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Interview with

GLORIA DENMON

May 12, 1988

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Mary Lohr

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Approved: Gloria Denmon  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Gloria Denmon

Interviewer: Mary Lohr

Date: May 12, 1988

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Ms. Lohr: This is Mary Lohr interviewing Gloria Denmon for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. Would you tell me when and where you were born?

Ms. Denmon: In Houston, Texas, on January 26, 1941.

Ms. Lohr: What was your educational background?

Ms. Denmon: I went two years to college.

Ms. Lohr: Did you go to segregated schools when you were young?

Ms. Denmon: Yes, segregated.

Ms. Lohr: Could you tell me what Denton was like when you went to schools here?

Ms. Denmon: It was kind of a quiet town. There were a lot of things I didn't like about Denton.

Ms. Lohr: Such as?

Ms. Denmon: Things weren't integrated enough. You couldn't go to the movies in the daytime. We had to go at night on Saturday night, which I was not allowed to do, anyway, but that was the only time we could go. We couldn't go to the restaurants and sit and eat. Things like

that I didn't like.

Lohr: Did you grow up in southeast Denton?

Denmon: Yes.

Lohr: What was it like there in growing up?

Denmon: There weren't any problems, really, that I ran into in southeast Denton. I went to church a lot because my parents were church-going people. There were a lot of church activities, so I really didn't have any problems.

Lohr: What was the typical situation in southeast Denton, as far as the streets and things like that?

Denmon: The streets were not as good as they were in the other parts of town. I remember that.

Lohr: Were they paved?

Denmon: Some of them were, but not all of them.

Lohr: What was your school like? Was it a good school?

Denmon: It was pretty good. I don't feel that we had a lot of facilities there that were in the white schools.

Lohr: What kind did you not have that they had?

Denmon: I don't think the library was quite as good as theirs. I can't remember the name of the school, but not it's the Denton Independent School District. The library is one thing in particular that I remember.

Lohr: It just didn't have as many books?

Denmon: No, not as many books that I felt was needed.

Lohr: Were your teachers good teachers?

Denmon: Yes, the teachers were good teachers.

Lohr: So you didn't feel like that part of the educational side was sound.

Denmon: No, not as far as the teachers. I'm sure some of the teachers weren't as good, but I guess that's anywhere. But the teachers were basically pretty good.

Lohr: When did Denton begin to integrate?

Denmon: It must have been about maybe the early 1960s.

Lohr: Do you remember the first thing in Denton that was integrated? Was there one thing?

Denmon: I remember the college.

Lohr: What about out in the town, as far as the movies and things?

Denmon: I don't remember exactly when that took place. I don't remember it taking place in the 1950s. It could have. I don't remember it, though.

Lohr: Was integration peaceful in Denton?

Denmon: Pretty much. I think there were a few little incidents at North Texas, but I don't think it was as bad as some other places.

Lohr: What about in the town, as far as the restaurants and movies and things? Were there any problems that you remember?

Denmon: I think popcorn was thrown down on the blacks that were there, and drinks. I don't think there were many fights or anything like that.

Lohr: What about the restaurants? Did they integrate pretty

easily?

Denmon: I think it was pretty easy, yes.

Lohr: How did you become involved in the Women's Christian Interracial Fellowship?

Denmon: Through my grandmother--she was a member--and then my mother. That's how I got involved in it.

Lohr: Who was your grandmother and mother? What were their names?

Denmon: Othella Hill and Norvell Williams.

Lohr: Well, you were pretty young then.

Denmon: Yes. When they joined I was pretty young, but then after I got married, then I got involved somewhat. I got married in the 1960s.

Lohr: Do you remember the first meetings that you went to--what they were like?

Denmon: They were pretty nice. I didn't really know what to expect by going, but most of the white women were...well, all of them that I was involved with were really nice.

Lohr: Were you sort of dubious about what the meetings might be about?

Denmon: Yes, I was wondering what they would be about and if anything would be really accomplished by it. That was my personal opinion before going.

