

SAFIYYAH SHAHID: How familiar are you with us, with the school?

MARISSA HOWARD: I've interviewed several people so far, so I think I'm a little familiar, but I would love to get a little tour, maybe, afterwards.

SS: OK! It might be junky now, because, you know, this weekend they clean up. But we'll do a little tour now, OK? [Inaudible comment]

MH: Is this your bulletin board of inspiration for your students?

SS: Yes, for me and the students. And so I started—and this is the thing about me. I started out with just a little bit of stuff. And it just grows and grows and grows [*laughs*]. And so things happen, like with Andre [Dickens] became the mayor, I put his picture up there. And so it just sort of grows. And also it has some that are my favorite people up there: Nina Simone—everybody. Everybody that's up there, I like them. I didn't get to see—do you believe I did not get to go to the exhibition there at the High Museum [portraits of Barak and Michelle Obama], because I kept thinking it was going to be over on the 22nd, but it was over on the 20th. But that's OK, I have some pictures.

MH: Yeah, it just means having to go to Washington.

SS: Exactly, which I do plan to go at some point. So that'll work out for me.

MH: What did it mean, having Andre Dickens being elected?

SS: Well, it was important to me, from my point of view. I did vote for him. And I wanted to see—maybe somewhat of a younger person, maybe someone who can have a better connection with a lot of the young people who live in Atlanta, who have moved to Atlanta, and he has experience, and I just thought that out of the two candidates that it ended up being, that he would be the best choice. And so I think some of my—I teach fourth grade, and some of them thought he was the best choice, too, because one day I could not think of his name, and one of the students said his name, so they were aware of what was going on in the city of Atlanta. So I think he's going to be good for the city.

MH: And he's a product of the school system.

SS: Yes, yes. Do you want me to put my mask on?

MH: No, it's OK. It's up to you.

SS: OK

MH: Well, for the record, do you mind saying your name?

SS: No, I do not. My name is Safiyyah Shahid. I am the fourth-grade teacher here at the Mohammed Schools. I was formerly principal of the elementary and the high school, and then I was appointed director in 2005. So I served from 2005 to 2012 as director and everything

else that goes with that--which means custodian, that means mama, grandmama—all of those things.

MH: How long have you been here at the school?

SS: I came to the school in 1986, and so I retired in 2012, so that's close to forty years. Prior to that, my children attended the Mohammed Schools. It was not Mohammed Schools then; it was—it started out being the University of Islam. And then after Imam Mohammed became the leader of this community, then the name was changed to Sister Clara Mohammed in honor of his mother, that's what the elementary was named after. And then we—this community chose to name our high school after Imam Mohammed, so that's W. D. Mohammed High School right there.

So a long time seems like I have been here—well, I actually became a member of this community—I started coming to the meetings in 1967. That's when we had our temple over on Bankhead. And then there was a process then called—you had to write off for your X; the X would be after your name, so it's like your last name is dropped, and you have an X after your name. And so I remember getting my letter—finally getting a letter that was accepted. I could not believe [inaudible] the letters I wrote. And there was a form, but I said, "Now, how could I make this mistake—whatever." But anyway, 1968 was when I officially became a part of the Nation of Islam. And then, as I'm sure you know, in 1975, we made a change, under the Imam Mohammed, so I guess I've been here a long time, over fifty years. Over fifty years.

MH: I believe I've probably interviewed a lot of your alumni, so far.

SS: I'm sure you have!

MH: So what has it been like, seeing so many of your students grow up and some still work in the community?

SS: Yeah, well, one of my students, one of my former students is now the principal of our school, Khalil Ali. And he reminds me of the time that I suspended him. [*Both laugh.*] But it's wonderful to see, but we recently had one of our alumni to pass. We had her—we call it Janaza. Her funeral service was last Thursday. And so I got the opportunity to see a lot of those students around the time that she had graduated. So it's good to see them, good to see them being successful. Many of them are very successful, and in ways that—not just because they have a career, but they're just successful in terms of just their own individual selves. Many of them are married. Most of them married Muslim, and so they have children—really, the children of those students are in the school. So actually in my class, I have one, two—one, two—two students whose parents were my students, were my high school students. And so that's sort of across the board in many of these classes. So it feels pretty good. It feels good. I

can see the difference from then and now. But I think even now, these fourth-graders that I have and the ones who are in my class now, I think they're going to outdo their parents. They're so smart. Not that those students weren't, but it's a difference.

MH: Do you think that they're—when you said a “change,” is that also with the Muslim faith or how they're living, or--?

SS: Well, what I do find, all of the students in this class—and all of them are not Muslim—but I find that all of the thirteen—I had fourteen; one, her parent moved up north, and so it was just hard for her to get her back and forth—but the students who I have in this class, Muslim and those who are not Muslim, they have very supportive parents. And not that the others didn't have, because that was one of the ways that we were able to sustain our school, was because we had supportive parents. Those parents, they wanted their children to get an Islamic education. And they did everything they had to do. Now, these parents don't volunteer as much as the other, the older, parents, and I guess because of the times or people are—have better jobs or have jobs, and so they don't volunteer as much. But the children, though, they want their children to have an Islamic education. And they do all they can to make sure that that happens, and they're young. Those parents, they're young. The ones that I've dealt with and I had, the high school students, they were older. But these are younger parents. These are parents who, like, just had a baby and have three or four kids. But they have—I think they have a stronger outlook than maybe the other, older parents that we had. I mean, we grew up in the Nation of Islam, and so we respected the tenets of the religion. But these younger parents now, they have a choice, you know. All of them don't necessarily follow along in the footsteps that we provided. And they're their own independent thinkers. And so in turn, their children are independent thinkers. But they are children, too, I mean they are not perfect, believe it. When I get home, the first thing I do is change my clothes and take a nap. [*Both laugh.*] They're smart, and they are full of energy. Full of energy. But I love them, though. They're—I think that they will create a wonderful future for African-Americans. I think these children are going to be among the foremost leaders for the society. They will be—they're balanced. I want to speak about us, a long time ago. We were not as balanced as we could have been, but anyway—but these children, they just have access to more—not necessarily material things, but just more access to knowledge, you know, can get knowledge. And these children actually seek out knowledge on their own. They tell me things. They bring things to me. And so I think that they are really going to be valuable to the society.

MH: I love how optimistic you are. And maybe that's—maybe I haven't talked to enough teachers, but I think that—I think that non-teachers might have a certain opinion of kids and

education, but coming from a long-time teacher, I think that's wonderful thing to hear, that you're optimistic about what their future is.

SS: Yes, and I fuss at them, and this, that, and the other—

MH: Well, that's a good teacher, too [*laughs*].

SS: Yeah, so—but anyway, keep going.

MH: Did you grow up here?

SS: Yes, I did.

