



## **Interview with Rosetta Brooks**

**Interview Date:** January 30, 2009  
**Interviewer:** Stephanie Deutsch  
**Transcriber:** Sarah Rouse

This interview transcript is the property of the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project.  
Not to be reproduced without permission.

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**DEUTSCH:** This is Stephanie Deutsch. I am with Rosie Brooks in the dance studio at St. Mark's, and it is January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009. And Rosie, why don't you start by—I know you grew up on Capitol Hill, but why don't you start by telling me a little about where you grew up and your childhood and your family?

**BROOKS:** I grew up in the 500 block of Sixth Street SE, and the family home was there until we sold it in December 2005. My elementary school is now Results Gym; that was Giddings Elementary, and also, because I'm a baby boomer—there were a lot of us going to school—Lenox Elementary which is now the Lenox Loft. So I've seen a lot of changes. My sister went to Randall Junior High School, but before that, there was a boundary change, I went to Hine, the old Hine, not the one that's there now.

**DEUTSCH:** Where ... was the old Hine in the same place?

**BROOKS:** The old Hine was in the same place, but we had a fire the year I graduated and after that, they realized they needed—because it was a very old building ...

**DEUTSCH:** So what year would that have been?

**BROOKS:** My year from coming out of middle school would have been 19 ... I came out of high school in '64, I do remember that. '62?

**DEUTSCH:** Okay.

**BROOKS:** '61, '62. Yeah, 1961. I then went to Dunbar High School, and there's a great story. My mother graduated from Dunbar High School, so in 1964, the graduates of 1935 had a, really, a high school reunion ...

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** ... because we realized—we didn't know there were so many of the kids of that era that were graduating in my class, and they were going, I didn't know you had a child in this class! It was really fun for them.

**DEUTSCH:** So it was a reunion of the class of what?

**BROOKS:** It wasn't, but my graduation ended up being that, you know, which was really cool in one way, now that I look at it. I think we were kind of insulted, when it—because it should have been all about us! [Laughs] The graduating class of 1964! I went to Dunbar at an awesome time. This was before Duke Ellington [School], there was no Duke Ellington. And the class that I went with, we were all artists

of sorts, singers, dancers, poets. So it was a very artistic flair to the school, even though it wasn't meant to be an art school. George Faison, who is the choreographer of the Broadway show "The Wiz," went there. He and I danced our way through high school together; and in fact he was the one that introduced me to St. Mark's Dance ...

**DEUTSCH:** Okay, wait a minute. F-A- I-S-O-N?

**BROOKS:** F-A-I-S-O-N, yes.

**DEUTSCH:** Okay, wait a minute. There's so much ... you danced your way through high school, and uh, he introduced you to St. Mark's?

**BROOKS:** Yes, he did. We both were going to Howard University, and I was in the phys ed department because that's the only way you could get dance. And he came to me, he said, you know, I know I can't get you to go to New York, you're stubborn—he was always fussing at me about that—but I'm in a small repertoire company at this moment. We need someone who can learn choreography in two weeks. One of the dancers had gotten sick. So he says, I want you to do it. And I'm looking at him, going aah. He says, come on, you chicken, it was that back-and-forth kids do. So I did. And that was in October of 1964.

**DEUTSCH:** Okay. I want to talk about that, but I want to get back to your childhood. I want to ask a few more things. Because it sounds like you were a real Washington family, because your mother, your mother had grown up here.

**BROOKS:** My mother grew up here, my mother grew up on the street that was called Heckman, don't ask me to spell it, Heckman Street which is now Duddington Place.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** They then moved to 449 First Street SE, and that was in the families until my grandmother passed some years ago. My mother went to an elementary school that was called Lincoln, because at that time of course, things were segregated. Lincoln Elementary was located at Second and C Street, there's now an apartment building ...

**DEUTSCH:** Southeast.

**BROOKS:** Southeast. Located there. She went to Randall Junior High School. Then on to Dunbar, then she went to Miner Teachers' College, which was the black version of the school for teachers, which is now U.D.C.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** Um, so my mom's family is the Washingtonians.

**DEUTSCH:** And did she go on to become a teacher?

**BROOKS:** No, she didn't. Unfortunately my mother ended up with really bad eyes and had to come out of college after about two and a half years—so she really didn't get her degree, but still she was—her job—people use that patience that she has, to teach. She went on to work for the Navy Department, which is a story, because my father was an Army person, so they had this great little rivalry when Army Navy played. [Laughs] But, I had a great childhood, very encouraging. The only thing my mother said to me—and my parents, I should say both my parents—when I said I wanted to be a dancer, they said, all we want you to do is get something else in case you break your leg.

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** So that's when I went into accounting ...

**DEUTSCH:** Oh, dear.

**BROOKS:** ... which has benefited me by being able to take care of the books and get that finance sense. Which, if anyone knows me, I'll knot up a shoestring a million times. [Laughs]

**DEUTSCH:** Pretty thrifty!

**BROOKS:** [Laughs] And, you know, squeeze the Lincoln, as they say. But I'm glad for that advice.

**DEUTSCH:** And where was your Dad from?

**BROOKS:** My dad was from southern Maryland, Charlotte Hall. In fact, we are a large, large family. He came from a family of 16 kids.

**DEUTSCH:** Ooh. So you have lots of aunts and uncles.

**BROOKS:** Yes, lots of aunts and uncles. There's not as many now because they've all, you know, passed on. I do have two that are still around and I had a great visit with the oldest one that's alive now. This past Christmas. It was really neat.

**DEUTSCH:** Nice. So your dad was career Army?

**BROOKS:** No, not really. He stayed in a bit after World War Two but he was a World War Two vet. In fact when he passed on, we were shocked. He didn't ever think he was going to get the twenty-one gun salute, and you know how you brace yourself? We got the seven, okay that's good, that volley's over

with, that's fine. Then two more volleys came! We all were falling out of our chairs, because we didn't think my father, we were—all I could say was, look at the grave as they go, Dad. Yeah, you know. So that was ...

**DEUTSCH:** Where was is this?

**BROOKS:** My dad didn't want to be buried at Arlington, because he did live long enough to know about Vietnam, and he felt that if he could relinquish his spot at Arlington—because he could have been buried at Arlington—to a Vietnam vet—because at that time my father died, in 1972, you know, things weren't good for Vietnam vets. And my dad said, no I'm not going to take that spot, he said, and hopefully there'll be a Vietnam vet that can be buried there. So my dad's actually buried in Lincoln Cemetery, but he got all the honors of a military man.

**DEUTSCH:** That's neat.

**BROOKS:** Yeah, it was really good. He was very emphatic about that, so there was no way we were going to go against his wishes.

**DEUTSCH:** He died kind of young.

**BROOKS:** He did, he was only 49. You know? But, he had a lot to say though, you know, he was out saying a lot, I mean, and when Dad said something, you did stop and listen.

**DEUTSCH:** What work did he do?

**BROOKS:** He actually worked for American University in their custodial department. He worked for the railroad for years, and if you remember back in the 60s, the railroads almost belly-upped.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh. I do remember that.

**BROOKS:** My dad used to jump trains. One—I'm backtracking—my dad got his high school equivalency diploma at the same time I got my high school diploma. He went to Cardozo during the day to get his G.E.D. In fact, when we had fire drills—because Cardozo and Dunbar were right across—the old ones—we would see one another and I'd be asking him, why are you playing hooky? [Laughs].

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs] So you were in high school at the same time?

**BROOKS:** We were in high school at the same time! And when I—I'm always just so proud of that, you know?

**DEUTSCH:** Yes, that really is neat.

**BROOKS:** And, my father came from farmers. They were tobacco farmers, and with 16 kids, not everyone finished school. A lot of them had to get out there in the field and stuff. But my dad loved to read, and my mom told me, okay, you're at this time—that was right after the furloughs that happened with the railroad—that's when my mom said, I've got this covered. You go on ahead and you get that degree. I want you to have that. So they worked the finances out together and, I mean, we weren't ... We had a house. It was so funny; all my friends said, oh, your mom and dad are just rich! Because during that time most blacks didn't own their homes. But my parents were able to purchase the home on the GI Bill. So that really made that something special.

**DEUTSCH:** And of course Capitol Hill wasn't quite as expensive as it is now.

**BROOKS:** I know! The original price of my parents' home—they purchased it in, I guess it was '45, '46, probably it was the year I was born. We didn't move in until '48 because they rented it for two years. Ten thousand dollars. Let's put it this way, my sister and I sold the house, because my mom, unfortunately, is in a nursing facility at this time, but still kicking, tough bird, she really is, she's a tough lady. Let's say we made quite a little bit.

**DEUTSCH:** I should think.

**BROOKS:** Which of course I'm really glad, because we pay my mom's bills and things with it. But goodness gracious, from ten thousand to that. Put it this way, it was definitely a good investment.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh. And a good place to grow up.

**BROOKS:** Yes, it was. It was a wonderful place to grow up. People knew you, they knew your parents. When you were a kid you probably thought it wasn't, because if you did something wrong, someone was definitely going to come around to your parents' house and let them know that you did that. And that would be aunty, you would be reprimanded by them. But as you get older, you realized that was really good

**DEUTSCH:** Yep. Yep.

**BROOKS:** You know, um, we'll say this, Hillary Clinton said it years ago, it takes a village. And it does. It really, really does. If someone really wants the best for you, whether it's your parents, extracurricular activity people, they're going to do that. You know, they really are going to do that.