Lohr: Did they start out more social than anything else?

Denmon: They started out social, but then we talked about other things as it went along.

Lohr: What kinds of things did you talk about?

Denmon: Improving the streets and the nursery school for the children that needed to go. That was one issue. There was the Christian Preschool at the presbyterian church. I remember that one in particular.

Lohr: Did you do anything about voter registration?

Denmon: Yes. I don't remember a lot about that, but I know we did talk about that a lot.

Lohr: What about jobs programs? Did they do anything like that?

Denmon: Yes, we did a little that, too. I must say that my grandmother was more involved in it than I was, though.

Lohr: What part did she take?

Denmon: She worked at the nursery some, where they had underprivileged blacks that needed their children to stay in a place while they worked. She worked at the voter registration table. She was real active in it. She was involved in community activities.

Lohr: Do you remember the vote on urban renewal?

Denmon: A little bit. As I remember, the people in southeast Denton didn't vote on that very well, and I was disappointed in that.

Lohr: It was about a 4-1 vote against it.

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Do you know why that was?

Denmon: I think a lot of people didn't understand it. A lot of them thought they would lose their homes. They didn't

understand how it worked. I think that was the biggest problem.

Lohr: Do you remember Jerry Stout, the man who led the opposition?

Denmon: Yes, I do. I remember him. I can't remember a lot about his involvement right now, though, but I do remember that name.

Lohr: The people who were against it...was it mostly the older people?

Denmon: Yes, it was mostly the older ones that didn't understand. I feel the younger ones were just afraid to take chances.

Lohr: And then after that, the group became involved in getting the streets paved?

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Did you take part in that?

Denmon: A little bit but still not as much as my mother and my grandmother.

Lohr: Do you remember what you did?

Denmon: I attended the meetings. That was the main thing. I worked in some of the groups, but I didn't work, like, at the voter registration table or anything like that.

Lohr: Did you go out from house to house and try to sign people up for the street paving?

Denmon: Yes, I talked to different people about that.

Lohr: What sort of reception did you meet in the community?

Denmon: Everybody was for the streets being paved--everybody--



from the older people on down to the younger people.

Lohr: Was it that they wanted the streets paved, but they didn't want urban renewal?

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Do you remember how the group came to be less of a social group and more of an activist group? Did it just sort of evolve, or was it a planned thing?

Denmon: I think the intent from the very beginning was to do all these things. It was planned. It kind of started out social so everyone would get to know one another, and then it really got down to business to try to make things better.

Lohr: Did you make any friends that you still have in the group?

Denmon: I did. But the couple that we went around a lot with moved away. I haven't really kept in contact with them.

Lohr: Of course, you were probably too young to have children then.

Denmon: I didn't have any children, no.

Lohr: Did you go to any of the picnics and parties that the group had?

Denmon: Oh, yes.

Lohr: Family?

Denmon: Family, yes. I went to several of those.

Lohr: Then the husbands participated in them.

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Were the husbands as eager for the group as the women were?

Denmon: Mine was, I think. I felt that most of them were in favor of the group.

Lohr: Did you know of any people--any women or men--in the black community who were suspicious of the group and wouldn't join?

Denmon: I don't know of any. I didn't talk with any that felt suspicious. I just feel like when the urban renewal deal came around that people were suspicious of that.

Lohr: When the group first started, was there any hesitancy? What was the atmosphere at the meetings? Was it very friendly, or were people sort of standoffish at first?

Denmon: I feel like people were a little standoffish at first.

Lohr: What did it take to break the ice?

Denmon: Just continuing to go to the meetings and talking and getting to know them a little better.

Lohr: What kinds of things did you talk about?

Denmon: Oh, just anything--family life and just anything, really. Just general conversation.

Lohr: Did any particular problems that came up...were they hashed out?

Denmon: We had speakers to come and to talk about how things were and to get people involved in the conversation. There was a lot of talk about prejudice that came up at the meetings. Like, I know one black guy in particular

talked about how his mother was a cook and how he wanted more out life than that for himself. We talked about prejudice a lot.