MH: In Decatur or in Atlanta?

SS: In Atlanta, born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up in Grady Homes housing project, which was later on—well, you might know that area. It's very close to Grady Hospital. I was born at Grady Hospital.

MH: Grady baby

SS, *laughing*: Grady baby! See, you know!

MH, *laughing*: I know.

SS: Yeah, a Grady baby. Attended Young Street Elementary School, and after that I went to David T. Howard High School.

MH: Oh, that's—I know where that is.

SS: Yeah, so it's changed now. It's now a middle school. But I visited the school not too long ago, and they were asking for alumni to come and talk about how things were and so forth and so on, so I think it's going to be a great place for students who are attending now. And I went to Spelman College, graduated from Spelman. And I went to Troy University, and I started work on my PhD, and you know, one of those starters, you didn't just quite fit in. But I think I reached a point where I was satisfied with where I was and knowing that I'm a student at heart, so I'll never stop learning. Students teach me, I teach them, and in turn, you know the whole Creation teaches you. The society teaches you, what's happening teaches you, so that's fine with me, too.

MH: What was it like attending Spelman during that time?

SS: Spelman—I love Spelman. I'm about to celebrate my fifty-fifth reunion with some ladies. And Spelman—if you went to Spelman, you were hot stuff. [*Both laugh.*]

MH: Oh, yeah.

SS: You were hot stuff, and it was a wonderful experience. And I went to Spelman several times, because initially I went to Spelman, I left after a couple of years, and I went back to get my degree. So I saw maybe several generations of Spelmanites. But Spelman was always about excellence, always about leadership—women leading. And so really everything

that the school did really supported that idea of women being leaders for society, and not just society as a whole, but society in your home, society in your personal life, and as a Spelman woman, you know, you were just expected to excel, to step out, not just to be in the ordinary. And Spelman, their whole focus was to make sure that that happened. And it did, and all the women I know—many women who attended at the same time that I did, and they all did things that were outstanding. You know, many innovations for me—first I couldn't believe that I became a Muslim, OK. My daddy was a Baptist preacher, so I grew up in the church. And I also attended Ebenezer. My daddy was a circuit preacher, so that meant we traveled on the weekends to places around Georgia, because he had several churches that—that's how, that was the structure, you know. One pastor didn't necessarily preach every Sunday. Churches was—they shared. You know, maybe two churches, two congregations shared a facility. So my daddy, for instance, he preached in Lexington, Georgia, which is close to Athens, and he would always go there on the second Sunday of the month. On the first Sunday of the month he went somewhere else. Third Sunday he went somewhere else. I think he went to Lexington maybe twice a month, the second and the fourth Sundays.

But, you know, of course, my family was totally shocked when I became a Muslim, but they are all for it now, because of what it represented. Maybe at the time it seemed as if it was a threat, because of the times, you know. We're talking about the '60s, Nation of Islam was promoting, you know, separation and so forth. And people really didn't know a lot—the general community, even African Americans, feared the Nation of Islam in terms of well, maybe just being too radical. That was what they thought, that it was too radical, because of, you know, some of the ideas and the ideals that were promoted. But here I am today, and I consider myself to be a, you know, a woman of the world. No separation but, of course, a person who believes in—that equal justice should be given to everybody, equal opportunity, that no one should be—should feel that they are less than, marginalized. But we see that, we see that happening; but it's so—in my work with my students, I try to design my classes so that we touch on those issues, but they have an understanding. They have a historical understanding. They understand, you know, what's going on in this society, and just give them some points of view that will expand them—not make them just small, so that they can participate, they can be participants. And our mission statement says that our goal as the founders of the school is to develop global citizens. That's who we want, global citizens, people who are—you know, you are welcome around the entire world, and you see the value of everybody in the entire world.

So that's all of that, my foundation with the Nation of Islam. There's a saying that says, in this religion, "What's for you will not pass you by." And I strongly believe that. The Nation of

Islam was for me. I never saw that, I didn't see it coming! But it didn't pass me by. And it actually helped me to grow, grow into the person that I like. I like myself, because I'm—I like to say I'm easy to get along with. Now, my sisters wouldn't [*Both laugh.*] agree with that a lot, and maybe some other people would not either. But in my head I'm easy to get along with. And I know I only want the best for everybody that I meet, and that doesn't mean that everybody that I meet, I'm going to get along with that person or whatever. But in my heart I want the best for that person. And I want that person to want the best for me, too.

MH: Could I bring it back a little bit to when the Nation of Islam did come to Atlanta on Bankhead Highway, I want to know—

SS: Well, actually, you know, it actually didn't start there. It started on Edgewood, and it was also on Auburn Avenue. And I can remember, when I was—let's go to your question, though, because I'll take you way back—

MH: Well, it was part of—I'm just curious about that time or who brought it here or who, like, what was that first meeting like, like what was--

SS: Well, I don't know that particular history. What I do know of the early, early history is—and this is when I was living at Grady Homes and a young girl, maybe I was eleven or twelve—but there was a temple on Edgewood Avenue. There's some stores there now. This is right at Edgewood Avenue near Jackson Street. And you know, Ebenezer's down at the corner. So in going to Sunday school, people always said to me and my sisters, "Now, when you get to that temple, cross the street, [*laughs*] because they'll pull you in. They'll make you be a Muslim." We laugh about that, even now, that that was the thinking of people. But that temple was there, and I would have to go back and check some of my notes to find out when it actually—when that actually was. But that had to have been, maybe late '50s and in the '60s. But I'll have to check my notes to see. And then after that there was also—they also met on Auburn Avenue at the Oddfellows Building, so they had meetings there, too. But I clearly remember the temple being right there on Edgewood. So and then after that I guess, you know, the congregation grew, and they moved—were able to purchase 1225 Bankhead, but that's another story, too. I used to know that story, but I don't think about it, so I just don't want to tell you anything that I have to come back and change.

MH: So, many of your friends—did many of your friends also join or—

SS: No, not many. As a matter of fact, in Grady Homes there was a family—I'm looking at my apartment at Grady Homes now, facing out to Decatur Street. We lived on Decatur Street, but you had to go down in the court to get to the apartment. And so in the next building one of my friends, who ran track with me in high school, her family became Muslim.

MH: Is that Quran?

SS: No, no, no. Quran—

MH: OK--because I think she said she also ran? No, no—I'm sorry. It's Jamella Jihad, she said she ran track.