**DEUTSCH:** Was there a church in your ...?

**BROOKS:** Yes! Yes, yes, yes. Ebenezer United Methodist Church which housed the first public school for black children. Its mother church is Capitol Hill Methodist, right there at Seward Square, and what happened, we—the generations and generations ago—used to use the balcony to have their services and they outgrew the balcony. And they raised enough money to buy a piece of property and purchase a church. The church I go to now is not the original building, there was a fire and that burned down. But it's been standing there many a year.

**DEUTSCH:** You must have enjoyed seeing—did you see the article on the front page of, was it the Post? About those two churches ...

**BROOKS:** About those two churches, yes. And we still have a connection, we still try to do Sunday schools and joint services, during different times. One of the things that was so neat is that my grandmother, she actually was—she came up here when she was about thirteen, fourteen years old—but she came from La Plata, Maryland, and my great-grandfather was a Cherokee Indian.

**DEUTSCH:** Ooh.

**BROOKS:** I'm a mutt. [Laughs]

**DEUTSCH:** Like the rest of us. [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** Yes, yes. But so neat, because my parents made certain that—and this was before looking up their family trees and all of that—but my dad and my mom, we always used to talk at dinner table, you know, and talk about the grandmother. My grandmother—I should say my great-grandmother on my mother's side—had quite a temper. I think that's where I get mine from, but anyway—we won't let anyone know that! [Laughs] Um, and there were some neat stories about her that my mother used to tell, and my father too, he used to tell stories about his mother and ... There were two brothers that married two sisters. So we were cousins on two sides—double cousins. And one sister raised turkeys, and the other sister raised chickens. And they used to have this little rivalry about who could do which the best. All the time, they were constantly feuding, and they were sisters. So my dad used to talk about that, and that's when he told me, you know, turkeys are really stupid.

**DEUTSCH:** He was from the chicken side of the family.

**BROOKS:** But actually what he was saying was true, turkeys will take and put their heads up, domestic turkeys, and drown when it rains. They don't have sense enough to say—get down, get under cover. You know. So of course, his mother, who was the chicken grower, thought that was cool, because she told the

sister, you can't even raise something that has sense enough not to drown, when it rains. You know, those kinds of things, that were funny, you know, to me.

**DEUTSCH:** And you had a sister?

**BROOKS:** My sister Denise is six years younger than I am, In fact, it was cool when I finally realized my sister was grown, and stopped calling her my baby sister, you know there's always that great—going to the lightning strikes, the stars go off, and you go, oh, wait a minute, she's just really my sister.

**DEUTSCH:** She's not really a baby anymore.

**BROOKS:** No. Exactly.

**DEUTSCH:** And is she still ... ?

**BROOKS:** Yes, she's still in the area, she works on Capitol Hill, and she lives in Temple Hills, Maryland, with her husband and she has two children. I have a nephew and a niece. And my niece is a webmaster, she works for the Washington Times.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow.

**BROOKS:** She has a little gig on her own, which, she's having a meeting tomorrow and I'll let you know how it turns out. Fynette's coming, so she's going to be—I was trying to pick out one person that I knew from every aspect of the studio, and my niece gave me, for Christmas, this is a gift, that cost the studio nothing.

**DEUTSCH:** She's going to make a website?

**BROOKS:** She's going to do a website and take care of it.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow. That's nice.

**BROOKS:** It's very nice. And her name is Cheree [spells it] with an accent over the E, Bradford.

**DEUTSCH:** And maybe they'll be at the dinner, some of them?

**BROOKS:** Yes, I am going to ask you about that.

**DEUTSCH:** We'll talk about that. So how did you get interested in dance? How did that start? Do you remember?

**BROOKS:** Yes! I do remember. I was born clubfooted, both feet.



**DEUTSCH:** Really?

**BROOKS:** And it was corrected, without surgery. This is where, unfortunately—or fortunately, I shouldn't say unfortunately—because my dad always said, positive comes out of everything. You have to dig through the muck sometimes. But good comes out of everything. It was a World War Two surgeon who was my doctor at the old Gallinger Hospital.

**DEUTSCH:** I haven't heard of Gallinger.

**BROOKS:** It was G-A-L-L-I-N-G-E-R, I believe is how you spell it. You can look it up for DC history. It is where the jail is, and it used to be a hospital to sit on the hill, and it did mostly things with orthopedics. A lot of World War Two babies unfortunately had issues, and they believed later on that it had to do with some of the, I like the Vietnam—the orange?

**DEUTSCH:** Agent Orange?

**BROOKS:** It had something to do with that. Because my father had friends who had children before they were over in the European campaign—nothing wrong. But when they came back, their children—my sister, her feet would go backwards if she put weight on them. So she had to sleep in boards for the first...

**DEUTSCH:** So she had problems with her feet, too?

**BROOKS:** She had problems, too. I had a brother that's deceased—he died when he was only a couple months old—that was a blue baby, which means that he had to have a transfusion, and there were other complications so he didn't make it. But, um, was clubfooted. And as a correction was made through, said it was going to work, the doctor recommended, he said I want your daughter to go into something like dance or so. And that was about, you know, I wasn't as young as these kids because I was still in heavy corrective shoes.

**DEUTSCH:** How old were you when you had the surgery? Oh, no, you didn't have any surgery.

**BROOKS:** My mom said he did it in the office. He took a scalpel—I have the scar right to this day, on the worst one—he slit it, went in—he pulled the Achilles tendon down—because that's what's not stretched correctly—and then he put me in a cast. I was in a cast—I don't remember this because I'm an infant—up to here.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow.

**BROOKS:** OK, and my mom and them just had to take me almost every week, because you're growing.

**DEUTSCH:** For a new cast?

**BROOKS:** For a new cast. So ...

**DEUTSCH:** So you don't remember this at all?

**BROOKS:** Of course not, I was an infant; I was a baby. So I don't remember any of that. But he suggested when I got about—ten-ish?—around that, that the corrected [sic] shoes—because I'll never forget, my parents were paying 75 dollars for a pair of shoes, and I was born in 1946!

**DEUTSCH:** Shoes did not cost 75 dollars!

**BROOKS:** No, they did not. So my parents, really, financially, went through a lot to make that work. And they were really lucky because this is here. There were people in southern range, let's say North Carolina, South Carolina, who didn't get that kind of really good treatment, and to this day, they're still clubfooted. But that's when, he said dance would be really good.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** And my mother went around, and found a dance studio. And that's how I got started, and knew that I liked it, I loved it! Actually, I wanted to teach it. I wanted to be a dance teacher once I got started.

**DEUTSCH:** You always wanted to be a dance teacher rather than a dancer?

**BROOKS:** Yes. Being a performer was secondary. I loved it. I'm glad I did it, but now, I'm really doing what I always wanted to do, which was to teach dance and to choreograph. That's why I said, I love what I'm doing.

**DEUTSCH:** Do you remember where the first dance studio where you studied was?

**BROOKS:** Yes, And the lady isn't um [scuffling sounds] oops ... still ... I think we're probably still OK, we're still going ...

**DEUTSCH:** OK, we've had a little mike problem.

**BROOKS:** I think it was OK. My first dance teacher was Florence Blackwell, that was her married name. I don't know her maiden name. Apparently the Blackwells were a prestigious black family in D.C. during that time, and her studio was off of Central Avenue Southeast. She gave me good basic training.

**DEUTSCH:** Was it ballet?

**BROOKS:** It was ballet. Ballet and tap. And my pointe work came from her, too. She was excellent. She always said—she loved sandals. She said, you don't want to have ugly feet. Being a dancer you do not need ugly feet. And of course you know back then, you just knew you were going to have these ugly toes and you just kept them encased in a pair of shoes. And she said no. There's no reason why you should have ugly toes. She had beautiful feet. And she gave me good solid training—theories about pointe that I pass on right to this day. None of my students have ugly feet. And I don't—I don't have any marks on my feet from pointe work. I have a few scars on my feet from floor burns—from modern dance—but not—I get my pedicures and everything every two weeks, so I can show my feet. And that's how she was. And I passed that on; she said when you get virgin feet, put that protection on them. There's no reason, there's nothing to be ashamed of. You know I had teachers later that would have—oh, why are you putting that on? Oh, you're supposed to stick your feet in the shoes ...

**DEUTSCH:** Protection, like lambs'-wool?

**BROOKS:** Lambs'-wool, or ... And when you did get to the pointe your feet had toughened up, I would just use a piece of paper towel. But what it was, was just not to have that foot encased in that shoe raw. Blisters don't heal as we ... Any of us have had blisters, they don't ...

