Dorothy H. Jones

July 6, 2005

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Wednesday, July sixth, the year 2005. We're in East Lansing, Michigan, on campus at Michigan State University. I'm Professor Jeff Charnley interviewing Dr. Dorothy Harper Jones for the MSU Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of Michigan State, which is being commemorated in this year, 2005.

As you can see, Dr. Jones, we have a tape recorder here. Do you give us permission to record this interview?

Jones: Yes, I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start with just some general questions about where you were born and raised. Where were you born and raised before you went to college?

Jones: I was born in Shiloh, S-h-i-l-o-h, Alabama, and that was a little section where my grandparents had a huge farm. So I knew something about farming. But I actually grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, and went to elementary school there and to high school, Councill School and then Parker High School. And they did not actually have a high school in my area, so I had to take the streetcar to another part of town because that was where the best school was. But also you have to think of the fact that there was segregation and so even though there were schools in

the area where I had gone to elementary school, they were not for persons of color. So I had to take the streetcar every day. But you end up getting to know a lot of people when you have to ride the streetcar every day.

Charnley: So you were fourteen, fifteen, right around there when you started high school?

Jones: Yes.

Charnley: What type of farm did your grandparents have?

Jones: They had a working farm in the sense of they may sell some of the crops, like cotton and corn and beans and those kinds of things. So we never went to a store for anything other than to buy meal or flour, because we had chickens and pigs and cows and all of that. So I actually loved going back there after I moved to Birmingham, because I had a couple of chickens who were my favorite chickens and they would not kill them. They could not hurt my chickens. So it was a farm.

In Birmingham I lived in a section called Ensley, E-n-s-l-e-y, Ensley, and it was segregated. I do recall very much that we had the streetcars in the beginning, and the streetcar stopped about four or five blocks from where I lived, so I would walk those five blocks, but at the end of that fifth block that was when the pavement stopped. So then it went into the, quote, "colored" area, and so then it was not paved at all.

But what was most important to me in remembering is that it was the cleanest dirt you've ever seen. We would sweep the dirt, so it was very clear. Everybody on the street had flowers.

And so our street, even though no pavement, looked much more hospitable, looked much better cared for, and that was pride. So to me, that may be end up being a theme of what I talk about in that even with segregation there were things that we did to say, "We are important. We value ourselves and we value where we are."

Charnley: This was early 1950s?

Jones: Yes.

Charnley: Were there some of the community leaders that you knew as a child in that area?

Jones: Interesting, most of the community leaders in that time period were ministers. I was a member of the Baptist church, I knew that he worked with the ministers from other—and so you had the Ministerial Alliance, and those were people that you looked up to. But you also, and for me, even more importantly, you looked up to your teachers, because they were the ones who kept saying to you, "You are important. You can learn." I learned so much from these dedicated teachers and they were all African American, male and female.

Charnley: Was there any teacher that you could just look back and think had a very important influence on you directly? By name, do you remember any?

Jones: No.

Charnley: I don't mean that's a memory test, but—

Jones: Dr. Norman, he was my algebra teacher and he made it fun to learn math and then geometry. To tell you the impact, I was going to be a math major in college because of that experience that I had with him. Because we went to one through eighth grade and then you went the ninth through twelfth for high school. But he was so instrumental.

I had another one who was a social-studies person, and that name is not coming back as quickly, but that person helped me to have a sense of value, that even though you are experiencing segregation, that this is not how you are defined. And it never once let down in terms of expectations, not just of me, but I mean you're talking about my connection. It was like if somebody in the classes, we did not do our work, that wasn't me, uh-huh, no, no, I knew better than not to do my work, but we knew that they would be in touch with our families. There was a sense of community, a sense of saying that we're going to do our best to make sure, I don't care if you were in a segregated school, that you are going to learn and you're going to be able to stand on your own two feet no matter where you go. So that was instilled from early on.

Charnley: Was there any point where you personally made the decision to continue on with your education?

Jones: I had never a choice. I guess if I'd, you know, been vociferous about it or something, but it was clear that I was going to go on to high school, I was then going to go to college, and I was going to then apply for scholarships and all of that, and then my family and my teachers were going to look at what was the best school for me to attend. So it was never, never any—I mean,

it was not expected that I would bring anything less than a B home, and a B would be, "Okay, what happened?" Because I loved learning and I loved being in school.

The teachers recognized that I had some talent in the area of performing, in dance, and I was a teacher's pet. So I had sometimes where the students, some of the students didn't like me. "You're her favorite," or something like that. But I'd say, "Well, you know, if you'd do better at your studies, maybe you'd get to be a favorite, too." So I would utilize even something that was seen as derisive as an opportunity.

Charnley: The opportunity for cultural things, like dance and theater, you were involved in those?

Jones: Oh yes. Oh yes. We would put on plays. We would put on plays that were written by Langston Hughes, and all of us had to learn his speeches. And we'd have oratorical contests. Have you ever heard of one of those?

Charnley: Yes. Haven't participated, but—

Jones: I was just going to say, I'll bet you participated.

Charnley: No.

Jones: So that there were many ways that—that is to say we would have the plays, we would have concerts. I didn't sing in the park, because I could not do everything, and so I chose the

drama and the other things, but we had beautiful choirs, beautiful choirs. And then when I went to college, the choirs were beautiful, and I kept saying to myself, "You know, I never heard of a bad African American choir," because they were good voices, but also, over the years, people who had evolved as directors saw what they could get out of students.

You don't know, but you got somebody who loves to talk.

