

## Interview with Ina Newton Taylor May, April 27, 2004

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Interviewee: May, Ina Newton Taylor

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Mims: Today is April 27, 2004. I'm LuAnn Mims for the Randall Library Special Collections, series on Health Services of Southeastern North Carolina. We are talking today with Mrs. Ina Newton Taylor May who was a 1939 graduate of James Walker School of Nursing.

Mims: How are you doing today?

May: Fine thank you.

Mims: If you could take a minute and give us a little bit about your background, where you came from, what your father was doing.

May: Alright, my mother died when I was just six years old so it was not a very happy childhood that I had, but that's beside the point. When I was a senior in high school, the doctor there in Kenansville called me into his office one day and he said, "Ina, have you thought about what you want to do after high school?"

I said I didn't know what I wanted to do. He asked, "How about my being a nurse." I always thought nurses had bad reputations. Somebody had told me that, I said no, I haven't thought about that. He said it was a good way to make a living and he said, "You need to go home and think about it."

So I went home and thought about it and I thought well okay, I didn't want to be a secretary, I didn't want to go to four years of college not really knowing what I wanted to do. So I thought about it and told him I believed I would like to be a nurse so I sent in an application to James Walker and another one to Norfolk General Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia. I don't even know if it's still in existence or not. Anyway that's besides the point.

So I was accepted in both places and because Kenansville and Wilmington are not all that far apart, my father wanted me to take that one year in Wilmington and I did and I was always glad I did because I had a couple of aunts and uncles that lived here. You know if I had had any really serious problems, all I had to do was call them.

But anyway I did go in training. The first six months were what they called your probation period. If you passed that probation period, then you were automatically a student nurse. We wore our uniforms, which there are pictures of them in those, if you want to take them with you, take them with you, but we had blue and white striped uniforms and white aprons and white cuffs and collar, but we did not have a cap that first six months.

After that we got to wear our cap without a band on it to start with and then with a narrow band the next year and with a wide band, a black band I'm talking about, the senior year. Of course when you graduated, you had an all white cap and your uniform was all white. But anyway I managed to stay there the three years and graduated and I was always mighty glad I did. I wouldn't take anything for it.

Mims: What occupation was your father doing at that time?

May: My father was a carpenter. He was employed by the County of Duplin. He was in charge of the upkeep on all the schools in Duplin County and of course, I could say my mother died in childbirth when I was a small child. He was devastated because he worshipped her almost. Anyway that's all beside the point. I was very glad that I came down here in training. I loved my nursing years.

Mims: Well, I know this was a time of economic distress for the United States.

May: Oh absolutely.

Mims: Can you give me a little bit of idea about you know what the time was like as far as like did you feel pushed to go to school to find a job?

May: No, I knew I had to, but my father didn't push me. Like I say if that doctor hadn't talked to me, I don't know what I would have done because I didn't want to be a secretary you know or anything like that. My sister did. She came down here and took a business course.

Mims: Where?

May: In Wilmington. They had a Miller-Mott Business School and she took the business course and she worked there in Kenansville in the courthouse. You see Kenansville is a county seat so the courthouse is there. She worked for many years. She lives in Raleigh now, but that's beside the point. I'm 84, she's 88. She's four years older than I am (laughter).

Mims: So once you came down to Wilmington, had you been down here previously to visit or anything?

May: Oh yes, oh yes, I had two aunts and uncles that lived here. Oh yeah, we came down to see them. My father always made us keep in contact with our relatives.

Mims: So it wasn't like you were coming to a strange place?

May: No.

Mims: Well, what was James Walker like physically at the hospital? Since we don't have the structure today, I'm trying to get people to tell me a little bit about it.

May: (Laughter) I don't know how to tell you. It was ... to begin with it was just the one center building that had the columns you know and all. They added a wing on to it. Leslie Boney and them designed it and they didn't figure it exactly right so it wasn't...you couldn't walk straight on that hall. You had to go down a little bit and that's where the children's ward and the maternity ward was in that other building.

And then, let's see, then they added a wing, I don't know how to describe it, a wing that had all private rooms on the second floor. There were private rooms in that wing. I can't remember how it was on the first floor. They had a basement. They had the men's ward in the basement I remember and you know it was all segregated. The men's ward and the women's ward and all that sort of

thing.

