

Tape Log

Interviewee: Emily Banks

Interviewer: Hudson Vaughan and Maggie West

Interview date: February 17, 2011

Location: Ms. Banks' residence, Kensington Trace Condominiums, Chapel Hill, NC

Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

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<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
00:01	Introduction: About Ms. Banks' life, journey to Chapel Hill, family history.
00:36	Family history. "I don't have any family here living or dead in the South at all." Her family came from the West Indies. Maternal grandmother, Teresa, came from Cuba. Her sister got sent to Dominica when they tried to go to America.
01:55	Why her family came to the United States: "to make a better life." They left in the early 1900s. They lived in Florida, and then went to New York. Emily and her family lived in the house with her grandmother. Her father's family came from Trinidad. Her parents met in New York, father's family was "well-to-do" and educated.
03:58	Father: Edward Primus; Mother: Virginia. Her paternal grandfather died when she was young, but her paternal grandmother lived with them.
04:42	Emily's home: three story house in New York. Grandmother lived on the second floor.
04:53	Emily seems to be showing Hudson and Maggie photos of her various family members. She discusses a photo of her mother's baby sister, says that her mother, despite being the oldest, outlived all her siblings. Her mother was the only black in her class, just like Emily would be. Her mother didn't like her school experience, said everyone else was very prejudiced.
06:10	Lessons from her parents: go to school, love everybody, don't fight. Just walk away and be patient.
07:00	More discussion of photos. Her father was able to get a new (at the time) camera through his job.

- 08:35 Her mother's pilgrimage to Dominica: was one year before she passed, Emily went with her. They went to her father's property and a daycare had been put there.
- 11:13 Father was in the service as a Tuskegee Airmen, but never flew himself, although he sent up weather balloons. He was based in Tuskegee, Alabama for six years, starting at the beginning of the war until the war was over. He didn't talk about the experience much, probably because he and his wife didn't like it. They had been lynching black people in the area then.
- 13:33 Emily's sister is the head of social workers in New York.
- 14:00 Her father became the first and only (since Emily left New York) black man to be the Head of Technicians for RCA Communications. He had to have a pass to get off and on the base because of his race as a black man. Mother was considered mulatto and was afraid to go outside at all.
- 16:28 Oldest sister: Virginia (after her mother); Youngest sister: Joanne. Catholic, so they were all named after saints.
- 17:20 Her father's sister, Pearl Primus: a professor and is featured every year in *Ebony's* 50th anniversary book. "She was on Ed Sullivan all the time." She was a dancer as well as an anthropologist and a medical doctor. When she became a doctor, she was not allowed to practice. She taught Maya Angelou dancing. She traveled all over the world teaching and studying anthropology.
- 22:07 Emily's father: born in Trinidad, spoke perfect English.
- 23:09 Emily's children: four total, three girls and one boy. Oldest daughter: Brookson Nightdale works in a nursing home. Middle daughter teaches at East Chapel Hill High School. Son is a broadcaster, his wife Stacy is a nurse. Youngest daughter is a supervisor for the bus company in Durham. They all do very well and went to school. Two grandsons: one works in the mall, another is a junior at UNC-Charlotte.
- 25:11 Education has always been important in Emily's family: it's the only way to move up, to be somebody. She kept going back to school to get computer experience and worked as a teaching assistant. She went back to school again to become a "media technologist" until she got a teaching job at East Chapel Hill High School. She loved that job.
- 28:16 Emily asks that the tape recorder be shut off so she can talk about something that she'd rather not have recorded.
- 28:30 Yearbook Committee honored her, dedicated their yearbook to her.

- 31:00 Abuse: those who have been abused should not use their abuse as an excuse to abuse others. Surviving it all was worth it because she got to see her kids and grandkids be successful.
- 35:25 Time at East Chapel Hill HS: 10.5 years. Worked in the principal's office, but students came in all the time (especially student government). Emily participated in four different student plays while there. As the only black student when she was in school, she wasn't allowed to be in the plays. She talked about it during school board meetings to help promote the arts in schools.
- 40:26 Moving down South: brought the kids to escape abuse. Her kids were very young when she left New York. They took a bus down to North Carolina and rented a house (1970). She worked at a funeral home and restaurants as she started to go to Catholic school, which sent her to UNC-Chapel Hill to take religious education courses.
- 43:41 The neighborhood: Emily had good neighbors and didn't have to worry about safety then. The community was mostly African American. Walking was the mode of transportation. She was in Kingston for 14 years.
- 45:10 Getting a job: she went to Hope Valley school in order to register her daughter. She explained her unemployment and how she was fleeing abuse, and they ended up offering her a job and helped grade math papers. She had to work in another woman's class (for three years in the 1980s). This woman looked fondly upon the times of racial segregation and would read her first grade class racist books.
- 52:23 On wanting to work with Gene Nichols: she was a Christian woman who would not subscribe to the racist thoughts that the previous teacher had said. She was a nice lady and her husband was a principal in an inner city school. They worked together for eight years, and their kids grew up together and were close.
- 53:34 Back to her daughter wearing the braids and not being able to twirl because of it: she refused to take the braids out and thus didn't twirl that year. She went to NCCU and tried out (and made) the flag team. She has gone on to edit films.
- 55:10 The foundation of Emily's faith and values: her grandmother took her and her siblings to church every single Sunday. It was a mostly white, Catholic church and her and her siblings were the only blacks there at the time. She went to school there, and her classmates' parents were prejudiced, but her peers weren't. They prayed constantly.
- 59:43 Prayer helps her to not hate. She wanted to hate her husband who was abusive, a drug user, cheater, and did not care for the children. Through prayer, God was able to give her an answer: her friend in Durham advised her to come down.

