

The following interview was conducted with Constance Woods-Brown, for the StarCity Treasurer's AmeriCorps History Project. It took place on 5/12/2006 at 'F' Street Community Center. The interviewer is Blaine Williams.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Okay, Constance uh, tell me about where you grew up.

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Okay, I was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. I was born April 7, 1955. Lived in Nebraska most of my life, some point we moved to Rock Island, Illinois, where um, my younger brother was born in 1960. So sometime between '55 and '60, we moved there.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Okay, tell me about your family.

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Okay, I have three brothers, one older. Miller Tarquintis Woods, III. And then, there's myself, and then there's my brother Steven Tracy Woods. And then, my younger brother, Nathan Tyrone Woods.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Do you have any uh, family traditions?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Yes. Um, one that I recall uh, New Year's Eve we'd always have black-eyed peas and greens. Black-eyed peas was for good luck, you had to eat them every year, and um, the greens was to say that you'll have money all year 'round.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, where did you go to grammar school?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Okay, when we moved here from Illinois – I started school in Rock Island, Illinois, and when we moved to Nebraska, I went to the old Capitol School, which is now Clare McPhee, on 16th and 'G'. And then I attended Everett Elementary School, which is on 11th and 'C', which is now a elementary school. And I attended Lincoln High School after that. I went to Lincoln School of Commerce, which is now Hamilton College, to pursue a Tour and Travel field, which I didn't complete.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Uh, is there anything about your teachers or your classmates that you remember?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: I remember one teacher, it was my fifth grade teacher, her name was Miss Tooney. And the reason why I remember her is 'cause uh, when I was in fifth grade I was needing eyeglasses. And I never wanted to wear them 'cause kids would always call kids with eyeglasses 'four-eyes', and so I kept my glasses in my purse, for like, two weeks after I got them. And then one day, my mom just happened to call the teacher and asked her how I was doing with my glasses, and the teacher said, 'What glasses?' Then the teacher shortly called me in her office, and said my mom had just called. And she said, 'I heard you have new glasses.' So she goes, 'Can I see them?', so I took them out of my purse and showed them to her. So she said, 'Well, you need to put them on.' So, I put them on and then, I was really shy back then, so I held my hands to the side of my eyes, so kids wouldn't see when I came out, but actually I brought more attention to myself.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, the training that you had at the Lincoln School of Commerce, has that helped you in any way, in what you're doing now?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Uh, just a little bit, with different classes I did. But, mostly all my life, like for summer programs and stuff, when I was in school, I always worked like, with daycares and at the Malone Community Center. That's the old one, that was on 20th and 'U', I believe. I worked there during the summer, when I was in high school. And I worked at the YWCA, with kids with behavioral problems, from thirteen to eighteen, and did some work with them. And now, I'm here. So I guess all along it has helped me quite a bit.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Do you have any uh, family customs relating to marriage?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: No, I guess I can't recall of any.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, are you married?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: No. I was married once, in 1991. I separated in '92, and then I ended up filing for a divorce in '97. It just wasn't for me.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Yea. Tell me about meeting your spouse?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Well, actually, I was working for Stephenson School Supply, uh, running a printing press. And it was on 8th and 'O', under the viaduct on 'O' street. And I lived on 8th and 'F', and every morning I would walk down to work, and he worked at the bus company, um, bus transportation. And it was on 6th -- it still is on -- 6th and uh, 'F'. Or, 8th and 'F', I guess. And, he would always be there, he knew about what time I'd walk by, and he'd always holler at me and talk to me. And then he asked me out, and we dated for awhile. And then he asked me to get married to him, so.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Okay, um, let's talk about your family history. Uh, can you tell me anything about your grandparents?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Okay, my mom was born in Gaston, Alabama, and her parents came up here 'cause her father worked for the railroad. And they moved up here, and my mom was thirteen years old and she was the baby of the family. And, that was on my mom's side. And my dad's side, his parents -- well, his mom was born in Palestine, Texas, and his father was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. And, uh, I knew my father's parents a lot longer than I did my mom's. Actually, I never knew my grandfather on my mom's side, because he died uh, before I was existed. But I did know my grandmother, but I pretty small when she died, too, on my mother's side. But my grandmother and grandfather -- my grandfather died when I was about thirteen years old, on my father's side. And my grandmother, my dad's mom, she died in 1995. And I took care of her the last three years that she lived.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, what about your grandfather's education? Did he go to school here?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Yes, he attended Lincoln High School, and also the University of Nebraska.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, tell me about your grandfather at the University of Nebraska.

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Uh, I believe he was, like, in a, in a sorority -- I mean, fraternity, excuse me. And uh, it was, uh -- I have pictures from that, and it was a all-black fraternity, and it still exists. But, I don't know if they have a house or, that they all meet in, or if they just have a chapter that they see each other in.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: What did your grandfather do after he uh, graduated from college?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Uh, to my knowledge, I think he did some pharmacy work, and I know he worked over at the Malone Center. And uh, that's basically most of the stuff I know about what he did.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, what about your grandmother?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Okay, my grandmother's pretty much a housewife, and later on in years, after losing my grandfather, she did work for a group home with girls. And she basically stayed in Omaha until her health deteriorated, and then my dad had put her in a nursing home. And then, she asked me to take her out. She probably was in there six months, she just wasn't staying there.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: What about your uh, grandmother in Palestine, Texas? Do you know much about her?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: No, I just know she moved here when she was, I think maybe in junior high or high school. She moved to Omaha, and some kind of way she met my grandfather and they got married. I never been to Palestine. She still has one sister living.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: What about your uh, mother's grandparents?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: They both were from Gaston, Alabama, and I just know her father worked for the railroad. And, my mother had three brothers, two of them worked for the railroad. And, she had one sister -- well, two sisters, one died as a infant. And then, the other one, she worked for King's. We used to have a King's Food Host at 19th and 'O', she worked there mostly all her life.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Did you ever hear any stories about Alabama, when you were younger?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Well, my mom had told me a lot about livin' down there, and how you had to be real respectful to white people. She said if you didn't say 'please', 'thank you', or let them walk first, that they would call before you got back home and say, 'Your daughter disrespected me today', and you'd hear about it when you got home. My mom could never figure out why people wanted to continually stay there, 'cause to this day they say it still goes on quite a

bit down there.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Have you ever been to Alabama?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: No, I never have went. My family all has been down there, I just wasn't the traveling type, so I always stayed home when they went on long trips to travel in the car. To family reunions and stuff, I didn't, never went.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Where did you live in Nebraska, uh, in Lincoln?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Um, when we first moved here, we moved in with my grandfather's parents. And it was at 650 South 20th, which now is an apartment complex. And, it was, uh – we lived there most of our life, until she passed away.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: And, what was it like, growing up in Lincoln during that time?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: During that time uh, I think Lincoln was a pretty nice place to live. And, I didn't seem like I had very much trouble with prejudice or anything. I was really tall when I was in sixth grade. Actually, I'm the same height I was now. And, my parents had my growth stopped for awhile, and I used to be called 'Jolly Green Giant', but I never was felt like a lot racism was goin' on. If it was, I just didn't realize it or see it. But for the pretty much part, I think it's a nice place to live, and a nice place to be growed up in.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Were there any parts of Lincoln that you weren't supposed to be in?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Well, for some reason, we were never 'sposed to cross 'O' street. As a kid, my mom would always say, 'Don't ever pass 'O' street!' And I was just curious to find out what was on the other side of 'O' street. Well, when I did finally cross it, I found out there was a lot of black people on that side of town, and I think maybe that's why she didn't want me to cross there. But, I'm not really sure. She just never wanted me or my brothers to cross 'O' street. We lived on the south side of 'O'.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: And, what else did your, were your grandparents involved in? Or, family?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Well, to my knowledge, they had a booth at the fairgrounds that they rent every year and served food, did cooking. And, they had a group of people that would help out with cooking. This was something they did every year. They made a big deal about that.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, are there other people from your father's – uh, grandfather's fraternity that are, that you recognize in the picture?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Yes, I recognize Reverend Trago. He was like, a reverend, and I can't remember what year he died, but it hasn't been too terribly long ago. And, for all the work he did in the community, they actually built a park and they named it Trago Park. It's

located near the Malone Center, on 20th, 20th and 'U' area. Or, 20th and Vine area.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Anyone else?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Mmm, I can't think of anybody else right off, that I know in the picture.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: I noticed you mentioned your brother's middle name, which was –

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Tarquintis.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Yea, can you spell that?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: T-A-R-Q-U-I-N-T-I-S.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: And that's a rather unusual name. Uh, is it uh, one of your family traditions, to pass that name on?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Yea, they've passed it on for awhile. My great-grandfather's name was William, I don't know where the Miller came out of. But, then he named my grandfather Miller Tarquintis Woods. And then, my grandfather and grandmother, they just had the one son, and they named him Miller Tarquintis Woods Junior. And then, when my brother was born, first-born, my father named him Miller Tarquintis Woods, III. So, that name's been carried on. Unfortunately, my brother got married and he had one daughter, and she's the only child. So, that name didn't go on. But, my brother under me, he decided he'd give one of his boys the middle name. So, his son's name is Trevino Tarquintis Woods.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: So, the name lives on! [Laughs]

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: [Laughs] Yea.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Um, any other memories you would like to share?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Well, I remember my great-grandmother, she used to make homemade brew. [Laughs] And she used, like, peaches. And she had it inside a nig crock, and she'd have a cheesecloth over it. And I actually remember goin' in there all the time and havin' me a little taste of it. I didn't really know what it was, but it was sweet and it was good! And later on, I found out it was -- she was makin' some type of brandy out of the peaches. So, I was wondering why, when I always was in there drinkin' I'd get pretty warm, but I didn't understand why until I got older.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: [Clears throat]. Excuse me. Any other memories you -- about your grandparents, or Lincoln or family?

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Um, I can't really think of none at this time.

BLAINE WILLIAMS: Well, in that case, I'd like to thank you, Constance, for this – for your time, and sharing your memories with us. Thank you.

CONSTANCE WOODS-BROWN: Thank you.