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Invisible Community Project
in partnership with
Housatonic Heritage Oral History

Ruth Evans

Recorded: March 19, 1998

0:00:00 to 1:05:22

Note: [0:00:00] (time code) indicates spelling question or other uncertainty. At times, recording is a bit difficult to hear.

Elaine Gunn: This is Ruth Evans of Pittsfield. Today's date is March 19th, 1998. Mrs. Evans has graciously consented to offer this interview for the Invisible Community project. Thank you, Ruth.

Ruth Evans: You're welcome.

Elaine Gunn: I'm going to start with asking you about your family background, for instance, who your parents were, where they were born, why they came to Massachusetts, when they came, and perhaps more specifically why they chose Great Barrington?

Ruth Evans: Well, my mother and father—my mother was Martha Wright Crawford from Mobile, Alabama [0:00:48] Alabama. So, then, my father was Isaac Crawford from Illinois. And you know something? I'm not certain if it was Bloomington or Springfield, but that area—Chicago area, anyway.

0:00:59 And my mother was from the south, Alabama, and my father from Chicago, from Illinois. And my mother's father worked on the railroad, so she, on this particular occasion when she met my father, went with him to Chicago, and they were—she was working at Sears, I think she said, Department Store, and that's where she met my father. So, in the ensuing years, we were back and forth between Alabama and Illinois because—

Elaine Gunn: You mean the family?

Ruth Evans: The family, the whole family. Like, Isaac was born in Illinois. Pearl was born in Alabama. Isaac was born in Illinois. But just maybe they both were born in Illinois. I'm not certain of that. And then Peter was born in Alabama,

and I was born in Chicago. [laugh] Marie and Jerry were born in Alabama, and Chuck, my youngest brother, was born in Jersey. Yeah. I think perhaps over the years, my mother was moving about, trying to find a better place for us. She was quite concerned about our growing up, and the schools we went to, and things like that. So, she was on the move.

0:01:59

They were trying to locate a spot that was suitable for our education, and things like that. And she came north to get a job. She was a domestic at that particular time. And we were in Tuskegee, Alabama, when she came on, and she settled in New Jersey, and she was working at some summer homes like in Salisbury, Connecticut, and places like that. And she kind of liked the area. She would go to Great Barrington with this family that she worked for in Salisbury, and she liked Great Barrington. I think that's how we finally settled here. She thought it would be a nice place for us kids to grow up. I think I was about 14 years old when we moved to New Jersey, and I went to junior high school one year in New Jersey. Then we moved to Great Barrington, I remember, the first year in high school.

Elaine Gunn:

Now, the year, the year that you moved?

Ruth Evans:

The year that we moved here, was it '42, '41? I'm not certain about the year but it was in the early '40s because I remember Peter and Isaac both went into the service just as we moved here.

0:03:02

I graduated from Searles High School in '46, so it was in the '40s anyway, in the early '40s, when we came.

Elaine Gunn:

Searles High School in Great Barrington?

Ruth Evans:

Searles High School in Great Barrington, yes, I graduated from there in 1946. I wasn't that fond of Great Barrington but I always felt that it was a place for young people, babies [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn:

[laugh]

Ruth Evans:

—and older people, you know, adults. I never felt it was a place for teenagers. There just wasn't—didn't seem to be anything to do there and, yeah, I wasn't too pleased with Great Barrington...in fact, I thought Pittsfield, where I live now, was a big city, by comparison.

- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] We all did. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** [laugh] I remember the first dance I came to up here. My brother, Peter, brought me up to a dance here in Pittsfield, and I thought that was just super, you know. It was just the greatest, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** You mentioned you didn't really like Great Barrington very much. Did you have any—was there anything specific that you would say you didn't really like about Great Barrington, other than the fact that there was little to do for teenagers?
- 0:04:03
- Ruth Evans:** There was a great deal of prejudice in Great Barrington, I found. I can remember one occasion. [laugh] I don't know if I should mention this or not. But we went—there was like a soda fountain up there on Main Street in Great Barrington, and I remember going in with some other of my friends. You remember that?
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember that soda fountain.
- Ruth Evans:** And we went in, we sat in a booth, and we didn't get waited on. No one would wait on us. We sat there, it seemed, forever.
- Elaine Gunn:** Owned by the [0:04:31]?
- Ruth Evans:** I can't remember who owned it.
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:04:33] in the kitchen?
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, yes, and we just didn't get waited on. Others would come in, and they would be served, and we still sat there. And then so finally, we did what you never should do. [laugh] We started a little commotion, and we did finally get waited on. But as teenagers, I suppose [laugh], would do, you know, we didn't leave the place as we should have, so.
- Elaine Gunn:** So, you were one of the original sit-ins [laugh]—
- Ruth Evans:** [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** —only in the north. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Yes, I suppose so.

0:05:00

Ruth Evans: No, really, at the school, I thought there was a great deal of prejudice in the school too, Searles High School, at that particular time. I can remember the performance at a school play that was put on, and there was reference to stereotyping Blacks. Well, we weren't called Blacks then but—and I can remember that my brother, Peter, got up and walked out of the assembly hall when that play was being [0:05:21]. Things like that, you know.

Elaine Gunn: That's understandable. You mentioned that your parents came here because your mother got a job here. Now, did your father come at the same time? Did he—?

Ruth Evans: No, my father did not. He was disabled from the war, First World War, and he was in hospital in Tuskegee at that time when we moved up here. He did not come with us. He came later, at a later time, when we were in Great Barrington. But my father was—didn't—he never really had a job, per se.

0:05:59

He used to chauffeur a lot in Great Barrington here. You remember that?

Elaine Gunn: I remember.

Ruth Evans: Yeah. But he wasn't able to hold down a job because of his disability.

Elaine Gunn: Now, I know your mother's story as a domestic. But, my goodness, she reached such heights for the time.

Ruth Evans: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: And you want to talk about that a little bit?

Ruth Evans: Well, she was always one to—an entrepreneur, if you would her that. She was always anxious to start something new, and really tried to succeed, and she had a tea room in Great Barrington, Crawford's Tea Room, and that was down on Main Street. It was popular but then it just didn't get enough people coming in to keep it on the upscaling or to really succeed. And I don't think—she ended up more or less having the tea room in her home, and she also had

room and board there. She rented rooms for people. They called it Crawford Inn—

Elaine Gunn: I remember that.

Ruth Evans: —yeah, in Great Barrington. And she had an employment agency there, Crawford's Employment Agency.

Elaine Gunn: [0:06:57]

Ruth Evans: So, she was quite—yeah, for many years, she was quite ambitious, and she was always trying new things.

0:07:02 But the thing—

Elaine Gunn: And she also ran a catering service up there?

Ruth Evans: Yeah, she did that. I can remember when we first went to Great Barrington, though, she was doing laundry, and then baking pies, and all sorts of things like that, for people. That was before she opened the team room. Also, she was doing laundry.

Elaine Gunn: You remember the year that she opened the tea room?

Ruth Evans: I think it was '40—no, I don't. [laugh] I don't. But, you know, when I came back—I went to Bennett College for one year, and when I came back, the tea room was open then. Now, I don't know if it was open—it was open before that, I think.

Elaine Gunn: If I may say, I remember I met my husband at—

Ruth Evans: At the tea room?

Elaine Gunn: —at the tea room. Albert Brinsky [0:07:47] and it had to have been in 1945, I believe.

Ruth Evans: Well, that '46, I graduated, so it was open before I went to school then, went away to school. Yeah, I didn't remember.

0:07:57 I do remember working there, and I remember—and she did a lot of catering from there too, yeah. She baked a lot of pies and cakes and things.

Elaine Gunn: But I think it's important to mention that your mother was ambitious, obviously, and she wanted to get—have an—and get a business going that would benefit Black folks,

certainly. I remember the [0:08:21] but the inn, and we used to come.

Ruth Evans: Yes, yes, they would come up during the summer, and they would get rooms there, and stay, go to Tanglewood and places like that.

Elaine Gunn: Exactly.

Ruth Evans: Yes, yes.

Elaine Gunn: But this was—I think it's significant to know that this was before [0:08:37].

Ruth Evans: Yes, yes, just before we [0:08:42 left?]. You see, [0:08:42 Karen was born?]
—well, it was in the '60s.

Elaine Gunn: But the '40s when she started.

