

## Transcript



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## BERYL DAKERS ORAL HISTORY

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Dedicated the memory of SC House of Representative

**Joseph “Joe” H. Neal**

August 31, 1950 – February 14, 2017



## Civil Rights Oral History Interview with Beryl Dakers

Interviewee:	Beryl Dakers
Interviewer (s):	Tre Tailor Karen Alexander Ricky Taylor Tony Kenion
Location:	Columbia, SC
Interview Length:	57:33
Supplemental Material:	Includes transcript, interview release form, select photos, video, art rendering by Rodgers Boykin, music by Byron Counts

## Abstract

Beryl Dakers was born in Columbia, SC where she has fond memories of her youth as an African American girl in the segregated south. Beryl attended Waverly Elementary School and C. A. Johnson High School in Columbia, South Carolina. She went on to Syracuse, New York to attend college at Syracuse University.

In the interview, Beryl describes her childhood memories of attending school and life in the South before desegregation. She gives an insight into the world of journalism in the early 60s and 70s. Sharing her journey from High School Reporter working with Charles Bolden, then the editor of the school newspaper, at CA Johnson High School to her days at WIS Radio and South Carolina Educational Television (ETV).



**Beryl Dakers**

## Transcript

Tre Tailor: Today is Monday, March 6th, 2017. I'm Tre Tailor here with Beryl Dakers. We're going to talk about her life with the emphasis of the time period, through 1979. What is your name?

Beryl Dakers: My name is Beryl Dakers.

Tre Tailor: When and where were you born?

Beryl Dakers: I was born here in Columbia, South Carolina in the mid-20th century.

Tre Tailor: Can you talk briefly about your experience in high school or in school? Did you attend an integrated school?

Beryl Dakers: I'm a product of the Columbia city schools, Waverly Elementary, W.A. Perry Junior High, C.A. Johnson High School.

Tre Tailor: Were they integrated?

Beryl Dakers: They were definitely not integrated during that period. Actually, the desegregation efforts began when I was in 10th or 11th grade.

Tre Tailor: Can you tell me about your experience in those segregated schools? Even though you guys were segregated, did you face any opposition from non-African-American students or non-Negro students, as they were called at the time?

Beryl Dakers: Well, we didn't have any non-African-American students.

Tre Tailor: From the outside. When you ...

Beryl Dakers: No.

Tre Tailor: ... interacted with them at some point.

Beryl Dakers: I think I am very proud of the education I received in those, quote, segregated schools. I think Waverly Elementary was probably one of the best elementary schools in the city despite the fact that it was literally decaying around us at the time, but we didn't think about it that way. Perry was a relatively new school when I got there, afforded me lots of opportunities that I don't think would've been available had I been in an integrated setting. C.A. Johnson has a proud, proud history. As you know, some of our most esteemed citizens of national note graduated from C.A. Johnson.

I think probably the fact that we had a dedicated staff of African-

American teachers was a plus for us, because unlike the integrated school settings where kids were allowed to fail, we had everybody ... You had kids that were very smart. You had kids that were slower. You had kids that came from upper-class homes. You had kids who came from very impoverished circumstances. But those things didn't have a part in determining whether or not they would be taught. Those teachers were just as dedicated to all students at that time. That's not something I saw carry over into the system of integrated schools.

We also had the best teachers that were available, because African-American teachers had no place else to teach. There was a competition there for the best teachers among them, and we had great teachers. I'm also thinking about the emphasis. Kids today don't know, except during designated periods, about African-American history. That was always integrated into our schooling coming up. We had Negro history week or whatever, but we didn't need that to teach us those things because it was always a part of it. The role models that you had around you stressed that, the integration of community and school.

I think one of my earliest memories as a child is going over to Allen University for their annual Christmas program. Mr. John Hunter and the Allen University concert choir would kick it off with this wonderful Christmas concert that always began with Angels We Have Heard on High and the choir processing down the aisles. It would always end with the Hallelujah Chorus, but it was a community event, not just a college event. My early dance recitals as a child were held on the stage at all at Chappelle Auditorium. We used to wrap the Maypole at Allen University.

