

*Tea with Trailblazers Event*

PRIMARY SPEAKERS: Clydie Pugh-Myers and Joyce Nichols

DATE: February 27, 2006

PLACE: Duke University Medical Center Library,  
History of Medicine room

CONTEXT NOTE: *This event was planned and moderated by members of the Duke Medical Center Library and Archives. It was attended by interested Duke Medical Center employees. Also in the audience were several members of early LPN classes who received their clinical training at Duke Hospital, many of whom then went on to work as LPNs at Duke Hospital. Several of these women told their own stories during the question-and-answer period.*

EMILY GLENN: We want to welcome our special guests today, and we're especially happy to have two folks with us who are going to be able to speak about their experiences here at Duke and in the community, their education and their training, and their service to the profession. First we'll hear from Ms. Clydie Pugh-Myers, who is a member of the [LPN] class of 1949, and she was actually part of the first licensed practical nursing class in North Carolina. And that was a program that was organized and run in cooperation with North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Vocational Educational Division; and Duke University. Then we are going to hear from Ms. Joyce Nichols, and Ms. Nichols was a member of the class of 1970 with the Duke University's physician assistants program. And she is actually the first female to graduate from the Duke PA program and the first African-American female physician assistant in the world. *(soft noises of approval from audience)* So we have among us some very, very special guests today. So I'd like to say thank you, and first we will hear from Ms. Clydie Pugh-Myers. *(applause)*

CLYDIE PUGH-MYERS: Well, thank you. Good afternoon.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Good afternoon.

PUGH-MYERS: I'm sure you are here to hear the best. (*audience laughs*) I would like to thank Ms. Jessica Roseberry and Ms. Hattie Vines and the rest of her staff for giving me the opportunity to tell you the history that has gone on for the last fifty-some years I have been involved. This has been a wonderful experience getting all of this written down and trying to tell it all. I'm not going to read everything I wrote. But in 1948, there was an article in the [*Durham*] *Morning Herald* that read North Carolina had appropriated money to start a practical nursing school for blacks. That's what it said! The training program started at Hillside High School. Seventy-two black women registered for the training. Ms. Lucretia McCoy and Ms. Charmin Watson and Ms. Elizabeth Jones were three of the oldest among us pioneering women. We did our clinical work at Duke Hospital. It was very rare for black nurses to be a part of Duke Hospital, because we as a race had not been accepted in society at that time. Our instructor, the late Ms. Adele Butts, the late Ms. Gertrude Henry, and the late Ms. Martha Johnson helped to keep our spirits high through this journey. They told us two things: to think, listen, and keep your mouth closed. Can you imagine me keeping my mouth closed? (*audience laughs*) I did. They taught us well. We will be forever grateful for their teaching and their leadership. During our clinical training, our responsibility was to work alongside the white registered nurse doing what we called *bedside nursing*. You know what I mean: giving patients a bath, putting them on a bedpan, emptying the bedpan, transferring patients to different clinics, to the operating room, and most of all cleaning your unit. That was very important. You don't see that today. After you'd finish your bath, you'd clean your patient's unit and left them well dressed. Our

uniforms, which were designed by the director, Mr. Collins, was a blue and white pinstripe. We wore a white blouse, white shoes, and colored stockings. Well, let me tell you that we was at class one day, and our nurse—and we had one white supervisor, she came in that day to class. Here sit we all ready for class, no one had stockings on. So they discovered, What’s wrong here? No stockings. That day, you were told to come to work the next day with some white stockings. So we had white shoes and our uniform. But even so, we wore no caps, we just had white caps, white stockings—and our uniforms, since they were pinstriped, they looked just like the bedpan cover. (*audience laughs*) And all of the help, including the housekeepers and some of you who have graduated since we did, they always wonder, Where’re those bedpan cover girls going? (*audience laughs*) But we were afraid: we were already told to be quiet. But we were proud of our bedpan covers. So we went about doing our work. We had to change our uniforms every day. We wore our street clothes to work and changed to our pinstripe and our little white shirt. And after work, we did the same. Duke did not want us to be seen on the street with their uniform. But even so, every two or three days they were returned. We had to go back to the basement. In the basement was the morgue; the director’s office; that’s where we ate, in the basement. That’s where they washed the clothes, in the basement. Everything went on in the basement. But in that little room, we had fun. We talked, we prayed, we giggled, we laughed at each other: how’d we look? we looked good. (*audience laughs*) But even so, at that time, things were tough. But back to the ward. Doing our work. We were told to stick together. We only worked on the public wards. Which was very nice. They only had one ward for blacks. Halls was full. Patients was very sick. And we were very scerred. I didn’t say “scared,” I said,

“scerred.” (*audience laughs*) Because we did not know what to do. But after being taught our nursing care—and our supervisor kind of stayed close to us—but we were young, we didn’t know what to do. But having our nursing training of the first three months at Hillside, we kind of knew what to do. But even so, while we was completing our clinical training, Duke gave us a stipend. Thirty-five dollars for three months, fifty for three, and seventy-five for the last three. We completed our clinical training after nine months. To start with, there were seventy-two womens in our class. But only twenty-six graduated. And at that time the school was named Durham City Schools Vocational Educational Program. So that’s what my diploma says. Over here is a lot of pins. (*referring to collection of pins*) Durham Tech, Durham Institution, it’s everything except Durham Technical Community College at this time. But however, whatever the name is, we made it. We did well. But after we finished our training, we went to Raleigh to take the state board. After we passed the state board, back to Duke to get a job. I was hired June 20, 1949. I worked two years. Now, this is the cute part. You wore a cap then: you didn’t wear a cap in the beginning. You had this pin that says LPN here (*referring to badge*), you wore it on your sleeve to make sure they knew who you were. After that—I stayed two years. I worked real hard. I had a head nurse, she was just as sweet as she could be. But Duke didn’t have many nurses. There were two RNs: the head nurse and the assistant head nurse and a Duke graduate, which was Dr. [Jay] Arena’s daughter, the maid and maybe an orderly. And that was it. With thirty-six patients.

SOME MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: That’s right.

PUGH-MYERS: But we did a good job. Because our head nurse—assistant head nurse—got out there and helped us. Now, they made us feel like nurses. But even so, Betty Gambols Taylor, she's out of the state now. We still keep in contact. Going to do private duty, oh, that was a joy. Here you go again. It was called the Durham Professional Nurses Registry. No blacks was there, but here I come. (*audience laughs*) They hired me. But even after being hired, I met some of the most gorgeous and some of the most nicest people you can meet. I'm still scerred, (*audience laughs*) but even so, I did a good job. Believe it or not, I've taken care of Dr. [Josiah] Trent. Dr. Trent died on me that night. That's Mrs. Mary Semans's husband. Oh boy, I could have cried. Hadn't never seen a death before. But she let the doctors at that time work on her husband all kinds of ways for medical reasons. Well, I got over that one. But anyway, I took care of Eddie Cameron, the football coach. Now, that was a trip. He was a real tall man, and I'm a little short lady, and he says, "How you going to get me in the tub?" I said, "You watch and see." (*audience laughs*) Anyway, I worked with him. Senator Kenneth Royall and his wife, mmmh! that was another trip. (*audience laughs*) But it was a good experience. Wallace Wade, the football coach; Dr. Hare; Dr. Davis; Ken Rand, the Coca Cola man; and just recently when I had my back surgery last year, I was in the hospital with his son next door. I noticed in the paper he had passed. Most of all, J.C. Scarborough, Sr.. Now, that was a trip. (*audience laughs*) He being the undertaker. Oh, he thought I couldn't do nothing. But he found out I was good, he would try his best to pull his catheter out, and I was peeping in there all the time, because I didn't want to leave the house to go across the street to Lincoln Hospital, which was our hospital right in front of him. He'd say, "Where did you get your training from?" I said, "Well, at

Duke.” He says, “You’re a good nurse.” He said, “But one thing about it is, you won’t let me pull this thing out.” I said, “No, you can’t pull that out.” But that was a good job. After that, we had another class come on board, which was class two. They came on board April 4, 1949 with fourteen members. Eleven graduated. Between class one and two, it’s only fourteen members, fourteen of us left. They’re getting smaller and smaller. But I’m glad that I had the opportunity at seventy-seven to tell this story, because there won’t be another one. (*audience laughs*) In between that, I sent my mother to practical nursing school. She graduated in 1958. Boy, she was a little old short lady. And at that time, Duke had demanded pharmacology. Can you imagine a sixty-year-old lady or maybe older giving medicine? I was *gone*, because I didn’t want to give that. But even so, in her class, there was one male nurse. He was the first male to graduate. His name was Alfonso Reed. Boy, you should have seen him after he got his license. He had his cap on coming down the hall just like we. How did he keep it on? It was on! (*audience laughs*) But he did a beautiful job. Alfonso turned out to be a mortician. Since we have graduated, some one hundred and fifty classes beneath us. And we had the opportunity, two or three of us, to go out to King’s Park to see a graduation, and Dr. Louise Gooch did the speaking. Those kids were so glad to see us and said, Look at those old ladies. I said, “Where? Who old?” (*audience laughs*) I was looking around. And I says, But the thing about it is, you get my age, you will realize what it mean to be this age. While we were here at Duke, you know, they had aides, and they helped. But one thing I can commend them—there was Amelia Harper and a Ruth Allen. They let them go by waiver and process that they might be called a licensed—well, they were licensed also, but they did it through the waiver program. But that cap was white with this LPN tag sitting in front of

it. But ours was striped across ours, which was blue and white. In 1950, we had the first black social worker. Her name was [Sarah] Harriette Amey. She came right after we came, but she couldn't go nowhere but on Nott Ward or where the black patients were. She did a good job getting patients to and fro to where they came from. But as Ms. [Vanessa] Sellars gave us these pictures. These pictures were some pictures that we had made that you can see later. This was our class, we was having our anniversary, now. We did a big thing that time. We asked these peoples out, we had so many people that we didn't even have food to eat ourselves. I told the girls, "Don't y'all eat. (*audience laughs*) Because we got to pay for this thing." (*audience laughs*) Now, I notice that like all pioneers—recall Rosalee C. Sharpe, she was an advanced LPN. But in here today, we have ladies. Some of them are teachers, we had some went on to be RNs, and of course, my friend here [Joyce Nichols], she went on to be the PA, the doctor like. But in this program, it has been rewarding to me. I educated my children. Times was tough at that time, but that little bit of money I made went a long way. Now I'm not making any at all, I can appreciate that little bit what I was making. (*audience laughs*) But in the meantime, I called several of the girls together, and I called John McCann. I said, "I want you to write an article." But let me tell you, before he wrote the article, he called Duke to be sure was I right. There was all the proof (*audience laughing*), there was books, there was the pictures, and he sit there and nibbled on that little vegetables because he wouldn't eat the wings, but he called Duke to be sure. So our question was [*title of McCann's article in the Durham Herald*], "Who will be there for them?" That means at this age. But getting to this age, it's graceful, but I didn't know it was going to be so stressful. My mama didn't tell me it was going to be like this. (*audience laughs*)

But even so when a task is once begun, never leave it until it's done. Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all. That's what we did, and you can see it as of today.

Thank you.

*(applause)*

JESSICA ROSEBERRY: Thank you. Next we'll hear from Ms. Nichols in the PA class.

JOYCE NICHOLS: Good afternoon.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Good afternoon.

NICHOLS: My name is Joyce Ann Clayton Nichols. And it's hard to follow a diva.

*(audience laughs)* It really is. My journey started in nineteen and sixty-five when I started work at Duke. I was working on one of the hardest wards that there was to work on, and that was Long Ward. And I was working with one of the meanest head nurses that was ever put out, and that was Joann McCleese. Now, you all may say, Don't call names, but I call names. *(audience laughs)* Because I feel like when you say, It was—and I'd rather not say: that, to me, you're lying. And this can be verified. They decided to start the cardiac care unit, which was CCU, the cardiac care unit. Joann McCleese was given the task of being the head nurse. She knew that she had to have some workers. Now, I'm very egotistical, too: I was a good nurse. So she wanted some good folks, so I was one of those people she chose along with Ernestine Tate, Bob Wood Adams, Lauretta Hayes, and a number of other people. We worked very hard. But that was when I met the new class of health care providers, and that was the PAs. And these guys were medical corpsman. And they were given the opportunity to be physician's assistants. And I applied for the program in 1967 and was told that I couldn't get in. I applied again in nineteen sixty—I applied the first time in '66. Then in '67. And I applied again in



1968. So then by this time I was really frustrated and angry with these folks, so I said, “Okay, why is it that I cannot get into this program?” The young man in admissions said, “For two reasons. One, you’re a female, and females don’t do very well in this field; and second is because we require that you have some college. And that’s not on your application.” I said, “Ooooh.” So that’s it, that’s it. I went to [North Carolina] Central [University], got my transcript. Now, that’s unheard of. Now, this lady I will not call. (*audience laughs*) Because she gave me my transcript, and it was—you know how you stamp it with that little stamp? So that I could walk it back. And I walked it back. And he said, “Well, I don’t know. We’ll see.” So I said okay. And two days before class was to start, I went back to Jim Mau and said, “Why is it that I have not heard, because classes are supposed to start.” And he said, “Well, we can’t accept you,” and I said, “But you know what?” You know, I love—by this time I’d done a lot of other things, and I was suing the housing authority and (*audience laughs*) all this kind of stuff, so I said, “You know, I *like* the newspaper.” (*audience laughs*) “So I’ll have me a press conference.” And he said, “Oh, no, no, no, no. You can’t do that. Let me—just wait and see.” On Friday he came to me and said, “You have been accepted by the program, and you can start on Monday.” Now, mind you, I’m working. I have not had the opportunity to give my head nurse notice that I was going to be doing this. I said, Oh, Lord, what am I going to do? So there was a nursing supervisor, and we had a very good relationship—and don’t you white folk get upset, but as good a relationship as you can have with white folk, (*audience laughs*) okay, at that time. *During that time.* You have to remember the time I’m talking about. (*audience laughs*) And so we—she said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, you can come to work, you can stay on the evening shift, you can come in at

seven—or come on the evening shift, you can go to class, and then you can come to work at four.” I said, “Well, how is the head nurse?” She said, “Well, I’ll let her know.” So she made sure that the head nurse knew what time I was going to be coming in. Now, I did this for three months. And then they had this program that they called the Work Self-Sufficiency Program, where you would work twenty hours a week and get paid for forty hours a week. I said, Aaaaah, that’s for me! (*audience laughs*) So I went, and I applied for this. That allowed me to work on the weekends. But guess what? My husband became a house husband. Because he had to take care of the children. And he would take care of the children. My two daughters, by the time I graduated, because all he could do was part the hair in the middle, put pony tails on, (*audience laughs*) there was a permanent part (*audience laughs*) in their hair. But they were neat! (*audience laughs*) Because he made sure that the bows and the ribbons matched socks. I mean, he was really good at it. But to make a long story short, they told me that I would be going, and then they set me up for part-time classes. At the time the program the first year was in four phases. So in phase one, you had to complete *everything* in order to progress to phase two. Well, the way it was set up, it was set up—they really set it up so that it would take me three years to finish a three-year program. You know, I said—I was a little slow then, and I said, Oh, no, I can’t do that. So then they said, Well, you have everything but lab. And if you can take second lab and first lab and pass, we will allow you to be a full-time student. And I said, Now, they are fooling. Because anything I want to do, with the help of God, I’m going to do it. (*sounds of approval from audience*) So I went home, and I said to my husband, I said, “It’s going to be rough.” He said well, I have wasted this time, I may as well waste some more. (*audience laughs*) And I did it. But that first lab

exam for lab one, I made a sixty. That was not too good. I sat there, You know, this is really kind of bad. And then I thought about it, I said, Now, they set you up to fail, and if you fail, it's your fault. And my father always told me, "If you don't plan, you plan to fail." So I *planned to pass*. That next exam, I got me a ninety-six, I said, I'm on the road now. (*audience laughs*) And I kept on the road. When I graduated from the Duke Physician's Assistant Program in 1970, I ended up with a 3.67, and I'm proud of that. (*applause*) It was not the highest score, but it was the second-highest score. Now, I really believe I had the highest score, but (*audience laughs*) I can't prove that. I cannot prove that. So I have to accept what's on paper. And that's all that I can accept. And you're talking about history, it has not been easy being an employee at Duke University or Duke Medical Center. Because I came along at a time when things were really rough and you had to be *better than* the person that was beside you if they didn't have the same color skin that you had.

SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS: That's right.

NICHOLS: And I'm sorry, that is just—that's a fact. That is a *known* fact. After I graduated, then I became the token nigger. Now, I can say that. Don't you all say that. (*audience laughs*) Don't you dare. You know, it took me a while to process that. When Dr. Harrowood would take me on these trips—you know, I went all over the country. And they said, Our class is 10 percent female and 10 percent black. Well, there were only thirteen folk in my class! (*audience laughs*) There was only one female, and there was only one black. So now *you tell me* which category I was in. (*audience laughing*) Ten percent? In two categories? Now, you know, that does not—. But hey, I went along. And we went. I finally ended up being one of the consultants for PA programs

that were forming, for their clinical area, to see whether or not they had the curriculum in place and this kind of thing. It wasn't all me, because God was there all the time. There was no way I could have done any of this without that and without the help and support of my family. Because my family was there, and there were times that I decided that I was going to quit. But I didn't. And can you imagine being a black female in a class with twelve white, egotistical (*audience laughs*) men? It was not easy. And I'm not saying this to hurt anybody's feelings, but it's a fact. You're talking about history, you want to hear it, and I'm giving it to you. (*audience laughs*) And that's the way it was. I went on to be able to do a lot. Before I graduated, I was looking around for a site and somewhere to work. Because then, you know, it was—you had to find somewhere for your employment. I went everywhere that I knew to go. And Dr. Davis, who is a surgeon in this city, gave me an appointment to come to his office to be interviewed for a job. But when I got there and his partner found out I was black, the job was over. So I said, Okay, I don't know what I'm going to do. So Dr. [Harvey] Estes said, "Joyce have you found anywhere to go?" and I said no. He said, "What would you really like to do?" I said, "After my rotation in Clinton, North Carolina with Dr. Amos Johnson, I really would like to start a rural health clinic. He said, "Are you serious about this?" And I said yes. He said, "Write up your goals and objectives, and we'll see what we can do." I wrote up my goals and objectives, Harvey Estes wrote the grant to the Howard Woods Johnson Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation. I got the money to start the first rural health clinic in North Carolina at Rougemont and Bahama and one at Braggtown Clinic. (*applause*) I did this for two years, and then I went to work at Lincoln Community

Health Center, because that was where I wanted to do my stuff. I did that until I retired, January 11, 1995.

*(applause)*

ROSEBERRY: Thank you, Ms. Nichols. Does anyone have any questions for our speakers? I think we can maybe hand the microphone to them if that's all right.

NICHOLS: Oh, I talk loud enough, so you don't need it. *(laughter)*

ROSEBERRY: *(laughing)* Okay. Anybody have any questions?

HATTIE DAVIS: I'd like to ask the first speaker, she was saying that there were very, very few nurses in general. How many black nurses were there—how many black RNs? You talked about the LPNs. Were there *any* black RNs whatsoever?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

HATTIE DAVIS: No?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: There was one: Miss Shaw. Not at the beginning.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Not at the beginning, no.

PUGH-MYERS: Not in the beginning, wasn't any black nurses here. About a few months *after* we got here, Ms. Shaw came.

LOUISE PRINCE: And there was Ludell Delaney from Raleigh.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The Delaney sisters.

PRINCE: She was assistant head nurse on McDowell Ward.

VANESSA SELLARS: We can't hear you.

PRINCE: It was a Ludelle Delaney from Raleigh. Her relative was a Dr. Delaney that was a doctor in Raleigh. This was his daughter-in-law. And she was assistant head nurse on McDowell Ward in 1993 or '94.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You mean eighty. Eighty.

NICHOLS: Seventy.

PRINCE: Fifty, excuse me. (*laughter*) Fifty-three. (*talking and laughing from audience*) She was on McDowell, Ms. Shaw was on Nott, Ms. McCullum was on Prevost.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ob-Gyn. That I know of.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Wasn't Vivian Shaw the first black head nurse?

PRINCE: Yeah, Vivian Shaw was head nurse. Miss Delaney was assistant head nurse to Mary Jo Arena. First black head nurse.

BETTY RIVERS: For years they didn't have but one black head nurse for white—in the sixties. They only have how many now? Two. So we haven't made too much progress, have we?

HATTIE DAVIS: Yeah, I think you have. I think you have. Still opened the door, though.

RIVERS: You're talking about 2006, and I'm talking about 1960 with one head nurse.

HATTIE DAVIS: But you opened the door for the fact that—

RIVERS: Oh, the doors were opened, but that's not—

HATTIE DAVIS: —that we *can* be. Not necessarily maybe at Duke, but the fact that we *can* be. I think that's the door that you opened.

RIVERS: Oh. Yeah, they had head nurses other places, but we were talking about *at Duke* right now. We're talking about just Duke.

HATTIE DAVIS: Well, I don't know the numbers have been the years—

RIVERS: I think they've had better at times, a little more than that. But not that many to my knowledge.

ROSEBERRY: We had a question here, I think.

MARTHA PARKER TURRENTINE(?): I'd like—it's a statement. There was a Miss Malone between—some time in '50 to '51.

PUGH-MYERS: Who was Miss Malone?

TURRENTINE: I don't remember her first name. But I know there was a write-up in the paper later that she went back to Alamance County, and she retired from being the head—supervisor at Alamance County.

PUGH-MYERS: Well, where did she work?

TURRENTINE: She worked on Nott [Ward] between '50 and '51. Because I was on Nott.

NICHOLS: She was a head nurse?

TURRENTINE: No, she wasn't a head nurse.

RIVERS: In the—I was here in 1960. Okay, they didn't have any RNs on the private side. They had no RNs working on the private side. Or Peds [Pediatrics]. They had the LPNs. But no RNs until later years.

ROSEBERRY: So just on the public.

PUGH-MYERS: Well, I'll tell you, when we got short of help, when I was working, they sent on McDowell for me to come to Cushing to help. Because we did good work. And I

went to Cushing and did about ten or twelve patients, and after we finish, you go back to McDowell. You still weren't supposed to be seen over there. So—but I think as time went on and we did such good work, Watts Hospital started a class between '50 and '51. But they were all white. Their uniforms were grey stripes and white. I talked to that lady over there; they don't even have the class anymore. But they are continuing this class here. But Duke was such short of help, sometimes I wonder did they call the General Assembly and tell them, Get those people, because they do better work. (*laughter*) I'm wondering about that thing, because definitely that day, we all gathered at Hillside with those seventy-two women was interviewed, and we did fast work, and we did good work. No time to go downstairs but to lunch. No break. No; they take breaks all the time here now. (*Nichols laughs*) Two of you worked together. But it was *hard* work. Patients were bad. Nurses were bad. But even so, we made it. It didn't kill us. But right now it kills them if they even ask for the bedpan. Because I was a patient, wanted a bedpan, she said, (*affects voice*) Well, I don't do it. If you use it, you have to do it. But it's—the program has turned out very well. And I do not believe as of today Duke would have been what they are today if it hadn't been for us. (*sounds of agreement from the audience*)

EUGENE LOFTON: What's the big difference between LPNs and RNs in the late '40s and '50s?

PUGH-MYERS: Well, RNs had a three-year program, and we only had one. And the difference was, they gave medicines and we didn't. But the time come along—I think it was somewhere in the '50s—where they demanded that the LPNs do some advanced



LPN, gave them a course take to give—to give medicines. And that's what helped them some more.

JESSIE P. SMITH: There was a war going on. And all the nurses, really RNs, they went to the army. You understand what I mean? And they needed a quick fix. So they set up the LPN program. That's how it really all came about.

PUGH-MYERS: Can I say something to you?

DAVIS: Yes.

PUGH-MYERS: I noticed in January 16, 2006, Duke had their school history. I called this director, but she never called me back. You've got an empty space from 1964 through '84. Just like Miss Smith said. It was a war going on. They jumped from the program, development at Duke, to the flight, the airplane out there. (*Nichols laughs*) But right through there, that's where we come. But I don't know why they didn't mention it.

HATTIE DAVIS: Is that the school of nursing?

NICHOLS: (*aside*) Yes, you do know why. You're still black.

PUGH-MYERS: This is the program here, for seventy-five years. And you went down, from 1925 on down and on down, but you missed from '65 to '83. But we were already in there. And we were working hard, making good.

CHARLIE LACKEY: Miss Nichols, did your classmates try and give you encouragement, or were they a hindrance to you?

NICHOLS: Who, me?

LACKEY: Yes.

NICHOLS: Um, in the beginning, no. But after that, we—after that I, uh—one thing about me is, I can be just as sophisticated as anybody on the corner of Pettigrew and

Maine. (*laughter*) And just as—I mean, in Hope Valley and just as alley as anybody on the corner of Pettigrew and Maine. (*laughter*) So after I got alley, then they realized that I meant business. By this time I had been working on the cardiac care unit, was very proficient with reading EKGs, doing EKGs. They had other areas of expertise. So I said, “You know, we all need each other. So let’s work together. I can tutor in this area, and you can help me in this area. Now, I cannot go to the pub where you all go. But now, on Wednesdays, you can come to *my* house. And then we can study.” And on Wednesdays, every Wednesday, they were at *my* house on *my* kitchen floor. And we studied so that all of us would graduate. So it started out rough, but after that, it—and we ended up maintaining some good relationship that we still talk to each other, we still call each other and see how each other is doing. So it really worked out very well. I became friends with a couple of the guys’ wives. Now, that was one thing that—and they were getting stipends. And so at the Christmas party, one of the wives said to me, “Won’t you be glad when they increase that stipend,” and said, “and give you seventy-five more dollars a month?”

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: (*softly*) What stipend? (*laughing*)

NICHOLS: Well, and I said, “That little, uh—,” she said, “Two hundred dollars?” I said, “Yeah, two hundred dollars; don’t do nothing now.” When we went back to class from Christmas break, I was right down in Jim Mau’s office. I said, “Where is my money? (*laughter*) All students get this stipend; I want my money.” He said, “Well, we can start you out in January, but we can’t—.” I said, “Oh, you can go back! You can go back.” Now, already I’ve completed a year. Was getting ready to start my second year. And these guys had been getting their money. All along. And I said, “Oh, no. No, no,

no, no, no. I want my money.” He said, “Well—.” I said, “Well, I guess I’ll go to the newspaper!” *(laughter)* And that’s all I had to say! *(laughter)* They gave me all of my money, the back money, and then my regular check. And then I was having to ride the bus, and that time, with the money that I had, I bought me a brand new car! *(laughter and applause)*

PUGH-MYERS: Let me tell you this. I was talking to some of the RNs what you all said was on the floor—I was talking to Alberta Allen. And she told me that when she came to Duke, they paid the RNs sixty dollars to not to want to live out there on that campus. I didn’t know that. They paid them sixty dollars a month for them not to live on campus. Of course down the road was where the little students and some of the head nurses stayed. But I didn’t know that. But what you—now, this is where you should’ve had fun: you should’ve seen us leaving from the basement going up to the first floor to eat. Now, that was the rat race. We’d go up to the doctors on the first floor over here to the cafeteria on the first floor, we went up there to get to eat: we’d been eating in the basement the whole time. Man, they’d like to start a riot. But eventually, it paid off. We come out of the basement with eating, so we began to eat on the first floor all together. *(sound of microphone feedback and moving of microphone stand)* But back there this is the way the story was, and this is the way they did things, but all in all, it paid off. And sometime I’d just look at them, and I’d wonder how we got over. Nothing but prayer.

NICHOLS: Nothing but prayer.

PUGH-MYERS: And that is what brought us through. Because it was rough here. The patients talked bad, the doctors talked—Girl, go get the nurse. I don’t know what he thought I was. But anyway, this is—you need this? *(referring to microphone)* —this is

the way they did. But then, you take Dr. Deryl Hart. He was tall, big surgeon. Walked with his head down. Clydie, come go with me and bring me this and bring me that. Those was the instruments. Of course we had a little old thing, you just get the whole cart and carry it to him. But he was very nice. But then we went to the OB ward one day. And Dr. Paul Tanner, he told us, “If you’re going to be a good nurse, be a damned good nurse. Don’t come on board if you’re not.” I said, “Ohhh, God.” I had the chance to take a patient home to Florida, and I met a doctor down there, and he said, “What are you doing down here?” I said, “I brought one of your patients.” So he told the patient, which he was a Jew, owned a lot of hotels—it was the first time I ever flown, first I ever seen Florida. He said, “You brought a good nurse with you.” I said, “Why, thank you for giving me that compliment—in Florida.” *(laughter)*

HATTIE DAVIS: Were there any—I’m sorry. Were there any black physicians at that particular time, or—?

NICHOLS: Did they have any black physicians where, baby? *(laughter)*

*(audience talking)*

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Dr. Johnson came on later.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Fifty-three. [1970]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That’s right.

PUGH-MYERS: That was many years, and he was a Dr. Johnson, too. And he let you know he was Dr. Johnson. He was from Alabama. He’s come back, and he’s working part time now. He was a good doctor. But he didn’t play. And he looked at us just like the rest of those folks looked at us. But the thing about it, he was strict. He was a good doctor.

HATTIE VINES: I was just going to ask if we have other members of the class of 1949 in here other than—?

BERNICE LONG: Yes.

VINES: Oh, good! Could you stand and let us—?

*(applause)*

LONG: I'm Bernice Long. In the first class. Finished in 1949.

VINES: Bernice Long?

LONG: Bernice Long.

VINES: Oh, okay. Great. Are there others?

TURRENTINE: I'm Martha Parker Turrentine from the second class. *(applause)*

SMITH: I'm Jessie Smith from the third class, and I was in the first advanced LPN pharmacology class. And Ms. Prince also was.

LOUISE PRINCE: I'm Louise Prince. I'm from class eleven. And I was in the first— Jessie and I were. We worked together through the years, and we retired together April the Third, 19—. *(indicates she won't tell; laughter)* The first one I worked on was on Cushing Ward—was on Cabell Ward.

TANIKA HAYES: *(after being quietly prompted by Pugh-Myers)* Yes, Ma'am. This is Beatrice Halsey. And she was in the class of '49, I think.

PUGH-MYERS: Beatrice who?

HAYES: Halsey.

PUGH-MYERS: Was that her name when she graduated?

HAYES: Yes, Ma'am. I think it was—

BEATRICE MCQUAIG BYRD [Halsey's daughter]: McQuaig. It was McQuaig.

PUGH-MYERS: Is that—?! (*they embrace; laughter*)

VINES: Oh, they see each other now!

PRINCE: What I was trying to say is— (*talking and laughter*) in the pharmacology class, it's like Ms. Pugh said. In the pharmacology class, we could only work on the public wards and not the private wards. We could only give medication to the public wards and not the private wards. In the beginning of pharmacology.

VINES: Okay. I see your hand. Are there others in the classes? Okay. Just before I get to you, I wanted to point out for those of you here at work, this [Louise Prince] is Cookie's [Alverina Prince Pugh—no relation to Clydie Pugh-Myers] mother. And she helped me with a lot of the names. And Joyce, our PA. Did you hear that name: Clayton? How about Eva Clayton?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

VINES: And Mary Dean [Nelson] is also her cousin, her first cousin. (*soft laughter and clapping*) So that was all the trivia that I came across.

RACHEL DAVIS: My name is Rachel Davis. And I'm the class—the LPN—nineteen, what is it? fifty-nine? Class twenty-eight. And as she was saying, we had time coming through, but we made it. Even when we finished LPN, you was not supposed to select the floor that you wanted to work on. You went to medical—let's see, what was it? Surgery. Hanes and Minot [Wards] and private floors was sort of off limits. But when I told them I was not going to work here unless I worked where I wanted to work, they decided to let me work on Hanes. And when I went to work on Hanes, my locker was downstairs in the basement. And I questioned my director: "You mean to tell me I've got to put my clothes down there in the basement and I work on the second floor? That's

wasting time. What's wrong with me hanging my clothes up where the other folks have?" And you weren't supposed to ask no questions because you were the wrong color.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's right.

RACHEL DAVIS: So I told them my clothes were just as good as anybody else's to hang up there. So she said, "Well, I guess you can." I said, "Okay, thank you." Then I said, "The locker's downstairs, and I don't work downstairs. I work up here on the second floor." And so she said, "Well, I guess you can." So that went along fine. They had several classes out here. You wanted to advance yourself, you would go, as you say, you would get to be an advanced LPN. They already had several groups. So we decided—about what? about twenty of us wanted to go into the advanced class. And we started off we were about five whites and the rest—five blacks and the rest of us white. When we finished there were five blacks in the course, the rest of them dropped out. There was already some already advanced LPN on the floor. And Lelia B. Clark was director of nursing at that time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes. Um-hm.

RACHEL DAVIS: She says, "Right now we don't need any more advanced LPNs. We got enough." So that meant that if we had become the advanced LPN, we get the what? ten more dollars on the pay or something like that? Probably didn't have the money, didn't want to pay us the money. So I stayed on the floor a little bit longer, and they opened up the first class of surgical technicians. Working in the operating room. And I decided I would go to that. And my charge nurse at that time, head nurse, Miss (*unintelligible*), said, "You going on the floor, you not going into medical—take the

pharmacology?” I said, “No, I done had that one time, got turned down. I see don’t see no need in going.” So I went on to OR. And I worked there, had several trips happening there, and I went there, had to learn *everything*! And I learned everything, and I worked with Dr. Guy Odom, Dr. [Will] Sealy, all the big doctors. And they wanted to know, Well, did you train here? I said, I sure did. Well, why don’t you train some of these other nurses? (*laughter*) And there was three blacks that finished in that class and went in my program. Three blacks and the rest of them was—well, there was ten of us. Two whites, the rest of them—three blacks. We stuck it out. They made it hard. They told me I wanted to be a doctor. They hand us the right papers, and I would go down to the root, be good to go. And they didn’t like it too well. But the doctors after they—fell in love with me. The nurses didn’t love me at all. They didn’t care nothing about me. But I made my score. I didn’t care; I didn’t come here to love nobody, I came to work. So we could perform. They started the PEP [Paths for Employee Progress] Program. And I didn’t go in immediately. I went into—a physician assistant course started. I signed for that, to go into that; this doctor started speaking up for me, Dr. Don Silver. He wrote all the VIPs and had everything cleared out. When it got to my head nurse, director of nursing, they couldn’t spare me to go into the PA program. So I decided I’d go to college. And I went to college—for two years my department didn’t know I was going; I was going in the evenings. And when they found out I was going, PEP called me: I didn’t call PEP. “I heard you was going to college.” I said yes, I was. “Would you like a stipend?” I said, “Good, because I’m working the same forty hours. Taking courses, eighteen hours.” Out of school so many years, and when I went back to college, I was forty years old, decided to get my RN. But it was keeping it up with my classmates,



when they knew, found out I was going: How's she doing in school, is she passing?

Now, I'm paying my own money. Back to that—I'm not trying to make a long story short, but back to that area—when PEP picked me up, my assistant supervisor says, “Oh, PEP got you.” I said, “Well, really?” I said, “How'd you know?” “Well, PEP called me.” I said, “Well, you know, they have to let y'all know something.” “Is that right?” I said, “Yes, they decided to call me.” I said, “But you know, no help from y'all at all. Somebody else told them I was going to school.” I had got on their program. And at that time I was working twenty hours. Case come up, I don't care what kind it was, it was my case. Before that happened—this is the truth—we had students that did secretary work. These are white students, pre-meds. Could sit up at the desk, get their lesson out, and answer the telephone periodically. When I started to college, they cut it out! Better not study on the floor! (*audience members chuckle and agree quietly*) No! And come time of that little directive—when I would leave tired and weary from working, I would go in one of the study rooms, and sort of lay my head down, not sleep, just be quiet until somebody said—if a case come up, I know they're going to call me. Come on and nudge me if I dose off. Now, everybody upstairs be playing cards and eating, what have you. *Soon* as a case called—it could be a craniotomy or a beriberi heart: Where Miss Davis? I run downstairs and get all the stuff and call somebody else (*unintelligible*). I did that all the way up until I graduated. When I graduated—oh, they worried about me graduating. Everybody—there was a contact—I believe it was in cahoots with the college, too, because I had some instructions just to (*unintelligible*). (*quiet chuckling from audience*) When I graduated, I was so glad, I could have kissed the ground. I was so glad to be out of school. It seemed like it was so hard. But yet I know it was a stepping stone. It may

be hard to deal with, but I had to deal with it. When I finished, it wasn't but three months after I finished college—and my head nurse at that time said, “It won't be six months before you have a position.” I said, “You think so?” She wasn't lying. Six months, I was named the first black clinical manager in the operating room. (*sounds of approval from audience; applause*) In 1970 to '80—I've been out a few years now. And to my notice, they have had *one* there, but since then they sort of let her go. I don't think they have replaced me at all. So Duke has been good at educating the children, but it was a hard road to go. (*applause*)

VINES: Okay, we'll have a couple comments from our director.

UNKNOWN QUESTIONER: I'd just like to say that you all are such good pioneers and trailblazers, and we talk about having mentors sometimes, who mentored you—this class—into going into that profession? Since you all are the trailblazers, I guess there weren't that many people before you.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: No.

BETTY RIVERS: My reason for going into nursing—I had never thought about nursing. I wanted to be a schoolteacher. Because a teacher as far as the black community, the schoolteacher and the preacher were the most important people for years in our community. But I got a domestic babysitting job for Dr. Philip Kistler, he went on to be one of the leading—he went on to be one of the leading surgeons that graduated from Duke. I think I worked for Dr. Kistler about a year or more. And I never saw him but one time, because he was in school here, doing his internship, and the first time I saw him, he was off for a football game. And I had a chance to meet him. Because I had talked to him over the telephone several times. He said to me, he said, “Betty,” he said,

“Why are you doing this type of work?” I said, “Well, this is the only thing I could do right now.” He said, “You know what? You need to go back to school.” I said, “What am I going to do?” He said—he was very, you know, he used profanity—he said, “Aw, hell, what you going to be? A nurse!” (*laughter*) I thought about it for a while, and then I decided to go. And I met Jessie Smith, Clarisse Suggs, and another girl that was working in Chapel Hill. They were taking the pharmaceutical course—pharmacology course. And I was a beautician. Because one of my girlfriends was fixing our hair, she was a beautician. And so Clarisse Suggs said to me, said, “Rivers, you know you need to go on and go in.” I said, “You know I can’t do that. I’m *afraid*.” She said, “Afraid of what?” I said, “You know, all those sick people.” She said, “Don’t you know a mother is a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, and everything else?” (*sounds of agreement from the audience*) So that’s how I got into nursing. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. Because let me tell you, when we came here, this institution, it wasn’t integrated, like Miss Pugh said, Clydie Myers said. We were in the basement. And we had to hang our things in the basement. Okay, I finished—and Miss Butts gave us hell. I’m like Miss Pugh. Everybody say we’re sisters. You had to keep your mouth shut. And I kept my mouth shut, and I graduated out of that class under Adele Butts, because she was hell. She was a very pretty woman, but she was something else. As soon as she told us—and I’ll never forget it—she said, “When you go out to Duke, don’t carry your feelings on your shoulders. Because if you do, you won’t make it.” And that was true. So I worked on Osler Ward. I helped to train Dr. [Victor Samuel] Behar, Dr. [Philip] Noyes, Dr. [Henry A.?] Callaway. Dr. Eugene Stead, he was the head man. (*sounds of agreement from audience*) That’s right. He was the head man. I was there when they first admitted the

first black student. Hoover. And I mean, we worked. We had thirty-two—I think there were thirty-two patients on that ward. We had one LPN at night, *one* orderly, and one RN! And if anybody went bad, they sent a PRN nurse there to help you. And I'd do the work. That's why I got nurse's knees now. (*laughter*) But anyway I enjoyed it. And so like the lady said, they gave us the *sickest patients*. We had traches, dialysis, respirators, *everything!* (*unintelligible*) And I'm going to bring it up with this: they took the full bedroom and made a mini unit out of it. And God bless Dr. Stead: if I had to have a procedure, I would trust him, because he knew his stuff. He turned out some darn good doctors, including a son of mine. (*applause*) They tell me Duke had all its major thing at the time, but that was the time then. My son, who had the privilege of being one of the—among the first black med students and finished from Duke University, never went to summer school. Dr. Waylin, Dr. Jesse Peters, all those guys—Behar and all of them—they took him in. He made it. He said to me one night, he came up there, he said, “Mama—” he was going through a rotation with the anesthesia—he said, “How many nurses working this unit?” I said, “Just two of us. Me and the RN.” He said, “How you stand it?” (*laughter*) I said, “We do it.” And that's what we did. And we didn't know this, but I'm going to tell y'all something. My son told me this after he graduated. He said, “Mama, you know what?” He said, “Dr. Stead and *all* those instructors used to stand up in that classroom with the med students and tell them, ‘I'm going to take you to a ward and show you how to take care of patients! Those *LPNs know how to take care of patients!*’ And we didn't know that! We were being bragged on all over the country about how we gave good nursing care at Duke Medical Center. And I'm going to tell you something: the patients came from *everywhere*. We were taught *how* to take care of

patients. Miss Butts taught us this: basic nursing care is the same all over the world. *(sounds of agreement from audience)*. And when that patient go home, they're not going to remember all the hurting shots they did for you. They remember that nurse who came when they needed them, to make them comfortable. *(applause)* And I would do anything for having worked at Duke. Because Duke has been good to *me*. Good to all of us, a lot of us in the community. They negatize Duke a lot. But I defend it all the time. Duke gave me a job. I tried to do that job the way I was trained to do it. You stay within your barriers. We could do some of the procedures that doctors do. But you don't train to do that. *(laughter)* Stay within your barriers! Yeah. I've done many procedures with the doctor. And one time he asked me, he said, "Miss Rivers, how long have you been working here?" I said, "Well, longer than your daddy is old." But you don't do that. I tell young people, "Stay within your barriers. Don't get so egotistic. If you're not licensed to do that, don't you do it, although you know you can do it. You don't do it." So Duke has been good to me. I educate—helped me educate my children, gave my son a *full scholarship* from the university to the medical school. He's practicing medicine today in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: His name is Ruben? Ruben Rivers?

RIVERS: Ruben Rivers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Worked with him down there. He's *wonderful*.

RIVERS: That's my son. *(laughter)* He's down there; he went to Duke. University and the med school. Never learned to tie a necktie, *(laughter)* but he knows how to take care of the patients! *(laughter and applause)*

PRINCE: I realize we would not be the women we are today had it not been for Adell Butts. *(sounds of agreement from audience)* She was hard, but she was right. She taught you how to treat a patient. She was just good, but she was a hard instructor, that's for sure.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Adell Butts was caring. She was a caring person.

PAT THIBODEAU: This has been an absolutely wonderful afternoon. Thank you all for coming and sharing your story. You know, we're celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Duke, and these stories are wonderful. This is part of Duke, this is how—you all helped make Duke great. *(laughs)* You all helped make a difference here at Duke. So it's wonderful that you gathered here together and shared your stories with us. We have more refreshments in back, and we hope you have time to stay.

NICHOLS: *[referring to Thibodeau's comment, "It's wonderful that you gathered here together," which could be heard as, "It's wonderful that you gals are here together."]*  
Um, let me just say something. For future reference, don't refer to us as gals, because we're not. We are ladies, females. It's very offensive for somebody to say I'm a gal, because I'm not.

THIBODEAU: No.

PUGH-MYERS: Excuse me. Let me ask this lady: are you the director here?  
*(meeting disperses; audience begins to talk and get up from seats)*

THIBODEAU: I'm the director of the library here. So the director of the library and of the archives. So people that have invited you here work with me.

NICHOLS: *(softly)* That's why you should know better. *(laughs)*

PUGH-MYERS: Well, I was looking for the director of nurses, because I called her, and she didn't ever answer my call. Because I wanted to ask about this article. Since I've retired—because I just retired in '75, I just been through *everything* trying to find out about it.

*(noise as meeting disperses)*

RIVERS: [*to Thibodeau*]: I just wanted to make a correction, like Miss Pugh said that we didn't have stockings on. We had stockings on, but the lady was not aware of our brown legs with our brown stockings.

THIBODEAU: Okay. Okay.

RIVERS: So that's what she means, she put on the white stockings.

THIBODEAU: So you had to change your stockings, okay.

RIVERS: We had on stockings, but she said we had no stockings.

*(meeting ends)*