Ruth Evans: When she started, yes. But I can remember the tea room, I mean, the Crawford's Inn was mostly in the late '50s and early '60s, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: And the snack bar.

Ruth Evans: Uh-huh, she had a snack bar—

Elaine Gunn: [0:08:57]

Ruth Evans: —at the Crawford Tea Room on Elm Court, yeah, [0:09:01] Court.

0:09:02

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. It's remarkable. Do you know anything or remember anything about your grandparents?

Ruth Evans: I remember my mother's. I don't—didn't know my father's parents. My mother's parents, Frank and Emma Wright, I remember them, yes, because when we lived in Alabama, we lived not too far from them. And I can remember my grandfather, Frank Wright, they used to say—my father always said he had his wings up. You'd see him standing over, and looking around, surveying the land.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: And he'd have his hands on his hips. And my father used to always remark that he had his wings out. But I remember

when he died, he died just about the year I think that we left that area and moved to Tuskegee. And I used to go over and sleep at my grandmother's house, Grandma Emma, on weekend nights. I remember that. But I don't—I was about 9 or 10 when my grandpa died, Grandpa Frank, and I don't have that vivid—I remember Grandma—my mother's mother came up to Great Barrington to visit us, and she stayed for a while.

0:10:06

Did you meet her then when she came up?

Elaine Gunn:

[0:10:06 I think I did?].

Ruth Evans:

Yeah. And my mother's sister?

Elaine Gunn:

[0:10:12]

Ruth Evans:

Yeah, Aunt Irma.

Elaine Gunn:

Is still living?

Ruth Evans:

She's still living. She lives in Mobile part of the year, and then part of the year, she's with her daughter in Ohio, I mean, Pennsylvania, yeah.

Elaine Gunn:

You mentioned your brothers and sisters. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Ruth Evans:

I have—there was seven of us: Isaac Crawford, the oldest. Pearl was the oldest. Pearl died when I was at St. Luke's. I think she was 29 when she died, yeah. She was the oldest, and then Isaac and Peter. Jerry and Marie were twins. They were younger than I am. I was in the middle, and then Chuck, our youngest brother, Chuck.

0:11:00

So, all told, there were seven of us.

Elaine Gunn:

And where are they now?

Ruth Evans:

They're all—excuse me—Pearl's dead. She died. Isaac is here in Pittsfield. Well, he's in Dalton, actually. Peter lives in Boston, Dorchester area. Jerry lives in Bloomfield, Connecticut. Marie lives in New Jersey—Monmouth Junction, New Jersey. And my brother, Chuck, lives here in Pittsfield also.

Elaine Gunn:

Did anyone else live with you when you were growing up? You know, sometimes, in families, especially I think the

African-American families, there might be—a lot have extended families in other parts. Grandparents were [0:11:42]—

Ruth Evans: No, my grandmother, my mother's mother stayed with us for a while just more or less like a visit. But, no, as I recall we didn't have anybody that stayed with us for an extended period, but just immediate family, to my recollection.

Elaine Gunn: When were you married?

0:12:00

Ruth Evans: I got married in 1953. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Yes, '52. Isn't that awful? [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Around there. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Around [laugh] there in Great Barrington. Got married in my mother's back...you know, in their backyard under the rose arbor there. That was in 1951. It was 1952 [laugh] because Pam was born in '53.

Elaine Gunn: You graduated from...?

Ruth Evans: St. Luke's Hospital, School of Nursing [laugh], in 1951.

Elaine Gunn: That's in...?

Ruth Evans: In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, right. Actually, now, that was another area [0:12:40]—well, there was another African American that was in the year before me. She was the first one. And then the year that I entered nursing at St. Luke's, there were four of us African Americans, and that was really a breakthrough right there. It was right when that had happened and then—yeah.

0:13:00

Elaine Gunn: [0:13:00] You remember who the others were?

Ruth Evans: Yes, there was [0:13:05] Chadwell. She did not finish. She left after we were [0:13:08]. [0:13:10 Brookie Robinson?] was from—was she from Iowa? Where was [0:13:14 Brookie?] from? And Helen Norwood was from Michigan,

if you can remember Helen. And myself. There was four of us. The three of us, [0:13:22 Brookie?], Helen, and myself, we did graduate. But [0:13:25] did not graduate.

Elaine Gunn: So, how long were you at St. Luke's?

Ruth Evans: I was at St. Luke's until they merged with Berkshire Medical Center here in Pittsfield, which was in 1970—well, I guess it was '69, actually, when they made the first steps toward merger. But I went over to Berkshire Medical Center in 1971, that year. But, all told, I put in about 37 years of nursing but not full-time. Most of that was part-time, and I did most of that on nights too because that was the easiest for me, you know, working and raising a family.

0:14:04 My husband worked a swing shift: a week of days, a week of evenings, a week of nights. So [laugh], that suited us best. I worked nights most of that time.

Elaine Gunn: Now, you mentioned you were married at your parents' home in Great Barrington.

Ruth Evans: Right, in Great Barrington, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: But who did you marry?

Ruth Evans: I married Thomas Evans from Pittsfield, yes. He was born and raised in Pittsfield. In fact, his father was born and raised in Pittsfield, and his father's father was from the Springfield area. I didn't know his—Tommy's grandparents on his father's side. His mother was Henrietta Chambers from North Carolina. In fact, she's still living. She's lives in a nursing home at Ashmere. And I knew his Grandmother Chambers, too, yes, because she was—she lived here. She moved here from North Carolina, and she lived here for a while on West Street.

0:15:00

Elaine Gunn: [0:15:00]

Ruth Evans: But Tommy's father was quite an entrepreneur also, and he started several businesses. He was a carpenter, he built homes, and he loved building furniture. And I just wish there was someone here that could talk to, you know, and give his background too because—

Elaine Gunn: Well, tell us what you know about him.

- Ruth Evans:** Well, I know that he had a [0:15:21 kiln?] over here in this area where we live off Cole Avenue here in Pittsfield, and used to make [0:15:27 charcoal for cats?]. Then when this area started to build up, he went up on Mountain going toward Albany.
- Elaine Gunn:** Lebanon?
- Ruth Evans:** Lebanon, yeah, route 49, yeah. Off there, he built a [0:15:41 kiln?], and he built a cabin up there too. He had a swimming pool that he built up there. [laugh] But, anyway, when he had that [0:15:47 kiln?] that he built up there, he used to make brushes and toothbrushes and dental equipment that dentists use. And he was affiliated with the company [0:15:57 Dickson & Company?] from new Jersey, and they used to come up here and check things out, and place orders with him.
- 0:16:03 He used to go down there and present different stuff to them. I really don't know his total involvement, and I wish there was someone here that really could remember—
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, I wish so too.
- Ruth Evans:** —and tell it.
- Elaine Gunn:** But I remember the fact that he was a builder. Didn't build a house?
- Ruth Evans:** He built the house that we live in—that I'm living in now. He built the house next door, and he built the house that they lived in on the corner here, on the corner of Cole Avenue and Lanark Road. He built the three houses. And I don't know the details but I can remember my mother-in-law talking about the trouble they had getting finances from this area, yes. They went through an awful lot, and I think it ended up with some kind of a court something. I'm not sure of the details, but I do know that she often remarked on the trouble they had getting bank [0:16:47] and being able to finance this. But he did [0:16:50].
- Elaine Gunn:** But he persevered?
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, he did.
- Elaine Gunn:** He was very successful.

Ruth Evans: That was the first house he built, 48 Lanark Road, I think it is, and this was the second, 46 Lanark Road. And then on the corner there is 165 Cole Avenue.

0:17:02 He built that house too. And Tommy's brother, Herbert, used to live in the first house there, and then Tommy and I moved into this one, and [0:17:10]. And they lived on the corner there.

Elaine Gunn: That's remarkable. I remember some of that.

Ruth Evans: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: Now, did Tommy, did your husband, Tom, help your dad in his business at all?

Ruth Evans: Yes, he did, part-time. But Papa—that was not his full-time job. Papa worked for Western Mass. Electric, and Papa's papa worked for Western Mass. Electric, and Papa's uncle worked for Western Mass. Electric. So, there was—I think when Papa retired, they did a family kind of a history for that particular thing, and there was over 100 years' service for, you know, all the Evanses at that time.

Elaine Gunn: You have any idea where that history is?