I remember in college that the director of the choir very seldom did more than just a small move of his hand. And there were times when I could just watch his hands, because they would never [unclear]; they had gotten so in tune to the way he directed. And I said, "Wow, that is truly a remarkable skill."

Charnley: When did you graduate from high school?

Jones: I've got to take it back. Let's see. '57 was when I graduated from Talladega, so you got to go back four years, and then take four away from that, and so that's where it was. So eighth, then to high school, then to college.

Charnley: And so where did you end up doing your undergraduate work?

Jones: I did my undergraduate work at Talladega College. It was called the Oasis of the South, and there's a reason for that. It's T-a-l-l-a-d-e-g-a. And the reason for that was that we had students from all over the world, during the time of segregation, at Talladega College. I remember students from Germany. There was somebody from Japan and there was someone from Norway. I'd never met any people; I was coming from Birmingham, Alabama, and

segregation, but all of these. And it was called Oasis of the South because as long as we were on the campus of Talladega College, there were no problems. We could not go into town together. So it was like we had a world of people on the campus, but we could not have that world out on the—

Charnley: Couldn't socialize outside?

Jones: No. We wouldn't even walk downtown together. But we said, "Okay, that's the way the world is." But, see, that was coming up to, it wasn't in place completely then, but it was fermenting, the Civil Rights Movement. But interestingly enough, when the Civil Rights Movement really took off, I had left Alabama, but I do know about some of the places. I remember one time, that was much later—I'm getting ahead of the story. But the point is, is that in college I had this wonderful experience, but after college it was still segregated.

Charnley: What did you end up majoring in?

Jones: Sociology.

Charnley: Was there any professor there in your undergrad that was an influence?

Jones: Donald Rasmussen [phonetic], who is still alive, lives in California. I'm in touch with him every Christmas. And several of us, you know, we may not even see each other, we may see each other at conferences, but we always talk about how we wrote to Dr. Rasmussen and then a

couple said, “Well, I actually got him on the phone.” I tried calling him and couldn’t get him. But as of last year he was still alive. I know he’s aged, but he just sounded, even in his letters, still that supportive professor that said these young people of color can do it. The first time I ever had any—his wife would invite all of the sociology majors to their house. I’d never had borscht. She served borscht. I didn’t really like it, but you’ve got to be a good guest. But they saw that that was giving several messages to us about ourselves, about their connection to us, and plus the experience of things, because we found out that borscht was primarily from Russia. Russia? Oh, my, my, my. Yes.

Charnley: Interesting. He took a personal interest in your work.

Jones: Oh yes. Oh yes. He was one that he would give us the exam and leave. There was no proctor; there was no one watching us. There was one time we were all struggling with a question and so we started discussing it while we were supposed to be doing our exam, and so afterwards he says, “Oh, I see that all of you got together and decided how you were going to answer that question.” He says, “That was good, but I still would have liked to have gotten what were you own thoughts about this.” We just said, “Oh, my god.” You know, it’d been something if he had—we were chastised, but in a way that it made us feel we had not kept to the trust he had in us, so that was as bad as getting a bad grade. Oh, my gosh, he—not upset, that wasn’t it, he was just disappointed in us, and that, I think, ended up being an experience for me, because, as I say, here he saw his role with helping these black, and we were called “colored” then, colored people in school and that “I have something to offer them.”

But then there was Dr. Hopson. Dr. Hopson was the one who said, "You are going to learn about opera." We had Leontyne Price. We had all of these big singers. We had orchestras come. We had to dress. I had to send home to my mother and tell her I needed a long gown. When we went to yearly concerts, we had to dress appropriately, and when you went to the opera sometimes that's what you did. He'd modeled it after New York. And after each one of these, we had to write. You didn't just say, "I enjoyed it." You had to do a critique in terms of how well, if it was a singer, if it was someone who was playing an instrument or whatever. So he was acclimating us to be able to not just listen, but how do you take something in and make it part of you and then evaluate it, and with the idea that that's not just what you do there, that's what you're going to do with other experiences.

We used to get all dressed up, and it was just really a very white-tie kind of thing for us. And for many who had come from all kinds of backgrounds, if this was—and when we get together now we talk about the fact that what he did was, and this was among us, he civilized us to what culture was like. And we had to keep a diary. We had to keep a diary on what we were learning in his class and the impact it was having on us.

So it's just that there were so many pieces to that, and there were others, but he and my major prof in sociology were the two, yes. And we had to do things like—no, that was back in elementary school. We had cooking classes and all of those kinds of things, but we didn't have that in college.

Charnley: When did you move north?

Jones: After I finished at Talladega, and I was an honor student there, my major prof, Donald Rasmussen, the one that I say now lives in California, he said, "So you want to be in social work?"

And I said, "Yes."

He says, "Well, that's only place you should go."

I said, "Oh?"

And he said, "To Smith College in Massachusetts."

And there was one other young woman there who wanted social work; she lived in Buffalo, New York. So he said that the two of us should go to Smith, and we applied and were accepted at Smith. Later on we found out that that didn't happen very often. We had not thought in terms of ourselves as being special. Dr. Rasmussen said, "This is where you should go, you apply and you will get in." So it was just phenomenal in terms of what happens when you have people supporting you. You're not subsumed by your culture. Instead, you are impacted by the people around you who say you have to learn because you will have to make a difference in society.

Charnley: Was that a culture shock when you got to Smith?

Jones: Yes, because it was integrated, but, yes, I think he had helped prepare me in the sense of, you know, "You're going to be around a whole lot of people that you had not been involved with in school before," he said, "but what you do is just think of them as your classmates." And so from that first year of graduate school are still some of my best friends. So he was so

instrumental in helping us value ourselves in that we didn't have to let down for anybody. The expression I like using now, "If you come to the table, people will have to respect you."

