

## PEARLENE OLIVER INTERVIEW, SUMMER 1992, TRANSCRIPT 2

INTERVIEWER: Marjory Whitelaw  
INTERVIEWEE: Pearlene Oliver

Whitelaw: Interview with Pearlene Oliver, and this is side A or side 1 or the second cassette. We are talking about her campaign to get black nurses into the hospitals. And you were standing on the doorstep of the Lord Nelson Hotel.

Oliver: Well first, it was the invitation from the chairperson of the Board of Trade. I didn't - to go to that, I was nervous. I was young, and to speak before all these businessmen - I didn't mind speaking before my own people or the church, but Bill said, "You'd better do it, and you can do it." So, I got myself all ready, and I had said to him, "Yes, I will do it." I pretty well knew what I wanted to say, and I had quite a few notes written out and everything to speak for about ten minutes. But I put the story right to them with gusto about what was happening to the black people, those that wanted higher education. I used the nurses example, plus a lot of other things, restaurants and whatnot. But the thing of it was, that day when I went there, I was all dressed up, a nice little suit on, looking very sedate. I knew pretty well - I was very young in those days, I was only about twenty something. So, he - the man was waiting for me, I can't give you his name. Those things didn't matter to me. All I wanted to do was to get there. I knew they'd get publicity because they always had a reporter there at their luncheons. So, he took me into the Lord Nelson, and I took a deep breath and I said, "Well, this is great. I'm in the Lord Nelson Hotel, in the lobby!" Ordinarily, a black person couldn't go in there. So, I walked in with my head up, and I would doubt if they saw me. They didn't look twice. They wouldn't know that I was black at that time because I was all dressed up nice and everything. And into the dining room. So, I said, "Number two, I'm going to be eating here." So, I was thinking about all of these things that I could talk about later that was happening that was of no consequence to them, you see. So anyway, here I am, and I give this speech. I hit the hospitals and I hit Nova Scotia. I'm talking Nova Scotia, I was very provincial, but I got out of that after these one or two speeches. And my own brothers, my own brothers over fighting Hitler! "What are they fighting for?" Words to that effect. And so the reporters there took it. They made a great story out of it. I think again, I got my picture in the paper. I'm not sure now, but there's quite a bit, there was a lot of publicity! Now, this publicity's getting out. Toronto papers are picking this up. After I made two speeches like that, not only to the

- the next one was the Y's men. That was the Board of Trade, then the Y's men wanted me. I suppose they thought, "Well, you know, we'll get this young lady in here just to get her to speak on this." I don't know just what they were thinking. But their dinner was not in the Lord Nelson, I had to go someplace else. Maybe it was the Y, I'm not sure. But I spoke for the Y's men. Again, more publicity. And then after I had spoken twice like this, I get a letter from Ruth Bailey in Toronto. I don't know her, I never met her. I've got her letter in one of my old scrapbooks. And Ruth said, "Dear Mrs Oliver, In our Toronto papers, there is quite a bit of - there have been a few writeups on you about you speaking about the hospital in Nova Scotia not accepting any black girls. I wanted to write you to tell you that it's not only Nova Scotia" - I'm hitting Nova Scotia now - she said, "I tried, I'm black, I tried every hospital from Vancouver to Montreal." And she said, "None of them - I have my grade 12 - not one of them would accept me." So, she said, "you're a little off when you're just saying Nova Scotia. You'd better use Canada." I said, "Praise God, I got that letter." I said, "Thank God, now I've got a bigger gun!" See, I was just using a sling shot! (Laughter) Now, I had this big gun. I said, "Somebody please invite me to speak because now I'm going to use Canada, Canada!" So the invitations, every week I was making a speech somewhere. And some of the womens groups wanted me in, and it was quite the thing because of the War. I guess I got my point across, this little young black lady coming in so brave and everything. So, that's the way it happened. Now, Ruth said, Canada, so when I got - Then I was also going after 'Little Black Sambo', because my first child was starting to school and he came home with this book. The teacher wanted him to read, 'Little Black Sambo', and I said, "Don't you dare read it. You stand up and you tell the teacher your mother said, 'You're not going to read this because it's putting your race down.'"

Whitelaw: Remind me about 'Little Black Sambo'. I've forgotten what happens.

Oliver: Well, I got in on that. That's me too. So anyway - and my children - I said, "Don't you read it." So, we'll let that go, and we'll go back to that. But this story and the nurses story - this story and the nurses story was making all the headway. Ruth gave me Canada. I answered her right back. I thanked her, and I told her I was sorry that I was just saying Nova Scotia, but that's all I knew. Then, I said, "Dear God, you don't mean to tell me the whole of Canada! I thought someplace in Canada would accept a grade 12 student who might happen to be mulatto or brown or a little different color." But no, she said, "Not one!" And then when I started using Canada, that's when things began to move. And I'll sum up quickly for you. I'll never forget everywhere I went,