Ruth Evans: Ah, no, but I might be able to look up something, and find something on it for you, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: That would be terrific, oh, yeah [0:17:53].

Ruth Evans: But Papa worked there, and Tommy worked there, and Tommy's brother, Herbie, worked there for Western Mass. Electric.

0:17:58 I remember when Tommy first came home from the service, he got a job at GE that lasted one year. He was at Liptons first, and then he went to GE for one year, and then he got into Western Mass. And he put in 40-some-year service at Western Mass. Electric, yes.

Elaine Gunn: Goodness.

Ruth Evans: But that was when it was over there on Silver Lake Boulevard at the plant, and then they built that place up West Street. He was still employed there when they built it [0:18:25].

- Elaine Gunn:** That's remarkable because I don't know of any other African Americans who were employed by those sort of service industries at that time.
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, they put—the whole family put in quite a few years there. Papa was born, like I said, here in Pittsfield, and they lived right down here on Dundee, a couple of streets down, yeah, on Dundee. And I can remember Papa saying how he used to walk to—had walked to school. And then he said when he had his tonsils out, he walked from here to Pittsfield General Hospital, which it was at that time, to have his tonsils out—
- 0:19:02
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** —and walked back home afterwards. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] Those were the days.
- Ruth Evans:** So, I think how things have changed since then, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** How things have changed. Children have to be picked up and driven two blocks. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** Right, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** So, how many children did you and Tommy have?
- Ruth Evans:** We had four: two boys and two girls. Pam is the oldest. She's—in fact, Pam lives next door now at my in-laws' home. And then Karen. Pam is Pam Ross now, and Karen—she never married. She's Karen Evans. She lives in Hartford, Connecticut. And I had two boys, and I've lost both of those.
- Elaine Gunn:** Such a tragedy.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, Thomas Crawford Evans, he was my oldest. He got cancer. And Chuck, just a couple months ago.
- Elaine Gunn:** And you have grandchildren?
- Ruth Evans:** Two grandsons, Matthew and Jordan, yes. They're delightful.
- Elaine Gunn:** They must be the light of your life.

Ruth Evans: Oh, yeah. Jordan is 16 now.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, wow.

Ruth Evans: And Matthew is 12. They're—well, Jordan will be 16 the end of next month.

0:20:01 I shouldn't advance his age, should I? [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Oh, well, you wouldn't like it. You wouldn't like it. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Yeah, I know. [0:20:06]

Elaine Gunn: Get his license, you see.

Ruth Evans: I know, and he's talking about that already, his permit anyway. And Matthew is 12. He'll be 13 on the 2nd of May.

Elaine Gunn: And they live across the—?

Ruth Evans: Right, next door.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, that's nice.

Ruth Evans: Yeah, so that's nice. Matthew comes up every morning, and spends about 20 minutes with me before his school bus comes.

Elaine Gunn: Just to check [0:20:23] [laugh]

Ruth Evans: [laugh] And I love that. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Checks if you're all right. I'm sure you do. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Yes.

Elaine Gunn: Can I ask you about your church affiliations? I know there was a long affiliation with—certainly, beginning with your mother—the church.

Ruth Evans: Oh, well, my mother, she's something else. She was very religious, and I guess all of us kind of picked that up from her, you know, great faith, you know, belief. She started the church in Great Barrington, as a matter of fact, the Macedonia Baptist Church. She and my father were the founders of that [0:20:54] for that. And I joined the First Baptist Church here in Pittsfield, in fact, the year before I was married because I had been living in Pittsfield.

0:21:04

After I graduated from St. Luke's Hospital, I stayed on as a nurse at the home there [0:21:09]. I never went back to Great Barrington after that. And I've been a member of First Baptist Church since '52, yeah, '51 or '52. [0:21:20]

Elaine Gunn:

Where did your mother—I know she began the church, she and your father, the founders of the Macedonian Baptist Church in Great Barrington. Where did they meet originally in Great Barrington? Do you remember that?

Ruth Evans:

They—no, I don't. Like I said, my memory is [laugh]—but I think—

Elaine Gunn:

Did they meet at their home first?

Ruth Evans:

They met at the home. They met at their home first, but it seems to me they met at some place—

Elaine Gunn:

A Thursday Morning Club?

Ruth Evans:

—down at—yes, right, they did, on Main Street there, right next to the post office. Right, they did meet there, yeah.

Elaine Gunn:

On Sunday?

Ruth Evans:

But I remember they did start it in their home, right, because when we first went to Great Barrington, we were going to the AME Zion Church—

0:22:01

Elaine Gunn:

[0:22:01]

Ruth Evans:

—and she was very active in that too. But her first love in church has always been the Sunday School, and she was superintendent of the Sunday School there. And she always had a youth group, and she would take them on trips and things. In fact, even after my kids were—

Elaine Gunn:

And all my kids [laugh]—

Ruth Evans:

—yeah, my kids, she took them too. Pam and Karen, they always talked about the trips that Grandma used to take them on, you know, as if it was for them personally. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn:

Exactly, yeah.

- Ruth Evans:** But it was for all the youth in the church, yeah, she'd take—
- Elaine Gunn:** Your mother was interested not only in faith and having a [0:22:32] not only had a very strong faith and instilled that in her children, but other children who were in her charge when they went to Sunday School.
- Ruth Evans:** Right, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** But she was also interested in education.
- Ruth Evans:** Right, yeah [0:22:43].
- Elaine Gunn:** Right, yeah.
- Ruth Evans:** And speaking of education, my mother had—she was just a tremendous speaker, as far as I'm concerned, and I just wish I had gotten one iota of her speaking abilities.
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember that.
- Ruth Evans:** But, yes, she was just wonderful to listen to.
- Elaine Gunn:** She was [0:23:00].
- 0:23:00
- Ruth Evans:** Right, and it would just flow and [laugh]—
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** She might have notes but she didn't read them.
- Elaine Gunn:** No, no.
- Ruth Evans:** She didn't have to refer to them. She just checked to see if she did bring up that particular subject. But she was an excellent speaker, and she was really in demand too.
- Elaine Gunn:** She was, and she was asked to. She was in demand.
- Ruth Evans:** She was. She was, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember when she took the children to visit the UN.
- Ruth Evans:** I went then.
- Elaine Gunn:** Did you go?

- Ruth Evans:** No, my children, Pam and Karen, went.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, even my kids went.
- Ruth Evans:** Well, we went to the World's Fair with her in New York, yes. Yes, we went to that. I remember [0:23:29 May Ringo?] went too, yeah, with [0:23:31 Erin?], yeah. But I didn't go to the UN, no. But I know Pam and Karen went.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, your children [0:23:36] and my children. What a wonderful [0:23:39].
- Ruth Evans:** No, she was great for trips like that, and Lake George and those places.
- Elaine Gunn:** She was a very special lady. But apparently so many of us did not appreciate it back then. But looking back [0:23:52]—
- Ruth Evans:** Back on it, it was marvelous, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Wow.
- Ruth Evans:** It was really [0:23:54 something?]. And I remember some of the guests that she would have at Crawford's Inn, she would take them on trips and, you know, take them to spots that—yeah, yeah.
- 0:24:03
- Elaine Gunn:** Remarkable. Remarkable, especially at that time when people were not—were too [0:24:08] to a lot of those things that we have now. So, you mentioned that you went to school, first of all, before you came to this area, Great Barrington in, say, Alabama—
- Ruth Evans:** Mobile.
- Elaine Gunn:** —Mobile, Alabama.
- Ruth Evans:** Mobile County Training School. We went to a one-room schoolhouse prior to that outside of [0:24:28] I think was the name of it. [laugh] And I remember being in the same classroom with Isaac. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** OK. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** I can remember him teasing him. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: But then we did go to Mobile County Training School, and then we moved to Tuskegee from there. And I think one of the reasons why we left, my mother was always, like I said before, trying to better things for us. And there was this problem with the principal of the school, at Mobile County Training School.

0:24:58 So, this was what prompted our move to Tuskegee. I remember that. Yeah, I went to school in Tuskegee. In fact, I graduated from the eighth grade in Tuskegee. And then the following—when school was out that year, that’s when we went to New Jersey. And I remember Peter was—Jerry claim...lays claim to it also. But I remember Peter’s the one that was responsible for getting us to New Jersey. We went up on the train, and Jerry, according to him, has a vivid memory of that.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: And he was [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn: And he was the one responsible. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Right. [laugh] But, you know, I just don’t remember all this.