But James Walker had some mighty good doctors and we graduated some very good nurses.

Mims: Well, when you came down here, you had to live at the facility, the nursing residence.

May: Right.

Mims: What was that section like?

May: Oh it was all right. They had a nursing director. She lived in that building too and we had very strict rules and regulations. We had to be in by a certain time and if you were going out during the week, you had to have a written permit to go out during the week. You know we always had to have a permit because the nursing director or whoever was in charge needed to know where we could be found if anything happened you know and all.

I didn't do much dating in the first year or two. We had a good time (laughter). I never smoked and I'll never forget this. After we'd had a hard test you know or something, we'd all go up to our rooms, gathering in one room and several of the nurses would light up a cigarette. It wasn't against the rules I don't think.

Anyway they would light a cigarette and I thought they looked like it relaxed them so much after going through a hard exam so I decided to try it. I couldn't stand the taste it left in my mouth. I never did become a smoker because I could not stand the taste in my mouth.

Mims: What kind of outside the hospital activities would you guys do for fun? Like in the downtown area or the beach?

May: Oh nothing other than going to the beach of course in the summertime and the movies were downtown. The Royal Movie and the Bijou, Carolina I believe was the name of one of the. Anyway that's really about all. We'd walk downtown. It was at 10th and Rankin Street so we could walk down there.

And at that time the colored people had their own hospital. Of course, we had an annex for colored...very definite segregation at that time and we had a building behind the regular building that was called the colored ward and it also housed the emergency room on the right in that building that had the colored people in it. So there was that wing that was behind the hospital but connected

and I remember the ambulances used to come up to the emergency room you know and they had their sirens on and we nurses, you know, we were right practically adjoining it but not really. But it was all in one blocked area, you know, the hospital, the nurses' home and all of it.

Mims: So the Community Hospital was the African American community hospital. Did you have any contact with any of them there?

May: No, not then, but after they closed the Community Hospital we had a colored nursing director or maybe she was the assistant director. I can't think of her name... I can't think of her name. But she was all right, she was very nice.

Mims: But while you were a student nurse, there was all the faculty and staff were white.

May: Yeah.

Mims: I understand you had to like go through the different areas during your training.

May: Oh yeah, we were rotated.

Mims: What was your favorite one?

May: My favorite one? Well, I loved the emergency room. I really enjoyed that and I guess the surgical floor. I didn't...well you know I liked all of it (laughter), the maternity floor, the children's ward, pediatric ward. Dr. Buren Sidbury was... he was living at that time and he had the Babies Hospital, but in the winter months, the children that were in the hospital, the Babies Hospital, were transferred up to James Walker to the ward there.

The hospital was closed during the wintertime back then. Later it was opened year round and we students, some of the student nurses served part of that pediatric training down at the Babies Hospital. I didn't, but I think that was brought to a stop somewhere along there. But Dr. Sidbury was a wonderful pediatrician.

Mims: I hear a lot of people say that. What was the man really like, his bedside manner?

May: Well, he was very, very sort of stiff. He didn't carry on any foolishness. We made rounds with him and he would, you know, give us the orders and we'd write them up in the chart and all, but he didn't ever take up any time laughing and talking at all. He was very...and then Dr. Auley Crouch was a pediatrician also and I couldn't stand him. That was because he was fresh.

I mean he would come up if you were in a little cubicle where a baby was, you were doing something with the baby, he'd make it a point to come up and put his arm around you to get to the baby and he'd kind of rub his leg against your leg and you couldn't say anything. I mean we couldn't afford it because he would have denied it. I don't think that belongs in there (laughter).

Mims: It's interesting though you know a bunch of young women there and of course the contact that you're having with the staff. Do you remember Dr. Fales at all?

May: Oh yeah.

Mims: What was he like?

May: He was a very nice man. He was a good doctor. He wasn't the best doctor, but he was a good doctor. Dr. Donald Koonce and Dr. Joe Hooper Sr. were the two chief surgeons. I mean they were the best and most well-known surgeons, but there were a lot of them. I can't even remember who all they were to tell you the truth. Coddington, Dr. Coddington, Dr. ... they're probably names in the book.