I used it. It was just like the only song I could sing. And I knew I had a good one, and I was determined that the world was going to know about this, and somebody good was going to do something about it. I knew we couldn't do anything about it. I remember the day, it was so traumatic. I was on my knees scrubbing the old floor in the parsonage in the dining room. We just had linoleum there, and I had to continually scrub it because I had two or three little boys and they were all over the floors and everything. I remember this day, I was down mopping up or wiping up the linoleum in the little dining room at Cornwallis Street there. So, I had to take the phone. I had no help, and I had to be everything you know, receptionist and everything else. Phone rang, and I cannot tell you, although I think it was Mr Zi, although you could find out by finding out who was the president of the board of the Childrens Hospital. But this male voice - he was probably at one of the dinners - and this male voice said words to this effect - because I wasn't expecting this and I didn't write it down because, you know, I didn't record this stuff. So, words to this effect - "Mrs Oliver, you've been talking quite a bit about the hospitals in Canada not accepting black girls to train. This was brought up at our board meeting last night." Words to this effect now, these are not his exact words. And he said, "We decided that - we decided that I was to ask you to select two black girls to come into the Childrens Hospital." Me, me to select them now! And I'm just sitting there, and my scrub bucket is on the floor, and my babies are around the floor. And he said - And Marjory, it happens, God was behind this, the Holy Spirit! I only had two. I had Gwen Barton, who was excellent! And these were A 1 plus. I had this girl in Toronto, Ruth Bailey. So, I said, "That will be no problem." I only had two. (Laughter) I let on that there were many more, and it showed that there were many more who would be - and who did get in. So, he said, "We want you to select two."

Whitelaw: Okay.

Oliver: So anyway he said, "Would you choose two" - because I was doing all the talking - "and either bring them out to the Childrens Hospital" - they must have thought I had a hundred - "bring them out to the Childrens Hospital to see the superintendent here and what not. But you must give them this stipulation, that they might not get any further than the Childrens Hospital. We will train them, give them all the training that we can give them at the Childrens Hospital, but they might not be able to affiliate with the other hospitals and get their RN. Now, if they will do that, you bring them to us and we'll do whatever we can to get the ball rolling." I said, "I will", I said, "I'll talk to their mothers", you know,

because I didn't know. So then I called them back and said, "Yes", and he told me when and whatever. I called Mrs Barton, she had this beautiful - and these were good families, strong families. These girls were really brought up, you know, the right way. And there was Gwen, and she was so sedate, and she'd gone right through grade 12 and she was just excellent. Her sister, Doreen, was a musician. I explained to Mrs Barton, I said, "Would you let Gwen come into the Childrens Hospital to get her training even though she might not be able to go on?" Mrs Barton said, "Thank you Mrs Oliver, I certainly will. At least we'll get something started. Yes, I'll let her go." I said, "I'll let you know then when she's to be there." I phoned Toronto - even though I worried about the phone bill - but I phoned Toronto, and Ruth was out, but I spoke to Mrs Bailey, whom I didn't know. I've never met this Mrs Bailey. I've met Ruth, of course, but I've never met these wonderful people in Toronto. I identified myself, and I said, etc, etc, etc, what was going on. She said, "Oh yes, yes, Ruth said she had written you." I explained to her that she could get into the Childrens Hospital, but she might not be able to get her RN. Other hospitals might not accept them when they were through. She says, "Yes, anything to get started." She said, "Yes, but you're going to have to meet her at the airport and try to find" - because there would be, probably when the plane came in, Ruth wouldn't know where she was going - "You have to take the responsibility of meeting her at the airport and providing, you know, the room for her." I said, "She could stay with me."

- Whitelaw: Pearlene, she'd come by train in those days.
- Oliver: I had to meet the train then. Are you sure there was no airport in '45?
- Whitelaw: Not much of an airport. People didn't come, people came by train then.
- Oliver: Well, I'm not sure, but I knew you had to meet her.
- Whitelaw: You had to meet her. Okay.
- Oliver: You don't think there was an airport?
- Whitelaw: I think it was a very -
- Oliver: Well, we'll leave that. We'll say train.
- Whitelaw: I would say train.
- Oliver: All right, let's do that because you see, that was about 1944, 1945. Anyway, we met her.
- Whitelaw: Yes, people travelled by train.

Oliver: All right then Marjory, thanks for - I'll think about that one because I was just naturally thinking - I knew we met her, but I'm just thinking we went to the airport to get her. But we probably went to the station.

Whitelaw: Do you know where the airport was in Halifax? It's where Simpsons is now.

Oliver: Back there in '40?

Whitelaw: Yes.

Oliver: Was it? I remember that. You know, your memory can do these things to you, so you've got to be -

Whitelaw: Oh, you invented an airport.

Oliver: Well, I invented that because I knew we went to meet her, and naturally I just think of airport. All right, we went to the train and we got her. I kept her overnight, because I had boys and we only had three little bedrooms. And then I got a family, the deacon and his daughter, the mother had died. And I asked Alita, Alita Johnston, she was close with me, and she's still around today, living in New Glasgow. I asked Alita, could she provide a room for Ruth because she might have to stay. This was just getting, going there to get signed up. They had to go back and whatnot. She said, "Yes, if she didn't mind" - Alita lived on Creighton Street - And Alita said, "If she doesn't mind, because we just live up here on Creighton Street." I said, "No Lita, you and your father", and he was a deacon and everything. They had a nice home, you know, a nice decent home and everything. So, we kept Ruth overnight, and then the next day Alita picked her up and what not, so we got her out to the Childrens Hospital. Gwen went out on her own to meet us there, whatever. That was the beginning of it. They went all through the preliminaries, what they were to do, and when the class was to start, whenever it was to be. If that was summer, when they would be entering and when they were to come and what they were to do and everything like that. Then they could go back home. So, they were going to enter. Now, I just forgot that and went on to something else, eh? Because now, they're going to get in. If they don't get any further than the Childrens Hospital, at least that's something. Then we went on to something else that was going on. But there were only two girls at that time that I had. And I, this is where the spiritual - I feel that all of this - I was so dedicated to this, and so sincere and not worrying about writing anything down to get everything exact for the future - dates - that didn't bother me. All I wanted to do was - this was hitting me in the face. The little girl from Guysborough, I was telling that story, how she came up, and when she signed Negro, she

