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**An Oral History of Juanita Jackson Mitchell  
Conducted by Leroy Graham**

Title: An Oral History of Juanita Jackson Mitchell  
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**Abstract:** Juanita Jackson Mitchell (1913-1992) was born to Lillie May Jackson and Kieffer Albert Jackson in Arkansas, and then raised and educated primarily in Baltimore, Maryland. After attending the University of Pennsylvania for her bachelor's and master's degrees, Mitchell returned to Baltimore to become the first Black woman to attend the University of Maryland Law School and then the first to practice law in the state of Maryland. In this oral history interview, Mitchell discusses her legal work done on behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) alongside her mother, as well as her mother's religiously-influenced philosophy within the organization. She explains how her mother's world-view and values guided both of their careers and accomplishments. Mitchell also provides personal insight into her relationship with her mother and her family; she shares anecdotes about everything from piano lessons to how her mother addressed "the birds and bees."

Note on Oral History: Oral history is a methodology of gathering, preserving, and sharing the voices and memories of individuals and communities. As primary material, it documents personal reflections, commentary, and recollections, and is not intended to present a verified or "complete" history of events.

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**An Oral History of Juanita Jackson Mitchell  
July 6, 1976**

Juanita Jackson Mitchell was interviewed on July 6, 1976, by Leroy Graham at 1239 Druid Hill Avenue in Baltimore City.

**Graham** [00:00:04] So you were good children, in your opinion, Mrs. Mitchell?

**Mitchell** [00:00:08] We were very good children. Really, as I look back on it. And the punishment they imposed upon us usually was to go to our room. But we had chores when we came home from school. We had chores to do. Then we always did our lessons. She taught us respect for the schools, the teachers—

**Graham** [00:00:29] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:00:29] —and for our lessons. She believed in education and we always had to get that done before we ate our dinner. And then she made us practice piano. She gave us all piano lessons.

**Graham** [00:00:45] Well, she taught you piano herself?

**Mitchell** [00:00:46] (speaking at the same time) and first lessons—No, my cousin, Mrs. Perry Dorsey, taught us piano. And later on, she employed others to teach us when Mrs. Dorsey became ill. And then she gave my sister Marion vocal lessons under the same teacher who had taught her: Madam Constantia Reckling. She was the wife of Mr. Ralph Reckling, the head of the history department at old Douglas High School, who is still living. But Mrs. Reckling is dead.

**Graham** [00:01:29] Mhm. Well, how creative was your mother and as it—in regard to, I guess, her political activity and I guess in any other phase of her life? How original was she? I mean, was she noted for her originality when it came to, uh—?

**Mitchell** [00:01:47] Well, I tell you, I really admired my mother. As I look back on our relationship, I thought she was brilliant. I really thought she was just tops in everything.

**Graham** [00:01:59] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:01:59] She was a good businesswoman. She and my dad bought property, and kept it, and rented out apartments. And my dad used to keep the property up after she began getting so active in the NAACP. And she used to give all of her time at the NAACP. But I thought she was an excellent businesswoman. And then in—And I admired her courage. I remember I used to listen to my mother talk and speak, and I used to be in hearings before the zoning board and in various other meetings, and I used to admire my mother's courage. She spoke out against injustice. So I guess I was one of the most ardent admirers that my mother had.

**Graham** [00:02:56] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:02:56] And we were very close. All of us. She kept us all very close. My sister married—Of course, she left, but my mother kept all of her family very close to her.

**Graham** [00:03:10] Hm. What kind of people interested her? I mean—

**Mitchell** [00:03:15] My mother loved all kinds of people. And in her branch of the NAACP, she had all kinds mingled together on an equal basis. In fact, she brought the whole mass movement into the NAACP to get the masses of the people—the little people she used to call them.

**Graham** [00:03:36] You mean on—

**Mitchell** [00:03:37] She said they were the ones who had the power because they had the votes. And she said, you know, so many of the intelligensia—that's what she used to call the middle class—the intelligentsia, they're so busy keeping up with the Jones' 'til you ask them to give a contribution to the NAACP. They'll pull out a dollar. But she said the people—the working people—who just get a small salary as a domestic laborer. They had (unintelligible) to make substantial contributions to the NAACP once they are convinced that this is the right thing to do. But in her activities in the NAACP, on her board of directors, she had domestics and she had doctors and lawyers, and teachers, and she had carriers. She brought in the unions' leadership into the NAACP and she brought in the Elks and the Pythians—she believed in fraternal organizations—as well as the aristocratic Masons.

**Graham** [00:04:52] Mhm. She.

**Mitchell** [00:04:54] She believed that all of these people were important.

**Graham** [00:04:59] Did the intellectuals give her any particular kind of trouble? I mean, say, professors at Morgan or Coppin or I guess even from Howard?

**Mitchell** [00:05:09] No, um—First of all, my mother herself was a well-trained person. She was a teacher and she was a very intelligent woman. Then, of course, she had the *Afro* backing her—

**Graham** [00:05:28] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:05:28] Which I think some of the intellectuals who had vested interests in segregation might have opposed her long before, but because she had such solid backing from the clergy and the press—the Black press, *The Afro-American*—

**Graham** [00:05:53] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:05:55] —and from the large membership she was able to garner from the masses of the people. 'Til I think, um—I think she got unusually representative support from all sections of the community.

**Graham** [00:06:15] Uh-huh.

**Mitchell** [00:06:16] For example, support for the equalization of teacher salaries. That got the intellectuals on her side.