**DEUTSCH:** If you're dancing on it all the time ...

**BROOKS:** Certainly. They just don't heal, you know. And there you are.

**DEUTSCH:** So you studied with Florence Blackwell, ballet and tap ...

**BROOKS:** Florence Blackwell, uh-huh. Then I did my jazz with Lola Beaver, which I know—after many years, and this is a funny story, she used to be on K Street Northwest, and she was interested in just doing private students, like maybe three or four, and that was it. And she had gotten into costuming. Well, about two and a half years ago, I get this telephone call here at the studio, and, I guess in the brochures that we sent out, every fall, she had gotten hold of one. And it was one of the latest ones with the picture. She called. She said, you may think I'm just a funny old lady—this was the message—she said, but I don't think there's a lot of Rosettas around, and I knew a Rosetta Whalen [Rosie's maiden name] ... She said, please tell her to call, if I'm calling correctly, please tell her to call Lola Beaver. She was right here in the area and I didn't know it. And apparently quite a few Hill people knew Lola Beaver.

**DEUTSCH:** Was she still teaching dance?

**BROOKS:** No, she was doing costumes, she was in her 90s and she didn't give me her phone number, she just—you know, you call this number, and apparently it was someone else's number, so I didn't, you

know, but she wanted to talk—we talked for about 40 minutes and she said I'm so proud of you. She said, I didn't know that was you. And it was really—it was something! I think in the meantime she has passed on, though.

**DEUTSCH:** But that was a nice thing to hear.

**BROOKS:** That was very nice—very, very nice. My modern dance class from when I was at Howard University and I had several teachers there, Erica Thimey [pronounced tea-my-a], was one of the dance teachers there at Howard when I was there, so I had about a semester with her.

**DEUTSCH:** T-H-I-M-E-Y. Sally Crowell studied with her.

**BROOKS:** Yes, in fact, Sally and I would send people to each of the studios. Like if I knew someone that—if someone called and said they needed tap, I sent them over to Capitol Hill [Arts Workshop]. If she know someone who really want serious ballet, they send them over here, you know. It's been like that forever. And you do that, you know, we're not teaching tap here, so why not pass that on to them, and they teach more like little introductions to ballet, so why not send the kids over here, because we do serious ballet, you know once they get beyond that point right there. So it's good when we hear—Well, we had our pre-ballet at Capitol Hill, so we know what that is, we know what they've done. So you know and where to place the children.

**DEUTSCH:** Rosie, your maiden name was what?

**BROOKS:** Whalen [spells it].

**DEUTSCH:** And your parents were—what were their names?

**BROOKS:** My mother's name was Rosa Lee Whalen, or Thomas Whalen, and my dad's name was Joseph Harold Whalen.

**DEUTSCH:** OK, so you graduate from Dunbar, and then went to Howard?

**BROOKS:** I went to Howard University in the phys ed department, which ended up not being too nice to my legs, because of the curriculum that you had to take—I won't say anything unkind but let's say the head of the phys ed department for Howard was a giant of a woman, and she thought everyone else was a giant, too, we'll just leave it at that. There were some other things, but we won't speak—she's passed on now. Um, I got shin splints, really, really badly. They had an indoor track—you had to climb up and it would circle around the top, and you had to run three miles. Well, it was like, must have been 80 years

old back in the 60s when I attended. And there was no bounce left. So you were running on concrete, because when that rubber is hard ... And we've all seen rubber get hard.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**BROOKS:** You know, very bad for your legs. I went to my doctor, he says, you got to make a choice. You want dance, or you want to be a beat-up gym teacher. And of course, I'm going to say dance—he says to leave that. What else do you want to do? I said, well, I like history, my dad told me I need to get something that, in case I break my legs, you know, and, I switched over and went to a school that does not exist anymore, Cortez [spells it] Business School, which was a business school for blacks. And it was located up on U Street. And that's where I got my business—

**DEUTSCH:** So you left Howard?

**BROOKS:** I left Howard. Yep. I mean, it was painful. I mean, if anyone's ever had shin splints, you can't even—it was so bad I couldn't even put a sheet on my legs. I mean this was the most painful thing I've ever experienced in my life—really, other than my bad knee.

**DEUTSCH:** So you went off to Cortez, and got a degree in accounting.

**BROOKS:** Business degree, yeah, which you had—the accounting, business law, I mean, you know, it was a hard course.

**DEUTSCH:** So what happened then?

**BROOKS:** Um, right about that time, or actually during that time—because I was in college—when I came here, I was 18 years old when I came here, in October of '64.

**DEUTSCH:** So they needed a dancer?

**BROOKS:** They needed a dancer ...

**DEUTSCH:** The dance studio must have been very ...

**BROOKS:** It was very young, because the dance studio did not—Mary Craighill did not start the dance studio until 1963, so she had only been here a year ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1  
TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**BROOKS:** 1963 was the actual starting point of the St. Mark's Dance Studio.

**DEUTSCH:** Okay. They needed a dancer ...

**BROOKS:** They needed a dancer—in '64 was when they came to me—and like, one of their dancers got ill. But they had a show in two weeks; and this person was not going to be well enough to do their part and in the repertoire companies, you know, you have to learn everything, I mean, everything. And they didn't have anyone who knew her part well enough, so as I was saying earlier, George Faison came to me and said, look, I know how you learn stuff; you know, come on and do this, bail us out, blah, blah, blah. I said well, okay, why not? So I said, well, I'll check it out. So I came over, and I've been here ever since. I did the piece. Now don't ask me to re-do that piece, because it's just like anything you can cram—when you learn, don't cram for a test, because you don't remember anything afterwards. You know you learn just enough to get through the test. But that's how I became a dancer with the St. Mark's Dance Company.

**DEUTSCH:** And they were performing regularly?

**BROOKS:** They were performing regularly. Definitely during the Lenten season. There used to be a chancel thing where each church took and sent a group out. Whether it was a choir, drama group, dance group, to another church. You shared.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** You know, potluck dinners, it was really very nice. And you danced all the whole time of Lent. And that was the one thing—we did that because the whole thing was that they had this great space up here, and there was no money transferred at that time between the church and the dance studio, so we always called it paying the rent, which was ...

**DEUTSCH:** Your dancing was paying the rent.

**BROOKS:** Dancing was—for the different chancel groups and things like that. We did a lot of grant work in the D.C. school system, and also in the Virginia school system. We would come and—Mary would get together and do a show, for children. We also performed at the National Theater, they used to do a Saturday morning program for children. And so we did several seasons of that. We did a couple of things early morning TV, on WRC ...

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** ... and I mean early in the morning, too. I don't know who saw it, but we were, we were at the studio about seven o'clock on the morning, doing this thing, and, um , then of course, the company, after I actually retired—I got chronic tendonitis—and my feet just got to the point, it was no pleasure.

Performing up to the peak you need to, you know. But after that, the company itself went to Prague, you know, and went to Czechoslovakia, so they did a couple of little tours ...

**DEUTSCH:** And Russia ...

**BROOKS:** And Russia, yes. And then you know, continuing. And then of course Mary came down ill, and stuff. She actually battled cancer for quite a while, it went into remission for quite a while. Believe it or not, and I like to say this, that's not what really took her out.

**DEUTSCH:** The cancer ...

**BROOKS:** Not really, she could afford that. Mary had that back operation, and I don't want to call it incorrectly, where they go in and fuse the discs together—hers was not good. When they went in, they couldn't do anything about it. And I think it just took her spirit down, really, to tell you the truth.

**DEUTSCH:** Lots of pain, probably.

**BROOKS:** Lots of pain. Because they had to go in, like they were going to do the operation, but when they got in things had collapsed back there. She shrunk.

**DEUTSCH:** Yes, I remember that.

**BROOKS:** It was amazing. So you know how small she was.

**DEUTSCH:** Oh yeah, she was tiny.

**BROOKS:** Really, tiny. I mean, you took a woman that was around five-six, and she ended up not being too much taller than I am, so you can imagine what that would have done. She never had a hump or slouch, but she had a very bad case of osteoporosis. And that I think is what really took her down, to me. Because anyone who ever knew Mary knew that she was a spicy lady, you know, but I think, that just, I don't think she could handle that. No, she really in her lifetime was very fortunate really truly because she never really truly had what you call painful illnesses; I should say that, because you know you can be sick and not hurt, you know what I mean?

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**BROOKS:** And I just don't think she could deal with what was going on with her body. I think she felt as though she had lost control, you know. I've had enough operations over the years, to know that my method of teaching is different now. I can't jump on these old knees like I used to, but I think I've

improved—according to my students—my way of teaching and their way of understanding, because I can verbalize. I don't always have to do it.

**DEUTSCH:** You can't necessarily show ...

**BROOKS:** Exactly. I mean, there are some things, I mean, I just—my knees aren't going to do, and if I'm going to continue doing what I like, you know there are some things you just cut out. So, you know, like, you show beats and things, I actually show with my arms, they get the same effect, and the students—I have them do it with your arms first, feel it up in your arms, then give it to me in your legs. It has worked, beautifully. Mary never allowed herself, I think, to get to that point. She had to demonstrate each and every step. And if you're going to be—And, dance teachers are old.

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs] Dance teachers, yeah.

**BROOKS:** You know, dance teachers get old, and you know, this is what you do. I had quite a few teachers on the way, taking in their different studios, they sat in the chair, they didn't budge off their chair, you know, for advanced dance. I'm not saying for young dancers, but advanced dancing. That's why it's wonderful that ballet has a language, it has terminology. You learn that terminology so that you can go anywhere into a dance studio and take a ballet class.