I don't recall any specific experiences while I was at Smith. Then we had to two years of placement. My first-year placement was in Boston and I lived in a settlement house, lived in the settlement house, because that made it easier in terms of managing. That was a mind-boggling experience for me, because in this settlement house, Norfolk House is right in Boston, had people living there from all over the world. There was someone from Germany. There was someone from Japan. There was someone from Switzerland. There were just people from all—and my gosh, here, coming from Talladega, sure, we had exchange students, okay, but interacting with these people on a daily basis, and we had to take turns cooking, and I learned to eat Egyptian food and Japanese food, and it was like, "Wow!"

So it speaks to that some things serendipitously happen that way, but there have been others where it just evolved out of places, and I've been very thankful for the kinds of opportunities. I worked at a family service agency as a student, had a wonderful supervisor who was just very supportive of my development as a social worker.

Then my second year, because you had to do a two-year internship, I did it in Rochester, New York, at Strong Memorial Hospital, which is one of the best hospitals in the country. I was in the psych department. This one psychiatrist, he was so good-looking I fell in love with him. [laughs] He never knew it, though. You know when you get a crush. But he was so good because we would be in a meeting and he would interview a patient who was in the hospital because of mental concerns, and he would sit there, and this one man came in and told me about his business and showed him his card and everything, and when he left, he said, "Not one word he said was true." It was his fantasy.

Charnley: Wow.

Jones: Yes. Yes. And so there were many things like this. It was top-notch, and I had wonderful supervisors. I would have stayed at Rochester Strong Memorial Hospital, but in the meantime I had gotten to know one of my schoolmates from Talladega, and it seems that we were going to move forward in getting married. [laughs] So my husband is actually from Talladega College also.

Charnley: And you were there at the same time?

Jones: He was a year ahead of me, yes.

Charnley: What was his area that he studied?

Jones: He ended up in social work, too. He liked administration, so that was his area. We never were in the same agency, but I liked direct practice with the clients.

Charnley: I forgot to ask his name.

Jones: His name is James Theodore Jones. We've got two children, Laurel, who is forty-one and she is head children's librarian at the main library in Durham, North Carolina. Our son is

Marcus Henry, Jones and he lives in Brazil and has lived there for eight years. He now is in business for himself that deals with negotiations and implementing new programs in businesses.

Charnley: Interesting.

Jones: Yes.

Charnley: Long ways away from Talladega.

Jones: Oh yes.

Charnley: After your clinical work, how was it that you came to Michigan?

Jones: I came to Michigan—this is when we lived in Cleveland, then my husband got a job here, and so that's when we came here to live.

Charnley: In Lansing?

Jones: Yes. Well, actually, no, we first lived in Detroit. He was working at more like a halfway house for persons who were having mental problems, but he was more the administrator rather than direct service. And we moved to Lansing after the riot.

Charnley: '67?

Jones: Yes. Yes, we did not feel that was a good place to live. And we still remember that we woke up on a Sunday morning and I usually would go to church, but for some reason I decided I wasn't going to church that day and later—put that back on this. There was a F___ Department Store near the area, so I said, "I'll go here and I'll get a few things and then I'll be back." Well, I got there, and all over the television and radio was about the riots. I didn't even know it. And I went back and said, "Ted, turn on the TV. Turn on the TV. They're rioting in Detroit."

Then his brother lived there, and it was going on. That was the first day, but it kept going the next night. He would go wherever there was burning and he'd call us and tell us about it. He didn't participate, but he was an observer. Then he said he'd find out about something else, he'd go and then he'd call. And we said, "Just go home."

"No, no." He said, "I'm not helping in any way, but this is a part—."

And he called one time and said, "Guess what?"

"Oh, Charles, what is it?"

"I'm watching them loot Saks Fifth Avenue." Because there was a Saks in Detroit and he's watching them. He says, "I can't do anything, so I'm just watching them. I saw somebody come out with this beautiful fur coat," you know, this kind of thing.

"Charles, go home." You know, he was young and being a part of it.

So we were in Detroit during those riots, but we stayed away from the area where it was the worst part of fires and things. I didn't cry, but I almost cried the next time I went through, because I said, "What has happened is that the people here, not because of something that was of their making, have destroyed their own property. They had no place to live." And I said, "Something is wrong with our society when this is what happens." And I cried because it was so

hurtful, and the looting and everything, and it was just showing how when you have pent-up feelings of not being valued and being kept down, that when it flares, it just flares with a vengeance. But that wasn't me. I've been a pacifist ever since I was in Talladega, because my professor, major professor, said, "The pacifists' way is the best to be in terms of yourself and what you can do for the world."

Charnley: What were your experiences when you first got to Lansing? Had you had any of your children then?

Jones: Oh yes. When we got to Lansing, yes, we had both children. When we moved to Lansing, we moved because my husband now got a job at the state level. It's one of those things where even though we both had degrees and all, and I always worked, not full-time with the children, but his job, the traditional way his job we would go then, so we were moving to Lansing. And this is really something. We were looking for a house, and we looked at a house on Harrison Road. Now, that was many, many years ago, and we asked how they were asking for the house. It was $21,000. That's a lot of money back then. And then we had some friends of ours who were white go and look at the house and ask. They were asking $10,000 for it.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two of the first tape of the Dorothy Jones interview.

When the tape ended, you were talking about a house in East Lansing.

Jones: Yes, on Harrison Road.

Charnley: In the 1960s that you were looking at, and you said the price was $21,000 for you. And then would you tell what the rest of the story?

