

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's Herstory Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 707

BETTY HOWARD

Interviewed

by

Mary Hulme

on

November 1, 1987

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: BETTY HOWARD

INTERVIEWER: Mary Hulme

SUBJECT: work experience, family relationships, women's roles, women ministers

DATE: November 1, 1987

HU: This is an interview with Betty Howard on Women's Herstory for the Women's Resource Center in conjunction with the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Mary Hulme. This interview is being conducted at 2565 Elm Drive, Girard, Ohio on November 1, 1987.

Can you tell me something about your parents please?

HO: My father died last year. He lived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He was married to my mother and they had four kids. I am one of the girl twins. My mother left my father when we were two years old and went North. My father remarried and had six other kids. My mother remarried and had another child, a daughter. My mother is still living. She lives on the north side of Youngstown.

HU: So you are one of five children that your mother and your father had six children after he was married to your mother?

HO: Yes.

HU: Did your mother work as you were growing up?

HO: My mother was a waitress in a bar in Youngstown called the Boston Grill. She worked until she became pregnant and married my stepfather. Then she quit work and she did not work until we were in the eleventh grade. She went back to work at Moyer's, a clothing factory in Youngstown.

HU: What kind of work did your stepfather do?

HO: He worked in the mill.

HU: Did you have a good relationship with him?

HO: No. He was a weekend alcoholic. He worked during the week. Then on Friday he would go out and drink with his friends, from Friday until Sunday. Then he would try and get himself back together and start work again on Monday.

HU: Did you have any relationship with your father as you were growing up?

HO: There was very little. It seemed like there was something between my mother and my father not being able to stand each other. That is what I need to say. So the kids suffered. He would send money from time to time, at least that is how the story goes, to have us go down South, the four of us, and my mother would spend the money on something else. Maybe that might have happened twice. We never had much of a connection. When I got married twenty years ago I sent him an invitation. He sent me ten dollars.

HU: So you did not really communicate with him hardly at all while you were growing up?

HO: No.

HU: What kind of relationship did you have with your mother?

HO: It was very bad. As I look back I can understand some of why we did not get along. It was because she was so unhappy and so miserable and did not fulfill her dreams. She had four kids under the age of three. She was eighteen and was a child herself and never really had a chance it seemed.

HU: What do you think her dreams were?

HO: I think that my mother could have been a lawyer. She went back to school after we had grown up. She got a degree in social work. She got the degree for the fact that she always wanted to go to college, not because she wanted to be a social worker, but she just wanted to go to college. She was able to realize that dream, but not until after we had grown up.

HU: Did she stay married to your stepfather?

HO: No. By the time we got to twelfth grade, we had moved out of our home and went to live in a foster home. My stepfather walked out and they divorced.

HU: Why did you go to live in a foster home?

HO: The home situation was intolerable.

HU: Because of the weekend drinking?

HO: Yes.

HU: So you had a twin sister, another sister your mother had after your stepfather, and then who are the other two?

HO: They are two brothers.

HU: Do you recall what your first job was?

HO: I had just gotten out of high school. The name of the market was Quality United Market. It was a grocery store down on East Federal Street. I was making 75¢ an hour as an all-around girl working at the cash register, the vegetable place, and stocking the shelves. That was my first job.

HU: Was that right out of high school?

HO: Yes, right out of high school.

HU: That must have been an interesting place to work, in a grocery store on East Federal Street in Youngstown with interesting clientele. Who owned the store?

HO: White Jews owned the store. The clientele were black people. He would stock greens and things that black people like to eat. The white Jews would call on the phone and he would have a man who had a truck deliver groceries. So the Jews would get their food from delivery. The black folks would come in and buy the greens off the shelf.

HU: Did you realize then at that time that there was a separation of the way that the service was given?

HO: Sure.

HU: Did you work hard at that job?

HO: I worked very hard.

HU: How so?

HO: I would work from ten o'clock in the morning until seven at night. Usually I would have to walk to work and walk back home.

HU: How far away was that?

HO: I lived on Scott Street. I walked from Scott Street to downtown East Federal Street, which was pretty far. I could

never just be standing not doing anything. I always had to be doing something. I had to dust the shelves and anything else besides mopping. If shelves needed dusting, I would take canned goods off from under the floor and put them on the shelf or whatever.

HU: Do you remember your first paycheck by any chance?

HO: No, I do not have the slightest idea outside of the fact that mother used to call the store and buy groceries from the phone. She would say, "Betty, bring such and such home." By the time I got to Friday--I guess I made about twenty-five or thirty dollars a week--I would end up with little or nothing.

HU: How long did you work at the grocery store?

HO: I worked there for about a year.

HU: Why did you leave that job?

HO: The Youth Corps, some kind of government funded program, came up. I went to work at Hagstrom House as a nursery school aid.

HU: How long did you have that job?

HO: I worked there about a year.

HU: What are some of your memories of that job?

HO: They were very pleasant because the woman who worked there was also black who ran the nursery school. She and I became very close. I was able to do some of the things that I always wanted to do like lead the kids in the music and take them upstairs. That was extra stuff.

HU: So you felt that job was more creative?

HO: Yes.

HU: Do you remember what you were paid for that job?

HO: Yes. It was \$1.25 an hour.

HU: Was that a full-time job?

HO: Yes, it was forty hours a week.