SS, *laughing*: OK. No, it was not Quran. So that family, though, their last name was Guilford, they lived in the next building in a five-room apartment—because my family did, too. We had a big family. And they were Muslim, so it was sort of a strange thing for the community. But, you know, the Muslims in those days, they didn't care what you thought. They didn't care that you thought that they were odd or different or whatever. And even Betty Ann—I need to get a tissue. When I get started talking, I get excited. So even Betty Ann, though she was pretty quiet and so forth and so on, she ran track—she was a great track star. And, but, you know, we didn't discuss religion. We did not hold that against her. We just said, "She's Muslim, she's strange," and that's the extent of it. So and in high school, I really didn't get acquainted with the Nation of Islam until after I graduated from high school. I knew a little bit about Muslims, and I knew about Elijah Muhammad. I really didn't know about Clara Muhammad, but I knew about the Nation of Islam. Because, you know, the brothers would be out selling papers and so forth, so I knew it then. And then, I—let me tell you something else that my mother never—now, remember my dad is a preacher, now. And my mother, though, I can remember coming home one day, and she had a record on, playing on the phonograph. And the record said, "The white man's heaven is the Black man's hell." That was Louis Farrakhan. But that was not his name then. I can't think of what it was. I'll think of it in a minute. But she was playing that record, and I was just totally surprised about that, that she was doing that. I mean, I only heard him maybe one or two times. But there was an awareness, though, of maybe not you becoming a Muslim, but there was an awareness of the inequities that were, you know, prevalent at that time. And so I was just surprised at my mother. I mean, she was—I was surprised that she would play that.

MH: Was that part of the larger Black Power movement and awareness at that time?

SS: Well, it was beginning to be, because what I also recall is that, you know, segregation was strong. I went to David T. Howard High School, which was all Black. Smith High School was off of Memorial Drive, which—we got many of the books from Smith High School. They said "Smith High School" in the books. So there was not among that group of African Americans, I would say, older, who protested or, you know, made waves or whatever. But the seeds were growing. Just—even that record, that—where did she get it from? You know. And that she played it, she played it in the house, [*laughing*] and she wasn't going to play

it where anybody else could hear it, and certainly not my daddy. [*Both laugh.*] But she was a remarkable woman. When I look back now and see, you know, just the things that she did. And she would ask us, too—at that time the buses were segregated—the buses were not totally desegregated, but they was getting to that point. And I remember we had moved from Grady Homes, we had moved to out here in Decatur; and we would have to ride the bus. Well, when we got on the bus, there were quite a number of students who had moved out in this area. So when we had to rise the bus, of course, we were standing up, because the white people were already on the bus, because they stayed further out; they already had the seats when we got on the bus. But we were, like, beginning to be little agitators, you know, just standing up, just staring at people and so forth and so on, making people uncomfortable. And so the beginnings, I would say.

MH: So where did your wanting to agitate, where—I mean—

SS: That's me [*laughs*].

MH: But still—I mean, I guess as young kids, you know, you—

SS: But I couldn't understand why—I could not understand why things were as they were. I just couldn't get it. I just couldn't accept it. Inferior? Show me why! You know, so forth and so on, so—and then a number of people, we were like, fifteen, sixteen, so, you know, quite naturally now, we were starting to think that way.

MH: Mm-hm. So this was also—Muhammad Ali also, did he—he joined the Muslim faith around this time also?

SS: I think—let me see, now. I know he was—I became a Muslim in '68, you know, with that letter that I had written. I think Malcolm X had passed, like, in '66 or '67, one of those years. And so that means that Muhammad Ali was already in the community, because, you know, he and Malcolm were good friends. So he was already in the community, and I guess maybe he became a part of it, maybe early '60s? I'm not quite sure. I just looked at a whole documentary about him, but I guess I just wasn't paying attention.

MH: Yeah, I just recently watched the movie *One Night in Miami*.

SS: Oh, you did? [*Inaudible, as both talk*] conversation.

MH: Yeah, it was interesting, because—

SS: I haven't watched it yet, but I want to watch it.

MH: It's a great, interesting—you know, it's a fictional story, but just the conversations and—

SS: Malcolm and Muhammad Ali—

MH: --it brings back what you were saying about, you know, other people thinking that he was a little strange or just a little—

SS: Right

MH: --odd, but he was, you know, sure of his convictions.

SS: And then, at the end, they said that Muhammad Ali became one of the most beloved people in the world. People all over the world loved him, because he stood up for what he believed. That's so critical. And so I found that, even among my friends, when I became Muslim, I mean, I could sense doubt in people's minds, even my family, of course, because that's not how we were brought up. And—but as time went on, that didn't—that wasn't an issue anymore. You know, it was more like, you know, "She's a human being, just like us." It's no, you know. Even groups I joined—I joined the Friends of Scott Candler Library. I loved the library, loved books. And so I can recall that, initially when I joined that group, it was—I could tell, you know, there was a distance. But I think that—well, I know as they got to know me, then there was no difference at all. It was just—some of them come to the Masjid when my husband passed in 2019, so many of them came. Well, I know some came, because they wanted to see [laughs] how we conducted our funeral services, probably. But I have good friends in that group, and that's really—I think it's people getting to know you. You know, they have to put away all the pre-conditioned ideas and just get to know that person, who that person is. And really, people—maybe they'll understand me. But many people do, that we really have the same beliefs, pretty much. You know, justice, belief in one God, and so forth and so on. I think, with Christians, the biggest thing is Jesus. You know, they feel like, "Well, you all don't believe in Jesus." Yes, we do believe in Jesus! But we believe in Jesus—we don't believe Jesus is God. But we believe in Jesus and the work that Jesus did and so forth and so on.

MH: He's one of the prophets.

SS: Yes. And he's you know, spoke about throughout the Qur'an and the work that he did. But the average person doesn't really know that. They don't—many people don't even want to read the Qur'an, because they think it'll change—it might conflict with something that they already have established for themselves. But I think that the world is growing, and so many things are happening that we all see that we better some together or else, you know. Those are my thoughts.

MH: So I wanted to bring it back to Ebenezer. Was that when Martin Luther King, Sr., was the preacher?

SS: Yes, he was. And that would be before Dr. King came, Dr. King, Jr. As I said, you know, my daddy was a circuit preacher. And so sometimes when he went to these various rural

churches, we didn't necessarily go. So my sisters and I and my mother, we would sometimes go to Ebenezer. My mother was a member of Ebenezer, and so we all were members of Ebenezer—we joined Ebenezer. So it was a family tradition. So Daddy King was the minister at the time that I was there as a young girl. And, you know, I was going—probably three, four, five years old, whatever. I remember vaguely getting baptized, but all of us went to Ebenezer. We all participated in choir, the BTU [Baptist Training Union, Sunday evening], the Sunday school, the everything. And Mrs. Alberta King, who was Daddy King's wife, she loved my sister, my sister who was two years younger than me. She considered her her adopted daughter. So it was a very close relationship. So—and maybe you're leading toward Dr. King and me working for him. *[Both laugh.]*

MH: That's what was first—when Quran mentioned it, that's what she said.

SS: Yeah. So—and I—the sister who was two years younger than me, she's like the timekeeper. I'll have to ask her. I said, "Now, when did I go over there? When did I start going there or whatever?" She initially was the first person to go to babysit, because I was at Spelman. I had something to do, and I couldn't go. They had to ask me to take the job, and I agreed that I would take the job, but I couldn't go that particular night, so my sister went. And she tells this funny story that, when—this is on—this particular house was on Johnson Avenue. She said that when she went to take my place that she was on the porch and that there was a dog barking next door, and she thought the dog was going to come over to where she was standing. She said she kept saying, "Coretta! Coretta!" See, Coretta didn't know that we called her by her first name, whenever, you know—it's just—that's all I heard people call her, so we called her that, too. "Coretta! Coretta!" She said Mrs. King came to the door *[laughs]*, and she told Mrs. King who she was, "I'm Hazel's sister"—my name used to be Hazel—"Hazel's sister, and she can't come tonight, so I'm taking her place."

And so she said Mrs. King said, "I wondered who that was called me by my first name." That's her. That is classic Coretta King.

So that was—so the next time that she needed a sitter, I was the person who went, thank God. *[Laughs]* My sister wasn't going back with that dog. That's the story, anyway. But yeah, I guess because, you know, I was active in the church, attended Spelman, and they needed someone about my age to babysit, and so that's how I got involved with them. But I knew her, I knew Dr. King. We called him "M.L." I'm just saying, that's how it was, you know. We just spoke of them in that way. Not to their face—

MH: This was senior or junior?

SS: This is junior—M. L., they called him “ML” and called his brother “AD.” But—so that was unofficial. Officially I started working—and maybe I started out maybe one or two nights a week, and then—it depended on how busy her schedule was. You know, it might be three or four times. Sometimes she—I couldn’t have my own life, because I had to go and see about those kids. So that ended up—we started out on Johnson Avenue, and then we ended up on Sunset Avenue, and I think that’s where I spent most of the time. And that’s where I got to see a lot of people who would be coming in and out of that house to see Dr. King or to see her. But it was a wonderful experience. It was a teaching experience for me. You want to know about that?

MH: I want to know about everything! [*Both laugh.*] These are some wonderful stories, yeah.

SS: Mrs. King—in a sense, you could say she was a businesswoman. That’s how she wanted her house run. And so you would probably think that you’re going to babysit for an African-American woman, and you know, things are going to be kind of casual. Uh-uh, [*laughs*] it’s not like that. You came on time; you had your specific duties; there was a—she had a cook, Ms. Walker; there was another lady, Ms. Harris—she was there during the—Ms. Walker, Ms. Harris were there during the daytime. I came in the afternoon, early evening, to, you know, sort of bathe the children, lay their clothes out, make sure they got their pajamas on, lay their clothes out, get them ready for the next day. But Mrs. King, she didn’t play. She didn’t. There was no, like, palsy-walsy, none of that. That was not in the picture. She ran that house like she was just in charge, she’s in charge. And her expectations of you were high. She expected you to do whatever your job was, to do that and do it well. She wanted you to be presentable at all times. You worked with the children, wanted you to use correct English, and she was comfortable in her role. She was comfortable in—she was comfortable in who she was. And she considered herself, in my opinion, she was not just an ordinary woman. She was something else.

MH: She was the muscle or the brains behind all the—

SS: But she loved that Dr. King, though. She loved that man, and she would call him “Murton,” that’s how she pronounced his name, “Murton.” And so we would talk about him sometimes. I remember asking her once how did they get started, how did they meet. And I think—because he was at Boston University, and I cannot think of the name of her school, but anyways, she was at some type of music school, I just can’t think of the name of it. But anyway, we were talking, and she said somebody told her, I think, that he wanted to talk to her, that he was interested in her [*laughs*]. She told me, she said, “I [*inaudible*] talk to [*inaudible*] that sharp man.” That was about as much as she said, but see, she ended up with him. And she admired

him, respected him—you know, he was just so smart. And so kind, too, such a kind man. And a lot of times people find out that the person that they're idolizing that their humanity doesn't show through, but his did. He would make it a point—everybody who worked in that house, he made it a point to speak to you, to ask how you're doing and so forth and so on. And he was just like a regular person in the house. He was not stand-offish or anything like that. And so I admired him, too, because, you know, I saw the real person. Maybe more so than other people, because here I am, I'm seeing him at least three times a week, but at the same time, he wasn't always there. You know, he had a lot of a lot of traveling to do, and everybody wanted him, wanted his attention and so forth. And so he had his business, too. What else do you want to know about the house? It was—as I think back, I mean--I guess, at the time, I just wasn't registering that this is something historical.

MH: That's what I was—that's sort of what I was leading to was, I mean, I guess sometimes you can tell someone just has—there's something special, or there's something, but I mean, that's—I guess you—you said you didn't register quite that it was going to be as historical—

SS: Right. In a sense I knew that this was a very special person, but in another sense—now, think about this, remember when they were in—when they were at the Dexter Street Baptist Church in Alabama, and somebody tried to bomb their home? But think about—I never even thought about just working in the house and getting bombed. It just didn't occur to me that something drastic would happen, but it could have. I mean, those were the times, and people had—some people had those intentions. But it just didn't—I never felt afraid, for some reason. Maybe because I was young, I didn't feel afraid. But I was aware, though, of all the dynamics that were going on, so I was aware of the riots in California and so forth and so on, those things that just triggered a lot of discontent. So I was aware of that, but within the house I was not afraid, the home was well-run. He wasn't there often; but when he was there, it was like he was the center. He was the center and such a human being. I observed that, and those sensitivities are still with me of how he was—even though he had all this fame and was getting more famous all along, that wasn't going to his head. And then the people that were working with him, they felt like they were a team—you know, Reverend Abernathy, Hosea Williams—

MH: John Lewis

SS: John Lewis. Of course, I didn't see them as much, but I saw, you know, Dr. Abernathy more, because they were, you know, seemed to me closer. But very strategic man. And I don't know if you know this, but I told this to my students, and I read it somewhere, that when Dr. King was fifteen, he made a speech. He was in an oratorical contest, he was

somewhere in Georgia. And when people looked at that later, they—from what I'm recalling—they determined that that speech that he made at that oratorical contest was like a forerunner for that "I Have a Dream." Have you ever heard that?

MH: I have not, but I'm definitely going to look that—

SS: Look that up. [*Laughs*] Don't say, "Safiyah, you must have been dreaming."

[*Laughs*]

MH: I mean, but it makes, you know, so much of our thoughts—we sort of have these through lines of thoughts from such a young age or ideas, and so wherever they came from, who knows? It wouldn't surprise me.

SS: Right, right. And have you read his speech, "Beyond Vietnam?"

MH: I have not.

SS: That's—I think you can get that off of Youtube. It's amazing. It's almost like another Dr. King. I just—I happened upon that speech, and I was really surprised. I think you should read it, too.

MH: I will.

SS: I can tell you another story that got on the *Story Corps* on PBS. So how about this? I told you I came from a big family, so my sister was going to some type of program at The Waluhaje, which used to be on West Lake, which West Lake sort of led to Simpson Road and all of that. And she was—my brother-in-law was going with her, my other sister's husband. He was going to be her escort. But when they got to the door of the big gala, he had to have on a tuxedo for that kind of elite event. So how about she calls me, and I'm at Dr. King's house—

MH, *laughing*: I know where this is going.

SS: "Does Dr. King have a—"

"Yes, he does have a tuxedo."

"Well, can I—?"

"No! No, you cannot. Don't put me in that position. Please do not put me in that position."

She insisted. She's older than me; she insisted. "Please. We'll bring it right back."

I said, "Well, look, they might get—" they weren't at home—"they might get back before you get back!"

MH: What if something spills on it? What if something—

SS: Do you believe that—

MH: Was he even the same size?

SS: [Inaudible] because my brother-in-law was short, so he could wear it. They came and got the tuxedo. I was so nervous. I was nervous the rest of the night, because I kept thinking that Mrs. King or Dr. King would come home before they were able to get that tuxedo back.

MH: At least it was before social media, where maybe they weren't—somebody was taking a picture, being like, "That looks very familiar." [Both laugh.]

SS: They got back—oh, my God they got back—before *they* got back. And then the next thing I know, they're telling the story to *Story Corps*! [MH laughs.] And I wasn't even present! And so three of them—three of my sisters, they're telling the story. They all know about it, they're laughing about it. And the lady, whoever interviewed them, wanted to know, "Well, where's Hazel?" That was me. "Where is she? Why isn't she here? Why isn't she telling the story?" I'm glad I wasn't there, because—anyway, I don't think I forgave them for that. I guess I did, but—putting me in that position, and then you're going public with it?

MH: So did Coretta ever find out about it?

SS: No! Not that I know of. She didn't hear it from me, and I was the only one—hopefully she didn't hear it on PBS, or wherever the *Story Corps* was. But anyway, they think it's a funny story that needs to be told, so I just let them go ahead. And then guess what? One of my friends called me early on a Saturday morning. She said, "Safiyah, they're talking about you on the radio"—and it was the story! They were repeating it. *Story Corps* was telling about—but by that time Coretta had passed, so, thank God.

MH: I guess the children maybe could find—could hear the story, but now it's just a great story.

SS: It is, it is. But I'm still not laughing about it.

MH: Was it monogrammed on the inside, do you think? [Inaudible comment]

SS: I shot that suit—handed that suit to them, and it was out of my hands then.

MH: So did any of your other friends contact you, or try to get—you know, just hang out?

SS: No, mm-mm.

MH: Because no one really knew what the historical significance, I guess—or people were sort of knowing, but not—

SS: Right

MH: And unfortunately, I think so much of his life is in retrospect now, because it was cut so short.

SS: Exactly. But he did and said so much in such a short period of time, you know. And I remember one of his last speeches was, longevity has its place. But he goes on to say that, you know, he knows that—in other words, his life is on the line. He’s—“I don’t fear any man.” That’s the speech where he said, “I’ve seen—I’ve gone to the mountain-top.” And so he was aware, I guess, with greatness, you—especially the times and how people were feeling. You couldn’t help but know he possibly could not live very long.

MH: Well, especially, the Kennedys and Malcolm X—

SS: Exactly. There was a lot going on. We think there’s a lot going on now, but just think about that period of time. There was so much going on.

MH: Where were you when you found out?

SS: Let me think. In a way, I wanted to say that I was in the library at Spelman, but, you know, I think I’m getting that mixed up, because I think I was in the library at Spelman—remember when the astronauts went into orbit and then it exploded? So I get it mixed up with—where was I at that time? So I have to think. I have to think, but I do know that I went to the house. I wasn’t working for them then, and I do know that I went to the house to speak to Coretta. I remember that. I went—she was back in the back bedroom. I can just see her now. She was in the bed, and you know, we just talked for a few minutes. There were so many people around, there were so many people there. But I have to ask my sister where was I when I got the news, because she remembers everything. Not the one who I loaned the tuxedo to—we’re not going to ask her anything! *[Both laugh.]*

MH: So she felt comfortable to talk to you in that—in those moments.

SS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, she did. We didn’t talk long. There was a whole line of people. But, you know, I just expressed my condolences, and it was a sad time. But she held up wonderfully. She didn’t—I mean, she didn’t show that—any face other than strength to the public. And that was her, that was her M.O., that she was always going to be in control, in control of her reactions and her actions. That was her.

MH: It also reminds me a lot of Jackie Kennedy, too, at that—

SS: Absolutely. Absolutely, because Jackie Kennedy was the same way. And I sort of made that connection, too, that Mrs. King, even I can just remember her at Dr. King’s funeral service, how she was just so strong. I can remember—seems like she had her arms around Bonnie [Bernice], the youngest one. I think she had—I can just see that picture in my head. But no weeping or wailing, which was a good model, I think.

MH: Did you attend to the kids at that time?

SS: No, I had left the house then. No, I didn't. And it's a funny thing that, when I went back to Spelman after a year from being at Spelman, Bernice, who is now—who was Bonnie—was in one of my classes. But I never told her. I didn't tell her. I told—I talked to Yokie [Yolanda] one time, and told her that I used to keep her. But I didn't tell Bernice that, you know, I used to babysit her.

MH: So was that the first time—like with children and teaching, was that your first exposure to that?

SS: To?

MH: Like teaching, to become an educator.

SS: No, I was exposed to that when I was five or six years old. I was always teaching people.

MH: Were you play-teaching in your—

SS: All the little kids, yeah. All the little kids. Always. I can remember that so clearly. In Grady Homes, out in the front yard, we were sitting—maybe some little chairs, maybe about four chairs, and I'm teaching them or reading them stories, talking to them. And so it's—I guess that I always knew that that would be one of my roles, would be to teach children. And I've taught adults, too, like in the Nation of Islam I became Captain of the Women. It's called the MGT Captain, Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization classes. And so I was promoted to that position, and so my job was to teach the women how to be Muslim, how to be a good Muslim wife, good Muslim mother, good member of the community. So a teacher, just in my DNA.

MH: So were your parents teachers?

SS: Well, my daddy was, you know, a preacher. And my mother did not have a lot of formal education—I think she got as far as the ninth grade. But my mother was a star in Grady Homes. She had ten children, and she raised—everybody admired my mother. And she died at an early age, died at fifty-three. And everybody knew her as Mrs. Jackson. But people respected Mrs. Jackson. And let me tell you what happened at her—and she was a teacher, too, and a kind person in the community. So many things that she was. Daddy King did her funeral, and her funeral was on a Monday, and Ebenezer was packed. It was standing room only, and he made the comment, "Somebody lived." To have this church packed to the seams on a Monday—on a Monday, a workday for African Americans. Who could take off on a Monday? He said—he kept saying, "Somebody lived." And she did. She was—you know, people came to her often for advice, how they should do this or do that. And I guess my mother also instilled in me, too, that I be a teacher, too, because in Grady Homes there was a Bible

class that met of older women every Monday night. And my mother would take me to that meeting, every Monday night. And maybe I was seven or eight, nine. And those women allowed me to participate. You know, they had reading materials and so forth, and I could read, of course. And they wanted to hear what I had to say. And so that probably was, you know, those seeds being planted to, you know, to get involved, to speak out, to listen, to learn how to do these kinds of things.

MH: Where are you in the—of all your siblings?

SS: Let me tell you about this wonderful thing: I'm number seven, and my mother told me this. She said the seventh child is a very special child. That's what she said [*laughs*]. And she told me all this stuff. And that people say that either you're going to have a wonderful life, or you're maybe not going to have such a wonderful life. But I had to—just from learning the seventh child has always been important in cultures, and so it was important in the culture of my family. And I guess because I had that in my head, I heard that, and I internalized it for the positive side. And so I was outstanding in school, good student, most popular in high school, most athletic. I don't know if you know Walter Frazier—you know, used to play with the New York Nicks? It's been some time ago—you're so young. But he became a New York Nicks, and he went to Howard High School. And he wrote a book, and I'm in that book, in the front of the book. But—so I was always interested in athletics. My mother made sure that I stayed busy, so I ran track, played basketball—what else did I do? I did swimming at Spelman. And I was, of course, a reader.

MH: What were some of your favorite stories?

SS: Well, I used to look at—my most favorite story when I was in elementary school, my series was Nancy Drew. And to this day, to this day, I love mysteries. I love Miss Marple. I love Hercule Poirot. [*Both laugh.*] I love Columbo. All of those great mysteries.

MH: I always find funny *Murder She Wrote*, because I think she's actually the murderer, though. She has to be the murderer!

SS: My husband used to say, "Why is it, wherever this woman goes, somebody dies?" [*Both laugh.*] But yeah, mysteries, I love them to this day. *Murder on the Orient Express*, you name it. The old one, the new one, and so forth. I love mysteries.

MH: When you were saying that you're the seventh child, and that you were told that you were special, it also—it makes me think that children and teaching, that when you tell the kids that they're special, something happens. And so I'm sure it happens in this classroom.

SS: It does. It does. And I tell them, you know, "Learn all you can learn." We use what we call—I discovered this in just reading this and that about Da Vinci notebooks. Leonardo Da

Vinci, you know, he kept many, many notebooks. Everywhere he went, he would write things down. And so I started my students off this year with their Da Vinci notebooks, and the idea is that—not necessarily what I’m teaching you in class, but what you learn on your own, what you go out and learn on your own and that you could bring back and you could put it in your Da Vinci notebook.

MH: That’s such a good idea.

SS: That you’re so curious about, you’re not just waiting on the teacher to tell you everything. You know, you’re creating knowledge, and you’re looking at other people who have done wonderful things. And so many times they tell me things that I didn’t know. So, yeah. And I like to tell them that, you know, you’re going to—we did a whole thing of sayings. And so what I like to share with them is things that I’ve learned over time, and so they’d put the whole list up on the board. Let me think of some of the ones that I told them. Well, I told them that patience comes from love. When you’re patient, that’s God giving you—that’s a gift. But when you’re impatient, that’s from you. The other day I had a former student to come who’s studying math education. Very smart, she was at the top of the class when she graduated from here. And she was talking with the class about teamwork, because that’s our theme. And she said to them, “Imam Mohammed said that we were going to Paradise as a community.” So one of her—her niece, who happened—is a member of my class said—told her, “Sister Safiyyah told us that—also taught us that God’s hand is on the group.” Now, she made that connection. I mean, I was just thrilled—I almost fell back in my seat for her to make that connection, just like that, that His hand is on the group. It’s not just you as an individual, that, you know, everything is about you. It’s the group, it’s the community, it’s the global perspective. That’s where God’s hand is. And so—well, let me—how can I think of the other things I gave them, *[laughs]* all these old sayings and things? And so, if somebody gets out of hand, something—“leave no stone unturned” or this, that, whatever it is, you know, whatever old saying that you can think of? They know it. I guess *[inaudible]*, I was going to say. *[Both laugh.]*

MH: Like little old people.

SS: Yes! Little old people, yeah. Mm-hm.

MH: Or wise

SS: Or wish people, definitely, definitely. And they are wise. I love it. And I also taught them about Ray Charles. See, I’m not just telling you this—I want you to stay--I want you to have a global education. They didn’t know anything about Ray Charles. But—and I said the parents can’t complain. And listen, when it’s lunchtime, they’ll say, “Sister, are you ready for us to put on Ray Charles?” They’ll put on Ray Charles, they’ll put on “Georgia on My Mind.” You

know, that's our state song. I said, "The parents can't say anything, [*laughing*] because that's the state song!" And also, they'll put on "America, the Beautiful." So I'm just saying—everything—you know, I love it, just from loving Ray Charles. But the fact that—they need to know "America, the Beautiful." You know, I'm not pushing the national anthem, but "America, the Beautiful" to me expresses it more about who we really are and who we should be. So I just try to give my students everything that I have, everything that I think will help them. If they'll embrace these things, just make it a part of their being, they'll already be ahead. They'll already be ahead, so when they get to high school, it won't be like you're floundering, you can't find your way. You'll have something that you can lean on that people have found over time those things that have worked for them and have kept them productive and focused and all those things. I wish you could meet my students. They are something else. [*Laughs*]

MH: I mean, yeah, I think that's a wonderful way to—you know, we started in here and to finish up, you know, with this optimism and these students.

SS: Yeah, really, I'm—I really can see in them a new idea, a new concept of what the future can bring. I can see it.

MH: They can become politicians—they can become the mayor, they can become—

SS: Yes, all of it.

MH: --the president, they can become—

SS: Yes, all of those things. They can be. Now, I have one student, she's just a little bossy. They get so they [*laughs*—they say, "She has the bossy virus." [*Both laugh.*]

MH: That's actually a good one. I had not heard that, but that's a good one!

SS: I had not either. [*Both continue laughing.*] But that's how they are, they're just amazing. She has the bossy virus.

MH: That's good. Well, hopefully, she's contagious and gives it to the other kids.

SS: Yes, uh-huh. Definitely. She can just let all this good—she is the good, let your good outweigh your bad. And, you know, she is—they all are wonderful students, and I'm very proud of them. They keep asking me, "Are you going to be our teacher next year?" Because some of them I had last year, just a few. And I don't think I will be. I think I'll just go ahead and take this incoming class, because they need some help, too. And to share what I know, what I've learned. Allah has blessed me to develop within myself. I want to share that with as many children as I can. I didn't know that I was coming back to the school, you know. They—this is like two and a half years ago, one of the teachers had left; and they were sort of stranded. "Would you come and just cover this class for a few days?" You know, that's game—you know that's game, right? That's two and a half years. [*Both laugh.*]

MH: Two and a half hard years, too.

SS: Yes, definitely. Two and a half hard years. But it's so—what I also see, though, there's so many benefits to this pandemic. We—everybody has had to stop and regroup and rethink a lot of things. Otherwise, we would've just kept going like we were going, never conscious of this, never conscious of that, just going, going, going. We see now that, you know, the world is bigger than you. It's not just you, you know, it's not just you. You have your part to play. But this is a big world, and the more that we can try to work together, work as teams, teams of people, just people caring about people, the better things—we'll see a better world. Not that our world is bad, but, you know, it could be better. There are things we can do to make it better, within your own self. You don't have to go all the way to the Ukraine to do it. You can do your part right here. Everybody can do, you know, everybody can get involved at some level. So that's my story. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it. [*Both laugh.*]

MH: That's a beautiful way to wrap up. But I'd love a tour?

SS: Oh, yeah, let's go. Let's see what we can—now, some of the rooms are probably locked up, but let's go take a tour. Let's go take a look-see. So, this is fourth grade. This is the principal's office. I think his door is probably locked.

MH: Oh, I've been to the principal's office enough. I don't need—[*laughs*].

SS: I know what you mean. So this is Elijah Muhammad and Sister Clara Mohammed. I met Sister Clara Mohammed, [not sure how to spell these, since the spelling of Clara Mohammed's name was changed after her husband's death, but his name remained the same] and with my students, the whole thing is, they want to know how old am I. That's something I won't tell them.

MH: Well, they think thirty is, like, ancient, so—their ages are all off. [*Laughs*]

SS: A student came--"My mama said you're not forty"--because he asked.

And I said, "Yeah, I'm forty. I'm the same age as your mother."

"My mother said you're not forty."

"Well, a woman—a real woman doesn't discuss her age," that's what I tell them.

OK, let's go down this hallway and see what's there. Now, this is an art room. One of our teachers, Sister [inaudible], who happens to be the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's granddaughter, she works here, and her daughter works here, and the principal is related to them. His mother is one of the granddaughters, too. [*Opens door.*] So she is just a magnificent art teacher. She taught [inaudible]. I'm just—she's just amazing.

MH: Has the art changed, like the subjects. I mean, are the kids aware, and so they're putting their thoughts and ideas more into art?

SS: I don't know. I really don't know. Look at some of the pictures. Oh, this is this lady with the stamp! Edmonia Lewis, you know, that's her stamp out now. I think this is the lady. I just bought the stamps the other day. And—let's see. And so she was an artist [inaudible].

MH: Went to Oberlin

SS: Uh-huh. But I'm sure this is the lady on this new stamp, because I bought some African-American-focused stamps, and I'm sure it's her, because I said, "I've got to look up Edmonia Lewis and see who she is." And if we come down this way—so you know about Ramadan, right?

MH: Yes, it's coming up.

SS: It's coming up—I think it's anticipated April 1st. So they're getting their—all the stuff [inaudible]. African American history and women's history, too, that was—this is the same art teacher. She just makes the best doors. But I like my own children to design their things. [Closes door.] Emmett Till, I have a memory of him. I remember, seems like maybe I was ten or eleven, but I can remember when that happened. It just sort of stays with me.

MH: Yeah. I actually went to—of all places, I was in Greenwood, Mississippi, this last summer, and we actually—just thirty minutes away is the grocery store. So we drove by it, and it's—it's a nondescript place, but it's just—

SS: Is there a marking about it?

MH: There is a marking, but it's—you know, it's just in the middle of nowhere, and it's just really hard not to be affected, especially driving through Mississippi. You can imagine, and it's—it was just really tough.

SS: Well, all these doors are locked. My students [inaudible] in this classroom. [Opens door.] So I do English, math, science, and social studies. And this teacher, Aisha Squire, teaches Islamic studies, and then my students get Arabic, as most of the students in the elementary school get Arabic from virtual from Morocco. The teacher used to be here; she went back home. So now she does it virtually, and it's wonderful. They're learning so much.

MH: Do they come away being fluent in Arabic?

SS: Not necessarily in conversational, but primarily they get the basics that they're able to read Quran, that's our focus. Our former director wanted them to get the conversational aspect, too. And they did just a tad, but not as much. She mainly focuses on their learning the different surahs and being able to read.

MH: Are those the pillars?

SS: Well, they know the pillars, the five pillars. But they would get that in this class, mm-hm.

MH: OK

SS: And we have a garden. Let me see if this door is unlocked over here. Now, this is our science lab, locked up. They locked everything! So this is our garden classroom, [*Opens door.*] and out here is our garden.

MH: Oh, this is wonderful. Wow.

SS: Now, she asked them to donate scarves so they could hang on the fence, so that's what the scarves—don't ask me what it's about, I don't know. [*Both laugh.*]

MH: I was just going to ask you what it's about. So does each—do they have each a little plot?

SS: Yes, and each class is going to have a plot. I don't know if she designated them yet or not. But when it's—

MH: You say it's strawberries?

SS: --it's really good. It looks really good.

MH: Strawberries already?

SS: Mm—I just send them to the garden. OK, let me get that. This is the high school, and so we'll go in the high school, too. And that's the soccer field back there. And that was one of the first sports that our school engaged in was soccer. We were playing soccer when no other African-American school was playing soccer in this area.

MH: What is all the food and the produce?

SS: Well, the name of the garden is [spelling? sounds like "produce"] which is an Arabic word that has to do with heaven or productivity. Now, what they're calling whatever, I don't know. I don't try to know [*laughs*]. But in the summertime, you can come and just get the best vegetables and everything out of the garden. They welcome people to come. [*Closes door.*]

MH: So this was a school before, when—

SS: No, this was a funeral home before. Willie Watkins—have you ever heard of him?

MH: Yes

SS: He owned—we bought this from him.

MH: OK, but the church, too—the former church? The sanctuary that was here before?

SS: Yes, all of that. But we redeveloped it, so none of this was here. We added on these rooms and all of that. And so yeah, a funeral home, but we made it look—not like a funeral home.

MH, *laughing*: No

SS: And I don't tell the kids too much what it was.

MH: No

SS: Let's take a peek downstairs. So, Marissa.

MH: Mm-hm?

SS: When did you start doing this? I want to interview you.

MH: [*Laughs*] I've kind of—I've done a few oral histories, but this one actually started—this whole series started a couple of weeks ago—or actually a month or two ago. We had a Black History Month celebration at our—about soul food at the DeKalb History Center, and so through there, I heard about Springreens, and it connected me, and then one thing led to another, and I did—

SS: Wonderful!

MH: --I've done several interviews so far, and that's where I am here. I'm just sort of--keep going until I can't go anywhere.

SS: So when the kids come in in the morning, they come here, and those who are late, they go through the other entrance in the back. So our little kids come here, and they wait until a few minutes before the bell rings, they make prayer, and then they go to their classes. Their teachers come and get them, or they come upstairs.

MH: Do they pray during noon—or at one o'clock? Is it one?

SS: Mm-hm, it's two o'clock. Yes, we pray the full prayer here, and before prayer, somebody calls the Adhan. We have students who do that. Some of my students do it also. And we go upstairs. And we go upstairs to the [*inaudible*], but it's locked, and I can't get in unless I get the key. And then now, the Asr prayer comes later. It was such that you could pray Asr prayer here, but now it comes in at five, so we're out of here.

MH: Is that because of Daylight Saving?

SS: Yeah, Daylight Saving. This is the pre-K and K. This is my favorite class, outside of mine. I love this lady. She is just the—she's miraculous. She—I mean, I think she has eighteen students now. How can you do all these things? How can you make all these? I just don't get it. But she is just—and she was a retired teacher, too [*laughs*]. So I guess, you know—I don't know. It's just the love for—and her little kids are something. Guess what one of them told me the other day? "You are fantastic!" This little one.

I said, "OK, then!"

And then another one said, "You're marvelous!"

I said, "OK, I'm just going to internalize this." I said, "I'm going to make it so." [*Inaudible comment*]

And at one point, she was doing this by herself. But she now has a helper who helps part of the day, but—and so this is where they serve lunches from. We used to be part of the

National School Lunch Program, but you know, all that sort of went the way of whatever during the pandemic. So, that looks like one of my student's bookbag. I bet it is, because he's looking for it. So they--I think we have a grant from—that helps us work with Supreme Foods, and so they supply the lunches. Let me pull this door. [*Closes door.*]

Yeah, this is first and second grade here. So their teacher recently left a couple of months ago, so they have a new teacher, so it's coming along. [*Door closes.*] This is this boy's bookbag. Nope, wrong person. I'll leave it right here.

OK, we'll go back up this way. Our library is not functioning right now, but it used to be where those yellow doors are and then over to the right. So there's an ongoing negotiation or whatever. I just try to stay [inaudible—sounds like “before fray”?].

MH: What is all this—what does this say?

SS: All of this is probably surahs from the Quran, probably of the bismillah. I think one of our parents probably did this, too. This is an artist who's always coming to the school and doing the artwork. I think [rest of comment inaudible]. Let me turn this light on. And we'll go to the high school. [Inaudible comment] [*Door opening and closing*]

MH: Another question, do—have you gone on Hajj, or do you—

SS: I have. I went on Hajj in 1982, and then I went with Imam Mohammed in 1995. He made Umrah, which is the minor Hajj—it's the Hajj out of season. So that was wonderful. He was a guest of the kingdom, so it was a wonderful experience.

MH: OK, so that's still in Mecca, the Umrah?

SS: Yeah, uh-huh. I might can get it on my TV. I usually turn it on every morning. You know, it's throughout the year. But when Hajj comes, it'll be Hajj, which is probably—maybe May?

MH: It comes at the end of Ramadan?

SS: Yeah, but not quite at the end. It's a little—maybe another month. [*Door opens.*] So this is the high school. I haven't been in these classrooms in a while. I think this is a—they do math and science in here. So the high school is ninth through twelfth grade. Let me see if her room is—she usually locks her room. Yep. She teaches social studies.

MH: There's a different aroma in here. I'm getting ketchup and—[*Both laugh.*] Is that it? Which is high school, I guess. Maybe some potatoes—

SS: Gym shoes, perhaps? This is our gym. [*Door opens and closes.*] And so we were able to have a few games this year.

MH: I think you actually played my alum—my—

SS: Did we—did we—

MH: I don't remember. I think it was over homecoming maybe recently?

SS: Well, I think we won homecoming.

MH: OK, I don't think we were very good. [*Both laugh.*]

SS: OK, and for the high school [*Door opens and closes.*] when they were about to build Drew [Charter School], they tore down something, so we were able to get all the bricks. And so we used the bricks to build this high school.

MH: Oh, OK

SS: The science lab is probably—look they've got the countdown going. [*Both laugh.*] Everybody's locked up. I think this is—I know one person does math in here, but I think other people teach English in here, too. I haven't been in here into the classroom—well, I did come here for a meeting. That must be an old picture of Malcolm. These are offices. Let's see what's back here. Yeah, I haven't been in here. I didn't know that they were doing—that they had this up and whatever.

MH: Where are students looking to go this year, do you know? Where are some of the colleges and—

SS: I have no idea.

MH: No idea?

SS: I should be a little more interested, but I try to keep to fourth grade, because all the years that I worked here, it was almost like night and day, seven days a week. So now I've learned to just stay right there. Even though, sometimes, you know, people might ask me for advice about something and do that, but I would expect that they're trying to go to some of the traditional schools. I know somebody always tries to go to Spelman and Morehouse. And I did hear a young man say the other day he wanted to go to Duke, and so I don't know. I don't know what they have in mind. I'll find out [*laughs*], just so I'll know. But I always love the artwork and things that they're doing.

MH: Did you join a sorority at Spelman?

SS: No, they didn't have sororities. You had to do something different.

MH: I didn't know that.

SS: Mm-hm. And after I left, I think they started something, but you had to do it outside of Spelman. [*Door opens and closes.*] I have to pull my skirt up so I don't trip on it. The weather's pretty nice today.

MH: I know.

SS: I thought it was going to be really cold, so I wore my coat. Well, it was kind of cold when I got here--

MH: Yeah, I think the sun helps.

SS: --at eight o'clock.

MH: The sun helps a lot.

SS: Yeah. So how many more interviews do you have to do?

MH: This is sort of the end right now. Don't have any more names, but I'd love to—if you have any suggestions or any—keep going, there's no deadline for this. There's nothing—we're just trying to add these to our collection. So this is a project that has no—a project that has no end. [*Both laugh.*]

SS: Well, good. That's a wonderful thing.

MH: It is, and this is actually—[*Door opens and closes.*] thank you--

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Claudia Stucke