Elaine Gunn: He was probably only about 8 or 9 at the time. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: [laugh] He was younger than I was, yeah. Well, no, he—let’s see. I’m two and a half years older than they were. If I was just graduated from eighth grade, yeah, they must’ve been about 10 or so.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

Ruth Evans: Yeah, right. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: You were right. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: But then I went to just that one year in New Jersey to junior high school, and I did not do well at all. It was such a transition for me. I’d always done very well in school prior

to that one year. It was kind of like, all of a sudden, I had all these faces that I'm not familiar with thrust upon me.

0:25:59

And I didn't fare well at school in New Jersey. So, when I went to Great Barrington, I was in the ninth grade. I was more or less repeating what I had done in New Jersey. That was my worst year of schooling ever. But I think it was going from an all-Black school to where we were very much in the minority, and that made a big difference.

Elaine Gunn:

It must have, yes.

Ruth Evans:

I think it affected me more than anyone else in my family, I would assume, because the others seem to have done all right but I did not.

Elaine Gunn:

But at that age, just beginning, so those teenage years when you're certainly very impressionable, and all kinds of things are happening to you physically and emotionally, that has [0:26:38]—

Ruth Evans:

Mmhmm, and that was the same year when they discovered that I had a heart murmur, and I was restricted from gym and things like that, you know. So, it was a bad year for me. I guess I could call it my worst year. But after we moved to Great Barrington, then we kind of settled in there, and I did much better.

Elaine Gunn:

And you mentioned one or two incidents in school in Great Barrington.

0:27:00

How did you fare with the students, all-white students socially?

Ruth Evans:

Didn't. No contact. Once you left school, that was it. You just saw your own in your own neighborhood, you know. No social life whatsoever. So, when I went to St. Luke's, it was a big difference for me because, there, we were like family, and I got to know some of the girls very well. In fact, some of the girls in my class were also from Searles High School, and it was like a whole new world, you know, to get to know them, to really get to know them, because we were a smaller grouping and, like I said, it was like a family there at St. Luke's Hospital. So, I got to know some of them that I probably never would have known otherwise, in fact.

Elaine Gunn: Did you then work with some when you graduated from St. Luke's?

Ruth Evans: Not...

Elaine Gunn: Any of the ones that you had gone to school with after Searles?

Ruth Evans: I did. I graduated with them from St. Luke's but they did—I didn't graduate with them from Searles—

Elaine Gunn: No, no.

Ruth Evans: —because I was older in my classes.

Elaine Gunn: OK, OK.

Ruth Evans: I was among the older ones in my classes because I didn't go into St. Luke's until a couple years after I graduated from high school.

0:28:04

Elaine Gunn: Oh, OK.

Ruth Evans: So, yeah, I was—there were a group of us that were older, and I was one of them, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: And then did you work with these—some of these—?

Ruth Evans: Yes, after graduation.

Elaine Gunn: And how did that work out?

Ruth Evans: Fine. I didn't have any problems with that. St. Luke's, I mean, nursing, you were considered—how should I express it? When I graduated, it wasn't what you had upstairs. It was what you were able to do with your hands, you know, more or less. Now, it's made a really big change in nursing now. It's more knowledge of [0:28:41] and stuff like that, and less bedside nursing. But at that particular time—

Elaine Gunn: [0:28:48]

Ruth Evans: Yeah. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [0:28:49] [laugh]

- Ruth Evans:** But I had no problems with them really. Now, when I went to BMC, it seemed like a different story.
- 0:29:01 I ran into a lot of prejudice there.
- Elaine Gunn:** At BMC?
- Ruth Evans:** At BMC. Well, it wasn't BMC then. It was—
- Elaine Gunn:** Right.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah. But after we merged, I did run into a lot of racial problems there.
- Elaine Gunn:** Was Pittsfield General was—what was—?
- Ruth Evans:** Pittsfield General, and then when we merged, what was it? Well, it was the BMC, I guess, now, and St. Luke's wing, and stuff like that. But I worked most of my time in pediatrics on nights at Berkshire Medical Center, and I can remember—you see, I was in charge, and maybe I would have an [0:29:34] working with me. And if the three of us were sitting at the desk, and someone came up, they would invariably address it to one of them; never to me.
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:29:44]
- Ruth Evans:** And you had one maybe that was very in tuned to you and your feelings, and she would say, "I'm not in charge. You'll have to talk to her about that." But you would have another one that was just delighted, and she would jump—
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** —right up. [laugh] "Can I help you?" And, "Oh, yes," and, you know.
- 0:30:00 So, I mean, that was—you encountered things like that, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** It's very difficult, even today, [0:30:05] you might [0:30:06]—
- Ruth Evans:** Might be charge, right.
- Elaine Gunn:** —in charge, you know. Yeah. How did you feel about that?
- Ruth Evans:** Well, I'll tell you [laugh], it didn't really bother me. I don't know if it was a matter of getting used to it or what. But I

would be very occupied and, you know, they would have to really direct themselves to get my attention sometimes. And I guess that was a little bit of a payback. I don't know. But it didn't really upset me an awful lot.

Elaine Gunn: I have just a little aside. My daughter-in-law has run into that same thing even to this day—

Ruth Evans: Oh, even to this day?

Elaine Gunn: —in 1998 at BMC—

Ruth Evans: Oh, really?

Elaine Gunn: —when she's been in charge [0:30:44].

Ruth Evans: Yeah, it just seems automatic that—

Elaine Gunn: People can't accept—

Ruth Evans: —that you can't be in charge; not if she's here, you know.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, exactly.

Ruth Evans: Then she must be in charge, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: Attitudes, you know, [0:30:55] change and everything. Did you work anyplace else other than St. Luke's?

0:31:00 You mentioned that you certainly worked in your mother's tea room early on.

Ruth Evans: Well, when I first graduated from high—when I was in high school, I used to do a little housework, and I used to babysit. I can remember a family that I babysat for in Monterey for years. And then I used to do housework on weekends and things like that. But my mother did a lot of catering, and I remember—do you remember Mr. Morgan in Great Barrington? He was an auctioneer.

Elaine Gunn: [0:31:24]

Ruth Evans: Yes. My mother used to cater at all of his auctions, and I used to go with her and help her with those things, selling sandwiches and sodas and stuff like that. But other than that, once I got into St. Luke's, that was it.

Elaine Gunn: Because that was a year-round program, wasn't it? Was it year-round?

- Ruth Evans:** St. Luke's was year-round, right, yes. It was a three-year program, diploma skills.
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:31:45]
- Ruth Evans:** Uh-huh, and I didn't really—well, maybe on a weekend or something—not a weekend. But if I was off, I might go to Great Barrington and go with my mother on a catering job or something of that nature. But I didn't have another job, per se.
- 0:31:58
- Then, after I graduated from St. Luke's, I just worked there. And then after I had my children, I just stayed right there, and I worked fewer hours or went on nights or something like that to accommodate the home situation. And then we merged, I went to Berkshire Medical Center, and that's—I've stayed there till I retired.
- Elaine Gunn:** The other thing is, if I'm not mistaken, that perhaps there weren't any other jobs for young Black women at that time, other than domestic work, unless you were able working within your parents' business.
- Ruth Evans:** Domestic, right. That's true, oh, yeah, or in the kitchen at a restaurant, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Or a kitchen in a restaurant or something like that.
- Ruth Evans:** But now there's—
- Elaine Gunn:** Or in the kitchen at the hospital.
- Ruth Evans:** Right, [laugh] but not as a clerk in a store even, no.
- Elaine Gunn:** No, no. It's sad. And we're in 1998, and I'm trying to think. I can't think of anybody who's in the bank. They had someone there a couple of years ago who was there for a while.
- Ruth Evans:** Oh, yes, there is. I don't know her name. But there's one at BankBoston. I've seen her.
- Elaine Gunn:** There's one at BankBoston?
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** In Great Barrington?