Jones: And then we had some friends go back, because the people said, "That doesn't look like it's worth that." The lady said, "Let's go by and see." And so it was $10,000 for them. And so we said of course we didn't want it because of that. And as I said, the house, every time I go down Harrison Road I see it and it is empty and it's been empty, people move for whatever reason, I have no idea, but that house has been empty for at least three years. So as my mother used to say, "God don't love ugly." [laughs]

But there's another piece of this that's interesting, is, okay, we looked around and we could not find anything that we really liked. It turns out Francis Fine [phonetic] was a builder in this area, and not too far from that place you go off the street and they were building a new subdivision. According to federal regulations, anybody could look at an area and choose to build a home. So my husband went and he told them that he was interested and they said, "Well, okay, we'll get back to you," and they didn't. So every day at lunchtime my husband would come and sit in front of the office where they were trying to sell the houses and he'd greet everybody who came up to the door. [laughs]

And so they finally said, "Well, it doesn't look like he's going to go away." Plus, by now we had gone to FHA and said, you know, "Something's not right here." So we said, "But we don't really want that house anyway, but we want to build here." So we told them that we wanted to buy a house in that new subdivision and they said, "Okay." Then they tried to give us

one of the worst lots on the site. The place has at least sixty-five houses, and they had been digging for this house and they'd run into some problems.

Charnley: And they wanted to give you that site, or let you buy that site?

Jones: Right. So we said, "No, we didn't really like that anyway," because we were surrounded by people, but we preferred a property that banked against an open field where we saw deer and all kinds of—it was just beautiful. So he first tried to give us grief on it, and we said, "No, that's what we want. Do you really want me to be in touch with FHA?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no."

So we built there and we still live in that house.

Charnley: Were you surprised that East Lansing was segregated at the time, at least in housing?

Jones: Well, we didn't think it would be and it technically wasn't, but it shows you what people can do to try to keep the status quo in place, I mean overcharging us and then not showing us the property, and then wanting to give us what was one of the worst lots. Because they eventually built on that, but they had to do something to the soil and all kinds of things before they did it. So it was surprising. But afterwards, as we got to know Bob Green, he and Lettie were dear friends, and we were members of the same sorority and all, we found out that his life was even more miserable than ours, and so that people had not changed much. There may be some places in East Lansing where it's still the case, but I think people have learned over the years you don't do that and you can not socialize with people, but you can't discriminate.

Charnley: You were pleased with your house that you built there?

Jones: Oh yes. They had specs and you could choose one of those, and so we chose one that was, we thought, very nice, but then later on we decided, oh, it wasn't quite big enough for us, so we added on a new family room in the back and then we added two bedrooms upstairs. So, as I say, we've been there for a long time, whereas we now, as I said, have a small home in Durham, North Carolina. Our home is still off of Harrison Road up near Lake Lansing. You remember where Meijers is now with all open field with deer and everything, and our subdivision blocked Knapp's. Knapp's had wanted to a build store over there where Meijers is now, and our subdivision said, "Oh, no. No, we want this to be kept just open for the animals and the wildlife and everything." You see what we've got now.

Charnley: Of course, there were just bears sited in the East Town Center. [laughs]

Jones: I said to my husband, I said, "We haven't seen a bear in years."

Charnley: How was it that you ultimately came to work at Michigan State?

Jones: My background was social work, like I said, and what you do is in order for students to graduate, they have to do internships, and so then you have to be supervised by a licensed and trained social worker. So that's what I did. I had students. One time I had five students and that was unheard of, but the school felt that I was doing a good job and they thought that I could do it, and so I did.

Then the School of Social Work asked me if I would come and teach a course, and from that it was, "Well, okay, would you be interested in being on the faculty here?"

I said, "Well, if I can work part-time," because our children were young then.

And they said, "Well, faculty schedules are not like everybody else's schedule. You have some flexibility."

So I finally said yes, and so then I came on at first as a supervisor, that was before, as I said, but then came on as an instructor, because I did not have a Ph.D.; I had a master's degree. So therefore I taught various courses in the master's program. We had an undergraduate program, but I always taught in the master's.

But then it was, okay, you've now learned about something else related to colleges, it's called the tenure system, and I did not have a Ph.D. So they said, "Well, you know, we love having you here, but you're not going to be able to advance unless you have a Ph.D." So that's when I went back to Smith College, because they had a Ph.D. in social work program, and the way it worked fit well because classes were all in the summer. That's the way Smith has always done it. So I went there and got my Ph.D., and obviously I had to do a dissertation and all of the usual stuff and present it and everything, and that was fine.

My study was looking at synchrony in the relationship between babies and their mothers, and I did videos. I did videos of these and then we did analysis of the videos and then I wrote it up. We had it actually set up over in Baker Hall. They have a one-way mirror in some rooms on the first floor, and so we had the camera set up and we could watch the mother playing with the baby in the other room and not have to be involved at all. So we had some measures that looked at when was the mother in synchrony with the child, and so that was my dissertation research.

I had families of color and I had white families. And one of my primary conclusions was that where there were variables, both the black mothers and the white mothers were in synchrony with their children. As a matter of fact, the African American mothers were more in sync with their children because they did not always have to talk with the baby in order for the baby to respond. It could be a touch, it could be a click that babies learn to react to that. And so it was the whole range of options of ways of communicating that I think made a difference in terms of how African American children develop. They have a sense, a greater sense of the range of ways you can relate to people starting from those early experiences.

Charnley: So you did some of your work at MSU, your research here. Who was your major professor at Smith for the Ph.D.?