**DEUTSCH:** And everyone understands what ...

**BROOKS:** Everyone understands. The language of ballet is French.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah. So, when you came in as a dancer, did the dance studio exist—the dance studio existed, but did the school exist?

**BROOKS:** Yes, the school existed. She had classes going on. I didn't start teaching until the dancer that I told you about—they really realized that she wasn't going to be able to come back. I didn't start until the second semester which would have been 1965. Actually taking a few classes. You know, I took the baby classes, and everything. Mary wanted to see if I really could teach. I had been teaching somewhere else, at my home studio, as I would call it, the studio I grew up in, and you know, earned a little extra money that way, teaching, believe it or not, tap to three-and-a-half-year-olds. Now, believe me, that is a funny sight, when someone does not know their right and their left and you're teaching shuffle-ball-change.[tap step]

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs] Does anyone study tap anymore? People don't do ...

**BROOKS:** Actually, it's making a comeback.

**DEUTSCH:** Is it?



**BROOKS:** It really is making a comeback. I get more people asking about it. If I could find a place, that's something I know I could probably still do, because the shoes are not flat, you know, but they still teach the tap. Usually you have to have a studio that has a different type of flooring than what we have, because the taps will cut this up. But yeah, I still get inquiries, that's why I say I still send people over there ...

**DEUTSCH:** Over to CHAW [Capitol Hill Arts Workshop].

**BROOKS:** Over to CHAW, and if they live in the uptown area there's a place called Ballet Academy run by Bill Garney, who's an old hooper, that's his—he has ballet and he has people coming to teach ballet ... but he'll still get in there and teach his tap, you know. Jones and Haywood, the studio where Ballet Theater of Harlem's dancers actually came from, which was here, there's like ABT [American Ballet Theatre] the dancers come from Washington School, you know? It's like, they get a lot of training and usually they can filter into that one ... For the Ballet Theater of Harlem, it was Jones and Haywood—Doris Jones and Claire Haywood. And actually I taught there for a whole season.

**DEUTSCH:** So that was a DC ....

**BROOKS:** It was a DC, up off of Delafield [Place, NW].

**DEUTSCH:** Doris Jones and ...

**BROOKS:** Claire Haywood.

**DEUTSCH:** Now let's get back to your dancing career. Didn't you say you auditioned for Alvin Ailey?

**BROOKS:** I did, and ...

**DEUTSCH:** What year was that?

**BROOKS:** That would have been—um, in the 60s—in the early 60s, because it would have been before I got married, and I got married in '68. So it was the early 60s. And it was just on a dare, from George. So you know, you go—Ailey Company—because George, by that time, had left St. Mark's, and had gotten into the Ailey Company.

**DEUTSCH:** So he was a member?

**BROOKS:** He was a member. And it was on a dare. They had a little audition-type thing down here. Okay, so you know, you go to it, these open things and—you're okay, you're something we would like to have. And I never wanted to leave D.C. because—that's not what I wanted—the small repertoire

company here was perfect for me, it really was. St. Mark's was perfect for me. I don't regret that move at all. It was nice to know that I could have gone on.

**DEUTSCH:** Was George mad at you, that you wouldn't, I mean that you had a chance to, kind of ...

**BROOKS:** No, not really. I think—at least he didn't say so, and he was like in and out then by that time. George was about himself, by that time, and he knew I could have made it, and, well, okay you did—

**DEUTSCH:** That was different from him, but ...

**BROOKS:** That was different from him, and not everyone wants that. You know, I've had a couple of friends—in fact, one of the best choreographers that I've known, I mean a guy that would just touch you right here—Ulysses Dove ...

**DEUTSCH:** I love that name.

**BROOKS:** Yeah, anyone who has done—just go to dance, you know that name, Ulysses Dove. He went to George Washington University. He was here, we were all college student when we were here, with Mary. And he went on to—in fact, Mary had a lot of people from here, that went on to, you know, big time—went to Ailey and he ended up choreographing overseas and here. And his work is just—unfortunately he died young, but just a sweet, sweet person. Never heard him raise his voice, not once. I guess we danced together for about, maybe three-four seasons?

**DEUTSCH:** Here?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. But like I said, real nice person, just totally even, you know. Soft-spoken, lots of talent. He even had talent in fashion, which, you know, now you look back, he used to make ties to sell for extra money. And now I'm looking back, of course I wouldn't have any reason to have a tie, but I wish I had bought one of the ties [laughs]. Probably worth some money, now.

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs] Okay, so, speaking of ties—you got married in 1968?

**BROOKS:** I did, yes, I got married to Arthur Dalvin Brooks, he's deceased now, unfortunately, and we have two beautiful children. My daughter's the oldest, and her name is Antoinette [spells it] Marie, and her last name is Stokes. And my son Joseph, middle name Arthur, Brooks—and I have to say senior.

**DEUTSCH:** Senior. Because he's got a little boy.

**BROOKS:** He's got a little boy. My grandson is Joseph Arthur Brooks Junior.

**DEUTSCH:** And Joseph is now five?

**BROOKS:** Joseph will be five in June. He's in pre-school now. And of course my daughter-in-law is April Brooks.

**DEUTSCH:** And she's a dancer!

**BROOKS:** Yes, she is. She's been here at the studio since she's been eight years old.

**DEUTSCH:** Is that how your son met her?

**BROOKS:** Yes. Now there is the funniest thing. The two of them used to take at Dorothy Walker, know as Dot, jazz class when Dot taught the jazz class on Fridays. And I never forced either one of my children into dance, because I felt—I loved it so, but I didn't want to push it on them. So my son asked to take the jazz class. He said, as long as I don't have to wear the tights. So I said, no, you don't have to wear the tights, you can wear a pair of sweatpants. And he met—and then April would take the pointe class—a couple of the teenagers would take the pointe class beforehand and stay to do the jazz afterwards. So that's how they met. They lost contact because, during all this time Joseph was playing soccer with a friend of his and was bouncing the soccer ball down the street to get home, and broke his foot. So of course that knocked out his dance career [laughs]. I'm always teasing him about that! But anyway, they met again at my daughter's wedding. Because, you know, my daughter knew April and she was invited, and blah, blah, blah. And that's how they got it back together and ended up marrying.

**DEUTSCH:** So, did you raise your kids here on the Hill?

**BROOKS:** I raised my kids—we lived here in town until the 80s in an apartment in the Anacostia area, and then my late father-in-law gave us a gift. We paid one dollar, for about a two-third acre lot in Vienna, Virginia. And that's where we built our home. And that's where I still live. And that's been almost 30 years ago.

**DEUTSCH:** That must have been a big transition.

**BROOKS:** You know, it was and it wasn't. It was time.

**DEUTSCH:** You were probably a bit cramped in the apartment, with the kids.

**BROOKS:** Well, we had—the apartment was big. We had a big 18-by-20 living room, I mean, this was a huge place. They've turned them into condos, now, you know. That wasn't the reason. The reason was the education. The D.C. school systems, right about that time, really started going downhill. My kids were lucky—the elementary school that they went to, which is Stanton Elementary, was under Title One, Title Two, they had title everything. Good school. My daughter talks about that right now. Fabulous principal.

Her name was Miss Stencil [spells it]. This woman knew every kid in that school, and could put you with your parent. She was never in her office, you found her in the halls.

**DEUTSCH:** In the halls.

**BROOKS:** In the halls, and a good education. But then when my daughter had to go to middle school, that's when things—I realized you know, we got to get out of here. We are not wealthy people, we can't do private school and save money for college. You can't do both.

**DEUTSCH:** Right. No.

**BROOKS:** You can't do both. It's not going to happen. That's when my father-in-law had been saying, I want to give you this, I want to give you this, I want you to have—and we took him up on it.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** And my children went to Fairfax County school system.

**DEUTSCH:** Right.

**BROOKS:** Uh, my daughter graduated from George Mason University, she had a degree in psychiatry [sic] and my son came out of—he went to NoVa [Northern Virginia Community College]. With my son, it was hard. His dad died when he was 15, so ... You know, you're a little rough around the edges, things—you know, you're not sure, but you go to school. That's it. So you went to NoVa, he got a certificate in computer—programmer—from Washington Business School. Then after that he did the nine-to-five and realized he would die, and that's when he asked me, he said, you know what I really want to do? I said what do you really want to do? I said I want to get you set. I want to do something that's in the theater. Hmm, what is this? Momma, you know I love sound, I love the equipment, I love playing with electronics. I said, I tell you what, do your homework. Find a good school that's going to give you that. Found an awesome place. The professor taught all this course. At American University. But then he had a little small thing on his own that he did.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh?

**BROOKS:** It cost just as much as American University. Joe took two years. But he has his certification, that's what he does ...

**DEUTSCH:** To be a sound technician?

**BROOKS:** Sound technician. So he does audio, video. He was with another person's business for years and years and years. And then he decided when the housing market was really at its boom. He said, Momma I think I know how to make some really good money for a while. I said, well, you know, you got to do what you got to do, you've got a family now. And he owned a trucking—he owned his own truck for quite a while. And he did very well, he made good money. And then he got out of it, because he saw where things were sliding. Well, guess what he's back in? He now has his own business, which is Star Audio.

**DEUTSCH:** That's great.

**BROOKS:** So it went around, you know, did that circle thing. So I'm really proud of him. Proud of him and my daughter, what they're doing.

