're exactly right, you're exactly right. And you know even though you know it's been 20 years you know over 20 since you were here. You know, there are still things that have not changed, you know. A lot of progress has been made but there's still room for improvement. And you know and I chuckle a lot when people come down to visit the center and they go in the African American Resource Room and they'll look at the Wall of Fame and they'll look at the pictures and then they'll go to the picture of the homecoming king. And they'll say oh, and they'll say oh there's an error here. And I said well what is it and I know exactly what they are pointing to. You left off the word black. And I'll have to say well that's because he was the first homecoming king period.
- MR:** Oh my God! Now you're telling me something. I didn't know that.
- LR:** Yeah so you know everybody thinks he was the first black and I'm saying no he was the first homecoming king. That was the year when Elon decided that they wanted a king in addition to having a queen.
- MR:** What year was that?
- LR:** That year was 19--, let's see that was in the '90's and I should have it memorized by now. 1993
- MR:** Wow
- LR:** ...and I am going to be interviewing him he's actually at the University of Virginia, UVA. And so..
- MR:** What, Virginia Commonwealth University?
- LR:** Cavaliers in Charlottesville, Virginia. The University of Virginia
- MR:** My daughters at VCU.
- LR:** Oh, Ok, Ok.
- MR:** I tried to get her to go to Elon.
- LR:** Oh she wouldn't come?
- MR:** No.
- LR:** What year is your daughter at Virginia Commonwealth?
- MR:** She just turned 19 and she's in her second year
- LR:** Ok one of my students, her brother is there. And she was on campus yesterday, graduated a couple of years ago and her brother's there and she tried to get her brother to come to Elon too.
- LR:** Small world.
- MR:** She said no way, I am not going to be the daughter of Elon's first black homecoming queen on campus.
- LR:** Wow!
- MR:** And Elon now just started their, you know their track program is really getting better.
- LR:** Yeah, it is.

- MR:** So my daughter was probably one of the best track athletes in the state of New Jersey when she graduated from high school. So she graduated 2003. And I tried so hard to get her to go to Elon. She was like absolutely not that your reality I'm going to let you have that. That's how she talks to you, she's a trip. That's the real truth she says I'm going to let you have that.
- LR:** Well that is ok sounds like you have raised a very independent thinker. She's her own woman.
- MR:** She dances to the tune of her own band. She's not a follower, she's just does what ever she thinks is right even if it's wrong and she takes total responsibility for it.
- LR:** That's ok she can stand on her own. Sounds like she's got some of her mama in her. Well I can not thank you enough and I am hoping that everything comes through ok. And I hope I don't have to call you back and say Mary it didn't come through. So I am going to keep my fingers crossed that it did. I did it a couple of times before and it came out ok. So I'm just going to hope that it came through.
- MR:** You'll be fine, you'll be fine. And the beauty is knowing that I am home so you're lucky. I work ridiculous hours when I'm working so it would have been impossible for us to do this.
- LR:** And I hope your recovery is coming along nicely too.
- MR:** I feel better than I ever felt before and I know it's early and I shouldn't like be out but I can't wait to put my clothes on today, go get my nails and my facial.
- LR:** Wow.
- MR:** I'm going to start feeling like myself.
- LR:** And I have to say this and I'm going to wrap up I really feel like this has been a conversation and not an interview. I just feel like I have been having a conversation with a good friend.
- MR:** So do I. So do I.
- LR:** And when I think of people like you and the other folks that are on the Wall of Fame you know, you all motivate me and you get me excited about this project.
- MR:** You stay motivated.
- LR:** And I just have to follow through you know, I just can't stop
- MR:** You put it best, it truly is a story that needs to be told.
- LR:** It is. It has to be. You know its history and people got to know about this history and it has to be documented and so that's why I really have....
- MR:** If it makes one professor be more caring and more open toward one black student on campus to be more supportive. What can I do to help you, then our job is done. If it makes one black student understand how far, I mean what had to happen so that they could just walk into any meeting on campus and say ok I want to join this club and know that you can. They need to know what it took for them to be able to do that. So it truly, I mean you can conclude with that. You put it best; it is a story that has to be told.
- LR:** Yes. Well thank you and I'll have to remember that.
- MR:** Best of luck to you and if it's anything I can do to help you further with this please let me know.