Jones: Ann Hartman. The fact that she would take me on, I was like in seventh heaven, because she was considered just one of the best in the country. Actually, she was my guide, and that was good because she said, "You can do this. I don't need to have to hold your hand." So it was a great experience.

Charnley: Did your work as a social worker allow you to pick that dissertation? What was your area of specialty before you went into teaching? Were you dealing with families or women and children?

Jones: I was dealing with families and I was dealing with women and children, and it was my looking at synchrony in the relationship between the mother and the babies.

Charnley: So you were doing that in the real world, so to speak.

Jones: Right. I did videotapes of the mothers with their children. So we had a cohort of guidelines, and then we'd look at them and say, "Okay, this—," but still saying there may be some variability there, but this is giving clear evidence of mom's in synchrony with the baby. One of my favorites was this African mother who—most of them were African Americans, but there was one who was an African and she was so wonderful. And what she did was a click back in the back of her throat, something back there. That baby would respond to it and there could be different dimensions to that click that the baby sort of knew that it was a happy click, or it was one where baby "I'm doing something that I shouldn't be doing." So it was just fascinating.

Charnley: Was that a personal thing or was it cultural, within her village or where she was from?

Jones: I think it was a cultural thing, yes, but primarily from her village, because as I learned more about where she was from, that there was a lot of nonverbal kinds of things.

Another piece of this is that during all this I was dancing, I was dancing, and I started my own dance company.

Charnley: When was that?

Jones: Oh, goodness. We celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary, oh, maybe about five years ago probably. Pashami Dancers. I went to Africa, took people to Africa. We studied and went to seven West African countries and to South Africa and then to Brazil and Trinidad. So I would go and then bring that back and do performances here with the company. We've done performances in the Fairchild Theater, we've done them on the Wharton Main Stage, both of the Wharton stages. As a matter of fact, my husband is trying—I asked him how many tapes we had, and I think he said we have three hundred and fifty tapes. So he's DVD'ing all of them, because some of them are old, before they really deteriorate.

Charnley: To preserve them. That's important, yes. That's interesting.

Jones: Yes. And then I walked in one day when he was doing it, and I said, "Oh, they look kind of good." And we made all of our costumes; our outfits. I didn't call them costumes. All our outfits. So it was really a family kind of thing.

Charnley: What does the name mean?

Jones: Pashami means togetherness. See, you don't know, you got a talker here. When Bishop Desmond Tutu came—and I may have said something to this effect—when Desmond Tutu first came to this country and to Detroit, my company danced for him and some of the dancers never forgave me. He gave us a standing ovation. We have it on video.

Charnley: Oh, that's wonderful. Did you meet him personally?

Jones: Oh yes. He gave us all hugs. Oh yes, he was a gentleman.

To me it was my interest in African dance did so many things for me, but it also did so much for the community. When we had the program welcoming him to this country and to Michigan, the dance companies in Detroit were angry with me. They said, "How come you got to dance for him and we didn't?"

I said, "I didn't do anything. They asked me and so I did."

Charnley: How did you recruit your early dancers?

Jones: I would go to community centers.

Charnley: In the greater Lansing area?

Jones: Yes. I'd watch people, what they were doing, and then I'd say, "You know, I have this dance company. Why don't you come and try it. I'm doing some African dances."

And, "Okay, I'll come."

Then I had the drop it because with our work we had a lot of drummers, and so it was that you don't do African dance to tapes if you really are being as authentic as you can. So we had people who were interested in drumming with us, and we had a master drummer who has studied under the best African drummers in this country. He was my lead drummer. He's dead now; he died of AIDS. But you know that's what happens with some situations.

But I went for authenticity and that it was important to have people who knew it well, and as I said, I've done them all over Michigan and one that I did in the correctional facility. We got a grant from the corrections department.

Charnley: In Michigan?

Jones: Yes.

Charnley: Which prison?

Jones: Muskegon Correctional Facility. So for eight weeks we went every Saturday there, and we had to go through the metal detectors and everything. Well, it turns out that the head of corrections was a friend of my husband's and he put the word out that, you know, "Make sure nobody messes with any of [unclear]." They'd all be in trouble. So we went for eight weeks, so I told them, we did a performance and then I said, "Well, we have this opportunity to teach you some of the dances that you've seen us do." And I said, "Okay, if you're going to do it, you're going to have to sign up for the whole time."

Not then, but later on we had a little debriefing after one of the classes and I said, "Okay, why did you—?"

"I wanted to be with these good-looking women." So you find all kinds of interesting things like that.

But anyway, the head of corrections, as I said, knew that, and so through him it got back that I really wanted them to do a performance. So they got the warden and everything and so I

said, “Okay.” But I said, “We can’t just get up there with what they usually have.” I said, “I want them to have Bermuda shorts and shirts.”

And the warden said, “Okay.”

Then here I am up [unclear] with these big vats of dye and they are tying their shirts and their Bermuda shorts, they dipped them in and then they got them.

Charnley: Making tie-dyed shirts.

Jones: Yes, tie-dyed shirts and then, you know, tried it to do it. That was more like African than the African style, which is more crunch than those concentric circles that we all did. And so the day of the final performance when we walked through those gates, they were all standing there in their outfits, just so proud. We did the concert and it was shown throughout the Michigan correctional system over and over, and a few of the people who were there kept in touch with me, because I gave them my address. I gave them my address. I felt very comfortable doing that. And to hear the stories, that’s where I was a social worker, too, because some ended up calling me Mom.

Charnley: Interesting.