HU: How many children would you say that you cared for?

HO: There had to be about twenty-five or thirty kids.

HU: Did you have much interaction with the parents of those children?

HO: Not really, but some of them remembered me. They will see me today and say, "You used to work at Hagstrom House." I don't remember them. I remember the kids.

HU: Could you describe to us what is Hagstrom House?

HO: Hagstrom House was a neighborhood community center. They were picked as a site for money from the government for inner city kids to work. I was part of that being able to work for \$1.25 an hour.

HU: When you left that job, where did you go next?

HO: I was unemployed. I do not remember having a job after that.

HU: Did the funding run out for that job?

HO: Yes, the funding ran out. They said if I went to college, I could continue to keep that job, but I did not want to go to college.

HU: They wanted you to go to college to be a nursery school . . .

HO: No, I could have gone to college for anything that I wanted to, but that is what I had heard. I did not know if that was correct or not, that if I went to college I could keep the job. I did not want to go to school. When I was working down at Quality United Market, my first job, I had tried to go to college and I had just gotten a full scholarship to go into music at Youngstown State. I sat in for about two or three weeks in a music theory class. They were going so fast. They were doing a chapter a day. I felt at that point that I could not keep up because I could not even read music let alone do theory.

HU: So in other words you loved music and singing, but you had no training or no background and the classes intimidated you and you quit?

HO: Yes.

HU: So then you were unemployed after working at the Hagstrom House and what happened next?

HO: The next thing that happened was I got married.

HU: Which was when?

HO: I got married in June of 1967 and in January of 1967 I got a job at the North Side Hospital as a nurse's aid.

HU: How did you like that job?

HO: I hated that job.

HU: Why is that?

HO: The next lowest job at the hospital was housekeeping. I was on the scale next to the last employed person. The nurse's aids were not appreciated and had to do all of the things that the nurses would never do.

HU: For instance?

HO: Changing bedpans, giving enemas, hauling fecal matter to the lab, and hauling patients from one end of the hospital to the other.

HU: Was it hard work?

HO: It was hard. I washed patients up, incontinent patients who could not hold their bowel movements.

HU: You did not feel that you were respected by the other people who you worked with?

HO: I was not respected; nurse's aids were not.

HU: Do you remember what you were paid for that job?

HO: No, but the pay was a little better than \$1.25.

HU: How long did you stay there?

HO: I stayed there two years.

HU: Then what happened?

HO: Then I got pregnant and had a baby.

HU: So you stayed home for awhile?

HO: Yes, I stayed home for seven years all together I believe.

HU: First I guess I should have asked you, who did you marry?

HO: I married Leon C. Howard.

HU: What did he do at that time?

HO: He was a student at Youngstown State.

HU: Studying what?

HO: He was majoring in history, a liberal arts degree in history.

HU: Did he have any career goals at that time?

HO: He just wanted to finish. I did not know what he really wanted to do with it.

HU: Was he going to be a teacher?

HO: No, he did not want to be a teacher. He did not really know what he wanted to do.

HU: Was your first son Leon Junior?

HO: Yes, Leon Junior.

HU: You stayed at home and you were a mother for ten years?

HO: Yes.

HU: What other things were you interested in during those ten years?

HO: I went to church a lot.

HU: Which church was that?

HO: I went to Beulah Baptist Church over on Sherwood in Youngstown. I went there quite a lot. There was a family that was part of that church. The girls in that family I grew up with. I was drawn to that church.

HU: Did you have a relationship with churches as you were growing up?

HO: Yes, my mother sent us to a church. We sang in the choir; we were in a youth group, and did everything.

HU: So you have always been a member of one church or another?

HO: Yes.

HU: But most of those ten years you were a member of that Baptist church?

HO: Yes.

HU: At what point in your life did you start thinking that you might have a particular calling to minister to people?

HO: I think if I had to pick a particular point it was after my Bachelor of Music Degree in Education.

- HU: I think we have missed something here. What had happened?
- HO: What we missed was that I went to school. After ten years of marriage I went to school. I got a bachelor's degree in music education.
- HU: Specializing in voice?
- HO: Yes.
- HU: So did you do a lot of singing to your children as they were growing up?
- HO: Yes, we used to sing in the car a lot. I don't know where we were going, but we were always singing in the car teaching them little ditties.
- HU: At what age did you graduate from college?
- HO: I went six years and I was thirty-five.
- HU: Where do you go to school now?
- HO: Right now I go to the Methodist Theological Seminary in Delaware, Ohio.
- HU: How long have you been going there?
- HO: This is my fourth year.
- HU: What made you decide to change from Baptist to Methodist?
- HO: When I was going to Youngstown State University the Dana School of Music got a call from a church that said they wanted a black choir director. There were only two of us in the school at that particular point. The other black woman was playing the piano for her father and mother's church. So that just left me. I answered the call. As I was talking to Reverend Raynes from Indianola on the phone he said, "The job is your's." I said, "How can you give me a job when you have not seen me?" He said, "Are you black?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you qualified?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, you have the job."
- HU: Why, is that a black church?
- HO: No, at that particular point it was a predominantly white church.
- HU: What was the reasoning for that?
- HO: Indianola sits in the middle of a black neighborhood. They knew that the church was going to change somewhere

down the road into a black church. So they were trying to transplant me, transplant a black choir director, so that the music would be in place when that happened. I am unique in a sense. I am choir director because with training I can do the "white music" and the "black folk's music." When the pastor found that out, he knew that that would be the kind of choir director they needed at that particular point.