**Graham** [00:06:23] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:06:23] And then she fought against discrimination. She felt that the assistant superintendent should not be—in charge of Negro schools—should not be Jim Crowed in this little

office building right back at the Booker T. Washington Junior High School there at McCulloh and Mad—Madden—McCulloh and Madison.

**Graham** [00:06:47] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:06:47] McCulloh and (unintelligible)—I am tired today.

**Graham** [00:06:47] Mm.

**Mitchell** [00:06:54] Guess that it's not coming out. But she felt that—I think she fought for the— She fought for better wages, she fought against discrimination in the unions, for the hod carriers, for the bricklayers, for the cement finishers, and the longshoremen. And on the other hand, she fought for the opening up of the graduate schools at the University of Maryland, and the equalization of teachers' salaries, and then she fought for the integration of the Black and white teachers in the public school system, as Dr. Bard talks about.

**Graham** [00:07:43] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:07:43] So that I think maybe that is why she didn't have, really—I know of no real organized opposition—

**Graham** [00:07:53] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:07:57] —that she had from any segment. As I told you once before, she was reelected again and again and again because she gave her life to the work. She was most unusual and most people were intimidated. They used to say, "I couldn't give all my time to the NAACP the way Dr. Jackson is." But my mother just continued to crusade. She really—It was a religious basis to it. I believe that she was repaying God—

**Graham** [00:08:30] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:08:31] —for having given her her life, by giving him a life of service. And then she— The people loved my mother because she would—people'd call her at home in jail or their children in jail. She went to the judges and she performed all kinds of miracles. The lawyers used to say, "Ms. Jackson, you'd taken all our business away from us." Because she would go and the judges would let the people suspend sentences, and send them home, and put them on probation. Some mother's son, some wife's husband. She'd say, "Judge, all I'm asking for is mercy. And they knew when my mother came she never asked for herself. She was a fair person. Always for her people. And the judges responded to her. I mean, she particularly was sensitive—She said the Bible's always talked about the poor people, and she believed that the poor people—we must be attentive to the problems of the poor. And sometimes I used to be in a hurry, my mother'd call me, "I'm sending somebody over to see you. This lady needs help." And I knew what that meant: I had to stop and help. I practically ran the Legal Aid Office for all the early years of my opening up of this law office.

**Graham** [00:10:03] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:10:06] They were cases of the NAACP, and cases of police brutality, and the like. And then when I became state president of the NAACP, I was doing just like my mother: giving all my time to the NAACP.

**Graham** [00:10:26] Uh-huh. Well, to what extent and how did your mother distinguish between personal friends and professional associates? Or did she make a distinction?

**Mitchell** [00:10:36] Well, my mother's family was her social friends.

**Graham** [00:10:41] Although—

**Mitchell** [00:10:41] (speaking at the same time) Her family.

**Graham** [00:10:41] She didn't have any friends outside of her family? I mean, any close ones?

**Mitchell** [00:10:45] She didn't socialize. She taught us not to socialize too much except with the family.

**Graham** [00:10:50] Uh-huh.

**Mitchell** [00:10:50] She used to say that—She used to read in the paper about the social affairs being given. And she always believed in her ministers. She would have dinners in her home for ministers and—

**Graham** [00:11:05] For any ministers or just the ones at Sharp Street?

**Mitchell** [00:11:08] No, the ministers who worked with the—for the NAACP. The NAACP was her social life—

**Graham** [00:11:13] Uh-huh.

**Mitchell** [00:11:14] —and her family, really. The NAACP and her fam—

[00:11:20] *pause in recording*

**Mitchell** [00:11:20] Did I finish that?

**Graham** [00:11:23] Yes. How conscious was your mother of other people's feelings? Was she able to put them at ease easily?

**Mitchell** [00:11:33] Well, if she thought you were wrong, she'd tell you in no uncertain words and she'd stand up and tell you that whether you were a preacher, teacher, governor, mayor, what have you. Um. She—She, um—

**Graham** [00:11:55] Did she give encouragement as well as—?

**Mitchell** [00:11:59] Oh, she gave encouragement. Oh, yes, she used to—In fact, you know, you got on the board of the NAACP by bringing in memberships and by working in your neighborhoods and the like. Oh, yes. But of course, she was very, very forthright.

**Graham** [00:12:23] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:12:24] And if she didn't approve of what you were doing she told you.

**Graham** [00:12:33] It could be on any matter? I mean a personal matter?

**Mitchell** [00:12:35] (speaking at the same time) On any matter.

**Graham** [00:12:36] Personal matter?

**Mitchell** [00:12:37] Personal, or civic, or—She was very forthright. You knew where she was. Nothing ever deceitful about my mother.

**Graham** [00:12:45] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:12:45] You knew where she was, and she was—She didn't bite her tongue. On the other hand, she would do the last thing in the world for you.

**Graham** [00:13:00] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:13:01] But she was very straightforward. She wasn't nice in the sense of glossing over wrong. If she thought you were doing wrong, she'd give you the (unintelligible). If you did right, she'd praise you.

**Graham** [00:13:28] Now, I can—

**Mitchell** [00:13:28] And, uh—So—

**Graham** [00:13:28] (laughs)

**Mitchell** [00:13:28] Mama, where are you? Why don't you explain to this young man how you— These questions make me pull a little for my own assessment of her. She—For instance, when she trained secretaries and the like.

**Graham** [00:13:56] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:13:56] Oh, she—She trained them. She said, "You've got to compete." She was very hard on all of us and she was hard on her children.

