

## Interview Index/Log

**Project name:** Folklore Fieldwork Fall 2019: Musical Legacy Interviews

**Field ID and name:**

**Interviewee:** Marilyn Whitlock Hockersmith

**Interviewer/Recordist:** Ellie Dassler

**Date:** 25 October 2019

**Location:** Bowling Green, KY

**Others Present:** n/a

**Equipment used:** Tascam DR-100

**Microphone:** Audio-Technica

**Recording Format:** .wav

**Recorded Tracks in Session:** 1

**Duration:** 1:21:31

**Keywords:** Gospel music, USO, Bowling Green, 1970s, John Edmonds, Gospel Truth, State Street Baptist Church

**Corresponding Materials:**

**Context:** Interviewee's home in the historic Shake Rag neighborhood

**Technical Considerations:**

**Index prepared by:** Ellie Dassler

<b>00:00</b>	<i><b>Insert your notes here; add time codes in the left-hand column each time the subject changes</b></i>
	Start with music and singing  Met John Edmonds at New Bethel Baptist Church age 14/15 Asked would she like to travel around KY singing on weekends In high school glee club Would make up songs as a young girl At different stages of life, loved to sing by myself Eventually traveled with John Edmonds, mostly at churches John would teach parts, learned to develop vocal chords by listening to him and following his advice
<b>2:27</b>	Started singing in church context  Gave life to the lord at age 5 I wanted to share the gifts that he had given me Sang all types of choir songs, I had an ear for music Liked all kinds of music, especially jazz, because I loved the instruments Singing brought me freedom, built my confidence
<b>3:45</b>	Follow-up, what do you like about jazz  Instruments coming together

	<p>Developed my ear Chords seemed off-key and sounded smooth and good</p>
<b>4:20</b>	<p>Why is gospel your favorite?</p> <p>Spreading God's word, that's why he brought me into this world Gospel is the number one thing that carried me through my life Starting with Amazing Grace and Precious Lord Heard my mom "strumming the meter" without music You grab hold of that</p>
<b>5:04</b>	<p>Met John Edmonds at church</p> <p>In elementary school Asked if she wanted to travel when she reached high school Always had my sister, she sang with them</p>
<b>5:41</b>	<p>Early days touring around Kentucky</p> <p>March of Dimes telethons- absolutely wonderful Didn't matter about color of churches, we were just welcome Traveled from KY to CA on spring/summer breaks End up with people we'd never met before Taught me culture, people were just people, so different and so warm, they trusted who we were</p>
<b>6:54</b>	<p>What was so different about those other places?</p> <p>AZ and NM, they didn't see color, such a mixture of different people, not segregated, even back in the sixties Taught me to love people beyond what I see and what I know Coming from a family of 13, we had a struggle But when I went west, I felt a different type of people, they were just warm and welcoming Even though they had children who'd maybe never seen Black people before Majority of the time it was with white people I'd never experienced anything like that love True Christians</p>
<b>8:50</b>	<p>What was those audiences' familiarity with gospel?</p> <p>They had to know we were coming Not just hymns, but foot-patting and hand-clapping type of gospel We went to an institution with physically challenged young people Music is soothing to the soul We were young, that taught us things as well</p>
<b>9:45</b>	<p>Affect how you felt when came back to Bowling Green?</p>