- Ruth Evans:** Mmhmm, the one here in Pittsfield.
- Elaine Gunn:** The one in Pittsfield. But [0:32:57]—
- Ruth Evans:** Oh, and the telephone companies had [0:32:59]—
- 0:32:59
- Elaine Gunn:** The telephone companies did have—well, [0:33:02 May Mary Ellen?] was there. I was there for a while.
- Ruth Evans:** But I'm not certain of who was there now because—
- Elaine Gunn:** It was later. It was later.
- Ruth Evans:** —you don't go into the telephone [laugh] company now like you used to.
- Elaine Gunn:** Exactly.
- Ruth Evans:** So, I'm not certain of that. But, no, I mean, you do see—
- Elaine Gunn:** And now—
- Ruth Evans:** —in stores, you see a salesperson, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, in Pittsfield, I'm not certain we have—and I don't know whether people have applied. That's the other thing—
- Ruth Evans:** That's, yeah, that's true.
- Elaine Gunn:** —in Great Barrington at this point.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** But we don't seem to have any in Great Barrington. I think there may be one or two—one at Kmart. I haven't seen at [0:33:36] or at the big Y.
- Ruth Evans:** I haven't seen—yes, yes, the big Y in Pittsfield, yes—
- Elaine Gunn:** In Pittsfield, not in Great Barrington.
- Ruth Evans:** —the checkout counter, right.
- Elaine Gunn:** There's one at the [0:33:48]. So, it's—
- Ruth Evans:** There's still—

- Elaine Gunn:** So, still, it's [0:33:54 uncommon?].
- Ruth Evans:** But, you know, what about the population, I mean, and how—?
- Elaine Gunn:** That's true.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** That is true.
- Ruth Evans:** I'm not sure.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, yeah.
- 0:34:00 But I would like to see more in the banks. The other thing is, sometimes, they might have an image problem, you know, that is—you know. But it's a little worrisome. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** Mmhmm, it certainly is, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes. I want to ask you now about some of your childhood and teenage memories, for instance, the kinds of games you might've played as a child, and whether or not you remember having to recite. I know being a child in your mother's church, I know you had to recite [laugh] something at some point or other, and sometimes in school, you know, we had to learn poems and things like that. Anything, any childhood memories about that?
- Ruth Evans:** No, not really. I was never—I was always a shy person. I'm not an introvert, I mean, not an extravert; definitely an introvert. So, if I had to do something [laugh], I probably would have. But, so, I don't have any fond memories of any of that. There might've been something there but it's the type of thing you'd probably push to the back of your mind if it's something that you did under duress, and you didn't really want to do it.
- 0:34:59 So, that could've been it. I remember in church, my mother in the choir. I sang in the choir. But, see, that was something that didn't require me performing solo. As far as reciting in school, I had to be called upon. [laugh] You didn't volunteer. And then you might not be called upon. So, yeah, and all of those things kind of are a detriment to your—yeah.

- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, to your own psyche, to your own self-esteem.
- Ruth Evans:** Right, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** But games that you played with your friends in Great Barrington, for instance, as you—well, you were [laugh] almost a teenager—
- Ruth Evans:** Cards at home [laugh], things like that. I can remember we weren't allowed to play cards when I was growing up. [laugh] It was a no-no in my house.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** You couldn't play cards. You couldn't dance on Sundays. You couldn't go to the movie on Sunday, and things like that.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] I remember that. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** I can—so, when I learned to play cards, it become a love for me because it was something that we were denied as we grew up, yeah. And I can remember that we used to love to play cards because I remember Betty, go in her house, and playing bid whist.
- 0:36:05 That's where I learned to play bid whist. [0:36:06 Arthur McCray?], we'd play with him, yes. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, yeah.
- Ruth Evans:** But as far as—and we—going to the movie was a luxury, so we would do that once in a while. But I was, well, 16 or something when I went to my first dance, and I went to that. Peter brought me up here to Pittsfield to that, and I thought, “oh, big city,” you know. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** I'm really going somewhere from Great Barrington. We used to go up to the lake. Mansfield, Lake Mansfield, is it?
- Elaine Gunn:** Mmhmm.
- Ruth Evans:** Oh, is that the one that's in Great Barrington?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, that's the one. That's the one.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, OK.

- Elaine Gunn:** It's up on the hill. We'd go the shortcut.
- Ruth Evans:** We used to go up there to swim.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes.
- Ruth Evans:** And, you know, I can remember once, I went up with Chuck, my—I mean, Jerry, and Russell. Remember Russell [0:36:48 Houston?]?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes.
- Ruth Evans:** I went up with them. There was a boat there that you could go out on the lake in, and we went out there in the boat. And they dove off the boat, and swam in. I said, "Well, if they dove off, it can't be but so deep out here."
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- 0:37:00
- Ruth Evans:** And I jumped off the side. [laugh] And Russell had gotten to the shore, and just happened to look back and see me going under.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh.
- Ruth Evans:** And they came back and got me. I couldn't swim. But [laugh]—
- Elaine Gunn:** Good Lord.
- Ruth Evans:** I remember that. But other than going up to the lake, we used to have picnics and things like that, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, I remember those. Did you play ball? Remember playing softball at all?
- Ruth Evans:** I don't remember that in Great Barrington. But, you know, when we were—I remember when we were in Alabama, I can remember that we were enough in the family with cousins and all that to play. I can remember playing ball out in the field. But in Great Barrington—
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:37:36]
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah. Well, you know, I think in Great Barrington—I wasn't there. After I graduated from high school, I really

wasn't in Great Barrington. And then I went away to Mary Potter Academy one of my high school years.

Elaine Gunn: I remember that.

Ruth Evans: So, I think, all told, full-time I was in Great Barrington maybe about three years because after I came—and then I went away to Bennett after that. So, I didn't spend a lot of time—

0:38:01

Elaine Gunn: In Great Barrington, yeah. Well, so, you know, a lot of them—I'm thinking actually when you were younger, you probably played jacks and that kind of thing.

Ruth Evans: Yeah, but that wasn't in Great Barrington, no.

Elaine Gunn: No, not in Great Barrington, no. You remember any household chores that you were responsible for when you were growing up?

Ruth Evans: The usual: cleaning and dusting—and not cooking. My mother—Marie and I were—took—in fact, we were—Peter and Isaac did the cooking. Isaac, when he was home, he did a lot of cooking. But when we were growing up in New Jersey, I remember Peter used to do the cooking because, at that particular time, my mother was working for the—during the war, and she was working at one of the defense plants. And Peter used to have to prepare a lot of the meals for us. And then when we came to Great Barrington, she was the one to do most of the cooking, all the different types. But I didn't learn cooking from her. And the household chores, which she did the laundry, she did all this. I don't know how she did it.

Elaine Gunn: I don't know [0:38:59 how she did it?].

Ruth Evans: She would go out and work—

0:39:00

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: —[laugh] and come home, and cook, and do the laundry and all this stuff. And she just felt that it was—we did our homework, and stuff like that, you know. It was more

important. But we did have clean-up chores and dishes and stuff like that. But, basically, that was about it.

Elaine Gunn: Well, you touched on the values. That's what I'm asking about next. What values did you learn from your parents? I know about the, certainly, education and [0:39:23].

Ruth Evans: The importance of education, yes, the importance of faith, the importance of honesty, and things of that nature— importance of family, you know, and stick together.

Elaine Gunn: [0:39:35] Yes. And these, of course, are certainly some of the lessons that you have imparted to your own children.

Ruth Evans: [0:39:44] as well.

Elaine Gunn: Were they receptive or were you receptive because sometimes, you know, children growing up, you know how we work?

Ruth Evans: Well, you know, it takes—you're not always receptive as you should be at the moment.

0:39:56 I can remember one particular [laugh] occasion when I think I was about 15 or so when I was a little bit smart with the mouth to my mother [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: —and I can remember Peter, my [laugh] darling brother Peter, taking off his belt. Peter was two years older than me, right? He took off his belt and gave it to her. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: OK. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Because I had said something that I shouldn't have said to her, and he—and Peter's always been like that, you know. [0:40:22]

Elaine Gunn: Did she use it?

