



Cultivating Common Ground

Transcript Details

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- ▣ **Interviewer :** Gathier, Jasmine
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Abstract

Hassie Ervin was raised in Greenwood, SC on her parents' farm. Her mother died when she was 10 and her father died when she was 16. Her older brother then moved her to Charlotte. After she married, she stayed in Charlotte, living in the Southside and then Wilmore neighborhoods. She describes her childhood, early gardening experiences and how she worked with her family on their farm. Since her father always kept livestock and grew vegetables, her family always had plenty to eat, and consequently was not affected by the Great Depression. She shares some of her favorite vegetables to grow.

About the Interviewee

- ▣ **Sex:** Female
- ▣ **Agerange:** 65-84
- ▣ **Place of Birth:** US--SC--Greenwood County--Greenwood
- ▣ **Native Language:** English
- ▣ **Languages Known:** English
- ▣ **Residence:** US--NC--Mecklenburg County--Charlotte--Wilmore

Transcript

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»IB (Ivica Bilich): changes when Jasmine's asking questions. Size once. OK?

»JB (Jane Blotnick): OK. You talk loud 'cause the mic's over there.

»JG (Jasmine Gaither): This is Jasmine Gathier. It is January 10, 2002. I am interviewing Ms. Hassie Ervin at her home for Cultivating Common Ground. Please take your time and say with us as much information as possible about, about the following questions. OK. We'll start with some questions about your childhood, childhood years. What is your full name?

»HE (Hassie Roulette Williams Ervin): Hassie Roulette Ervin, Williams Ervin.

»JG: Where were you born?

»HE: Greenwood, South Carolina.

»JG: Can you talk for a few minutes about the community where you grew up? Take your time to describe what it was like and how it, how it was rural.

»HE: Well, I grew up, my mother and father had a farm. I lived on a farm with my sisters and brothers, which I have four sisters and three brothers. And my mother passed when I was about ten years old and I lived with my father and my sisters and brothers. And my father passed, I was about sixteen. Then, my brother taken us. One of my brothers brought us to Charlotte, and that's where I lived with my brother until I married. And then I was living here in Charlotte for the past, I can't say how many years [laughter] and I've been with the Wilmore section for about twenty years, which I've been with the garden about three--, four years.

»JG: OK. Tell us about the house you grew up in and how its different from the house you live in today.

»HE: In the farm we had--. We all lived on about four rows, on a farm which I kept on the farm, with my father and mother. We grew cotton, corn, wheat, potatoes, and we had a garden, potatoes, peanuts, cabbage, collards. In a row we had chickens. And I helped on the farm and after my mother passed I had to do all the housework which was four, I had four sisters younger than I am, my brothers was all older. [pause] And which--.

»JB: Can you answer this one? Number seven.

»JG: OK. Tell us about your father, the kind of work he did, the things he taught you and what you remember most about him.

»HE: Well, all I remember that he's a farmer and he grew up our, grew our vegetables and on Saturdays we'd take some vegetables to town and sell them.

»JG: Tell us about your mother. Did she work outside the home? Things she taught you and what you remember most about her.

»HE: No, I was kind of young when my mother passed, but I do remember her baking cookies. [laughter] And, well after she grew up, my father taught me, I guess, more cooking than my mother did.

»JG: Where did you stay and what kind of chores did you do when you were growing up? Can you talk about, can you talk about that for a few minutes?

»HE: Yes. I did whatever they was to be did in house: housework, washing, ironing.

»JG: What do you remember about your school years? What schools did you attend and can you describe what they were like?

»HE: Yes, my school. I went to Hodges [pause] School, which in the country all the grades are together from first to the eighth grade I think was in that class, which was--. We had to walk to school and when it was raining my father would come and get us in the wagon. [laughter] And it's just one big schoolroom, which had a big pot bellied stove. And in the morning it would be so cold my hands would be freezing.

»JG: Can you talk for a, for a while about the kinds of things you did play as a child and how that's different from your grandchildren today?

»HE: We played with, well, we always got a doll. [coughing] We played with our dolls. We had made a little playhouse out in the yard and we walked to our friend's house. They would come over or we would go to they house and we would play and my brother would make, made a wagon which we would play with.

»JG: We have some questions about your adult life. How long have you lived in Wilmore?

»HE: About twenty-three years.

»JG: What do you remember about the neighborhood you lived in before Wilmore and tell us why you moved here?

»HE: I lived in Southside. Fairview Homes--, Southside.

»JG: Tell us about the kinds of work you've done over the years. What was the first job? What was your first job?

»HE: My first job was babysitting [clears throat], then I worked in a mill, Trim Line Foundation. I worked there about twenty-five years until I retired.

»JB: What kind of work is that?

»HE: Making girdles.

»JB: Um-hum.

»JG: Do you remember how much you got paid an hour?

»JB: On your first job or your early job.

»HE: My first job I think I was making about two dollars a week. [laughter]

»JG: Can you talk for a few minutes about living through the Great Depression? What, what was it like for your family?