**Graham** [00:14:07] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:14:07] You know, if we brought in ninety, she'd want to know why we hadn't made a hundred. Pursuit of excellence, she believed in that in her office and all around her and she'd make everybody toe the mark—

**Graham** [00:14:21] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:14:22] —you know, as far as—And yet she was kind. She always had baskets at Christmas and—

**Graham** [00:14:31] What—Baskets that she'd got her own self?

**Mitchell** [00:14:34] (speaking at the same time)—and Thanksgiving for the poor. No, she'd get the merchants—

**Graham** [00:14:36] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:14:36] —to give baskets for the poor people, like—And she was kind, she'd do the last thing for you if you were in need. She—

**Graham** [00:14:52] Was she abrasive? I mean, I—Was she—How could—Did she—Was it—

**Mitchell** [00:14:57] I don't think she was abrasive. She was forthright.

**Graham** [00:15:02] Mhm. Office staff: I mean, did they appreciate that the NAACP—There seems to have been—What was the reason for so many executive secretaries in such a short period of time?

**Mitchell** [00:15:11] Money.

**Graham** [00:15:11] Oh, money. (laughs) It wasn't your mother—

**Mitchell** [00:15:13] I just talked to Addison Pinkney. I took his name. You ought to talk to him.

**Graham** [00:15:20] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:15:20] Addison Pinkney is the only executive secretary who's living.

**Graham** [00:15:24] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:15:25] Because Randall Pious or Pius (??) is dead.

**Graham** [00:15:27] Right.

**Mitchell** [00:15:28] Addison Pinkney was our executive secretary for seven years.

**Graham** [00:15:32] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:15:34] And I just saw him at the NAACP convention in Memphis, Tennessee, and remind me, I have—He'd be glad to talk to you.

**Graham** [00:15:43] Sure.

**Mitchell** [00:15:43] He told me that Dr. Jackson was hard on him, but she trained him.

**Graham** [00:15:50] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:15:50] And she trained him for—Well, she believed in working until you got the job done.

**Graham** [00:15:59] Mhm.



**Mitchell** [00:15:59] If it took you 24 hours. She never—And she was impatient with people who were not hard workers. She said, "Success in life comes with hard work." There are no shortcuts. She didn't believe there was any such thing as luck. She said, "It's honest toil and hard work and preparing yourself to compete." So she was like that with her—No, the executive—It was money.

**Graham** [00:16:36] Money?

**Mitchell** [00:16:36] First of all, the NAACP has never had large sums to work with. We got our money from the public. Memberships used to be a dollar a year, and half of that had to go to the national office. They didn't begin to be \$2 a year until the fifties. But in all the early years, we had to raise money from baby contests and dinners, from a multitude of activities, and from contributions. And that—So that the executive—We couldn't offer much to the executive secretaries.

**Graham** [00:17:17] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:17:17] And what—We would train them in the NAACP. My mother trained them and then they would go on and get the cost of their activity. One thing, *The Afro* publicized their work and they would build up quite a reputation for their work with the Baltimore branch NAACP, and then they could go on and command much larger salaries. So we lost our executives only because of the salaries.

**Graham** [00:17:47] Mhm. Right. And your mother, I guess, was very neat and thorough and organized, I would imagine.

**Mitchell** [00:17:54] Oh, yes, she was a superior organizer. I have her little book—She used to keep little ten-cent notebooks in her pocketbook. And I have the names and phone numbers. She was a tremendous organizer. She would call people assiduously, you know.

**Graham** [00:18:13] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:18:13] She'd keep calling them and if she didn't get them at one time—The minister's wives used to say Ms. Jackson was the only woman who could call their husbands after twelve o'clock and they would not get angry—

**Graham** [00:18:27] (laughs)

**Mitchell** [00:18:28] —because they knew that she was about her father's business.

**Graham** [00:18:32] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:18:32] So, she was a superior organizer herself. And then she trained the executive secretaries. But all of our executives stayed with us a number of years, really. And it was her vision; she's the one that fought for an executive secretary to begin with, because they—

**Graham** [00:18:54] (speaking at the same time) You mean in the local branch or for the national—  
?

**Mitchell** [00:18:55] The local branch.

**Graham** [00:18:56] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:18:57] You know, we were one of the few branches that had paid executive secretaries. And then she used to, um—So that when the executive secretaries came, they had to really, like the preacher, raise their own salaries, you know? So it was hard work, but it was rewarding work because we were fighting segregation and discrimination. So, um—

**Graham** [00:19:26] How did your mother handle crowds? I mean, I would imagine she needed—

**Mitchell** [00:19:31] She was born to handle crowds. My mother had learned to handle crowds in the movies—when she was lecturing and singing at my dad's moving picture exhibitions. And the crowds never fazed her. She talked to the crowds as if she was talking to one person. She had a rapport with them, she spoke the common language of the little people.

**Graham** [00:19:58] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:19:59] And she used illustrations that got it across. She used to say to us, "Don't use a whole lot of big words. Talk in terms that the little people will understand." And she was a superior orator.

**Graham** [00:20:21] Mhm. Would she write out her speeches before or would it just flow from her?

**Mitchell** [00:20:24] (speaking at the same time) No, no, it—her speeches—The first time I ever knew my mother to write a speech was when she was—She asked me to help her organize it.

**Graham** [00:20:36] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:20:36] When she gave an acceptance speech for *The Afro*—she was selected *The Afro* "Ideal Mother." They had a banquet for her, and—

**Graham** [00:20:46] Can you recall the year of that?

**Mitchell** [00:20:48] It was '57, I believe, or '56. And the next year she received an honorary doctorate from Morgan College, and she wrote an acceptance speech. I—We came across it the other night.

**Graham** [00:21:02] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:21:02] Did my sister give it to you?

**Graham** [00:21:04] No, not the speech. You mean the handwritten speech?

**Mitchell** [00:21:08] Where she had made her corrections?

**Graham** [00:21:10] No, no, but that would be a valuable document to have. But, uh—

**Mitchell** [00:21:13] I think—Let me call her back.

[00:21:17] *pause in recording*

**Mitchell** [00:21:17] I really wanted to do an in-depth thing, because she deserves it. She was just an unusual woman.

**Graham** [00:21:28] Mhm. Who were some of her other intimate friends besides Mr. Murphy—Carl Murphy—and yourself? Did she have any other very close and intimate friends that—

**Mitchell** [00:21:39] No.

**Graham** [00:21:39] —to whom she could confide in?

**Mitchell** [00:21:41] No.

**Graham** [00:21:42] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:21:42] She had her family and God, cause she used to say, "Put not your trust in man."

**Graham** [00:21:52] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:21:52] And Mr. Carl Murphy was not a social friend. He was an NAACP friend.

**Graham** [00:21:58] Mhm. So they never—

**Mitchell** [00:21:59] (speaking at the same time) I mean, my mother—No, we never had—my mother never had the Murphys in our house for dinner or things like that, no.

**Graham** [00:22:08] That's why the families have never married, I guess—I think. Is that true?

**Mitchell** [00:22:11] Huh?

**Graham** [00:22:12] Have the two families ever married?

**Mitchell** [00:22:13] No, we were never social friends. We were civil rights friends. We were united in a crusade for freedom. And that was the basis of our relationship.

**Graham** [00:22:28] Maybe—Do you think that's why it lasted so long? That it wasn't strained?

**Mitchell** [00:22:33] Huh?

**Graham** [00:22:34] Maybe, do you think that's why it lasted so long,—

**Mitchell** [00:22:36] Could be.

**Graham** [00:22:37] —it wasn't strained on a personal level?

**Mitchell** [00:22:38] Could be. My mother didn't believe in a whole lot of socializing anyway. She said, "The wise—" No. "The fool sets the table and the wise man eats it up." (both laugh) So she didn't believe in a whole lot of— She believed that all these sororities and fraternities—she used to tell them they ought to take all that dance money and all that banquet money and invest it in freedom.

**Graham** [00:23:04] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:23:05] She believed that you ought to give instead of eating it up and dancing it up and drinking it up. I can hear her now. That's the way she would say. Instead of—you invest it in freedom. And then she said, "Your children's children will rise up and call you blessed." That's the kind of speech she would make.

**Graham** [00:23:25] Well, how did she seek solitude? I would imagine, being so involved and active with other people's concerns, she had to have—or she had to—

**Mitchell** [00:23:34] She believed in prayer.

**Graham** [00:23:37] Oh, did she have a special way or a special place to pray?

**Mitchell** [00:23:39] No, she prayed anywhere. Everywhere.

**Graham** [00:23:42] And this is the thing that kept her going, you think. That kept her mind—

**Mitchell** [00:23:47] Oh yes, my mother—It was—My mother was—

**Graham** [00:23:49] —(speaking at the same time) serene.

**Mitchell** [00:23:49] —deeply religious.

**Graham** [00:23:49] Mm. Was she a serene person, you think? Or was it more agitated—

**Mitchell** [00:23:53] She was a fighter, but she was confident in her God and she was confident that God—that in serving God through this civil rights crusade, she was being obedient to his direction.

**Graham** [00:24:12] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:24:12] And she taught us that. She taught everybody who came within the sound of her voice that the NAACP was God's workshop. And she used to say to the preachers, she said, "You get up on Sunday mornings, you tell your people that God does—"

[00:24:27] *pause in recording*

**Graham** [00:24:31] What were some of your mother's weaknesses? We know her strengths. Did she have any weaknesses?

**Mitchell** [00:24:38] With all due respect, I don't know of any. My mother was an unusual woman. She was a good woman. She worked hard for her family and her race and her church. She would forgive people. I used to say, "Mama, how can you—that woman talked about you." Oh, she says, "You make your enemies your footstool." And sure enough, some people who would be jealous of her success, well—She had a golden touch. Everything she touched (snapping) blossomed, and—mean, this movement just blossomed under my mother. One thing, she worked so hard. A lot of people didn't know how she stayed on the telephone way after midnight at night, early in the morning. And how she used to—my boys, she used to grab them, "Will you give out Grandma's handbills?" She used to get—they were boy scouts—"Get four or five of your boys. I'll give them a

dollar." She used her own money because she believed that was God's work. And she used her own money along with NAACP—When the NAACP didn't have the money my mother used to give her money.

**Graham** [00:25:58] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:26:00] And Carl Murphy, he did the same thing following her lead. When the NAACP didn't have the money, Mr. Carl used to have *The Afro* give it. She used to get 'em all to give. She said, "We've got this. God is working through us." She felt that. And she inspired others the same way. And I don't know how many weaknesses she had. Because she was humble. My mother didn't go around in fine clothes. She always looked nice, but she never went around in fine clothes and furs. In fact, her first fur piece we gave her on her 70th birthday. We gave a birthday party for her at Sharp Street Church, and we gave her—you'd see the clippings of it—and we gave her—my husband and I gave her fur: her first stole. And she never—her television set—She was humble. She lived humbly. She was always clean and neat and the like, but she didn't believe in fancy clothes and fancy furniture. And even in her death, her last year, I said, "Mama, I'm going to get you a new living room couch." She said, "Oh," she said, "You ought to see the mansion I'm going to have. I'm getting—the mansion I'm going to have up there." She believed that—She didn't believe—She didn't place too much emphasis on material things. She placed emphasis on spiritual things. She felt you were rich if you had a family. You were rich if you had people who believed in you and worked with you. You didn't need all of this other stuff. If you were active in the church—She was—She just—I just believe she was just—I admired her. She was my mother, but I used to sit and look at her at mass meetings and in these meetings with officials. She always had me tagging along out with her secretary and lawyer after I became a lawyer. I was every—She had me believing too, that our talents we give to God and he blesses them and uses them. And then he blesses whatever you're trying to do and I found that's true. I've tried—We've tried to instill our boys with the same thing: service. Service for others is the rent you pay for your space on Earth, I believe.

**Graham** [00:28:56] Well, how did she relax? Did she have a special way of relaxing?

**Mitchell** [00:28:58] In the church.

**Graham** [00:28:59] (speaking at the same time) That was the only—

**Mitchell** [00:28:59] Revivals, church services—My mother enjoyed the church.

**Graham** [00:29:05] She really enjoyed it.

**Mitchell** [00:29:05] She enjoyed good music. In our church when—You know, we had a succession of pastors and some of them very—had music that was really very cold, you know. She'd slipped out to her Baptist friends and would tell her preacher too, "I just went over to Reverend to get warm. And so I've come back to warm up Sharp Street."

**Graham** [00:29:29] (speaking at the same time) Did she approve of shouting? Did she approve of shouting?

**Mitchell** [00:29:30] Oh yes, she approved of shouting. She said the spirit's scripture said, "If you don't praise me, I'll make the rocks cry out." She believed in praising God. And she believed she would visit the Holiness Church as she believed in making a joyous noise unto the Lord. She would

be so proud of this young John Bryant because he believes in making a joyous noise. And he's got a Ph.D. in theology. But he believes—over at Bethel—in making a joyous noise unto the Lord. Her relaxation was really in the church. Really.

[00:30:11] *pause in recording*

**Graham** [00:30:15] Mrs. Mitchell, can you tell me what was the source of your mother's ideas and values?

**Mitchell** [00:30:20] Her deep religious beliefs and convictions.

**Graham** [00:30:26] Religious—you say religious—

[00:30:29] *pause in recording*

**Graham** [00:30:29] When you say religious—Or what particular kind of religion do you mean?

**Mitchell** [00:30:33] Well, my mother was a very beautiful young woman. She was a teacher. And her mother had given her training in piano—she played the piano. And vocal lessons under Madam Constantia Reckling, who was an understudy of Madam—

[00:30:56] *pause in recording*

**Mitchell** [00:30:57] Understudy of Madam Schumann-Heink. So that she was, um, a very attractive young woman with a beautiful voice. She often used to tease my dad, and she used to say that he fell in love with her voice because here he was from Mississippi and he was a traveling exhibitor of religious motion pictures. And he booked Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church at Dolphin and Etting Street, which was just around the corner of where she lived at 1134 Druid Hill Avenue. And he heard her sing in the choir at Sharp Street Church, and she said that he fell in love with her voice and married her voice (both laugh). At any rate, she left her teaching after a year of teaching—

**Graham** [00:31:57] You have a date on that?

**Mitchell** [00:31:59] Uh, left her teaching and married my dad on September the 7th, 1910. At 556 St. Mary St. We found the wedding invitation among her papers. And then she toured the South, mainly, with my father. She lectured and sang while he exhibited the motion pictures. And of course, we were born along the way. But when we came back to Baltimore in 19—um, 17, um, to 18, I'm not sure of the exact date—she developed an infection of the middle ear. The right ear.

**Graham** [00:32:58] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:32:58] And it was neglected by the local physician who treated her. And she often told us children how she was in such great pain that she walked into Johns Hopkins Hospital. And there was a very great professor, the head of the eye, ear, nose and throat department: Professor Crow or Crowe (??). I think Mr. Wagandt knew him.

**Graham** [00:33:32] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:33:32] He has since died. And when he saw her in the clinic being examined—the infection was so bad, it was on the way to her brain, as I understand it. And they told her that if she wanted to live, she had to have an immediate operation. She's always said that she was in such great pain that she gave her consent to an immediate operation. And Professor Crow or Crowe (??) took her case himself and operated on her for a mastoidectomy. That's the—The mastoid bone was infected and had to be removed and they put a steel plate in her head—

**Graham** [00:34:20] Was—Did he really (unintelligible; speaking at the same time)?

**Mitchell** [00:34:21] —behind her ear. Yes, in that operation. And she said that Dr. Crow or Crowe (??), after the operation, came to her and said, "Lily, are you a religious woman?" And she said, "Yes, Doctor." And he said, "Then you need to thank your God because only God saved you." He told her that he had taken more bone out of her head than out of any human head he had operated on at that time and had put a steel plate in it. Now, she says that when she under—just before she underwent the operation, she prayed to God and said, "If you just let me live to rear my three little girls—" At that time, they were only three little girls. "If you just let me live to rear my three little girls, I'll give you a life of service." Then after the operation was over, she did just that. She gave God a life of service. And this religious conviction was to dominate all of her activities the rest of her life. Now, interestingly, and this is an index into her character, the operation was successful in that her life was saved. But in removing the bone, the surgeon cut the fifth facial nerve, which caused a paralysis of the—

**Unidentified** [00:36:16] (whispering) Of mom's face.

**Mitchell** [00:36:16] —of one side of her face. And I remember when she first discovered—when they took the bandages off—and she first discovered that she was losing control of one side of her face. Now, here's a young, beautiful woman. And my brother has just found a photograph of her in the trunk—my daddy's trunk—down in the cellar at 1320 Eutaw Place, their home, which will show you what a beautiful woman she was. And she took a great deal of pride in her appearance, so to lose control of that side of her face was an awful blow. And I remember that my mother—someone told her about Christian Science, and I used to go with her to the Christian Science practitioner, where they would do what you call "read Christian Science." And she bought Mary Baker Eddy's whole series of books, and she used to read them aloud to me. As a child I used to have earaches and she inducted me into the beliefs of Christian Science to the place where I no longer had earaches—the painful earaches I used to have. And so, although she remained a member of Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church and was to be an active member until the day—almost the day she died—until her health failed her. Nevertheless, she continued to read Christian Science to buttress her religious beliefs from the Methodist church. And this is where she got this tremendous faith that enabled her to face a public with her face one-sided, and to ignore that physical defect. Or rather, if she didn't ignore it, to, um—Well, sometimes little children would look at her funny, you know, this woman with the one-sided face. But her religious faith gave her a strength and an understanding and willpower to face the public. She'd continued to sing in the public with a one-sided face.

**Graham** [00:38:56] Was it difficult to sing with—?

**Mitchell** [00:38:58] No—

**Graham** [00:38:58] It wasn't diff—

**Mitchell** [00:38:58] She conquered that—

**Graham** [00:39:01] (speaking at the same time) Huh. She had (unintelligible) lessons?

**Mitchell** [00:39:01] —she sang as never before. No.

**Graham** [00:39:03] It was just a matter of—

**Mitchell** [00:39:05] She—It was a matter of physical appearance.

**Graham** [00:39:07] Oh.

**Mitchell** [00:39:07] (background noise; ambulance) Her whole face on one side that was like it was paralyzed. And when I got older, I thought, "What a wonderfully strong and courageous woman my mother is," when I was young and being courted and the like. And what a tremendous trial that was to have one's beauty destroyed. But she believed then in the inner beauty. She used to teach us—and I think that's one of the reasons—she used to teach us very sharply, "Pretty is as pretty does." She used to teach, "If you're pretty outside and you're ugly inside, then you're ugly." And she taught us that to be beautiful you must do beautiful—act beautifully. You must be kind, you must have nice manners; she taught us to have manners and to smile to people. I see so many children—little children—who don't know what it is to smile when they welcome people. That's training. My mother trained us how to greet people, to be kind, and the like. But I think this religious conviction—she told God that if he would save her life in that Johns Hopkins Hospital, she'd give him a life of service. And I think everything stems from that religious conviction.

**Graham** [00:40:49] Right. Well, did changes occur over a period of time in her personality? I mean, at various points did her personality and values and ideas change at all? And can you note a particular example where it may have changed, say, in relation to courting, or dancing, or drinking?

**Mitchell** [00:41:09] Oh, my mother was an old-fashioned Methodist, now. I don't dance 'til this day because my mother—my sons say that grandma brainwashed us (laughs). But she did it sort of painlessly. You know, the Methodist Church used to prohibit dancing, card-playing, smoking, and drinking, and they used to have a very strong temperance department of the Methodist Church. And of course, wine and liquors were forbidden in our home, we never had that—

**Graham** [00:41:45] How about coffee?

**Mitchell** [00:41:46] —in our home.

**Graham** [00:41:46] How about coffee and tea?

**Mitchell** [00:41:47] (speaking at the same time) Oh, yes, coffee and tea, but, um—

**Graham** [00:41:49] Sodas?

**Mitchell** [00:41:50] —but it was alcoholic beverages. And card-playing and dancing were taboo in our home. We were all \_\_\_\_\_ (??). But she was such a wise mother because—and my dad never took that away from us without putting something in its place. Because every summer my dad and mother used to take us in their Model-T Ford on trips across this country. We've been all over the United States. Vacations. And she used to—we used to sometimes fret when the other



girls were going out when we were adolescent. Other girls were going out to dances and she said, "That's alright. When they're home this summer, taking breezes off the gutter, you'll be in Atlantic City getting breezes from the Atlantic Ocean." Every summer we went somewhere for vacation. Then every Saturday she used to take us down to the Maryland Theater, which was on Franklin Street next to the old Congress Hotel. It's now a parking lot, it's been torn down. She used to take us there and—my sister and I, my older sister and I—and she used to take us to the movies and always explained the movies to us: what was wrong in them, she didn't like, she'd tell us right then. "Now, see, that's wrong," she would say. And we were so close to our mother that we never rebelled. Whatever she said, we respected, you know.

**Graham** [00:43:37] What about your cousins? Did she have a—did you have a close-knit family with regard to cousins and—?

**Mitchell** [00:43:43] Yes, she was—

**Graham** [00:43:44] Did she have control over them too?

**Mitchell** [00:43:45] No, not from the standpoint of—My mother believed in family, the importance of the family. She said, "You don't need wealth if you have a family. You're rich when you have a family and you are to cultivate your family ties." Now, we were a very close knit family, and I have an aunt, Mrs. Florence Snowden, and her husband, and my aunt who died, Mrs. Marion Armstrong, and her husband, Mr. Joseph Armstrong, lived in Philadelphia. We lived with them when we went to school in Philadelphia. We were a very close family, the holidays were always occasions for the family getting together with family dinners, family outings, and the like. With our cousins—she maintained close contact with Mrs. Francis Carroll Madden and Mrs. Barbara Carroll Young, who were elderly cousins of ours—were always included in all of our activities. And she was the one who always wrote to my father's relatives in Chicago and kept in close touch. Well, my mother and my father believed in keeping close to your family; my father came from a large Mississippi family, and they always wrote and kept in touch and visited. She believed in keeping close to the family.

**Graham** [00:45:22] Was she the leader of her family in a sense? Or did you have a sort of head of the family—of your Carroll side of the family?

**Mitchell** [00:45:28] Well, when her mother lived, her mother was a strong—was the leader of the family.

**Graham** [00:45:36] Yeah.

**Mitchell** [00:45:36] Now, her mother, who was Mrs. Amanda Bowen Carroll Scott—Well, I remember my mother's mother was a very strong, tall—she must have taken after her grandfather who was the African chief, because she was very tall, she was dark brown with definite negroid features and very aristocratic in her bearing. I mean, very straight. We had to help my mother care for my grandmother when she was old and I remember my grandmother as being so tall and she always carried herself with a very noble bearing. But she was the strong person until her death. Then, when she died, my mother became the strong person in the family. My aunts and uncles all deferred to her.

**Graham** [00:46:45] (speaking at the same time) Sort of—uh-huh. But she was one of the youngest, wasn't she?

**Mitchell** [00:46:46] She was she was next to the baby girl.

**Graham** [00:46:51] Mhm, so—

**Mitchell** [00:46:51] But she—They all said that my grandmother said that my mother was the seventh child. And as the seventh child, she was born with a, uh—

**Graham** [00:47:07] A call?

**Mitchell** [00:47:10] A veil.

**Graham** [00:47:11] A veil, mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:47:11] Or whatever you call it. And they always felt if her mother had talked about my mother being the seventh child and born with, um—veil, they used to call it. Having—sort of being special.

**Graham** [00:47:32] Right, right, right.

**Mitchell** [00:47:33] And it's very interesting that my grandmother wanted—Well, my aunt, who is now 84, says that my grandmother offered her piano lessons, but she didn't want them. The older daughter, who—older sister, Marion Carroll Armstrong, would not take the piano lessons. In other words, as my grandmother's—I remember her talking about it: that my mother was the only one who, um, who took the piano lessons and took the voice lessons and wanted to—wanted them badly. In fact, my mother always says that she wanted to go on the stage. She had dreamed of going on the stage.

**Graham** [00:48:28] As a child?

**Mitchell** [00:48:29] As a—When she was growing up and taking these piano lessons and these vocal lessons. But back when she married and went into religious work with my dad, that's when she decided to sing for God instead of, as she put it, for the world.

**Graham** [00:48:54] Oh, she was a honkytonk singer, in a sense, before?

**Mitchell** [00:48:58] Oh, no. Oh, no. My mother—

**Graham** [00:49:00] I mean—I mean—

**Mitchell** [00:49:01] My mother was trained in the classics.

**Graham** [00:49:04] Oh (laughs).

**Mitchell** [00:49:04] She was an understudy of Madam Schumann-Heink.

**Graham** [00:49:07] Right, that's right. I forgot that.

**Mitchell** [00:49:08] And she sang only in the churches, and at, um—there. She sang classic music.

**Graham** [00:49:16] Was it—

**Mitchell** [00:49:17] But she thought of going on the stage in opera and things like that.

**Graham** [00:49:22] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:49:22] But she was not a blues singer, by no means.

**Graham** [00:49:25] Oh, okay. Okay.

**Mitchell** [00:49:26] She was, in fact—I mean, she had to come out of a religious background that, um—I guess they would've disowned her if she'd gone into, you know, singing blues and being an actress—that kind of thing.

**Graham** [00:49:51] (speaking at the same time) Or jazz.

**Graham** [00:49:51] Right. Well, how confident was she of her intellectual capabilities? I mean—

**Mitchell** [00:49:57] Oh, my mother—

**Graham** [00:49:58] Did she have a certain kind of sense of knowing that she was right as far as intellectual problems or just a solution to problems in general? Did she have a certain way of knowing?

**Mitchell** [00:50:07] Well, first of all, her religious conviction—There's something that Christian Science gave her, with her Methodist religious upbringing, that just made her feel that she was special and that God lived in her and that he had possession of her mind and her abilities.

**Graham** [00:50:29] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:50:30] And that, therefore, uh, she was—She used to say, when she spoke to the people, "When God made us, he made us good and very good." And she said, "God didn't make anything inferior." You know, this is part her preaching to the people and that was her philosophy. And I think Christian Science had a lot to do it, because she used to say, "God is all mine."

**Graham** [00:50:59] All mine?

**Mitchell** [00:50:59] "And God is in you."

**Graham** [00:51:01] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:51:01] And she used to say that nothing is impossible with God: "God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-powerful." And the day before she died the nurse says she was rolling around in her wheelchair and she said she was repeating again this phrase, which was her belief, which she got from Christian Science: "God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-possible." And she said, "God knows, he sees, and he cares." And the nurse said she kept saying that. She kept singing and she kept saying that over and over again the day before she died from the wheelchair. She was wheeling her wheelchair around. My mother was not afraid of death by any means. She prepared for death, and she believed that this Earth is just preparation for new and better existence. And she

was preparing for the next adventure and for the next world. She believed and had a very strong belief.

**Graham** [00:52:17] Did she ever have visions? Or—?

**Mitchell** [00:52:20] No. I never heard her talk about any visions.

**Graham** [00:52:24] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:52:25] But she was always talking about what God wants us to do. Now, my mother believed in honesty, she believed in character. When she was bringing us up, she said, "Now, don't look for riches." She said, "You look for the young man you select to be your husband for life." She believed in staying together for life.

**Graham** [00:52:51] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time)

**Mitchell** [00:52:51] She said to make sure he has character. She said, "If he has character, then the other things will come. Is he honest? Is he courteous? Is he industrious? Able to work hard and support you?" You know, these are the things she told us to look for in our husbands. And I was right. I had selected mine for all those—for character, because he didn't have any money. But I've had him for 38 years. This is—you want to go over there—(unintelligible)

[00:53:28] *pause in recording*

**Graham** [00:53:31] So your mother didn't approve of divorce?

**Mitchell** [00:53:36] No.

**Graham** [00:53:36] Why she didn't approve of Mrs. Kiah's marriage, at first? I mean, do you know of anything besides what Mrs. Kiah may have told us?

**Mitchell** [00:53:48] Uh—I really think that—My mother was very tight on us growing up. And she had—

**Unidentified** [00:54:03] I got Josephine (unintelligible).

**Mitchell** [00:54:05] Oh, you did?

**Unidentified** [00:54:07] Oh, excuse me, I'm just—

[00:54:07] *pause in recording*

**Mitchell** [00:54:09] I think that one of the reasons my mother had not known Dr. Kiah—then he was, of course, a college student—she hadn't known him very well. There had not been a, um—

**Graham** [00:54:41] A long courtship?

**Mitchell** [00:54:43] An opportunity—It was not a long courtship. Plus, she—His father was—He was the son of a clergyman because his father was the President of Princess Ann College. But she

was very tight. She and my dad both. I think my dad more so than my mother on my sister, Virginia—oldest sister—having company.

**Graham** [00:55:13] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:55:14] And, um—

**Graham** [00:55:17] Was this the result of personal experiences or just a religious—outgrowth of her religious background?

**Mitchell** [00:55:22] No, I just think—No, because when Virginia eloped and got married, my mother learned from that and loosened up on myself and my younger sister.

**Graham** [00:55:39] Oh.

**Mitchell** [00:55:40] And then, um—

**Graham** [00:55:41] When you say loosened up, what did that mean?

**Mitchell** [00:55:43] Well, we were able—we were then—She was very wise in that she encouraged us in activities in the \_\_\_\_\_ (??) in the church, with teaching Sunday school, and we could bring our friends home. She'd encouraged us to bring our friends home and which include male and female. She encouraged us after we were, um, graduated from college—after I was graduated from college. She encouraged us in the City-Wide Young People's Forum. Constructive youth activities and of course we could bring our male and female friends into the home. She encouraged us to bring them home. And she made her home available for them.

**Graham** [00:56:49] For what kind of activities? Did she sit in the parlor with you or could you sit alone by your—?

**Mitchell** [00:56:52] No, we never courted alone (telephone ringing).

**Graham** [00:56:54] Oh, you never could court alone. Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:57:01] We—(both laughing) I—Of course, I was 25 when I married. One of the reasons is because I went away to work. I worked for the NAACP as Youth Secretary from '35 to '38. And I traveled all over the country then. But—You know, as I look back and as I think about it, I think that my mother had envisioned—She'd always told us that if we were good girls—that's the way she used to—She used to tell us, "Keep your dresses down. Young ladies keep their dresses down." She used to tell us that. And she said, " And if you are good girls when you find a fine young man and you love him, then I'll give you—your Daddy and I will give you a beautiful wedding."

**Graham** [00:58:07] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:58:07] And she did that for myself and my younger sister, who were—Myself and my younger sister—

[00:58:20] *pause in recording*

**Graham** [00:58:22] How did your mother instruct you on the birds and the bees Mrs. Mitchell?

**Mitchell** [00:58:27] (laughs) My mother never instructed us on the birds and the bees. She only told us to keep our dresses down, and we knew what she meant (both laughing). She told us to keep—And she would point out—she would say—There were girls we used to go to high school with. She said, "That's a fast girl and you stay away from her." She said—You know, she used to say, "Show me your company and I'll tell you who you are." And she used to say, "If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas."

**Graham** [00:59:06] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:59:06] So she never did tell us the birds and the bees. She told us—Though, we knew what she meant: keep your dresses down.

**Graham** [00:59:13] Well, how did the birth of Bowen affect her attitude as far as a courtship, having friends over, the facts of life, and that kind of thing? Was it a change in her attitude?

**Mitchell** [00:59:28] No. She was very happy to have this son.

**Graham** [00:59:32] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:59:32] In her old age, she loved my brother. She said, "You know, like Sarah in her old age, along came my son."

**Graham** [00:59:42] Well, how old was she when she had Bowen?

**Mitchell** [00:59:44] I don't think she was all that old, but she used to say the Lord answered her prayer and sent her a son.

**Graham** [00:59:51] Oh, she always wanted a son?

**Mitchell** [00:59:53] Always wanted a son.

**Graham** [00:59:53] Did your father want one too or what?

**Mitchell** [00:59:55] Oh, yes. He was crazy about my brother, too.

**Graham** [00:59:58] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [00:59:58] My mother and father loved us all, but they were very strict disciplinarians with all of us.

**Graham** [01:00:05] Mhm.

**Mitchell** [01:00:09] My brother and us girls—they were very strict with us. Very strict. But it was kind of a loving strictness. As I said, my mother and father tempered their strictness with the activities they engaged in with us. We went to the fairs together, we always went to the circus together, we went to the movies together, we—

**Graham** [01:00:35] Did you get spanked a bunch?

**Mitchell** [01:00:37] My mother never spanked us. She lectured us. My daddy did the spanking.

**Graham** [01:00:42] Oh, he did the spanking. Was it partic—?

**Mitchell** [01:00:44] As I look back—I used to tell my boys—we were—

[01:00:47] *end of recording*