Ruth Evans: No, she didn't. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: But I did remember mostly is his taking it out.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

- Ruth Evans:** That's what did the trick, you know. [laugh] And that was the first—
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] Oh, dear.
- Ruth Evans:** —and the last time that I said anything like [0:40:34].
- Elaine Gunn:** In those days, you knew better.
- Ruth Evans:** Mmhmm.
- Elaine Gunn:** You knew better, and just it wasn't acceptable.
- Ruth Evans:** So, I think, for the most part, yes, we were receptive to it.
- Elaine Gunn:** Well, what methods of discipline did your parents use when they had to, even when you were younger? By the time you were a teenager, I know it's probably [0:40:52] passe as far as spanking [0:40:56].
- Ruth Evans:** Well, when we were younger, my father's hand was quite sufficient, yes. [laugh]
- 0:40:59 And my mother, I can remember the switches. You remember the twigs from the tree?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, I remember those switches. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** Yes. [laugh] They were great on the legs. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:41:04] [laugh] [0:41:06]
- Ruth Evans:** But my father, just one, with that hand of his, just one of those little slaps on the rear [0:41:13] was quite sufficient, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember. I have to say this because I remember one time when there was a young man in Great Barrington who wanted to date you, and sort of like your father saying, "Over my dead body." [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** [laugh] And I remember once when we went to Connecticut to something, and we weren't able to get back. The car broke down or something, and we didn't get back. And I was afraid to go home, I really was.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]

- Ruth Evans:** And I can tell you that I had an imprint of a hand on my face for a few days, yeah. But, yeah, [0:41:47]—
- Elaine Gunn:** And things like that, I know, were a very serious business, and they were serious about discipline when they had to be. Remember any stories that you heard when you were growing up, any stories that perhaps your parents told, any kind of stories about their own lives, what they have had to—what they had to confront [0:42:06]?
- 0:42:06
- Ruth Evans:** Well, I'm sure there were many. But that's the type of thing that I would have to think about. And, you know, if I—to questions like that in advance, you know, give me a chance to recall some of it. I'm sure there were many. But off the spur of the moment, I [0:42:20].
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, because your family moved various places within—
- Ruth Evans:** Right, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** —the south and [0:42:24].
- Ruth Evans:** I can remember one particular thing that my father used to talk about. His sister was married to Uncle Tom in Chicago. Uncle Tom used to come to Alabama to visit us. Well, when he came to Alabama, he rode as a white person because he was up there. And my father would meet him at the train as his chauffeur, and bring him out to our place.
- Elaine Gunn:** Interesting.
- Ruth Evans:** [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Interesting.
- Ruth Evans:** And Uncle Tom came to Great Barrington to visit us, he and Aunt Mary and their daughter. In fact, they were in Great Barrington when I got married.
- 0:42:58
- They came to visit us there in Great Barrington.
- Elaine Gunn:** Isn't that interesting?
- Ruth Evans:** But, yeah, he used to have the passage and the train to come down. But when he got to Alabama, Dad was his chauffeur, and would meet him at the train [0:43:10].

- Elaine Gunn:** [0:43:12] a story like that that you never know. See, all these kind of things [0:43:16]—
- Ruth Evans:** But I'm sure there were many, many stories but I just off the spur—in the spur of the moment, I can't tell you [0:43:20].
- Elaine Gunn:** Now, some children when they were growing up or [0:43:25 that be?] teenagers especially have—help with family finances outside of the home. I know this has happened in a number of families, for instance. Did that ever happen to either you or your chil...you or your siblings?
- Ruth Evans:** Not to me. But I can remember Jerry and Isaac, their references to it. But I couldn't go into detail about that. But for myself, I never did. I used to babysit and things like that. But what I made was mine. And even when I went in nursing there, the course, the finances were [laugh] nothing compared to what they are today.
- 0:43:59 I mean, for the three years, I don't even think it reached \$1,000 back in those days. But my mother did what she—she managed. And any money that I made, like when I helped her catering and stuff like that, I would use it if I needed clothes and stuff like that. She didn't have to put clothes on my back once I had left home. But I don't remember making any great contributions financially to the home.
- Elaine Gunn:** Did you have a particular or any sort of skills, or did you learn to do anything like knitting and crocheting or developing any craft skills? Did you do any of those kinds of things?
- Ruth Evans:** Well, I can remember when I was in Tuskegee when I was in [0:44:40] school there, I learned to knit, and I loved it. I was never great at it but I enjoyed doing it. I can remember even trying to teach my mother to crochet—to knit, and she said she just couldn't get the hang of it. Her fingers were just not accustomed to doing that kind of a—I don't knit so much now.
- 0:44:59 But I crochet a lot, and I love it. That's my pastime, is crocheting. In fact, that Afghan there that I made.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, wow.

- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, and I make a lot of clothes—
- Elaine Gunn:** For your children or just for your grandchildren or—?
- Ruth Evans:** I think every—for weddings, all my nephews and nieces, I think, just about every family has an Afghan that I have made.
- Elaine Gunn:** No kidding.
- Ruth Evans:** I think Karen said she has something like three of them that I've made for her.
- Elaine Gunn:** No kidding.
- Ruth Evans:** I've made all my kids Afghans and...
- [End of Recording]
- [Begin Recording]
- Ruth Evans:** I have at least two. They're usually baby Afghans, smaller ones that I've made that they [0:00:10] and they've always managed to go. But right now when [0:00:14 Rhoda?] was in hospital, I made her one burlap robe. And the one I'm making now is for my own self. That's for [0:00:19].
- Elaine Gunn:** Wonderful.
- Ruth Evans:** But I enjoy doing that, and I'm not great at it but I use the same pattern. Once I learn a pattern [laugh], I make the same one over and over again. But it's very relaxing when you're sitting in front of the TV or something like that. And other than that, I guess my second love right now is computer. I'm not great at it but I love, you know, going online and stuff.
- Elaine Gunn:** I was just going to ask you what else you do now with your time, now that you're retired, other than—?
- Ruth Evans:** I volunteer also. I volunteer. I used to volunteer two days a week but it began to seem more like work, and I wasn't enjoying it as much, so I cut down to just one full day now. Usually on Tuesdays, I go to the Berkshire Medical Center medical library. I volunteer there for a few hours in the morning and then in the afternoon.

0:01:01

Elaine Gunn: What do you do there?

Ruth Evans: Sort of like a clerk, I guess. If other hospitals in the area send in—they want some [0:01:09], some reference material, I might look it up and send it to them. And mostly what I do right now are statistics. We have, I think [0:01:20] all the hospitals that are affiliated with us from Massachusetts and [0:01:24] send their stats to my library, and I have to compile them annually, so we [0:01:30] to whoever's the chairperson [0:01:34]. I shelve books, and I copy articles and things of that nature. So, I guess you could say I'm kind of a clerk there in the medical library. And in the senior center, I work in the office there, answering the telephone, putting information in the computer, and things like that.

Elaine Gunn: And you also...

Ruth Evans: Not as—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: I travel a little bit but not as much as I would like to, you know.

0:02:00 I can remember when my husband first died, which was in '89, for the first two or three years, I just didn't want to stay home. I couldn't go enough. And that year, a couple of years after he died, in fact, I went to Europe with Isaac and Rosemary at that time. We went to California a couple of times. I went to the Rose Bowl that time of year with a group from Boston once. Now, all of a sudden, I'm content to stay home.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: But at that particular time, I just couldn't go enough.

Elaine Gunn: Felt the need to?

Ruth Evans: Yeah. So, I don't really travel enough—very much now. I do try to get to Pennsylvania maybe once a year to visit my cousin in Harrisburg. And I go down to Jersey to visit my sister. But I don't travel like I used to.

Elaine Gunn: You have a cousin in Harrisburg?

Ruth Evans: Yeah, my mother's sister's daughter.

Elaine Gunn: Irma's?

Ruth Evans: Irma's daughter, yes, in Harrisburg Pennsylvania. In fact, Irma's my mother's only—she's [0:02:55]—

Elaine Gunn: Only living—?

Ruth Evans: —living relative, yeah, because Uncle Joe died, Uncle [0:02:58 Ernst?], all her brothers have died.

0:03:02 So, Irma is her only sibling that's still living. Irma's, what, 80—upper 80s?

Elaine Gunn: [0:03:10]

Ruth Evans: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: [0:03:11] Right now, she'd be [0:03:14].

Ruth Evans: She still lives at home, you know. She still runs her own home in Mobile, Alabama. But she visits Dolores, her daughter, maybe about four or five months during the winter months, yeah, and then she goes back home for the summer because she still loves her garden. She still likes to garden. What was I talking about before that? I don't know. Traveling—

Elaine Gunn: Traveling.

Ruth Evans: —we were talking about. But in May, I am going to the Bahamas with Ruth and [0:03:45 May Ringo?] [0:03:47]. In fact, I haven't been anyplace other than that this year. I go on a bus trip with the senior centers maybe down to Foxwoods at the casino or Atlantic City or something like that. But just to travel, I haven't done too much of that lately.