had to go back. I told that story over and over. By that time, she was up in Boston getting her training. She went there and she stayed there. And now I had these two girls going in. All right, to make a long story short, when it came time for Ruth and Gwen to enter the Childrens Hospital - well, Ruth came back from Toronto, and they went in. They graduated in September, 1948, and of course, Ruth stayed close with us in the church, you know, while she was getting her training. She was just in and out with us. She stayed at Alita's, but she was just like one of the family. And when they graduated - I've got their graduation, I've got Ruth's graduation picture with her nurse's uniform, but I didn't get one from Gwen. Now, Gwen was a West Indian family, and the West Indian families, while they were nice, they kept their distance from the local blacks, of whom I was one. They respected Bill and I, but they knew that we were dealing with just the ordinary black people. They were very society conscious, so I didn't have - although Mrs Barton did invite us out to dinner. She lived in another section, she was fortunate to be on the edge of another area. We were all in one ghetto down there in Halifax. But I didn't get Gwen's picture. She didn't give me one, eh? And then they moved away. They moved away too, you see, because that's all she wanted. They moved first to London, Ontario, and then I think eventually they went back to the West Indies. They were, they were, you know, a different level, see? They have a caste system, I think, you know, in the West Indies. And they are graded according to color and everything, so I understand, which is quite, quite, quite ridiculous to us. However, Gwen and Ruth were the first two to enter in Canada.

Whitelaw: And it was in the Childrens Hospital in Halifax.

Oliver: And when they graduated, they graduated from the Childrens, but they had affiliated with the Grace, the V.G. and the Nova Scotia Hospital. They had to affiliate, take their training at all these hospitals. So, they were accepted, although not always treated right. You know, like, if they went in to bathe some woman, she'd look at them. At the other hospital, children didn't mind at all, the children were gorgeous. But like at the Grace Hospital, Ruth used to tell me, you know, the first day she went in, you see, Ruth went in to bathe this woman - she'd just had a baby - the woman said, "Well, what are you doing here?" She wouldn't let Ruth do it. So Ruth said - she was trained, if you come against that, you're just going to report it at the desk and they'll send somebody else in and we'll put you someplace else. So they did. So that was the beginning. If that's militant, that was a great militancy. And we got the hospitals to drop the bars and it went right from Canada, right throughout Canada. And I think most of them after that. And it was just a

matter of getting that knowledge out. Somebody, somebody had to be used as the ramming rod, and I was used without realizing and not wanting to be, but I was in the position as the young minister's wife. I had the gift of speech, and I had my grade 12, and I knew English. I could get up and give a good address, I was a good - you know, I could deliver. So, that was it. And now today, I say, "Well, dear God, that's how I got them in. I didn't even know what I was doing!" (Laughter)

Whitelaw: We're going to take a break for a minute.

Tape Paused  
Tape Resumed

Whitelaw: Now, come back a little bit. Pearlene, I want to go back for a moment. You mentioned a Mr Husbands, B.A., B.J. Husbands, could you just identify him? Who was he?

Oliver: Yes, he was an immigrant from, I would think Barbados, but that could be checked out. He came to Halifax as a young man and married and had a large family. He lived on Maynard Street. He became quite a leader in his own way. He got in with the politicians, and he could always deliver the votes and things like that, you know. He was a Methodist, he was with the Methodist Church.

Whitelaw: It was just a new name to me. Now, I think we've done the nurses pretty well, how did you meet your husband?

Oliver: Oh, that's nice, I'm glad you, oh, I'm glad you asked that one, because I kept running - I wasn't chasing, I was running. (Laughter) Well, how did I meet him? I was in grade 11. He was a student minister, and they sent him down to New Glasgow. We didn't have a minister at that time, and what they would do, they would send the student ministers down in the summer to work. He had spent one month of his vacation working with Doctor White here in Halifax. [Dr. William White, M.W.]

Whitelaw: Now, that would be the father of Portia.

Oliver: Yes, and Bill by that time had his first degree, which would be the Bachelor of Arts, and he and Portia became very friendly.

Whitelaw: We should identify Portia. She was the famous singer.

Oliver: Yes, Portia is our famous singer. So, the second month - that would be August - Doctor White felt that he didn't really need that extra help, so he - where New Glasgow didn't have - the black church in New Glasgow didn't have a minister, he - because they had paid Bill something. So, he asked the Home Mission Board to take over the account and let him do that month at New Glasgow. Now,

he came there in August of 1935, or maybe 34 - '34 or '35, we were married in '36 - '34.

Whitelaw: He was a student at Acadia.

Oliver: Yes, yes. And a marvellous person! Now, he came there, and I'm just - I think I'm in my grade 11 - but young girls in those days were - at least I was - very retiring as far as the boys went. You didn't let boys know you liked them or anything like that. I wasn't thinking about boys, really. I admired him because of what he stood for. He was one of the first university graduates, and that was an ideal that I didn't think I'd ever get, although I was hoping maybe I would get university. And would have, perhaps, had I not married, because there were other people working on that. They were going to get me up there and let me live with one of the professors and baby-sit and whatnot and all this, to pay for my tuition. But Bill, there was an attraction between him and I. You see, there's five, there was five years difference, so if he was, say 20 at that time, there was nearly five years difference between us. He was probably 21, 22, he had his BA. And I was about 18, 17 or 18. But that didn't interest me. You know, I thought he was great. Gee, I'm glad to see that our men are doing this, but there was nothing, no heartbeat or anything. But before he left, we had a Sunday School picnic, and so we all, the girls always did put on their very best slacks and fixed themselves all up nice. But he had a girlfriend there. I think that would be Portia. I wasn't concerned. He was with the deacon's family, so we went down to the beach for this picnic, Sunday School picnic. I can recall my mother had bought me a pair of white slacks with red bell bottoms, and I thought I was the queen of the walk. I wasn't worrying about bathing suits, because it was cool down there anyway. So, I had this nice outfit on, and a nice red satin blouse. I was just seventeen then, and everybody was saying, you know, that I was nice looking and all this. But I wasn't worrying about him, but I liked for people to see me, you know. So anyway, down there, some of the girls were - there was a diving board, and somebody was there taking pictures. They said to me, "Pearlene, you go up on that diving board." I had a lot of nice friends in those days, boys and whatnot, and they wanted to get a picture. So, I went up. Oh, I thought that would be great, everybody will see me in my nice new pants and red - you know, that's all I was thinking about. So, I got up there on the diving board and I posed. I've got that picture. I posed up there thinking I was somebody from Hollywood or something, and Bill was not too far away. He had a camera, and he came over. See, he had his eye on me, and I didn't know. And this other local boy that was taking the picture of me, I'm up there posing for him, you know, and Bill was



behind. Bill snaps the picture, and I didn't even know because I'm too busy looking out to sea. (Laughter) You know, showing off. He gets the picture, and it's a lovely picture. Now, I didn't know that. So, he leaves to go back. We never said any more. I never said any thing. I called him Mr Oliver because he was the student minister, and that was it. I didn't know he was interested in me. I had no - I saw him with this other girl. I was not interested in him, I was not interested in any boy at that time. So anyway, Christmas comes - I don't see him anymore - but Christmas comes, and that would be the Christmas of 1936 - '35, Christmas of 1935. I wasn't getting many Christmas cards because I wasn't writing any. I didn't have money to buy Christmas cards, the Depression was on. But I remember, my brother went to the post office and he came back, and he said to me, "Pearl, here's a letter for you." Christmas eh, "A letter for you." This is how it started. I said, "A letter for me! Gee, that's great." So, I open it and I see, Wolfville, the stamp mark on it, see? And when I open it, there's this nice Christmas card, and in it is the picture of me posing on this diving board with my nice white - I think we must have had color, but whatever, it was really nice! And all he said on the card - and I still have the card - is, "I thought you might like to have this picture I took of you at the picnic." See?

Whitelaw: Smart move.

Oliver: Yes, he wasn't going to play his cards fast, but I had to be careful too. So, I began to think, and I showed it to my mother. She said to me, "Well, don't you think we should get a card, and you send it back and thank him?" I said, "Well, do I have to do that?" And she says, "Yes", and she gave me the quarter. "You go down town and you buy a card with a picture." She told me, "Buy a nice picture now of the town." I remember I bought one of the park, but it was a Christmas card. I paid 25 cents for the card. That was a lot of money. So, I said now, "What will I say on the card?" Why did he send me this? Why did he" - I'm trying to analyze it. I'm not that stupid, even though I'm only 17, and I'm just beginning to think about romance and all this foolishness. So, I said, "Why would he send me this?" I thought, "Gee, he might be a little interested." So I'm not going to let him know I'm interested, so all I wrote was, "Thank you for taking the picture and for sending it to me. I think you took a very nice picture - Pearlene." That's all I wrote on this card. So, I mailed it back. New Years - that was Christmas, he got the card - he told me later. New years, I came home one day from school, you know, school's ending - He has a New Years break and he had friends in New Glasgow where he stayed, and he's at the house making a visit. I'm

shocked! I wanted to run. If there had been someplace where I could have run and hide, I would have. I didn't know what to say to him. So, he just was making a visit with my mother. So, I sat there and we talked a little bit. And then he came back again, before - He was down for the Christmas vacation that year, and he was staying at this particular family, and he came back the day before he left. It was snowing, and he asked me if I'd like to go out and have a walk, you know. I thought that would be very romantic, so I went. We just walked down the road, and he asked me what I was going to do - I was in grade eleven then - and what my ambitions there. We just talked about things like that. On our way back, he sort of took my hand and held it.

Whitelaw: Oh.

Oliver: That's right. But that was all. And I let him hold my - we just walked hand in hand. I didn't - I just thought, "Well, I'm not in love, but this is nice." This man, he's to me -

Whitelaw: An older man.

Oliver: Not only that, but he's somebody too, you see. He's a university - and he comes from a real good family and everything. I was just from a little poor family. But I wanted to get ahead and I wanted to get an education, but I didn't want to get mixed up in that kind of stuff, you know. So anyway, we walked down, and we came down to the door. He said, "Well, I'm leaving tonight, or I'm going tomorrow morning. I've got to go back to classes." He said, "I might write you, okay?" I said, "Fine." We didn't even kiss, we didn't even kiss.