- LR:** Thank you, you have been a big help already. And I'm just looking forward to keeping in touch with you, you know. I just don't want to call you up when I need something from you. I just want to keep in touch with you if it's by phone or writing.
- MR:** I am going to email you my wedding pictures.
- LR:** Yes, please do.
- MR:** I just got married to the most, God is so amazing, God is just so amazing. He will give you what you need when you need it. You know, I'm telling you that he has put the most amazing man into my world in my life this man is my rock he makes me believe. And guess what we've been friends for like 13 years no 14 years. And he just treated me like one of the boys I was dating some other jerk. No ____ But I'm just saying and he was dating somebody else all we were all in the kind of the same circle, we were just friends. I was just one of the boys. In fact, I have introduced him to somebody else to date once. And he told me he says for years I liked you but you just seemed so strong and on the ball. Now not to mention this man is a trader for Prudential Finances. He had traded millions and millions of dollars of public money and so talking about being strong but down to earth all at the same time he said I always wanted to date you. And we dated over the last three years and said ____ that's it I don't ever want to wake up without you in my life. I got it right.
- LR:** Wow, what's that Dottie Peoples says "He's a On Time God"
- MR:** Yes he is, yes he is totally and I got it right this time.
- LR:** Oh, that's wonderful! Well congratulations, I tell you.
- MR:** I'll send it to you so you can see this heavy voice. So I will send you, I'll either email it or get him to drop it in the mail.
- LR:** Ok sounds great. Well listen I have enjoyed this so much. I tell you, you know I got this big smile on my face and I don't think you know anybody can take it away from me right now. And this warm feeling inside. Well this is, it just makes it all the more worthwhile, it just puts things into perspective. And sometimes you never know why you're entering a profession but eventually the Lord allows you to see.
- MR:** He'll reveal it.
- LR:** Exactly, exactly and that's what he has done for me. He really has.

Interview with Mary Carroll Robertson

December 2004

By

L'Tanya Richmond

MR: Had to pay out of state tuition and there were a couple of my friends in high school who were going to Elon and who had done campus visits and it was also a football player who was a distant relative of mine, Phil Hutchinson who played for Elon who also had given me wonderful information about Elon and so Elon was my second choice.

LR: Wonderful.

MR: The residence halls my first year there when my parents were bringing me to actually to go up to my room my umm, I was shocked that I was the only black female in my dorm. Now being in predominantly white experiences as I have expressed to you on many occasions before when you and I have had an opportunity to talk even when you interviewed me years ago, I said to you that I was a product of a student being bussed. So I had gone to predominantly white schools before and actually my academic experiences were being in predominantly white settings so that was not going to be a culture shock to me. But I thought that there would be more girls at least in my dorm that kind of looked like me. But for my first semester on campus that wasn't true and I also shared with you a story about when I went to Stanley Hall I had been corresponding with my room mate via mail over the phone, I mean via mail all summer long and my real name, my complete name is Mary Catherine Carroll which you know could sound black or white or whatever you know whatever way you want to interpret it. And I truly believe to this day that she thought I was white and I'll never forget the expression on her face when she walked through the door and she and her mom immediately got her out of the room with me. They never said I don't want her sharing the room with a black girl but it was like very obvious so I remember one of those experiences as well. But the residence halls...

MR: Hello,

LR: I'm still here. Is everything ok?

MR: Yeah on my end, yeah. I can still hear you clearly

MR: The residence halls were less than 10 % well, actually less than that black. And you know the dining hall was always a fun experience for any kid that's going away to school because you get to choose what you want to eat. But you know oddly enough that was one situation where you would see somebody of color. But there was this one lady that worked in the residence hall collecting or stamping your pass I don't remember like which it was and I can't remember her

name but we shared a birthday or birthday month. I remember she would always give me a birthday card she was an elderly lady and I can't remember her name and I am really sad now. I think that I had talked to you about her before and I hoped that you would remember.

LR: Yes, yes I remember and I don't remember writing down a name for her. But I remember you indicated that the two of you shared a birthday card and the whole time you were there she would send you a birthday card.

MR: Her name was Leona Updike.

LR: Ok Leona Updike?

MR: Yes. She was a very, very senior citizen when I was there so I don't even know if she is still living. But she was always so nice to me and I remember students both black and white always teasing me because every time I would come into the dining hall she would hug me. Here's my Leo friend and she'd give me a kiss. It felt good but at the same time publicly it was a little embarrassing but I have to say to you that privately it felt good. I remember her being the person that always made me feel at home on campus, uh huh.

LR: Oh wonderful, that's great. And what did you do on the weekends Mary?