0:04:00

Elaine Gunn: But you stay very busy?

Ruth Evans: Yes, yes, the time just flies by, and I still seem to get involved with other people's welfare. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Yes.

- Ruth Evans:** Because now I have a neighbor that I've been taking care of her finances for her, paying her bills, and things like that, trying to manage her house and my house as well.
- Elaine Gunn:** How is [0:04:17 Rhoda?]?
- Ruth Evans:** She's so-so. She's up in Willowood right now.
- Elaine Gunn:** Is she?
- Ruth Evans:** Yes. She's supposedly maybe for a few weeks to really get better adjusted to being home. She did come home to the house but she didn't do too well. So, right now, she's at Willowood. So, I'm trying to take care of her finances and my own and, you know, her house, and kind of oversee things.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, it's good that she has a friend like you.
- Ruth Evans:** Mmhmm.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, because you do need that sometimes, somebody else who cares.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** You have any favorite recipes, or your mother's or—because your mother was a cook, and ran—?
- Ruth Evans:** My mother gave—when she was—my mother lived with me for about 11 years after my father died.
- 0:05:03 She came here in 19...my father died in '78. So, that following summer, she came to live with me, and I had her with me for 11 years. She did give me a soup recipe that I use for turkey, you know, for leftover turkey after Thanksgiving, the turkey bones and all that. So, I make that. There was one other recipe she gave me too. I can't remember it. My mother was a great cook. But she was a dash of this, and a pinch of that, you know. So, when it came to giving somebody else the recipe, she—
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:05:30]
- Ruth Evans:** Yes. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]

Ruth Evans: I guess so. And I have to follow a recipe. I'm not that—I'm really not a good cook. I don't enjoy cooking, to be perfectly honest with you. So, that's another thing I did not get from my mother.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: I didn't get her speaking ability [laugh] and I didn't get her love for cooking. I cooked—I had to cook when my kids were growing up.

Elaine Gunn: Right, you had a family. You have a husband and children.

Ruth Evans: The only part of that that I really kind of enjoyed was baking. I loved baking. I did get a biscuit recipe, and my family always liked my biscuits.

0:06:01
And I got her apple sauce recipe, and they loved my apple sauce. But, other than that, I used to make birthday cakes for everybody, yeah. Now, I don't cook anymore. I very seldom cook. My Pam and her family, we try to get together every Sunday for dinner, so we kind of share the menu, and I'll bring something. I'll make something or bring something. And Karen tries to get home once a month from Connecticut. So, now, she's coming home next weekend, and she's—the three of us will be sharing the menu for that. In fact, I think she said she would make the macaroni and cheese, and the cake for dessert, and I'm supposed to do the—she told me to do some baked chicken, and Pam's supposed to the salad or vegetables and biscuits, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: And it's a special occasion or it's just—?

Ruth Evans: No, it's just that we try to do that, yeah, at least—

Elaine Gunn: Great.

Ruth Evans: Yeah, we do this every Sunday unless we have something else that we have to do.

0:06:58
Like, last Sunday, we had our Forever Young Group at church. So, I wasn't able to. We weren't able to have it then. But we always do when Karen comes home anyway. But for the most part, we've been doing pretty well with it, and I enjoy that, I really do. It's kind of like the families together.

Elaine Gunn: Yes, and it's so important, isn't it—

Ruth Evans: It is, yeah.

Elaine Gunn: —the families together. So, what do you do on a normal basis? You said you're not cooking much during the week.

Ruth Evans: I love salad. I eat a lot of salads. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] It sounds like Ruth Jones. I think she says that she—

Ruth Evans: Yes [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn: —doesn't cook either anymore.

Ruth Evans: —and I don't have a lot of people's aversion to TV dinners. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, well, they're—

Ruth Evans: I've had—

Elaine Gunn: —much better.

Ruth Evans: Yes, they are, and I love the Lean Cuisine, you know, and things like that. So—

Elaine Gunn: I like the turkey pot pie.

Ruth Evans: You know, they tend to be a little heavy on the sodium, I think.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

Ruth Evans: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, one brand though is pretty good, yeah, [0:07:48].

Ruth Evans: Yeah. But I like TV dinners. Some of them are great. And there are different affairs that you go to.

Elaine Gunn: Yes [0:07:58].

0:08:00

Ruth Evans: So, I had breakfast. I'm not a breakfast eater, so if I can somewhere between breakfast and lunch, and then have dinner later, two meals a day, it's fine, yeah.

- Elaine Gunn:** Especially if you're not using up the—bringing any, you know, the energy. You're not really doing a lot to [0:08:16].
- Ruth Evans:** That's right. And the most thing I do is walk. [laugh] I do—
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, yeah, which is good.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, I try to get in a few miles a day or maybe at least three days a week. Like, I went to the mall this morning, and I walked around the entire mall. It's three-quarters of a mile around, and I went around four ti...
- Elaine Gunn:** Was that [0:08:32]?
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, I went around four times, so I had a total of three miles and two-tenths—almost three and a half miles, yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** That's good to know.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Usually, we start at Sears, and walk all the way up [0:08:44].
- Ruth Evans:** Well, if you go into all the little doorways and, you know, make all the little—
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, yes.
- Ruth Evans:** —then it's three-quarters of a mile around. Outside, it's a mile and a quarter, walking all the way around the outside, and I have done that too—
- Elaine Gunn:** You have done that.
- Ruth Evans:** —when the weather has been good. I have a pedometer so I can [laugh]—
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, you do?
- 0:08:59
- That's what I keep saying I must get.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, so I check the mileage that way.
- Elaine Gunn:** Where'd you get your pedometer?

Ruth Evans: I got it at a sports store but I'm sure they have them in other stores too.

Elaine Gunn: I must check in with that. You mentioned that you have—your hobby, of course, is crocheting. You do a lot of that.

Ruth Evans: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: And did your mother and your grandmother have any hobbies that you know of?

Ruth Evans: My mother, I don't know if she had any special hobby. But she just loved being involved in anything that was in the field of Christianity, you know, and school and church. She was very involved in that always. My—her mother, I don't recall. I just don't remember if she did have any, you know. But I know her sister, Irma, like I said, her pet—her love is gardening. She loves that, being outside and working in the garden. My mother had a great love of many things that she was able to get basically involved in, like gardening and flowers. She loved beautiful flowers and roses.

0:09:59 I can remember she always had an arbor, a rose garden or something.

Elaine Gunn: I remember that.

Ruth Evans: Yeah. But she liked to be involved with church activities. She was in Eastern Star. She was very involved in that. So, I don't know if you can consider that a hobby, really, but it was an involvement that she enjoyed, yes.

Elaine Gunn: And your father was a hunter, wasn't he?

Ruth Evans: My father loved to hunt, yes, deer season. And I can remember when we were growing up, there was—one of the food staples was rabbit, and I think people [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Ruth Evans: Yeah, I recall those days, yeah. But he loved hunting.

Elaine Gunn: Do you have any memories, any special memories of just Berkshire County itself or Great Barrington, anything that we haven't talked about, any memories at all, good, bad [0:10:58] special times or things or people or—

0:11:02

- Ruth Evans:** Well, especially not in Great Barrington. Like I said—
- Elaine Gunn:** —or Pittsfield?
- Ruth Evans:** —I was only there for those few years. In Pittsfield, I have not—not really. We had a club here in Pittsfield with the Golden—do you remember the Golden Leaves?
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] The Golden Leaves. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** [laugh] It was young married women—
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes.
- Ruth Evans:** —and, yeah, I was involved with them. And then we had another club that we started, Partners in Progress. This was in—you know, I remember that. It was—
- Elaine Gunn:** I don't remember.
- Ruth Evans:** —dealing mostly with housing and—
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:11:29]
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, we had several houses. We used to pay dues and buy shares and stuff. It was quite involved. But that petered out because we ran into so many problems renting. That's something that [laugh] I would never want to get involved in again. But there was quite a few of us.
- Elaine Gunn:** It wasn't an investment club?
- Ruth Evans:** It was, it was an investment club.
- Elaine Gunn:** It was an investment club, oh, OK.
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, yes, yes, it was an investment club. We invested in it, and we had shares. And, in fact, Isaac and Rosemary—there were quite a few of us that were in it. But then, slowly, it just kind of petered out.
- 0:12:00 Arthur Stein was our attorney, and we used to meet regularly. Henry Rollison was in it, and there was quite a few of us. You never heard of that?
- Elaine Gunn:** You know, I think I did hear of it. But it wasn't—it didn't affect us. We were down county in [0:12:15].