Lohr: The schools were integrating about this time. Did anyone bring any problems that their children were having in school?

Denmon: Yes.

Lohr: Do you remember any of those? Any particular instances?

Denmon: Most of them talked about how the white teachers felt like a lot of the black students weren't up to par in comparison to the white students. Some of that was true because they didn't have the facilities. But the thing came up that the white teachers didn't seem to have much patience, so they immediately wanted to stick the children in special education groups. That was very disturbing to me in particular.

Lohr: Why was that?

Denmon: Because a lot of the children didn't have learning disabilities. I felt like they needed maybe some tutoring or maybe break them up into special groups. I don't feel like special education was the answer.

Lohr: What was done about the children?

Denmon: A lot of parents went up and stood up for their children and kind of got it worked out that way.

Lohr: Do you know of any children who did have to go into special education who maybe shouldn't have been there?

Denmon: Not anyone in particular, no.

Lohr: Do you think maybe most of this got worked out?

Denmon: I think most of it did.

Lohr: The group itself was involved in tutoring, was it not?

Denmon: Yes, they took part in tutoring.

Lohr: Do you know if that did any good?

Denmon: I think it did.

Lohr: As the 1960s ended and as integration became more prevalent, what happened to the group?

Denmon: I don't really know why people stopped attending. All of a sudden, it just kind of went away. I guess less people started attending, and it just kind of dwindled away like that.

Lohr: Do you think maybe they didn't see a need for it any longer?

Denmon: I don't know if maybe people felt like things were being worked out or if the group wasn't really that helpful. I really don't know how most people felt about it.

Lohr: Do you think the group was helpful when it was most active?

Denmon: Yes, I do.

Lohr: What do you think was its best influence?

Denmon: Well, I guess the fact of knowing that a lot of whites were legitimately interested in wanting to help. You know, a lot of blacks felt like, "Well, is this person real? They had a suspicion because of all the prejudices

that have gone on.

Lohr: Do you think Denton was a less prejudiced town than other towns?

Denmon: Less than some, especially in comparison to, I guess, towns in East Texas.

Lohr: In this part of Texas, do you think it was because of the colleges maybe?

Denmon: Maybe because of the colleges.

Lohr: What about the town itself? Were there very many incidences that happened?

Denmon: I think there were more subtle incidences that happened. I still think there is a lot of prejudice in Denton.

Lohr: In Denton?

Denmon: I still do.

Lohr: Do you think it has improved any?

Denmon: It had for a while, but I think that when Reagan got into office, a lot of things changed. A lot of attitudes changed. There's still a lot, even though it's not as open. It's more subtle. I would say it's underhanded.

Lohr: Can you tell me some of the attitudes that you think changed?

Denmon: Like, a lot of people make more statements--belittling statements--because of examples being set by the Presidency.

Lohr: Do you mean they make statements to people's faces or just statements in general?

Denmon: Statements in general. They haven't gotten quite that far--making them to your face.

Lohr: So you think that in Denton there was a period there when it was better than it is now?

Denmon: It seemed to be better.

Lohr: What about the role of the churches in integration? Did they play a very big part?

Denmon: I thought there were some, yes. In particular, the Presbyterian church played a very big part.

Lohr: Why do you think it was the Presbyterian church?

Denmon: Maybe it was that more women were involved that belonged to the Presbyterian church. Maybe that's the only reason.

Lohr: Did the group attend different churches as a group?

Denmon: Yes, they attended different churches, and we would have some of our meals at the...I can't think of the name of the church on Locust Street.

Lohr: Trinity?

Denmon: The big church--there on the corner across from the Mobil station.

Lohr: Oh, I know what you are talking about.

Denmon: We had a lot of meals there.

Lohr: I can't think of the name of it, but I know the one you mean.

Denmon: Yes, that one [First Methodist]. I would say that church and the Presbyterian church. I remember those in particular.

Lohr: It is a Methodist church, I believe.