There was this ... I keep using the word integrated ... but I guess this woven entity of living in a segregated black community that was girted by these educational institutions that gave us our strength. It's the undergirding that gave us what we needed to get out and face the world.

Tre Tailor: That's interesting. I asked ... IS Leevy Johnson said the same types of things that the teachers were the best of the best ...

Beryl Dakers: They were.

Tre Tailor: ... because that's who was able to teach in those schools. Now, was that your experience in college, too?

Beryl Dakers: Well, I'm going to tell you, before I went to college, when they

integrated the schools in Columbia, I think the summer of my sophomore year, I elected to go to summer school, which was the summer before the integration. I went to A.C. Flora along with two guys that also went to school with me.

You didn't have any of the fanfare and stuff you had when they had the actual school opening coming up in September. This was the summer. Here we are, these three black kids. We roll up. There were white kids lining each side of the walkway. The summer school was held at A.C. Flora. There were all these people there waiting, awaiting our arrival. You marched in amid the jeers and some not so nice comments, kind of thing. But people were actually amazed, I think, that you were just kids like they were. It was an interesting experience to do that.

Tre Tailor: Did you garner any friendships or relationships during that summer school time?

Beryl Dakers: Probably I would say one or two relationships. For the most part, the kids kept to themselves. That was not a part of it. Because academically we were probably better prepared than most of them, that was not an issue, and they soon left us alone. It would be interesting. You'd go to the restroom and the girls would be afraid to come into the restroom because they just assumed that I was carrying a knife or something. They had all these negative connotations and misconceptions about people. They would actually say something like that to you. You'd just look at them and go on. After a while, it finally dawned on them that we were just like everybody else. But, no. To say we formed lifelong friendships as a result of that, no.

I was fortunate, however, that while I was in high school, the South Carolina Council on Human Relations, I believe, formed a group of high school students from all of the area high schools. There were people from Booker and Johnson as well as Flora, Dreher, Eau Claire University and Columbia High. And, we would get together for just get to know you sessions where they tried to, quote, teach you about each other's culture, whatever that means. Pretty soon, everybody realized that your lives were not that different, and that you were just kids. I did form some lasting relationships in that circumstance, a couple of which I still have today.

Tre Tailor: Did you ever have the conversation about race, about why there was that tension?

Beryl Dakers: Well, strangely, among the students, we didn't. You know. Even back

then, they felt that this was an artificial construct. Once we sat across the table and they realized we had the same goals and aspirations, things of that sort, we didn't. We went to. I remember we went to Penn Center, one summer, this group did, went to Penn Center.

And. The worst part of that was crossing the bridge out of Beaufort, because we were couple carloads of mixed races. There were locals who got behind us making noises and throwing bricks and things of that sort, but once we got out to the pastoral quiet of Penn Center, and we were sitting around just like kids everywhere. You know. A couple of guys were playing guitars. Some people were singing. You did the civil rights songs, but you also did folk songs. And we just talked about what we felt we would do to make the world a better place.

Tre Tailor: What was that? Do you remember what your, I guess, 16, 17-year-old self thought?

Beryl Dakers: I think my 16, 17-year-old self probably thought the same as my much older self thinks now, that you do it; it has to be one-on-one, because you can't change people's minds. You know. You have to live experiences and relate. That's the way things happen. So, I know that we all committed ourselves to continuing some type of social justice action. And for the most part, I think those people did that as I think about where they are today, and the marks they have made.

Tre Tailor: Let's talk about college. Where were you educated?

Beryl Dakers: I did my undergrad work at Syracuse University in upstate New York.

Tre Tailor: And that was a segregated school?

Beryl Dakers: Oh, no.

Tre Tailor: No.

Beryl Dakers: No. No. No. I chose Syracuse because coming out of C.A. Johnson, despite the fact that I can tell you that we had the best of the best, I needed to know for myself that the things that you heard in the popular press were not true. I needed to know that I could compete anywhere, and that race would not be an issue. And so, I did not choose to go to an HBCU, which I regretted on many occasions, but I consciously chose to go to a predominantly white school.

Tre Tailor: Right. But so it was integrated. It was integrated. Did you have any instances of racism there at Syracuse?