Mims: I'm just trying to find out more, you know you've seen a lot of changes in your time in working with some of these doctors, didn't know whether you were getting a sense of a transition earlier on. Like if they relate, "Well in my day we used to do it like this". Did you get any kind of stories like that?

May: If so, I don't remember.

Mims: Because I know that medicine has changed so dramatically.

May: Well you know doctors' offices were all downtown on Front Street back then and of course they're all over town now, but they were down on Front Street. I remember Dr. Koonce's office was down there; Dr. George Johnson's office was down there. I think it was in the Murchison Building. George Johnson was a very good orthopedic, I don't mean orthopedic, what do you call it...

Mims: Obstetrics.

May: Obstetrician, yeah, he was good. He delivered my babies.

Mims: How about some of the other nurses that you worked with like supervisors? I know we saw a

picture of Beadie Britt in there. What was that like?

May: Well, for the most part you know I got along with all of them, but I thought Beatie Britt was fine. Beadie Britt was a good supervisor. There were one or two and I can't even think who they were that too a dislike to me. The one was a nursing director, Louise Demme.

She didn't know that I knew from back several years, the person who worked down in the basement in charge of the linen department. Her daughter was a good friend of my aunt in Kenansville. Her name was Miss Bessick and I'd go down there every once in a while you know and just chat with her when I had time. But she called me to go down there one day. I don't know if you want this on there or not. But she called me to go down there one day and she said, "Ina, I need to talk to you."

So I went down there and she said, "I want to warn you. You be careful. Everything you do, you be doubly careful because Louise Demme," who was the nursing director at that time, "has taken a dislike to you and she told me she was going to send you home if she could possibly get anything on you so you be careful." Well, if I'd been sent home, I would have been disgraced. The whole town of Kenansville would have been horrified, but anyway I listened to her. She didn't get to send me home.

Mims: But girls did get sent away?

May: Oh yeah, if they you know broke the rules and did things that they weren't supposed to do.

Mims: How about academically?

May: Academically I don't remember much about that. I managed to pass all my subjects. I'm sure if you failed, you know, a certain number of subjects, you'd have to go on, but I don't really remember much about that. I didn't so that's all I was interested in.

Mims: Well, you mentioned that you liked some of what I would consider a higher stress type area like surgery. I understand there was a lot of conflict during some surgical rotations. Did you find that to be true?

May: I wasn't involved in that at all. We just served like three months of our time, three months I think it was that we were scheduled for the operating room. You know you had to rotate to all the different departments and I loved it in the operating room.

Mims: Do you remember exactly what you were doing in the operating room?

May: Yeah, we knew what we were doing.

Mims: I know, tell me because I don't know.

May: Well, you were the scrub nurse. There was more than one thing you did. There was the circulating nurse, the scrub nurse. The circulating nurse had to be in there when the surgery was going on so that if the doctor needed anything he didn't have on his table there where his surgical instruments were or anything like that, if he needed anything, she got it. She was not scrubbed up, but she had a mask and all that sort of thing on and she did that.

And the scrub nurse, of course, was right there like a second pair of hands for the doctor. And also the interns did that, they scrubbed in with the surgical procedures because that was there way of learning. I enjoyed the operating room. I enjoyed the delivery room. All of that was very interesting to me.

Mims: What kind of delivery did most women have? Did they have an assistance with medication during this time? Do you recall that?

May: I'm not real sure. It depends you know a lot on the patient and whether she was in a long labor thing or was she fairly fast with it. She was given something to lessen the pain, but you know she had to be able to strain down and push that baby out. But I didn't work very much in the maternity part.

Mims: It's just curious 'cause you think when was the transition where more people started delivering their babies at the hospital? Was this a time when home births were still typical and hospital births weren't?

May: Well not very much, not very often. I mean of course sometimes they started in labor and had it before they could even get to the hospital, but when I was a student nurse almost all the babies were delivered in the hospital.

Mims: Did the babies stay with the mom?

May: No, they were in the nursery. They were all put in the nursery. There were premature babies that had required special places in the nursery, special attention you know and all. But the ones that

were full term, and the nurses that worked in the nursery would bring the babies to the moms to nurse. I mean they had, that was accepted that they were going to nurse their baby.

