

Reverend Monroe Simms

(b. January 23, 1935)

Pastor, First Baptist Church of Elkridge

Dorothy Taylor Richardson

(b. September 1, 1916)

Teacher and florist

DOROTHY: My mother was a domestic and they went over to Relay and St. Denis to work. And my father worked there on the railroad tracks and then on the weekends he'd cut hair, he was a barber. Right there in the kitchen, had his big chair and his towels and things like that.

REV. SIMMS: The women, they went and were maids. And my mother used to have Dr. Brumbaugh, some of the leading whites, would bring their clothes to the house. Sometimes they would have them already washed. If not, she would have to wash them and then iron them, because, like Dr. Brumbaugh, he did not want anyone to touch his shirts except my mother. And then when she got sick and she had to get someone else to do it, he was very unhappy 'cause he was so used to her starch and everything was just right.

So he would deliver the clothes that morning, maybe like on a Monday, and he would come back on Friday or have his wife to pick up the clothes. He wanted his clothes to be specially hand done instead of putting them in a laundry, he said they last longer.



REV. SIMMS: He was the only doctor in this community. And there was a double standard in his proce-

dures there, too. Number one is that when he wrote out his prescriptions, he wrote on the white prescriptions "Mr." or "Mrs." On the black prescriptions, it was always, you know, if your name is Monroe Simms, it was "Monroe Simms."

And plus, his general procedure was that he would prefer coming to your house. He charged you one dollar or two dollars for a whole visit, you see? He would prefer coming to your home than you coming to his office—but he did not deny you from coming to his office.

There was double procedures there in Elkridge. The procedure was that if you were white, you could come into the soda fountain area and drink out of a glass. If you were white and you wanted to take that soda out, you paid two to five cents for the cup. But when a black came in, they didn't drink out of the glasses, they drank out of the paper cups—free, whether five cents, two cents, whatever it is.

They didn't have a sign up there saying "Black" or "White," but see I worked there when I was ten years old and you knew that when you walked in and you wanted a soda, you would get a paper cup. If a white walked in there at the same time, you knew that she or he would get a glass to drink out of.

But blacks had a form of prejudice against each other. There were some blacks that could afford more than others, you see? And so, we talk about black and white prejudice, but this goes way back. People were prejudice about people's hair. If her hair was longer than yours—"She thinks she's cute." If you had a nice dress on, they might rip it off you. I mean, this was blacks for blacks, see? Yeah, they would call Dorothy's family the "cute Negroes that live on the hill."

DOROTHY: "The Taylors that lived on Taylor's Hill," 'cause we all went through school, you know, and had a car.

REV. SIMMS: "They think they're more important than anybody else." But the problem they have on Race Road is that there were a certain segment of homes that were up on the hill and there were some that was in the lower part. Those people always thought the people up on the hill thought they were better than everybody else 'cause they had cars, they were first ones to have television, and you know, all these things that makes life more easier and the luxuries of life. But they didn't realize those people up on the hill worked to try to make something of themselves.



REV. SIMMS: Her father did work on the railroad tracks, but he was a big-time politician, too, in those days. He was considered one of the head men as far as blacks—as a Republican, you see? And he was considered the mayor of Race Road because he interceded in getting streetlights, and he had succeeded in getting a blacktop placed on Race Road, and a lot of little things. And he interceded in getting out the black voters to vote the Republican ticket.

When you lived in his household or lived around here, it was a life and death thing if you voted anything else except Republican. Because when I first started voting, I voted Republican when I was young until I got good common sense and got on my own. I'm not saying that Republicans is bad, but I'm saying at that

time it wasn't doing us any benefits, and so that's why I changed my affiliation from Republican to Democrat.

But when I did it, I could not breathe the word Democrat around him. And so his whole family had to vote Republican 'cause he had set it up. And we didn't have to worry about going to the voting polls; they would send cars (he was responsible in coordinating that) to come down and pick us up and take us to the polls.

The fact is that the Republicans here in Howard County had promised him so many incentives if he would get the blacks to vote Republican. So naturally, to see streetlights going up in a place that was totally dark, that was enough incentive to get people out. He could say to them, "Look what I have done for you," you know?