»HE: I don't know nothing about no depression because my father always raised everything we had. We had plenty to eat all the time cause he raised chickens, cows, hogs, whatever.

»JG: Do you remember who, who the first president was you voted for? Tell us about that election.

»HE: My mind doesn't work like it--. [laughter] I can't remember.

»JB: Not too many people can remember that one. [laughter] That's OK.

»JG: Can you tell us some old stories about Wilmore? What it used to be like when you first moved here? What did, what did it look like?

»HE: It was very quiet here. There are childrens around now, but when I moved here you hardly ever saw a child and for the most was older peoples and it was very quiet and it's changed a good bit.

»JG: Do you remember, do you have any stories, stories you'd like to tell us, stories to tell young people about the days of segregation and what it was like growing up here?

»HE: Yes. We walked to school, which was a long ways, but the white childrens rode the bus and they would pass and holler out at us. And we had black children didn't go to school together. We went to our school and the whites went to their school.

»JG: How did the civil rights movement affect your family? Do you have any stories about those days you want to share?

»JB: Like in the 50s or 60s when things were changing? [long pause]

»HE: Not too much I can remember about that.

»JG: Tell us about your children and grandchildren.

»HE: I have one daughter, Sophie. She's grew up in Southside and she graduated from Myers Park High School and she went to King's College, which she has one daughter, she got married and she has one daughter, which she is sixteen now and she goes to Vance High School, which she will, she will be graduating from next year.

»JG: How do your love of gardening begin? How do, how do your love for gardening begin? Can you tell us about some of your early gardening experiences?

»HE: The reason I've always worked in the garden with my father when they would plant they garden, we always planted our little gardens. And we had potatoes. We had our little potato patch. In the old times, we plotted the potatoes and they had a big potato bed which we'd have potatoes all winter long, in our own little garden. In our little first vegetables. [laughter]

»JG: Talk a little bit about how gardening is different today than when you were coming up.

»JB: Is there any difference?

»HE: Very little. Only that we lived on the farm, we had a bigger garden. And we used to grow everything in the garden: cane, made our molasses. So, my father hardly ever went to the store. Maybe to buy some sugar or something like that.

»JG: Tell us about you working in the Wilmore Gardens.

»JB: Hold, hold it a second. Let me show her something else.

»HE: [looking at cotton] I have hoed this and picked this and in my time, most of the cotton was picked. Their little buds were left in the fields and we'd pick it after school and my father would take it to town and sell it and that's what he bought our Christmas with. [laughter] I've hoed cotton, picked cotton.

»JB: Did you ever do anything with it afterward, or did they just, you just took it to market and sold it?

»HE: Took it to market and sold it. My mother, I can remember she made quilts, but I think she would always buy the lining to do the quilt.

»JG: Tell us about your work in the Wilmore Gardens? How you become involved and what kind of things do you enjoy planting?

»HE: In the garden, I became Loa Manzelle. I went down to the garden, I went down with her and she signed, signed me up in the garden. I like to grow, in the summertime, string beans, and squash, cucumbers, tomatoes.

»JG: What do you know about the history of the Wilmore Gardens? How it got started? Were you at the first location and why has it moved around so much?

»HE: Well I only knew it down where it's at now. I wasn't with it when it was moved around.

»JG: If you could grow, grow just three things, what would they be and why?

»HE: Grow--?

»JB: If you could grow just three things, what would it be and why?

»HE: Tomatoes, cause I love tomatoes, and string beans and corn, if I could grow corn, but that little place you can't grow corn, I mean [laughter] 'cause I love corn.

»JG: Do you have a garden in your yard at home?

»HE: Not now, my back yard has growed up too much. When I first lived here though I had a good garden. I had tomatoes out there until it frost. And the next year the squirrels found them and they eat 'em, by the gobbled up the vines. [laughter] So after then, well I hadn't gotten nothing out there in about, about five years I guess and got to the place it could be so dry in the summer. I wouldn't get enough out of the garden to eat, so I just quit bothering with it. Now, there's too much shade back there so screw it.

»JG: How are gardens and community gardens different from gardening in your own yard?

»HE: Well, in my own yard I probably went down there everyday and watch it grow.

»JG: What has having a community garden at Wilmore meant to you over the years? Why do you still work in the garden?

»HE: Well, I love to work in the garden, one thing, and I love the tomatoes. [laughter] Store bought tomatoes is not like tomatoes you grow.

»JG: Have you worked in the greenhouse all these years?

»HE: Yes, I worked in the greenhouse last, last winter I worked in the greenhouse helping to plant.

»JG: Is there anything you have enjoyed growing?

»HE: In the greenhouse? Yes. They plant vegetables and in the winter we'd put the flowers, put the flowers in there. You start your flowers in the greenhouse and we also made wreaths for Christmas.

»JG: When you first put tomato plants out in the spring, what are you thinking about when you put them in the ground?

»HE: Be glad when I can eat them, eat them of course. [laughter]

»JB: How do you like to fix your tomatoes? How do you use them?

»HE: Mostly I just slice them and eat them.

»JB: Um-hum.

»HE: In sandwiches.

»JB: Hold on.