MR: My first year on weekends I did everything I could to find a way to get home. And my parents were like you know you got to get used to campus you have to know more people. And I would say to her there's absolutely nothing for me to do on the weekends. And of course my father being the person he was, uh study. My father was a judge and his thing was that you know I'm sending the three of you to college to make good grades anyway. So in a way unlike what I tell my daughter that socialization is a huge part of your college experience but it has its place. I never heard that terminology come from my father his thing was the important piece is at the end of the day you walk away with a degree. So his thing was use that private time to study. And you know I would always say that he just didn't get it. Not just for me but for most of the black kids on campus there wasn't a lot for us to do because we didn't get invited to a lot of the fraternity and sorority parties which a lot of that occurred on the weekends. And I had met the person would then become my future husband, his name was Charlie Williamson who had been on campus before me and he was a star basketball player on campus. For me that made it a little better in terms of Charlie being invited to a lot of you know off campus parties and fraternity parties and you know getting together with the football and basketball teams so I got to go to a lot of that type of stuff. But I think I had a conversation with you before about the time we showed up and we showed up with a bunch of students who looked like us and the message was very, very clear if we invite you that don't mean invite your other black friends as well. So I won't go into what that whole thing was like. But for the most part what ended up happening was as we were able to get cars our junior and senior year and Charlie had a car. We would go to Greensboro, we would go to North Carolina A&T, we would go to clubs in Greensboro on the weekend you know as we became upper classmen we would find things outside of Burlington and Elon College to do. And then you know, I

think we had long in-depth conversations about Marsha Hughes and a couple of other girls forming Delta Sigma Theta because there were no sororities for us. And you know we just decided one day we needed to bring a black sorority on campus and that's what we did. And so my senior year that was something to look forward to but other than that there was really nothing for a lot of black students to do on the weekends

LR: Ok, we're almost there you're doing wonderful. Thank you so much Mary. In addition to chartering Delta sigma Theta can or do you recall any other major events that took place on campus?

MR: I remember one of the most, one of the things that's most vivid in my mind is every single day I knew Elon was going to be this huge, huge beautiful campus. The grounds were always neatly manicured and that was one of the things that was very impressive to my parents and I. Because my father kind of majored in horticulture so having beautiful land and grass and stuff was always important to us because to this day our yard looks like country club grass even though he's deceased my brothers just like learned how to keep it that way. So when we pulled up I remember us in his station wagon going wow the grass is nice here. You know, cause we're just a weird kind of family that way anyway. And as smart as he was academically and him being a magistrate judge he did he minored in. And one of his part time jobs was taking care of lawns at country clubs that he couldn't even play on because back then the country clubs were predominantly you know they were for whites only. And my father would get to practice his game in between taking care of the lawn and he was a wonderful, wonderful golfer and so much so he would take my oldest brother with him and my brother ended up going to St. Augustine College on a golf scholarship. So I remember like when all of us drove up to take me school looking at the grass going ooh you know the lawn here is very nice. But I remember that I knew Elon was going to be a just a fabulous, campus because every single day of my I want to say my sophomore, junior and senior year there was always some kind of construction going on. There was always renovation, they were always building something and making something that was always all better. You know I just knew it was going to be this fabulous campus. And it is.

LR: Wow! And Mary prior to enrolling at Elon did you visit before then?

MR: No.

LR: Ok, Ok. Alright, alright. Can you name me at least one of your highlights while you were here as a student at Elon?

MR: Yeah, I think that we had a lot of conversations about this. And I remember that it was critical for me to be a party to organizations where there were some level of comfort and also it was also encouraged by the black kids on campus. They always talked about strength in numbers. And I was invited, I remember when I was invited to join the Black Culture Society and I would go to those meetings and we would get together and it did it served its purpose. It felt good it gave us a sense of purpose. And I remember being elected to represent them on the homecoming court and not giving it much thought we just always thought it was

good that we could get to have a representative on you know the court. And with Elon being predominantly white and in a 100 years of existence there had never been a black homecoming queen you never even thought about that type of thing. I think you and I had long conversation about. I remember you asking me questions about what was your expectations about once you won. There were no expectations, there was never any thought of what if I win because you never expected to win you know. And I remember that was a highlight and a lowlight all at the same time because of what happened afterwards.

LR: Wow. And I know that earlier we had talked about there were no duties even after you were crowned homecoming queen.

MR: Absolutely not.

LR: I remember that so vividly when you talked about that. Ok, do you recall any challenges that you faced when you were a student?