- Ruth Evans:** In fact, I think my brother, Peter, in Boston was going to get a share too. But I don't know if he ever did or not. Now, if you—that's something that Isaac could probably tell you more about because—yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, that's interesting, that is, because that wasn't recent, apparently, was it?
- Ruth Evans:** No, that—I think maybe in the late—early '70s was might've been when it disbanded, or the mid-70s, yeah, somewhere around there, because we ran into so many financial problems with renting to people and not being able to collect the rent. So, we ended up—we bought a few houses, so we did manage to buy a few houses. But we just weren't—
- Elaine Gunn:** What happened to them?
- Ruth Evans:** The bank took over or something because we eventually just totally lost out on the deal because we just were not equipped to handle the situations that we ran into.
- 0:13:05 But, like I said, I'm sure there's somebody else that could give you more information on it than I can.
- Elaine Gunn:** That's interesting.
- Ruth Evans:** It might've been in the very early '80s that we totally disbanded. But I'm not certain. But the Golden Leaves, we—
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember the Golden Leaves because I was [0:13:18]—
- Ruth Evans:** We kind of grew out of that, I guess, our kids grew up, you know. When we first started that, we all had young kids, and it was a group of young married women when we first started that.
- Elaine Gunn:** It was an outlet [0:13:28].
- Ruth Evans:** And I enjoyed that. We had a lot of fun with that. We used to have—remember the [0:13:33 queen?] contests that we used to have?
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember, yes, I remember that.
- Ruth Evans:** And it was nice. It was something that they didn't have here in the city.

Elaine Gunn: They didn't have, and it was needed. [0:13:40]

Ruth Evans: And we used to have dances and things—

Elaine Gunn: They had wonderful dances.

Ruth Evans: —and it was a place [0:13:44] kids going.

Elaine Gunn: Very successful.

Ruth Evans: And I still have pictures from that [0:13:49].

Elaine Gunn: You have pictures? [laugh]

Ruth Evans: I still have them.

Elaine Gunn: But you were never a—oh, what was the organization your mother belonged to?

Ruth Evans: Eastern Star.

Elaine Gunn: Eastern Star.

Ruth Evans: No, I never got involved with that, yeah.

0:14:01

I never had any interest in that at all. She talked about it, and she would love to have had me become involved in it. But I just—well, you know, I was working, and raising a family, and I know I just didn't have her get-up and go, I guess, because she could do all these things, and I just never—

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, she had the energy, didn't she?

Ruth Evans: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: So, those were your only community involvements with the—

Ruth Evans: Golden Leaves and the Partners in Progress.

Elaine Gunn: —Golden Leaves and the Partners in Progress.

Ruth Evans: And then church.

Elaine Gunn: And the church, of course.

Ruth Evans: I didn't teach church school or anything like that. But I was involved. When my kids were small, I used to be—do like

the roll calls and stuff like that in the church school. We called it church school but it was Sunday School, yeah. And I used to be there on Sundays for that. I was an honorary deaconess, and involvements of that nature, in the church. But the only thing that I'm involved with right now in the ch...I was on the library committee and the flower committee in the church.

0:15:00

Elaine Gunn: Well, if you think of anything else, I'd be happy to hear you, and if you can think of anything later on, I'm happy to come back. [laugh]

Ruth Evans: That's usually the case, you know. You're, "Well, why didn't I say this or why didn't I mention that?" You know, spur of the moment, you don't always think of things.

Elaine Gunn: I know. [0:15:15]

Ruth Evans: It's like I said, if you had a questionnaire or something [laugh] to study and—

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, well, I guess, you know, basically [0:15:20].

Ruth Evans: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: But if you can think of anything and, you know, just jot it down, I'll be happy to come back and, you know, we'll try this again—

Ruth Evans: OK. I'll keep that in mind.

Elaine Gunn: —but any time. You have given me a lot of information.

Ruth Evans: Well, I don't know. I hope there's something there that you could use.

Elaine Gunn: Absolutely. It's very important, and we will file this away.

Ruth Evans: OK.

Elaine Gunn: [0:15:43] I want to thank you very much for letting me come to interview you.

Ruth Evans: You're quite welcome, yes.

Elaine Gunn: And I know our relationship goes way back also.

- Ruth Evans:** Way back, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** We were—you know, I was a teenager at the same time you were.
- Ruth Evans:** Right. Now, you are younger than Marie and Jerry or right here with them?
- Elaine Gunn:** No, I'm—
- Ruth Evans:** In between?
- Elaine Gunn:** —probably some months older than they, yeah.
- Ruth Evans:** OK.
- Elaine Gunn:** We are the same age for a long period of time, and then I have a birthday.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, OK. That's the way it was with Tommy's sister, [0:16:16 Bib?], yeah, because she turned an age in May—April, and then I turned that same age in June. January was her birthday. Chucky, Tommy's brother, Chuck's birthday is April 1st, and he was—
- Elaine Gunn:** I remember his [0:16:33].
- Ruth Evans:** Well, Herbie, you remember Herbie, don't you?
- Elaine Gunn:** I should remember Herbie.
- Ruth Evans:** Herbie died last November.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, golly.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, he was—he worked [0:16:42] also. Herbie was—had moved to East Longmeadow, but he was very—he had a heart attack, and he arrested in the emergency room, and they revived him. But he was never too, too well after that. He had emphysema something terrible too. But he died last November.
- 0:16:59 And his brother, Chucky, lives in California. His brother Bill—Bill was in Boston for years and years, but he moved to California. Right now, he's living in Texas. He's retired. And there was just the four boys.
- Elaine Gunn:** The four boys, yeah.

- Ruth Evans:** His sister [0:17:16 Bibby?] died. She died just before her 50th birthday.
- Elaine Gunn:** I was going to say I think she was fairly young when she died.
- Ruth Evans:** And his sister, Betty, lives in Youngstown, Ohio. Tommy was the oldest.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, I didn't realize he was the oldest.
- Ruth Evans:** Yeah, he was the oldest, and then Betty, and then Chucky—[0:17:32 Bib?], Chucky, Bill.
- Elaine Gunn:** His mother, you said, is still living here, and [0:17:37]—
- Ruth Evans:** She's still living. She lives in—she's in the Ashmere Nursing Home now [0:17:41].
- Elaine Gunn:** She must be quite old then at this point?
- Ruth Evans:** She'll be 89. She just had her birthday in January, and she was 80—wait a minute. She was born in 19...88, she just turned.
- Elaine Gunn:** Does she have her faculties?
- Ruth Evans:** No, she is—well, to use an expression that is despised by most—vegetable.
- 0:18:00 She—they put a feeding tube in her, which I hated to see, yeah, just this past—not too long weeks ago, yeah, she had a feeding tube put in. In fact, she was just in the hospital the last week because she had an infection, bronchitis. But, no, she's not well, and there's no response from her, although I did—when Pam and I went out to see her—Monday, we went out—and I thought that she seemed to—her face seemed a little bright, and it's because of the feeding probably, yes, because—and she did open both eyes when we were talking to her. But no response from her.
- Elaine Gunn:** No response?
- Ruth Evans:** None whatsoever. But she did open both eyes when we were talking, so.

- Elaine Gunn:** So, you don't know whether she heard you, understood you, or anything?
- Ruth Evans:** I don't know. I just talked to her.
- Elaine Gunn:** It's hard to tell.
- Ruth Evans:** But she's not well. Yeah, 88.
- Elaine Gunn:** Well, I remember her very well [0:18:54].
- Ruth Evans:** [0:18:55] and she has a sister [0:19:00] too but I haven't been in contact with her.
- 0:19:06
- Elaine Gunn:** Well, time gets away from us.
- Ruth Evans:** Yes, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** Well, I thank you again. This has been very fruitful, as a matter of fact, and I'm glad I had a chance to come and see your lovely home again. It's been a long time.
- Ruth Evans:** A very long time, too long. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes. [laugh]
- Ruth Evans:** And speaking, you know who was here this morning? [0:19:21 Renita?]. Remember her? She—you just missed her, as a matter of fact. She was here.
- 1:05:22 *Recording ends*