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Interview with Louvenia Barksdale

Louvenia Barksdale

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #325
BARKSDALE, Louvenia**

BARKSDALE, Louvenia

Louvenia D. Barksdale Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation, Bethlehem Center of Spartanburg, SC

Interviewed: July 20, 1984

Interviewer: Michael Cooke

Index by: Alyssa Jones

Length: 53 minutes, 59 seconds

Abstract: In her July 1984 interview with Michael Cooke, Louvenia Barksdale described her work with what was previously the Spartanburg County Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation. Barksdale discussed the topics of sickle cell anemia/trait, sickle thalassemia, the Department of Health and Environmental Education, Dr. James R. Clark, and various radio and television stations that aided the foundation. She also discussed the numerous ways in which the foundation supported sickle cell patients, raised money, and educated the public. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Sickle cell anemia/trait, sickle thalassemia, Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Spartanburg County Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation, Crippled Children's Division/Department/Program, Rehabilitative System, Dr. James R. Clark

Interview Session (July 20, 1984): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:30 *Question:* Could you give us a brief sketch of your life? *Answer:* LB was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She attended Allen University, and then went to summer school at Howard University. She entered Columbia University's Teacher's College with a focus on English and Education. She received an M.A. from Columbia University. She then worked on a special program in Reading at the University of South Carolina. LB returned to Howard University for more classes on English.

00:03:53 *Question:* When did you first become aware of sickle cell anemia? *Answer:* In 1969 she got a phone call from Harry Belafonte, asking her to start a movement in South Carolina for sickle cell anemia. LB agreed, but knew very little about sickle cell.

She became concerned about it after that. LB thought that lupus and sickle cell were the same before doing research.

00:05:35 *Question:* What's the name of your church? *Answer:* Greater Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church.

00:06:37 *Question:* You mentioned "we". Who are you talking about? *Answer:* LB was referring to the congregation and the people who donated money to the church and sickle cell research.

00:07:13 *Question:* This is a first attempt? And it was issued on Sunday, January 27, 1974? *Answer:* Yes. They received enough money to start an organization. They then started a temporary organization in January, calling on people from Columbia and other cities. Their first president was Edward N. Barksdale.

00:09:57 *Question:* Is he related to you? *Answer:* Yes, distant relative. LB was the first treasurer. The meetings were held at the Greater Trinity A.M.E. Church before LB asked the president to look into the legal side of the organization.

00:10:42 *Question:* Is he a lawyer? *Answer:* No, EB was an assistant principal. Before becoming a principal, he was a mathematician. EB got the organization incorporated and under their first charter, the organization became known as the Spartanburg County Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation. The next year, EB became the treasurer of the organization. Under Roy Henderson, the foundation gave their first donation to the Sickle Cell Center in Augusta. After RH, Willy Fuller served as president, and under him, the foundation donated money to Howard University for research. The foundation continued to advance under WF's administration. The first screening was done at LB's house.

00:15:29 *Question:* Was testing done in churches? *Answer:* Yes. The churches were more involved in the 1980s when a dedicated staff was added to the foundation. The foundation received a grant that made it possible for them to have a staff.

00:16:43 *Question:* What type of grant did you have? *Answer:* South Carolina Genetic grant.

00:16:53 *Question:* What organization donated that grant to the foundation? *Answer:* The grant came through DHEC.

00:17:00 *Question:* Did DHEC get the grant from the federal government? *Answer:* Yes.

00:17:06 *Question:* Do you know what particular agency they received the grant from? *Answer:* The Crippled Children's Program/Department, at the time of the interview, this was the Rehabilitative System.

- 00:18:13 *Question:* Did the state provide that type of service? *Answer:* No, the Spartanburg foundation provided transportation. One of the members, a mortician, provided a car and a driver to transport the members of the foundation when they had to go to Columbia—the base for the Crippled Children’s Program in South Carolina.
- 00:21:30 *Question:* Special foods were essential and the crisis—? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:25:00 *Question:* What were some of the teething problems you had at the beginning of the organization? What were some of the startup problems? *Answer:* Staffing was a big problem at the beginning and getting board members who were faithful to the foundation. Another problem was people using the name of the organization to get money and not giving it to the organization. They also had a problem with White doctors exploiting the Black patients.
- 00:27:21 *Question:* You didn’t want to deal with the democratic red tape? *Answer:* No.
- 00:27:25 *Question:* But you did have to take a procedural approach. *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:27:32 *Question:* If you didn’t take the procedural approach, the foundation may have failed? *Answer:* LB said it would have failed.
- 00:29:01 *Question:* You’re saying that the organization was built on Black pride, in part. *Answer:* Yes, Black pride and Black organizations.
- 00:29:40 *Question:* Were those White sororities and fraternities? *Answer:* No.
- 00:29:49 *Question:* In other words, you did not receive any significant contributions from White organizations. *Answer:* In the very beginning, no.
- 00:29:56 *Question:* Has that changed? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:29:59 *Question:* When did that change? *Answer:* In the 1980s.
- 00:30:02 *Question:* It took ten years? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:30:06 *Question:* Why do you think that is? *Answer:* LB said it was because people were not educated.
- 00:30:33 *Question:* First it took a campaign to educate the Blacks—? *Answer:* LB said they had campaigns for every occasion. LB then described some of the campaigns that the foundation had.
- 00:31:45 *Question:* How long did it take to become informed? What were some of the types

- of misconceptions that people had about sickle cell? *Answer:* LB said White people were never fully informed about sickle cell anemia.
- 00:31:54 *Question:* What about Black people? *Answer:* LB said Black people were not informed about sickle cell either.
- 00:31:58 *Question:* What about Black people, first, then White people, second. *Answer:* LB wanted to talk about White people first because that was where she had a problem. LB went on to tell the story of how the foundation had been called to go to the hospital in the middle of the night. The situation was that a White woman wanted to be removed from a ward because a Black woman with sickle cell anemia was receiving transfusions in the same ward. The woman thought she could catch the disease.
- 00:32:26 *Question:* She thought it was a communicable disease? *Answer:* Yes. LB said that they used the word “catch”. The foundation then started visiting churches, schools, malls, and everywhere else with their educational programs. Most people thought that all sickle cell was the same. LB said one was never done educating the public.
- 00:35:32 *Question:* And sometimes they might have need of special food? They can’t wait on that. *Answer:* Right. The foundation put on fundraising drives. There was one called “Fantasy in”.
- 00:36:00 *Question:* What is “Fantasy in Blue”? *Answer:* The foundation would pick a king, a queen, and a poster child.
- 00:36:17 *Question:* Since the 1980s? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:37:12 *Question:* What are the most important priorities of your foundation? *Answer:* Patient service.
- 00:38:52 *Question:* Have you ever had any problems with that priority with the Department of Health and Environmental Control? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:39:01 *Question:* Did they see it the same way you did? *Answer:* No. DHEC fought the foundation hard because LB was feeding the patients that would have usually gone without food all day. DHEC told LB that she should not feed them.
- 00:39:25 *Question:* Why did they say that? *Answer:* LB did not know, they just told her that she was wrong for feeding the patients. LB said DHEC fought her all the time, even in the satellite clinics.
- 00:39:32 *Question:* Did they offer an alternative to the food? *Answer:* No, DHEC just said

- that she was spoiling the patients by feeding them.
- 00:39:50 *Question:* Did the patients order things while they were in Columbia and then the foundation compensated DHEC, or did they have money available to the patients to procure their own food while they were in Columbia? *Answer:* LB's experience was that the clinic, under DHEC's management, did not provide any food for the patients. The foundation's board authorized the allocation of money to provide a sandwich and drink for each and every patient while they were at DHEC headquarters in Columbia.
- 00:41:57 *Question:* Were you compensated by DHEC? *Answer:* No.
- 00:42:10 *Question:* Why did they object to giving the patients food? *Answer:* LB did not know.
- 00:42:16 *Question:* Did they offer to help provide those services? *Answer:* No.
- 00:42:34 *Question:* Could you tell us who said you were spoiling them? *Answer:* LB preferred not to give names.
- 00:43:20 *Question:* When did the satellite clinic come into being? *Answer:* In 1981.
- 00:43:25 *Question:* That's really a recent development. *Answer:* Yes. LB said they still gave the patients at the satellite clinics some type of refreshments.
- 00:43:37 *Question:* Did DHEC ever suggest the Department of Social Services in pursuing the feeding of patients. *Answer:* No.
- 00:43:54 *Question:* Did you suggest that idea? *Answer:* LB said the foundation did pose the question, but they never received an answer.
- 00:44:03 *Question:* You took it upon yourself? *Answer:* LB said that they had to.
- 00:44:13 *Question:* What was the response of the medical community to your organization? *Answer:* LB described how the medical community was involved.
- 00:45:00 *Question:* What are some of the activities/projects would you like the foundation to take part in? *Answer:* Neonatal.
- 00:47:13 *Question:* What was the role of James R. Clark in the organization's development. *Answer:* James R. Clark was the focus of the state organization. Clark advised foundations, including the Spartanburg county foundation. LB stated that some of the organizations underwent name changes.

- 00:48:08 *Question:* Because of the death of Dr. James R. Clark? *Answer:* Yes. LB and MC discussed Dr. James R. Clark, an African American physician who did extensive work with sickle cell research and foundations.
- 00:49:55 *Question:* What stations are we talking about? *Answer:* WSPA. The first program that sponsored by WSPA—
- 00:50:04 *Question:* Is that a radio station? *Answer:* Radio and television. The first sickle cell foundation program that was sponsored by WSPA was the Spring Fling in 1979.
- 00:50:29 *Question:* May of 1979? May 6, 1979. *Answer:* Yes. It featured local talent from Spartanburg. Ever since, the foundation had a partnership with WSPA. The foundation also worked with WRD.
- 00:51:01 *Question:* Is that a Spartanburg station? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:51:05 *Question:* Is that a radio station? *Answer:* Yes. The foundation also worked with WASC, which gave the foundation its first blood bank. LB continued mentioning radio stations.
- 00:51:39 *Question:* That's out of Charlotte? *Answer:* No. MC and LB discussed other radio stations and Black reporter who worked with the foundation.
- 00:52:34 *Question:* Did she come in the 1970s? *Answer:* No, she came in later.
- 00:52:51 *Question:* Prior to her coming here, was the staff of the Herald Journal very helpful? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:53:59 *End of interview*