HU: So when you went to that church were there black choir members at that point or not?

HO: Yes, there were.

HU: Did you do a mix of black traditional music and what you would call Christian . . .

HO: Or classical. I did from one end of the spectrum to the other.

HU: That must have been an enjoyable position?

HO: It was.

HU: That church appealed to you; you became comfortable in that way of worshipping God versus the Baptist's way. Was there a difference?

HO: That church appealed to me because I guess about five years after I got there a black woman pastor was appointed to that church, which in my mind opened up the possibility that black women are called into the ministry. Going and attending a black Baptist church you do not get that message.

HU: Why is that?

HO: It is male dominated and male oriented as far as the leadership is concerned. Their whole conference says, southern Baptists, northern Baptists, and whatever Baptists there are, that women are not allowed in the pulpit.

HU: Is that continued to this day, that policy?

HO: Pretty much. If a black Baptist church decides to ordain a black woman then they get thrown out of the conference.

HU: So this is quite an interesting situation as I am just sitting here thinking about it. You as a black woman have found an entrance into the ministry through a supposedly traditional white church and not through the black church.

HO: Yes.

HU: So you were the choirmaster at the Indianola United Methodist

Church. At what point did you decide that you might want to try to become a minister yourself?

HO: I received my calling into the ministry. I did not decide myself. I would have done something else.

HU: What do you mean?

HO: I do not know what else I would have done. I am saying that the only way that I have found myself sitting in this position is because God called me into this position. If Betty was going to do something else with her life at that particular point it might have been a Master's degree in music and to teach at a college level somewhere, but after seeing Benita and seeing her gifts and talents and realizing that God does speak to black women, I went to an annual conference which is held every year. It is the East Ohio Conference held in June. Through music and through sitting on the stage looking at other people's faces who were being ordained, I got my calling into the ministry. I knew that was God talking to me.

HU: So it happened really during that one weekend?

HO: That one week.

HU: From that point on has it been pretty clear to you that this is what you want to do with your life?

HO: Precisely.

HU: How long ago was that?

HO: Exactly four years ago.

HU: So you immediately went to work on that?

HO: Yes. The annual conference was in June and in September I was at the Methodist Theological Seminary pursuing my Master's degree in divinity.

HU: What was your husband's reaction to that decision?

HO: He hit the left front ceiling.

HU: Why?

HO: I did not realize at the time, but I realized it more in the last four years that he wanted a traditional wife and he wanted his wife to stay home. He had become very successful working for Burger King and thought that he had everything under control because he was successful and his wife was at home. After having gotten my degree I was a substitute

teacher. It seemed like everything was going in a straight line and the kids were growing up. Leon and Stuart were getting pretty big. He was pretty pleased with the way that things were going, but I was not.

HU: Did he have a relationship, so to speak, with God?

HO: No.

HU: Was that a problem in your marriage?

HO: Yes. If I had to explain it, it is one extreme to the other. It is me having such a deep relationship with God that I can hear God talking to me, hear a calling, answer it, and dedicate my whole life to God. On the other end of the spectrum is my husband who is sitting in the business world and has done everything that it took to get to that point of success in the world. We have two people, one is in the world and one is, so to speak, with God. It seems like never the two shall meet.

HU: So he did not go to church with you over the years?

HO: No, he went to work.

HU: You never discussed it that much?

HO: Of going to church, yes, I wanted him to go. I wanted us to look like a family. I wanted the four of us to sit in church and the four of us to have a relationship with God because I knew with Leon and Stuart being black men, growing up to be black men, that they would need a relationship with God.

HU: Because they were going to be growing up as . . .

HO: Black men.

HU: Why do you think that is particularly important for them?

HO: I know that black women have a difficult time in this world and the next; I felt the next most difficult group would be the black man coming up against the white male. So I felt that in order for them to be able to make it, because I would not be with them the rest of their lives, then they would need a relationship with God. I thought that if the four of us sat in church, they would get it.

HU: But that did not happen, so you kept going to church and just kind of lived with the situation making the best of it. But your children did go to church with you?

HO: Yes.

HU: When you told him that you were going to enter the seminary school, he reacted negatively?

HO: Yes.

HU: Was he paying for you to do that?

HO: To go to school?

HU: Yes.

HO: No. The Lord has opened the doors and the United Methodist Church is very good to ethnic minorities, especially women. They have paid a lot of my schooling. There are other scholarships and funds which the Lord has led me to and I was able to find, and have paid for my schooling.

HU: How have you worked out this conflict with your husband?

HO: So far at the end of this particular period, zero-zero.

HU: No progress?

HO: No progress.

HU: So he does not go to hear you preach or take part in any of the activities, like here where you are an associate pastor at Richard Brown Memorial?

HO: He did when I first got appointed here in July. He came to the last church that I was student associate pastor in and tried to run the church as an associate. Through talking to a marriage counselor, the marriage counselor suggested that it might not even be a bad idea if Leon did not even go to the church where I was an associate because Leon felt like he was the one who was the associate instead of me.

HU: How so?

