



Interview No. SAS3.14.02
Mrs. Lewelleyn Husketh Walker

Interviewer: Megan Coe
Location: Baltimore, Maryland
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Q: Mrs. Walker, where were you born and where did you grow up?

Walker: Baltimore. Born in East Baltimore. Durham Street. On we moved to Rutland Avenue, 900 Block, and from the 900 Block we moved to 425 North Caroline Street. Still on Caroline Street.

Q: And what did your mother do?

Walker: She [Mrs. Lovey Husketh] was a musician, a piano teacher, an organist. She was a lecturer, she was a very good, concerned about her church and her community. So she did lots of community work along with teaching piano.

Q: And where, do you know where she was born and raised?

Walker: Born in Annapolis, Maryland, but she was reared in Baltimore, her mother. She was adopted by this Emily who was, well, we say Negro when you used that word. She was a free Negro from West Virginia.

And her mother must have been a maid for some people in Annapolis. And she had this child. She was about to drown her, and they found her doing it, and they took the child from her.

And the police knew Emily, of course, from the police station, and asked her did she want a baby. In those days you could just take a child. You didn't have to pay for adoption. And she said: "No children, I don't want any children." And she changed, thought about it again, she went over and looked, and she fell in love, and she took this little girl and reared her and gave her the best education at that time that anybody could get. School, piano lessons, elocution, bought her fine clothes, she traveled, and she was well cared for and loved.

As a youngster she was very active in music. They found out she had a good memory, and in those days you did a lot of dramatic reading of poetry and prose, and that was very popular at that time. And she did that, and she was called to do that. Plus, she was called often to play the piano.

Now she studied her piano from the Washington Conservatory of Music in Washington. She studied under Professor Charles Russ, who was the organist at Madison Street Presbyterian. It's the Atlantic Church now. She did at one time took some courses from Peabody. As I told you, they didn't know what [race] she was. [Laughter]

Q: So your mother was of mixed race or?

Walker: Yes. Mixed family. Mixed marriage or mixed whatever. [Laughter]

Q: So do you know about at what time period it was that she took courses at Peabody?

Walker: When she was born? 1875. Born January the 5th, 1875.

Q: Do you know when she took the classes at Peabody?

Walker: Oh, I cannot say. That I'm not too sure. But it had to be between this time, 1875, about ten, fifteen, let's say, fifteen more years later. That would be about eighteen, whenever Peabody was open. I'm not too certain about that exact time.

Q: Was your mother still performing when you were a young child?

Walker: Oh yes. You see, she opened her first school down at Glen Burnie. She went to Morgan [College], she was a member of the first graduating class at Morgan, and then she took a job down there. They called, well, they called it Glen Burnie, but it was really Furnace Branch.

And she worked down there in a tavern that was all boarded up except this one room that was used for teaching all the grades. And she fell in love with the people, they fell in love with her. And those children from that group came to her to take music lessons. I heard from one of them about ten years ago, asked me could I recommend somebody to play the organ for down there. They were her great love, and whenever you visited, the table was set up fine.

"Miss Lovey and her children are coming." Just loved, she had a lot of love for people, and they gave it back to her.

Q: So did she teach school all of her life?

Walker: No. She stopped teaching. I think she decided that she could teach piano, because that was a long distance and they weren't paying hardly anything, you know. Cause when she lived with the people down there, somebody would take her and then another family would take her to pay for her, you know, to feed and whatever. So she decided she would take her piano, she started doing dramatic reading and piano, do her own concerts, which she did.

And she went up as far as Harrisburg Pennsylvania, because she had some relatives up there.

Then later on, she started teaching, she would go to people's houses to teach their pupils. But when she married and had children, she found that she needed to be home for them always, so

her people started coming to her. And they were coming to her from all over the city, northwest, from out Glen Burney, from everywhere. And her house all day Saturday and right after school was just crowded with children.

Her last report she spoke to somebody, she had seventy-five pupils, and she said she could not take anymore. She just had to stop, and maybe she would give some of her pupils to some of her good pupils that were teaching, and this is how. But she was well liked and very popular. Very strict. She didn't have any foolishness with her teaching.

You came, you had to practice. If you didn't practice, I can see her many times leaving. She'll say, "I'll be right back." Find that little boy's house, or little girl's house. When your mother come in from work, she'd walk up there and take that fifty cents and give it. Say, "Your child is not practicing. I cannot teach him. You're just wasting your time. You get him to practice; I'll gladly teach." But I had seen her do so many times. And yet there were others very anxious to learn.

She taught, I can name twenty-five pupils that she taught that became organists of big churches here in Baltimore.

Q: Wow!

Walker: Twenty-five. There are many others. I figure if my sister were well, I'd be able to tell you more. Because I moved up here, and she was down there with my mother. But one fellow became the head music teacher at Shaw University. Another girl I know she was the supervisor of music, Molly Miller, very fine and an organist in Madison Street Presbyterian Church. Another one, let me see, her name is Arngie Wiles, fine musician.

Oh I could go on and on and on. Jamesetta Holloman. She had her doctorate in music from Juilliard. She was a child prodigy. My mother started her.

Q: Did you and your siblings take lessons?

Walker: Lessons. All of us. Everybody studied piano. And it was kind of hard, as I think I told you, we wanted to practice, but she had so many pupils we had very little time to get to the piano. So my brother and I were given violin lessons. We took that.

But my mother found my brother was doing well, I wasn't doing, and I guess she changed. Well, I took piano, but she thought my voice. I should really study voice instead of just the piano.

I knew the piano. I know music, but I could not play like my sister or my mother. I can tell you when you're wrong. [Laughter.] I'm trying to think. And my husband, the fellow I married studied piano. He played for his church until he went to Howard University.

Q: Did you have other family members who were involved in music?

Walker: My sister. Quite a musician. She studied under Mr. Shrubbs of Peabody. Very fine pianist.

She, I think, she appeared one time. She played the "Moonlight Sonata." I was trying to tell you about that the other day. And she played it by no music right straight through and won a prize. But she was a musician.

My mother belonged to the Negro National Music, what did we call it? Negro National Music Series, no, Convention. They met. It was formed by the great violinist Charles Cameron [White]. He organized this National Negro Music Series. They met every summer in August, and they met at different big cities, and all the musicians, all over the United States, came.

My mother at one time was the secretary. She was quite a number of years the secretary of it. But that was something the musicians in Baltimore, they would go. You'd see them going. You'd see fifteen or twenty of them leaving here going to the convention.

And they would have the workshops. They would have presenting each year, they had presented some outstanding pupil, and then they had the big banquet. And of course they had a day naturally when you'd go visiting, to visit and tour the various places. But this was every summer

We went to all the concerts. I don't care where it was, how much it cost, my mother always found the money. You were going to concerts. And she said, "you can go to go sleep, but you're going."

We lived and breathed music in that house. Music from early in the morning until late at night. She either had her pupils, or she had a group come in from her choir, a certain group that she wanted to work with, or it'd be somebody who wanted a little help with their voice. She wasn't teaching voice, but she would play and help them, with them because.

Then she had quite a number of them that studied not only the voice, but they studied piano from her. I tell you something else. In her church work, now you had no foolishness, that church being on a choir was a big job. You weren't there to play. It was like school. They had their prayer before they started, then they get into their business, and then they started. Almost everybody in that choir I think could actually direct that choir.

They knew the piano. They'd learned to read music. All the things. And it was a joy. Sometimes I'd just go to listen to them. It was like school, and they loved it.

Q: What church was that?

Walker: Peoples Christian Church, but eventually its name became Memorial Baptist. Right there, Preston and Caroline Street. You see my people are very emotional, and we were just a Christian church. The minister thought that we just might as well change and be a Baptist. [Laughter]

Q: How did the music in relation to the church and being religious, how did that bring music ?

Walker: Well, if you were coming up in my race, church was where you went. You had no question about whether you were going or not. Saturday you got your clothes together, and

Sunday morning you got ready for either Sunday school. Sometimes it would be in the morning, and sometimes Sunday school would be after church. But whenever, you were going. Nobody said, "I'm not going. I don't feel like it." There was no question in my house. You went to church because my mother was an organist.