And then next thing, instead of riding down a dirt road, muddy when it rained and everything, he put blacktop down there. "Look what I have done for you through the Republican party." The Democrats at that time did not come in and say, "We'll do this for you, we'll do that for you, if you will vote for our ticket." And that's how that came about.



DOROTHY: We had what they call a henhouse outside. It was fenced in, you know, and that's where the chickens were raised.

REV. SIMMS: Early in the morning they went to the henhouse to gather the eggs, because we didn't go to the store at that time. Didn't have that kind of money to be buying eggs every day. When they got a certain size, they took them to a chopping block and took a hatchet and chopped their heads off, and then they put them in the water to take the feathers off, and that was the Sunday afternoon meal. And sometimes people became very envious of her family because they were able to have quite an abundance of chickens, and a lot of people came to their house on Sunday to eat dinner.

And when we got in the state of Depression, not only did you think about the chicken legs and the thighs

and breasts, so forth—you look at the chicken feet. And what they did, they would chop the chicken feet off and scale them down, and take potatoes and onions and celery, and then boil it and make what you call a chicken-feet soup. And it would just be a simple meal: water, some seasons and potatoes, and sometimes you'd chop up carrots. Take those chicken feet, throw them in there, and you put that on the table.

You might get a couple of them in your soup bowl and you just suck them up there, just like you take a chicken bone and suck it, you know. Sometimes during those times, if you had a chicken bone in your mouth, you were so proud and so happy to have it, boy, it'd be just like having a T-bone steak. I can really taste it right now.

DOROTHY: And the school that we went to up where Gaines Church is, that's where we went to school. We walked from where I lived, Race Road, up to Montgomery Road. Didn't have buses, we walked.

And the rest of my education, I caught the train up here and went to junior high school in Baltimore. I had relatives who lived in the city and I used their house number as my residence, and that's the way I went to junior high school and Douglass High School. There wasn't any high school nearby and that's how my sisters and whatnot got their education, we all rode the train.

And my biggest problem going to school was, I had long red hair and I had three plats—had one on each side and one up here—and every morning, I would have to sit there and wait 'til my mother got my plats in.

And then half the time I'd be going to catch the train, because I would be late, and sometimes the conductor would see me running and he'd wait for me to get there to get on the train. Because I went down to South Baltimore for junior high school, and I tell you, those years getting to school was something.

REV. SIMMS: This church was blown up in 1965 by three whites. They were working on the building and then they blew up the church, the original church. That was a church dated back to 1843, and this church was deeded to us by the Ellicott family—and this was a *white* family. This church also was used during the Civil War as a hospital, the original church. And we were told that they would deed the church to us as long as we kept this church a black Baptist church.

This church was used with some of the great famous blacks that visit here, such as Booker T. Washington. He came through here and spoke in this church, the original church. And then this was used as a part of the underground tunnel [Underground Railroad]. See, we have a railroad track on the other side and Mary Bethune, Harriet Tubman, all of those leading blacks at that time had used this church as a refuge center and also as a railroad tunnel, you know, during the time of the Civil War.

But the money that was used to rebuild this church was from the white community—from the white Episcopal church that let us use their church. Grace Episcopal Church opened their doors just like that, and we went in there, and we never broke service. This church burned down on Monday and we were back serving on Sunday.

Some of this repeats, so I'm not sure we have the whole interview, or bits and pieces.

150 Years of Howard County

Getting an education took energy, effort

■ **Schooling:** Elkridge natives recall long treks, used books and cramped quarters from their youth in a mostly black section of town.

The Rev. Monroe Seawood Simms Jr. is pastor of First Baptist Church of Elkridge. His aunt, Dorothy Taylor Richardson, has lived in Elkridge all her life. They were interviewed by folklorist Alison Kahn on May 14, 1998, for an oral history project coordinated by Friends of Patapsco Valley & Heritage Greenway Inc. This is the first of two excerpts.

Dorothy Richardson: I was born in the same house where I live today. I was born on September the first, 1916, on Race Road. And my mother was named Nanny Byrd Robinson Taylor. And my father was James Taylor.

My mother was a domestic, and they went over to Relay and St. Denis to work. And my father worked there on the railroad tracks, and then ... he'd cut hair on the weekends. ... He was a barber ... right in the house ... in the kitchen right there, had his big chair and his towels.

The Rev. Monroe Simms:

... Yes, this community goes back. It was primarily African-American community, but over the years it has become a diversified community. There are whites and blacks both that live ... in the area of Race Road. It's two areas, see? It's called Race Road and Church Avenue, and the blacks lived in both of those sections. Church Avenue was destroyed by the flood in ... 1972, and everyone in that area, except one family, was relocated in other areas like Baltimore and Columbia, Maryland. And one black family ... they lost that home, and now it's a white family that lives in that home.

Richardson: ... And the school that we went to ... it's still there, but it's just an old building, up where Gaines [A.M.E.] Church is. And that's where we went to school. It was a one-room school, and [we] went there ... in that one-room school, I think, until you were in the sixth grade. ... And then, the rest of my education I stole because I caught the train up here and went to junior high school in Baltimore ...

I had relatives who lived in the city, and I used their ... house number as my residence. And that's the

way I went to junior high school and Douglass High School. ... There wasn't any high school nearby, and that's how my sisters and whatnot got their education because ... there wasn't [any] place close by that we could go to school.

Simms: The closest school ... for junior high school and high school students was in Cooksville, Maryland, and that was ... almost a two-hour ride.

Richardson: [The local school is] still up there, but it's falling



PEGGY FOX: SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Community roots:

The Rev. Monroe Seawood Simms Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Elkridge, and his aunt, Dorothy Taylor Richardson, recall growing up in Elkridge in an oral history interview with folklorist Alison Kahn. "This community goes back," Simms said. "It was primarily African-American community, but over the years it has become a diversified community."

down. But it was a just small room, and had one teacher. Miss Jones was our teacher. And you just sat there and she taught from class to class.

Simms: ... They didn't have buses.

Richardson: Didn't have buses, we walked. We carried our lunches, and we sat at the desks and ate them.

Simms: ... Well, during that time the lunches were not like, you know, prepared with all these fancy sandwich bags and so forth. They would have slabs of fatback, just like slab bacon, fatback, fat in a little piece of aluminum stuff. ... And you would cook it on the stove and get it real crisp, then you would put it in between a slice of bread. Sometimes you'd put mayonnaise on it, sometimes you'd put mustard on it. But sometimes you just ate it just like it is.

Richardson: I think some of them were old, the books.

Simms: Old used books.

Richardson: Old used books that came from white schools. That's my opinion.

Simms: ... Even the teacher's salary, salaries at that time were tremendously different. It was a lower scale for the black teachers because, see, a lot of the black teachers did not have to have a formal B.A. or B.S. degree. They were just teachers that were out of high school, had just what you called a "normal school." A normal school was just like ... the A.A. degree we get today in our schools. ... I started out with a salary of \$3,800, and that's way down the scale.

I was a teacher and principal for 36 years in the school system in Prince George's County. And I

went from teacher to administrator. ... I was used as one of the target people that went into some of the white schools and tried to get them to have an understanding. The culture of black students, their dialect and all those things, I had to teach them, because it was like a little course. ... And I was borrowed from Prince George's County to develop the human relations of how to deal with ... blacks. ... And I did it also with the Howard County Police Department. ...

See, one thing she failed to tell you about, about her father. Her father did work on the railroad tracks, but he was a big-time politician, too, in those days. And he was considered one of the head men, as far as blacks, as a Republican, you see? And he was considered the mayor of Race Road because he had succeeded in getting ... street lights. One time, they were dirt roads, and he had succeeded in getting a blackout placed on Race Road, and a lot of little things.

And he had succeeded in getting out the black voters to vote the Republican ticket. And when you lived in his household, or lived around here, it was ... a life-and-death thing if you voted anything else except a Republican. Because when I first started voting, I voted Republican when I was young, until I got good common sense and got on my own. I'm not saying the Republicans [are] bad, but I'm saying at that time it wasn't doing us any benefits, you see? And so I had to go where the benefits of my people [were]. That's why I changed my affiliation from Republican to Democrat. But when I did it, I could not breathe the word Democrat around him.