HO: He would have to play the wife role in the church where I am the associate pastor. I do not need a husband; I need a wife. He has to sit and look pretty and keep his mouth shut. That would be his role within a church.

HU: As it would have been your role had he been the associate pastor?

HO: Right, or the pastor, which has been my role as his wife with him in business. When I go to an office party, I sit and look pretty.

HU: The woman who was your inspiration, what was her name?

HO: Benita Rollins.

HU: How did her husband handle this?

HO: She was single. She did not have this problem.

HU: So you enrolled at the . . . What is the name of the school?

HO: Methodist Theological Seminary in Delaware, Ohio.

HU: You started right in the classes in September of 1981?

HO: It was in 1983.

HU: How old were your children at that time?

HO: They were thirteen and eleven.

HU: How far away is Delaware, Ohio?

HO: Three hours from Youngstown.

HU: So what kind of a schedule do you keep?

HO: Now?

HU: Yes.

HO: I go to school on Sunday afternoon. Around four o'clock I leave Richard Brown and go to Delaware, Ohio, to the school. I go to school all week and get back in my car on Friday, usually when Stuart gets out of school at three o'clock, and drive back to Youngstown. If there is a meeting or a party, a Halloween party, I will attend that on Friday. Then I will continue to work all day Saturday in the various jobs that I have here at the church. Then on Sunday, I help with the worship service and a youth meeting from two to three-thirty. Then I get back in my car and start all over again.

HU: You have been doing this for four years?

HO: Yes, for four years.

HU: Have you experienced any moments along the way where you thought--This is just too much, I cannot do this?

HO: Doubt?

HU: Or this is too much, I cannot do it. It would be more in the category of total exhaustion maybe or stress.

HO: If I was absolutely honest, I would have to say no. I have not felt like that.

HU: You have not?

HO: No. I get in my car on Sunday. I put my spirituals on. I talk to God all the way back to school. That is my inspiration; that is my being filled up; that is my strength for the week to do what I need to do.

HU: When you say you talk to God, does that mean you are singing spirituals?

HO: I am singing; I am having a dialogue of conversation, just like I am sitting here talking to you; I talk to God like that. I pray.

HU: Your son is in the car with you?

HO: Sometimes he is and sometimes he is not. A lot of times he is and he sleeps.

HU: Do you mean sometimes he stays in Delaware?

HO: Yes.

HU: At the school?

HO: Yes, at the school.

HU: This must be a very unusual school. You can live there with your children while you are going to divinity school.

HO: It is not an unusual situation for a seminary. Other seminaries have places for families to stay. A whole family stays and has a job, a student pastorate on the weekend. A lot of times if they have a student pastorate, they have a house, a parsonage. They will travel back and forth to their church and school.

HU: So most of the men and women who you go to school with are associate pastors?

HO: Or student pastors where they are the sole pastor to a small congregation.

HU: What kind of classes do you take when you go to seminary?

HO: You take bible classes. I have had Jeremiah; I have had Isaiah; I have had the New Testament courses like Paulean, the books that Paul has written like Acts or Romans. Paul's letter to the Romans is a course that you could take.

HU: Do you have much music training?

HO: I am pursuing a second degree called a Master of Liturgical Arts Degree. That is a very new degree. There have only been two people, I believe, who have graduated so far with that degree. It is for people who are in the arts, people like me who have a music degree and feel a valid calling from God to pursue that calling, but to use all of the gifts that God gave me. So with this special degree I get free voice lessons. Other people get free organ lessons or free piano lessons.

HU: So you will graduate with a dual degree?

HO: Yes.

HU: So you are kind of getting your feet wet here at Richard Brown Memorial on weekends as far as what your life will be once you graduate. Do you foresee that you will get your own church or will you stay in an associate position like you are here for awhile?

HO: When I graduate in May, I will be an associate pastor here at Richard Brown. One of the scholarships that I have called the Crusade Scholarship given by the general board of missions will pay for a doctor's degree after three years of working in the local church. What I foresee is after three years of being in the local church to go and pursue my doctor's degree at Drew, which offers a doctor of liturgical arts degree.

HU: Drew?

HO: Drew University in New Jersey.

HU: So there is a long road before you for schooling. You are forty-one?

HO: Yes.

HU: What is it about you that you feel . . . Well, first of all, what do you think are the qualities of a minister? What are the things that you have to be able to do to be a good minister? Maybe a better question is what do you think about you, Betty Howard? Where does it come from inside of you? This is the spiritual part of this interview. What is it?

HO: I think it is the mother part of me, the part of being patient, trying to be understanding. I think about taking care of my kids as a part of a way that God takes care of us. Who does that better than a mother? So the qualities I think that a pastor should have are those mothering instincts of knowing when a child hurts, knowing what to say, when to say it, knowing to say nothing, knowing to hug, having the freedom to

hug. Mothers are normally great huggers.

HU: You like to be physical with your congregation, so to speak?

HO: Yes.

HU: Who mothers you?

HO: God does.

HU: That is a very strong thing in your life. I think most of us compartmentalize our spirituality either by just leaving it at church on Sunday or going to it when you need it, but I suppose in your life it is much more; it has to be much more pervasive. Do you always feel like it is right there or are there moments when you are not thinking at all about your ministering the people, taking care of people in a motherly way? What are the moments you have when you are just free and easy? Of course I know that you do not have many now in the life style that you are leading.

HO: I don't even know. I think if there was, when I am just being me, I think it is when I am beating my son at bowling.

HU: You just go bowling?

HO: I just go bowling. I beat the socks off of him.

HU: So that is something that you really enjoy doing?

HO: Yes.

HU: This morning I attended the service here at Richard Brown Memorial. It was All Souls Day. I noticed at one point that you said . . . You were starting a prayer and you said, "Mother God." When you think of God, do you think of him as a he or a she? What is your concept of God?

HO: My concept of God is she, a black woman she. Believe it or not, my concept of God is me when I look in the mirror.

HU: Do you think that everyone's concept of God should be what they see when they look in the mirror?

HO: At a deep level, yes, but specifically for the black woman.

HU: Why is that?

HO: It seems that within the secular world everything points away from the black woman. It seems like there is nothing but negativeness. Because we are all made in the image of God, the black woman specifically needs to understand that she is beautiful and to be able to see God when she looks

in the mirror.

HU: Where did that come from, that realization you conceive of yourself very much as a black woman minister. It is not like a lot of women who just want to be perceived as a person, not a woman, but you want to be perceived as a black woman minister. You want to minister as a black woman.

HO: Yes.

HU: That is important to you?

HO: Yes.

HU: Has that always been a realization to you from the time you were younger, or is this something that has grown, or something that you have realized at some point that was really needed in this world?

HO: I think it began for me at a very early age because I was not blonde and blue eyed; I had to work on my own identity. I had to find myself because there was no help out there to find me. It came at a very early age. My sister and I were sitting by the register. We were crying because we were cold. It came to me as if someone had been speaking to me. God helped those who helped themselves. I sat up and looked at my sister and I told her to shut-up. I said, "It is time for us to quit crying and to get up and do something."

HU: So what did you do, do you remember?

HO: Yes I do. We went to school the next day. I went straight to the guidance counselor's office and told them to get us out of the house.

HU: That is when you went to the foster home?

HO: Yes.

HU: So that has been kind of a moment in your life that you have worked from and you realized that you had to do something about your situation and no one else was going to do it for you, but yourself?

HO: Yes.

HU: In this position at Richard Brown Memorial, what has been the reaction of the congregation to you as a black woman? What have been the reactions?

HO: The reactions seem to be positive. I think because I have not been there, but on the weekends, that they really have

not gotten a full flavor of me yet.

HU: Are you doing that on purpose or are you kind of easing in there or what?

HO: I guess in a sense, yes. I don't see any need to kick up any unnecessary fires until I have some wood back there. I need to get to know people first. They need to get a sense of who I am and that has not happened because I have not been there. They just get a tired person coming in on Saturday and Sunday. Then I am off again.

HU: I have had the opportunity to attend a couple of the services there with you as the co-minister, so to speak. I found them to be two of the most interesting experiences I have ever had at a worship service because you have a white male pastor positioned on the left-hand side of the church and there is you, Betty Howard, a black woman minister on the right-hand side acting in a manner that many of us perceive as black. There is the verbal affirming of his message maybe as he is giving a sermon. The way you seem to enjoy worshipping is something I think is different in white churches and in black churches. Recently I have been going to different churches and I have noticed that. The black method of worship is so much more verbal and outward. I find that very interesting. Maybe you can describe a little how that church, Richard Brown Memorial, is a unique ministry.

HO: For one thing, the first thing that you see when you go into the church is Craig and myself. That is unique. At this particular point it is the only church in the East Ohio Conference and I am sure the West Ohio too that has this combination. It has been tried before, but unsuccessfully.

HU: Why, what was the reason?

HO: Before it was tried with two men, a black man and a white man. Both egos were so big that they could not work together. The second unique thing that you would see when you come in here is people who seem like no one cared [for] them, from the group homes in Youngstown. That is unique. Then you look around and you see white folks. That is unique. Then you look around and you see black kids.

HU: Everybody and anybody is there.

HO: The Kingdom of Heaven is there.

HU: How do you find working with Dr. Hunter?

HO: Dr. Hunter is unique too. When we had our meeting at the conference, we went to lunch together. We talked about working together. I told him if he made a racist remark

anywhere, at any time, I was going to call him on it. I was not going to take him aside, I was going to call him on it at that particular point. I did not know Craig at that time and I feel that he is the kind of person, he is the kind of white male who somehow God has given him some insight of what it is like to be different. He can understand as much as his white maleness will allow him to, to understand that everybody does not have it made in this world. With just that kind of understanding, with just that kind of outlook, he and I will be able to work together.

HU: Is that kind of like a perfect church for you or do you think that you could minister in any congregation?

HO: I think that I can minister in any congregation.

HU: Would you want to?

HO: Yes, I think that is unique. I think it would look good on a piece of paper. I think that it looks good sitting down inside of me because all of the things that I ever wanted to say to white people, I will get to say in one way, form, shape, or other while I am here. On the other hand, they will get to maybe ask me how did I curl my hair, as the secretary asked me. They will get to ask a black person so that we will not be strangers to each other. We will be real human beings. We will be people who we can love and touch. They will be able to say, "I know a black woman and I love her very much."

HU: So in other words, those are the things that you want to say to white people?

HO: Yes.

HU: Summarize it.

HO: We will have one thing in common. We have a couple of things in common, but the one thing is that we are all human beings. We are all going to die and see God.

HU: So there are several objectives in your ministry. You want to be an example to black women. You want to reach the white consciousness. Of course you want to mother. You want to reach the children also. Do you think there will ever be a time when a black woman could minister to a white congregation?

HO: I don't know. I think when I was a choir director the other white male pastor kept the congregation kind of away from me. I think Craig does the same thing. One person said to me, "You are here just to help Craig." They don't

see me as a pastor. They see me as a black woman who is helping the pastor.

HU: How do you feel when someone says something like that to you? Do you feel anger?

HO: I have an awful lot of anger inside.

HU: You do?

HO: Yes. I do get angry when they say that to me. Yes, I do.

HU: Do you verbalize it?

HO: Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

HU: How do you reconcile the spiritual aspect of life here on this earth and that anger? How does the spiritual help you deal with that anger?

HO: The spiritual part helps me to direct the anger in a positive channel. The spiritual part, I think about Jesus being angry at the money changers and turning over the tables. So I have from that kind of anger to Jesus in the garden praying to God to lift this burden (anger) from me--take this burden from me. I swing from one end of the spectrum to the other, but I feel that the Lord allows me to channel it and puts me in situations where I am allowed to preach and say the things that I have to say through my anger, when I am angry, which is all the time being a black woman.

HU: Do you have fellow students at school, black women?

HO: Yes.

HU: Very many?

HO: Not a lot, but there are more than there have been.

HU: Do you talk a lot about things like this?

HO: Yes. I just finished writing a paper. I visited Rosalie Grant who is sitting on death row. She is from Youngstown. She is at Marysville Reformatory. I worked there one day a week visiting the black women. Most of the women at Marysville are black, young black women. I wrote a paper on Reinhold Niebuhr who was a white theologian. He wrote about everything. I wrote about love and justice. I told the class that I found it ironic that I found myself writing on love and justice when I have not felt much love or justice in this world except from God. I have felt an awful lot of love from God. After seeing Rosalie I could hardly get back to the seminary. I parked my car and started screaming and

yelling and said, "Where is God for Rosalie?"

HU: Tell us her story, Betty.

HO: Rosalie was a black woman four years ago who . . . I don't know the full story, but I believe that she was a drug addict and was on her way outside of the house to get some drugs. She said that she was on her way to the store. The kids burned up in the house. she had three kids and they burned up in the house while she was gone. They gave her the death penalty. So for the last four years she has been fighting for her life.

HU: What is her relationship with God?

HO: I don't really know because that was my first visit. She was talking to her lawyer who was a white woman. I did not get a chance to talk to her very long. They had pulled her away from her lawyer and she said that she was supposed to get four hours with a lawyer. She only got two.

HU: So you said that you got back to the seminary. What was going through your mind?

HO: I was very angry. I have said in my paper that I wrote that Rosalie was already dead before she walked out of the house. She was dead. We never got to see the bigger picture. All we saw was Rosalie leaving her kids and her kids dying when Rosalie was dead. I felt [for her] because society had killed her before she had stepped outside the door. Society was not brought to trial and put on the death row. Since you cannot make a baby by yourself, where was the black man who helped make those babies? When he walked out of the door, he did not get the death penalty.

HU: You kind of think to yourself--All of the people who sit and read the Vindicator every night and say, "Oh, that terrible woman," it is just so seldom that people take things one step further and go behind and ask the right questions. These kinds of experiences you will use. Could you imagine giving a sermon on an experience like this?

HO: Yes.

HU: Would you temper your descriptions, your feeling, or your emotions?

HO: No. It is very important for white people to see and hear my anger. It is important for them to see my love, but it is also important for them to see my anger. My husband asked me this morning . . . I have not spoken to him for about six weeks because I have been so angry. I have been angry at the roles that he and I have played as to what society says

the roles should be. In the last ten years I know I have broken away from that and yet have felt him trying, with all of his might, to keep me into a particular role because he was comfortable.

HU: What do you think brought this to a head all of a sudden? It has always been there.

HO: I think what brought it to a head is that May 14th I will have two Master's degrees and a job. Whatever society says that two people are supposed to be doing in a marriage no longer exists for my husband and me. It seems like this society based the relationship of marriage on the man takes care of the woman; then he is allowed sexual favors, a maid, and a body to have babies for him so that he can say that his life will go on because he has had kids. When that woman steps out of his shadow and becomes her own person, then the man is not able to let go, so to speak. A number of things will happen in that instant. One thing is he will try to tear her books up, and in essence he will try to kill her, to get her to get back to being him, his piece, his second self. She will hold him up and mold him and help him to be all that he can be, but when she moves out of that and becomes what she wants to be, then the question is--Is the marriage over?

HU: Is that pretty much up in the air for you right now?

HO: It is pretty much in the air. On Friday, after my presentation talking about Rosalie, love, justice, and Reinhold Niebuhr, when I had preached in a class, a man would get up and leave. Friday he sat up in his chair and listened very closely to what I said. Then his whole presentation was that he was able to hear what I was saying for the first time. Some of my anger, some of my hurt left . . .

HU: Because you felt that you have reached someone?

HO: Because I felt I had reached a black male. If I could reach one, then there was hope . . .

HU: Is this man a fellow student?

HO: He is a student.

HU: He used to walk out of your presentations?

HO: Any presentation that I would give in his presence he would get up and leave.

HU: Because you usually expressed anger?

HO: Because I am a black woman and I will tell him what my life

was like. Yes, I would express anger. Sometimes black men feel that the black woman has had it a little better than they have. I do not know why. I don't know where they are coming from. I don't call rape being in a better position, and that for me is where the black woman has sat.

HU: Could you expound on that a little bit?

HO: When I said that, what came to my mind when I said the word rape was the white slave owner going down to the black slave woman's house and making love to her. She bore his kids. She had his kids. That is rape. That is not a better position; that is rape.

HU: Are you at all familiar with the book that has just been published, Beloved, by Tony Morrison?

HO: No.

HU: It is a story of what happened to the blacks after slavery, so to speak. This story centers around one woman who slits the throat of her two month old baby rather than let her be taken back to the plantation. This child who is two months old, they called "Beloved", through the years stays in their home as a ghost presence. It has been reviewed as a masterpiece. One part from it was, maybe you can respond to it in some way, that a white person could do anything to you, not kill, mame, or work you, but dirty you, dirty you so you could not even think of yourself, dirty you so that you could not remember your name. She and others would live through it and did, but she could never let it happen to one of her own. I think that is a real comment on the black mother, black woman, and some of the things that you have talked about here today. It is an anger that you cannot get away from. You have to find if you are at all moved to be in a public position some way to deal with it. Your way has been through God.

HO: When I think about my calling and think about where I was sitting at that particular point in my life, a lot of this stuff I did not realize as to exactly where I sat as a black woman. I really did not know. I was angry, but I did not know what I was angry about. It has just been in the last four years that I was able to kind of sit back and look at the political world, look at the black Baptist church, look at the white female with her blonde hair and her blue eyes and understand where society has put me. My calling helped me to realize where God had put me. As a human being, God made me in the image of God, therefore anything that God makes is good; but it took thirty-five years of sitting inside in order to fully understand that. I believe God is always on time. Once I really sat back and looked at where I sat and was angry, about as angry as I possibly could get . . . If I was in the secular world I don't know

what I would do. I think I would have to move out of the United States.

HU: Do you foresee this anger dissipating? Do you foresee yourself being able to handle it in different ways, or is it something you think will always be right there in front of you? Will it be the driving force of your ministry?

HO: I had a Mexican-American male take me out to dinner about two weeks ago and apologize to me as a man of color, to apologize for what other men have done to black women. My thesis is that when the oppressor has his foot on the oppressee, he knows he has his foot on her neck. When a man is beating his wife, he knows he is beating on another human being. Even though you can explain it by saying that he is oppressed, he knows what he is doing. When this Mexican-American guy apologized to me, I felt some of my anger dissipate. In just the past week I had two men come to me and say, "I have a little respect for you."

HU: Do you think that this happened because you have persevered in speaking your anger, or do you think that other factors have come into play in their lives?

HO: I think the most important thing is that I have not been afraid to express my anger to whoever I meet. It scares me sometimes to hear me tell the bishop when he asks me to sing, "No."

HU: Why did you say that?

HO: I felt at that particular moment he wanted me to sing for his own whim because he is the bishop, because he is a black male; he said "Sing," so jump. I told him no and I laughed. He laughed. Then I said, "Okay, I will sing." I think that he knew what I was saying to him, that it is not at his whim; I am not a puppet; I am a human being. I don't feel the same thing that he does when he feels it. I am a unique individual and I want to be seen. I must be seen and I will not be erased. I am not his facsimile and I don't wish I had a penis.

HU: How does your ego come into play with all of this? Do you ever say, "Betty, you have to back off"? Do you ever say that?

HO: No. I don't say, "Back off," because there are not a lot of black women sitting where I am sitting. There are not a lot of black women who are not afraid. I feel like I have to speak for all of those who are afraid to speak. So I don't back off at all.

- HU: Do you ever have black women come and say anything of how your ministry affects them?
- HO: Yes. They come and they talk to me, especially some of the black women students who are not as vocal. They find me abrasive. Some of them do not see the need for me to be so abrasive, but yet I see them always coming around me to hear what else I have to say.
- HU: Are you able to separate your feelings about a person who has a racist attitude? Are you able to separate your feelings toward them personally or is it the fact that they have been oppressed or limited by their background?
- HO: Yes, I am able to see the person. I see a child of God. I say on Sunday morning, "Let us take off the shackles of who we think we have been all week. Let us all become children of God." That means to me that we are all equal.
- HU: Who are some of the people who give you strength as far as heroes and heroines? Do you think or read much about Winnie Mandella?
- HO: No.
- HU: Why not? That was a quick no.
- HO: Winnie is in Africa. Whatever I hear about Winnie I hear about her husband. I hear her fighting the cause for her husband. It could be a little distortion on my part, but that is what I see. That is what I hear. I have met some sisters from Africa, one in particular. I went to lunch with her and a Catholic priest. I was the only one who was angry at the table. I said, "I am angry." They said, "We are not angry." I looked at the African woman and I could not believe that that was coming out of her mouth. I am sitting in America with some unique problems of America, being a black woman, having been taken from my homeland. I can understand being in Africa and denied your humanness in your own home, but how about taking you out of your home and taking you across the ocean and throwing you someplace else. It is a unique situation. I don't know who is my heroine or my hero. I know one man I like particularly. He is James Cone, who is a black theologian, and talks about black theology. I don't hear a lot of black women theology. That is what I am looking forward to hearing. Since I don't hear it, I am going to have to write the book myself. There is a unique black woman's theology.
- HU: Could you summarize that for us or just comment on it or where you think you might come from in that direction when you do write?

HO: Part of my doctoral thesis is on: What did the black woman bring across the water from Africa that is still sitting in her psyche; even after having been raped; even after having her kids taken away from her; even after having had to go into the white woman's kitchen, be raped by the husband, and made to feel like a child by the white woman; even after the black woman has been beaten by the black male because he is so oppressed; she can still stand up and say, "I know that I am a child of God." That to me is what is not being said about the black woman for black theology. What is it? What is that essence of her that has come from across the water that has made her able to survive through it all?

HU: So what it is, is her relationship with God?

HO: I want to go back to Africa. I want to go sit in a hut and hear her sing her song because that relationship with God is related and tied up in her song. The reason why I know that is because it is in my song.

HU: Maybe the way we can finish up this tape, if you are in the mood for it, do you think that you can sing a little, maybe some African or spiritual song? Sing one of the ones that you sing when you are on the road back to school that give you strength and that makes you feel close to God?

HO: I have not heard her song in Africa. I want her to hear mine. I need to sing mine. I want to sing mine to her and she can sing her's to me. I don't think it would take any kind of explanation either. We would not have to explain what it is that we heard from each other. I would know what had transcended across the water.

"Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows climb? Why should my heart be lonely and alone for heaven, heaven and home when Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is he. His eye is on the sparrow. I know she watches me. Her eyes are on the sparrow. I know she watches me. I sing because I am happy. I sing because of me. I am happy for her eyes are on the sparrow. I know she, she watches me."

HU: What is your relationship with your sons at this point? How do you see your role to them at this stage in their life?

HO: I see my role with my sons as trying to impart and impact upon them that women are human beings. We have feelings. We love and we care, but that must be returned. It is not something that they get simply because they have a penis, but because they are human beings as I am. It has been

very difficult to impact that and impart that to them because of the role that my husband insists upon playing of being the macho man, although there are times when he will cook and he will clean. One time I came home at night and the house was dirty. I said, "Leon, the house is dirty." He said that he did not care. I said, "You are the one who lives here. I am only here on the weekend. You live here which tells me that you are dirty because my apartment in Columbus is clean. That is where I live." It is to say to my sons that women are human beings. Men are human beings. They don't have to play a role. They can just be who they are. I believe in a sense down inside that I have been successful because one of my sons is going to be a psychologist, which means that he wants to dive down deep into what makes people tick. He sees it happening between the two of us. My other son wants to be a musician, which means that my talent will live on. He wants to play jazz which is a unique black American, the only original black music, the only original American music. So he will be carrying on that legacy. As far as mothering is concerned, in the next two years I am finished.

HU: How about their relationship to God?

HO: I find my fifteen year old, when I am not up at Columbus with him, will take out his Bible and will read it. I call him and he says that he is lonesome. I say, "Stuart, are you praying?" He says yes. One night he had been so lonesome. I said, "Ask God to send you someone. Ask God to send you a friend. I would like a friend too. While we are praying, let me ask God too for a friend." The next day both of us got dates. He got one for the home-coming and I got invited out to dinner.

HU: You were telling a story about your son borrowing your car. Can you tell about it?

HO: Leon Jr. borrowed my car for two days. The next day was Sunday. I wanted him to go to church with me. He got up and said, "Mother, do I have to go to church?" I told him, "The only thing that you have to do is die." I told him that I wanted him to go to church with me because he wanted to be with me. If he did not want to be with me, he could stay home. I was well aware of the fact that he had used my car and had used me. I told him those words, "You used me and yet when I ask you to do something, then you ask me, 'Do I have to?'" What we are working on now is a relationship between the two of us, and this is how you are treating me." I did not like it. Before I left, he was begging me if he could go with me. I told him no. I could not under those circumstances allow him to go with me because he did not want to. I want him to be with me

because he wants to be with me, not because I am making him.

HU: At that point as a teacher, you said he was begging you to go with you; maybe he had realized something or another. Do you feel you have to stave the line on something like that?

HO: I felt like I had to follow through. I felt so guilty because I wanted him to go and since he was begging me I felt I should give in, but the esessential message was that he did not want to be with me. At that point I thought it would have just been coercion. I would have been forcing him to go because now he felt guilt. I wanted to follow through on that incident and say, Wait until next weekend comes; let us see what happens. Let us see if you have learned anything from me telling you that I want you to be with me because you want to be, not because I told you you had to go with me.

HU: So in other words you want him to sit and think about that instead of just the immediate reaction, "Well, okay Mom, I do want to go." "Okay, you can go."

HO: Shall I tell you what happened this weekend, to follow through on that?

HU: Yes.

HO: He did not go to church with me.

HU: Why?

HO: He did not want to, nor did he use my car. He used his father's car. The lesson is still sitting there needing to be learned. The next weekend that I come home and he asks to use my car, I am going to tell him no.

HU: Will you give him a reason?

HO: Yes, because I don't want to.

END OF INTERVIEW