	<p>It was back to the norm  We had different dress codes, long gowns  I was laughed at, Bowling Green wasn't used to that  Church folks would laugh  But it was stylish when we went to CA  I can't say that I made a great impression, I just wanted to have a peace of mind  and build my self-esteem  Always been a "full-figured girl" but singing gospel and being around people who  respected you and loved what you did, it built me  I couldn't have told you what color someone was, it just didn't matter</p>
<b>11:49</b>	<p>Can you talk more about self-esteem?</p> <p>Was it different in different places? Yes  When Jesus went to his home town, they received him not  When I left and went elsewhere, I felt more at ease, like people saw me for who I  was and not because of weight, not because of the color of my skin</p>
<b>12:58</b>	<p>When did you start going other places?</p> <p>We went to larger places like Knoxville, Chattanooga, Lexington  Wasn't until later we started traveling overseas  That just really gave me a lift</p>
<b>13:45</b>	<p>First trip overseas?</p> <p>1971, in my 20s, I had my son  First trip to Okinawa, Philippines, Guam, Korea  Have these booklets here  Traveled to 6 or 7 countries  Called Pacific Hospitals Tour  45-day tour  Like the burn units</p>
<b>15:13</b>	<p>Book she has, fliers and photos for different shows</p>
<b>15:26</b>	<p>Different appreciation for people overseas?</p> <p>Military, expecting us to come and sing for them  They talked about when they get back to the real world  So appreciative of someone coming to serve them  Twice to Vietnam  To see their expressions, we were singing on the back of a flat-bed truck, and it was  hot  They missed where they were, but we came to help them, but it was all about them  They were so appreciative</p>

<b>16:48</b>	<p>Did they know you were from KY?</p> <p>No, they would ask  Some from KY, knew somebody from Bowling Green  We even taped a TV special in Vietnam  Just wonderful  Saw children in Saigon who were... orphans, sleeping in the alley  Outside the hotel, there was a narrow alleyway, and I saw all those people laying in the alleyway, and it made me appreciate my own son, and what I had, even though I didn't feel like I had all that much</p>
<b>18:23</b>	<p>Did that affect the way you thought about your music?</p> <p>We sang contemporary gospel, spirituals, hymns at times  Most of them had upbeat tempos  They loved the hand-clapping more than anything  We did message songs  They just wanted to hear something that would encourage them  Our job was to make them remember that hey, life was still good</p>
<b>19:30</b>	<p>Message songs?</p> <p>Contemporary songs, did not have Jesus' name in it  "There's a Place in the Sun," "I can see clearly now the rain is gone"  They tell a message without saying Jesus is the waymaker or things like that</p>
<b>20:23</b>	<p>Why did you choose to sing those?</p> <p>John selected, because they had a message behind them  We were the only bible people would read, maybe they didn't know about the lord, but we'd give them a message song that let them know somebody cares  Song called "He"</p>
<b>21:32</b>	<p>Reactions of soldiers?</p> <p>Knowing we'd come from the states just for them  Hired by USO, dept. of defense  Songs would bring tears to there eyes, let us know they enjoyed it  Some would clap their hands, their feet just tapping  Just according to the audience  Sang in officers' nightclubs as well  Whoever's in command would tell them, you know this is a gospel group, can you put your drinks aside  That was really respectable  It was taxing but it was rewarding</p>
<b>23:00</b>	<p>Why was it taxing?</p>

	<p>You'd have to get up, sometimes we'd do like, 6 30-minute shows a day  Sometimes a trip would be an hour or 2 long, and you couldn't rest because the roads were so bad  Went on USS America aircraft carrier  We'd get finished at like 8 o'clock at night and then we'd have to linger and talk with them  You'd have to unwind and get back into the groove of it  Sometimes you couldn't always get rest</p>
<b>24:20</b>	<p>Talk to soldiers after shows?</p> <p>Yes, you'd know if they wanted to talk because they'd linger  We'd thank them for coming out to support us, and they'd thank us  Some had not had a USO show at all, because we went to very remote areas because we were considered a small group  We went to areas where the big groups could not go, because all we needed was a tambourine and a keyboard  One time it wouldn't work, so we've done things a cappella before  Determination—we came for this, just do it, no matter what it takes</p>
<b>25:30</b>	<p>Specific stories?</p> <p>Burn ward in Okinawa?  We knew a guy who had family right here in Bowling Green  We were amazed, they were my neighbors  When he got out, he came to visit them, and we got to see him  In Germany, one of the singers when we finished a show, this little boy ran behind us and said, "can I have your autograph?"  She closed the bus like she was too tired  But I learned something—never ever turn any child down  That goes a long way, it means they enjoyed what we did  I never would rush off after, I wanted to be right there  People are important, and what you give out, you get it back</p>
<b>28:22</b>	<p>What did you learn?</p> <p>Don't ignore anybody  You don't know what that person has been through  That song could have made a difference in their life  Just give your time to them, I've carried that through my life  You learn to treat people the way you want to be treated</p>
<b>29:40</b>	<p>In hospital – man with friends in Bowling Green</p> <p>Amazing to find a connection like that 5,000 miles away  You get excited, it was a rare thing  You give people hope when you listen to them and attend to their needs</p>

