Rogers: This is a taped oral history interview with Mrs. Ura Bowie, conducted on Friday, September 8, 1995, in Moorhead, Mississippi, by Owen Brooks and Kim Lacy Rogers. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Brooks: ... from Duke University.

Bowie: What's the other college's name?

Rogers: Tougaloo?

Bowie: Tougaloo.

Bowie: Your name was on the sheet of paper, too.

Brooks: My name was on the sheet of paper?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: And he came here?
Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Or he called you up?

Bowie: Well, now they called me. Somebody had give them my name and he came and talked and interviewed me. I believe it was Cora Fleming. He interviewed her.

Brooks: How long ago was this, Mrs. Bowie?

Bowie: About three weeks or two. I can't think.

Brooks: Two or three weeks ago?

Bowie: Yes.

Rogers: As part of the Duke project.

Bowie: But he said he was from Tougaloo, I think.

Brooks: He said he was from Tougaloo?

Bowie: Yes. It was three of them out, he said.

Rogers: That's probably the project that's done under Duke University. It's called "Behind the Vail." It's on segregation.
Bowie: Yes. He wanted to know what happened on the other side of '60.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, do we have your permission to tape this interview?

Bowie: Yes. But I told him, I said, "You don't have to use my name, do you?" He said, "Not without your permission." But he thought it would have been all right if I'd used it. I said, "Well, anything you see fit," because we laughed about some things and some things we got straight.

Brooks: Yes. And other things we didn't get straight.

Bowie: Yes. Well, I couldn't tell him, because I didn't even think to tell them that I was a Worthy Matron. I said, "Well, I could have told him I was a Worthy Matron of the Eastern Star."

Rogers: Oh, that's quite something.

Bowie: I thought about that after he left. But I told him what we could think about.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, we're trying to find out all about people's lives here in the county. Were you born in this county?

Bowie: No. I was born in Lee County.

Brooks: Carthage?
**Bowie:** Carthage, Mississippi, was the county seat.

**Rogers:** When was that, Mrs. Bowie?

**Bowie:** About 1911, I believe.

**Rogers:** What did your family do?

**Bowie:** They were farmers on those little red hills. I mean, they'd sometimes work a whole year and sometimes make two bales of cotton. But everything, you know, like that. But we had a lot of livestock. We had a lot of cows and hogs and fowl. We had guineas and turkeys and geese and chickens.

**Rogers:** I remember guinea hens. They were the best watchdogs.

**Bowie:** Yes. But we had pets. Dogs. What did that one do when you come up out there?

**Brooks:** Came from under the house, and looked at me and I said hello to him. He didn't pay any attention to me anymore.

**Bowie:** Well, there's some peoples, he don't like the scent. He just don't let them up. That's the reason I didn't hear him bark and I was wondering.

**Rogers:** He wagged his tail at me. Maybe he likes women.

**Bowie:** Yes.
**Rogers:** How many children were there in your family?

**Bowie:** Well, now, actually, you're talking about my maiden family.

**Rogers:** Yes.

**Bowie:** Well, they were giving a count of ten, but I didn't know but eight, because I was the last child, and they said two of them had passed.

**Rogers:** So you were the last of the family?

**Bowie:** Yes.

**Rogers:** What are your memories of growing up? Did you grow up most of your childhood in Lee County?

**Bowie:** Well, I was about eight or nine years old, I guess, when we come to Sunflower County, and that's where I did all my growing up, you know.

**Brooks:** Did the whole family move?

**Bowie:** Oh, yes. My daddy come down.

**Rogers:** Did he come down and rent land or be a tenant farmer?
**Bowie:** Well, he came down. He would come in the fall. Our crops and things was kind of slim, he would come down in the fall to pick cotton, about a hundred, you know, after we got through before it got cold in the hills, because we didn't make at least eighty. I wasn't working when I was in the hills, but my family was. Then he had a cousin move down here, and they was real close, and he kept on and talked to my daddy to come up there, tell him how much better it is down here. So my daddy decided he would move down here. He had his stock shipped by freight. We had our chickens in crates. We just had killed hogs, but those that he had left over, you know, he never would kill all of them. We'd kill four or five hogs in the winter, and we would kill some more. I guess they brought them, too. I can't remember.

**Brooks:** Did you come first to Moorhead?

**Bowie:** No, we come to Sunflower. Sunflower was the town my cousin was going to. But the next year it was Moorhead.

**Brooks:** You came to Moorhead the following year?

**Bowie:** Yes, because he was farming with a man, warned him--well, my cousin was. He had promised Papa a fair share of everything. I can remember that.

**Brooks:** So he came to sharecrop?

**Bowie:** No, we was renting. He had his own stock. And he come to approve of what he could do by him and everything. So when selling time come, he wanted to get us off it. But he told my daddy he was going on with it this time, but he wasn't going to do it no more.
Brooks: How many acres did he rent?

Bowie: I can't tell about that. Now, to me it was huge because--

Brooks: But you were just a little girl.

Bowie: I was little. But Papa moved that same year then. That's when we come to Moorhead.

Brooks: And sharecropped in Moorhead?

Bowie: No. He has never sharecropped.

Brooks: Oh, he never sharecropped. I mean, rented.

Bowie: Rented.

Brooks: Rented land out from Moorhead.

Bowie: Yes. His property was on the river, not far from here.

Rogers: When you were a little girl and coming up, did your family tell you stories about relations between black people and white people?
Bowie: Well, yes. White peoples was always down on the colored. They hadn't stopped, you know, you could hear tell them carrying them out in the woods, you know, like whooping them. Sometimes they'd disappear. You wouldn't see them anymore.

Rogers: Black people would disappear?

Bowie: Yes. I think I told the other man our neighbors was white. I think I could hear them talk, and one of the reasons my daddy was picking up fixing to go, you know, wanted to go, because there was two brothers. One of the brothers, he was nice, and he had a place. He let my daddy rent his place, because he was fixing to leave. He had another brother. The other brother took the place.

Brooks: This was in Lee County?

Bowie: Yes. The other brother took the place, and then he wanted to go, and they rented the land to my daddy. The other brother, he had a large family of childrens. But the one named Dan didn't have any children. His wife died and he just turned his place over to him. Well, he got out here. He come out there. I think they said he moved to Webbs, Mississippi, the other man.

Brooks: Tallahatchie County.

Bowie: He moved. But he got in tough down here, and they had to come back home and then Papa had to give that place up. Dan had to give it back to his brother. And Papa, we wasn't there long before the moving of us to come to the Delta.

Rogers: What was the Delta like then?
**Bowie:** Well, now, the Delta was a really prosperous place. Cotton would be about so long, tall, and be just full from the bottom to the top. The people made so much cotton. But they never could get nowhere, because the other fellow was handling it. They'd let them clear a little bit more than they were used to having, I remember. But, now, when my daddy come down here, he didn't even get no support from them or nothing. He got his backers from the hills where we come from. And that man was named J.W. Reynolds. He [unclear]. He's the one that furnished my daddy, and that made the white man didn't have much to get. That was a little feud.

**Rogers:** Did that cause hard feelings from the white people he got the money from?

**Bowie:** Well, he said that my daddy wanted to come down here and take over, because, see, he wasn't used to nobody furnishing. He'd give them what he'd want to have, like for a furnish, they called it. That's the way I learned good third and fourth. Have you heard anybody working on third and fourth?

**Rogers:** Third and fourth?

**Bowie:** Yes. He'd furnish him, but my daddy never did work on no third and fourth. But the people around was working on it.

**Brooks:** They'd get a third of the crop?

**Bowie:** Yes. They'd get a third. Now, the fourth, the man, he would furnish everything and the man just worked the crop and gathered the crop and get a third of it, and he'd get the rest. That was half.
**Rogers:** So he got like three-quarters of that whole crop.

**Bowie:** Yes. The man that was working on the fourth had to pay his expenses out of the fourth.

**Rogers:** So people just stayed in debt?

**Bowie:** Yes. Some of them never did get out of debt.

**Rogers:** Did you go to school here in Moorhead?

**Bowie:** Yes. I went to the Catholic school. The teachers come from up north, and they had a building here. We had two schools here, because you had to pay to go to the Catholic school, but you'd go every day to public school, you know, just like routine, now they're going to school.

**Rogers:** So how far did you get in school?

**Bowie:** Nowhere along. They wasn't giving diplomas then. Some peoples was teaching the others when they got eighth and ninth grade. But I took a G.E.D., and I wanted a diploma. I went over to Valley State and got my G.E.D., you know, and then that give me some months through in college. When I really was going to sign up to go to college, I had married. My husband had agreed. But he got sick, and I didn't go further in college. But I think I was taking about three months or three hours, whatever that was. I went to Tuskegee [Institute].

**Rogers:** Was that for your G.E.D. or for some college?

**Bowie:** No. I was taking a course.
Brooks: Do you remember how old you were, Mrs. Bowie, when you went to Tuskegee?

Bowie: Yes. I remember I was grown. I was grown. I had a husband. But I was [unclear].