**DEUTSCH:** What did your husband do?

**BROOKS:** My husband was one—there was only two—blacks, that actually made it to the sales floor for Kinney Corporation. Before he died he ended up being a troubleshooter, which means he would go into a store and clean it out and make it profitable. Though the last store he was in was at East—of course, Kinney no longer exists.

**DEUTSCH:** Kinney was clothing? Or furniture?

**BROOKS:** Kinney was shoes. It was owned by the Woolworth—the five-and-dime—Woolworth Corporation. But he took that store in Eastover Shopping Center from a store that was losing, they were getting ready to close it, to a million dollar store.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow.

**BROOKS:** And that's what he was doing when he died. Major heart attack. You know, some people have one, two, three in them? He had one. And it's sad because his mother died at the same age with the same issue. But you know, that was before people realized—talk about your family history! You know, see, that's what my parents did, you know, they let us know what was going on. I know my grandfather has a bad heart, I get my heart checked, I make my children get their heart checked. In fact when my son played football, because of that, the doctor said—you know how they asked for the children to get their physicals and everything like that—I said I want him to have an electrocardiogram. Oh, well, he's a young man.

**DEUTSCH:** So was your husband when he died.

**BROOKS:** Thank you—52 years old. Thank you. And so I've been glad. And of course now you know you even get the echograms, I mean the whole thing progresses.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**BROOKS:** But his family didn't talk about things. Things were always a secret.

**DEUTSCH:** So that must have been kind of a difficult moment.

**BROOKS:** It was, it was. But one of the things that got me through it was my dance. It really was. I didn't stop. We had a show to do. In fact it was exceptionally hard, because we buried him the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, so the next day I cooked Thanksgiving dinner.

**DEUTSCH:** [Sighs]

**BROOKS:** But you keep busy. I tell people, keep busy. And that was the season that I worked with the [St. Mark's] Players. And we—I did the choreography for the dream scene for "Oklahoma." And that was great. I did a couple things with the Players. But that year, that was very good for me.

**DEUTSCH:** Oh, dream sequence for "Oklahoma" or from "Carousel"?

**BROOKS:** "Oklahoma."

**DEUTSCH:** I don't remember "Oklahoma" here.

**BROOKS:** Yeah, oh, this would have been ... in the early 80s.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah, I didn't start coming to St. Mark's till mid-80s.

**BROOKS:** Mid-80s. Okay, this would have been earlier.

**DEUTSCH:** So you were choreographing for the Players

**BROOKS:** Yeah, I did that. I did that one and "The Little Mermaid." Which is where I met Lou Bayard.

**DEUTSCH:** Yes, "The Little Mermaid," um ... Hans Christian Andersen, that I do remember. And that's where you met Lou Bayard [Capitol Hill resident, novelist].

**BROOKS:** Um-hmm. What else? The dance company still goes out. In fact, we're doing a program on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, black history ...

**DEUTSCH:** Where?

**BROOKS:** Garden Memorial, the church I work for. It's a small church but they're trying to get things together. We did it last year and it was very nice. It was sponsored by their youth of the church. And we do nursing homes, which is what Mary—I try to carry on the legacy, really, in a way, because I consider myself a caretaker, and hopefully someone else will come after me, you know? This is ...

**DEUTSCH:** A caretaker of?

**BROOKS:** Of the legacy of what's been, what has happened here, all these years. Count them up, it's a lot of years! You know, I mean. Then hopefully someone else will love it as much as I have, you know? You don't get financially rich, I mean, I do gigs all over the city, you know that. But there's something I have that a lot of people my age cannot say they have—I like what I do. It's as simple as it can be. There's too many people in my age group, they really do not care for what they're doing, at all, you know? And, you can tell, they're stressed out. Well, put it this way, I've got a lot of people that come to my adult classes, they are making fabulous money. But they are stressed out to the max. Not to say that this doesn't get stressful in its moments, but it's a stress that's a good stress and I know it's only going to last for like x number of time frame, like recitals, my open house that I do, you know, those kind of things.

**DEUTSCH:** And you've also done liturgical dance for the church?

**BROOKS:** For the church, definitely. Which I really—I really enjoyed that. That is something I have been wanting to do for many years before I finally got it going.

**DEUTSCH:** We got to get it going again.

**BROOKS:** We got to get it going again. Looks like there's been issues the last two seasons, with people's schedules [laughs]. Um, because what I saw was a fellowship, and there's times when people forget that in our Christianity, as well as in other religions, the fellowship is so important. You know, to your religion, it really is ... [beep/bell in background] Ignore the boop-boops.

**DEUTSCH:** Okay.

**BROOKS:** And when I saw that, on the dancers' faces week in and week out, you know, it wasn't just the commitment, but that they really enjoyed what they were getting, from this whole—this whole process, you know, of learning this. Maybe—hopefully, in their own way—they got a little closer to God.

**DEUTSCH:** Because the emphasis wasn't on the performance. It was an offering rather than ...

**BROOKS:** Exactly, exactly. And it was something that was a partnership, because so often in today's society we've gotten very selfish, it's me me me, you know. This was a partnership and everyone had to work together, I mean that was very, very important. I think everyone—if they didn't get anything else I think they finally realized that. It wasn't this person or that person or anything, it was together, you know, it wasn't me. Because at a point in time I said, hey, it's not mine anymore, it's yours. You know? And I think that's very important, like I said, especially in today's society, when everyone is just thinking of themselves. They get into that rut, I don't think people mean to do it, but I think it does happen and you've got to be so careful not to just sink into that permanently. I mean, there are times you do need to take care of yourself.

**DEUTSCH:** Right.

**BROOKS:** But there's those other times you need to be thinking about the surrounding, what's going on around you? I hear people, you know, I hear people talk about something like just going, walking down a block. And it'll be a block that this person is walking through. I'll say, did you see that house with those pretty flowers? What house are you talking about, Rose? And I'm going, hello! Come out of yourself, look around you, you know? Get off the iPod, and the telephones—and I mean I have a cell phone, but come on! You know?—and find out what's around. You're missing a lot of beautiful things. And I think, that meant a lot to me to get that liturgical workshop going. It's very, very important. And I—hopefully, I really think I did, I think I gave that to a large group of women, you know what I mean? And that really, all of a sudden I realized, you know, I can do this.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**BROOKS:** And enjoy it. And not feel out of place.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah. As one of those women, I can say ...

**BROOKS:** And I just think that meant so much. That right there, to me, you know—because I've had friends who were good teachers, who danced. One of my good friends, she danced with Katherine Dunham for years, and a lot of these other studios that teach adults, they'll say, oh well, you know, we just teach ... I say well, I know, you're just taking their money.

**DEUTSCH:** [Sigh]

**BROOKS:** You know, don't just take their money. There's more to those adults than you think. This is why we have the adult recital. This is not children, these are adults. And these people work hard, they travel, you know, and stuff? But it's something that makes them feel good. And we've been doing it—



now I can't even remember how long now—I think it's about eight years now we've been having a separate adult recital. Something like that, I'll have to ask. You know, and it's the same thing.

**DEUTSCH:** Give them a chance to ...

**BROOKS:** Yes! This is why they are also represented in the open house. We have the best pieces from the children's recital and the adult recital, to showcase them in the open house, and that is an honor. So you better believe all of my adults really work hard and wait for the results, saying, what do you think, Rosie? I've had one particular class who's been in it for two years in a row. They earned that right.

**DEUTSCH:** Rosie, I want to ask you about two events that happened during your lifetime on the Hill. Do you remember the March on Washington in 1963?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. I was down on the Mall, I would have been about sixteen-and-a-half, seventeen years old. And ...

**DEUTSCH:** I guess there were no Jumbotrons in those days?

**BROOKS:** No, just stood back in the pack and ...

**DEUTSCH:** Could you hear?

**BROOKS:** No, no. I could feel. You know? And that was enough right there. Unfortunately, behind all of that when Martin Luther King was killed ...

**DEUTSCH:** That was going to be my next question.

**BROOKS:** ...I was engaged, to my husband. We were to be married that spring. We also stood across the street and watched his store burn down; threw Molotov cocktails.

**DEUTSCH:** He had a store then?

**BROOKS:** Yeah, Kinney, that's when—it was his first store that he actually managed. Like I said, this was a guy who—went from stock boy—was not allowed on the floor, because he was black—to own his first store. It was at 11<sup>th</sup> and H Street NE.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow. So you stood there together and watched it burn.

**BROOKS:** Stood there, because the only thing I could ask him—he lived, he had a little rooming house he lived in, and he took my wedding band—because I had my engagement ring—

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

START OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**DEUTSCH:** ... You're watching your husband's store, you're not married yet ...

**BROOKS:** We're not married yet, yes, my fiancé ...

**DEUTSCH:** But he managed to retrieve your wedding ring out of the safe ...

**BROOKS:** He got my wedding ring out of the safe, and, um, we just stood across the street. Because the store—this was pre- just prior to Easter.

**DEUTSCH:** Yep, I remember it.

**BROOKS:** And of course if you know anything about retail, they are fully stocked to the max, especially a shoe store, for—everybody's got to get their new shoes and things. And the store was stocked to the max. Nylons, shoes, handbags, it was nothing but paper, cardboard, so that it wouldn't have taken much to set that place on fire.