Denmon: I think it is. Maybe it's the First Methodist.

Lohr: Why do you think the churches in Denton aren't more integrated than they are now?

Denmon: I think it's a matter of...to me, personally, I prefer going to a black church. I think it is just a matter of preference. I guess I have gotten used to our type of services. I think it is a matter of preference. I won't say a lot, but there are some blacks that do belong to white churches, and to me that's fine if they feel comfortable.

Lohr: What about housing? Did the group do anything about integrating housing in Denton?

Denmon: I don't remember anything in particular, but that doesn't mean that they didn't get involved. I just don't remember anything about it.

Lohr: I know black Denton--southeast Denton--is still having trouble with the ordinances not being enforced about trash and pick-ups.

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Why do you think that is?

Denmon: Well, it's probably because maybe not a lot of blacks are getting involved. I do feel like you have to care about yourself first. There are still a lot of black folks that aren't as educated as they should be, and I think that has a lot to do with it. The black people can't say

now that segregation is holding them back because everybody has that opportunity to attend college somehow; I mean, even if you work and pay your way as you go, you still have that opportunity. I guess it's where they are in their minds as to whether they want to get out and pursue it that much. You know, do what you have to do to get there.

Lohr: Some people say that that part of Denton is dying, that it will cease being one of these days. Do you see that as happening?

Denmon: I never thought of it that way, not really. I think that more young people will want to get out and go to different neighborhoods. This is not because it's just a black neighborhood, but because when you buy out in the different areas, the houses are the same in that area; and if you want to sell, you have a better opportunity to sell if you're in the neighborhood where the houses are kept up about the same. If you are in southeast Denton and you build a big home, you might be next to one not up to par, so then you might have difficulty selling. So I think more young people will get into different neighborhoods, not because they feel like they just want to be in a white neighborhood, but because you have more people striving for the same thing in that neighborhood. So that makes a difference.

Lohr: So you feel the group did make a difference in people's



lives?

Denmon: I feel that it did at that time, yes.

Lohr: Do you think a group like that should or could be in existence now and do some good?

Denmon: I suppose it could if people would stick together and really work at it. Yes, I do.

Lohr: What areas do you see the group having to work in now, if there were such a group?

Denmon: Getting involved in what's going on in the city as a whole.

Lohr: Is there any particular area in the city that you think the group should be involved in?

Denmon: Well, I would still like to see a lot of houses that are really in bad shape be made to be torn down, be made to be where they come up to standards. I don't know how that would come about, but I feel like it should happen in Denton as a whole.

Lohr: Why do you think the black community is not fighting for something like that as a group?

Denmon: I think a lot of them are depressed economically. In order to get out of that depression, you have to...I think a lot of blacks don't get involved in self-help groups that could help them figure out things. They just sit there, and they don't really try. Some of them don't know about the self-help groups and don't care to know about them. You just get in a rut. They just figure,

"Well, I can't do any better, so I'm just stuck." So they don't do anything.

Lohr: Well, what about the churches? It seems like in most places the churches are for that kind of thing. Why do you think the black churches in Denton don't get together and try to do something?

Denmon: I really don't know the answer to that one--why they don't get more involved. I think that Morse Street [Baptist] is one of the biggest black churches--newly developed. I think that church is trying to get more involved, but I think it is going to take time.

Lohr: Do you see more black people becoming involved in city government?

Denmon: Yes.

Lohr: In elected positions?

Denmon: I do.

Lohr: Do you ever see a time when there will be a black mayor in Denton?

Denmon: Possibly. I think it is going to take some time to come.

Lohr: What do you think it would take for a black person to be elected mayor?

Denmon: A lot of blacks standing behind him, for one thing. And he has also got to be somebody who is educated and ready enough to be in that position.

Lohr: Do you think there is anyone in Denton now like that?

Denmon: Yes.

Lohr: So it is not because there is not enough people to choose from?

Denmon: No. There aren't a whole lot to choose from, but there are a few.

Lohr: We were talking about Fred Moore School. Why was it closed?

Denmon: Let me think of all the reasons. I think it was due to the lack of facilities, and they pulled out a lot of the better teachers to go to the white schools. I feel like that was part of it. And just the facilities in general.

Lohr: Did they ever move any white teachers into Fred Moore?

Denmon: Very few. I remember my oldest daughter was there. I remember maybe a couple that were there.

Lohr: But then they just decided to close the school down?

Denmon: Yes. I guess the white teachers were there by choice--on their own.

Lohr: And when did the day care school open?

Denmon: I think it might have been fifteen years ago.

Lohr: And it has been in operation ever since?

Denmon: Right.

Lohr: Do you think it does a good job?

Denmon: I think so.

Lohr: Is it more just a regular day care, or is it like a Head Start?

Denmon: It's more just a regular day care. There are whites, blacks, and others that bring their children there. It's

not all black children. I guess anybody that has a low income can go there.

Lohr: They go more by need?

Denmon: More on need.

Lohr: Were you grandmother and your mother instrumental in founding the group?

Denmon: I think my grandmother was.

Lohr: Do you think the group was more for white women or for black women?

Denmon: For both.

Lohr: You think both equally got the same thing out of it.

Denmon: Yes, I think so.

Lohr: What do you think the white women got out of it?

Denmon: I think they really wanted to help--those that were really involved at the time. I think it made things better in the black community and also will be helping Denton as a whole. I think that's how they felt about it.

Lohr: What do you think the black women got out of it?

Denmon: Feeling that there are some people in Denton that really are genuine and caring, who want to help southeast Denton to become better.

Lohr: Do you think it would improve Denton if there were a group like that today?

Denmon: If they could really get action, and not just as a pressure group.

Lohr: Do you think you could get people to join today?

Denmon: Possibly.

Lohr: What did you get out of the group?

Denmon: I got some of the same things I mentioned earlier. There were some whites that really cared about what happened to the black people.

Lohr: You mentioned the subtle segregation. Could you give me some instances of that?

Denmon: Yes. I could say, like, in the different work places there are still just a few blacks in comparison to the whites that are hired, and that's in most places in Denton, I feel like. They're just not going to hire, for instance, half-and-half. It's just not going to be that way, and it's not that there aren't enough blacks that are qualified. I just feel like that's not something that they want to do right now.

Lohr: Why is that, do you think?

Denmon: Well, I guess it's just being in control. That's the reason.

Lohr: Do you think it's a conscious choice?

Denmon: Sometimes. Sometimes it is. I still feel like a lot of businesses aren't going to do anymore until they have more pressure. If nobody says anything, well, then it stays the same.

Lohr: Do you think maybe that could be one area that a group like this one could work on--have more influence in the

business area?

Denmon: If that's possible. If that's possible. I have my doubts on that one.

Lohr: Why is that?

Denmon: I guess that's just one area I don't feel where it would be a real big help right now--just my feelings.

Lohr: What do you think it would take to get more people employed?

Denmon: Blacks fighting for their rights and having some influential people behind them. That would really help.

Lohr: What about in the schools? Do you think black people in schools are getting as good an education as they should?

Denmon: In the integrated schools?

Lohr: Yes.

Denmon: Yes, I feel like they do get as good an education.

Lohr: Do you think they are being slighted in any way?

Denmon: I still feel like there are some prejudiced teachers, just like there are some prejudiced bosses. We have come along way, but I think we have a long way to go. There are still a lot of white teachers and children that hate, so where is it going to end? When is it going to end?

Lohr: It was about twenty-five years ago when all this got started. Do you see it improving in your lifetime?

Denmon: If we get the right President in there, yes.

Lohr: What would you see the President doing? Do you think it would just be as a symbol or that the President would

really do something?

Denmon: To me, to have a Democratic President in office would help.

Lohr: Just because of the attitude in the country? Do you think he could really do something?

Denmon: Well, he'd still have to work with the cabinet, of course, but I think it would be a step in the right direction there.

Lohr: Well, thank you very much.