Whitelaw: Pearlene, you must have been an awfully pretty girl.

Oliver: I was, I was handsome. You see me today, I'm 75.  
(Laughter)

Whitelaw: You still have -

Oliver: Oh, come on. Get that off.

END OF A SIDE OF TAPE

Whitelaw: Hang on a minute. This - Pearlene is not easy to interrupt sometimes. This is tape - side two, tape two, of the interview with Pearlene Oliver. She has just - courtship is beginning.

Oliver: Yes, I began to think, but then you see, I didn't think he would write. And no sooner was he home, than the

first letter came. I took my time, I waited a week. I would tell him about school, and marks, and church, that was about all I could talk about. And it wasn't until the next summer, he came for the summer to be the minister. Then we had to be careful, then I had to be careful, see, I mean because he was the young minister there. But we didn't - we just spoke. I never went out with him or anything, see? And he was there for July and August, but he didn't have any other girls around. But then I noticed too, that I was trying to keep away from him. I didn't want anybody to think that - I was always in the church, and I didn't want anybody to think that I was going to the church just to meet him. And there was a piano in the church, and I was taking piano lessons. They had given me permission to practice on the piano in the church because we didn't have a piano. I was taking a few piano lessons, and I'd go down in the mornings in the church. If he came in, I'd leave. If I heard the door, I'd say "Hi", and then I'd be gone. I didn't want - but that was it. He knew then, and I was beginning to feel then too - that would be 1935 - that there was something going on that I wouldn't be able to stop. So, I graduated. I was going into grade 12, and then we kept corresponding. I've got all his letters. No, I haven't got all his letters, he's got all my - he had all my letters. After he died, Jules found them, my son Jules. He had them put downstairs where he had a lot of things in his office. Jules was going through the things, helping me. I didn't know he had saved every letter. I only had a few of his. And Jules came up with this box, and Jules didn't know how to say it to me. I didn't even know they were - there was a place where he kept things, and there was a door in there. Jules said, "Mum, I've got something here, I think it's pretty important." I was just ready to die. This was just a week after the funeral. And I said, "Whatever it is, Jules", I said, "just set it aside." "No Mum", he said. "I'm sorry that I looked at it." I said, "Well, what is it Jules?" And he brought me this box. He said, "You'd better look at it." I didn't even know they was there, because that was his office and I didn't need - He used to clean out his shelves and things. And when I opened it, they were all - right from the very first - every letter. But you know, they're my letters, and they're not worth anything because all I was talking about was school and -

Whitelaw: So, when did you actually get married?

Oliver: I graduated from high school in June of '36 - '36, and we were married in July.

Whitelaw: Of that year.

Oliver: Well, we knew we were going to get married, eh? We knew by the time I graduated - he was just waiting for me to

graduate from high school. But I always tell people this so that it can go on the record, we were married on July - I'd better get my dates straight - July 29th, 1936, and my first child was born on June 29th, nineteen - June 11th, 1937 - so, 11 months. I think you see where I am coming from because so many of our leaders - He didn't have to marry me, eh? We were married 11 months when our first was born. And then we were in the city by that time. Oh, we had a wonderful life together, hardships, but fun and joy and adventure in a small way. And digging with our people, you see, we had the advantage of being at the grassroots. I'll tell you, you can't get that out of you. Like the nursing, it just becomes so much - as you get older, you say, "Gee, did I do that?" You don't think of it. But we were working when there was so much - you just had to put your hands out.

Whitelaw: Everything, everything had to be done.

Oliver: Everything. And we just said, "Here we are. We're young and we're dedicated." And we moved right in with our people and became one with them. We were always one, just like now today, I'm in Beechville. When you read that article that the paper down here did - I go out to Beechville. At that time, Beechville was thought of as the less, nothing, nothing. And we had Cornwallis Street, but we went out there because these were our people. And today - we stayed with those people 53 years. We stayed with the Halifax people 25 years, built their hall, organized them to build the hall. And another thing, Marjory, while we were in the process, just at the climax of trying to get that hall built in Halifax - they had come through the Depression and they were in debt when we came there - We thought we were coming to a great big place, but they were in debt, and it was awful. It was just terrible. But the Lord was with us, and the thing of it is, you think that you're coming to a great place and you've got a great work to do, but you see there's just nothing but hard, hard work. And then you uncover this and you uncover that, and you uncover the other thing. And you just say, "Well, that's my work", you see. The place was going up for sale. We didn't know that. They waited till we got there. And the City of Halifax put the parsonage up for sale for unpaid taxes. We had to raise that money. Then, the old hall they had was just eaten away with rat holes, and we had to work in that. I used to say, you know - it used to scare me because you could see the rats coming in. And we built the new hall, got the people organized, got the people organized and brought in one of these people who teach people how to give, to pledge so much for three years to build. They keep the records and keep going and whatnot. And Bill and I and the dear people worked right along. We always led, you know, gave whatever it was - you'd find - they've got all the records there today. It amazes me. We built the hall.

Now, after we tore off the old hall - I'll tell you this because this shows you how God was behind everything. We'd get ahead of God, and the Lord knew that he wanted us to stay there and build this hall for these people, remodel the church and what not. We tore off the old hall. B.D. Stephens, God bless him, he was the big builder, one of the biggest builders in the City of Halifax - big Baptist.