**DEUTSCH:** And someone threw a Molotov cocktail?

**BROOKS:** Yep. And we actually saw the H Street corridor go up in flames. Kinney's' had another store up on 14<sup>th</sup> Street that they had not long finished remodeling, and this was a two-story store—oh, it was the most innovative thing in the world! And they tear-gassed the area so badly that they couldn't get the tear gas smell out of the store, so they closed it. And that's not pleasant. We drove up there, trying to help the guy that was there, who was managing the store at that time, to see if we could help him out at all, you know, we figured that was a loss down here, so let's see if we can salvage something there. Kinney's also had a store on Seventh Street, down by the old Kann's and Lansburgh.

**DEUTSCH:** Sure, I remember that.

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. That one came unscathed. That one was okay. But I'll tell anyone, I don't know why these crooks and everything want to ever get tear-gassed. That is a horrible experience. We just went through an area with tear gas. We didn't actually get tear-gassed. But the stuff was still so potently in the air, you know, it burns your throat, it burns your eyes, you know, it's a horrible experience.

**DEUTSCH:** So did you get married that spring?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. Got married in May.

**DEUTSCH:** And, at Ebenezer?

**BROOKS:** No, believe it or not, because of everything that had happened. I told my parents, I don't think we can take a church wedding. You know? It was just too much, you know? We got married in my minister's living room, and ...

**DEUTSCH:** Here on the Hill?

**BROOKS:** Here on the Hill. At that time, Ebenezer had the parish house, for the minister. Right next door.

**DEUTSCH:** So, just a very small ...

**BROOKS:** Just a very small wedding, and my parents gave us a wedding dinner at home in the dining room, and I look back now and I say—the only thing I do regret, we didn't get pictures. But that's okay. I actually have a picture of when he proposed to me, though.

**DEUTSCH:** You do?

**BROOKS:** I do. Someone snapped that.

**DEUTSCH:** I want to see that.

**BROOKS:** I didn't know. I will, I'll show it to you. And didn't know what was going on.

**DEUTSCH:** Where was that?

**BROOKS:** It was at a New Year's Eve party! Isn't that a ...

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah, well, that explains the ...

**BROOKS:** And I had a shape then. But I had this little green mini-dress on, and in fact, I laughed at him, I said, you know, you had a couple of drinks tonight. Did you really know what you were doing? You know? But he said, yes he did. But he was a lot older than I, he was 11 years older than I. But, it was good. It would have been almost 20 years when he died. We had a very good marriage. [Pause] Yeah, because it would be 41 years, it would be almost 41 years.

**DEUTSCH:** So he's been gone a long time now.

**BROOKS:** Long time. Over 20 years I've been a widow. I proudly say I put two kids through college by myself! [Laughs]

**DEUTSCH:** That is something to be proud of!

**BROOKS:** Yes, I'm very proud of that. I'm very proud of them, too. Because it was tough, it was hard for them because he just dropped dead. He went out in the morning and didn't come back. You know. That was the hard part. The hardest part was not being able to say good-bye. With my dad, my dad had a stroke—thrombosis, and heart attack together, but he lasted long enough for us to say goodbye.

**DEUTSCH:** But your husband didn't.

**BROOKS:** No, and it took me a long time to get over that.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah. So how did you feel about the inauguration of Barack Obama?

**BROOKS:** I loved it! [Laughs] What can I say?

**DEUTSCH:** How did I know you were going to say that? [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** And you know, it may sound silly, but it was the way he ran his campaign. He didn't run it saying I'm black; I'm of color. He ran it saying, I am the man for the job. And I guess I liked that because like I told you, my parents made sure I knew all of my heritage, on both sides. And I am—because Susan Jacobs who's a potter, most people know Susan Jacobs—we talk about being the mutt.

**DEUTSCH:** And of course, Obama uses that word about himself.

**BROOKS:** Yes, yes we are mutts. I happen to know—and a lot of people don't realize—slave ships didn't just stop in America, now, they stopped in Scotland, they stopped in Ireland. I happen to know where mine was, and it was Waterford, Ireland, so I have the right to wear green ...

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** ... on St. Patrick's Day, because I'm part Irish. That would be from my father's side. The other part stopped in St. Thomas, West Indies, and that's where I get a little bit of the—some of the accents, in fact Dot Walker and I both—because her family's from Trinidad. And her mom, her late mother, used to say, Rosie? I said yes, it's there, that little island twang is there, you know. I wasn't born there but I had enough, it's deep. It's one of those things I think that just runs deep in your blood. And of course I did state earlier that my great-grandfather was full Cherokee, and my great-grandmother was—her mother and she was a barnyard child.

**DEUTSCH:** A barnyard child?

**BROOKS:** A barnyard child, means the master ...

**DEUTSCH:** Oh.

**BROOKS:** Okay? So her father was Caucasian but her mother—German Caucasian—and her mother was black. So you have the German descent.

**DEUTSCH:** I've never hear that term, a barnyard child. I mean, I certainly know the phenomenon.

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. And that's why they talk about this. There's an area in Virginia, you may know of it, called Gum Springs. This is the heirs of Saint—of Thomas Jefferson. Okay? In fact I had a grant project I did there for about a year and a half.

**DEUTSCH:** Was that your family?

**BROOKS:** No, it wasn't my family. I just happened—you know I like working with children. I did a reading readiness project where you take pre-school children, work with dance, but you work with the lettering, and things, through movement. So we'd make the letter A, how many ways can you make A? We can make A several different ways with your body. You know? How can you make S? You know, and all that kind of thing. So it was about a year and a half. I had grant for that. So that was a lot of fun.

**DEUTSCH:** That was down there?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh, it was down in Gum Springs, Virginia. Which is not that far from Mount Vernon. It's in that area. Of course, I think that everyone knows that our founding father, George Washington, had his set of barnyard children as well.

**DEUTSCH:** Did he? No, I did not know that.

**BROOKS:** Yep, apparently so. Yeah, I know about Thomas Jefferson, but someone—we were talking about this not too long ago actually, the history of being a mutt, and someone was telling me he had seen some documentive or something on the History Channel, you know, and I had told him I hadn't seen that. I said, I know about Thomas Jefferson, you know.

**DEUTSCH:** But what's interesting about that, of course, is that George Washington didn't have any other—I mean, he didn't have any children with ...

**BROOKS:** I know he didn't.

**DEUTSCH:** So that is interesting.

**BROOKS:** There were some strange things going there with that fellow. Yeah, you know, just to show you this is not a modern phenomenon.[Laughs]

**DEUTSCH:** Strange things [Laughs]. Any plans for the dance studio that ...?

**BROOKS:** I want to keep it going. I want to keep it at its very top. We're really very well known for the type of training we give here. I have many students in the past and currently that have gone on to—and have done well for themselves in dance. The young lady that did the solo, for the open house, she was the young lady that we gave the money to, to go to the intense program. And that makes us feel great, because what they told her was that, you go back, you've had good ballet training, and you get some more.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow.

**BROOKS:** Because, where you're getting it from is good. So she is, she's back, you know? In fact, I should see her this evening, she takes my pointe class on Fridays. In the years past, I've had a dancer that went on to Joffrey. Laura Desmond, and—I got tickled to death because I heard from the parent of a student, her name was Nan Palileo. Nan was a Hill person, for a long time, and then they went to Italy, her husband's family's from Italy, and went to Italy for a long time. But her daughter, Gina, was in one of a small repertoire modern company, from what I understand. So we've had some—you know—I think one of the coolest things though is that the dance company is made up of past students. That grew up here. April, Karen King, Page Grayson, Ayana Hawkins, all of them ...

**DEUTSCH:** All of them grew up ...

**BROOKS:** All of them took dance, here, from their youth. Went on to college. Karen is actually a professor, so she's a professor of N.Y.U. in math.

**DEUTSCH:** [Sighs].

**BROOKS:** I know. Ayana teaches law. They all come back. They came back.. Karen commutes between here—her house—her home is here. She has a small flat in New York, and she does that because she wants to continue to dance.

**DEUTSCH:** Wow.

**BROOKS:** And what she does, she ...

**DEUTSCH:** Did you say she's a math professor?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. Professor of math at N.Y.U. Comes back here to dance. She gives me her schedule, and we work around it. Because I've got people that have jobs—you know—and careers and things. So we make it work. Sometimes it's like, burning the midnight oil when it gets close to performance time. But, you make it work. In fact, I wouldn't have it any other way, you know. I think it's the most

marvelous thing. The only one that's not what I call, from a child, home-grown is Pat Hill, Patricia Hill. Pat's been around the studio for a lot of years.

**DEUTSCH:** Right.

**BROOKS:** And she was just—with her multi talents—very multi-talented.

**DEUTSCH:** How many classes a week do you teach?

**BROOKS:** Okay, all together, about 18—18 to 20. Because I teach x number of classes here, but I teach for a charter school on Saturday which is KIPP—Key-DC, Key Academy DC. I started with them when they first came to DC, and someone told them I was a dance teacher. And, because they started in the church that I work for, that was their temporary site. For the KIPP-Key. So that was good. And I'm still with them, I still work with them on Saturdays, and stuff. And that's been very rewarding, because I work with fifth through eighth graders. [Pause] Then, I'm over at St. Peter's—Catholic school—Interparish School on Wednesday afternoons. Because I still teach pre-K. I only teach one class, but you know, you got to keep your finger in there, you know? So I teach a pre-K class, pre-K/kindergarten, and then a first/second grade class over there. Because they have half-day.