Rogers: So when did you get married?

Bowie: ’29. When I got married, I was A-1 [phonetic]. I was smart. I got married in the spring of ’29. I didn't know no better than to get married. I thought, you know, just get married. My husband was a good bit older than I was. Well, he didn't hardly get to go to school himself, and so that put a damper on us for a while. But when I got through with my children, I started right back.

Brooks: How many children did you have?

Bowie: I was the mother of eight, but didn't but seven live.

Rogers: How old were you when you went back to school?

Bowie: I was about--I don't want to tell the wrong thing. Looked to me like I was about the last of the teens and first of the twenties or something like that.

Brooks: But it was after you got married?

Bowie: After I got married, because I had finished, you know, what schooling you could get. Now, our schools, I'll tell you the way they had them, they'd wait on school when they thought everybody was through
picking cotton. We'd have just about four months of school, and their children would be going. That's what caused us to go to the Catholic school. My daddy decided to pay, you know, because the Catholic school was going on until about the twenty-eighth of May, you know, or something like that. But them other childrens would be out like no sooner than they got in there good. And everybody was poor. That's the reason anybody could teach them, because they didn't intend for them to get nothing. They didn't care whether you knewed nothing or not, because the families that had boys, some of them never did see the inside of a schoolhouse, because they had to work, plow.

Brooks: Stayed in the field all the time.

Bowie: Yes. That's why my husband didn't have much schooling. They come from Lorman [phonetic], Mississippi. His mama was a teacher down there in the hills. His daddy was a [unclear] man. I couldn't tell you how far he got in school. But he really was a shifty [unclear], but didn't have the courage to push his way through, because he'd always be on shares, working on halves and stuff. When they had a crop, well, his children--he had a lot of boys--

Brooks: Even though Alcorn [College] was right there.

Bowie: No. He moved to the Delta. That's where I met him at.

Brooks: But he grew up down there in Jefferson County?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Right by Lorman.
Bowie: Now, I don't know. When I went to Jefferson, I knew that down there I got a chance to go on tour. That's when I [unclear]. It was a pretty fair-looking place. To me it looks a whole lot better than where we were staying when we was in the hills. The reason I know how it looked when we went to the hills, I went back there on visits. I went two times on a visit, you know, after I got grown. So that's why he missed his.

But, now, he had a young baby brother and two young girls, sisters, baby sisters. His mother died first and then that made him have to stay there and tend to them little ones, because them others were big and just scattered. Then when his daddy died, they was in the middle of a crop and they stayed until the crop--they had thought they had to stay. They didn't have to stay. Stayed till the crop was gathered. Well, they didn't get nothing. His oldest brother, he stayed in Clarksdale. He came down and picked up the little ones, and that made then go to school. They knew more than them older ones.

Brooks: Did he take them back to Clarksdale with him?

Bowie: The oldest brother did, and he kept them until one of them married up there, you know, and then they wanted to come back here, and they come back here. You know what that was--picking cotton by the hundreds. They were chopping cotton by the day, you know.

Rogers: Did your family have any family stories about the old days in Mississippi, about family members?

Bowie: My daddy was a good provider. We didn't never have to go without no food. But I would always hear him getting after my mama about letting other folks come there and tote off stuff. I was telling him, now, just like I tell you, he raised nearly everything we ate. We'd have two potato pumps, and we'd have a potato bed where they'd bed out the seed potatoes.
Brooks: This was in Lee County?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: And then he did the same thing when he moved to Sunflower?

Bowie: Moved to Sunflower County. He studied kind of what matched.

Brooks: Grew his own?

Bowie: Yes. But, now, you see, we had to learn how to grow it when we come down here.

Brooks: When you got to the Delta, yes.

Bowie: Because anything would grow in the hills. I remember in the fall when he'd come, when he'd come to the Delta to pick cotton, he'd come back by the time--you know, now the children went to school out there longer, because there wasn't nothing out there for them to do but to go. But he'd come home. He brought a winter supply. He'd have all this food there. He'd go to the store to buy the children's school things. He'd buy three or four bolts of [unclear], three or four, you know, pieces of gingham. And they had some stuff, you know, rough, he called it.

Brooks: For your mother to sew.

Bowie: Yes. Mother sewed. She sewed for peoples, too.
**Brooks:** She sewed the clothes for the children?

**Bowie:** She sewed for us, yes.

**Rogers:** She sewed for other people?

**Bowie:** Yes. She sewed for other peoples. She come down here and she didn't do much sewing. But she sewed in the hills.

**Rogers:** Did she teach you to sew?

**Bowie:** Oh, yes. I make everything I wear. And I made everything my childrens would wear, and I made clothes for the other children, you know, that stayed around. When they'd think [unclear] my childrens had, I had a good opportunity, because they would have proms and balls and things. Well, I would be just busy making their formals and things. I sewed until, let me see, when I went to working with this Head Start, you know, and ACSC [Associated Communities of Sunflower County] and all. That's where I learned. Joseph, now, he stayed out there in the hills at Pickens [phonetic].

**Brooks:** Joe?

**Bowie:** Joe Harris. That's when my oldest sister stayed out there.

**Brooks:** In Holmes County?
Bowie: Yes. My sister's dead now, but their little home they had is still out there. But the children came and got their daddy after she died, because he was beginning to get sick. I don't know what's happening to the place out there. But they got him away from there and they [unclear] on keeping him. He is something like 100 years old, too. I remember him when I was a child. He was a big boy then, him and my brother, the oldest one I know. So now his children is scattered. He's got some in Vallejo, California, some in Portland, Oregon, some in Chicago, some in Detroit.

Brooks: How is he related to you?

Bowie: My brother-in-law. He married my oldest sister. When I was a child, I used to stay with them. When I was young, Mama let me go down there and stay with them.

Brooks: He's still alive?

Bowie: Now, his home's in Pickens, but I think, you know, the children don't allow him to stay there by himself. He decided anywhere he can go, if he gets sleepy, he'd lay down and go to sleep, on the roadside, in the church.

Brooks: Is he living in Sunflower County now or is he still in Holmes County?

Bowie: No, he's still in Holmes County.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, you grew up in a church?

Bowie: Mount Ararat.
Rogers: Mount Ararat Baptist?

Bowie: Baptist, yes.

Brooks: Where is that? In Moorhead?

Bowie: Right down the street.

Rogers: So were you saved? Were you baptized?

Bowie: I was baptized twice. They baptized me when I was a baby, and then when I got any knowledge and knowing right from wrong and what was happening, you know, I was baptized again.

Rogers: What do you remember, Mrs. Bowie, about the Depression years, the 1930s, here?

Bowie: I had two babies in 1930 and '31. It was kind of a stretch in there. In that year didn't nobody make nothing. They had a bad crop here. But I had two babies. The first year I married, I stayed with my daddy. My husband I married--if I hadn't stayed with my daddy, I would have had to stay with his sister or something, because he didn't have nothing. But people say they ain't got nothing. Well, I don't say nothing, because we didn't have nothing. You work for what you get. Work yourself up. That next year my baby was a little baby, a young baby when I moved. But we moved on the plantation. That's in the other write-up, what I give the other man. I've got his name. What is his name?

Brooks: I don't know him.
Bowie: Well, he said he's on campus at C___ College. No, it wasn't C___ College.

Brooks: You said Tougaloo.

Bowie: Tougaloo, yes. He said that he had finished. You know, he was working on his doctorate.

Brooks: Graduate school.

Bowie: Yes. And he said it was three of them out, but he was the one come here. They scattered across.

Brooks: Now, you moved on the plantation during the Depression?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Where is the plantation, Mrs. Bowie?

Bowie: Down the road there.

Rogers: Who's plantation was it?

Bowie: Joe Reeves [phonetic].

Brooks: Out from Moorhead?
**Bowie:** Yes.

**Brooks:** And your first child was just a baby then?

**Bowie:** My first child wasn't big enough to nurse the other child, and I had stayed at the house, you know, and keep them. Well, it didn't make much difference, because if I had been out there I wouldn't have been getting nothing no how. But I would keep the cotton weights for the man. I heard him tell the other white man come out there talking to him. He says, "Joe, is these niggers going to get any money?" They didn't see me. I was over behind there.

"Sure. If they make it."

"But you ain't going to let them clear none, is you?" They were just talking.

He said, "Well, I had one this morning, didn't owe nothing for it, and give his crop up to pick it by the hundred. You see what a fool he was?"

And that was my husband. Because, you see, I couldn't pick. I had the babies. He was out there picking. You know, he couldn't make nothing picking by the hundred, because I could beat him picking cotton if he had tended to the children. But, you see, that was just the way it went. They're working for the man.

I said, "I'll fix you." And every time [unclear] weigh up, it'd weigh about forty or fifty, I'd have seventy-five or eighty.

**Rogers:** As the weight keeper.

**Bowie:** I picked up there on it. So that was how we come out from under that, was me dealing with the pencil. And I know they was really dealing with the pencil, because they had the whole thing.