MR: Huh, I think that, I think that a lot of stuff was, I think that almost everything we did was, was a challenge. You know because when you think about it, we, not just me, we were achieving against a lot of odds. And in particularly with my family thinking back I understand it better now but when I was living in the moment I can remember calling my father and my mother and saying you just don't understand. And having my father say, "if you quit, if you come home the people who don't want you there, win." If you graduate and get the gift certificate I mean get the uhh, and get the uhh the degree, success is you know is so much better and you're going to feel so much better about yourself. And I just think that everyday I can remember having people in my dorm miss so many classes. Wealthy white kids that would just not get up and go to class. And I remember saying to myself, how can they waste their parents money and my thing is there were times I didn't want to go to class but I knew that I had to go because my parents were working so hard and I knew what it took to get me there. And so there were a lot of challenges. I remember taking a public speaking class because I knew that would be important to any career. I don't care what you do for a living at some point you are going to have to open your mouth. Even if it's to sell a product even if it's, regardless of what your career would be and I knew that this public speaking class would be good for me. But I remember sitting down front again looking in the back of the classroom and recognizing that I was the only black kid in that class. But it was a wonderful class and a wonderful experience for me. It was challenging. I remember the very first time I had to stand before them and recite something that I had memorized. And recite it with feelings. You had this teacher who was trying to teach you how to talk in public but how to express yourself and how to make people believe in what you were saying. And I remember that was more difficult than my stats class. I'm telling you I still challenged when it comes to statistics, economics and numbers. But I remember being more terrified with that than to take my finals for stats. But I don't know.

LR: Wow! (Laughter) Well you got through it. Did you feel supported as an African American student on Elon's campus Mary?

MR: I don't remember anybody of in an administrative position including the then president Fred Young ever coming to me apologizing for what happened with respect to leaving my picture out of the yearbook. You know you and I talked about the book burning as one of the major events on campus my senior year. Although somebody instructed them to try to correct it and take a picture of me and make sure it's on the cover of the magazine that you hand out at the next year's homecoming game. And that was as close as it came. Even the photographer when I showed up that day just simply took pictures you know of me walking around campus, I mean just said, "stand here" took the pictures and said ok, thank you, I think I have enough, that was it. There was never anybody there from administration to say you know we're doing this and we hope that you accept our apology and we hope that you know we're trying to correct this and even though you've graduated this is what we're trying to do, there was none of that. And even during my years on campus I remember being able to go to Dr. Marlette as my counselor and she telling me like what I needed to graduate and all your grades are really good and next year you're going to need take xyz and you have enough credits. But I don't remember anything encouraging like anybody I felt like I could run to if a course was too hard but I always made sure that I would go directly to the professor and that they knew that I was trying and that I was interested or maybe that I needed extra credit. But I don't you know we had to form our own support systems and we did that whether it was with the Gospel Choir, the Black Cultural Society or just getting together in study groups within our dorm. And we did that and I have to say to you, I will say it again Tanya that, L'Tanya that even thinking back I don't think any of us thought we were trailblazing or knocking down any doors we were simply doing what we had to do because we wanted to graduate. We did want to have a sorority I remember that being really, really important but we weren't thinking being the first to do anything. It was just a very energetic group of people who knew what was out there. And I can remember that there were students from all different states which was the beauty of it at that time. We had these kids from New York, kids from New Jersey very smart and strong kids who were politically connected in North Carolina. We had you know my background having my father understand the importance of education and don't quit. So you had all these personalities coming together and saying, "Oh this can be done" and being strong enough to go to administration saying we want to do this, what is it going to take, we need an advisor for xyz. But I don't think we were trying to be first or trailblazers or knock down doors we just, the timing was right, the timing was right.

LR: The timing was right. I like that. Ok, we're almost finished because as I indicated earlier I had gotten half of it and I didn't get the first part of it. So I think we're fine because I got your other comments on here. So I'm just checking my questions to make sure that I've gotten everything on here. And you know what I do Mary. I got everything; wonderful, wonderful. I do appreciate everything. The only other thing that I need from you and I know that when I spoke with last I asked you what you were doing and I just wanted to get your job title.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose to attend Elon?
2. What was Elon like when you attended (i.e. makeup of campus, black professors, president)?
3. What were the most important events on campus during the time you were a student?
4. What were the best classes you had? Who were your favorite professors? Who are the people on the faculty or staff who made the greatest impression on you?
5. Talk about life in the residence hall, the dining hall, and social activities.
6. What did you do on the weekend?
7. What were some of the major events and changes during your time at Elon?
8. What were some of the highlights of your college years?
9. What were some of the challenges you faced?
10. Did you feel supported as an African American student?
11. How were race relations on campus?
12. What are your fondest/strongest memories of Elon?
13. What is advice to African American students enrolled?
14. What do you think of the new Elon?
15. What do you think about your recognition as a Wall of Fame honoree?
16. How would you like the Elon community to respond to the Wall of Fame?