**DEUTSCH:** So you have pre-K, and then first, second grade?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. And then on Mondays I have my grant project, with T-G-I-F, and those children are usually from first graders up through seventh graders.

**DEUTSCH:** And are they children in a particular ...?

**BROOKS:** Most of them come from Brent Elementary, but not all of them. She has a couple of them that come from the charter school called Edward? Edward Charter School? There's a charter called Edward? [?] She has a couple people that have them—she picks them up and they come over, but there's mainly ...

**DEUTSCH:** So it's an after school program?

**BROOKS:** It's an after school program, it's an after school program for low income children, right.

**DEUTSCH:** And then you have all your classes here?

**BROOKS:** Then I have all my classes here, rehearsal schedules ...

**DEUTSCH:** And then you work, you have a job!

**BROOKS:** I do! I have a day job, which I got after my husband passed, for insurance purposes. Got to have health insurance. And I've been there—ho-ho-ho—since 1991! We didn't realize I had been working for them so long.

**DEUTSCH:** And where is that?

**BROOKS:** Garden Memorial Presbyterian. And that's at Minnesota Avenue SE, 1720 Minnesota Avenue.

**DEUTSCH:** And what do you do there?

**BROOKS:** I'm the office manager. I answer the phone, do the books, I'm it.

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs].

**BROOKS:** This is a small—the building is large, it's a huge church, it's 114 years old, but it's a small congregation. So, you know, they don't have money to be paying receptionists.

**DEUTSCH:** So is that kind of a full-time job?

**BROOKS:** No, it's, I would say more three-quarter time, yeah, because you need—for them, you have to do over 20 hours, to get the benefits and things, you know, the health benefits. And then I do that and I come from there, from there I come over here and do what I love best—that's why I lucked up. Actually I have to tell you the story of how I got that job. Mildred Wheat, who used to work here at St. Mark's, which we used to laugh about, because she's a Presbyterian, okay? So we also figured we've got it covered, now I just want you to know that I'm a Methodist, working for a Presbyterian, dancing in an Episcopal church. I also work in a Catholic school! I got it covered!

**DEUTSCH:** So Mildred ...

**BROOKS:** Mildred knew my cousin—I had a cousin that went to Garden Memorial and she knew me from there, you know, and then she worked here. And I—she asked me one time, she said, Rosa, how are you doing? I said, I'm doing fine, but you know, I think I'm going to have to pick up a little something in the morning, because, you know, I'm trying to pay health insurance out of my pocket, and it's killing me, you know, like that. My mom was trying to help me, too, she—my mom was helping me out with that. And she said, hmm. She said I need to talk to you. She said, you do the books, you do everything for the studio, you're doing all sorts of things. So I said, well, yeah, kind of, you know. And she said, can you come up here and talk to me a while, we'll make a little deal? I said, sure. So that's how it started. She said, I want you to go for this interview over there at Garden Memorial. I said, Oh, yeah, Jimmy's church.



That was my cousin. She said, because they need someone who has your multi-talents and who's also a pushy broad ...

**DEUTSCH:** [Laughs]

**BROOKS:** ... which we know, in my own way, I am—you know? And that you will get some things done over there that they need done. It's a nice—the people are very nice but they tend to kind of do it, you know, when the feel like it.

**DEUTSCH:** Right. A little bit, kind of, slow paced?

**BROOKS:** Uh-huh. So, that's how it started. I got the job and I've been there ever since. And it's been a good marriage. Really, if you want to call it that. In fact, quite a few of those folks make it their business. They ask me, when is your show in December? And I've got about twelve of them that come over here. So they support me on this end, too. Like I said, that's why I do the little—I've done a couple benefits for them over the time with the dance company. And it gives us a place to perform.

**DEUTSCH:** Anything else you think we should talk about? We didn't talk much about choreography.

**BROOKS:** Oh, wow. I love it! [Laughs] I learn something new about myself every time I do a piece. And I had a bet with myself—and I've had this bet for over twenty years—with the recital, the following season, that it has to be better than the previous. So far I've been able to keep that. It's the same with the open house. For those of you that have been coming to the shows. I have to be able to do better than I did before. You know, it's just a personal thing. With teaching, if I don't learn something every season—and I said it when I started, and I really mean it—I have to learn something new about how to teach, how to convey my thoughts. And when I don't, Rosie hangs it up. I retire. I have to be able to do that. I have to also not forget what it is to be a student. Teachers do forget, they have a habit of forgetting. You've got to be—you have to remember what it is to be on that side of the classroom. You know, what is a student going through? It's not just dance, it's just—it's in general. I will take a course, it could be a weekend course, but I always take something somewhere along the line within the year. It could be on nothing, sewing, macramé, I don't care. But I have to be a student. I have to be a student. It's important that every teacher continues to be a student.

**DEUTSCH:** And maybe every person.

**BROOKS:** Yes, yeah, that too. But as far as choreography, I love it. I love to do—I am classically trained, and it is the most important training a dancer can get. In fact, looking at bios of modern dancers and jazz dancers, what do you see? It's classical ballet! They had that training. But when I choreograph, I

usually choreograph modern or jazz. Because I like doing abstract pieces, as well as the classical pieces. There are some classes, you have to know that your beginners can't do abstract. You give your beginners, children and adults, you give them the classical. Because you've gotten them to that comfort zone. But as your children get closer to pre-teen, teenage stage, you need to whap them a little bit out of their comfort zone. Because they need to know there's something else other than ballet. And that's been good, because then, when they go to college, especially with the girls—if they're not sports oriented—most universities and colleges now let you do dance as your phys ed requirement. So here you are doing something that you like, and earning a grade. You can't beat that. That's a win-win—you know?—situation. But choreographing, I love it. I've been doing it ever since—especially here—I guess the most momentum [momentous?] one I remember doing and having to re-do was the Lord's Prayer. Not to your standard Lord's Prayer song. This was a group, I can't remember the group's name, but the album was called "Rejoice Mass." And I was asked, many many years later—because I taught Beryl Martin, Bertha's daughter, and—in fact the way I found out she had gotten killed in an automobile accident, I was teaching. Actually, I take that back, I was taking a class and Bertha came up the steps and did that [unseen gesture] to me, and I said—I just excused myself—I said, yeah, hey, what's happening? She said, I need something from you. That's how she went about telling me. She said, I need you to dance the Lord's Prayer. So I'm thinking it's for something in the service because, you know, she's always been involved in the church. I said, you know, oh sure, I'll have to revive it. I haven't done it in years. And I said when and where. And she said, at Beryl's memorial service. I just about fell down the steps. Flat out, that's how she told me. And I re-did it for that. I actually danced in that memorial service for Beryl. Because she always said—because I had trained Beryl from a little child, up until she went to college. And of course she died on an icy road, coming home. Bertha and I go way back. Plus, before we moved out of the city, she was my children's dentist.

**DEUTSCH:** So have you ever danced the Lord's Prayer since?

**BROOKS:** No, I haven't. I don't recall ...

**DEUTSCH:** Would that be something we liturgical dancers could do?

**BROOKS:** Actually, you could. I could revise—I could tweak it a little bit. It had a lot of knee work.

**DEUTSCH:** Ooh.

**BROOKS:** You guys know me, I tweak stuff for you guys. But it would be a beautiful piece. I'd have to get the music out, and see if I could—I'm sure I could, because just about everything is on CD now. Because I have the old album at home. i-tunes. Oh, sure. And that could be something that could be done.

**DEUTSCH:** Maybe we should think about that.

**BROOKS:** It could be done. It was a solo, but, it could be done by, by, you know ...

**DEUTSCH:** Maybe that could give you an interesting task, to turn it into something for a group.

**BROOKS:** It could be. The piece, I'll get the music. You'll love it. I wish I could tell you the name of the group. But the album was called "Rejoice Mass," and we actually did a whole thing for the Lenten season. Mary did a whole—we did like a story, you know. We used a lot of that music. And back in that day, you know, it was like, oh, my goodness gracious, this is not the regular Lord's Prayer music. But it was beautiful! Beautiful! I did another solo called Walk with Me. Martha Bass. Which I have put that on many different junior company members. We used to have a junior company. Kids of today do all kinds of soccer and stuff. I haven't been able to get that junior company going again. Which I wish I could. I'm still working on it, believe me. I haven't said nay yet! But we used to have a little junior company. In fact, that's where April and Karen and all them came up, they came up in the junior company, you know? And that was, oh, that was the thing. And Mary used to do a Christmas show. She did the "Peter and the Wolf," "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," and oh, "Christmas Carol," Dickens' "Christmas Carol." That's where she would use a lot of the children, I will give her that, she ...

**DEUTSCH:** And that would be a show here?

**BROOKS:** Oh, yeah, sure, a show that was done here, for several weekends. And see, this was before the Players.

**DEUTSCH:** So it was just a dance ...

**BROOKS:** It was just dance, yeah. And some acting. I mean, you know, it was a big production, it was a huge production.