**Rogers:** But you did come out that year?
**Bowie:** I didn't have no crop. He had done give it up to pick by the hundred.

**Brooks:** He had given up raising his own crop?

**Bowie:** He had done made the crop. It was ready to pick, but I wasn't able to help. You know, I had the babies and he, just one, he couldn't pick.

**Brooks:** What was the deal on Reeves' plantation? Was he sharing or renting?

**Bowie:** Well, now, look. I don't know. They tell me his wife was the head of it. They had a house up here. They'd come out there. That's what me and him, we got into it that one day, the way he got Murray to move. The people, the white peoples was furnishing them groceries. They wouldn't give no money.

**Brooks:** They wouldn't give them any money?

**Bowie:** No. Nothing but food. He told my husband, my husband's brother was already on the place and he didn't have nothing, but he was talking for Murray to come on. He wanted him out there.

**Brooks:** Murray was your husband?

**Bowie:** My husband. And the one on the place named Danny [phonetic]. So after Murray moved, that store--well, that Saturday, they'd worked all the week, and they'd go to town on Saturday and get the--now, this was wintertime. They was working for him, supposed to have been working for pay. But on Saturday
they would go to town. Well, the first time he went to town to get paid off, the man had already bought their 
groceries and had everybody's groceries in different piles. They didn't have nothing to do but just--

**Brooks:** No money?

**Bowie:** No. Just pick it up right quick and then come back home. I was surprised, he getting back so quick, 
and he had his little box of groceries. So that was the first time I'd ever seen my husband get mad.

**Brooks:** That was his pay.

**Bowie:** The groceries. They didn't get no pay. You know, he looked in there. I think this table was what I 
measured, the side of a hog. You know, they called it side belly. It was [unclear] as long as this table here 
and rolled up.

**Rogers:** So it was about three feet long and about a foot and a half wide.

**Bowie:** They rolled it up. Nothing but fat. No lean. No nothing on it. Murray opened that and he seen it.

**Brooks:** That all he had was fat.

**Bowie:** He seen that. He took that roll up--he didn't even get time to get no paper to put it in--and brought 
it back to town. But, you know, they reached and got him some real meat. He didn't get no pay, but they did 
give him some nice pork. So that's what me and the man got into it about. I was sweeping off the porch, and 
I told him, I talked to him and I told him about he promised us pay and not no groceries. I say but now some 
of this stuff I just couldn't eat. I don't eat no peas. You know, he just got what we presumed we would eat.
He told me, "Well, the rest of them got it and eating it and they ain't saying nothing." And that made me mad, and I had the broom. [Laughter] I went out with the broom, but he got away. I didn't get a chance to hit him, not a lick. [Laughter] But that broke up the grocery buying, though. They was able to get their own grocery. But, you see, just me, one, on that plantation.

**Brooks:** You were the only one that complained.

**Bowie:** The only one Complained. And we got it. So the next thing--

**Brooks:** They gave you money after that?

**Bowie:** Yes. We got what we needed. I mean, first it would go. They wouldn't give you too much furnish, but you did have that.

**Brooks:** Did you get money to buy your own groceries?

**Bowie:** No. We'd go up there and buy it.

**Rogers:** So you could go up there and buy it?

**Bowie:** And buy what you want. "I wants this. I don't want that."

**Brooks:** You'd be able to go and pick it out?

**Bowie:** And pick it out.
Brooks: But you didn't have the money to pay for it?

Bowie: Well, they tell me they didn't have none either, but I don't know.

Brooks: Who didn't have none?

Bowie: The boss man.

Brooks: Shoot. You didn't believe that, did you?

Bowie: No. I believed his wife had it. They said she even bought his clothes. You know, she picked him up somewhere, and her name was Panky [phonetic].

Rogers: They didn't ever let you all have cash money?

Bowie: Well, not on the plantation. I didn't get none. Then after that year, we moved.

Brooks: You only stayed one year up there?

Bowie: Let me see. Yes, I stayed. I stayed one year. Wait. Now, I stayed two years, I'll tell you, because it was well in the winter before they got me to say I'd go that time. Well, you see, I couldn't work, because I told you I had them two babies. So we was kind of down in the field. But it was a person up on the road moved, and Mrs. Panky got Murray to take that house up there on the road. Well, that was better than down
in the field. So she would have Murray anything she'd have to do. She'd sit and get Murray and she would pay him.

Brooks: She would pay him?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: She'd pay him money?

Bowie: Yes. She'd pay him.

Brooks: The house he lived in was a shotgun?

Bowie: No. It wasn't shotgun. It was a little old single house.

Brooks: How many rooms?

Bowie: It looked like somebody had stuck a room on it. But we had two bedrooms and a kitchen.

Rogers: So that was better than a house in the field?

Bowie: In the field.

Rogers: How long were y'all there?
Bowie: We stayed that year. That's two years. That winter, Mrs. Panky had bought Murray a pair of gumboots and a pair of overalls, because she knewed she was going to want him to come up there and do things, you know, what she had to be done, she thought. But when we got moved, if she had knowed he was going to move, he wouldn't have got that.

Brooks: She wouldn't have given it to him?

Bowie: No.

Brooks: How many children did you have by the time you moved?

Bowie: I still had the two.

Brooks: You just had the two?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Then you moved back to Moorhead?

Bowie: No. I moved back out there where my daddy was. That's the only time when I was with that I had some money, you know, we did, we could buy the children sufficient things to wear.

Brooks: He stayed on the place and you went back to your daddy's?
Bowie: No. Well, he come with me. Both of us moved back. They wanted us to stay out there, but they knewed I wasn't going to stay.

Rogers: You'd rather be getting pay with your father.

Bowie: My daddy, all of his children were grown and gone, and he didn't have nobody to help him and Mama. But now we was on halves out there, because he was renting. So the next year, when my children got kind of big enough to help, Papa wanted us to still stay there, and I told him, "I just don't see it." I said, "That's giving all of my children's labor away." I said, "Papa, if we could get through with our crop, maybe I'll let the children go work for themselves and they would get pay." I could see that. I said, "But we get through with ours, we have to work yours." And I said, "Ain't nobody but you."

When I did that, Murray was sitting there. Murray ain't said a word. My husband ain't said a word. But he had told Papa, "Well, we're doing all right." He said, "We'll just go on like we're going." But when I told Papa like I did, Mama said, "Huh?" That's all she said. Then she said I was the onliest one that stood up to Papa. Well, Papa just turned loose the whole thing. He done it. He said, well, he won't fool with it. He won't have no parts of it. Murray had the whole. I said, "[unclear]." Then we were renters from then on out.

Brooks: How many acres did you make?

Bowie: I don't know. It was about sixty or something. My children got where they--and I could help, you know, didn't have no baby then. We would pick that cotton. When we would get two bales picked, he would go sell, and he could pay his rent out of those two bales and they'd come out of debt. Then we'd have about twenty bales in the field. But, now, I'd take them childrens and we would pick that cotton and get through
with it by the time school started. My children never had to stay out of school. So that's why they got good jumps. All my children got pretty good learning. My oldest son, he died back here in March.

**Brooks:** Where was he living?

**Bowie:** He was in Chicago. He finished school when he went in the Army. He went on to school and he finished high school. Then he took a trade. He didn't never have to take no real punish in the Army, because they'd have him for checking them out or keeping up with the--he'd always have a good job in the Army. His [unclear], his [unclear], they hadn't went to school either. He was the best they had. That's how he got it. But, you see, he went to school.

**Brooks:** Was this the Second World War?

**Bowie:** No, he wasn't old enough for the Second World War.

**Brooks:** It must have been Korea.

**Bowie:** He went over in Germany. But, now, I don't know what else he did, but I know he put up two years over there and he come home. When I seen him when he come home, we were staying here, because the man had told Murray, after we made all that cotton, they didn't get it and they knowed it was made. Told him his son said he just couldn't afford to rent it no more.

**Brooks:** That was the end of that.

**Bowie:** That was the end of that. Murray put up this and we've been here ever since.
Brooks: He put up this house?

Bowie: This house, yes. So my other girl, Bernice, she was next to the oldest boy. She was a girl. She married. She's still with her husband, but they's in Toledo, Ohio. She was a pharmacy, you know, worked at the drugstore department in a shopping center. Joe Hassett [phonetic], he finished school here. Then he went up to Michigan where his uncle was. He was going to go to school up there. He said they had the [unclear] up there and said there was a lady writing and said, "Mr. Bowie, I hear them all talking about their home town, everything, but you."

Brooks: They were talking about what?

Bowie: Their home towns. "But you don't ever say nothing about yourself." And Joe said he just had heard a boy, one of his friends, "I wouldn't want to pass over Mississippi in an airplane." So he had just heard one of them say that. And said when she was writing them up, she said, "Now, all right, Mr. Bowie, where are you from?" And he had to tell her, you know, he was from Moorhead, Mississippi. So she said, "Ah!" You know, cupped up her mouth, because she figured that was [unclear]. But now as a whole, Mississippi is about one of the straightest one around here.