- 1:01:32 She left Kinston to leave her second husband, who was not physically abusive like her first, but he was “scary” and possibly schizophrenic or bi-polar. She left behind her two story, fourteen room home. Her and her whole family has prospered since.
- 1:04:12 Emily begins showing pictures of one of her classmates, who was Puerto Rican and eventually moved back to Puerto Rico because of the prejudice he faced. He encouraged her to move to Puerto Rico to avoid prejudice.
- 1:05:09 Memories from New York (the Bronx) with her grandparents: her house had two kitchens, so she learned how to cook very well. The older women of her family sang often. Her mother and father, three siblings, one auntie and two uncles all lived under the same roof.
- 1:08:25 (cont.) They played outside a lot in the big yard and garden.
- 1:08:53 Her greatest mentors: her mother. Her mother didn’t like to talk about history, but her father did.
- 1:10:05 Meeting Malcolm X: he was a friend of Emily’s mother. Her mother encouraged him to travel to Mecca to help relieve the hate he was feeling. He changed his thinking after that and was killed, which Emily’s mother felt guilty about. Her mother babysat for a Muslim boy, whose mother introduced her to Malcolm X.
- 1:12:08 Ethical issues at Tuskegee: her father talked about experiments done on the soldiers there, especially the experiment in which they gave black men syphilis and gave half penicillin and half nothing.
- 1:13:23 Memories of the Civil Rights Movement: she remembers it, but did not actively participate because her parents didn’t let her. She was 17 when MLK made his “Dream” speech, but her mother wouldn’t let her go. She did however, get her sister to leave work to go march with Malcolm.
- 1:16:50 On her courage: she always felt that God had an angel looking out for her.
- 1:18:40 Prejudice from within her own race: black people didn’t like her family because they spoke very properly, were well-off, and privileged. Called her names like “half-breed,” “half and half,” “zebra,” despite her never considering herself anything except black.
- 1:19:37 First time noticing racial problems in America: when she went to school and had a teacher who “hated” her. People focused on her grandmother’s color, called her “white” even though she was black but light-skinned. She had never really recognized race much otherwise. “Prejudice is something that is taught.” White people called them Negros, but Emily would only call herself black.

- 1:23:19 What she heard about the South while in New York: she thought it was all outhouses and very racist. Her mother was afraid when Emily told her she was moving down South. Despite things getting better in the North during the 70s, they still hadn't improved as much in the South.
- 1:25:29 Going to Europe: "I flew there with 69 white people. I was the only black." In 2001, right before 9/11. Went to London, Wales, and Ireland. Everyone was so nice and friendly, she almost wanted to stay.
- 1:27:42 Beginning to attend St. Joseph's Church: 2003. She had been a member of Orange Grove Missionary Church but would have to stay with her sister because mass was at 8am. She went to St. Joseph's often for funerals, but decided going to St. Joseph's every other Sunday when her friend Leroy came to pick her up in the church van. She ultimately decided to leave her old church for St. Joseph's when she realized that she was causing unnecessary trouble for her daughter and she was very close to that family.
- 1:35:52 All of Emily's children remain in North Carolina, except her son who is in Taylor, Georgia near Atlanta.
- 1:36:11 Pastor Harrison and his wife Bernice: Emily has always been really close with Bernice, who she calls "Miss B." She has "the utmost affection for her." Her and Pastor Harrison worked extremely hard at St. Joseph's, but left for a different parish.
- 1:39:47 Back to Europe: Emily shows pictures of England, her in front of Oxford College, on London Bridge. Ireland and Wales were cold and damp. She emphasizes how blessed she feels to have had the opportunity for this trip and cruises to the Caribbean. People were the friendliest to her Ireland.
- 1:46:09 In Kinston, she would get followed around in the store. She told the woman working there that she does not steal and does not need to be followed.
- 1:46:42 Other places Emily has worked: K-Mart, Belk's, and whenever she goes back to visit, people hope she is coming back to work. She has finally felt like the love for her has been returned. Parents at the school used to give her gift cards to show their appreciation for her.
- 1:48:59 Hopes for the future: to put something in writing for her children, which she wishes her mother had done for her; to take her grandchildren on one nice trip
- 1:50:33 Broadway plays: Emily got to see Raisin in the Sun, Josephine Baker (Anita Baker's grandmother). Other significant events she remembers: she got to meet Muhammad Ali and see JFK become president. She got to witness Queen Elizabeth being crowned.

- 1:52:39 (cont'd) Emily got to witness Obama's election, but was sad that her mother didn't get to witness his election too.
- 1:53:10 Fearlessness came from her father, who told her not to be afraid of anyone. If someone is going to kill you, they would. She couldn't understand why people would want to kill her, but nowadays people seem to be killing each other for no reason. Despite this, she tries for forgiveness, often with the help of prayer.
- 1:54:25 She has shared parts of her past with her grandchildren, who gave suggestions for what she should've done. But "things were different then" and her parents were "strict."
- 1:56:07 When you grow up on faith, you never lose that faith, even when you feel like your prayers aren't being answered.
- 1:57:56 Rock bottom: "Nothing is lower than me than a roach crawling around on the ground." She was working five jobs and had to do all the "dirty work" when she moved down to NC. She joined the PTA to keep up with her kids.
- 1:58:02 She is proud of her children growing up and is glad they're raising their kids well. God continuously gives blessings.
- 1:59:58 Overheard a nun telling a woman that God doesn't have time to answer prayers because there's too many people in the world. (Recorder cuts off, as she says she believes differently).
- 2:00:44 End of Interview