**DEUTSCH:** Tell me a little about the scholarship. I mean I know about it, but for the tape.

**BROOKS:** Mary Craighill left an endowment scholarship fund for would-be dancers, not necessarily theatrical dancers, but maybe dancers who wanted to teach, and who needed just some funds to go on to school to further this—need, I will call it—because I really do think it ends up being a burning desire and need—and this has been really great. I spoke before of the one young lady receiving a small portion. We are at the point now—the dance board—in seeing that we can do more in a bigger sense with the DC CAP [organization that advises on placement of scholarship funds] and hopefully, that will really get it going. This would be something that I think she would maybe jump up in her grave and say okay! Because she really was about dance, youth, and especially in her early years. And I think that's why she did leave that

money, you know? So that it could—how can I say it? Mary started dance late. She didn't really start training until she was in her 20s. She always told us that. So like she never did pointe work, because she really didn't do ballet until later in life. Yeah, she was—interesting story. She always wrote notes. Okay. And if she didn't have her notes she would get totally befuddled. But I think I now know why. Sometimes it would kind of bother me—why does Mary always have to go back to those notes all the time? She knows her class—but I realized, that is something you almost have to have had as a child. My adult students, I see it. They have to take notes.

**DEUTSCH:** Uh-huh.

**BROOKS:** But I can always tell an adult who had dance as a child. Most of the time they don't have to take notes. So I now know—this is what I'm saying, you learn something new, if I don't keep learning new things like this, you know, I need to just hang it up—they have to take the notes because they never learned that rhythm. And I think it's a rhythm that you learn as a kid. You know, you have little children that can learn choreography, you know, that—because I think they have that sense, and I do call it rhythm. It's like that trust. If you're taking swimming and if the teacher tells you as a little kid to jump, you'll jump. When you become an adult, you think about the results of you jumping and not knowing how to swim. [Laughs]. You know, so there's a—I don't know if it's a trust, I don't know what it is. But I've seen it over and over again. I can always tell a person that's had dance training—good dance training—as a youth and may have been away from it for fifteen, twenty years. But it's something—it's like riding a bike.

**DEUTSCH:** You never forget.

**BROOKS:** You never forget. You get rusty, but you never really forget. And this doesn't say that taking those notes is bad. Because I encourage it. I'm thinking, if this works for you, you use the teaching tool that works for that person. You know, you don't go around—because—I have a—my girl friend, you know, and she's a great person, I mean—she like myself danced from a little tot, you know what I mean? And she said, well, Rose I don't understand why I've got to take the notes. You just don't remember. I said, let me tell you, it's not going to work that way, end up with a bunch of frustrated people. Why not take the notes? Allow five minutes before the class is over. What harm is it doing? They have something. I also tell them, you know, now with the burning of CD's, we burn CDs and you have a piece of the music. You practice. And that's what has made, I think, the difference between St. Mark's Dance adult classes—ordinary people—and some of the other studio dance classes—ordinary people. You've got to be able to switch your teaching skills. I mean, for example, you have to be able to change your teaching

material, if you know that the children that come in—I'm going back to children—have been stuck inside all day long, maybe for a couple of days, because it rains. Okay!

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1  
TAPE 2/SIDE 2

**DEUTSCH:** Rosie teaches in the St. Mark's Dance Studio, and elsewhere.

**BROOKS:** One of the changes I have noticed, and maybe this is going back for about eight years, or more, maybe, but the newer generation of children, younger generation of children now—and Dorothy Walker and Jessica Sloan, the other two staff members here, we've talked about it—children aren't limbered. Like they used to be. It used to be the time you put a child on the floor, they put their legs out, and you had to tell them to put their hands in front of them to go down, because they're going to hit their heads on the floor. That's not so now. And I've been trying to figure out what's caused it. I'm talking about the young children.

**DEUTSCH:** Little kids.

**BROOKS:** I can see older kids, because they've been sitting too much, they—the whole physical education thing in schools, period. It's just not there. I don't care whether it's private, public, they do sports but they don't do physical education. Children of today just aren't stretched, overboard—you'll find some that still have that stretch, but you see too many—I have too many—I have a whole class that's stiff. I mean, if you asked them in September—they can touch their toes now—to go down and touch their toes? It wasn't going to happen.

**DEUTSCH:** They can't do it.

**BROOKS:** They can't do it! I don't care, you know, you can't force that. We had to work on it. I stretch the kids every class they come to, we stretch. They know what to do now, they come in, I don't even have to tell them. They go on and get the little mats out, sit down. If they want to chit chat, that's fine, but you sit down and you stretch, you know? If it's a holiday, when we came back, I know they didn't stretch, they saw they didn't stretch, they went ... That is something—that right there is something I do see a big change in. There is a—I can't say it's a non-commitment—children have too many things they have to do. When my daughter-in-law and them came up, you may have done two things, you took dance and music. Nowadays I see these kids, dance, music, soccer, choir, da-da, you know? Every single day is just packed and that's not—we're not talking about going to school yet ... going to school. And I have over the last couple of years, maybe the last six or seven years, have said things to parents. And I said, you know, I'd rather see you take them out of my dance class, I said, because I just see this kid just burnt out.

Because the children will come to me, they won't say they don't like things, but they'll ... they are so tired, I've got this project, and, you know, the high expectations for school. And that's the one thing I do wish. I think a lot of it is coming because people are—parents are fearful. I think I raised my children at a good time. I think it is hard now to raise children, there are so many negative things out there, with the media, with life in general now, that I think parents are—most parents I think are just frightful that their child had one moment to breathe.

**DEUTSCH:** They may fall behind.

**BROOKS:** They may fall behind. And it's not that, I mean it's okay for your kid to be a kid. I do believe that either they're going to be a kid while they're still a kid, or they're going to be a kid later on when it's really bad. And I've seen that, too. I have seen that. Do I speak up to parents? Yeah, I do it very quietly. Very, very quietly. And I've had kids that have made that choice, and after one season have come back. Glad that they took the break. But glad to be back. So I didn't lose anything. If anything, I gained a kid and a parent, and a family that respected me more.

**DEUTSCH:** And that's a little more stable ...

**BROOKS:** More stable, and I wasn't just worried about getting that money. We're going to get—You know I think we've established a good reputation, as long as we keep that reputation going and the staff knows, hey, it's up to you, we get the students in there and then it's up to you to keep them there. And you're going to lose some, I mean, some people find out it's not what they want, and I'm talking about all around children and adults. But I think we have a good reputation. We have too many people from the adult classes that have been here for eons, and that's a wonderful feeling, you know?

**DEUTSCH:** Right.

**BROOKS:** And then we have the kids. I have a set of girls that I'm going to lose this year—they graduate from high school. And that's always a sad moment, because you've had these kids since pre-school, you know? And then—all of a sudden—so we're working with them. Fortunately their graduation is on the day of the recital.

**DEUTSCH:** Oh, dear.

**BROOKS:** Well, you know, there's compromise. One of my adults heard this story and she said, well, Rosie, could they get here in time for the adult recital? So they're actually going to do their Wednesday modern piece in the adult recital, which is later. And their parents said, that'll work.

**DEUTSCH:** Oh, that's wonderful.

**BROOKS:** Isn't it? These girls have been together through the different classes, you know, so this is their last time. And it's a small class. Every five years or so we hit that point with the teenage class. Because all of a sudden I've had a couple years, we've lost them. And then we've got to get a—now, next year, we'll have a new group and it'll be—the class'll be big again—but it's about every five years. And it's been like that ever since I've been here.

**DEUTSCH:** How many kids in the Dance Studio?

**BROOKS:** Mmm. Maybe about 150, 143? I haven't done a count. Something like that? It's a nice—it's a nice number. And the kids are—other than the little children—the pre-teen and teenagers have to take two to three classes a week. So you've got that multi-thing there. Because that's important. I guess that's the—as far as change is, that's probably the biggest change I've made. Because you need—if you're going to do anything with dance, then you need to be taking dance ...

**DEUTSCH:** At least three times a week.

**BROOKS:** ... at least three times a week. If not more. And I did incorporate that in. Mary had it to the point, you really couldn't take but two, maybe, if you took the pointe class. One year, we tried to get her to teach the teenage classes and everything.[Laughs] But anyway, so that's, I think that's one of the biggest changes that I made. That and—what else? Oh, we had the place spruced up! We had it freshly painted—what's that, was it two years ago now? And that was cool. We changed—we did change the format of the brochure. I think that was—and it was a good change.

**DEUTSCH:** And now you're going to have a web site.

**BROOKS:** Yes! That should be—hopefully, we're going to take it slow and easy on it because we want to do it right, but we're having a big brain session tomorrow.

**DEUTSCH:** Wonderful.

**BROOKS:** So if you want to come on over and get some lunch, I'm bringing lunch. And I've got staff, the dancers from the company, some students, I invited a couple of parents. I want the whole spectrum. Because this is what makes this place. I tell everyone, it's not me. Again, I state it—I'm a caretaker. I'm a caretaker. That's what I am. It's not mine, you know.

**DEUTSCH:** You're a steward.

**BROOKS:** Yes! Exactly. Exactly.

**DEUTSCH:** Maybe that's a good place to end.

**BROOKS:** Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW