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**An Oral History of Virginia Jackson Kiah
Conducted by Leroy Graham**

Title: An Oral History of Virginia Jackson Kiah
Interviewer: Leroy Graham
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Abstract: Virginia Jackson Kiah (1911-2001) was the daughter of Lillie Mae Carroll Jackson and the sister of Juanita Jackson Mitchell, as well as an artist and activist in her own right. She served as a membership and then promotional secretary for the Baltimore branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and painted portraits of famous Black leaders such as Mary McLeod Bethune. In this oral history interview, Kiah discusses the internal workings of the Baltimore branch of the NAACP and how local individuals and church leaders impacted the organization's efforts. Kiah also explores her relationship with her mother, as both a motivational force as well as an obstacle, particularly when it came to her marriage to Dr. Calvin Kiah.

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 Virginia Jackson Kiah
June 28, 1976**

Virginia Jackson Kiah was interviewed on June 28, 1976, by Leroy Graham at 1324 Druid Hill Avenue in Baltimore City.

Graham [00:00:08] Mrs. Kiah as membership secretary, you had some firsts to your credit, right? Can you tell us about those firsts?

Kiah [00:00:15] Well, it was while I was there, as membership secretary, that for the first time—I think it was, a lady came in and gave her membership to the NAACP. Before that, we had to solicit completely. Nobody came to the office to bring a membership. But after that, the memberships started coming in as a result of my—what would you say—my pushing, my work. For example, there were some ideas, I thought, that should be put over, including "Every day, a membership day." That was a slogan: "Every day, a membership day." Now, I felt that we should establish salesmanship clinics every week, every Tuesday night, and have key people who were going to work to solicit memberships to be trained to learn how to solicit. So we'd have the insurance agents from different insurance companies, Black insurance companies, to appear as speakers each Tuesday night.

Graham [00:01:23] Did your husband ever take part in one of these clinics? As a shirt salesman? Or former—

Kiah [00:01:29] No, he was teaching then.

Graham [00:01:30] He was teaching then?

Kiah [00:01:31] No, no, he was in the Army then.

Graham [00:01:34] Oh, in the Army.

Kiah [00:01:34] I was with the Baltimore branch NAACP while he was in the Army.

Graham [00:01:38] Right, from '44, I guess, up until what?

Kiah [00:01:41] Twenty-three years. That's all I can say, mister exact years.

Graham [00:01:46] (laughs) Now, uh—

Kiah [00:01:47] Now, that's a (unintelligible; background noise), if you could check that, I'd appreciate it. I can't remember all these things.

Graham [00:01:52] Now, but during your term as membership secretary, did you come to know a Laura—

Kiah [00:01:56] Alright now, wait a minute, wait a minute. I haven't quite finished this. Uh, we, uh— After the insurance agents would finished their talks on—or their, uh, workshops on how to solicit memberships, then we would set out to cover certain areas of the city. We'd begin soliciting immediately after those workshops. We'd start, for example (telephone rings)—We'd start, for example, at the housing project, McCulloh housing project. (telephone rings) We'd divide up.

[00:02:40] *pause in recording*

Graham [00:02:41] So you went to McCulloh projects. Where else did you go?

Kiah [00:02:44] Oh, we went to solicit from block to block. In other words, one worker or two workers would be given, say, two blocks nearest to the office to solicit, and then finally we'd come back and report our memberships.

Graham [00:03:05] So you covered the whole city that way? Or at least a Black areas?

Kiah [00:03:08] (speaking at the same time) No, no. This area.

Graham [00:03:08] Just the area around _____ (??) and McCulloh?

Kiah [00:03:11] No. The Fourth District.

Graham [00:03:12] Oh, the Fourth District.

Kiah [00:03:13] We'd go way up on the, uh—

Graham [00:03:14] North Avenue?

Kiah [00:03:14] Northern housing project, McCulloh—not McCulloh, which housing project?

Graham [00:03:22] Gilmore?

Kiah [00:03:22] Gilmore. Gilmore Housing Project. We'd get around northwest Baltimore, that's what I'm trying to say. Northwest Baltimore. In other words, we were putting theories into practice and getting the memberships in prior to the monthly membership meeting so we'd be assured of a certain amount of money for memberships before the mass meetings would occur. We'd report everything, all the memberships in a, um—Well, the total number of memberships we'd report at the mass meeting. So we'd get at least 350, 400, 500 memberships at the mass meetings. We were sure of the success in that respect. We had the money. We'd also get donations and the like. See, that was under my direction. I was paid to do this.

Graham [00:04:13] Right.

Kiah [00:04:14] Paid to do this.

Graham [00:04:14] Oh, you were paid to do this?

Kiah [00:04:14] Yes, I was paid to do this.

Graham [00:04:16] Well, I thought you were—

Kiah [00:04:16] (speaking at the same time) I didn't volunteer, no no.

Graham [00:04:16] —you were volunteering your service. Uh-huh.

Kiah [00:04:16] I was paid to do this. I was a paid membership secretary.

Graham [00:04:22] Oh.

Kiah [00:04:22] Yes, yes, I was paid. Not like mama, mama gave her services. But I was paid to do this, so I had to deliver.

Graham [00:04:29] Uh-huh.

Kiah [00:04:29] I had to deliver.

Graham [00:04:31] Right. Well, did—

Kiah [00:04:31] So I was going day and night. Laura Moran are only in the mornings. Say, 2:00 in the mornings, we were downtown taking a—mailing correspondence for the mass meetings or for special meetings we had. We would have meetings in people's houses, different people's houses to raise money. We'd look in a telephone book and check—Uh, so and whether it was white or colored, we'd go to different houses. And we'd see so-and-so person would call on the phone and ask if we could have a meeting at the so-and-so house. And it worked.

Graham [00:05:10] Mm.

Kiah [00:05:10] It worked.

Graham [00:05:11] Mm. So you just went at random in a telephone book?

Kiah [00:05:14] (speaking at the same time; unintelligible) creative ideas—

Graham [00:05:15] Oh. Hm.

Kiah [00:05:15] —that I put over.

Graham [00:05:18] Right.

Kiah [00:05:18] Mhm.

Graham [00:05:18] Now you—

Kiah [00:05:18] Just at random. And now finally, you said if it just covered northwest Baltimore, and so I think back—No. We'd meet in South Baltimore.

Graham [00:05:30] Mhm.

Kiah [00:05:30] The salesman would meet us down in South Baltimore at a Reverend Lee Ann (??) or Leigh Ann (??) Thompson's—she used to work in the NAACP. And from there, we'd start out covering part of the South Baltimore area. Thus we didn't have success in South Baltimore as we had elsewhere because it seems that money was very—what would you say? Uh, we just couldn't get the money, that the people didn't have the money to give as they had elsewhere.

Graham [00:06:03] Right. Now, you mentioned Laura Moran Carey. Did you come to meet her when you were a membership secretary?

Kiah [00:06:11] Mhm.

Graham [00:06:11] And, uh—

Kiah [00:06:12] Mrs. Mitchell—Juanita, Laura had been knowing for some time. Laura had admired her a great deal, and she felt that Juanita was her inspiration. That's while I was away. I was, you know, I was with my husband at the time. She felt that Juanita was her inspiration. She'd heard Juanita speak at the—what was it, inter-racial fellowship? Which they had in Baltimore at the time. And she asked her—went to see her one day and asked if she could do something for NAACP, something constructive. She gave her services. That's when she came on around to the office and met me and asked what she could do.

Graham [00:06:53] Right. Mrs. Carey was white, right?

Kiah [00:06:55] White. Oh, yes.

Graham [00:06:56] Right. Now, you said that she got involved. You mentioned before to me that she got involved in buying houses for Black—

Kiah [00:07:03] Well, that was later. Later.

Graham [00:07:04] Mhm.

Kiah [00:07:05] That was not long ago before I left the NAACP. This real estate operator—Black—contacted her about opening up Fulton Avenue to Black people. And he had this plan: if she would sign for the purchase of sixteen houses on Fulton Avenue—say, two in one block, one in another block, two in another block. Blockbusting you'd call it—

Graham [00:07:40] Mhm.

Kiah [00:07:40] —then he would provide the money, and at the same time, she'd be continuing with her NAACP work because she would be helping to open up Fulton Avenue to Black people. So she did. But she did not know that he was going to exploit the Black people, because he—of course, when those houses were bought by whites, naturally they moved out. Then other whites moved out. He, in turn, sold those houses for terrific prices—such terrific profits that indicated that his objective had been to exploit Black people.

Graham [00:08:27] Right.

Kiah [00:08:27] In a way, he was helping to open up. In another way, he was getting a great deal of money for himself. So he had his own interests at heart at the same time. Naturally, he should get a profit from each house, but oh my, they were ungodly prices, and Blacks bought those houses. They bought those houses. They were anxious to get out of the ghetto.

Graham [00:08:49] Right.

Kiah [00:08:50] Then after that, of course, when the restrictive covenant case came up—oh my gosh. Everything beyond Fulton Avenue began to open up to Blacks.

Graham [00:08:59] Mhm.

Kiah [00:08:59] And she opened up Fulton Avenue. He could not have bought those houses.

Graham [00:09:04] Right. That was Mrs. Carey.

Kiah [00:09:06] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) a white girl who opened the door. The whites would sell to whites, but would not sell to Blacks.

Graham [00:09:11] Right.

Kiah [00:09:12] She was put out of the Quaker church where she was a member as a result. The Quaker church put her out. Said she, uh, hoodwinked members of the white race in doing what she did. Hoodwinked them, took advantage of them.

Graham [00:09:38] As membership secretary, I guess you were involved in trying to bring Mrs. Roosevelt to Baltimore. At first, was that meeting supposed to be held at the Lyric? And then—

Kiah [00:09:48] (speaking at the same time) No.

Graham [00:09:48] —and then it was banned from the Lyric? I have some information—

Kiah [00:09:55] She was scheduled for a mass meeting speaker. One of my mass meetings.

Graham [00:10:02] Right, this was in—

Kiah [00:10:02] I went over to Washington and spoke at the National Women's Conference. And then after I got through speaking, why, I talked with her about our organization in Baltimore and what it was meaning to Black people—people period, in Baltimore and the state of Maryland. And I asked her if she would be a guest speaker. Course, Mrs., uh—Mrs., uh, (snaps) Bethune was her friend and Juanita knew Mrs. Bethune, so all that had been pre-arranged, see?

Graham [00:10:37] Right.

Kiah [00:10:37] It had been prearranged.

Graham [00:10:41] But she wasn't supposed to speak at the Lyric and was barred from there? Because according to an *Afro* article about March 25th,—

Unidentified [00:10:50] (speaking at the same time; unintelligible).

Graham [00:10:50] —1944, said that she was barred from—She and Duke Ellington were barred from the NAACP's May membership drive.

Kiah [00:10:58] Is that right?

Graham [00:10:59] Right.

Kiah [00:10:59] I didn't know anything—

Graham [00:11:00] And they were trying to get McKeldin involved in the situation, to open up—

Kiah [00:11:03] I couldn't—Juanita. Now, Juanita could tell you about that end of it. I'd never knew anything.

Graham [00:11:07] Right. Well then—

Kiah [00:11:07] My job was to get her as a guest speaker and speak at the conference so that this might stimulate her to, uh—And since I was promotional secretary on hearing me speak and knowing the relationship to _____ (??), she might come over. And she did.

Graham [00:11:26] Now, I guess you were involved in the organizing of the NAACP's Youth Council, which involved getting young people involved in the NAACP from like—

Kiah [00:11:40] We had Ms. Hurley come down and organize our chapter. Ruby Hurley from New York City. Um—Let's see now. What else do you want to know about the (unintelligible; speaking at the same time)?

Graham [00:12:02] Well, can you enlighten us at all on the—

Kiah [00:12:04] Oh, it's the youth who went out to solicit memberships and learn how to solicit memberships—youth memberships as well as adults. They helped to put over the mass meetings, they were ushers at the mass meetings—

Graham [00:12:17] Mhm.

Kiah [00:12:17] —they were actively engaged in the work of the NAACP.

Graham [00:12:23] Right.

Kiah [00:12:25] They would picket. They'd also picket when the time came for picketing.

Graham [00:12:29] But this was something that grew out of your term as membership secretary—

Kiah [00:12:33] (speaking at the same time) That's right, that's right, oh yes.

Graham [00:12:33] —which was quite a important thing, I guess.

Kiah [00:12:36] (speaking at the same time) Yes, oh yes.

Graham [00:12:37] This is when the _____ (??) was probably introduced to the NAACP, was it not?

Kiah [00:12:40] (sighs)

Graham [00:12:45] Well (laughs), we'll go on to something else. Did Mr. Pratt—Harry Key Pratt, did you know him?

Kiah [00:12:52] Oh, yes.

Graham [00:12:53] Mhm.

Kiah [00:12:53] He was my principal.

Graham [00:12:54] Oh, he was?

Kiah [00:12:55] He was my principal at 103 School.

Graham [00:12:58] Did he encourage you in your art?

Kiah [00:12:59] He didn't know anything about my art. I was just one of many students that attended 103 School.

Graham [00:13:03] Ah (speaking at the same time).

Kiah [00:13:04] I was a little old thing at that time. Tell the truth I wasn't— When it comes to art, why, I loved art, but it was when I developed into a teenager I really became more active in art.

Graham [00:13:19] Now your mother—there were two other very striking Black women of this period and I want to know what kind of relationship they had with your mother. One was Sarah Fernandis, who came from a distinguished Baltimore family—

Kiah [00:13:36] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) portrait that was painted of her?

Graham [00:13:36] You did—?

Kiah [00:13:36] I painted the portrait of her.

Graham [00:13:38] Oh, I didn't—well I wasn't aware of—

Kiah [00:13:40] It was hanging in the publishing house for a period of time. I don't know where it is now.

Graham [00:13:43] Mhm.

Kiah [00:13:43] But I painted that portrait.

Graham [00:13:44] Oh, she died in 1951, Mrs. Fernandis, but—

Kiah [00:13:48] You know, she was head of the, um—Did you find an organization she—?

Graham [00:13:54] Right, it was the Corporative Woman's Civic League—Cooperative Women's Civic League.

Kiah [00:14:04] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) it was called —it was the Civic League, she headed for a period of time.

Graham [00:14:05] Right. Well did your mother and she have a close relationship?

Kiah [00:14:07] No.

Graham [00:14:09] They weren't close?

Kiah [00:14:12] No.

Graham [00:14:12] Uh-huh. But—

Kiah [00:14:12] No, she was a member of the "pie crust crowd."

Graham [00:14:14] "Pie crust"? Now, what's that?

Kiah [00:14:16] The "pie crust crowd" at that time did not work with the NAACP as it should. It was the common everyday man! I say common—No, no, let me—no, no, no. It was the everyday man from the garbage men on up to, well, people who, in the everyday walk of life—people who were really exploited and exploited and felt the pinch, perhaps, of starvation and so forth. Now those people, Mama worked with. She called the others the "pie crust crowd" most of whom didn't appear to be interested in helping the plain, everyday man, you know?

Graham [00:14:58] Well, I was under the impression that Mrs. Fernandis was different. I know she does—She did come from a distinguished Black—

Kiah [00:15:04] (speaking at the same time) Now, don't misunderstand me.

Graham [00:15:04] Mhm.

Kiah [00:15:04] Don't misunderstand me. She had a project herself.

Graham [00:15:08] Mhm.

Kiah [00:15:08] She headed that. See, she didn't work with the NAACP.

Graham [00:15:12] Oh! But—

Kiah [00:15:12] She was in that organization. She put everything she could in that civic organization. Oh, she was working in civic life, in a way, but (hits the table)—I scared you to death.

Graham [00:15:27] Unh-uh.

Kiah [00:15:27] I scared you to death.

Graham [00:15:27] No.

Kiah [00:15:27] That was the _____ (??) —uh, whatcha call it? _____ (??) of the "pie crust crowd" in that organization.

Graham [00:15:34] Hm.

Kiah [00:15:34] Understand?

Graham [00:15:34] Right. Now—

Kiah [00:15:35] No, no, no, no people who needed help badly were in that organization.

Graham [00:15:43] In the NAACP?

Kiah [00:15:43] No, in that civic organization.

Graham [00:15:45] Oh, in the civic organization. Oh, the Cooperative Women's—

Kiah [00:15:49] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) No, it was the NAACP that worked to improve the opportunities and the status and the, I mean, even the jobs and all that type of thing, so that they could live better in life. It's the NAACP, not the other organization.

Graham [00:16:06] And what about—?

Kiah [00:16:07] And when it came to NAACP memberships (hits the table), trying to get memberships from the (begins hitting the table with each word) "pie crust crowd" was a job.

Graham [00:16:15] The "pie crust crowd"?

Kiah [00:16:17] What is the pie crust?

Graham [00:16:18] Well, it's the top.

Kiah [00:16:19] It's the top!

Graham [00:16:19] Right.

Kiah [00:16:20] That's Mama—was Mama's expression. And she'd heard it before, but that's how she referred to them: "pie crust" crowd. We had a job. Why shouldn't I know? Because I walk the streets soliciting to get memberships.

Graham [00:16:32] Mhm.

Kiah [00:16:34] If you encourage others to do it in those salesmanship clinics, you had to do it yourself. Get out and get 'em!

Graham [00:16:42] Mhm.

Kiah [00:16:42] Yes sir.

Graham [00:16:43] Well didn't the "pie crust"—

Kiah [00:16:45] (speaking at the same time) We had a time.

Graham [00:16:45] —crowd live right around your mother? Because wasn't Druid Hill Avenue and McCulloh Street the sort of center?

Kiah [00:16:50] Course lived around Mama.

Graham [00:16:52] And—

Kiah [00:16:52] But they didn't bother with the poor people.

Graham [00:16:53] They didn't?

Kiah [00:16:54] No, no. And I'd have just said—They liked their luncheons; they'd have—I tell you what they would have, they'd sponsor art exhibits and the things of that nature. And I—Let me see—I won the first prize—second prize in a statewide auction. They had that type of thing, you know.

Graham [00:17:25] Hm, no.

Kiah [00:17:25] Well, their upper cultural type of projects. But getting opening opportunities for jobs and so forth, that wasn't their—and they weren't interested.

Graham [00:17:37] Mhm. Now, another lady who carried on yeoman's work, I would imagine, was Ms. Frances Murphy. Did she have a—

Kiah [00:17:48] Oh, she was associated with *Afro*.

Graham [00:17:50] Right, but—

Kiah [00:17:51] But she'd involve with the NAACP. She'd have these—it was Frances Murphy who had—

Graham [00:17:54] (speaking at the same time) Clean Block—

Kiah [00:17:54] —Clean Block Campaigns, but that wasn't in connection with the NAACP.

Graham [00:17:58] Now, I'm not—I didn't mention her with that in mind, I just wondered what kind of relationship that, say, Mrs. Fernandis and Ms. Murphy had with your mother, since they were—

Kiah [00:18:10] Well, I mean, their paths didn't cross much—

Graham [00:18:13] Oh, they didn't?

Kiah [00:18:13] —because their activities were in different directions.

Graham [00:18:18] Right.

Kiah [00:18:18] You know? Different directions.

Graham [00:18:18] But I read an article once—an article which said that your brother Bowen got his start in organizing and so forth by being a part of the Clean Block—

Kiah [00:18:32] Oh, he was a party, yes, but that doesn't say the Clean Block activities were spearheaded by the NAACP—

Graham [00:18:37] No, I wasn't saying that, I was just wondering what kind of relationship your mother may have had with other people beyond those who were so closely identified with the NAACP. That's why I mentioned Mrs. Fernandis and Mrs.—

Kiah [00:18:50] But she wasn't closely identified with the NAACP, Mrs. Fernandis.

Graham [00:18:53] No, I meant— Your mother—

Kiah [00:18:55] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time). Now, Mrs. Diggs, who was connected with the NAACP, went out—really went out for the NAACP at the annual drives—membership drives. Oh, she was a captain, and so forth, you know. Or Mr. Young, who used to be with the post office: Raymond Young. People like that, see. Well, each was doing his own thing!

Graham [00:19:18] Right.

Kiah [00:19:19] Ms. _____ (??)—she made her contribution in the Civic League. But Mama was working with the poor men.

Graham [00:19:27] Poor man.

Kiah [00:19:27] Poor man. Poor man! I mean working.

Graham [00:19:32] Right.

Kiah [00:19:32] She got in the streets. I surely got in the streets and Laura and I both worked in the streets all the time. When I say all the time, we were in the office for a period of time and then we went on out in the streets.

Graham [00:19:43] Well, what kind of reaction did the "pie crust" have toward the southern immigrants.

Kiah [00:19:51] (unintelligible) the pie crust (laughs).

Graham [00:19:52] Uh—

Kiah [00:19:52] For the southern immigrants?

Graham [00:19:52] (speaking at the same time) Toward the southern immigrants that came up, especially when issues such as the controversy over where to build housing projects—

Kiah [00:20:03] I don't know. I don't want to discuss it really. I don't know. I really don't.

Graham [00:20:08] Uh-huh. Did your mother welcome these Southern immigrants to the city?

Kiah [00:20:12] All I can say is this: that all Black people who needed help—Mama was there.

Graham [00:20:18] Mhm.

Kiah [00:20:19] If someone was in prison, who had been sentenced in spite of the fact there was insufficient evidence, Mama was there. The families would send for Mama. Members of families would send for Mama and Mama would get them out. I mean, people really needed help in that nature. That's all I know.

Graham [00:20:43] Well, it seemed that—it seems—

Kiah [00:20:46] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) from Brazil! Here comes a letter from Brazil!

Graham [00:20:47] Brazil?

Kiah [00:20:48] We had members in that folder. A letter from Brazil; a fellow heard about her and her work. And he was writing her, telling her that they needed someone like Mrs. Jackson over there.

Graham [00:20:58] Oh, well, I wasn't aware of that.

Kiah [00:20:59] It was in a letter.

Graham [00:21:01] Mhm. Now, it seems that Bethel A.M.E. did not play such a significant part in the NAACP's activities as, say, Sharp Street. Can you account for this?

Kiah [00:21:12] Oh, well, you know, the Young People City-wide Forum was started in _____ (??) in Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Graham [00:21:19] What was?

Kiah [00:21:20] Juanita, yes.

Graham [00:21:20] Hm.

Kiah [00:21:21] It was my idea to have a forum.

Graham [00:21:23] Hm.

Kiah [00:21:24] My idea! Not Juanita's idea, my idea. That's what I'm trying to clarify with Mr. Wiggin (??) or Wickham (??) when he was interviewing us. Juanita gets the credit for it, but it was my idea to have a forum. I graduated from the Epworth League Institute. I was there for three summers. And there's where I met my husband, and I wanted to get out and help youth in the city. And that was my idea to have a forum once a month whereby different issues on young people would be discussed and held by youth, and they have speakers and the like. But Juanita was better qualified than I was to put over this type of thing. And so it was Juanita who we had organize the City-wide Young People's Forum. And it became a guiding light and a foundation for all these, uh—say the picketing of the Lyric Theater and the picketing of the five and ten cent stores: an outgrowth of City-wide Young People's Forum, which started at Bethel A.M.E. Church. So you can't say Bethel AME Church didn't cooperate. Oh, yes.

Graham [00:22:42] Now, I was told by someone that it was at these Young People's Forums—is that how you say it? It's at one of these meetings where you met Theodore McKeldin. Is that true?

Kiah [00:23:01] My sister would know more about that.

Graham [00:23:03] Mhm.

Kiah [00:23:03] Yes, and she'd know much more about the Young People City-wide Forum.

Graham [00:23:08] Young People City-wide Forum?

Kiah [00:23:08] She and Mama, oh my, they really pushed it.

Graham [00:23:12] Right.

Kiah [00:23:12] Yes.

Graham [00:23:12] Now, you said that's where you—

Kiah [00:23:13] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time).

Graham [00:23:13] You said that's where you met your husband, at least—Well at that—

Kiah [00:23:17] No.

Graham [00:23:19] At the—What's the "Epth-worp"—?

Kiah [00:23:21] The Epworth League Institute. A Methodist institute.

Graham [00:23:25] Epworth League Institute.

Kiah [00:23:25] A Methodist church institute that was conducted every summer at Morgan State—

Graham [00:23:28] Right.

Kiah [00:23:29] —well, it was Morgan College at the time, see. There's where I met him. It was I got a certificate of merit for my work during those three summers at the Institute. And I thought of this idea of having this forum and now I'm making it clear to you and I want it to go down in the records, because every time I turn around it's Ms. Juanita Jackson Mitchell who's idea—brainchild—it was and who started—she started it. She started it. She's the one who organized it. But it was my idea.

Graham [00:24:02] Right. To get back to your husband, in July of 1947, *The Afro* stated in one of his articles that your husband was named as superintendent to Cheltenham.

Kiah [00:24:14] That is right.

Graham [00:24:15] Now, can you—?

Kiah [00:24:17] You want me to elaborate on that.

Graham [00:24:19] Now—Yeah. In a word—

Kiah [00:24:19] They only allowed him to stay for six months. That was the—uh, what would we say? The—

Graham [00:24:29] Probationary period?

Kiah [00:24:29] Probationary period! There was so much politics at Cheltenham, which you knew about beforehand. He had been warned not to go, not to go—

Graham [00:24:42] Who had warned him?

Kiah [00:24:42] Well, so many people. They knew what went on at Cheltenham.

Graham [00:24:45] (speaking at the same time) Did your mother warn him?

Kiah [00:24:46] I can't recall Mama, whether she warned him. But I know different people warned him. And he decided that he'd just get a leave of absence from his job in Cambridge.

Graham [00:24:59] Right.

Kiah [00:24:59] Instead of just quitting his job completely—that he'd get a leave of absence and try this job. So Mr. Fauntleroy, who was the Supervisor of Schools, at the time, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, brought the papers for him to sign and so forth. He felt that he should apply for the job. So that's how it came about. He was going to accept the challenge. But, my gosh, the road was rough and rugged.

Graham [00:25:32] Mhm.

Kiah [00:25:33] They had a—you know, there were so many escapees from the school. It was a racket.

Graham [00:25:42] A racket?

Kiah [00:25:43] You get 5 dollars—Each boy who escaped and was picked up on the outside of the grounds, a person who caught the boy would get 5 dollars.

Graham [00:25:56] Oh.

Kiah [00:25:56] And, well, there'd be at least 30 or 40 who escape per month, you know?

Graham [00:26:01] Mhm.

Kiah [00:26:01] And of course, that wasn't a whole lot of money. That was a lot of money in those days—it's nothing now. But my husband broke it up. He was not popular. Now, you see, all that was planned within the school.

Graham [00:26:12] Oh, you mean some of the staff would—?

Kiah [00:26:15] That's right.

Graham [00:26:15] Oh.

Kiah [00:26:15] Right within the school. So, then he thought that Cheltenham should be a training school for boys.

Graham [00:26:24] And not a penal—

Kiah [00:26:25] Not a prison.

Graham [00:26:25] Right.

Kiah [00:26:26] Not a prison. So he started right away making changes. Some felt that maybe he should have waited until later, till after his probationary period, but he insisted on beginning then. He wanted to be honest. And he felt that he could not be a man and face up to what was going on with the political set-up within the walls of Cheltenham. So he was willing to take it.

Graham [00:26:53] Mhm.

Kiah [00:26:53] And he did. And the board was very unsympathetic. In other words (laughs), there were members on the board who would also cooperate with this chicanery.

Graham [00:27:07] Well the kickback on the—

Kiah [00:27:09] Now I better not say kickback. I don't know, actually. But the board was very unsympathetic. I'll leave it there.

Graham [00:27:14] Mhm.

Kiah [00:27:15] It's like how they gave him a time; they gave him a fit. And one of those who helped to give him a fit became one of Mama's best friends.

Graham [00:27:26] Now, who was that?

Kiah [00:27:28] Perhaps he tried to make up for— (laughs) oh, we're in _____ (??) today. I better not say. There might be repercussions. Perhaps there won't be. But he became one of Mama's best friends because he worked like the dickens, later, to cooperate with Mama in this, uh, this police, uh, you know—improving relationships between the police department and Black people in Baltimore who had been persecuted by the police.

Graham [00:28:04] But you won't mention his name?

Kiah [00:28:08] No, I will not. No, but he was a humdinger. He was a devil.

Graham [00:28:13] Uh—

Kiah [00:28:13] He was a devil.

Graham [00:28:14] Did Mr. Wilson—Edmund Wilson—Did your mother have influence on the board at Cheltenham? Did she work through any particular person, say, Edmund—?

Kiah [00:28:28] And she stayed out of it!

Graham [00:28:29] She stayed out of it?

Kiah [00:28:30] Oh, yes.

Graham [00:28:30] Until they dismissed Mr. Kiah?

Kiah [00:28:33] Oh, yes. After they dismissed him, that was a different story.

Graham [00:28:35] Then—oh yeah, then she got into it?

Kiah [00:28:38] (unintelligible; speaking at the same time) But she didn't want anybody to say that she, you know, tried to influence him or that she was trying to influence the board, anything like that—had nothing to do with it.

Graham [00:28:46] Mhm.

Kiah [00:28:46] Nothing to do with it.

Graham [00:28:47] But she did get in it after he was dismissed. In what way—?

Kiah [00:28:51] Well, I mean, as far as I know, she wanted to help to make it a new type of institution. It became Boys' Village.

Graham [00:29:02] Right.

Kiah [00:29:02] You know, the name was changed. The name was changed. Juanita can tell you more about that because we left Baltimore and went on back to—You know, he went on to get his doctorate then. He decided he wasn't going back to Cambridge. He went to get his doctorate. He went to Columbia University. And we were there for two years.

Graham [00:29:26] The Cheltenham affair is rather complex and confusing. When he was dismissed *The Afro* said it was a unanimous decision. Then later on, in another article it was—

Kiah [00:29:37] Right back there! And he found that another decision had been made. Now, I can't recall exactly what it was. You can read about it.

Graham [00:29:50] Mhm.

Kiah [00:29:50] You can read about it; it was very confusing. Cause they said that he'd done a very good job—very good job! And they came back in the same breath and dismissed him.

Graham [00:30:04] Right.

Kiah [00:30:05] That was politics. Politics. He went to town at Cheltenham.

Graham [00:30:10] Mhm. Well, according to—

Kiah [00:30:12] I was in charge of promotions. And that's when Elder Scholl—uh, no— Elder Conn (??) or Cahn (??) presented a piano to the institution or—Oh, a number of people in the community, gave to Cheltenham to encourage the boys, you know.

Graham [00:30:29] Mhm.

Kiah [00:30:29] Yes. In that six months time, that fellow did a Herculean—a gigantic job, I mean, gigantic job. Talking about my husband; I'm boasting about him now. I was right there and so I heard it right with him. He went to town and the board recommended that he continue at Cheltenham and then wasn't two or three days later, here comes another decision that he should be dismissed.

Graham [00:31:02] Right.

Kiah [00:31:02] And that man had something to do with it.

Graham [00:31:04] Who? Oh, the man who later became—

Kiah [00:31:05] (speaking at the same time) It's the man I refuse to name.

Graham [00:31:07] —later became a friend of your mother's?

Kiah [00:31:08] Yes.

Graham [00:31:18] Alright. Calvin Kiah?

Kiah [00:31:22] It's been a little time, I can't remember exactly—uh—but we were married in Ellicott City.

Graham [00:31:33] Oh.

Kiah [00:31:34] We eloped.

Graham [00:31:35] Oh, you eloped. Did your mother encourage you—I mean, your mother didn't approve of your marriage to Mr. Kiah?

Kiah [00:31:42] No.

Graham [00:31:42] Is it fair to ask why?

Kiah [00:31:45] He didn't have anything.

Graham [00:31:47] Oh, he didn't have anything.

Kiah [00:31:48] He had a wonderful heritage. His father had entered Princess Anne Academy.

Graham [00:31:51] Mhm.

Kiah [00:31:53] She thought that her treatment should weight her girls. Especially—I guess all mothers feel the same way—that their girls should be married to men who could really support them.

Graham [00:32:05] Really support them?

Kiah [00:32:08] Mhm.

Graham [00:32:08] Well he seems to have proven to be quite a worthy catch, I mean—

Kiah [00:32:13] I felt that way when I saw—when—Well, he's a son of, um, Dr. Thomas Kiah, who headed Princess Anne Academy, which became Maryland State College, for 26 years. There were eleven children. And he, of all of the children, was the only one who tried to help himself in school. He was a janitor at Morgan College. That's when I first met him. He was cleaning the grounds and taking care of the fires at Washington Hall. Of course Washington Hall I think it's been torn down. But I was impressed while I was up there attending the Epworth League Institute during the Summer of—oh, I can't even remember what—

Graham [00:33:06] Some time '35 or '36?

Kiah [00:33:06] Somewhere around 1930, no— Around 1930. Or '31. I saw him doing this work, found out who he was, and I was shocked. A fella whom I felt didn't have to do that type of thing, the son of a president or, you know, of an institution of that type, which was one of the major institutions at the time in Maryland and on the Eastern Seaboard. I felt that he had some qualities or possessed some qualities that, uh, were some I should—I might do something about it.

[00:33:49] *pause in recording*

Graham [00:33:52] So you said you were going to do something about it, and I guess doing something about it was eloping to Ellicott City.

Kiah [00:33:57] Well, that's right. That's right.

Graham [00:33:57] And I can't understand your mother being so opposed to Mr. Kiah. She seems to have been a lady who approved of people who showed some initiative and get up and go about themselves. How about your father?

Kiah [00:34:13] She didn't, uh—they both didn't know but so much about him at the time.

Graham [00:34:17] Oh, I see.

Kiah [00:34:18] And they thought that I should wait and finish school—as most parents feel—and go as far as possible in education: art education, especially. My mother wanted me to—in fact, my parents wanted me to become a supervisor _____ (??). A supervisor was about to retire. And the—

Graham [00:34:41] For colored schools?

Kiah [00:34:41] Yes, with colored schools. I can't recall her name right now, but she thought that I could take her place because I was really prepared.

Graham [00:34:51] Mhm. Was this after you had graduated from, um— (unintelligible; speaking at the same time)

Kiah [00:34:54] Oh, yes. I taught a year. I taught a year.

Graham [00:34:56] Before you got married?

Kiah [00:34:57] Before I got married.

Graham [00:34:58] Right.

Kiah [00:34:58] That's right, I taught a year.

Graham [00:35:01] Did your mother have an indication that you would be appointed to this position as a supervisor?

Kiah [00:35:06] Well, the supervisor herself was grooming me for the job.

Graham [00:35:10] Oh! Oh, I see. So, your mother—

Kiah [00:35:11] Yes, she had me to observe her and so forth, you know. She thought that I would follow her.

Graham [00:35:18] Now, I was just wondering—

Kiah [00:35:19] There were very—You see, there weren't any qualified Black art teachers at the time except, uh, Leroy—Chippy Taylor—What was his first name? Who taught art at the high school: Douglas High School. There were no other qualified people. He graduated from the same school—art school—I went to. And that's the main reason I went to the art school.

Graham [00:35:44] (speaking at the same time) And what's the name of that art school?

Kiah [00:35:44] Philadelphia Museum and School of Art on Broad and Pine Streets in Philadelphia. It is a very old school. It's now the Philadelphia College of Art. It was a very old school dating back about 1878, or somewhere in there. Uh, so that—Since my mother and father wanted me to have the best, they eventually sent me to that school. But when I came out there were no other qualified persons but myself.

Graham [00:36:19] Did Mr. Kiah encourage you in your art endeavors?

Kiah [00:36:20] See, I taught a year before I got married.

Graham [00:36:21] Right.

Kiah [00:36:22] So, you know, let me see. Uh—

Graham [00:36:25] You got married, you think, around 1932?

Kiah [00:36:27] Well, my husband was—When my husband got out of school—when he graduated from Morgan, it was difficult for him to get a teaching job because of, uh—there was a short—it was during the Depression years. He just found it hard to get a job, period, in teaching. So as a result, he got a job selling insurance policies. Uh, Southern Life Insurance Company.

Graham [00:37:01] That was headed by Williard Allen, wasn't it?

Kiah [00:37:02] (speaking at the same time) Willard Allen. It was headed by Willard Allen. He walked the streets, especially East Baltimore, trying to sell insurance policies: ten-cent insurance policies, twenty-five-cent insurance policies. Uh, the minor, there was—He didn't have a debit from someone else—established by someone, started by someone else—to build up on. He had to start from scratch. And there's where the problems came in. Some weeks we lived on a dollar and a quarter for a week.

Graham [00:37:35] Mhm. So you were married when he was selling insurance?

Kiah [00:37:38] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, Yes.

Graham [00:37:39] Well, so you stayed in Baltimore for how many years before—didn't you finally move to Cambridge? Go back to Cambridge?

Kiah [00:37:45] We went to Cambridge eventually. And we, um—but not then—he finally was offered a job in—a job offering came up: a teaching job in the counties of Maryland. Of course, most of the, uh—of those who had majored in teaching at Morgan College, wanted to stay in the city. Wanted to stay in the city. But he was willing to go out in the rural areas of Maryland. So, eventually, this teaching job opened up at Upper Marlboro, Maryland, which is about nineteen miles from Washington. We were there for two years. He taught there for two years. Then he was promoted to a principalship in Prince Frederick, Maryland. And we stayed there for about two years. And then he was promoted to Cambridge, Maryland, which was supposed to be a top job at that time.

Graham [00:38:43] When was that? Can you recall?

Kiah [00:38:47] (unintelligible).

Graham [00:38:47] (speaking at the same time) Was that the early forties? Was it the early forties that he was promoted at Cambridge? If you got married around '32, and—I think I've sort of totaled this up in my head. I think totaled it up in my head, it comes out to about early forties and when he moved to Cambridge.

Kiah [00:39:05] Perhaps so. Perhaps so. We were there for 13 years.

Graham [00:39:08] Mhm.

Kiah [00:39:08] Um, two of those years he was—Well, we had a regular established residence there for thirteen years, but nearly three of those years he was in the Army.

Graham [00:39:15] Right. But he did encourage you in your artwork?

Kiah [00:39:22] Oh, yes. I would—When we were at Cambridge, uh, he would—I would go up to New York and stay for ten days. And get orders: portrait orders. I would contact the heads or the chairman of the trustee and deacon boards of the Methodist and Baptist churches. I'd appear before those boards when I found out when they had the boards were scheduled to meet. I'd take a sample of my work or samples of my work, and then I would preach art portraits.

Graham [00:40:02] Mhm.

Kiah [00:40:02] When I received my commissions—so my deposits—I would go on back to Maryland where I would get started on the portraits and then bring them for the unveilings. Bring them back for the unveilings. Adam Powell's portrait was painted as a result of using that type of technique.

Graham [00:40:27] Mhm. Did your mother ever help you to get commissions?

Kiah [00:40:31] Oh, yes.

Graham [00:40:32] And which ones?

Kiah [00:40:32] (speaking at the same time) That was later on! Later on, when I opened up a—My mother was after me to open a studio in Baltimore, 'cause we were in Savannah then. She said that I could use one of her little stores. There's one store that had been a beauty shop wedged between the buildings 1625 and 1620—I think, it was 1623 Hill Avenue.

Graham [00:41:09] Mhm.

Kiah [00:41:11] One of her stores. Well, you know, she was in real estate and she had been in real estate for some time doing it the hard way. She'd even get up on the roofs of garages in the rears of several of the houses she owned in the 1600 block. And she would patch roofs—patch herself. She'd put on my father's pants and she did things in that fashion. Went around in a little Ford—secondhand Ford. But for years she used that as a means of economizing. Uh, now (telephone rings)—

[00:41:48] *pause in recording*

Graham [00:41:50] Mrs. Kiah, on October 14th, 1939, *The Afro* had a photograph of you unveiling the portrait of Ida Cummings, a local supporter of NAACP, and she was head of the Frances Harper Elks Temple, I think. Did your mother have anything to do with you getting that commission or how did you go about getting it?

Kiah [00:42:15] No, at that time I did all my own contacting. She helped me when I had the studio up on Druid Hill Avenue. Did we finished that?

Graham [00:42:20] Yes.

Kiah [00:42:21] The studio on Druid Hill Avenue. At least—she, uh—Well, she—I didn't pay any rent whatsoever, I just fix it up for the studio. And I for two years would commute from Savannah to Baltimore in this fashion: I'd remain for about ten days in Baltimore, get my commissions in the studio, and then I'd go on back to Savannah and paint. And I'd either come up for the unveilings or send the paintings.

Graham [00:42:56] Well, that was after your husband moved to, uh—

Kiah [00:42:58] Oh, Savannah. Yes, Savannah. Now—

Graham [00:43:00] (speaking at the same time) And that was around when?

Kiah [00:43:01] Huh?

Graham [00:43:01] That was when? When did he move back—When did you move to Savannah?

Kiah [00:43:07] You know, Mr. Graham, when you ask me about these dates I have a time because I can't—I've been married for a period of time, and it takes a little time to reflect on these dates. I can't remember offhand. I really can't. All I can say is that we were in Savannah for—in Cambridge for thirteen years and we've been in Savannah for twenty—going on twenty-six years now.

Graham [00:43:32] Mhm. Now, in that article in—of the—

Kiah [00:43:34] Now wait a minute, you asked me about my mother, if she helped me to get any orders—

Graham [00:43:37] Right.

Kiah [00:43:38] Now, we had the studio—When I had a studio on Druid Hill Avenue—I think it was 1625 and a half Druid Hill Avenue—uh, my mother would check with the ministers when they would happen to come in the NAACP office—

Graham [00:44:03] Mhm.

Kiah [00:44:03] —or my sister's. You know, this office here on Druid Hill Avenue. My sister's office.

Graham [00:44:09] Law office, right.

Kiah [00:44:10] Law office. Mama would say, "You need to have a portrait painted of yourself. You know, good and well, that they're not gonna think about you. In fact, after you're gone, ain't going to be anything up there at all unless you do it and have it done while you're living. So you might as well have your own—" What is it now? "Not wait for others to give you flowers while you're living, see that you get them yourself!" And so. "Yes, Mrs. Jackson. Alright, Mrs. Jackson. All right, Virginia. Come on, now. And when can you start on my portrait?" It would be like that, see. And that happened. You know, I got one order after the other like that.

Graham [00:44:50] Mhm.

Kiah [00:44:50] My mother would just talk like that and people—Even on the street, when we'd be walking on the street, Mom and I together on our way up to—well, I would say we'd—uh, we might be walking on up Druid Hill Avenue to the studio. She would say—Or to her—Or we're at her apartments. Her apartment houses were in the 1600 block. She had more in one block—in the 1600 block—than in any other block in the area where she had apartment houses. Uh, she would

say something on the street if she saw around a minister or anybody who she knew, period. Just stop him over on the street: "Come on. What about your portrait? Here's Virginia. She has studio."

Graham [00:45:38] Mhm.

Kiah [00:45:39] "Okay, Sister Jackson." And you know what it means, "Come on, immortalize yourself through portraits." (unintelligible) portrait orders all the time, just like that.

Graham [00:45:49] Right.

Kiah [00:45:49] Yes.

Graham [00:45:51] Getting back to that October 14th, 1939 article, it said that one of your tutors or teachers was Ralph Damon, and it said that he was a—

Kiah [00:46:03] Dumond. D-U-M-O-N-D.

Graham [00:46:06] —and it said that he was a close friend of Frederick Douglass.

Kiah [00:46:09] That is right. That is right. That is right.

Graham [00:46:10] (speaking at the same time) Now, did this influence—I would imagine your mother—Did she put you in his charge? Did your mother get Dumond for you to—

Kiah [00:46:21] Oh, no.

Graham [00:46:22] No?

Kiah [00:46:22] No. My mother is the one who caused me to go to the Art Student's League.

Graham [00:46:32] Huh.

Kiah [00:46:32] And she felt that—Well, my husband was working on his doctorate at the time and I was working on my master's, and she felt that I should also specialize in art at the Art Student's League.

Graham [00:46:46] Mhm.

Kiah [00:46:46] And, uh—

Graham [00:46:46] And that's where you met Mr. Dumond?

Kiah [00:46:48] Mhm. He was one of my instructors at the Art Student's League.

Graham [00:46:51] Right. Well, did Frederick Douglass—

Kiah [00:46:52] Now, my husband was in accord with my taking art at the time—he also was in accord with my taking art. And it was then that he took care of the expenses for the Art Student's League.

Graham [00:47:03] Mhm.

Kiah [00:47:03] For my master's degree, it's my mother, who took care of my expenses.

Graham [00:47:08] Right.

Kiah [00:47:08] Yes. Course, she felt that I should continue to speak my husband's language, at least by getting a master's degree. The males aren't in accord with the females getting in the limelight, you know.

Graham [00:47:22] Uh-huh.

Kiah [00:47:22] At least, not until this women's lib has come up. This movement has been on. And I feel it's been the natural thing and women should be in the background.

Graham [00:47:36] Right, now, that's what your mother thought? Women should be in the background?

Kiah [00:47:37] No!

Graham [00:47:37] Oh!

Kiah [00:47:39] My husband!

Graham [00:47:39] Oh!

Kiah [00:47:40] My husband! Not my mother!

Graham [00:47:41] Yeah, I was—

Kiah [00:47:42] My mother's the one who said, "Virginia, you get your master's degree so you can continue to speak your father—your husband's language. Now, of course, he'll be getting his doctorate, but you are to at least get your master's." So that's how that came about, see.

Graham [00:47:57] Right. Because I found it interesting—

Kiah [00:47:59] It's my mother, not my father—not my husband.

Graham [00:48:03] Right. I found an interesting quote that you made in 1944 about women ministers. And I was wondering if you had your mother in mind. You said that—Out of *The Afro* article on May 13, 1944, you said that, "I feel that women should be allowed the same privileges as men. As ministers, many women could do a more effective job of converting persons to the cause." Now, did you have your mother in mind when you made that statement?

Kiah [00:48:31] Yes.

Graham [00:48:31] Did your mother ever indicate she wanted to be a minister, or—?

Kiah [00:48:34] No. Well, my mother—(unintelligible) when my father showed the religious moving pictures when we traveled for seven years after I was born. Traveled over 28 states. My mother

would lecture and sing. She practically preached. She was the evangelistic type of, uh—Well, she was an evangelistic type of person. And she would practically preach and she used to say—brought converts to Christ during the moving pictures.

Graham [00:49:02] Oh, she did?

Kiah [00:49:02] Yeah, *The Life of Christ, Heaven and Hell*—let's see, *The Sermon on the Mount*. Pictures like that were shown. And my mother went, and she just—She believed in women being ministers. She did.

Graham [00:49:18] Well, why didn't she become one? If she believed so strongly, in fact. I mean, what did your mother—your mother must have had—

Kiah [00:49:25] Well, I mean, I don't think that she thought so strongly along those lines. But she had the talent, had such talent for the ministry, for speaking. She was very oratorical. Uh, my father wasn't much of a speaker. It was my mother who was. Now, I really don't think that she thought of becoming a minister of a church or anything like that.

Graham [00:49:53] Mhm.

Kiah [00:49:54] No, but using this—And she was just so full of—and fiery! Oh, she was fiery. It's just a part of her, that—Many people thought she was a minister, but she wasn't.

Graham [00:50:06] I know you have—

Kiah [00:50:07] Maybe I'm not making myself clear, or coherent, but I think that's about the best way I can put it.

Graham [00:50:13] Well, I've heard you and your sister say that she had a special sense of referring to herself as being someone who God had opened her mouth and that no man could shut it. And that she used to tell you that when—that you didn't know speaking to her children, that they didn't know who she was, but they would find out after she died. Did she have a special sense or special—

Kiah [00:50:42] "You won't know how great I am until I'm gone."

Graham [00:50:45] Right. Did she have a—

Kiah [00:50:46] That's how she used to talk.

Graham [00:50:47] Right. And did you—

Kiah [00:50:49] But during later years.

Graham [00:50:50] During later years—

Kiah [00:50:52] While she was ill, she would begin talking in that fashion. You know that when she had these strokes, a series of strokes, she began talking in that fashion.

Graham [00:51:01] But had she had a religious experience, say, in the thirties or twenties, that convinced her that she was a very special person in the sight of God? Beyond the—

Kiah [00:51:10] (speaking at the same time) No, that's a—No, no, no, no, no.

Graham [00:51:12] Mhm.

Kiah [00:51:12] She had a—What is it—She had a bone mastoid that—she had a mastoid operation.

Graham [00:51:22] Right.

Kiah [00:51:22] The bone behind the left ear had decayed and was causing poison to seep through the system. And finally, she couldn't stand the pain any longer. She was treated for neuralgia for about six months by a local physician. And When she could no longer stand the pain she went to John Hopkins Hospital. They operated on her the next day. They said a day if she'd waited a day later, she would have died.

Graham [00:51:57] Right.

Kiah [00:51:57] Now, she felt that God had saved her life. And she promised God, if he let her live after that operation or during that operation, if he'd let her continue to live, she would devote her life—the rest of her life to his service.

Graham [00:52:22] Right.

Kiah [00:52:22] That's how that came about.

Graham [00:52:24] Did did your mother approve of the other marriages made by your sisters? To Clarence Mitchell and Karl Downs.

Kiah [00:52:30] (speaking at the same time) Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was the only one who bolted the fence.

Graham [00:52:34] Uh-huh.

Kiah [00:52:35] I believed that my husband possessed—I mean, this young man possessed qualities. Such unusual qualities. I felt that, uh, that I should marry him, you know? That he was the one. He was the one. I was in love with him. He was the one. So I bolted the family and we went to live for ourselves. A room—We, uh—I don't see how in the world we made it, but we did. During Depression years, of course, everything was much cheaper. But golly, I'm (unintelligible) to think he only would get some weeks for—a dollar and a quarter a week from selling insurance and some five dollars a week. We managed to rent a room and use the kitchen and buy food to exist.

Graham [00:53:21] Do you mean to say your mother ostracized you, or what?

Kiah [00:53:23] Oh, no.

Graham [00:53:24] She just didn't support you.

Kiah [00:53:25] Oh, no. No, no. Well, we went and left, and we determined we'd step out for ourselves. And refused any help.

Graham [00:53:31] Oh, refused help!

Kiah [00:53:32] Refused any assistance.

Graham [00:53:33] Did she offer to give you—

Kiah [00:53:35] Wanted to show what we could do.

Graham [00:53:36] Did she offer to give you any help?

Kiah [00:53:37] Oh, yes.

Graham [00:53:38] Oh.

Kiah [00:53:39] Why she got us in an apartment there when we first got married—one of her apartments. You know, parents—typical parents, they feel they know and you don't know. Mama would come in and change furniture all around and so forth. And so then we finally decided we'd go out and decorate a place for ourselves.

Graham [00:53:58] Oh, oh.

Kiah [00:53:58] That's how that came about, yes.

Graham [00:53:58] Now your husband—

Kiah [00:54:01] She didn't mean any harm, now remember, but the typical parent—After all, we were young and we hadn't had the experience. I had a background in art and I felt that I knew something about fixing up apartments and the like. But, you know, typical parents.

Graham [00:54:18] Mhm.

Kiah [00:54:18] We didn't have the experience that she had. She should help us in that fashion. Oh, yes, when we were eight year—around eight and nine, Juanita took around six and a half or seven—I must have been eight. That's, uh—Maybe a little earlier, Papa taught us how to make bread, biscuits, and rolls. He did most of the cooking. He let my mother rest because she was the star attraction of the moving pictures, the shows, you know. She would do this lecturing and singing. It was pretty hard on her, so in the mornings—or he would let her rest while he did the cooking. See, they were a team. That's how they work together.

Graham [00:54:58] Yeah, I understand that this is how—

Kiah [00:55:00] But he taught us to cook. And we learned to cook at very early ages. We did. So I definitely knew how to cook when I got married. My gosh, I could cook everything practically.

Graham [00:55:11] Right. Now—

Kiah [00:55:15] As far as everyday cooking is concerned, not all fancy stuff.

Graham [00:55:18] Mhm. Did you ever get to—Well, I guess you did know Mr. Downs. He seems to have been a quite remarkable man. Can you characterize him in a few words?

Kiah [00:55:30] I don't know much about—See, I was away from, uh—I was away from Baltimore for quite a period of time, and I don't know much about the other two sisters and so forth. I went out for myself and that's when I went out for ourselves. And I couldn't give you much of a background on them. They would have to do that themselves. Juanita, now Juanita could do it.

Graham [00:55:47] Right.

Kiah [00:55:47] She'd know much more about it.

Graham [00:55:52] Now, you unveiled the portrait of Mrs. McLeod Bethune—

Kiah [00:55:59] McLeod Bethune. That is (unintelligible speaking at the same time).

Graham [00:56:00] In the—

Kiah [00:56:00] Department of Labor.

Graham [00:56:00] Right, on October—

Kiah [00:56:01] Now don't dare asked me for the date.

Graham [00:56:03] October 1940. I have a date right here.

Kiah [00:56:06] (speaking at the same time) Wonderful. Wonderful.

Graham [00:56:06] Now, did your mother help you to secure that commission or—?

Kiah [00:56:08] No.

Graham [00:56:08] Where'd it—

Kiah [00:56:09] I was out on my own.

Graham [00:56:10] Oh, you—So you really—

Kiah [00:56:11] Oh, yes. I told you, I went back and forth to New York to get orders and the like. And I contacted also Mrs. Bethune about her portraits being painted. But nobody helped (unintelligible).

Graham [00:56:22] But I guess your mother—She was aware that you were the daughter of Lillie Mae Jackson.

Kiah [00:56:26] Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Graham [00:56:26] Oh, so indeed your mother's name—

Kiah [00:56:28] (speaking at the same time) Oh, yes, of course. Oh, yes, surely. Oh, yes.

Graham [00:56:28] (speaking at the same time) So indeed your mother's name did give you entree into some place. Yeah.

Kiah [00:56:33] She knew that I was Lillie Mae Carrol Jackson's daughter.

Graham [00:56:37] Alright.

Kiah [00:56:37] And she knew of course that I was Juanita Jackson Mitchell's sister.

Graham [00:56:41] Right.

Kiah [00:56:41] Juanita Jackson Mitchell used to be her ghostwriter.

Graham [00:56:44] Her ghostwriter?

Kiah [00:56:45] Yeah, one of her ghostwriters.

Graham [00:56:46] And for what magazine or newspaper?

Kiah [00:56:50] You'll have to (unintelligible). Maybe Juanita doesn't want me to talk about that. You let Juanita talk about that.

Graham [00:56:56] Uh-huh.

Kiah [00:56:58] I'm never sure that she was (unintelligible) Mary McLeod (unintelligible) ghostwriters.

Graham [00:57:04] Uh-huh. Well, were your mother and Mrs. Bethune close friends? Or do you—I guess—

Kiah [00:57:10] Juanita! Juanita. Juanita and Mrs. Bethune were close friends. Used to call Juanita "the girl from the Golden West" with affection. The affection—That's when Juanita and Mitchell were out there in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Graham [00:57:24] Right.

Kiah [00:57:25] He was an executive secretary of the Urban League at the time.

Graham [00:57:29] Did your mother ever—Well, you can't comment on your mum's relationship with Mrs. Bethune at all? Do you have any way of characterizing it for us?

Kiah [00:57:37] You see, I had Mary McLeod Bethune over at one of the NAACP mass meetings. I was promotional secretary at that time.

Graham [00:57:46] Mhm.

Kiah [00:57:47] And she wasn't able to appear during the month of February. It was packed and jammed on the inside and outside. I have to admit myself, I'm a crackerjack promotional agent.

Graham [00:57:56] Right.

Kiah [00:57:57] I can promote and not have the jam in the streets all around there. She couldn't come, she disappointed us, but she came the next month when Dr. Mordecai Johnson was our guest speaker.

Graham [00:58:09] Mhm.

Kiah [00:58:09] Also had Mrs. Roosevelt to appear as a guest speaker at one of mass meetings. But of course, when I made my contacts, they knew, definitely, that I was the sister of Juanita Mitchell and, of course, Lillie Jackson's daughter.

Graham [00:58:27] Right.

Kiah [00:58:27] Yes.

Graham [00:58:34] Um. Okay, uh—

Kiah [00:58:34] You know, the membership was practically doubled when I was membership secretary of the Baltimore branch NAACP and finally promotional secretary.

Graham [00:58:42] Right. Did—

Kiah [00:58:44] Used to even get down there—the longshoreman union's meetings—and used to be a soapbox speaker. Used to get on the streets and preach NAACP.

Graham [00:58:53] Right. And then there was an article in *The Afro* in January of 1944 which said that your first meeting as promotional—as a membership secretary was quite successful. You drew a capacity crowd at Sharp Street. You had Ollie Stewart, who was *The Afro* war correspondent, and—Was that 1944? The year you became involved in branch activities in Baltimore, was it? Or did you start in—

Kiah [00:59:17] You know, you deal in dates, which is very important, but I am not very good on dates. You would have to check on that yourself because I can't recall. I really can't recall.

[00:59:27] *end of recording*