Jones: Oh yes. Yes, because I was the closest thing to a mom they had ever had. And so that was something that I think changed my dancers, I think it changed me, and I think it had some impact. And some of them wrote me for a long time after that. But we just did so much with dance where people had never seen African Americans, and to see us do something that was well

done and it wasn't, you know, something that we were going to jail or something, but to have it as part of the culture. So we are not doing it now, but I felt that those twenty-five years were very good. The university always supported me; the provost always supported me.

Then, because I was doing all these things, and I moved from the School of Social Work and I was then an associate dean in the graduate school, and from there I moved to the provost's office as a diversity officer, and that's where I retired from.

Charnley: When you came back and you finished your Ph.D., did you come back to a tenure appointment or did it take a little time before you got tenure?

Jones: Oh, it took a while, because you don't automatically get it.

Charnley: Were you able to publish any of your dissertation, in either article form or book form?

Jones: Articles. The first one I did was one where I was comparing the analysis of the mothers with their babies from different cultures and using videotape. So I videotaped mothers with their babies in Africa and mothers with their babies here, and so most of my research was cross-cultural.

Charnley: When was your first experience in going to Africa?

Jones: That would have been—the first time, I know I was out of—

Charnley: You were an MSU prof at that time?

Jones: No, not the first time. Not the first time I went. So after that I think I did go with support from MSU, yes, and I went to, as I say, five different countries in West Africa and South Africa. I was able to get support from Michigan State, so I was sort of this strange person who wants to go off and do these things and, "Let her do it."

Charnley: What was your relationship with David Wiley and the African Study Center?

Jones: David Wiley and I are still good friends. We don't see each other as much as we used to, but I was very much—social work is my core, and my other affiliation is with the African Study Center over the years, and he was always supportive of what we were doing, because nobody else was doing anything like that. I got to know his family very well. We never were in the same place in Africa, but whenever I would come back, and then I was part of the core faculty of the African Study Center. So that's very much a good relationship, and I was doing something that no one else was doing.

Charnley: What were some of the courses you taught in social work?

Jones: I taught interviewing. I taught cross-cultural issues. I taught supervision. Oh, goodness. I'm trying to think. In the clinical area, where you are supposed to develop the core competencies, I think I did all of them except group work. But supervision, direct practice,

worked with couples, but I didn't do groups. My husband was the group [unclear]. But then administration. I didn't start it, because you could major—you could have administration as your track. That wasn't me; I preferred being involved directly with people and making a difference that way. But later on as I became more involved with the university, I did take on administrative roles, but my love had always been making an impact on people's lives directly.

Charnley: I think we talked before a little bit about Gwen Andrew and the fact that she just died not too long ago. As a dean, did you work with her and in what ways?

Jones: She had me do some work in her office, too, but I wasn't assigned to her office. She would use me for various projects, and I was on lots of committees out of the dean's office. And she'd say, "Dorothy, I want you to do such and such."

I'd say, "Okay, Dean Andrews." Because I was always on it with anything she wanted me to do.

As a matter of fact, even after she retired, a friend of mine that I had known from way back when I worked at Family and Child Services was a dear friend of Gwen's, and so we would get together each month for lunch and Gwen was still—and I didn't call her Gwen; I called her Dean Andrews. She'd say, "Call me Gwen."

"You're Dean Andrews to me."

But up until the last time we had a lunch together, which was too long, Nancy Press [phonetic] and I were talking about it later, that we let it slide and we shouldn't have, because we didn't see her right near the end. But we'd ask her which restaurant she wanted to go to. She loved the one in Williamston just as you go in the city, and it's nice, it's a homey kind of place.

It's Williamston. Then other times she'd say she wanted to go some other place, and we basically just listened, because she loved to talk and she knew so much about people. She knew so much and had such insights into what was going on. She'd say, "Oh, I don't know about that person." But it was never anything where she demeaned anyone. Her conversations and comments were always in the context of what is in the best interest of the university and what is in the best interest of our students' lives. I always thoroughly enjoyed her. As a matter of fact, when we first started doing it, I felt in awe of her, because she was one of the first women deans around here.

Charnley: One of the colleges other than human ecology.

Jones: Thank you. Yes.

Charnley: Was there anything in terms of her as an administrator that you modeled in your own experience as an assistant dean? You have different things when you're assistant dean.

Jones: Right. But I guess one thing that I think I learned from her is that you don't have to make quick decisions. Sometimes if you don't think about clearly of what it is you want to do, then something's not going to go right. And if people are trying to push you, then just tell them you aren't ready yet, and then you give it some thought and then you get back to them. So it was her saying, basically, to me that I had the skills, and don't let people bamboozle you into trying to make you do something that you don't want to do. As I said, she had confidence in me, and that's how a lot of people found out about me. That's how the provost found out about me.

Charnley: This was Lou Anna Simon?

Jones: Yes.

Charnley: When she was provost?

Jones: Yes. Yes.

Charnley: What was the nature of your work with her?

Jones: I was her diversity officer. That was the position I held when I retired. I still taught some, but primarily my job was diversity officer. And I'm bragging on myself—

Charnley: You should.

Jones: —because one of the things she said that was my responsibility was the Martin Luther King March prior to her—

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two, side one of the Dorothy Harper Jones interview.

When the last tape ended, she was talking about the Martin Luther King March and duties as associate dean, was it?

Jones: Yes. So because I was like half-time there and half-time in her office and so she said to me that, "Dorothy, I want the Martin Luther King celebration to be better than it has been."

So I said, "Okay." I didn't say it like that to her.