She got up and got breakfast, and we ate breakfast as a family. We had our prayers on our knees every Sunday morning. Sometime my father was there because he was a Pullman porter, wasn't always home. But when he was there, the family. Then my mother would have the dinner ready except for cooking the potatoes and the Jell-O. That's why I hate Jell-O now. We had Jell-O most every Sunday for dessert, but anyhow.

We went to church, and sometimes in those days they had church in the evening. Eleven o'clock and then again at three. So that meant, you know, you didn't have to go to all of them. Unless there was a special service for children or some special entertainment was coming for that evening, your mother would let you have the evening Sunday because we would take walks and visit our little friends.

When she was free, we would take long car rides on the streetcar. The longest distance in the city. She never did, deserted her family. She was a most remarkable person. I don't know. I still today can't see how she managed to do all that she did. I really don't.

Q: You mentioned last time how sometimes on Sundays or holidays you would go to friends' houses, and go around to different people's houses and people would play the piano.

Walker: Oh from the church?

Q: Yes. Tell us about that.

Walker: Oh, well everybody, all my friends played the piano, or they studied voice, or they played the violin, and they went out together. So we would go to church. We would go to our special church, but in the evening, at six o'clock, they have what they call, some people called it Epworth League, and some people called it BYPU. And we'd go. And everybody had, you had a little scripture to say, and before you'd get in there sometimes: would you play the piano program, or would you recite, or would you do this, or?

So we went, everybody was doing, taking part in the program. But we were happy to be there because they're young people and a lot of sharp looking boys. [Laughter] But we would do that, that was over I guess about seven-thirty, and we started walking home, and we would stop at your house and play the piano and talk and laugh. Then we'd go up a little further. We'd stop at somebody else's house, and we'd stop and we'd chat, we'd play the piano, we'd all sing. And then we'd move. I think my house was about the last house on Caroline Street, and they would play the piano.

Well, they were happy to get to my house because my mother had a baby grand, and everybody wanted. But that's the fun we had on Sunday. My mother didn't have to wonder where we were

because we were all with a group, and that's what we did. And then late in the evening was your time to get ready for your school.

So, and you were speaking about some of the entertainment. What did I tell you about? On Saturday did I tell you we went to dancing class?

Q: Was this when you were a child?

Walker: Yes. When we were growing up and they're teenagers. Mr. Ellsworth Toomey had a dance class, and you were invited. You didn't just come because you wanted to learn. You were invited.

And every Saturday from 2 to 5 you went to dancing classes of good manners and how to behave yourself with the dance and with the fellows and whatever. Very entertaining. And between that time and let's say around April, he'll start getting some dance lessons together. He had his voice pupils and the dance group, and he would have what they call May Ball at the Lyric [Theater]. The only Black that could use, now that's one word I don't like, but they use it so much. He was the only Negro that could use the Lyric Theater. He was a good friend to Mr. [Freddie] Huber, who was in charge. He was the president or whatever.

But that was a big affair, and that Lyric was jammed and packed with mothers and children. And after we were presented, everybody got a big basket of flowers for their dance and for singing or whatever. And believe it or not, I sang part of Carmen. I can't. Every time I think about it, I just can't believe. But he said I could sing it, and he was a good, very fine teacher. But.

He'd have a dance just for his pupils in the Blue Room in the Lyric every year. The mothers and their children.

Q: Wow. That's great.

Walker: Let me see what else. Oh, my mother's advanced pupils, after they got to a place where they were very advanced and where she felt that she had given them as much as she could, she'd send them to Ellsworth Toomey or W. Lewellyn Wilson. Or sometimes they were at the age where they were ready to go to college, and she sent them to Howard.

And Howard I knew the professors at Howard, and I have a dear friend, Todd Duncan, he was the one that was in Porgy and Bess. He said every new, every Baltimore music student that came from Baltimore, because they were well prepared.

Q: Once you were older, as a young adult, what did you do? Where did you go for entertainment and musical entertainment? Where did you go to see musicians perform?

Walker: Oh, we went to all the concerts. When I was in, I think I was a young adult, I went down to the Ford [Theater] even though we couldn't sit downstairs. I went to a lot of the plays because I liked dramatics and I was in dramatics at school. Very concerned. We went to the Lyric.

My mother could always find money for concerts. Foolishness no. But if it was a ticket for a concert, and they weren't much. When you look at the price of, but it depended, it was the time of the year. But fifty cents was a lot of money then. [Laughter] Yes. Fifty cents. You children look at fifty cents, throw it in the street now.

But we, I don't think it was much. Went to the ballets, I went to the operas. My mother sang with A. Jack Thomas who was an outstanding musician. He was the only Black that directed the, at that time, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. And he had a group called the Aeolian Chorus. And she sang, my mother had a very, very rich contralto voice. My sister too. They sang in the club.

But my sister didn't sing that, she sang somewhere else. But my mother sang with that group, and I was just reading here where she sang with the Samuel Coleridge Taylor Chorus. Some fellow who was a British, Afro-British writer in Britain and London.

So she not only taught, but she engaged in concerts. And as I said, many times you went to concerts. You didn't have time for no foolishness.

So we knew good music. Now we liked jazz. But we used to laugh when mother was trying to play some jazz music, and we would just sit off and laugh. Cause, it all had a little feel, a taste of classical music in it. [Laughter] But she was playing, trying to make it jazzy.

But I don't think there was anything that went on. Most of our concerts were at Sharp Street [Memorial United Methodist Church] . That's over in West Baltimore. Most of our outstanding people like Todd Duncan and Marian Anderson, Roland Hayes, and this lady, Camille Nickerson. They were there, came. Oh, there were so many. Oh, a little girl, Phillipa Schuyler. She was a child prodigy. A pianist. She would come.

But we used the Sharp Street, I think because acoustics there must have been very good. Now later on they started having affairs at school auditoriums, but it didn't have the class. Because when you went to a recital, you wore recital clothes. You had your hair fixed up, and you had your hair covered with a lace piece.

And the [last] time I was at Lyric Theater, I was there for something, I don't know, Messiah or whatever, and these youngsters came in on the first floor in the orchestra. They had on dungarees. It cut me up in here. I couldn't believe it. I said this I cannot believe. But that's with the change of time. The '60s did all of that.

You know that don't you? You don't know because you, you're a little young. But it had. But I just loved to see my mother get ready for concerts. She always had beautiful clothes. And the one thing that impressed me, her shoes, her feet used to hang over her shoes. And I always said when I grow up I want my shoe, my foot never did that. I wanted my feet to hang, you know, over my shoe like hers.

But many of her dresses she kept and she had a friend who was a seamstress. She made many of our party dresses from some of her dresses.

Q: Oh wow.

Walker: I can see a pink crepe. I can see dark blue satin. No, it wasn't satin. Yes, that was satin. But she was very thrifty, but her clothes were very rich clothes. When I say good taste, she had good taste.

So going to a concert was just like going to church. [Laughter]

Q: When you were older, did you go to clubs and see jazz, see more jazz musicians or?

Walker: The clubs. Oh yes. Well, I think I had finished college or was in college, I don't know which. But I'm sure because my husband was at Howard. And they would have outstanding musicians to come to the Comedy Club, and we went there. Beautiful order, no confusion, just like any other place.

And as I told you, people from Washington were coming to Baltimore because they didn't have open the nightclubs like ours. Then there was the Sphinx Club. Then we had another one called the Merry Go Round. What's the other one called?

But I do know that they brought outstanding violinists or singers or maybe two people, not a whole group. Maybe a small combo entertained. And you sat and you were entertained. Then at a certain time then that was over, then they'd have another group to come in.

Sometimes you'd stay to the second session. You know. But well behaved. It was a joy to be out. That was our treat on the weekends.

Then we had dances. The sororities and the fraternities and different clubs would give dances. And a long time ago it was an invitation thing, then it got to a place where they asked you to pay. I can remember we never paid to go to a dance. They liked us because they knew both of us liked to dance and we enjoyed dances.

But we had club called the Guardsmen, and there was one fellow would invite you and say, "well we don't have Lewellyn or Norris down, where are they? Oh, well, I'll take her. I'll take them." That's the way, you know, when you were popular and people enjoyed having you at their dances.

Women beautifully dressed. Fine music. And after that, sometimes they would feed you there, and then sometimes they just, after the dance, they'd come to my house. We'd have breakfast, something else to drink, you know. And just a very, I would say a good life, very good life.

Q: In what other ways, in your adult life, once you were married, did you have music in your life?

Walker: Any other time. Well, I can't say. I can't think any other time. Let me see. I studied with Mr. Toomey, and that was every week after school.

Q: When did you study with Mr. Toomey?

Walker: Oh I stayed with him I guess about, oh I guess about eight or nine years. Because I would see him sometimes downtown, and he'd say, "You're getting too grown up for me." I'll never forget.

But you see I had my high school activities. We had W. Llewelyn Wilson, who was a very fine musician. He was the only high school teacher that presented operettas. Now put that down to remember, Pied Piper and the Flying Dutchman. No other high school did it, but we did it. A big performance. He not only taught the course. He had to voice special singers. Anne Brown, who was a very outstanding musician, she was one of them. He directed the orchestra. It was a big.

So high school took up a lot of my time. I never got home until six o'clock any day. There was so much going on that I was in everything, believe it or not, and I enjoyed. And my mother was happy that I was.

I was trained. Why should I be trained to dance or to speak and then don't do anything with it? [Laughter] As a result, my children love music. Both of my, my older son, who is a bishop now, studied piano, but he had so much homework, he didn't have time to practice. So in the morning I'd say, "Well, practice." My husband said, "Morning is no time to wake up the neighbors with the piano." But he learned enough to use it for his liturgies that they have to read and study.

My oldest son would be up there studying from his Bibles and singing his various music. My second son would be down on the first floor doing his chores, and the music would be jumping, and I'd be in the middle, and I'd say how can I stand it. I felt like I ought to put my clothes on and go out. But then I thought about it, and I said, well, they're in the house. They're not out in the street.

But they both, my young son knows jazz very well. He knows all of them. And we have gone to all the jazz concerts. Any that come to Baltimore or close by, we are there. My older son, of course, he likes classical. He's in New York and gets to see all the fine operas and whatever you want. Of course they have quite a lot of them in Long Island where he is.

But we just had music. We have music in the house. We got records back there of people. Records upstairs that high. [Laughter] And tapes. I never learned to work those tapes.

Q: I know when I talked to you last week, you told me that your mother worked almost every day.

Walker: Every day except Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning she had kindergarteners. It was precious to see them come in. And they, she was teaching composition then. I'll never forget. I run into people sometimes when I'm out at lunch or somewhere. And they say, "oh, I remember Miss Lovey." I didn't say who I was. "This is Lewellyn Walker. Oh, she Miss Husketh's daughter." You know, that's what they say. Well, she taught me composition. Well, now that was unusual. She had her Matthews, which was a regular piano book. I got it right there. . And everybody had to play the hymnal, the church book.

Everybody. That was something, whether you were good or bad, you learned it. And then she had, you had your little notebook for composition. Very important. There was no foolishness.

Now Saturday evening, I guess about, I would say about six o'clock she would have finished. She would take some of those pupils that had to come a long distance on Saturday. Then all those that, because most of her pupils came right after school. Then she had some older people that came in the morning before they went to work.

There were some maids. And I've got to tell you about, this is very important. In the choir, they would come in. She would have, sometimes she'd have the choir to come to the house, and there was a man, a short, stocky, dark fellow. I can't forget him. Mr. Brock. And most of the black people have natural voices, good voices. He did not know how to read, nor did he know how to write, but he wanted to be in the choir and he wanted to sing, and they knew he had a voice. If you had heard his voice, you would say somebody had trained him. He had the most beautiful bass that you ever seen.

And when he sang. Of course, he learned. You had to teach him the words. He heard the music enough. And when he sang, he put his soul in it. And the church would get upset. They would be laughing and they would be clapping and crying because he sang with all that feeling that the people in our church. You don't know so much because you're Catholic. But when we have the feel of the spirit, we begin to let it out. You have to with crying or shouting or clapping your hands.

Q: When your mother didn't work, on the Mondays, what did she do?