Beryl Dakers: Certainly. You find out you have ... That's not limited to being in the south. I lived in an honor's dorm that had 500 girls. There were 50 rooms, so 100 girls on my freshman floor. They came from all over the country. My first introduction was seeing a Confederate flag taped to the door of one of the girls who came from Georgia. So, that was my introduction to that dorm floor.

My next instance was having them all crowd around when I got out of the shower one day because they wanted to see what would happen to my hair in the shower. Pretty soon, though, that went away. My roommate was a Jewish girl from Long Island. And, as different as we were in appearance and probably in upbringing, we found out that we were like two peas in a pod. And in many ways, she felt as isolated as I did. Even though Syracuse had a large Jewish population, there was a sharp ... There was probably more of a distinction between Christian and Jewish kids there than between blacks and whites.

Back then, this was in '67, there weren't that many African-Americans on campus. I mean, it was a huge campus. There were probably 100 African-American sprinkled through. Half of those were athletes. This is the school of Ernie Davis and folks like Floyd Little and people like that. They were accustomed to African-American males in particular. African-American females was made a little bit of a difference, but you could literally ... once it snowed, I could literally go a week and not see another black face.

Tre Tailor: Did you major in mass com journalism?

Beryl Dakers: I had a dual major, American studies and television, radio and news journalism, yes.

Tre Tailor: How did you become interested in that? Or how did you decide to slant it more as towards journalism?

Beryl Dakers: Well, I did not think that I would be working in journalism, if that's what you're asking me, but I had always been active in journalism in high school. We did editor of the high school newspaper. I should say I started working the high school newspaper when I was a freshman. I was a reporter. Charles Bolden, who later became the head of NASA, was our editor at that time. We had a very active journalistic experience there. We created a literary magazine. I always had an interest in that.

My high school journalism teacher was interested in television. I



remember maybe seeing her Christmas of my freshman year, something. She asked me about journalism. I said, "Well, I'll take some courses." You couldn't get into the J school until you were junior year anyway. You had to have another major. My major at the time was zoology. That's another story. Because I wanted to be a research scientist.

But, once I got there, because Syracuse does have a pretty intense journalism school. I took these magazine and newspaper courses, but I had the opportunity to dabble in broadcasting, which is what I did initially. I always thought it would be something interesting to do, but I didn't think of it as a career move.

Tre Tailor: Well, you broke down walls. You made history when you came back to South Carolina working as the first African-American newscaster on WIS Radio. How did you get that job?

Beryl Dakers: I was in graduate school, and I needed a summer job. And a friend of my mother's worked for the Columbia Urban League and happened to say to her ... WIS was actively recruiting African-Americans at the time, I think. I'm not really sure. I just know that I was encouraged to send them my resume, and I did. And I had this telephone interview with Brent Hill, who was the general manager at the time. And he hired me over the phone.

Now, I have to assume that he knew I was African-American, but that never came up in the conversation. There was nothing related to race in our discussion. And so, while Mr. Hill may have been expecting me, my first day walking in that June of 1972, walking into WIS Radio, a few other heads did turn a little bit. But at that time, they did have blacks working in traffic, but they had never had a black person on air before.

Tre Tailor: You said that some heads turned when you walked in the door.

Beryl Dakers: Yeah. Yeah.

Tre Tailor: Was there any other challenges, so to speak, that you experienced being an African-American on the air?

Beryl Dakers: No, I did not. I think probably because my voice was not particularly ethnic. I'm not sure. I had more challenges because people thought I was not a Southerner. I remember one of the senators calling me to correct my pronunciation on something one day. And he said, "Now you Northerners need to understand we have a distinct way of

speaking down here," and he went on to tell me that there were definitely some inflections that I needed to know. He talked about Huger Street and Gervais. This happened to have been Sen. Ralph Gasque. I think I had hit his news running in a newscast. I said, "Sen. Gast." He let me know that he was Gasque, and there were other names like that, which by the way I appreciated, very much, because it taught me that you familiarize yourself with names and things of that sort before you go on the air. It was a great lesson to learn. Again, it was the Northern ...

I'll tell you a funny story. I used to run the audio board for Bill Benton's Time to Talk program. And he did an interview with Robert Scoggins, who was, at that time, the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. And when Mr. Scoggins came in, Bill introduced him to me, and his mouth dropped open. And he said, "Well, I've been listening to you all this time. I had no idea you were one of them." That was the extent of it. He was fine. He decided that I was an okay person. I actually interviewed him on a couple of occasions myself several times after that.