<b>30:47</b>	<p>Were you ever homesick?</p> <p>My first tour yes, because my son was young, and I missed him  He was maybe 3 months old  I knew I had to make a living for him, I had a responsibility to take care of my child  Thank God for relatives who did not mind  I have no regrets</p>
<b>31:51</b>	<p>How long were you gone?</p> <p>First one was 45 days  Second one was... (flips through booklet)  17-day tour to Vietnam  Most between 17 days to 6 weeks, from 1971-74, 22</p>
<b>32:44</b>	<p>What made you say yes to the tour?</p> <p>Because I had nothing else going on for me in Bowling Green  Coming from a family like ours, I wouldn't have been able to ever travel like that  Great financial chance</p>
<b>33:45</b>	<p>Coming from a family like ours?</p> <p>There were so many of us, we were raised up poor  I was the fourth oldest, and I know what it was like to be without  I was able to provide for my son  Went back to the hospital between tours  It was a struggle, had to prepare: medically, shots  But it paid off, was rewarding</p>
<b>35:07</b>	<p>Talk through photos in book  John [Edmonds] gave you this book</p> <p>Photo of whole group at March of Dimes Telarama in Nashville  At Opryland in 1974  Performed at our capital in Frankfort  Debra Whitlock, your sister  John and I are the last 2 from the group left  At that time we had a different name, Angelic Specials</p>
<b>37:04</b>	<p>What was it like going with your sister?</p> <p>She never went overseas  Nebraska State Home for the Mentally Retarded in 1968, visited people who were disabled, all white folks there  John had gone to Vietnam a couple times before me, Greenland and Labrador  We went to Holland, Germany, Australia in 1974</p>

	In Frankfurt: sat on the steps of the capital and we sang
<b>39:00</b>	<p>Went to Washington D.C. for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1973 What was that like?</p> <p>We sang in front of the reflecting pool, they had a banquet for Kentucky with an ice sculpture We had America the Beautiful Audiences that surpassed 100 thousand</p>
<b>40:13</b>	<p>How did that audience size compare to what you were used to?</p> <p>That was great Our governor, Ford, came through We were there for about a week, stayed at Marymount University So very hot that year That was the first time I'd ever been to Washington, D.C. Went to the Smithsonian to see the Hope Diamond I never knew I'd end up living across the Potomac in Fairfax</p>
<b>41:31</b>	<p>Why were you asked to represent the state of KY?</p> <p>Dr. Jones, professor and pastor at State St. Baptist Church heard they were looking for a small group, and he gave the people our names That was taxing too because of the weather, of course I was a lot younger We sang "America the Beautiful" on the 4th of July across from the Constitution in the National Archives Building</p>
<b>42:25</b>	<p>Looking for a Gospel group?</p> <p>Just a small group that didn't need to carry much, all we needed was a keyboard and tambourines And it paid, that was how I made my money</p>
<b>42:55</b>	<p>Launched off and landed in the South China Sea Landed on the Miss America mascot plane, that brings you to a screeching halt They gave us one of those bars as a souvenir It was a huge aircraft carrier, so we landed on it and we also catapulted off</p>
<b>43:48</b>	<p>I enjoyed Greece, and Turkey, Spain, Morocco They had the best gold jewelry, I bought a ring Spain was wonderful—we went to a bullfight in Madrid Memories, memories</p>
<b>44:41</b>	<p>This picture down at the bottom: You're the only woman in the group—what was that like?</p> <p>I didn't mind it Fred and I went to school together, we went to prom together back in the day I got royal treatment, they were just like brothers to me</p>