Brooks: Who says that?

Bowie: I said.

Brooks: You said that.
Bowie: I says it now.

Brooks: You said it now.

Bowie: Now, we have some folks they say is gangs. I know you heard about it. Well, now, they come from up North. We didn't have nothing like that till they migrated down here. Then the others take on, you know, sometimes do things like that. But, now, you don't have nothing like some things. You don't have everything like you have up the road. You know, they'd send the Northern ones down.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Brooks: This was your second son?

Bowie: Second son. Now, he did good for hisself, because when he came back, he worked for the city up there. The city bought him a car to ride to see what was needed, and he'd come back and report it. He did that until he got a job at Oldsmobile and he made supervisor. So now he is retired. He said his check is bigger now than it was when he was working. But he has a ranch style. They used to call them ranch style, but it's a big old long house. He has a car and his wife has one. He put both of his children through college. Buzz, he's an actor, you know. He's all over the world. He's a dancer, entertainer. He's all everywhere. Now he's in Scotland.

Brooks: Who is this now?
Bowie: That's Joe Bowie's boy. We call him Buzz, but he's junior. Joe Bowie. So his daughter, she finished school down in Atlanta, Georgia. When she graduated down there, she got a job down there. That's where she is.

Rogers: That's real good. That's a big success story.

Bowie: Yes. They're nice to their parents, too. They ain't been long coming from down there, visiting. Joe said he told his daughter while they was down there, they had a sun porch and have a swing out there, you know, to lay out in. So he says, "I likes down here, this here. I be able to move on down here."

Brooks: Down where? Where is this?

Bowie: In Georgia. That's what he's telling his daughter. So she said, "Daddy, I'd be glad to have you." But said, "The next day or two after you get here, we'd have to go out apartment-looking, get you an apartment."

Brooks: Get you a place to stay.

Bowie: Because, you know, she knowed he's going to have things his way when he come. And she was doing fine. They laughed that on off.

Brooks: They'd find him an apartment. [Laughter]

Bowie: Yes. Because she said she knewed how he was.

Rogers: Was your son in a union in Detroit, in the Autoworkers union?
Bowie: Yes. And my other son, he's a carpenter.

Rogers: What's his name?

Bowie: His name is Jerry.

Brooks: Where does he live?

Bowie: He's in Toledo.

Rogers: So a bunch of your kids have left Mississippi.

Bowie: All of them gone. Ain't nobody here but me.

Brooks: Just you by yourself?

Bowie: By myself. Because the Lord took Murray away from me. I got the boy what died, he was in Chicago, and I got a daughter in Chicago. Now, she's finished school down here.

Brooks: Mrs. Bowie, when you moved up from the country and Mr. Murray built the house here, you remember when that was?

Bowie: '23, '24, somewhere along up in there, because we got here before Christmas.
Brooks: He built the house?

Bowie: Yes. Got in it before Christmas.

Rogers: Was it in the Depression years, Mrs. Bowie?

Bowie: I told Murray--I said he told us we had to move. I said, "Well, he sure didn't leave us broke." Because I was the type didn't throw away no money. So we moved here. It might have been '24. I give it '24.

Brooks: You got married in '29.

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: It had to have been about '34.

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: What kind of work did he do from there, when you moved in town.

Bowie: Murray had worked in [unclear], you know. He went to New Orleans first, and he worked down there. When winter come, he came home. He was at home. So he went to up in Toledo and worked at Erie Arden [phonetic] until he come on back home. And they wasn't going to let him be still. They got him down to the school for a janitor. You know, he didn't have much to do down there.

Brooks: So he was up in Toledo for a while.
Bowie: Yes. Then he come on home.

Rogers: What kind of work did he do in Toledo?

Bowie: Now, they was going to build a place. I don't know what kind they were doing. But I know where Joe was working, in Oldsmobile, he was working in a big place, and they had a little something like a train that carried you over the place. He didn't have to walk.

Rogers: What do you remember the years of World War II, Mrs. Bowie?

Bowie: Well, World War II, I remember that my niece was staying with us, going to school. She come out of the hills and she was staying, going to school. I remember her boyfriend wrote and told her that they done gone in the Army, and she got awful worried. So when he come out on a furlough, they got married. I think she had three boys. She is dead. Now, she was the one staying in Vallejo, California. But they had a nice home out there. Her husband's still out there.

Rogers: What was the war like for you in Mississippi? Were things harder or better?

Bowie: Well, I tell you, they was rationing sugar and they was rationing shoes. Then they got down to where they was rationing lard, grease. But, you see, my children never did go barefeet, because they would allow you coupons to get the shoes, and I could get more shoes for them and then I could pay for them. And the same way about sugar. I would buy it, you know, somebody didn't have, less fortunate than me. I remember my sister, she stayed down at Crystal Spring and she was coming up. Her girl wrote me and said, "Aunt Ura, Mama said can you get her a little lard up there? We can't get no lard down here." You know, you could get
it in boxes. I was able to get her two boxes of lard. I had lard. Then we were killing hogs and making all that lard, and then I didn't have to fool with trying--

**Brooks:** Where were you raising the hogs at?

**Bowie:** Out in the country.

**Brooks:** Your husband had a place in the country?

**Bowie:** Well, it went along with the place where we stayed.

**Brooks:** No, but this was during the war.

**Bowie:** Yes. We had hogs then, had baby pigs. Oh, had plenty of pigs. And my daddy had some, but when he stopped farming and give up, you see, he couldn't push me one way or the other. Well, he went North.

**Brooks:** Who did?

**Bowie:** My daddy.

**Brooks:** Your father went North?

**Bowie:** My father went North. You see, Mother had died and it wasn't nobody but him.

**Brooks:** So you and your husband stayed and worked the place?
Bowie: Stayed and worked the place.

Brooks: Then you built this house?

Bowie: No. We hadn't built this house then. That was when he left us and we stayed out there. I'll go back over it. We stayed out there on the river, and I don't know the boss man of that place yet, because my daddy rented it. We didn't ever see nobody. We just stayed. And we did nicely out there.

Brooks: Do you remember how long you stayed after your daddy left?

Bowie: No, I don't know how many years, but it wasn't too many, because I didn't like to stay out there because my little babies were not big enough to go to school and we stayed too further off the road, and I moved on the highway so they could go to school. That's where we moved from on the highway, where the man told us he couldn't afford the rent anymore.

Brooks: And you moved from there where?

Bowie: Here.

Brooks: That was before the war?

Bowie: No. That's after the war. I called myself grown, you know, then.

Brooks: That was after the war?
Bowie: Yes. But now where I lived at before the war, I was at home with my daddy.

Brooks: No. That's the first war. We're talking about the second war, now.

Bowie: Well, that was the second war. I was at home.

Brooks: You were with your father?

Bowie: I was in my daddy's house. My childrens was small when we did, we stayed there and rented. One thing I had to do--I liked to forgot this, too--when Mama got sick, I had some childrens and I couldn't keep them quiet. Mama couldn't stand the fuss, and I called my sister, told her she had to come and stay with Mama because I couldn't keep the childrens quiet. So I went on out there and got a little house right around where they was staying. She had childrens. I got hers and kept them with mine. Nobody in the house. So Mother did pass. Mother passed that year. In that fall, I come right back to my Daddy's. Murray's folks went talking, saying, "Child, she ain't going to let him stay away from there." But wasn't nobody there, because Ruby and her husband went back home. They stayed in Crystal Spring. I stayed there, and that's raised, you know, the children come in and were born and where, you know. Then when them little ones got big enough to go to school--

Brooks: You moved on the road.

Bowie: I moved on the road. And that's where I was. They had done opened up then. You had school buses, but they wouldn't give us but one bus then. It was so crowded. My children would get off, they'd be wringing wet with sweat.
Brooks: Where did they go to school at?


Brooks: In Moorhead?

Bowie: Yes. Moorhead. Now since they've got an elementary school here, you go to the eighth grade down on the other side of town, and then the high school is over at Indianola. But nobody has to walk nowhere. They've got the buses running out.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, how did you get involved in the Movement? Was that first with Head Start or were you involved with some of those--

Bowie: I was involved. I mean, I tell you, I slipped off one day and went to Sunflower. My friend carried me. She had a truck. I made a canteen of lemonade. We were going to carry some food. We would meet them, you know, where they have a meeting, monthly meeting. I had some sandwiches. And I put me some old walking shoes in my bag. I had a big bag, because I knowed I couldn't walk, you know, in no heels or nothing. So we got to Sunflower, and she put me out. Well, I think she was scared, because she told me, she said, "Ura, I would go with you, but I've got to carry the baby to the doctor." But I don't think that.

   Anyhow, I got there. When we got ready to move, we went on and got in line. We had some preachers in front, too. We got in the church. We left from the church. One of them prayed. He prayed and told the Lord about it and said, "Now we's fixing to travel." All the peoples up there was willing to come down and help, because I was the first one let one of them in the house.
Rogers: Were these the civil rights people?