Walker: Monday was her rest day. And she would, of course, she saw to it we got to school. That's why I say she was remarkable. She got up, got three of us out to school, and then she had her time. And sometimes, before she went downtown, she would be interviewed by some of the preachers. The ministers all came to my mother's house because, you see, our ministers they know that — I heard one minister say in a workshop three fourths of the service is your music.

And it's true. You don't have good music, you just might as well give up. So she would interview them. Then she would go downtown. She would demonstrate a piano for Kunkel Music Piano down there every year. Somebody wanted to buy a piano, some of her pupils, and she would demonstrate it.

Then she would, maybe she'd go to the music store on Howard, Cathedral Street. I can't name it, but I can see it just as plain as day. She would go there, buy the music for some of her pupils, or see what's new. Then she'd go to the movies. And that was her relaxing.

That was the only day that we would come home from school and mother was not home. She was always home every day, but she had to have her Monday off.

Q: The church choir and things like that, was your mother the leader of the choir?

Walker: Oh, the choir. Oh yes. You see, many times the organist was the director too. And then sometimes they would have a director and the organist. But in many times my mother was the director, as well as the piano and the organist.

And, well, I tell you my church, and I have to say it because it's true. It had some beautiful natural singing voices. Every Christmas Eve my church sang up and down the streets. That's right after World War I. Now I don't know what stopped it. I don't know what interfered, but I can hear, I could almost hear my mother's voice. Because we would go to bed, and we'd try to wait for her to come in, come down the street. You could get her contralto. They did that every year, and they still are doing it.

Doctors at Hopkins have expected it. So every year they send this invitation, and say what time they're going to have their reception for the choir. And many of the people were in just my choir, but there would be people from other places that knew we went, and they would come and join that choir, and sing through Hopkins [Hospital].

My girlfriend was there sick one year, and she said she heard this glorious music. She couldn't imagine that, and she looked up and found she recognized so many people, and she found it was my church. They've been doing it now. Other choirs did it, not only mine, but I know mine went to Hopkins.

Q: This was, at what church was that?

Walker: Memorial Baptist. And at first she called it Peoples Christian Church, and then when they moved up here, they decided they should change their name and call it Memorial Baptist Church.

Q: Are you still a member of the church?

Walker: I'm still there. Yeah. I can't say I'm ashamed, but I was a mother, and I didn't like being away from my sons too much. So I never sang in the choir. I did work for the church. I did little special jobs. I was the historian for the church and different things. But as far as singing in the choir, I did not. And I regret it because if you don't use your voice, you lose it. And if you hear me singing, you'd never think I studied music. I'm telling you it's awful. God gives you this talent, you're supposed to use it.

We had one named Charles Stanley. They presented the Messiah and the Seven Last Words every year, and I'm telling you. They would have different music pupils from different churches that would sing with the choir when they presented it.

I tell you what else. On Sunday mornings you'd have a guest singer. You'd have somebody come from another church to entertain. Just sing. Not entertain, just sing you know.

Q: Was that common? Was it common for churches to come together and do different activities and things?

Walker: Do they get together? Oh yes. Very devoted. Like women's day, they would meet across here. Then they met somewhere else. My church would come up there. And way out on Loch Raven was another church. And they would have a joint session on women's day. And they would have big programs. Very close. The churches were very close and caring. I have always found it.

If somebody like to have a little trouble, a little church, somebody just beginning to start, then the big church would go there and meet and help them, you know, with the program, and the money. [Laughter] Bring the music.

I'm trying to think of another little group. My mother had a group down at the church called the Singing Association of Men. I think there were women in that group, but most of those people from my church are from Virginia, North Carolina, and the different southern places, and they were very happy to go back in, little country places in Maryland. Go back and take their music back to them.

So they'd go down, get in a bus, and they would go down there and have a great big show, sing all the glorious music. And when I say they would sing, cause my mother didn't have no foolishness. She didn't teach chorus, but she knew it. And she would teach. Then after they entertained, then they would have what's called a promenade. You know what that is?

Q: It's like a dance.

Walker: Where they'd dance and they'd strut. But that was their life. They enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW