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ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

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Signature of Interviewee:

*Mary R. Berlin*

Name: Ms. Mary Berlin

Address:

~~1821 Newson Station Rd~~ 8509 Newson Station Rd  
Nashville, Tennessee  
37221

Name of Interviewer: Dana Daniels & Sarah Zehringer

Special Restrictions:

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ORAL HISTORY DATA SHEET (to be turned in with tapes & transcript)

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Berlin

ADDRESS: 8509 Newson Station Rd.  
Nashville, Tennessee 37221

DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 4, 2000

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: phone interview

INTERVIEWER/S: Dana Daniels & Sarah Zehringer

TOPICS COVERED: Longwood's involvement in efforts to help the community in the late 60's, early 70's

NUMBER OF TAPES: 1 - side A & B

Sarah Zehringer and Dana Daniels/ Interview with Ms. Mary Berlin

Please state your full name. *Mary Regina Berlin*

Will you state your <sup>age</sup> ~~name~~ for us please? *48*

What was the timeframe in which you attended Longwood? *1969-1973*

And what was your major? *Psychology*

Oh wow. *What?* That always throws me because I'm not a mental person, I'm hands-on.

What dormitory did you live in on campus?

*Well, I lived in several. I lived, let's see, hold on, let me think. I came to the summer school session before my freshmen year, and that summer I lived in...there are 2 that are identical that are set back and they border that street that Reverend Griffin's house is on...let's see....*

Was it Cox or Wheeler?

*Yes, yes, I think it was Wheeler that I lived in then. And then my freshmen year, I lived in Cunningham, South Cunningham.*

That's where we live now.

*Oh my gosh. And then I also....sophomore year is a little blurry...I don't know, but anyway, I ended up living in Curry the last couple of years.*

Was that a new building?

*Oh yes, oh it was new and we just thought it was the greatest. Everything else was kind of circa 1930. And then Frazier was built, and that was just really neat. And I had some friends that were, what was that sorority, they were in a sorority that lived on the second floor of Curry, DZs. And so I wasn't in a sorority but they let me live in their little suite. Anyway, so that was kind of fun.*

What organizations were you involved in on campus?

I really wasn't. I was, and I may be telling you more than you're interested in, but I felt a little odd coming there because I felt pretty different than most of the people there. I had gone to school, grown up in Mclain, Virginia, which was northern Virginia and I came down there and everybody was an elementary ed major and they went home on the weekends.

Very little has changed now.

Oh really? And I felt kind of out of step there because I had...I was going to major in psychology and I didn't go home on the weekends and I really wasn't in to that whole sorority scene. I guess I just quickly took an alternative kind of place at the school I think. So I wasn't involved in pretty much anything on campus. Most of my activity was off campus.

Was Longwood your first choice?

No, I don't think it was. I had applied to....but my dad wanted me to go there. He had dated this woman who's husband was a professor there, a psychology professor and he just kind of wanted me to go there and I just followed his wishes.

From your perspective, what was the sentiment of Longwood students towards what had occurred and what was occurring in the community?

Oh, I do not have any sense that anybody really knew anything about what was going on in the community, or that they were interested. Now I could be wrong, but that wasn't something that people talked about. LWC was a very insulated, insular community that was very focused on making the girls, the Longwood girls happy and not experiencing any difficulty. It was much more structured when we were there, you couldn't wear pants, you could only wear skirts. In the dining hall you had to wear skirts and freshmen had to wear these little beanies. And it was very sorority focused and they had all that stuff about CHI which I didn't understand, it seemed like the Ku Klux Klan to me. So there really wasn't much interaction at

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*all with the community. The first summer I was there, that summer through a woman that was pretty wild and crazy on my floor, I came in contact with Burl Robinson, do you know him? He was supposed to speak to your class. He was the teacher that got fired.*

Yea, I don't think that he's been there yet, I think he's speaking to us in a couple of weeks.

*Well, I got involved with him and that's how I got to meet him and met his brother who I later married and I got to know them, what they were doing in the community, met rev Griffin, do you know who he is?*

Yea, we know who he is.

*And just got involved in what was going on in the community and in the community outside of Hampton Sidney out there and some of the things that were going on.*

Where there any black students who attended Longwood at the time that you went here and if so, how were they treated and how did they participate in the community?

*There was one, the first black student came when...my freshman year. There were some of us who kind of bonded that summer. Myself, Sally Walk, was my roommate. She was the woman that dated Alfonso White, who was the first black student at Hampton Sidney. And then there was another woman named Beverly Ham, she was the woman that was kind of wild and crazy that I told you about and the three of us had gotten to be good friends, had gotten to know Burl Robinson and other folks out in the HS community. The first black student was Mary Jane Booker, and she came and they put her as a roommate...they set her up with Beth Ham, which was real interesting to me, because Beth Hamm, although she was kind of alternative and on the edge a little bit, she was pretty intolerant of Mary Jane. Mary Jane was a real country girl. And really this was her...she talked a lot and she was just really overwhelmed*

*with coming to Longwood. She was from Amelia and it was a real stretch for her being there. So anyway, she was the first and while I was there the only.*

How was she treated by her classmates, other than her roommate?

*Probably more tolerated than anything else. She was kind of an oddity and she was very gregarious and outgoing and friendly. So I think she was treated a little bit like an unusual person but she was the token black person there.*

You've already talked a little bit about being involved with what was going on outside of Longwood and what was going on outside Hampton Sidney. Can you elaborate on that more specifically?

*I'm sorry, what was the last thing you said?*

Just more specifically?

*Yes, let's see. I got involved in a tutoring program. There had been one that had been started a little bit before but there was nothing formal. Gail Robinson, what was her maiden name? She would be a great person for you to talk to. Gail Evans was her maiden name. I had gotten to know her because she was friends with Burwell as well and they later got married. She had been involved in a tutoring program. She was a senior when I was a freshman. But I went and somehow I don't know quite how this came together, but I went down and met with the new superintendent of schools down at the courthouse...I think that's where his office was. And asked him if I could come into the schools and do some tutoring and he said yes. And so I started going down to what was then called Mary Branch elementary school, which was actually Motion High school, the original Motion High school, but they had turned it into an elementary school. Do you know which one I'm talking about? The one that's there on the corner as you're going out to Hampton Sidney?*

Yes, yes.

*At that time, as I said, it was Mary Branch elementary. And there was a woman that had, maybe it was a second or third grade class and her name was Mrs. Fowls. And her first name was Flossie, Flossie Fowles. And she was just, she was probably 55, in her fifties somewhere and she was just a wonderful teacher. And she had these kids in this huge classroom and I would come in a couple times a week and just kind of float around and coach and help some of the kids and they were just charming. And I became really close to some of them, one of them in particular whose name was Minnie. I don't remember Minnie's last name. But Minnie, and then there were a couple boys that I got to be real good friends with and I remember one day in particular. Minnie would come over with her little sister and come visit me in the dorm which was really courageous for her because that wasn't known territory to these kids and they were just little. And she'd come up and visit me in the dorm and leave me notes. In fact, I probably have one somewhere. It was written down in broken English and she'd sign it your friend Minnie. And I remember going to see her at her house and there was this area of town that was really—it was back behind...you know where Rev. Griffin's Church is? First Baptist?*

Yes. Yes.

*There's a big parking lot there and then there's a string of stores behind there. It used to be a grocery store. Now, I think it's, the last time I was in Farmville, I think it's a gym or something on one side of it.*

Yep.

*But anyway behind there was a whole kind of like an area where black people lived and it was real poor. Dirt streets, kind of shanty houses on either side of it. And I remember so clearly*

*one day walking down there and I was in my white gym suit. We had these little gym outfits that looked like little pinafores of something. And just walking down that street and feeling like such a stranger. Just like everyone was watching me walk down that street like who is this girl. And I was going to find Minnie and her house and she came out and she was just real happy to see me. She was a real kind of bright spirit. She wasn't impacted by the kind of poverty that she lived in. And then the other experience I remember is too some of the little boys used to come visit me over in South Cunningham and oh they were so, it just took a lot of guts to do that; and I remember at that time, it may be different now, you had kind of sitting rooms downstairs they were like parlors where you could have guests because boys couldn't come upstairs. And the house mother would say, would call up on the floor and say so and so, in this case Mary Berlin, you have a caller. And that's how they would say it, is that the way they still do it?*

No. No. They got rid of those sitting rooms. Now we just have like lounges.

*Ok.*

We have to sign in guests, but they don't differentiate between males and females.

*Ok. Well if it was male, they would say Mary Berlin you have a caller. So they would come over and visit me and I remember coming down and the little parlors were all decked out with little broqueted wingback chairs. And there were two little black boys sitting in one of the wingbacked chairs together and their feet didn't touch the ground and their legs were just swingin' and their eyes were just as big as saucers. And they had come over to visit, and they would come periodically, but that first time was just a real big thing. And I was always, I could tell, but nothing that she said, but my house mother whose name was Miss...what was*

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*her name...I'm not sure she was too excited about this, this thing that had happened that I was having little black children come over and visit me from the community.*

When you were in the schools how many white children would you estimate...

*were in the schools?...*

were in the classroom?

*Oh there weren't any. None at all. It was all black children and they were just really early stages of reading and they had a lot of problems and limited resources and the classrooms were cold, and it was just... I remember the last day I was there I came in to stop by to say Hello, Goodbye actually. And they had this performance that they had prepared for me to say goodbye and had given me a gift...I don't remember what it was...but it really caught me by surprise. And they were real appreciative of the time that I'd spent there. Then the other things that happened out in the community were more out in Hampton Sydney and that was, in that year, I think it was my junior and senior year, a group of Vista Volunteers had moved into the community and several of us who were more of the kind of odd folks at Longwood at the time would go out and get involved in different community projects...and one of the things the Vista Volunteers did would be to assign students, a few from Longwood, and mostly from Hampton Sydney, they would pair up a Hampton Sydney student and a Longwood student and there were very few of us...and they would assign us to a family out in the community that was in need out there...and it was certainly as much of an education for us as it was for them...and the guy that I got paired with was a friend of mine, and I can give you his name to call too if you want to, his name was Brian Grogin...and he and I were assigned a family and I can't remember the family's name, but he probably would...and we would go out there and spend time with this family...and it was a grandmother, a mother and three children, and they*

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*lived in the real small, very rundown community...the grandmother was sick but clearly the matriarch and head of the family...one of the children was retarded...and we would do some kind of visiting and coaching and come out and talk with them and spend some time in their house...and we'd help them burn out there fields before the planting season to just help them get their fields ready and just help them in any way that we could.*

That's awesome.

*Yeah.*

Did you guys, the work you did in the community, was that through Longwood or was that individually?

*Uh, huh. Oh no. Uh, uh.*

Because we heard stories about how after the free school opened how Hampton Sydney students were allowed to go work in the public schools but Longwood students weren't because they had a fear that the women would be molested or whatever.

*Oh I'm sure. You know there was never anything ever formally said to me but you know I kept a lot of what I did under wrap...and I remember being called into the Dean's office, and she would never, I don't know it was really strange, she would never say anything specific, but she would say you know you know people kind of watch are watching you and they're saying things about you like you are taking drugs and if people were saying things like that about me I would certainly want to know...and it was kind of like all these kind of vague references...so it was really rather odd*

Were there any organized efforts put forth by the College to help the community...like for example I know we have a volunteer program that's on-campus, was there anything like that that would allow students to go out in an organized effort to help the community?

No all the student teaching was done in the lab school. The lab school was there was constructed. And you know it was just always so appalling to me that here and so people did their student teaching or practice teaching or whatever they were doing here in the lab schools...and here were these you know communities and public schools that were tremendously in need as well as students who were out in the community who had lost four years of their education...and you know nobody was out there...it was really, the community and the schools and the Prince Edward County was totally invisible in my experience to the Longwood campus...now I did have a Sociology professor whose name was Byrd. B-Y-R-D. And he was really neat...what was his first name I can't remember...but he and I got to be friends...and he was really very alternative and very interesting and we had lots of conversations but I don't think he had any formal projects out there at all but he certainly had an awareness and he had gotten to be friends with Reverend Griffin. Rev. Griffin was just an amazing person. I would go to church there a lot and Burwell Robinson and George Robinson were very close to him...and we would go down to his office and he would talk about what was going on and talk about the free schools and Bobby Kennedy...and when Bobby Kennedy spoke and came into the community and did work and it was just fascinating...and I didn't know that he was the one that took the case to the Supreme Court...and I remember sitting in history class the first summer that I was there and looking in my history book and it said "L. Francis Griffin vs. the Prince Edward Board of Education" and I thought then I made the connection...I thought "Oh my God!"...is this telling you what you want...give me some feedback I'm not sure if...

This is fascinating like we, we've been really in the dark about any Longwood participation...we've heard that Longwood was really closeted in...and it's still that way

now...but it's embarrassing that there's no history of Longwood participation whatsoever in the community.

*No, uh, uh. Not at all. Now you mentioned that you had talked to Dean Wells? Now I didn't know her, but that was a person that I vaguely thought was more open-minded. It was very provincial there.*

Uh huh.

*It was very provincial...it was...you have to understand that this was like the beginning of the 70's...and I and a few other people were getting into more kind of alternative peace kind of stuff but that was just real not the norm at Longwood at all...*

I was just going to ask you, Prince Edward Academy, what were the feeling of Longwood students toward that and your personal feelings and were there student teachers there?

*I can't remember if student teachers were there or not. I would think not, but I'm not sure.*

*That would be a real good thing to find out...I'm sure they have records somewhere of what the what the student teacher placements were...but usually they were in public schools...and I just remember...I was one of the few people who didn't do student teaching...I mean I...that just wasn't a direction I was interested in going...but most of the people that I did...even if they majored in history they did student teaching...or anything they majored in they did student teaching...and often that was it seemed to be that they would go some place like Richmond or something to do their student teaching.*

OK.

*Has anybody researched that, in terms of where the student teaching placements were?*

I don't know if that's been researched yet, this is still a really new class, this is only like the third year it's been offered, so we're still doing a lot of research ourselves, we're interviewing people

that have never been interviewed before, so but we'll definitely check into that and suggest that that be checked because we can do that...we can check with Fuqua now and check their records and see what kind of student teachers were there.

*Yeah...that would be fascinating.*

Yep. Alright. Switching gears just a little bit, do you know what, how like the white power structure viewed Longwood? And what the black sentiment toward Longwood was? Like I know there were two distinct groups in Prince Edward at that time and I would assume that the white power structure would have been happy that Longwood was staying out of it, but I can't be sure. I, I didn't know if you had any thoughts about that.

*I just think that Longwood was not was just not a factor. I mean the idea that any students would be involved or have any interest...I mean we were referred to as Longwood Ladies and that was just out of the definition of what they were there to do...and let's see who was the President of the College there then Willett was...and he was in my memory...I know I had a friend that worked on the newspaper named Ethyl Ryder and she was always kind of writing editorials that criticized Willett and that would just drive him crazy and he would have her come into his office...and as I remember the thought about him was that he was always losing his temper...had a real short fuse...and that's pretty intolerant of any just kind of challenge in any way...and so Ethyl used to get under his skin big time...*

How did the professors feel about the community situation, what had happened, was it talked about?

*The awe of, it was talked about some...let's see...that psychology professor, Dr. DeWitt, who was a friend of my father's, he and I would talk about it some...and you know he would express dismay and just disgust about it...he was from New York so we kind of felt some kind*

*of understanding about you know the South and just having another perspective about some of the mores that existed there...and he was very supportive of me and would say things like you know you just have a different world to you and clearly a different experience and educational experience prior to coming here...and he would talk about the community some but I never got a sense that people were particularly involved in it...the only professor I got that thought from was another psychology professor I had Phyllis Wacker and she was her husband was the coach at Hampton Sydney...so she was more kind of integrated in this community...I had an anthropology professor that I don't know what her involvement was in the community but she seemed to be, what was her name?, Christo, Mary Christo, and she seemed to be more kind of tuned into the world and what was going on.*

OK, what did you know about the situation here if anything before you got to Longwood and then once you got here? Like how did you find out about what had happened in the community-- about the schools closing?

*OK. I did not know about it before...let's see...well, in high school, I mean not specifically what had happened in Prince Edward County...but in high school, the high school that I went to in Fairfax County, VA was very progressive and we had black history as one of the classes that we could elect to take...and so I had taken a black history class...and also taken a very interesting American civilization class...so I had some background in just what had happened in terms of the Civil Rights Movement in the sense of black history and some of the struggles that had gone on...so I came to Longwood with an awareness of what black history was and some of the struggles, but I had not associated what had gone on with that particular community...but as I said early on that summer I met Rev. Griffin, Burwell Robinson, George Robinson who were very active in the community and who were running the neighborhood*

*youth core programs, which was part of the LBJ Great Society Programs and they were federally funded...and so that's when I kind of had a sense of what was going on and the whole Civil Rights Movement and I certainly was educated by Burwell and George about that...and met some of the black kids in the community...Blue Morton was one of them who had been one of the victims of the school closings and met some of the community leaders...and just got to know just very informally by happenstance not by anything formal is what I'm trying to say about the community's history and what had gone on.*

Did you talk to you parents at all about what was going on when you were here and like how did they feel, what were their opinions about you being here in the midst of some turmoil?

*That's a good question. My father had grown up in Richmond, VA and was not the most liberal of people and so I talked to him some but he was never encouraging...in fact I just had a conversation with him last summer and asked him...because I had come back to...no this past fall were you involved in the symposium that they had out at Hampton Sydney in the fall.*

No we weren't involved in that.

*You were?*

No we weren't. We weren't really aware of that.

*See that to me is just amazing.*

It's still almost identical. I mean we don't get out...I mean the Longwood students are not aware of what goes on in the community and the community has no idea what goes on at Longwood...it's still very much it's own entity.

*Because that was the most incredible experience out there. And it was in...there were...it was required by some of the students out there...it's such...it's such a travesty cause they had people talking that had been students they had Rev. Griffin's son there talking about his*

*experience growing up...Burwell Robinson spoke...it was incredible...and so I had come for that just to revisit all that and also had gone to see my father after that and ask him what he remembered...just I was asking him some things about my growing up and he said you know I really was not in favor of any of those things that you did when you were in college...and so it was...I often wonder how I kind of maintained you know my interest in doing it cause I didn't get a whole lot of external support but then again it was at a time I was kind of doing the rebellious thing so it appealed to me.*

OK. Ms. Berlin, can you tell us about what you of Hampton Sydney's role in the efforts to help the community?

*It seemed like to me they were always at Hampton Sydney. Hampton Sydney wasn't quite as structured as Longwood. Longwood was so structured...you know...policies and procedures and when you could eat and what you had to wear...you know rules, rules, rules, rules, rules...and very confining...and to me and it maybe just at that time the nature of a boy's men's college they didn't seem to be as structured and there also seemed to be a number of professors particularly several...Ron Heinaman who was a History professor that was very involved in the community...and professors wives that were involved in the community and there seemed to be more of the connection there...although I don't think it was formal connections by any means...but they seemed...there seemed to be more students out there...guys that were involved in community things and when the Vista Volunteer Program came...there were Vista Volunteers involved.*

**TAPE SIDE B**

OK. Will you tell us about this project again?

*Yeah. I think that they were organized out of Hampton Sydney. I could be wrong. But they were projects that we did on Saturday and there were painting projects...and we would go to some of these...OH Golly...it's embarrassing now to think about it because it was such a white honkey thing to do...you know going into these old, very old, rundown kind of shanties and white washing them. You know we'd come in on Saturdays, these college students and as I remember, most of them were from Hampton Sydney and we would paint the houses, inside and out and kind of paint over things. And it was kind of, kind of quickly done in and out...but that's a memory that I have of a project that was organized out at Hampton Sydney...that may have been a fraternity kind of thing, I don't know, or it may have been some kind of a, some kind of social service organization out there.*

That's interesting cause we've kind of gotten the idea that Hampton Sydney was more involved, but we haven't been able to hear any stories or talk to any students from Hampton Sydney yet.

*Oh OK. So. That would be something definitely to do. Brian Grogin would be a good person to talk to. He was out there at the same time I was, and he can give you names of other people too.*

Are there any interesting stories that you know that would benefit our archive that we're making?

*Other than the ones I've told you, I'm trying to think.*

Well, while you're thinking, I have a question. Although you said that Longwood probably wasn't your first choice, did you enjoy it here?

*There were parts of it that I did enjoy that were very enriching. I got a, I feel like I got a real good foundation in psychology and part of that was because I took classes at Hampton Sydney as well as Longwood. I don't know how it happened that I did that. I kind of self-selected, but*

I think it was the year that I was there they began to offer, or make available some classes at Hampton Sydney, so what I did was kind of look at the curriculum and pick up over at Hampton Sydney what I wasn't getting at Longwood in terms of psychology. And I also took some French classes out there. So, I enjoyed that and I was really challenged by some of the classes that I took out there and they were interesting. And, and I was challenged by some of the psychology classes I took at Longwood. And you know certainly this other aspect of civil rights, being involved in the community, doing stuff, the tutoring program were very enriching experiences for me. If I hadn't done those, I think I would have been very disappointed. It was kind of a strange experience, it was kind of depressing sometimes because the campus would just empty out on the weekends. It would literally empty out and unless you were a PE major or an education major, you were in the minority, and you were kind of left to your own devices.

It's still very much that...

*that way...*

Yeah PE and education majors abound here...

*Wow!...*

so if you're not in the teaching program people kind of look at you like you're from another planet...

*YEAH!...*

But I have to admit that our business school is coming along though... OH really... We're very well-known for our business school right now in Virginia; we've just gotten accredited last year, and so I think we're coming around. Our social work program's just been accredited, so we're getting there. We're branching out.

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*Yeah well that's wonderful, that's really great. I don't remember any stories right off, any other stories. But I'll, you know, I didn't have time to think about this last night. But if you give me your number, I will, kind of think about it and see if I can come up with anything and I'd be happy to call you back.*

Ok, do you have a... *YEAH... OK (804) 395 395 3402...and whose number is that...that's Dana and I's room...that's our room on campus...OK...we're roommates...Alright...so it makes it a little bit easier...*

*OK that's great...well do you want me to give you Brian Grogan's number...sure that would be great...Hampton Sydney student...OK...ahh...let's see...his phone number...and he's in California in Yosimite...is (209) OK 379 Alright 2802 2802...and do you do e-mail do you want his e-mail address...if you have it that's great...OK...hold on just a minute. It is*

*Grogan@inreach.com OK will you spell his last name for us. Yes, G as in George, R-O-G-A-N.*

*OK. OK. Thank you. He would love to talk to you.*

That's awesome. Every year you know we look for more people that can help us expound you know the archives. Cause a lot of the people who were students and teachers when the schools closed are now getting older and it's harder for them to come and talk to us.

*You know I can give you one other name, she's remarried, but Gail Robinson was a student at Longwood and she is, oh she helped start one of the programs. She did lots of work in the community. I bet she'd talk to you. She would be a great person to interview and would have even more stories than I did. OK so that was Gail Robinson and she was Gail Evans when she was a student here, right? Right. Let me give you her number. It is, this is her old number. She got married this summer and moved to Mechanicsville, but I can give you her old number and that might give you her new number. OK. And I can also give you her new address. OK.*

*Her number is (804) or it was (804) 553 553 8264 8264 and that was her old number? Yeah and her new address which you might be able just to get her is 7467 OK Rural Point Court, Rural Point Court, and that's Mechanicsville, alright, 23116. OK. And you know worst case you could write her and tell her to contact you.*

Well, thank you. Ms. Berlin, I have a question for you. Do you still keep in touch with all of these people and do you feel like it's because you were involved in the community with these people?

*Oh absolutely. Absolutely, I feel that's a real bond that we have, and I do keep in touch with them, and I value their relationships a lot.*

I know, I think, it was in 94, they had a big 40-year reunion. Did you come back to that, or did you know about that?

*You know my connections that I feel are not to the school as much as they are to the community, and the people, the friends there. I just never you know, that's not where I ever wanted to send money for alum. I probably shouldn't be saying this to ya'll. But you know I didn't feel that much connection to the school, I felt it more toward the community and the people I worked with in the community. OK. Listen let me give you one more person's name.*

*OK. Cause she was a social work major and she was also one of my roommates. And she may have some things too and have done things that I don't know about. Her name is Margaret Terrell. Her name then was Terrell, and now her name is Gillespie. And her number is (703) 297-5016. Alright. And she's in Huddleston, VA. And this was your roommate? Yeah.*

*OK. And she'd be great to talk to. OK. OK? And you don't think these people would mind us calling and talking to them? No, they'd love it. OK, great! Thank you. And you can tell them*

*that I told you to call. OK. OK? We'll do that. Alright. Thank you so much for your time.*

*Good luck! Thanks. You're welcome! Bye! Bye!*

*Sarah K. Zehringer  
Dana N. Daniels*