Bowie: Yes. I let them in the house. Well, we had an icehouse right here on the corner, and Mr. Chestine [phonetic] seed I let him in. He was sitting on the porch.

Brooks: Who was he?

Bowie: Chestine. The man who had the icehouse. He was a white man. And he told them. And you know, they wouldn't let Murray work. Murray was one of the main hands at the [unclear] here. They wouldn't let him work that fall, wouldn't give him no work to do. But Murray hadn't did nothing, because he wasn't even here when I let him in. We talked and I signed up then, because I had already went once, and Murray didn't know I was going.

Brooks: To try to register to vote or to the meeting?

Bowie: I went to a meeting they was having. We were getting ready to vote. So I went with Mr. and Mrs. Palmer [phonetic], and I wanted to go. They told they didn't mind carrying me. They said, "Anybody that kind of understands and knows, we don't mind. We'd be glad for them to go."

Brooks: They're from where?

Bowie: They was from here. His wife is over there now. But he's dead. And so we went. We went over to Indianola to the meeting. So when we got ready to dismiss, one of the men says, "Come to the door. If anybody stops you all, try to stop you all along the road, don't be scared. Just stop. If they ask you where
you've been, you just tell them where you've been and come on." And I said, "Lord, what has I done got into now." That's what I said to myself.

But we came home. They didn't say anything to us. We were getting ready then. They told me that I had to go to Edwards, Mississippi, and get information, and when I get the information-- [Visitor interruption]

The man who's head of it, you know, while they was having the meeting, I went to his office and sat down. He gave me all the instructions and gave me some books and told me what I had to do. This is the first of the Head Start. He told me I had to first call a meeting at the church, and after we had the meeting at the church, then we could have one where we choose, and that was here. And that's where we picked out the officers at and got started. We didn't have money, first, but we just was in it, always was. And we went and--

**Brooks:** Did Cora [Fleming] go with you?

**Bowie:** Oh, yes.

**Brooks:** And Mrs. Giles?

**Bowie:** I'm trying to see. She was in it. Now, she could have been there when we would meet. And then I asked them, we didn't have nowhere to meet at, to get the children. Got the children. And I asked for my church. They wouldn't let me have it. They said they didn't want nobody burning down the church. They said that's what they do. I don't know whether you know Reverend Matthews or not.

**Rogers:** Is that Reverend David Matthews?
Bowie: Yes. Because me and him were at the church that night. They wouldn't let us in. And then when I got down there--

Brooks: Did he pastor your church here?

Bowie: Oh, yes. Sixteen years.

Brooks: He did? In Moorhead?

Bowie: In Moorhead. And when they found out he's kind of white, you know, he was [unclear] white--you know what I mean when he turned white, you know. He said, "Mama told me to come over here." Because the folks, you know, had them looking upside the wall, all that [unclear]. [Laughter] And so he come over here. He got up and made like he was overworked, you know, try to smooth it off. But I was going and there's me not knowed what was happening.

So finally the Church of God right on the other side opened their doors for us, the Church of God in Christ up the road over here. We had two churches. One church wouldn't hold them all. We put part here and part there. Then they went to talking about trying to have folks teaching the children. I never stopped going to Sunday school or nothing. You know, I'd go right on. See, I'd be going. Even though I had some [unclear], I'd be listening. We had a man here named Reverend Field. Leonard Field.

Brooks: No, I don't think I know him.

Bowie: He would get up and talk about the folks back on the plantation, and didn't have no learning and call theirselves trying to teach the other folks' children. When I got up, I told them, these here are these folks' children. If it hadn't been for the folks back, we wouldn't have no children. I kind of set him straight. My daddy, you
know, his mama, Miss Lela [phonetic], he died before my mama, and he come over there to tell my stepmother on me, because I stood up to him. Told her she ought to keep me from talking so much. "She was talking to you. You ought to stop," she told. [Laughter] "She was talking to you, wasn't she? She wasn't talking to me." They didn't have no children, and they would send these other folks, who [unclear] children. They'd send and tell other folks, big child, shucking bricks and things in them churches and things. And they was our color, too. Well, you know we weren't doing that.

So finally, you know, they didn't know how we was getting the gas to haul the children. But any of us would go around and give two or three dollars' worth of gas this time. Next time you'd go give them some. We got them there. So then they went to furnishing the groceries for us to cook for the children, and two of the womens out of the--

Brooks: Tell me one thing, Mrs. Bowie. Before you went to Edwards, had you ever tried to register to vote in Sunflower County?

Bowie: I'm telling you. I had registered when me and my husband were together back on the river, but I didn't know it and he didn't know it, because when Papa turned the farm over to us, Murray had to sell his own cotton. When we went, we had to write our name down. But now them folks over there didn't know it was voting until it turned out to be voting. Murray used to have to pay poll tax.

Brooks: They made him pay poll tax?

Bowie: Poll tax. I didn't know what poll tax was, but I knew I didn't have to pay no poll tax, but he did.

Brooks: And you hadn't voted?
Bowie: No, but--

Brooks: But he still had to pay poll tax?

Bowie: No. He went to paying the poll tax. Well, now, he went to paying poll tax before he, you know, when he was still--I can remember--when he was still working with Papa, he was paying poll tax.

Rogers: But was he voting then?

Bowie: I remember then they was coming around and taking them up. They didn't have to go to the pollhouse. So now somehow or another they stopped paying poll tax. I don't know. That went out.

Rogers: There was a court ruling that said you can't do this anymore.

Bowie: Oh, yes. Well, it went on. So when them CORE [Congress on Racial Equality] workers come in, well, they stood them up, and I have got pay for hauling folks to the poll to vote.

Rogers: Were they CORE, Congress of Racial Equality? Was that it?

Bowie: Yes. They would go around and pick you up, and when they come to pick me up, I told them, I said, "I'm going to vote. I'll be there." I said, "But, now, I don't want nobody to come and carry me to do what I'm supposed to do. I'm coming myself." And they said, "All right." They left. And when I got over there, I let them know that I was there.

Brooks: And you were living here?
**Bowie:** I was here. So I went, and they had about five sheets was this big, but they was in a little book form, and all them questions, all them questions on them. At that time I was pretty swift with a pencil, and I was writing. I answered all them questions. One lady was sitting beside of me. They was watching me filling them out. She told me, "I've been coming here three days, and I just can't write." I say, "You just don't know the words and answers." I said, "But you wait till I get through. I'll help you." [Laughter] That's what I said. And they was on my back. The man was standing up over me and reaching for my paper when I got through and told me to come on in here. And I said, "Did I make it?" "Yes, you made it." He said it just as low-down as he could. "If you hadn't, do you reckon I'd be telling you to put your name on the book? Now, you can't put your name on the book here and don't put it on in Moorhead." You know, that's what he told me.

**Brooks:** Do you remember when that was, Mrs. Bowie? That was before you went to work for Head Start?

**Bowie:** I'm trying to see. It was before. You know, I don't want to tell it wrong. We was volunteering.

**Rogers:** For Head Start?

**Bowie:** Yes.

**Brooks:** So you had already been to Edwards?

**Bowie:** Yes. That's how come we had got all the children and we were set up.

**Brooks:** You went to Edwards in '65?
Bowie: Somewhere along in there.

Brooks: But you had not registered before that time, to vote?

Bowie: What I'm trying to tell you, this time was the last time I went to vote. But it seemed to me like I had registered because they saying they told us to come on up here. But my husband, he didn't even go to register, and he was like me, he didn't know he had already registered either. I'm trying to see. My husband died in '74. Let me see now. It was long about '72, I guess, something like that.

Brooks: He died in '74?

Bowie: Yes. When I come back home, they sent him. The teachers couldn't even register. They were scared. Had them scared they was going to take their jobs away from them. And so Murray come to the house. He was [unclear]. He knowed I had come from over there. He said, "Mama, I wouldn't go up there, if I was you, to try to put your name on the book, because Miss Alma said they wasn't going to let you put it on there." That was one of the teachers, one of the head teachers, too. They weren't going to let them put it on there because her husband went up there and they wouldn't let him put his name on the book. And I was just looking at him and saying what we're saying. I took good pain to tell him. Didn't tell him I wouldn't, because we mind one another pretty good, and I took good pains to tell him. I mean, I just said, "Uh-huh." That's what I said. In time he got out of sight, to town I went. And I went up there. They called me, "girl." Knowed I wasn't no girl. "What can we do for you, girl?"

I said, "I want to put my name on the book."

"Have you registered?"

I said, "I have."

"When did you register?"
And I told them. Some of them got on the phone. "Yes." They had to verify.

**Brooks:** They called Indianola?

**Bowie:** Yes.

**Brooks:** To see whether you had your name on the book?

**Bowie:** Yes. My name hadn't never been on the book uptown. I just had that over in Indianola. And he told me, "Sign right there." And I signed. It was some more folks at the railroad there, they was wanting to go there. They were scared. You know, they just said they wasn't going to let you sign. Wasn't going to let you sign. So when I come out, I said, "Y'all can go write your names down, because they got the book wide open." And, boy, them folks went just like maggots, putting their name on the book.