But then what I did was talk with people find out what had been happening and what was the reason people weren't marching. Some people didn't even know about Martin Luther King [Jr.]. You know, all kinds of things. So I had a committee and we worked on getting it out to people, getting information. We had captains from different schools. We had people who had roles to play. Then we always ended up at the Wharton Center, where there was a big celebration. They had had this in the past, but they were not well planned and it was people who really had some sincere interest in what Martin Luther King was about didn't take part in it. But we did it with dignity. We did it with people being involved. There was always the students representing the different organizations of color who had speaking parts, and they saw that as a big honor.

Then we had it where unit was expected to do something on Martin Luther King, and so therefore they had to let me know. So the day of Martin Luther King, because we had the march in the evening, I would go around to different sites, not in terms of checking up on them, but just wanted to see what they were doing. There were so many different ways they were doing it. Some had people write poetry, so you read your poetry, and somebody else did a skit. It was just so many different things, and some had roundtables where the faculty did presentations. Others had it where faculty and students did. "So it's okay with me, whatever you do, as long as it's

clear that you're honoring Martin Luther King's memory by sharing and moving forward, that we are not going backwards here." And a couple of marches, it was cold.

Charnley: Last year was cold.

Jones: Yes. But this was earlier and I said, "Well, we have no choice; we march." So it went down for a while, but now they are trying to make sure it continues as an important part, and it depends on who is really responsible, because when I retired, that was the end of my responsibility there.

Charnley: I think from her presence, though, the president now, it's indicating its importance.

Jones: Oh yes. We worked on it. Because our president is very smart. Some people say he's not, but I don't agree with that, because he sees when something is going well. He knows when it's appropriate and the right thing to do.

Charnley: Would you talk a little bit about some of the diversity efforts that you made, or at the time, in terms of talking about some of the issues facing students here at Michigan State that you encountered maybe earlier as a professor and then later on?

Jones: Well, one of the things is I would go around and speak to classes, I would go around and speak to units. Anything anybody asked questions about on diversity, I'd go and try to do it, and if I didn't know how, then I said, "Okay, I'm not so sure I am the best person for this, but I will

find a person for it." And then what I would try to do is to go with that person when he or she went to that unit. So it wasn't just one way of doing it. It was diversity, it's important, the provost has said this, now if we can be of any help to you, then we will do so, and then making it happen. So it was an open kind of thing, because some people didn't know where to start with diversity. I said, "Well, you don't have to start big. You've just got to start."

Then another thing we did, we had students go out in the community to different agencies and do something on that day and then, "Okay, if you come back and you found that was kind of fun, that you felt you were making a difference, all right, now, what if you look at doing that for the next five months and have your professor give you some credit for that?" So what we were doing is continually trying to expand the definition of what Martin Luther King is about and how you could take that to the next level. Actually, we had some work in terms of persons of color, because some of the students of color were feeling, you know, this is just lip service. I did some preaching. "You may feel this is lip service, but it's not, and if you get yourself involved, you'll see it's not lip service, and if somebody says something is lip service, then that should be your time to say, 'It ain't going to be lip service,' that Martin Luther King is important enough."

So Martin Luther King was sort of the lynchpin for a lot of things that we did, but it wasn't the only thing, but it was like—and you know the banners they have around now?

Charnley: Yes. That was your idea?

Jones: I started it. I started it. I said, "I want some banners. I want people to know that we're celebrating, so if people come on campus—."

"Oh, no, no, no."

I said, “No. No. No. If I go to people and try to get some money, can I get these banners?”

And so I had to work with people over in the plant area, because they’re the ones who’ve got to put them up. I had friends over there. Oh, I just—I was determined. And so now you go out and you see banners up for all occasions. So the first year we did it and then we took them down and then we got some more, so the second year we had even more up. So now they’re a regular thing. But now banners are seen as a way—because like the museum has theirs up all the time, and other places celebrate various things. Yes, Dorothy, you had something to do with that.

Charnley: That’s great.

Jones: And I say that to you just because we’re having this chat, but I was always interested in celebrating in a respectful, knowledgeable way, that it wasn’t just you get out there and walk, but we always had wonderful speakers. I remember we negotiated one person one year, everybody wanted him, Ernie—he had been one of the marchers in the Civil Rights Movement. And they wanted him and it was like, oh, golly, he’s so busy and everything. I stayed on the phone, but I mean, he finally came, and it was like they had a chance to feel even more connected from what they heard about his experiences with Martin Luther King.

So that was a piece that was just very exciting, because I thoroughly enjoyed the challenges that the students brought. But I also liked the idea of saying that there were things that could be changed, and with the provost’s support that I felt that I could try to make some of those changes.

Charnley: Were there any other faculty that you worked with that you think deserve great mention, that you worked closely with? Dr. Bonner, was he your replacement?

Jones: No, no. Ralph Bonner was—no, his title was very different from mine. He was technically—and I don't remember his title right now.

Charnley: Vice president.

Jones: But he was out of the president's office.

Charnley: And you were the provost?

Jones: Right. And so mine was in terms of students and the educational process and his was more looking at the bigger picture.

Charnley: Staff retention, recruitment.

Jones: That's right. One of the great experiences was being a part of the provost staff meetings where you see how things get done. I am on the sesquicentennial committee and working at trying to make all of that celebration. It's interesting because people on that committee are from so many different backgrounds, they have their own agendas, but they also spent a lot of money and you can buy some things and they are expensive, but that's what you do when you celebrate

a sesquicentennial. And then who's going to be the speakers and the parade and all of these. So it's fun. So that's one committee that when I was asked to be on it I said, "Of course, that would be fun."

The other has been that in the College of Social Science I, along with a couple other people, decided that we want to stay connected with each other. We were retired faculty, but we thought there were some things that we could do, and that we thought we could mentor students, we could do presentations. There were about five of us. I was the only female and the rest were retired profs from Social Science, and we started meeting on every—let's see. It maybe twice a month that we would meet and we would talk about what were some of the things we could do that would be of benefit to the units in the college and that we could feel that we were making a contribution. So we did some presentations to students. We had them come in and we worked with them on various things. But then lo and behold, guess what? This is now a university committee, and they have meetings once a month. Sometimes I'm able to go and sometimes I'm not, but it's now that the emeriti faculty has agendas of things that it can do. I think I prefer when it was smaller, because I knew everybody and we were all on the same page, and I'm not saying the leadership now is not good, but it was like we could take a project and we could look at trying to make it happen. If you've got more people, it doesn't go as fast.

Charnley: That's true.

Jones: But one of the things I think that did happen, some people thought that we were overstepping our bounds—we didn't hear this directly—that we were doing things that people in the departments, in those units, should be doing in terms of providing that to students. Well, if it

was identified and we were available, we thought that was okay, but—yes, protocol. But we enjoyed it. That's a committee that, as I say, continues to function and it has meetings once a month. I have not been to the last three, not because I don't support it, but that I had conflicts. But it still functions.

Charnley: When did you retire?

Jones: I've been retired now, oh, goodness, at least five years. I miss it. If I wasn't doing something, if I wasn't teaching at Smith, I would really miss it, because I do enjoy academia and when I'm asked to do something here on campus, I do. Like this, I could have said, no, but I didn't because—

Charnley: We're glad you didn't.

Jones: No, and it's because Michigan State has been a part of my life for a long time and I'll be interested in what comes of this. So I think it's an excellent idea and I think that emeriti faculty will be pleased, are pleased about this. Oral history is just something that's really a wonderful way of capturing people. It's very different from just if they are writing something. And you're a good interviewer.

Charnley: Thank you. Better than I used to be. [laughs]

What's the nature of your teaching at Smith? In the summers?

Jones: Yes. Smith has it, I may have said this, but Smith has it where their program is very different from any—I think there's one other one in the country where all of the classes are held during the summer, then the students go to agencies all over the country and they are there for nine months and they are supervised in their training by someone who is in their agency. They still have to send in monthly reports to Smith on what they're doing, what they're learning, this kind of thing, but on the ground they are not interacting. Then a faculty from Smith has to go on site and do checkups to see how things are going and making sure that the student is getting the kind of experience that they want. So that's the way that works. Then, as I say, they come back to Smith in the summertime for ten weeks, and you have to do two field placements of nine months and then three summers at Smith.

The course I'm teaching this time is the first time I will have taught this course. I have taught direct classes. I've taught supervision. I've taught lots of different ones. But the person who usually teaches this course is on sabbatical, and so they asked me if I'd teach it, so this will be the first time I've taught it, and it's called "Knowing, Not Knowing, and Muddling Though."

So for me it gives a lot of different options of what we cover, but I'm framing this as a very positive kind of thing, that they know a lot and that they really are not going to have to do much muddling through if they remember that they know a lot and that they can ask questions, that they don't have to feel that they know it all, because you don't. After all these years, I continue to learn. So I go in about a week's time, so putting me on the schedule was really something because, as I say, I leave Sunday and I don't expect to get back here until in October. So the timing was very good.

So with Smith and all, on a very personal level I have a suite, I have daily maid service, I don't have to cook one thing, and they have good food. And then you get this opportunity to eat

with the students, you get the opportunity to look forward to them, and I hope it continues to go well. I'm not usually superstitious or anything, but someone told me that my class is already full.

Charnley: This is a graduate-level class?

Jones: Oh yes. This is seniors. They will have their MSWs. They will graduate the day before I leave. So these are students that I know and I'm glad to be a part of their graduation.

Charnley: In looking at your career at Michigan State outreach, both to the community and beyond seems to be an important theme in your experience, that and the land-grant mission. Would you care to talk a little bit about that?

Jones: If I talk about the land-grant prospective, it is that that definition can mean a lot of things and that this university is supposed to be open and available to all citizens, and with that in mind, I don't try to do everything. What I do with people when I go out in the community representing Michigan State, I try to do the best that I can so that whatever it is, they look on MSU as being a viable part of the community and it has something to offer. And if you come here to this campus, you will find something, and come to the programs we have. You will find that there's so much happening at Michigan State. So I see myself as an ambassador for Michigan State, because I continue to have a good relationship with it.

So the land-grant piece is in place. We're supposed to be doing for the citizens of this state. I remember very early in my career we had CIC fellows, and we would go and meet

people quite frequently in Chicago from other schools, and then we were learning from each other how we could do something back at our school. So that was a piece. It's just that a school like this has so many options of ways that it can use its talents and its resources, and I think that Michigan State does a good job there.

I mean, I've been out in the sheep pasture. I just have tried to, not exactly my area of study or anything, but of looking at the whole thing, and when I think about this here, I remember we had something where they took us around to all of the places on campus. That was phenomenal, because I don't think I would have ever gotten there. But that was part of us knowing what's happening here, how it fits with the land-grant focus, and making a difference in this state and in the country and in the world. As I said, when I would go to Africa I was always indicating that I was representing Michigan State. If I was dancing or if I was in a village who'd never heard of Michigan State, that was okay, too, I still would tell them.

Charnley: That's great. I'd like to thank you, on behalf of the project, for your time and especially your insights. Thank you very much.

Jones: Thank you. It's been a pleasure talking with you. You're good in the sense of you say a few things and then, I don't know if it's just me, but you prompt. You give good prompts. So I appreciate being asked.

Charnley: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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