<b>45:44</b>	<p>Folders she had with her from Vietnam</p> <p>They gave us these plaques stating that we did come over Also Mediterranean tour The general, Fred C. Wyand in US Army signed there General Abrahams signed that one, for Vietnam as well Went to Vietnam twice in the same year: March and December Bring these out to show my grandchildren and other people where I've been I've got a lot of it written down, I'm trying to get my book published by spring of 2020</p>
<b>48:15</b>	<p>How did it feel that your travel was linked to your singing?</p> <p>It was a gift given by God That's important to me, it's all I know He's the one that gave me the voice to sing, and my job is to use it for his glory It's my first love Even at funerals I do have a business, called DBA, Doing Business As... Vocal coaching and music etiquette I teach others vocal control and how to present themselves Do you hear what I hear? Can they pick out their voice in that song? Encourage them to let go of the fear</p>
<b>50:30</b>	<p>I used to be very afraid to step out and sing When I'm singing I'm in a different frame of mind, I'm just focusing on me and God, praying that it's helping someone else I have a story to tell, and I tell it with my voice</p>
<b>51:11</b>	<p>Business with vocal coaching—what's gospel like in Bowling Green today?</p> <p>Music itself has changed, it's more contemporary, people want the beat more than anything I like to stick to something- what are the words saying, how are they ministering to you? You have to meet people where they are, some people aren't going to talk about God What God has given me I don't mind sharing, I have to be an example You can make it, all you have to do is listen and let somebody help you</p>
<b>53:17</b>	<p>When you would come back home, what was that like?</p> <p>I missed my son, at one point he did not know me because he was so young There was something I always said to him: "hi-dy baby!" When I said that, his little feet started kicking, he realized that was really me He'd hold onto my clothes, he didn't want me to leave again Other tours were not as long, and he did not forget I did it because I wanted to take better care of him</p>



	<p>I'd always buy him those nice clothes overseas that didn't cost me much</p> <p>One time I bought him a pair of suede jeans in Greece, he wore them 'til he was about 2</p> <p>Our mother was so wonderful to us, even though she had so many, she left a legacy of good things for us</p>
<b>56:03</b>	<p>Did you sing to your son?</p> <p>I did, and I sing to my grandchildren too</p> <p>What's that like?</p> <p>Absolutely wonderful, you can spoil them and then give them back to their parents</p> <p>I taught my granddaughter how to sing as well</p> <p>I would place her fingers right here (at the base of her neck) so she could feel the vibration of my vocal chords</p>
<b>57:30</b>	<p>Anything you carry with you from Bowling Green, to your church, etc?</p> <p>I came back home because I got tired of where I was (in VA)</p> <p>I came back to be around family and to go to Western</p> <p>Me and John connected up again, and he'd ask me to sing at church and at other events/albums</p> <p>I started coming to State St. (Baptist) because of my husband and because John was connected here as well</p> <p>When I had my son, I'd go over there, and the choir from State St. would go different places with us</p> <p>I'm glad I came back</p>
<b>59:20</b>	<p>At one point I did wish I'd never come back</p> <p>I was in school, and my mother got sick, so things were kind of rough</p> <p>When I came back in '05—2009 was when my mom got sick</p> <p>Hard to focus on math, I took it last</p> <p>With the help of a good math teacher</p> <p>Michelle Hollis at the time, now it's Michelle Jones (department administrator?)</p>
<b>1:00:40</b>	<p>What's it like singing in church now?</p> <p>It takes everything out of me</p> <p>I'll go when they ask, I don't just go and volunteer</p> <p>One time the pastor asked me to get a group together</p> <p>On occasions John has asked me to sing: Christmas, for other organizations, MLK Day, at Western</p>
<b>1:02:35</b>	<p>It did something for you—what do you mean by that?</p> <p>My mother had gotten sick, so it boosted me, helped me mentally, gave me relief</p> <p>I was so gung-ho into getting that degree</p>