Mims: Did you do any formula preparation?

May: No, that was done; you know I'm not sure where it was done. I don't know if it was done in dietary or what. I don't remember about that, but we didn't do it, no.

Mims: Because I know Dr. Sidbury was instrumental in getting some like milk stations set up at various places throughout the community and didn't know whether James Walker was involved with any of that during that time.

May: I don't remember about that. You'll have to ask somebody besides me that question.

Mims: So your time at Walker prepared you for a number of things. Tell me what it was like when you graduated.

May: I was so excited, I didn't know what to do to be a graduate nurse, I know that, oh me. Well, I went to work and I got married almost just a short time after I graduated.

Mims: Really?

May: Yeah.

Mims: Where did you meet your husband?

May: Here in Wilmington. He was a Wilmingtonian and his mother ran a... you know at one time when I came in training, the Coastline was the main way people made their living was at Coastline, the railroad station. My husband's mother ran a boarding house for railroad people on N. 4th Street and so my husband, of course, carried me over there to meet her and everything and she took a liking to me. I think she loved me more than she did her own daughter to tell you the truth cause her daughter was not the easiest person to get along with.

Anyway we got married in Kenansville just not too long after I graduated. We had a small wedding. We went to South Carolina for our honeymoon (laughter). Anyway we came back and my husband was working down at the Ford place, which was downtown then. It was between 2nd and 3rd I think on Market. A lot of those places...it's changed so much downtown. I haven't been downtown in I cannot tell you how long. It's been years.

Mims: It's changed tremendously. What was the actual ceremony like whenever you graduated? I think you said you got a new uniform or a white uniform.

May: A white uniform, we had to wear white uniforms after we graduated. You know, I don't remember what that graduation ceremony was like. I guess, I just don't know. I'm sorry, I'm the wrong one to talk to you about that. I can't remember.

Mims: Well, sometime after graduation did you have to take the state exams?

May: State Board in Raleigh. Yes, I'll never forget that. A number of our nurses failed it. Fortunately I didn't. I was so glad because I thought I'd be absolutely disgraced if I didn't pass state board, but I did. I went to work in a doctor's office, Dr...well, I worked for the urologist, but well, I worked somewhere... I worked at the hospital for a long time before I went to work for the urologist.

Mims: So we were talking a little bit earlier about the pay for nurses at this time.

May: What?

Mims: About the pay, what your salary was. Tell me again what it was.

May: I think it was \$4.00 a day. I'm not sure.

Mims: And that's not when you were a student.

May: No, that was when I was a graduate, but I'm not real sure. I really don't remember. It's been so long, I don't remember what exactly we got, but it was very different you know then from then to now as to what a salary was based on and all.

Mims: Did you go back to work at James Walker after I graduated?

May: I'm sorry I don't remember, I really don't.

Mims: I was trying to figure out was it different being a student nurse and a graduate nurse working in the same kind of environment.

May: I'm trying, I went to work...well at one point I worked for 14 years in Dr. Hooper and Dr. Hare's office. They were the urologists and that office was behind the James Walker Nurses' Home.

Mims: Right there, was it on Rankin?

May: It was the street right behind the nurses' home. They had an office back there. In fact, there were several doctors' offices. Dr. Donald Koonce's office I think was back there next to ours. But I didn't work for Dr. Koonce. I thought he was the greatest doctor that ever was, but I didn't work for him (laughter). I nursed his wife when she had a baby and I was honored that he would ask me to do that. Anyway...

Mims: Well, what was it like at Dr. Hooper's office? What did you have to do there?

May: Well, that was quite an experience. I'll tell you I really did learn an awful lot about urology. That's the kidney and the bladder and the tubes that drain the urine from the kidney to the bladder and all that. It was very interesting. They were very nice to me to work for. During office hours I'm telling you that office was full.

But at that time also we still had segregation so we had a separate office room for the black people. I mean that shows you how long ago that was. They came in a different door. They came in a side door to go in the office and the white people came in the front door. Isn't that awful?

Mims: It's different.

May: Very different.

Mims: Very different. What were some of your duties as an office nurse?

May: Well, you get the patient in there...

Mims: Wait, you did what? You wouldn't have anything to do with men patients?