Tre Tailor: How did you transition from radio to TV to WIS TV, again, being one of the first African-Americans on the air?

Beryl Dakers: Well, I certainly was not the first. While I had been away in school, I believe Marjorie Clarkson may have been the first African-American on the air. By the time I was working in radio, Jackie Johnson had started working as the early morning newscaster for the, what we call the graveyard shift, very early, early at WIS.

But my movement from radio to TV was prompted by a tragedy, actually. Lynn Nevius was the on-air cohost with Joe Pinner of a program called Today in Carolina, which was a very popular early-morning program. And, unfortunately, she committed suicide. While they were looking for someone, Lynn had also been one of the producers of that program. While they were looking for a way to transition past her death, they decided to just move me over from radio since I had, I was somewhat familiar to the audiences by then. And I think it was meant to be a temporary thing.

But, I moved from radio to television. I spent my first day on the air sitting between Joe Pinner and Jim Welch, who were the two co-anchors at that time. And I spent the entire hour doing this, because both guys talked so much. I could hardly get a word in edge wise, other than they introduced me and they started talking. And so, pretty much, I made up my mind then, "Well, you know you're going to have

to start speaking." It helped that I was the producer. I couldn't make it ...

Tre Tailor: Provide your stuff ...

Beryl Dakers: Right. I could make sure that I had something to say.

Tre Tailor: Did you have any trepidation or concerns accepting that job at WIS TV?

Beryl Dakers: The one trepidation I probably had would've been I never thought of myself as a television personality, anything. All of the fake ideas you have about TV people and they have to be a certain ... I'm basically a fairly reticent person, and so being there, being upfront kind of was a little bit unnerving. You have to understand, I had spent several years, by this time, doing these news beats. I didn't have any trepidation about material or the job itself.

Tre Tailor: What about being a female in a male dominated, white male dominated field? Did you face any discrimination, any challenges?

Beryl Dakers: Not really. I think, as I said, being the producer helped me because the morning part of my job was producing Today in Carolina. The afternoon part had to do with being a straight beat reporter. At that time, you know, the assignments came in and they went out. You didn't do it. I did make sure that I didn't do what were the traditional female pieces for the show. I didn't do the cooking segments. I didn't do the gardening segments. I didn't talk about the changes in fashion and things of that sort. Even if I were interested, I didn't do that. I made sure that the guys did that, so that the things that came my way tended to be more generic news issues or social issues, and things of that sort.

Tre Tailor: Tell me about your transition to ETV.

Beryl Dakers: Well, this sounds very strange. While working in radio, I was approached by Bill Terrell to come and institute a new show for ETV. He was very interested. He had a very successful program, Job Man, Caravan going at ETV, which disseminated job information then social service information, packaged around a format of really hot music, with all of the great stars of the day.

And uhm, but he had decided that they wanted to do more in the area of public affairs. And so, He auditioned several people, I believe, to do this, but he called me and asked me if I would be interested. We

talked about it. We clicked. And so, I started working with them on a part-time basis. I was still employed in radio at the time. And I worked with them part-time to inaugurate this program For The People.

Tre Tailor: Tell me about your audition.

Beryl Dakers: My audition consisted of being interviewed by Bill Terrell on air with cameras and things of that sort. And it was hysterical. He said, "I'll be a popular figure of the day. Who would you like me to be?" And I said, "Angela Davis." Bill sat there. I proceeded to interview him as though he were Angela Davis. And apparently, I must've done it the right way because at the end of that, he decided I was okay.

Tre Tailor: Now, you went on to end up working full-time at ETV. How did that happen?

Beryl Dakers: Several years later, I had been working for WIS television. And, I produced a documentary on the South Carolinian of the year, I believe, in 1976 or '77. And it was Judge Matthew Perry upon the occasion of his appointment to the military Court of Appeals. I worked with a very talented videographer whose name was ... or a cinematographer at the time ... whose name was Russ Moss, who was a graduate of Benedict College. And we worked really hard on this program. Each year, WIS would pick one person that they felt was their newsmaker of the year.

And we did the documentary, but we started it using civil rights footage from some of the civil rights marches. And WIS didn't like that. They liked the documentary, the body of it, and they used it, but they wanted us to change the opening. And that bothered me. It bothered Russ to the point of he actually started sending out tapes the next day. He was the editor. He did not change it. They did get one of my white colleagues to change the opening. It was only 50 seconds. It wasn't like it changed the ... but it made me start thinking about what I wanted to do. I had enjoyed a very successful and very positive relationship with WIS serving as sometimes as anchor, being a producer, doing the morning show. I produced a religious program. I did an international program called The World Thing.

So, I worked a lot. And they were very positive and very supportive of that, but I realized that I really wanted to have an opportunity to do long-form programming, to do things that I could really put my teeth into. Documentaries were not that easy to come by working in commercial television. I did a series of bicentennial documentaries for WIS. After that, actually, ETV called me and offered me a job. And I.

This sounds very strange, but I declined initially, because I thought that the job would be strictly in minority programming. And I felt it was time that ETV open up their ranks. They promised me that I could come over as their news and public affairs director.

Tre Tailor: And when you got there, you were able to create some great minority programming, but some non-minority programming also.

Beryl Dakers: Well, as the news and public affairs director, I you know, I could do any kind of programming pretty much. And I was fortunate to branch out in a lot of directions. I mean, I did financial programming for goodness' sake. I did. Well, after doing the nightly news and public affairs show, we started doing a little feature on a nature series. I had worked with Rudy Mancke occasionally at WIS having him come in when a guest was absent, or when we didn't have the time to do something else.

And, Rudy had always impressed me, but more so he impressed my mother who was a biology teacher. And she had always gotten on me. She said, "You know, if I had the resources available to me that you have, I'd take that camera out in the field and I'd take my students on a video field trip. That's what you ought to be doing. You ought to use ..." And I thought about it. And I talked it over with Rudy. He was excited about it. And the result was, I was able to create a program called Nature Scene.

Tre Tailor: Which is still airing today.

Beryl Dakers: They do still air it today. They do. Now, I will tell you, and you want to talk a little bit not about racism but sexism. When the program had been on the air for several years and was very successful in South Carolina, and ETV decided that they'd like to offer the show nationally. We went to the PBS meetings, and I sold the program in terms of talking about it and its success for us. And then they informed me that it wouldn't be proper for a woman, especially one with children to go traipsing around the country. So, they decided that it would be better if one of my male colleagues started doing the show. It was a sore blow, a sore blow, but at least we got a good show out of it.

One of the other non-stereotypic programs was What In the World Is it?, which was actually a predecessor to Antiques Roadshow. And, I created that program because Rudy's counterpart at the State Museum ... Rudy was the curator of natural history. Excuse me. And Roger Stroupe was the curator of materials culture, the artifacts that we define our lives. And Roger said to me one day, "Well, you created

a show for Rudy, what can you do for materials culture?" And I thought about it. Somehow, we came up with What in the World is it, which was also a very popular show that later ... that resembled in many ways Antiques Roadshow, which had not yet come.

So those were the kinds of things, but my heart and soul, really ... I love South Carolina history and culture and the people of South Carolina, their lifestyles, their interests. I started doing documentaries on significant people, both black and white. I feel very privileged to have done a number of those, which I think still stand as definitive works in biographies.

Tre Tailor: You have. You've hosted forums, produced documentaries. Tell me about two in particular, the one on with Modjeska Simkins and then the one on Strom Thurmond.

Beryl Dakers: Okay. Strom Thurmond, at the time we did that documentary was third in line for the presidency, if you think about it. He was, of course, the Senior Senator in South Carolina, and had actually been in office my entire life. It made sense that ETV would do a documentary on him.

Tre Tailor: Did it make sense for you to do it knowing his ...

Beryl Dakers: Well, I was probably given ... Yeah, I was the senior, quote, reporter on staff at the time. And so, yes, it made sense for me to do it. Given the fact that, yes, he had had his stance on segregation and was well known for that. Strom Thurmond was a very complicated political figure, because for all of his hoopla about race and things like that when he was a Dixiecrat and for his personal involvement with having fathered a black child, he was the consummate politician. And he delivered the best constituent service of any politician, black or white. His black constituents swore by him. He sent cards when people died. He was the one that would help you get your child into school, or help you get a passport, or help you out of this issue. His staff was extremely responsive to his constituency, regardless of color.

Now, when I interviewed him in DC ... and I had interviewed him before. This is not the first time, but certainly to do this ... He was so proud that his home state was doing this documentary. He took us around to everybody. I mean, I got to interview people like Ted Kennedy and Orrin Hatch and Robert Byrd, all these other people on Capitol Hill, because Strom wanted us to, asked them about me, talked ... He very proudly took the crew around.

As I was sitting there, I asked him specifically about his stance on

segregation. And what he said to me, which was not really a complete answer, but he said, "Well, it was the law of the land at the time, and I was just upholding the law." And I said, "Senator, it had to be more than that." He just looked at me and he said, "Well, I probably would've done things differently later on as I thought about it, but at the time, it was the law of the land and we let it go with that."

Tre Tailor: Well, here we are, we in the mid to later '70s, when most people would've felt like the civil rights era was technically gone, or was over. Do you still feel like there were some civil rights issues, concerns, challenges that you were having?

Beryl Dakers: I think everybody was still having civil rights issues. Just because we had won legal battles, that does not change a society. Yes, maybe now you could go in certain restaurants, and you could sleep in the hotel, or you didn't have to ride on the back of the bus, but that did not change the hearts and minds of mankind. So, yeah, we were very much ... I mean, there were certainly job issues. There was that old thing of people would say, "I can't find one." I mean, that's really why I stayed here and stayed in television is they would use that excuse, "Well, we tried, but we couldn't find one," you know the idea that we didn't have qualified people to take jobs. Certainly, we were just after the bicentennial in '76. You know, feelings were still rampant about the way things used to be. There were lots of jobs.

I'm a child of the Urban League, by the way. We've not said this. I'm probably one of the few people who has been a client of the Urban League, an employee of the Urban League, and a board member, trustee of the Urban League, as well. When I was a sophomore in college, the Urban League had something called ... They established a youth program, because this was the time when the Panthers were out on the West Coast, and there was a lot of upheaval, and schools were being taken over on the East Coast. People were protesting the Vietnam War, but also there were civil rights marches and things still going on. They formed a youth cadre. And they provided summer jobs for kids across the country. I was fortunate enough to be one of those people.

I got involved with the league at that point, whose major emphasis was on job development. Whitney Young was the head of the Urban League at that time. And my first assignment was in Columbus, Ohio the first summer I worked with them. Whitney Young came to Columbus to speak at a CORE convention, The Congress of Racial Equality. The various factions of the civil rights movement were all there to speak, but Whitney Young came. Those of us who ... there

were four of us on our team ... were working at Columbus went to see Whitney Young.

Now, why am I telling you this? Because the very next day, or the day after, my parents were visited by the FBI at home. And my neighbors at home were questioned by the FBI who wanted to know about my radical subversive interest. So, when you say were there civil rights issues still going on, yeah, very much so. That was in the late '60s. By the time we got to the '70s, yeah, that stuff was very much still going on.

Tre Tailor: Let's finish talking about your experience with the Urban League. That's how you got that job at WIS.

Beryl Dakers: Right.

Tre Tailor: Then, as you said, you worked with them through CORE. Then, you ended up serving on the board of the Urban League. Tell us about that.

Beryl Dakers: I did when I came back to Columbia. I think they were following the lead of national, because national took it very seriously. The youth movement within the national organization had prompted national to actually open up some of their slots, too, for younger people. And that permeated down to their affiliates.

Gosh. I was in my 20's. I was pretty young. I was invited to join the board and subsequently actually served two terms as President of that board. Probably also because I did also have the opportunity to join the national board for two terms.

Tre Tailor: Tell me about your time at the Urban League on the board and working with what organization. What were some of the types of things you all did during that time that maybe would stand out?

Beryl Dakers: The Urban League was heavily invested in the idea of job development and job training programs, and very much, probably the leading organization. Each organization had its own thrust. You go and make the waves, we go do this, you do that.

And so, I think those early on-the-job training programs, those early business sessions with opening up the commerce and the whole structure of how our cities worked back then were very, very much a part of the Urban League's thing. That's also when they started the heavy emphasis on youth development and youth training jobs and



things of that sort.

For me, it was like, on-the-job training, too, because we had a change in leadership at the time. And, for a while, we were without a president, a CEO of the organization. I'm learning and I'm working with these consummate professionals at the league, but bearing a lot of responsibility, arguing for their funding, that kind of thing as well. It was quite a learning experience. I guess I should be proud to say that I was actually the board president who hired J.T. McLawhorn. That says something since he's still there many, many, many years later.

Tre Tailor: Are there any students or fellow board members that you worked with that you want to mention?

Beryl Dakers: I worked with so many wonderful board members at the time. I mean, people like ... Let's see. You know, we had. It was an interesting board because the persons who were the CEOs of major organizations at that time didn't designate people, they were on the board. Virgil Summer who was the head of SCE&G and Hootie Johnson of what is now Bank of America Fame, and these ... and the Masters. These guys were on the board. I can't think of names, as I'm going on, but so were people like Dr. Mariah Davis, for example, and Col. P. Taylor and Gus Rogers, Pat Noble. There were just lots of people who were very, very instrumental and Bob Royal, who was the President of what is now NBSC.

Just. These people came together to make Columbia unlike other cities that maybe were not ... where the leadership was not totally involved. They came together to make it work.

Tre Tailor: People of all races?

Beryl Dakers: Yeah. People, well at least of two races at the time.

Tre Tailor: As a trailblazing black woman in your field, do you feel like ...

Beryl Dakers: Oh my goodness.

Tre Tailor: ... you feel like you were judged or observed more harshly during your career?

Beryl Dakers: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think, yes. I think that I had an obligation and a responsibility to be the best I could be in that job. I know that as I've observed over the years, I have many, many colleagues who are not African-American, who had goofs and snafus and things, and they'd

been given another chance. It was pretty much written in stone that I could not afford those missteps.

People say, "Well, you're good at your job." Well, you had to be good at your job. That could not come under question, because if you were, you wouldn't be there. You wouldn't be given a second chance. It had to do with things even as basic as the way I speak. Language was important.

One of the early things that killed off several African-Americans who desired a career in broadcasting was the fact that they didn't have a mastery of the English language. Now, I can speak with the best of them on the street, but you have to know the English language, and you have to be able to ... You also have to be able to understand the subject that you're talking about. I'm a big believer in homework. If I don't know something about the subject we're talking about, then I'm not going to be a good interviewer. A lot of people don't necessarily understand that. A lot of people don't have that same philosophy, but with us, there was never a chance not to have it.

Tre Tailor: Do you think the industry's attitude towards race has changed during your career?

Beryl Dakers: The industry's attitude toward race, that's an interesting question, Tre. I don't know. I know on the outside, you look at the field of broadcasting and you think, "Wow. There's as many blacks here as there. There are a whole lot of folks. Everything is ..." I still, for the most part, don't see blacks populating upper management in any great degree. There are more of us involved behind the cameras now than before. Have we reached that pinnacle? I don't know. What I see happening in smaller markets is a lot of those of us who were in front of the camera are rotating out now. And those dynamics are shifting as well.

In some ways, I think it may be closing back up. I know that all of the people who started with me in public broadcasting on the national level are gone now. There are very few of those people, not just ... I mean, they've aged and retired, but the people who replaced them were not African-American. And so, those people who pioneered programs back in the '60s and '70s, those pioneering efforts have all but been forgotten in a lot of ways. I'm not sure, as we look at what's happening with the shifts and anchors in the cable news industry now, we must be ever vigilant.

Tre Tailor: You have been so diverse in your coverage, everything from, as I

said, documentaries. You've done forums, politics, arts and culture, very much that. Were you able to, or do you think it's important to bring out the social justice element in everything that you cover?

Beryl Dakers: I think if you do your job right, you can't help but bring out the social justice element in everything you cover. I've been passionate about the arts. I've done high art. I've done low art. I've done folk art. I do a whole lot of different art, but I have always consciously made sure that I also included minorities in the arts coverage that I did. And, whether it's opera or modern dance or visual art, yes.