Whitelaw: Not a black -

Oliver: Oh no, he was white, B.D., and everybody knew B.D. If he saw goodness in you, he was going to stick with you. But if he saw that you were no good, he'd just walk away from you. He stuck right with Bill and I, so he must have saw something good. And B.D, when he said, yes, he would do it - and he didn't charge even for his own services, all we had to do was pay his workers, eh? He had this big - So, we had torn all - I remember the day the old hall came tumbling down. I just praised God, thinking that old rotten stuff is coming off, and we're going to have a new hall, everything nice for the children, and the young people and everything. After we got it off, B.D. had boarded up the back, and then he was going to gut out the church, remodel the church, put a new chancery. We had raised all the money through this budgeting. See, we had gone our three years, we had enough money in to start, and then we had to go another three years afterward. At the end of three years, everything was paid for. So anyway, the day the hall came down, oh, we just rejoiced. We rejoiced, Bill and I. "Thank God, that old rotten place is gone!" It wasn't too much longer than this invitation came for him to accept the First Baptist Church in Toronto, to become the minister of the First Baptist Church in Toronto. The old hall is off, B.D. is going to stand by us and see that the building goes up, and the money is coming in from the people. And here we get this invitation, they want him to come up to preach, and he decides he'll go. They're going to send him the money for his fare up for a weekend, preach and whatnot. Then they'll decide whether they want him, and he can decide whether he wants them. He goes up there. Right in my china cabinet behind you, there's an engraved silver chafing dish from the First Baptist Church that they presented to him when they found out that they really wanted this man, with all his education and everything. They presented him with this silver dish, a gift to bring back to me, you know. And then followed the letter, would he accept, would he come? And he came home and told about this beautiful new church, First Baptist Church in Toronto. They had just built a new church and everything was gorgeous! I said, "Oh, we've got to go for the children's sake, our boys. Look at the universities up there in Toronto, all the advantages!" I was also thinking about myself too. There would be more advantages perhaps for me to get out to. I had been

corresponding with the Ryerson School, this that and the other thing, taking correspondence courses. And I thought, "Gee, we'll be right in the middle of all this culture. We'll go, we'll go, we'll go!" And he said, "Well, I guess - okay, we will." But B.D. heard it. We wrote them back - or Bill phoned them - Bill phoned the chairman of the pulpit committee, and he said, "Yes, we'll be with you in two months time." That would give the church there a chance to get somebody else in, but it would also - we knew the money was there for B.D. to start - and it was just a couple of mornings later, about seven o'clock in the morning, the little old doorbell at Cornwallis Street rang. I'm getting the children up for school. I hear Bill say, "B.D. you're starting early!" Because they were going to start tearing down - B.D. said, "Oh, but I've got to talk to you. I want to talk to you and Mrs Oliver." So, I thought, "Oh, dear God, what's wrong?" I came down, thinking that something terrible was wrong. So, I only have my kimono on because I was getting the boys ready, the baby ready, the little one ready for school. It was about seven-thirty by the time I got down. B.D. was there in the little old living room, and he said, "Bill, what's this I hear about you going to take over the Church in Toronto, the Baptist Church in Toronto?" And so Bill looked at me, and I think I spoke up, and I said, "Oh, B.D., we've got this call to Toronto. It's a beautiful church." I said, "We've been here twenty-five years." No, not at that time, we were there 22 years. I said, "We've been here 22 years, and this will be a wonderful opportunity for us." He stood up (Laughter) - remember the old hall is off, all dust! He looked - He knew the people too. He had confidence in us, but he didn't have that confidence in the people. And all we were thinking is, "The money's all there. B.D. knows the money is there for him." He said, "So, you're going to Toronto?" And we said - I was doing the speaking - I said, "Yes, we've been here long enough, and we would like to have better advantages for the children, more cultural opportunities for us. We want to make the move." He said, "Fine." But he said, "You'll get another building superintendent", because he said, "If you're leaving, I'm giving up on this project." We looked at him. "How could he do this?" We said, "Well why? The money's here." Their pledges were all there. He knew, he knew where everything was. "The money's there." He said, "I'm doing this because you and Bill are behind it! "But", he said, "If you and Bill are leaving, get another builder." I couldn't believe it. I said, "Oh God, what are you doing to us?" So, that was it, you know what we had to do. And then they got angry at us up in Toronto because they were all preparing then for us to come. Bill had to write them - he couldn't phone them, he didn't have the nerve to phone them - So, he wrote this letter and said, "Because we have torn the building off, and because the superintendent of the construction company said he would not continue, they'd

have to get another construction company." We couldn't leave them like that. So, we said, "We have to stay to finish the job. Boo Hoo." And I said, "Well God, you're really punishing us." I thought we had earned that beautiful church in Toronto. (Laughter) And the nice living. Oh, I was thinking for the children, the boys, and thinking of myself too - selfishly. I'd be able to attend classes. I was thinking of this Ryerson place that I was taking correspondence courses from, and I said, "I'll be able to just find out where that is and go and take my classes there." So, B.D. said, "That's it, this is the ultimatum! If you say, I stay. If you go, they'll have to get another." So, we stayed.

Whitelaw: That's a story, all right.

Oliver: We gave it up.

Whitelaw: And you never got back to Toronto.

Oliver: Oh, we never - we didn't dare go back. (Laughter) They were so angry. They thought we had, they thought we should have known that from the beginning. And they had it in the papers and everything that we were coming. It was a week that the new minister was coming.