May: Except take them to the room they were going to be in and the doctor would come in and tell the men what they wanted. But the women, I would get them to take their pants off and get up on the table. They always wanted a catheterized specimen of urine because women, for the most part, have a little bit of discharge and when you pass your urine you'll wash some of that discharge and it'll show up under the microscope as pus in your urine when it really isn't. But anyway we always had to catheterize the patient.

Then I would pull the foot thing out and let them lay on the table and the doctor would come in and he would feel the kidney area and all. But they also, there were several treatments that they did with women. One of them was some women had a very tight urethra, that's what they pass the urine

through and it was have to be stretched, dilated. I would have to put...we had a local anesthetic that I could put on an applicator and put it up in the urethra to deaden it so it wouldn't be painful for the patient. But oh Lord, I don't even know if they do all those things anymore or not.

Mims: But you wouldn't catheterize any of the men?

May: Oh yeah, we catheterize them. We catheterized the women. I didn't have anything to do with the men.

Mims: Who did those, the doctors?

May: Doctors did those.

Mims: Hmm, that's interesting, so you were segregated by race and by gender (laughter).

May: Well they didn't always catheterize the men because the men could pass a little bit of urine and would clear out their urethra. Then it was what they called a good specimen so you didn't have to worry about it. See men are built so differently than the women (laughter).

Mims: So what did you do during World War II? Were you working at that time?

May: Worked at the clinic at the shipyard. Dr. Hooper and Dr. Hare were the surgeons that were hired for the shipyard clinic and Shirley Anderson who was the anesthetist at James Walker and I were hired. Dr. Hooper hired Shirley and Dr. Koonce hired me to start the clinic and order all the equipment and get everything we needed for the clinic.

You would be amazed at the terrible accidents that happened down there.

Mims: Really?

May: Yeah, they had a safety director and a lot of the people who worked there wouldn't pay any attention to what the rules of safety were and there were several bad accidents before people finally...people back in the country from all over everywhere came here then and I don't know if anybody's told you what a busy town it was during the war, but it was a very busy town. The shipbuilding company and Newport News, sent some of their key people here to set up and to open up and they stayed. You know as long as the shipyard was kept open, those key people stayed.

I lived on 23rd Street and one of them lived on one side of me and one of them lived on the other

side of me. My husband and brother-in-law were running a service station at that time and they quit the service station and they went, everybody went to work at the shipyard I mean if they could from all the surrounding areas. It was a busy, busy time. The traffic was absolutely horrendous in this town then.

Mims: So the clinic was for general, it wasn't necessarily just for urology, right? At the shipyard, it was just a general clinic?

May: No, they didn't just come up there because they wanted to see a doctor. It was for injuries. If you got sick on the job, of course, you were sent to the clinic. We had, before I left there, we had a large number of nurses that worked around the clock because the shipyard was opened around the clock. But I had to quit when I got pregnant (laughter). I was so sick; I couldn't hold my head up.

Mims: So that's interesting because that's the beginning of industrial type medicine and this is in the days before OSHA's regulations, the ones that govern safety procedures. You didn't have a rulebook that you had to follow about guidelines or anything?

May: Well, not really. We pretty much knew what was expected of us, but I don't remember them having any special guidelines. I'm telling you some strange things happened (laughter).

Mims: Well, can you think of one you'd like to share?

May: Well, I mean they'd come up there with things that had nothing to do with people that worked on the yard, like a sore foot or something had nothing to do with the shipyard, but they had a chance to see a doctor free. They didn't have to pay, you know. But it was just...I mean we had ... Shirley Anderson and I really had our hands full. They gradually hired more nurses. But when I got pregnant, I had to leave that ended my time out there but I enjoyed it.

Mims: Well, if somebody was really sick and they had to go to the hospital...

May: They had to go in the ambulance.

Mims: Really.

May: We had two orderlies from the hospital that we hired to work in the clinic at this shipyard and one of them drove the ambulance. I remember one time I was taking a patient to the hospital and we had an accident. No, there was an accident just up ahead of us and the traffic was all stopped.

The police were all around, wouldn't let you get by or anything and I had to get out and tell that policeman I've got a real person who's been injured, I've got to get to the hospital. So they cleared the line and helped us get out and get by. It was a busy time during that shipyard.

Mims: Well, I have looked at aerial maps of Wilmington I think it was back in '49 was about the earliest and from the shipyard over to where James Walker, it doesn't seem like there were very many roads that went directly that way. How would you go there?

May: No, there wasn't. I think they built some additional roads. See that's Shipyard Boulevard, 17th Street runs into Shipyard Boulevard and that street went right on down.

Mims: Because I was just trying to picture what was the most direct route from the shipyard to the hospital. Were there blacks working at the shipyard?

May: Black people?

Mims: Yes.

May: Oh yeah.

Mims: Was it the same situation with a segregated type clinic for them?

May: No, I don't remember things being segregated at that time; we didn't in the clinic anyway. To me they were all treated you know the same way. They weren't segregated in the clinic.

Mims: So you quit for a while there. Did you go back to work after you had your baby?

May: Yeah, I did, but don't ask me where I worked. I don't know (laughter). It seems to me I did nursing at the hospital for many years.

Mims: At which hospital?

May: Well, of course when they closed James Walker, I told you I worked at the doctor's office for 14 years and then when they opened New Hanover I decided, and of course the New Hanover at that time was just the one building, that center building, I decided if I was going to stay a nurse, I better get back into nursing because office work is not nursing, not really.

So I didn't know if she would hire me or not, but I went and talked to the Superintendent of Nurses and she hired me.

Mims: Do you remember what year that was?

May: No, I don't.

Mims: Was it when the hospital first opened?

May: Yeah, uh-huh.

Mims: How did you feel about James Walker closing its doors?

May: It was not anything I was really concerned about. It was the thing to do. They built this hospital and then they transferred their patients over there. The people, the nurses that were working at James Walker, were automatically just switched over to the particular type of illness, you know, like if they worked in the men's ward at James Walker, they were put on the men's floor. But we didn't have many wards at New Hanover. I'm trying to think if we even had any.

Mims: Maybe the pediatrics was?

May: Yeah, they had pediatrics. I can't remember. I know that the maternity floor was of course had the nursery for the newborn babies, but it was all in one building. I worked on the 7th floor and at the end of the hall on the 7th floor was a locked area where they had to put mental patients or someone who had committed crimes that had to be in the hospital were kept back there. I don't know if they still have that or not because I haven't been over to New Hanover and walked all over, it's been a long, long time.

Mims: What section of 7th were you doing, what specialty was there?

May: Started on the urology floor because I came from a urology doctor's office. Later I was made a supervisor in the afternoon from 3 to 11. That I enjoyed cause then you got to go all over the hospital you know. And I loved the emergency room. I used to love the emergency room, but I just served my regular time as a student nurse in the emergency room, but I didn't work there afterwards.

Mims: Who were some of the doctors you worked with when you went to New Hanover Hospital?

May: I mean there are ... a lot of doctors here that I don't even know; I mean a lot of them. But it was the older ones, Dr. Koonce, Dr. Hooper, Dr. Murchison. I guess Dr. Murchison was still

practicing when they opened this hospital. He was a mess, Dr. Murchison was, big cut-up but he was a good doctor. He was an internist and ...

Mims: How about other Walker graduates when you went to New Hanover? Did you run into a number of people who had graduated from James Walker Hospital?

May: They needed nurses so bad, they hired them from everywhere, anywhere they could find them and yes, there were a few nurses from James Walker. But it's been so long, I don't remember who they were.

Mims: How about men entering the nursing field?

May: Yeah, that was a new experience for me, but there were a few, not very many, but a few of them did go into nursing and they were good. But at that time they were stationed where they thought they might need a male you know, not necessarily the men's ward, no, but they had them in the intensive care unit, coronary care unit. I think there were some down in the emergency room. I loved the emergency room, always did like that.

Mims: There was also integration at New Hanover.

May: Oh yes, integration had come into being at that time. I mean the black people were treated exactly like the white ones.

Mims: And as far as the staffing went?

May: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about, staffing.

Mims: I know there's a lot of diversification now among nursing specialties. You were trained with probably a lot of hands-on bedside?

May: That's right. We had to give the patients baths. If they had been there for several days and were able to do it, we would just take the basin of water and the washcloth, towel and let them do what bathing they could by themselves and then we would finish. We always washed their back and rubbed it with alcohol and all that stuff you know. You had to see the patients were turned frequently because they could get a pressure sore at the end of the spine. Once you had a bedsore, you had a real problem trying to cure that.

Mims: But then when you went to work at New Hanover Hospital, what type of work were you doing

there? Was it the same kind of stuff you were doing at James Walker? Were you still doing the bed baths and that total patient care?

May: Well, you're asking me something I don't remember.

Mims: Were you still taking the patient's temperature and respiration and blood pressure?

May: If you were the charge nurse, you didn't do that. You had your hands full running the floor without that. You had the other nurses working up there. You assigned, if you were the charge nurse, you assigned somebody to take the temperatures and blood pressures and the other nurses were given a certain number of patients to bathe and change the bed and all that.

They weren't necessarily nurses. There was what they called nursing assistants. The LPN's were just a step below, that's the practical nurses, just a step below the RN's. We had a lot of nursing assistants that gave...some of them were white, some were black, it didn't matter, that gave, what was I starting to say, that gave the bedpans and all that sort of thing. But if I ever went in a room and a patient said, "Can I have a bedpan," I'd give it to them you know. It was not something you were not supposed to do.

Mims: How were the LPN's utilized?

May: They could give medicines and the medicine nurse was assigned by the head nurse in the morning and at 3:00, the head nurse at 3, on from 3 in the afternoon until 11 at night. That was primarily their job, but they did other things in between when they were not giving medicines.

Mims: So it seems like what I'm hearing is you had a little bit more of a break when you went over to New Hanover, it was a little different than Walker because you weren't having to do like everything for the patients. There were other people involved with that. Did you find that there was a difference with the relationship with the doctors at New Hanover Hospital with it being a larger and more spread out, you know more diverse?

May: Well, we didn't notice it you know. Some of the doctors we liked better than we liked other doctors. Of course some of them could be just as mean as a snake (laughter), but we had to treat them all with courtesy and respect. You didn't dare talk back to a doctor.

Mims: When you went to work at New Hanover were you still in your nursing uniform?

May: Oh yeah.

Mims: With your hat?

May: The white uniform, the white cap and all that.

Mims: Do you remember whenever you stopped wearing your hat?

May: No, no I don't. I don't remember. And I had a cap and all that for a long time. I don't know what I finally did with it. This was after I retired. I don't know what I finally did with it, I reckon put it with the trash out or whatever (laughter).

Mims: How long did you work at New Hanover?

May: I don't know. I was working in the 'same day' surgery unit per se, not really...I didn't look after the patients. I would come in, this was the last job I had, I would come in in the afternoon and get together the results of all the preadmission testing and review it and if there were any problems with it, I'd call that doctor and let him know so he could cancel the surgery if he thought it was necessary.

I would get the lab reports in the chart and all right ready for the next morning when the patients...the same day surgery patients came into the hospital the morning that they had their surgery. If it was a big operation, no, they came in the afternoon before and had all that lab work done and the doctor saw them the night before in the hospital. That's just the way it was.

Mims: You've seen a lot then out at the hospital. What year did you retire, do you remember?

May: I don't remember, I really don't. I want to think it as somewhere around 1982, but I really don't know.

Mims: Another thing I was just thinking about, I've heard some of the nurses say they were not trained on IV therapy at James Walker.

May: No, we did not do it. They had an IV nurse that...she was called all day long, paged to come and start fluids in different parts of the hospital and our responsibility was keeping it going, changing the bottles when they needed to be changed and keeping check on the site where the needle was, but if there were any problems with it, we'd call the IV nurse.

Mims: Now when you went to New Hanover, did you have to start IV's at New Hanover?

May: No, I did never start IV's. No, that what I was talking about, New Hanover.

Mims: But at James Walker, the nurses didn't do the IV's at all?

May: I think they may have had an IV nurse at James Walker, but I really can't remember anymore. I'm sure they did because there wouldn't have been anybody else to do it if they didn't have an IV nurse. If the nurse was on the floor...

Mims: Well, I heard that some of the interns did them.

May: Well if they had a problem, a lot of patients had bad veins and if they had a problem, we had to call the intern to do it, yes.

Mims: Sounds like you guys had a really good relationship with everybody at a smaller hospital.

May: Well, you did, yeah.

Mims: With a smaller hospital. Looking back now on your career as a nurse, do you think you would still stay on the same path or would you do something a little bit differently?

May: No, I like being a nurse. I would want to stay with it.

Mims: So there must have been something that that counselor saw in you at your high school who said you were going to be good at doing this. Can you think of any characteristics that a nurse should have to be successful like you were? Like what do you think was in you that made this work for you?

May: (Laughter) I don't know. Oh me! Well like I told you, the doctor is the one that said he thought I ought to go into nursing training. At that time nurses had a bad reputation. I don't know...I don't mean for the work they did, but they were looked on as kind of wild.

Mims: Really?

May: Yeah, uh-huh. There was two girl, they were sisters in Kenansville that came down to James Walker Hospital and went in training and they were the only two that I had any way of knowing about because I didn't know any nurses. I don't remember if I ever talked to them or not, but somewhere I got the idea that nurses had bad reputations. I don't know where it came from ... so don't print that (laughter).

Mims: No, but when you came down here, you found out that there was a pretty strict environment.

May: Absolutely, absolutely.

Mims: 'Cause I heard that you were even told what street to walk on when you went downtown and not to take a ride from strangers. Is that ...?

May: Well, you didn't catch a ride with a stranger that's for certain. I don't remember if they told us or if we just decided that was the way we wanted to go, but we would go down Red Cross Street to get downtown because it was at 10th and Red Cross Street is where the hospital was. So we could walk down there, we could walk down 10th Street until we got to Market and that was the safest way to go and then you know you'd turn at 10th and Market and head toward downtown.

Because we didn't have cars, none of us had cars. We thought nothing of walking. It was good for us. We walked up and down the halls enough; you know the walking downtown didn't seem to make any difference. You know I haven't been downtown in I cannot tell you how long. It's been years since I've even been down on Front Street. Do you ever go down there?

Mims: Uh-huh, I was down there the other day. They had the Walk of Fame down at the Cotton Exchange and I went down there to see that. I was sure there were a lot of dress shops in downtown Wilmington.

May: Oh yeah, the Wonder Dress Shop. They had the most expensive, the better line of clothes, the Wonder did. That was the one I traded at, Marcus Goldstein on that one. Of course Belk's and Effrid's and J.C. Penney's. There were all on Front Street and they were department stores, those three.

Mims: So is that where you ladies would take off to, to go window-shopping a little?

May: Oh yeah.

Mims: As far as social events that took place at the School of Nursing, I've heard other people say that there were like organized clubs. Was there anything like that when you were there because I heard at one time there was like a singling club, a Glee Club, a basketball team at one time?

May: No, we didn't have any of that.

Mims: Nothing like that. How about your church time? Was there a certain church or was there

something there on the campus there for you to attend if you wanted to?

May: You mean at James Walker?

Mims: Yes.

May: No. I was a Presbyterian and when I didn't have to work on Sunday, I usually went to...I started to say First Presbyterian, that wasn't it. It was a church on N. 4th Street I think, anyway it was a pretty church, just can't think of the name of it. That was where I went when I went, but when I first got to Wilmington, my daddy always had us in those church doors every time those church doors were open so I was glad of an excuse not to have to go to church for a while (laughter).

Mims: I'm sure you saw things differently once you came down here, that nurses were very strict and disciplined because I think that's one of the things that you're telling me, that you were a very disciplined person.

May: Absolutely.

Mims: So that was part of your success with doing this. Can you offer any career advice for somebody that would want to enter this field? What would you tell a young girl now like if you were that counselor?

May: Well, I would think that they would need to be sure and investigate it to be sure that's what they wanted to do because it's not an easy life. Nursing is not easy. You get a lot of satisfaction out of it if you do a good job, but you can't be lazy. You've got to really work hard and have genuine empathy for the patient and you need to be a very caring person is all I know.

Mims: Can you think of anything that we haven't touched upon during our talk here about your life as a nurse or student nurse?

May: No, not really.

Mims: I really appreciate your talking with me today.

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