Typically, in covering the arts, social justice, makes it's a way to the front because the artists themselves are involved in social justice. The arts tend to be a very, very democratic area of concern. Yes.

Tre Tailor: My final question is ... and this is actually from Karen ... do you have a proudest moment from your career?

Beryl Dakers: A proudest moment? I can't say that I do, because I have been so privileged. You know I could say interviewing Jimmy Carter was one of the proudest moments of my life, but I can also tell you that doing a series on domestic violence, talking to the families of survivors of domestic violence, being able to give a forum and a picture to their pain. That, to me, was really moving and important.

Sitting on the piano stool with Dizzy Gillespie was a proud and fun moment for me, but so was listening to the woman who talked to me about the heritage of making the sea island baskets when she talked about how proud she was 'cause this is our heritage. This is our heritage. It came from West Africa. We are still doing it today. I had goose pimples. So, I don't know what my proudest moment was. There'd been many. I think being able to create Nature Scene and say, "Mama, this is for you." That's one of my proudest moments.

Tre Tailor: Of all the interviews you've had, and then you talked about interviewing the man from the Ku Klux Klan and Strom Thurmond, was there any interviewee that you felt did not want to be interviewed by you, maybe because you're a woman, or an African-American?

Beryl Dakers: I don't know whether it's because I was a woman or an African-American, or whether he just hated interviews, but William F. Buckley stands out. It's down for me as the most difficult interviewee I've ever worked with. That's because aside from the fact that he spoke in this polysyllabic language, where you felt you needed a dictionary to understand what he was saying, he would never maintain eye contact

with me. He'd lean this far away from me as he could get throughout the whole interview. That was difficult. Because he was a conservative, I suspect that some of those other things came into play as well.

Tre Tailor: Anyone else have any questions?

Karen Alexander: Beryl, this is Karen Alexander. My question is what do you want your legacy to be? How do you want to be remembered?

Beryl Dakers: Wow. You know, I've asked that question of people for years. I would like to be remembered as someone who really cared, and who did her best to make a difference, to make life more positive for others. That's how I'd like to be remembered.

Tre Tailor: Ricky or Tony, do you guys have question?

Tre Tailor: Okay, Beryl, do you have anything else that you would like to share with us concerning your career and your experiences as it relates to the civil rights period, or anything you'd like to share with us?

Beryl Dakers: People give you credence for being the first. You get a lot of props for being the first, but that simply means that you happened to be in the right place at the right time. I don't think being the first is nearly as important as what you do after you are there.

And I don't think it's very obvious to people on the outside that broadcasting is not an easy job. I know it looks like it's easy, but it's not an easy profession. It's not an easy one to stay in, at least not the side of it that I've seen. I think I'd like it to be understood that you have to have a personal commitment and always understand that you don't let other people, or job, or position define you, that you make your own way. You have standards and you have to hold onto them in order to be a worthwhile human being.

Beryl Dakers: One incident that stands out in my mind during the period when I worked for WIS was having been sent out to Spring Valley Country Club to cover the national chicken cooking contest, or something of that ilk. I got there and I couldn't get in because the country club didn't admit blacks. And so, even though I happened to be the reporter, I couldn't get in. To WIS's credit, they said if I couldn't get in, they weren't covering the story, and they didn't. And that was a good thing.

Tre Tailor: You talked about your afro, was a ...

Beryl Dakers: Yes, because in the early '70s, afros had not quite drifted back in any great degree to Columbia. And here I was, I was coming back from Cambridge from Boston and I had this huge afro at the time. And so, most of the comments that they got at WIS on the switchboard about me didn't have to do with the fact that I was black. It had more to do with my hairstyle, whether they liked that hairstyle or if I were wearing a gaylay or something. It's funny things.

The other racial, definitely racial, comment that I'm reminded of is in the early days of Nature Scene, ETV used to get quite a few complaints because they didn't feel it was proper for this black woman to be out in the woods with this white man all alone, as though we were all alone, or as if there were any impropriety anyway. That was just always funny to me that it didn't have anything to do with the content of the show. It's just that we somehow offended the moral sensibility by being a, quote, mixed couple.