	It just gave me a sigh of relief, to do what I love best, got some energy from that
<b>1:03:25</b>	<p>Same songs now or different?</p> <p>Different Still Amazing Grace As you can see, I've got tons and tons of CDs I'll sing some songs that catch me, that have a good message And John knows me so well he can just pick it up and play it He taught me perfection, stage etiquette That's why I started my own business I've kept those standards, 'cause they work He still sings like a mocking bird I'm very adamant about professionalism and how to carry yourself You can't be phony, don't act like you're so above people</p>
<b>1:06:23</b>	<p>Reminds me of the story about the little boy who asked for the autograph</p> <p>It's like God just said, "Don't you ever do that" That stayed in my mind for years Always make time for people</p>
<b>1:07:02</b>	<p>Anything else you want to share?</p> <p>I wish I had other opportunities, that some things would open up here in Bowling Green I don't mind volunteering, but that's my livelihood I just wish there were more opportunities and that they would offer- That's a lot of air you're breathing, I'm not as young as I used to be, I don't want to be taken advantage of I feel like if I'm professional enough to sing, then pay me my props and dues There's always something somebody can grab somewhere—John taught me that I've volunteered so many times, I don't broadcast it (When they do pay) I don't feel like it's enough, they go pay someone else a little more What about me? I'm just as professional as someone else</p>
<b>1:09:23</b>	<p>Why do you think that happens?</p> <p>I feel like discrimination, not color, but feeling like someone else is better than you If you're gonna pay a speaker \$500-some dollars, why not give me \$200? In VA, 1 song paid \$100, and then you get here and it's just "oh, would you just do this for free?" It costs—it's just not fair I'm not a person who'll say, "OK give me the money" But if you're- you must know that I can sing, well I'm worth it, because I'm God's person, and I think I'm worthy of the hire I'm gonna be professional, because I was taught by the best</p>

<b>1:11:02</b>	<p>Why do you think that changed?</p> <p>Location—people like the status quo  What's important to me is to get something across to other people, something they'll grab hold of and retain it and grow from it  If you're gonna pay somebody to give a speech, I'm not saying that speech is not good, but here I am giving a speech but with a song</p>
<b>1:11:42</b>	<p>Message songs</p> <p>Churches ask me to come, it'll drain you  I don't mind 1 time, but I've had people take advantage, and it's not fair  I do have contracts  I've sung at nursing homes, different places</p>
<b>1:12:50</b>	<p>Recent singing contract?</p> <p>I did a funeral, about 6-7 months ago  Beforehand, he said I'll pay you, what do you charge, and he did  Churches I do not charge  If you want to give me what we would consider a love offering—gift cards—I'll accept that</p>
<b>1:13:38</b>	<p>Why do you not charge when you go to churches?</p> <p>Because God gave me the gift, and that's what I'm supposed to do is to be a witness for him  But at least you could offer, but no I do not charge churches, but I will accept a love gift</p>
<b>1:14:27</b>	<p>What about in the future?</p> <p>I think it'll be wonderful because of the times  So much chaotic things  They're gonna be looking for somebody to give them hope, and I want to be available  Tell them your stories about what you went through  We have doctors and nurses in our family, my son does well  I just want to let them know, hey, whatever's needed, if I can help I will  People are gonna gravitate to God, they're gonna have to, because so much is going on  People are gonna need help, and we have to be available  No harm in being kind  I don't mind helping, but I don't want to be taken advantage of</p>
<b>1:17:20</b>	<p>I've gotten to a place where I'm older, so I do take better care of myself, I rest  When I can't do it, I just can't do it</p>
<b>1:17:37</b>	<p>Anybody else who has a good musical story?</p>

	Can't think of anybody right now, that's OK
<b>1:18:25</b>	<p>Anything else you want to say?</p> <p>I hope that what I've said will help somebody when they hear it  And I hope some doors will open that I can walk in  Not too much, but 3-4 times a month is not bad  Anybody wants vocal coaching, I'm available  The other DBA is ASM: A Senior Moment—seniors who need some help at  different nursing homes, and even sing to them  There's always something to do</p>
<b>1:20:40</b>	<p>Thank you</p> <p>I think sometimes people might not understand me, because I don't have a hidden  agenda, I'm wide open  I want to be an example, it's a joy serving others... that are appreciative</p>