Whitelaw: I'd like to talk about the Oliver Family a bit because that's an interesting story too. When we talked about it earlier, we didn't record the history and the background of the Oliver Family. Tell me about it.

Oliver: Marjory, it's twelve o'clock.

Whitelaw: I know.

Oliver: You want me to finish this tape up.

Whitelaw: Yes, that would - if we could just do the Oliver Family.

Oliver: Okay, the Oliver Family. Well, the first William Oliver, that would be the great-great grandfather, I guess, of Bill, came here as a slave, and secured quite a bit of land right here.

Whitelaw: This would be after the War of 1812.

Oliver: Around 1812, 1812 to 1814. His will that we have, I think is dated 1818. He made his will, leaving [parsons]. All these homes up here are all Olivers, and this was all Oliver land, eh? Now, his son worked for - his son, of the first William - He was an outstanding man, that first William. He was a man that - he wasn't a slave - he was a slave, but he was somebody, eh?

Whitelaw: Well, surely the British Government gave them - brought them, brought the -

Oliver: But not him, not this one. He got this land from - What's the name of that island out there?

Whitelaw: McNabb.

Oliver: McNabb, because it says "This land was purchased from this McNabb."

Whitelaw: That's McNabb, who owns McNabb's Island.

Oliver: I would think, because he was collecting all the land. But the people of settlements, this Lucasville is not a settlement. See, the settlement is Hammonds Plains. Then, it gradually, some of the black people eventually came down this way to work at the mill down here.

Whitelaw: A lumber mill?

Oliver: Yes, Heffler's. And most of the early settlers that came in, came from Hammonds Plains. Now, William Oliver's wife came from Hammonds Plains. See, Hammonds Plains was a refugee settlement, and that was settled in 1812.

Whitelaw: A refugee black settlement.

Oliver: Black, like Beechville is, where we go to help there. So, he married a black woman who had been a slave from Hammonds Plains. That's the first William. Now, they had - they had many children, but their son, William - that would be the second William - when he became of age, he got - Dalhousie was just opening around that time, but he worked on a big farm out here, right up at the end of this road, that the President of Dalhousie owned. Don't ask me for names right off, but you can get - find them. And he was, this William now, that would be their son, he was the caretaker for this Doctor So and So, who was the President of Dalhousie. He cared for the cattle, and he cared for the land. That's why they all became great - my husband was a great caretaker. All of the Olivers were great workers with the soil. William was. Now, William left - that was the first William - his son, William, worked for Doctor - whatever he was at Dalhousie University. That would probably be about 1830, 1840.

Whitelaw: That would be Doctor McCullough.

Oliver: No, I don't think that was him. No, it wasn't McCullough, it was another name.

Whitelaw: He was the first president of the University.



Oliver: Yes, well, it might have been the next one. And he had the farm, he was working for him. Now, Acadia - and he was highly the son. This would be - he was -

Whitelaw: William 111.

Oliver: That would be Clifford's father. That would be William's grandfather. So, Acadia now is getting ready to open their college at Acadia, so they would be 1840, 1850, something like that. And this doctor here is getting old now, and evidently he's going to sell or something. Or I don't know, I don't know the whys or the wheres of that. But he's been with the heads of the Acadia staff, the principle, the director or whatever, and they are looking for a superintendent of grounds. And so he says, this one says, "Well, I think you should get William Oliver. He's been looking after So and So." They were going to sell off, there was going to be a change, and "He'll make an ideal, this William Oliver." So, they came down and saw him and asked him, and he said, yes, he'd go to Wolfville. That's how the Olivers got in Wolfville. So, William Oliver's son, William Oliver's son, William, went to Wolfville. That's the old man, William Oliver.

Whitelaw: That's William 11.

Oliver: William 11. We don't go for that, William 1 and William 11, like the Americans do. So anyway, he goes up and he gets the job, Superintendent of Lands. I think that was it, Superintendent of -

Whitelaw: Grounds.

Oliver: Grounds, something like that. And they just loved him. He stayed there till he died.

Whitelaw: There's a charming picture of him, when he's an old, old, old man. The graduates of that year have him sitting in the front row of the graduating class.

Oliver: That's William?

Whitelaw: No, that's Clifford.

Oliver: I haven't come to Clifford yet.

Whitelaw: Sorry.

Oliver: No, I haven't come to Clifford. So, that's William, who was the son of this William. So, he goes up, and he marries a girl from Kentville, black girl, who had settled down around Port Williams. The slaves were coming in around there too, Port Williams, wherever their ships - And he marries this Jones, I think she was Jones. I have the names down. And his first child -

- he has five children by her. I have all these old pictures too. He has five children by her, and Clifford is his baby, I think. Clifford was the last. So, Clifford, when he becomes of age, he goes on working with these - takes over from father, William. And he marries a girl from Halifax, a West Indian family's daughter, a lovely lady. I have her picture out there in the hall. I'll show it to you when you go out. And he marries her, and he builds a lovely - He had it quite rough when he was building a home, he wanted to build a nice home. And that home that's standing there today, that's now part of Acadia University, is the home that Clifford built for his bride. It's a home that, when you look at it, everytime I look at it, I get pride. He had others helping him, builders to build it, but it was right on University Avenue, the last home. But many people objected to him building there. And Clifford has told us - he told Bill and I when he used to come down here to visit us before he died - of the people that objected to him building there. They were going to burn his house down.

Whitelaw: Oh.

Oliver: Yes, yes. And he said he felt that he was going to be working for Acadia, and that was back land then, and he wanted a nice house so that - nicer than - his father had a little house right on the campus. I've got a picture of the little house that his father lived in right on the campus. That was all fields and everything. So, Clifford built this beautiful home, he had builders help him - beautiful! Just as good as any home on University Avenue. And had quite a bit of trouble, but he went through with it. And that's where Bill was born, in that house.

Whitelaw: Clifford was your Bill's father.

Oliver: Father. And Bill was born in Wolfville, and started that strain. So, he came from - the William that came here from Virginia or somewhere, coastline down there, Carolina, I think, Carolina. And his son, William, worked for the President of Dalhousie - his son William - and then William went up to Wolfville and married a girl, and had Clifford. And then Bill was - there were a couple of girls that died in birth, little girls that died in birth, Bill's sisters. But Bill's the only one that lived. There were three children. And then he married me.

Whitelaw: And then Clifford, Clifford married a second time.

Oliver: Yes, now, Dolly was the woman that - She lived on Charles Street in Halifax. She came from a very musical family. They played the mandolins, the piano and the organs. They were real musicians. And Dolly was quite an

outgoing, gay type of person, you see. She liked music, and she liked - if there was a picnic or a party, she liked to go to it because she could play all these instruments. She liked to dance. Clifford was a hard-working, stay-home, don't-go-anywhere, you know, don't-go-anywhere, and good - but that kind of a man. And Dolly, whom he wanted, was a real little doll. She liked to dance, and she liked to play music, and she was very young. But he came down here to Halifax and he married her. Now, she was some relation, she was some relation to his father's wife, like a third cousin. I'm not sure, but there was some - that's how they got to know this Halifax group. But Dolly, she was - she liked to dance. I've got a lot of her little dishes in there, and nearly all of them are little dancers. I've got all her dishes.

Whitelaw: What happened to poor Dolly? Did she die?

Oliver: No, Dolly liked to go to picnics, and Dolly was gay and happy. Clifford stayed home.

Whitelaw: They separated?

Oliver: They separated, yes. So, she fell in love with another at a party, at a picnic. He liked to dance too, this other man. You know what I mean? And first, it's just an affair, and then it's too much. No children or anything, but it gets out in those days. So Clifford said, "A divorce, no other way but a divorce." Got to go, eh?

Whitelaw: Dolly was Bill's mother?

Oliver: Yes. So, then Bill was left with his father. Bill was born, he was getting to be quite a hunk of a boy. So, it was just him and his father there. So Dolly, she goes to Boston. She couldn't stay around here, see, because that was a terrible thing to get divorced in those days. It was a disgrace. And so she goes to Boston, where she dies. And I'll show you her picture, it's hanging out there in the hall. She was sweet, gay, and happy. But Clifford was just the opposite. I never saw him smile! He was just work, work, work, work, get ahead, work, work, work, work.

Whitelaw: So, he married again.

Oliver: Now, okay, he said he'd never marry again. So anyway, he brought Bill up, just him and Bill in that house. And now, Bill is in college, and it's still just him and Bill. But Bill is coming down to Halifax now as a student, and he brings his dad down to Halifax. He's using his father's car, he drives his father's car. And Bill is working in the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church

as a student. And he goes to Doctor White's house because that's the contact he had. And Clifford just comes for the drive, and Bill just brings him down for the drive. And Clifford gets friendly with the oldest daughter of Doctor White, Helena, the oldest daughter. And at first, it's just friendship because he was much older. He must have been 15 years older. She just died here last year, up there, died in the house, same house. So, now Bill was in his last year in college. His father knows that he's not going to have Bill for company, Bill is going out now. I remember I went up there in February, before we were married, to meet him. And Bill - he had to meet me before he could say, "Yes." He didn't know me, he didn't know what I was, and he knows -

Whitelaw: This is Clifford.

Oliver: He knew he had made a mistake, and he had heard, he had seen my picture, and he knew that I was, you know, pretty, and a pretty nice -

Whitelaw: We're almost at the end of this tape.

Oliver: Well, I can tell you this. Yes, okay, so then -

Whitelaw: He married Helen.

Oliver: Helena.

Whitelaw: Helena, sorry.

Oliver: And then he had Donnie and Shirley and - Donnie and Shirley and Nancy and Jeannie and David. He had five children, they had five children.

Whitelaw: And Donnie became a lawyer and a QC.

Oliver: Donnie's a lawyer and a QC. Shirley graduated from the hospital in Montreal in nutrition. There she met a young West Indian doctor, Clarence, who is now the chief surgeon or whatever, down in Bermuda. He's from Bermuda, so he takes Shirley to Bermuda, and they're number one people in Bermuda. He was just - he and Shirley and their family - I've got their picture too - they were just presented at Buckingham Palace last year, and received the British, the BME award, the Order of Canada. Clarence, Shirley, well, Clarence got it for his work in surgery. Here's the picture of Shirley and her family there at Buckingham Palace. So, they are really big shots in Bermuda. If you go there -

Whitelaw: He must have received the MBE -

Oliver: That's it, he got the MBE. And Shirley, I met them all at the funeral of their mother last summer. She died in

the home there in Wolfville. Now, Nancy is a missionary over in Swaziland, and I have a letter from her that I received yesterday, Friday. She's in Swaziland. Jeannie is the head dietician of the hospital in Bermuda. She -