The next job they give me and another lady was to tell them to let us see the books. And, oooh, they said they ain't never had nobody to ask that before. [Laughter] So they called over at Indianola and they said that book belongs to Moorhead and anybody wants to look in it, if they're a citizen, they have a right to. They had to turn the book loose. And that's when I said, "Mrs. [unclear], you write the living, and I'm going to write these dead folks out." They had more folks on there voting, had died. But having been here all my days, just saying I knowed they was dead.

**Brooks:** You knew who was alive and who was dead.

**Bowie:** And who was dead. So that got it kind of straightened out, and they didn't like it.

I wanted to buy a set of encyclopedias. They told me, "All you can do, you just go up to the bank and let them sign your name." They knowed me when I come in there. They wouldn't accept me no way up there.
The man asked me what, and I said, "I ain't done nothing but registered and voted." [Laughter] And so that's how then they let them alone. But, now, they had picked out, they felt, the best of the men, knowledged folks. They had to have them to have enough to run theirs, and they figured we didn't have sense enough to do nothing. So it was really our program. But they took it and had these colored men going around, "You want to be on the board?"

"Man, what board?"

"Just say you want to be on it." You know, they got up some colored folks.

Brooks: Associated Communities of Sunflower County.

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Versus a CAP agency taking over Head Start.

Bowie: They took over and they had to take us as their [unclear] agency. But that's how come we're out. They wouldn't accept us no more.

Now, they flew me to Washington, D.C. They would send you places, too. [Laughter] I know what, I don't expect to see Washington, D.C. They had a big old long table, and I sat down, and different auxiliaries would give us money to help us feed children and different things. They helped us. We were talking, and I asked Mr. [Hubert] Humphrey--let me see, who was that? What was that President's name, took over [Lyndon B.] Johnson when Johnson died?

Rogers: [John F.] Kennedy died and then Johnson took over.

Bowie: Yes. I'm talking about when Johnson died.
**Rogers:** [Richard M.] Nixon?

**Bowie:** No, it wasn't Nixon. This here was another one.

**Brooks:** What was going on? Tell me what was going on.

**Bowie:** Well, we went to get funding. They had done took us off. I mean, when they accepted. But I'm trying to see. I started to say [unclear] here, but I didn't know nobody named [unclear] here. Mr. Humphrey.

**Brooks:** Humphrey. He was the Vice President.

**Bowie:** Yes. Well, that was him.

**Brooks:** Under Lyndon Johnson.

**Bowie:** But how, look, Lyndon Johnson wasn't there, and that's another. My auntie told me don't I be going to--"You tell Ura I said"--I stayed out of her sight. "Tell Ura I said don't she go to Washington, D.C. and be getting all around that President." But the President had heard that we were coming. They moved President Johnson out and Mr. Humphrey--I know it was some kind of name--he was there.

**Rogers:** He was the Vice President.

**Bowie:** Yes. And I sat down and said, "Well, Mr. Humphrey, tell me." You know, they laughed about it. [Laughter] I was asking him so many questions, want to find out, and told him how it was. They told me,
"Mrs. Bowie, you all are going to get y'all's grant, because you really talked for it." And I laughed. I said, "Yes, and I want to know when." They didn't tell me when they was going to send it. They did tell me to go ahead on home; they were going to send the money. It would be there by the time I get there. But they did know it was coming. Well, they sent that money, but CAP kept it. But, now, they didn't use it. I mean, they were scared to use it.

**Rogers:** CAP was?

**Bowie:** Yes. But they kept us from getting it. Somebody was giving us something to feed the children. We were steady going. They had a board meeting over there, and we poured in. We went. One of the mens asked what is we going to do with that money, you know, let them know what money. "Oh, we'll find somewhere to put it." They didn't intend for them to tell that they had the money, but they had to tell me, send it back. But we didn't get it. But somebody, I'm trying to see, it was some college or another come in there. Was it Natchez? I don't know.

**Rogers:** Mary Holmes College?

**Brooks:** The CDGM grant came through.

**Bowie:** Yes. I know you knowed Gregory. Walter Gregory. And Jeremy Lee. They didn't care what kind of meeting we'd have. They'd have them there to listen. So one night they had Keno [phonetic] there. You might not know Keno. But he stayed up the road in Blaine. But I know he got up and seed how they were going, he said, "I say if you can't whoop 'em, join 'em." When he said that, they spilled the beans and told how didn't know what they had done. You know, they just spilled the beans and told it out.
Brooks: What do you remember about Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer? When did you first meet her?

Bowie: Now, when I first knewed Mrs. Hamer, I heard them talk about Fanny Lou Hamer was going to speak tonight, and that was up here on Number 3, that big long building. It was used for the sanctuary of our church. They had rented it as a colored man's auxiliary, you know, building. We had tried to rent it for Head Start, and he wouldn't let us have it. His name was Gus. But he'd let the white folks have it, and they filled it. After Hamer spoke in there, didn't nobody else speak in there, because they filled it full of old [unclear], sacks, and just put some of everything in there to keep the folks out.

Well, I didn't go to the meeting that night. I think we were having something at church. But Mrs. Beasley went, and she said Mrs. Hamer didn't do nothing but talk. See, she was all for us, all for us. And she did do some good help, too, when she started. But when the thing turned around, she had wound herself up in it so she had to turn, because she had borrowed some money, you know, built a house and they was pressing her. They was going to take the house if she didn't come up with the money. And, no, she didn't have no money. But that was how they was going to get back at her.

Brooks: Do you remember when she registered to vote?

Bowie: No, I don't remember when she registered.

Brooks: Did you remember Mr. [Charles] McLaurin, when he first came to Sunflower?

Bowie: Yes. He was working with us.

Brooks: He was working with you all?
Bowie: After we went down, he's one of the guys was moving our stuff over to Head Start. Is he working with them now?

Brooks: He works for the city in Indianola. He worked a long time in the Community Action Agency.

Bowie: Well, I know he was good friends, too. You know all of them. But when they see they wasn't going to get funded, they was needing the money. I couldn't blame them. But I didn't care how poor I got, because they cut me off. I was getting some food stamps. They cut them off.

Rogers: They cut off your food stamps?

Bowie: They said I didn't qualify because I could be working at the same place I was working at, talking about I could have went over and worked with the Head Start. But I didn't go. I wasn't [unclear]. I didn't go. Well, I could work pretty good with my hands, fix the boards and do things. They was asking me to come and help them out and, "Will you fix this bulletin board for me?" and so on. Well, now, I didn't have nothing against these folks. But they sure was acting funny. But I just spoke to them and went right on.

Brooks: Did you ever join the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]?

Bowie: Yes, I did, but that's how come I quit it.

Brooks: Who was the head?

Bowie: What is this dark man's name?
Brooks: Was it [Nelson] Dodson [phonetic]?

Bowie: No. It wasn't Dodson. I didn't have no fault to find with Dodson.

Brooks: Were you a member when Dodson was the head of it?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Carver? Carver Randall?

Bowie: No. He's a fine boy.

Brooks: He was the head of the county chapter.

Bowie: Yes. But I'm trying to see the man. He died.

Brooks: Not Medgar Evers?

Bowie: No. No.

Brooks: Do you remember Medgar?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Have you ever heard him speak?
Bowie: No. But they showed the place where he got killed at. I've been down through there. But I'm trying to see, what was this man's name? He had a wife and some little grandgirl.

Brooks: Where did he live?

Bowie: He stayed here.

Brooks: In Moorhead?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Are you talking about Reverend Knighten?

Bowie: No. Not Reverend Knighten. This here was a colored man, because he got married. He lent us some heaters. He didn't give his wife no job, and then he come and took the heaters.

Brooks: He was the head of the NAACP?

Bowie: Yes. That's how come, you know, he'd come around sometimes twice a month and collect for the NAACP. We knowed we didn't have to pay but one time a month. And I asked him, I said, "You come around taking the money." I said, "But, now, where is the receipts? You don't never give nobody no receipt."

"Well, they ain't come yet. They ain't come. When they come, I'm going to get--" He never had a receipt, but he's steady coming around taking the money.
Rogers: Was this Mr. Jimmy Lewis?

Bowie: No.

Brooks: Were you working in the Head Start then?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: You didn't join NAACP before you went to work at Head Start?

Bowie: No. I was working with it this way. But they let me know that if I went up to the courthouse and did any more--City Hall, you know--did any more writing up there, see me working up there, I couldn't work in the program.

Brooks: Do you remember the election when the black people ran for public office here in Moorhead?

Bowie: Yes. I know who were running. Had two. Jimmy Lewis and--let me see, who was that other one? But they didn't get nothing. And Thelma Barry [phonetic]. I think she got hers the first time, because the old white man said, "I don't see how come they didn't give Thelma hers." Them others might have got theirs, too, as far as we know. But they put you out. They wouldn't let you--

Brooks: Do you remember that big election in Sunflower?

Bowie: Yes.
Brooks: And Moorhead?

Bowie: Yes.

Brooks: Had the election in 1968. Do you remember that, when the people came down? Joe Harris helped to organize that.

Bowie: Yes.

Rogers: And Charles McLaurin.

Bowie: Yes. They was with us.

Brooks: Joe and Mac put that election together. Joe Harris and Charles McLaurin.

Rogers: That's when the regular Democrat beat them out?

Brooks: No. This was when there was a redistricting in Sunflower and in Moorhead in '68. They were new elections, and they had a slate of candidates, black candidates ran here in Moorhead and a slate ran in Sunflower.

Bowie: And Mrs. Hamer was running.

Rogers: Was running for the Senate. Was she running for Eastland's seat at that time?
**Bowie:** Now, look. We treated her just like [unclear], and I don't know what she was doing, but I know she left here. See, she had done turned. But she was crazy about McLaurin and Joseph Harris. You know, I think she was the cause of them coming over. So she come here and they had a big old--I don't know what. It was closed in. I don't know whether it was a truck or what. Had it all lit up and decorated up and had music in there. And they come on in.

**Brooks:** Asking people to come out and vote.

**Bowie:** Come out and vote. So every one I get to my house, [unclear]. Now, Mrs. Barry wasn't for that, because she gave me her vote. When they gave it to me, I just raised [unclear]. I just balled it up in a big old ball, and they all seen it.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

**Brooks:** ... didn't have any Head Start at all. They had to make a choice. They made a choice. That's why [unclear] program did not get funded, because they were given the Head Start money to CAP, the Community Action Agency down in Indianola.

**Bowie:** I hear them all the time grumbling about what they're doing, what they're getting now.

**Brooks:** Well, at least they've still got a Head Start program. They wouldn't have had none at all.

**Bowie:** Yes.
**Rogers:** Mrs. Bowie, was it dangerous? Did you feel like it was dangerous around here during those years when you were with Head Start and the Movement was here?

**Bowie:** Yes. They asked me if was I scared? I said, "Nuh-uh." Both my sisters, one is from California and one is from Chicago, met up here to see what was happening, and they asked me was I scared. I said, "Nuh-uh. I ain't scared." My sister Lula said, "Well, I'm not going to the meeting." I said, "I want y'all to go to the meeting with me tonight. We're having a good meeting." We went to the meeting. That night Lula didn't go, but Ruby went. And Ruby enjoyed the meeting so, she wanted to be in it herself.

**Brooks:** Who was Ruby?

**Bowie:** My sister. See, they wasn't around when I was raised there.

**Rogers:** What was good for you about the Head Start experience, when you were working with that?

**Bowie:** Well, I'll tell you. I got brushed up a lot, because some of the things that I had forgot all come back to me. Then I started back to school, and all of them was at school. But they'd come out that you had to be a twelfth-grade graduate to work, and everybody was sitting down and I stole away. I went up to Valley and took the test and got my certificate for it.

**Brooks:** You got your G.E.D.?

**Bowie:** Yes. I got it. And I come back and nobody had it but me, and they asked me how was it. I said, "It's all right, but you have to watch. It's kind of catchy." Once you caught on, you could see where they were trying to hook you. I had these others just wouldn't go. Even Mrs. Barry didn't go. So when the push come
to shove, Dr. Simmons come down here and give it. He was giving a test somewhere else, in Greenwood or somewhere, but he'd stop by there and give them folks there and then he'd come on down here and these folks down here [unclear] everything.

He had a little graduation down here, and I never will forget what he said. And I was so glad I was out of it, you know, didn't have to fool with that. So while they was down there trying to take--and they charged twenty-five cents for one cent of paper. They'd make a mistake and--one woman one night paid six dollars for paper just trying to get it right. He come down and he told them, he said, "Some of them was in the test did it good, some of them did pretty good, and some of them did fair, and some of them I just had to push out." That's the report he made.

He done had them buy these pins, and I got so embarrassed with my pin until I wouldn't wear it. They never knowed I was in it, because I was over there on the [unclear] seat. You know, I had gotten mine and was sitting down, wasn't thinking about it. When we all could have went with him; he had a school. We were just slow about moving off, all but me. They'd say I'd be trying to run things, but I'd be going on. They wasn't stopping me.

Rogers: What gave you the strength to do all of this?

Bowie: I told the man here, I said I just don't know. I just don't know. But I always knowed that I thought we could do better. I reckon I got a heap of that from my daddy, because he always [unclear] for the best. I would go to he field, maybe I'd pick three or four hundred, but in between that time, morning and evening, I would have to stop about eleven o'clock and cook and feed the folks. Then in the evening when I quit, we'd get supper, whatever we were going to do, and then I was pulling out the sewing machine and I was sewing till eleven and twelve o'clock at night and getting up in the morning and go into the field, picking most of the cotton. The Lord helped me. I think He's for me. He knowed I meant right.
**Rogers:** But it just seems like that's so much work.

**Bowie:** Well, it was a heap of work. It was a heap of work. But I helped some of them other folks that tried to do something, too, because they were sitting down. I was telling the other man, I sent my children to school and they were thinking, man, they're going to stop your children from going to school. But the man we was picking cotton for, I went out there, and he'd come out there every morning. He'd wait until about time to leave, till my children come on to go to school. He'd carry them to school every day. See, we wasn't thinking about them children going to school. He wanted them to go. But, see, we had it in us, the others did, "He's going to stop them children. He wants them children to pick, pick cotton." You know, they'd say it.

**Rogers:** This was the white man who was running the plantation?

**Bowie:** Yes. He was right. And then he would go there waiting on them to go to school, and they thought he was trying to stop the children from going to school.

**Rogers:** Maybe he just realized that you were determined.

**Bowie:** You know, they'd seed that I was trying to have flowers around my door, and they would bring me flower plants and things out there. Me and him got into it one day.

**Rogers:** You and the boss man?

**Bowie:** Now, you see, we were chopping, and as a whole, if you're chopping, you're chopping. But he was coming down behind me and I didn't know it. If I had have been chopping a bad row, he might have would have told me something different. But he told me, "Ura, I've been coming down your row watching you. You
ain't doing nothing but pecking and talking." I said, "I'm hoeing a clean row, ain't I?" That's the answer I give him. Something run over me and I chucked the hoe. He had to get out of the way. I said, "Look, if I ain't chopping to suit you, I can quit." And I walked off. See, I had plenty of temper. But I wouldn't do that now, you know. [Laughter] I don't think I'd do that now.

Rogers: But that took a lot of courage.

Bowie: Yeah, but, and so he knowed my daddy pretty well, too, because he apologized with Murray, and my daddy said, "He didn't say nothing to mean no harm." But he never did mess with me no more.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, what sorts of things did the Head Start do for the little children around here?

Bowie: Well, now, in the morning they'd pick them up and put them on the bus or truck or whatever they ride. You know what I mean? Pick them up and put them up there. That meant they didn't do nothing else, just sent them home. I had a little boy there. I had to get some coats and things and put up a little tent around the heater. I carried a tub up there. You actually had to bathe some of those children, and you always had to comb their hair. One little girl must have been tender-headed, because her hair never did get combed. She says, "Mama says she didn't want nobody to comb my head." But I don't think her mama actually said it, because Mama didn't never comb it. And I said, "Well, you tell mama to see me. Tell her I'm the one combing it." And the little girl's hair just growed. And, honey, I mean, I--and we would send them to the barber shop and get their hair cut and, you know, bring them clothes.

I got in contact with a lady out in California. My sister Ruby would tell her about me, and she'd send me clothes up here on the bus. I had clothes. They got to where they'd say, "Mrs. Bowie, my boy needs a sweater." "Mrs. Bowie." You know, they just looked to me to give them because they figured I had some. But they didn't try it, you know.
Brooks: Is this the sister down in Crystal Spring?

Bowie: It was her.

Brooks: This is the same sister you--

Bowie: It's the same sister, but she moved out in California.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, what kind of changes have you seen in this community since the days that you were in Head Start? Have things gotten better?

Bowie: I think so. Because I told somebody the other day, I said, you know, I watch these childrens now as they go to school. Because the bus don't ride these within walking distance. And they're just as neat. Their hair is nice, and they've got it fixed nice. You can look at their socks and things and tell they're pretty and white. It's just a big change. And I told the girl last night, "These children look like they're going to church."

One night a little boy was uptown and he wanted to get by, and the white man was standing up in the way, "Let me by, mister." And that man jumped like he had shot him. [Laughter] And they talk and they'll tell you. They used to wouldn't talk, but they'll talk now. It was a change. It learned them how to sing and we learned them how to talk. I think it just helped them 100 percent.

Rogers: And they got food and they got some doctors to take care of them.

Bowie: If they needed eyeglasses, they got them. Then if they needed medicine, teeth pulled, you know, they'd tend to the teeth. They never would have got it if they had to wait [unclear].
Rogers: Have politics changed in this county, in this community, much since the sixties, do you think?

Bowie: You're talking about relationships with one another?

Rogers: Yes.

Bowie: Well, I have never had no trouble out of acting, you know, what I thought was acting. But when this here movement was really going, they'd speak to you before they got to you, because they was scared of you.

Brooks: Who would speak to you?

Bowie: The white people would speak to you before they got to you. You know them ladies, "How you doing this morning?" Give you time to speak, because I know my nation of people, I know we are mean, and it do you good to pick up some and go off with it, and they weren't going to give you a chance to go off with nothing. One man said, "If [unclear], say anything to them, they're ready to sue you." You know, they knew that. But all of that done quit. Everybody seems to be getting along fine after they tore up Indianola. You know when that was. Do you know when they tore up Indianola? That ain't been too long ago.

Brooks: The boycotts and all of that?

Bowie: No, I'll tell you. No, we had a heap of boycotts and all that stuff, but I'm talking about this real one. U.C. Merrick [phonetic] is there, the colored man.
Bowie: U.C. Merrick. He had all the works it took for the superintendent, but they was going to put the white man there, and he didn't have no experience at all.

Brooks: They boycotted the town.

Bowie: They boycotted, and I mean they liked to run it.

Brooks: They got him. They got the black superintendent.

Bowie: Yes, they got him.

Brooks: He's now retired. He's retired, you know.

Rogers: Do they have another black superintendent then?

Brooks: Yes.

Bowie: Yes. He retired. Some of them was talking about his childrens weren't even going to--they're going to private school. Well, you send your child where you want.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, have you seen some negative things in Mississippi or in the Delta? You've talked about all of your children living outside of the Delta. Have you see a lot of young people leave?

Bowie: Well, them that wanted to do something. But, now, it is half grown. It just burns me up to see them, boys, walking up and down the street, should be done finished school and have a job, or either should be going
to school, and they have the pants half off them and just going up the road. You know, that makes you tired. But you can't do nothing about it, because the people think if you bother them, they'll set your house afire when you go to sleep, because Moorhead liked to have got burned up the other night.

And I tell you, the reason they ain't working, they know they ain't going to get no schooling, but they tell them they must have a G.E.D. to get a job. Well, they ain't going to get that, and some of them don't even know what it is. That just makes it they ain't going to have it.

**Rogers:** Does it seem to you that some of the young people then feel hopeless?

**Brooks:** Well, if they're waiting on them to give them a job, if they don't just give them something, it's just hopeless, I believe. Now, you see it don't need to be, because they've got schools, adult schools. I heard them talking about one last night, you know. But they ain't going.

**Rogers:** What are some other changes you've seen in your own life, Mrs. Bowie? What things are you happy about?

**Bowie:** I'm happy about? Well, let me tell you what I do in my church. Do you want to know what I do in my church?

**Rogers:** Yes.

**Bowie:** I'm superintendent of my Sunday school, and the Easter program, I'm chairman of that. I am the chairman of mother board [phonetic].

**Brooks:** What church is this now? Mount Ararat?
**Bowie:** Ararat down here, yes. Let me see what else is I down there. I'll think of something. Because I done started--you know, we has [unclear] at our church and they try to get me to help them, you know, fix their plate, but I don't. But I will cook them some and mix it with it every now and then. But I don't work back there. If the usher is away from the door, you'll have to go back there because the preacher will tell you, "Sister Bowie, take that door." You know, he'll tell me. I don't want to sit there and act stupid. I just get up and go on.

**Brooks:** What's your pastor's name?

**Bowie:** Reverend Winters [phonetic]. T. Winters, Theopolis [phonetic].

**Brooks:** He's from Greenville.

**Bowie:** Yes.

**Brooks:** I've know him. Known him since a little boy.

**Bowie:** Oh, you do?

**Brooks:** Oh, yes.

**Bowie:** Yes. Well, he kind of--at least I can take observation of I know he's got plenty of temper. But, you see, he don't know what mines is. [Laughter]
**Brooks:** I remember when he worked at Head Start, too.

**Bowie:** Head Start?

**Brooks:** Before he was preaching.

**Bowie:** Yes?

**Brooks:** He worked for Head Start in Greenville, Washington County.

**Bowie:** Yes. Well, his brother was--

**Brooks:** He was just a young boy then.

**Bowie:** Yes? Well, now, he can preach good. He preached a nice sermon last before Sunday. That's his first day over here. But now, he'll talk and kick just like a cow giving a bucket of milk. He'll kick it over, you know. He can have a business meeting and, you know, they get these things together, but they laugh about it. They say, "No, he ain't going to have no business meeting, because he's scared y'all might turn him out." But I always say, if you turn him out, you ain't going to get nobody no better or not as good.

**Rogers:** What are some other things you're pleased about with your life? You said that you're a matron in the Eastern Star.

**Bowie:** Oh, yes. I'm a worthy matron. Wait. I should show you this.
**Rogers:** Oh, that's beautiful. That's really beautiful.

**Rogers:** Is there anything you'd like to tell young people, like the young people at Tougaloo or at Dickinson who would be listening to your interview?

**Bowie:** Now, I'd like to write that, you know, take time with that. Well, I'm talking about if I had to, because there's plenty you can always tell the young peoples not to drift, because there's plenty of it around here, where they can head the boat and head for the stream and go swiftly down it. I've said that before, I know it. Didn't I? Don't drift into the habit of smoking, because if the Lord intended for you to smoke, he'd have put a chimney in your head. Let me see. And don't drift into the habit of gambling. A lot of them do that. Don't drift into the loose way of keeping Sunday. That's another thing.

**Brooks:** Mrs. Bowie, the community, is it in better shape today than it was when you--

**Bowie:** Well, now, that's something. I got mad voting day, because I think everybody should be up voting now while they've got the opportunity. I done really did some tall, tall talk about that, and I said, "I think it's time now we all be standing up being counted." But we got some members today yet ain't voting. We got some ain't even registered. We've got this man now is down sick, but now he didn't register this time, didn't vote. He said he was sick. But he went over to Indianola sick, and he could come right by the voting place and voted. When he would vote, when he [unclear], his wife didn't vote. She says she thinks she remembers voting one time, but I don't think the child knows what she was talking about. I don't think she voted never a time, because, you know, when you go to vote, if your name ain't on that book, you know you ain't voted. If they can't find it, you have to go find it, if you got it, or either you've got to go register. We have some here hadn't even voted, and then we has the white people furnishing cars to carry you to the poll and really school you on who to vote for.
Rogers: Telling you what to do.

Bowie: Yes. They really haul them down there for you.

Rogers: Do they watch you people vote then?

Bowie: No. They've got a voting machine. If you don't know how to vote, there's plenty of them don't know how to use those machines. But now the names is right there, you know. Where you know who you want to vote for, you just do it and that's it. But now when we was really in action, we'd have people going around to the house teaching you how to vote. But I ain't seen nobody do it now.

Brooks: Whoever hauls you down to the polls suggests who you ought to vote for.

Bowie: I know it. And some of it don't go to the polls.

Brooks: Too many of them don't go. That's right.

Bowie: Yes. And, you see, and they don't tell them.

Brooks: Yes. So there's no organization in the community, is there?

Bowie: No.

Brooks: That's really doing something for children and for the community.
Bowie: Wait now. I started up a sewing circle with them, and they was in line with it. My baby was staying in Indianapolis, Indiana, she got sick, and I had to quit and go up there.

Brooks: You went up there?

Bowie: Yes. I had to go see about my baby. She didn't die that time, but she did die. She died about four years ago. When I went, they stopped sewing and never picked up nothing else.

Rogers: You mean, without you they just fell apart?

Bowie: Yes.

Rogers: Mrs. Bowie, we thank you.

[End of Interview]
Index

Associated Communities of Sunflower County  15, 46

Barry  55, 56
Barry, Thelma  53
Beasley, _______  49
Bowie, Joe Jr.  29

CAP  48
Congress on Racial Equality (CORE)  42

Dodson, Nelson  50

Eastern Star  65
Eastland, James  54
Evers, Medgar  51

Field, Leonard  40
Fleming, Cora  2, 39

Giles, Mrs.  39
Gregory, Walter  48

Hamer, Fannie Lou  48, 49, 54
Harris, Joe  15, 54
Head Start  15, 37, 38, 43, 48-50, 52, 55, 56, 59, 60, 64
Humphrey, Hubert  46, 47

Keno, _______  48

Lee, Jeremy  48
Lewis, Jimmy  53

Matthews, David  39
McLaurin, Charles  49, 54
Merrick, U.C.  61

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  50, 52, 53

Race relations  7, 8, 61
Randall, Carver  51
Redistricting  54
Reeves, Joe  18, 20
Reynolds, J.W.  9
Simmons, Dr.  56

Tuskegee Institute  10

Valley State  10, 56
Voter registration  41

Winters, Theopolis  64
World War II  32, 33