»JG: Do you ever, do you ever freeze your vegetables?

»HE: I never have. Now the first year I worked down there, I froze some tomatoes, but since then, like I've never had enough to freeze.

»JG: Do you can them?

»HE: No, I can't do no canning. 'Cause mine's all spoiled. [laughter]

»JB: Did you ever used to put up vegetables?

»HE: I didn't.

»JB: Just never got the hang of it?

»HE: Uh-huh.

»JG: Have you passed on your knowledge about gardening and putting up vegetables to your children or grandchildren?

»HE: No, they always are busy, they're not interested. [laughter] No, they always are busy, they're not interested.

»JG: Do you have any stor--? Do you have any stories about snakes in the garden or other creatures?

»HE: I saw, maybe a couple of times in the yard.

»JB: The kids wanted to know about. That was their question. [laughter] They're a little concerned.

»HE: They were just real small, like you know.

»JG: Can you talk about how you decide when to plant the spring garden or when you plant your fall garden?

»JB: Have you ever used--

»JG: Have you ever used--

»JB: an almanac?

»JG: an almanac?

»HE: That's what I mostly go by, an almanac.

»JB: Tell us about that, how does that almanac work?

»HE: Well, they have in there certain times you should plant or certain days, because if you plant on the wrong time of the moon, your vegetables just grow and won't have, won't have no fruit on them. They'll just grow and bloom like string beans. You get the old pretty vines, they bloom but hardly ever you, you don't hardly get enough out, off of them. Certain times--. The moon or something is to blame.

»JG: Do you ever remember having a really bad year in the garden?

»HE: Um-hum. It turned so dry, it just didn't do anything. Just dry and hot. Just burnt up.

»JG: We are going to include a section in our book about vegetable garden tips and gardening (). Can you tell me what you learned over the years in terms of growing a good garden?

»JB: Any tips that you have the kids to use when they plant a garden?

»HE: Yeah, it's best to go by the signs, because as I said, when you plant on the wrong side they don't have nothing but big pretty vines.

»JG: What do you, what do you do to keep bugs from eating your vegetables?

»HE: In the old time, they said if you'd take self-rising flour and burn it, put to the oven and bake it and put it on your greens, or beans, that would keep some bugs off. But there are () you can buy, but I don't like to use them 'cause it's poison. And if you don't wait until it to all wash off, it's nothing. [long pause]

»JB: Have you ever used compost or fertilizer? Can you tell us about that?

»HE: Yes, my father always used, that's what he'd use, compost. In the chicken house, that's what he'd always put on the garden.

»JB: Have you ever used any in your garden down here?

»HE: I have. They're the little stones, I have. It is better than fertilizer, because it don't burn up when it gets hot in the summertime and doesn't burn the vegetables, like fertilize.

»JG: We are going to include favorite recipes in our book. From your garden, do you have any favorite recipes for our book? Can you talk a little bit about cooking with your garden vegetables and herbs and can you share some of your favorite recipes? [long pause]

»JB: How do you fix your string beans? Do you just boil them or do you have a recipe for them?

»HE: No, I just put my meat on. I always use two pieces of that (beef). Put it on and boil it. When it gets about half done, you put your string beans in there with the salt, pepper, and a little bit of sugar.

»JG: Why do you think it's important for young people to learn about gardening?

»HE: Well, for one thing, it's a lot of fun. [laughter] But when you raise your own vegetables, which is much better than you buy at the store.

»JG: What did others, a special wisdom or advice, would you like to pass onto the younger generation?

»HE: Learn, learn to raise your own vegetables is much healthier than the vegetables you buy at the store. You can get string, a mess of string beans at the garden and you can fix a mess at the store and you can taste the difference.

»JB: When you say gardening is a lot of fun, because before, you said gardening is a lot of fun, but if we use that quote, they won't know what you're talking about.

»HE: I just love to see it grow and it looks so pretty when vegetables come on the vine. It's just, it's just fun, I think.

»JG: In closing, is there anything you'd like to say that we haven't gotten into?

»JB: Is there anything else you want to add about gardening or the garden in Wilmore?

»HE: Well, I'm glad, that they have a garden in Wilmore. You get to meet more peoples, you know, you get to know more peoples in the garden. I really have enjoyed it.

»JG: Thank you very much.

»JB: Jeffrey, do you have any questions we haven't covered?

»JG: No ().

»JB: Well, thank you very much Ms. Ervin. I think, is that a cut?

»IB: It's a cut.

»JB: That's a wrap. Great. Well, that was very good.

»IB: That wasn't so hard, was it?

»JB: It was easy. Just a little bit of--. It's interesting to hear which ones of you have grown up on farms [laughter] you know, and which ones of you haven't. Like Ms. Coleman, she didn't grow up on a farm.

»HE: I know.

»JB: And she grew up, she grew up in Matthews, but I don't think she grew up on a farm, but she did pick cotton. [laughter] Just about everybody I hand the cotton to know what it is, and they've seen plenty of it.

»HE: I've picked cotton, pulled cotton-.

»IB: Pull that tape out.