

Winfred Rembert Interview

This oral history captures the life story of artist **Winfred Rembert**, told in a 2003 phone interview with Shelley Zorn for the Turner County Jail Museum project in Ashburn, Georgia.

Rembert recalls his early life in rural Georgia, where he was raised in cotton fields with little access to education. As a teenager, he became involved in civil rights demonstrations. At age 18, after stealing a car during a protest in Americus, he was jailed in Cuthbert. Held in secrecy for two years while the Army listed him as AWOL, he endured harsh treatment, including severe beatings. After fighting back against a deputy, he escaped briefly but was captured.

He describes being taken by law enforcement and local citizens to a secluded site prepared with ropes for lynching. There, he was tortured - hung by his feet, cut, and nearly lynched - before one man intervened, sparing his life. He was paraded publicly in chains, convicted in a biased trial, and sentenced to 27 years for larceny, escape, and related charges, though he served seven.

In prison, he was transferred from Reidsville to Leesburg and eventually to the Turner County Work Camp in Ashburn, where he found comparatively humane treatment. At Ashburn, he learned road construction, reading, and writing, and was eventually made a trustee. Most significantly, he met his future wife there, beginning a relationship that connected him permanently to Ashburn.

Throughout the interview, Rembert emphasizes survival, resilience, and the shaping of his later art, which drew directly from these lived experiences of labor, incarceration, racial violence, and community memory.

Transcript of interview of Winfred Rembert:

It is Thursday, February 13, 2003.

Shelley Zorn is interviewing Mr. Winfred Rembert from Connecticut by phone.

Winfred: I want to ask you a question.

Shelley: Okay, go ahead.

Winfred: What's the purpose of this interview?

Shelley: Okay, what we're doing here in Ashburn is we are taking our old historic jail that's across the street from my chamber, and we're turning it into a museum. And we're trying to do like a, not just a museum about, we're trying to do a museum, not just a jail museum, but almost like a storytelling museum, and we want to include people's stories in the script or the tour of the museum. And down the road, you know, we hope to maybe put some of these stories in book form or maybe a couple years down the road maybe even do a play, you know, in the spring and the summer different stories that we collect. And we've collected stories, everything from

families who've lived in our jail, a dog that was at our jail at the one time, a trustee. We've talked about some of the murders that have happened here in Turner County. So we've got ghost stories and love stories and everything in between. So I knew that you had visited here in Ashburn looking at our old work camp.

Winfred: Yes, I did.

Shelley: The extension agent gave me your name, and then I called the Martin Luther King Center and they gave me your number. So that's what we're doing it for. It's for a jail museum that's going to be here in Ashburn. And since your wife is here from Ashburn, or this was her hometown, that kind of makes it interesting too. So, um...

Winfred: When are you opening up? Well, we hope to have it open maybe this May or June. When we get closer to a date, I'll be glad to call you and let you know that it's opening up.

Winfred: The time I'm coming down there too.

Shelley: Oh, okay. So you're coming...

Winfred: In June, yeah.

Shelley: Oh, okay. Well, that's probably about the time that it'll be opening. So we'd love to have you here. When we have a certain date, I'll let you know. We'd love to have you here for the opening.

Winfred: Yeah, that would be great.

Shelley: Okay. First of all, I need to get permission from you. It's okay if I tape record you.

Winfred: Yeah, go ahead.

Shelley: Okay. All right. Well, I don't know that much about your story except... Where were you from originally, Mr. Winbrant?

Winfred: Did you see the CNN interview?

Shelley: No, I didn't. I knew that CNN interviewed you, but I haven't seen it. So I really don't know that much.

Winfred: All right.

Shelley: Where were you from originally?

Winfred: From Cuthbert.

Shelley: Cuthbert. Okay.

Winfred: I was born as a little baby in Americus.

Shelley: Oh, okay. Well, how did you get from Americus to Cuthbert?

Winfred: Well, my mother gave me to her aunt.

Shelley: Okay. And your aunt was from Cuthbert?

Winfred: Yes.

Shelley: Okay. How old were you when you went to your aunt's in Cuthbert?

Winfred: Three months.

Shelley: Three months old. So did you have any ties to your parents after that?

Winfred: Well, way on up the line after I was in my early 20s.

Shelley: Okay. After you were grown. Well, the only thing that I really knew about you that supposedly you had been lynched in Cuthbert and lived to tell about it.

Winfred: Almost lynched.

Shelley: Almost lynched. Okay. Could you tell me...Well, you can start wherever you want to. You can start with your upbringing or that story, whatever you want to do.

Winfred: Well, I was just, you know, as a child raised up in a cotton field and didn't go to school. It was hard, tough working in the cotton field because, you know, the first thing I remember is when I was about six or seven years old, I had my own sack, you know. But my sister was going to school. My first cousin, he was going to school. And when I was raised up in the house with her, so we raised, we said we were sisters and brothers.

Shelley: Oh, okay. But she was your cousin, but it was like your sister.

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Okay. Now, did you get to go to school?

Winfred: Yeah, but not much.

Shelley: Because you were working most of the time.

Winfred: Uh-huh.

Shelley: So did your sister maybe teach you to read and write or...

Winfred: Oh, I learned that in prison.

Shelley: Oh, okay. Later on. Well, how did, what did you do to end up in trouble in Cuthbert?

Winfred: Well, you know, back in Americus, George, I don't know if you can remember back there before when they had the, um, the Charlie Hopkins case.

Shelley: No, sir. I don't know anything about it.

Winfred: Well, there was always demonstrations and things going on in that time.

Shelley: Oh, okay.

Winfred: And I went to America to join, like I say, well, let me, let me back up some.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: When I grew up, you know, I didn't want to rebel from the cotton field as soon as I got big enough.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And I started hanging around in the streets and then I started working in civil rights and going to Albany and places like that, listening to people talk about civil rights.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: So that's how I ended up in Americus at this demonstration they were having for this person named Charlie Hopkins.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: Who had shot into a crowd of white people and killed them. And killed one.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And so things got out of hand there at that demonstration and I was running through this alley and there was a car in the alley with the keys in it and I took it.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And I got caught. That's how I ended up in jail.

Shelley: Okay. So you were in jail in Americus?

Winfred: No, I was jailed in Cuthbert.

Shelley: Oh, okay.

Winfred: I made it to Cuthbert with the car.

Shelley: Oh, okay. All right.

Winfred: And I got caught with it there.

Shelley: Okay. So you got caught with the car in Cuthbert. So you were in jail in Cuthbert?

Winfred: Yes, I stayed in jail a long time in Cuthbert.

Shelley: How old were you when that happened?

Winfred: I must have been about 18 because when I got sentenced, I was 20.

Shelley: Okay. What year were you born?

Winfred: 1945.

Shelley: 1945. Okay. Well, what happened to you after you went to jail there? What was the jail like?

Winfred: Well, the jail was tough. You know, small cell. But the thing that was very unfair about that is that I didn't -- no one knew where I was. And at that time I was in the Army.

Shelley: Oh.

Winfred: And when the Army people came and looked for me they told me that they had never seen me. I was locked up in the back.

Shelley: You are kidding.

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Did they ever let your family know where you were at?

Winfred: No one knows where I was until after I got sentenced.

Shelley: Wow. So for two years.

Winfred: Yep.

Shelley: So the Army had you listed as AWOL.

Winfred: That's exactly right. And so one day I got angry and I rolled the toilet paper into the toilet and flooded the jail. And the deputy sheriff come back and he was, you know, he was going through all the nigger stuff and talking -- he was just talking a bunch of stuff and he was going to come into jail and he was going to beat my butt. And when he come in and open the door, you know, I was prepared to take that butt beating, you know. There was nothing else to do but take it. But once he got in there and he was hitting me all in my face and kicking me down and me back up and knocking me back down, I decided to fight him back. And I... when I hit him, he went for his gun, you know. And when he went for his gun, him and I was wrestling over the gun and I ended up taking it from him.

Shelley: Wow.

Winfred: And I didn't know nothing to do but he was begging me to give him his gun back but I surely wasn't going to do that. And so I locked him in his cell and I escaped.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And I went to some people's house that I thought that I could get help from and there was other blacks and they were civil rights workers. And when I got there, the man of the house, he wasn't there. And I told his wife what was going on and she welcomed me in the house and everything and she went in the next room and called the police. I don't know today why she did that but that's what happened.

Shelley: Okay. So she called the police without you realizing it.

Winfred: Yes.

Shelley: And that's when they came after you.

Winfred: She gave me a shirt because I didn't have a shirt on. She gave me a shirt and she gave me coffee and it was in February, I recall right.

Shelley: So it was probably about 1965, something like that?

Winfred: Exactly right.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And I told her what had happened and I thought she was okay with it but she went in the next room and called the police. And when I realized it, when I looked out the window I just saw just a yard full of white folks. You know the police, the sheriff, the state police and just good old citizens also.

Shelley: Yeah. Just folks watching, right?

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: And so they kicked the door in, and boy I took one of the worst butt-beatings of my life. And that must have went on for at least 45 minutes in there.

Shelley: Good grief.

Winfred: Yeah. And I thought they was going to kill me right there in that house but for some reason the sheriff told them to bring me back to jail so he turned me over to these two state policemen. They delivered me back to the jail, so when they got in the jail, I mean when they were on their way back with me, the dispatcher for the state police was screaming and hollering over the intercom for them to bring me by there. And then they didn't want to do it, but they, he kept screaming at them so they finally did it. And on route there, the one that wasn't driving, he was talking to me, and he said to me, he said, "Nigger, don't you know better than to hit a white man?" And when he said that, he backhand me, the back seat. And when he backhand me, right in the mouth, you know, blood spewed out on his shirt. And then he said, "Oh shit, I got nigger blood on my shirt." And he took all of his medals and everything off his shirt and he threw his shirt out of the window.

Shelley: Good grief.

Winfred: Threw it away. And then commenced to hit me. Finally, I arrived at the state police barracks there on Highway 27. And as a matter of fact, the barracks was new at that time.

It was a brand new barracks. And the one guy that was behind the desk, he was just, he was going through the nigger thing and hitting white folks and telling me about I shouldn't do this and do that. And when he drove back to hit me, I spit on him. The blood and all. And he just, boy, he act like somebody had threw some acid in his face. He rushed to the bathroom and

washed his face, and came back and stuff. And then so I took another butt beating then. And then they finally delivered me to the jail. And when they took me to the jail, I sat in the car and they all commenced to have a big conversation standing next to the jail. And I sat in the car for a long time. And I saw other white folks coming to the jail. And it seemed like to me they were, I can't say what they were doing or what they were saying. But my guess was that they were calling people telling them that they had me and if they wanted to be a part of what was going on, they could come because there got to be a crowd of people there that really didn't have nothing to do with the arrest.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And say about, it must have been like about 5 o'clock or 5:30 in the morning when they took me from the car. And they took me over to another car over the trunk which was a bigger car. And I took it to be the sheriff's car.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And they threw me in the trunk. And that trunk was a big trunk. It had a lot of space in it. But they shut the trunk down and they began to ride. And I was trying to remember, you know, directions and my turns and every which way I went.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And I think I finally put it together last year when I was trying to relive it when I went back there because I had been going back time after time.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: Trying to find the directions to where I thought it might have been. You know, trying to remember the turns and everything.

Shelley: Right. What were you thinking when you were in the back of that vehicle?

Winfred: I thought they were going to kill me.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: But I had no... a rope wasn't on my mind. You know, I just thought maybe they were just going to take me and kill me, not hang me.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: Of hanging, but it wasn't...

Shelley: You wouldn't think in 1965, yeah, that they would try to hang somebody.

Winfred: Or they're just going to take me and shoot me or something like that. But you know what, in 1965, 1963 is on record as a lynching in Georgia. You know, because the United used to keep records.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: The last one that's on the record that we could find was in 1963.

Shelley: Mm.

Winfred: That was on public record.

Shelley: Where was that at? Do you remember?

Winfred: I can't remember, but it's not too far away. Have you seen this show, "Without Sanctuary?"

Shelley: I've seen it on the Internet. I say I would like to see it. I'm not sure if I would like to see it or not because the little bit that I saw on the Internet disturbed me so bad. I don't know if I want to see it.

Winfred: That particular show has got all the records and everything about different places in Georgia.

Shelley: Right. I've got the two gentlemen's name that did that, the "Without Sanctuary" photos.

Winfred: Yeah. But you can, I think maybe you can easily, you need to find the book.

Shelley: Okay. All right. So what happened to you when, what did they do, take you out to a field out in the middle of nowhere or something?

Winfred: No, no, this place was very well prepared for folks.

Shelley: Oh, okay. So this is a place they had taken people before.

Winfred: I think it had to be because they had ropes and everything there.

Shelley: Oh, did they have a gallows there or just a tree or what?

Winfred: There were three trees and three ropes.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: Three trees and it looked like to me it was a rope from each tree. But you know when they opened the trunk, it was daybreak. You know, day was breaking.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And it seemed like I could see a rope in the distance as I looked up, as I was looking up out of the trunk at them and looking past them. You know, in the background, it looked like I could see a rope, but I wasn't sure. But when they stood me up, I surely made out that that was a rope. You know, and as I looked down the line, it was another and another.

Shelley: So it was a place that was prepared for this. But was it a field or was it in town or?

Winfred: It was a club, it looked like, because there were cabins.

Shelley: Oh, okay. There had to have been five or six cabins and it was well kept, you know, with the grass.

Shelley: Huh.

Winfred: You know, and a pond. It was just a, you know, just a well kept place. It looked like a club type of place. The only thing that was messing it up was those ropes.

Shelley: Yeah. Well, you said you've been back many times since then. Have you ever found this place?

Winfred: I think last year we found it.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: But you know, I got a mighty irritable feeling when we found it. And they had a big sign up there that said, you know, private property. Don't go any further. So we turned around.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: I had my family with me and I had some friends.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: Came from Connecticut with me. We didn't want to make any waves and we didn't want to get into trouble. But we were out in the middle of nowhere, I can tell you that.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: We was out on those old muddy creeks, you know, and old muddy red roads, you know. And so we just, I got the feeling very well that that was the place. I went back in there and I talked to some more black people, older black people, you know.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: And I asked them, you know, when they were hanging people, killing people back in the day, what was the most likely place they were taking them? And they all said the same thing. And that was the place that I had run.

Shelley: That was the place you ended up going to.

Winfred: Yes.

Shelley: Mm. Who, do you think that the group that was, had you that morning, do you think they were an organized group like the Klu Klux Klan or were they just a local group or?

Winfred: I don't, now that's a good question.

Shelley: Hmm.

Winfred: I think they all could have been Klansmen, the whole crew, but they wouldn't dress as Klansmen.

Shelley: Because, you know, here in Ashburn they had a group called the Early Morning Club or something like that. And they weren't, I don't think they were actually KKK, but I think, you know, they basically did the same thing. You know, they were a local group.

Winfred: Yeah, I think that's the same thing mine was. I don't think they was really dressed up as a, but these weren't dressed up, but I did get the feeling, and I didn't hear any commentations on it about anything about they were Klansmen and all, but I just took it that they were, that was an organized place. That's what made me think that they all were together.

Shelley: Because it was a campground and they were all together and...

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Hmm.

Winfred: And then the fact that they took them so long to get together to take me to this place.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: You know, and I thought that's what made me think.

Shelley: So they organized a group of people before they took you out there.

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Well what happened once they got you out there?

Winfred: Well, they opened up the trunk, and the thing, and you know what saved my life was two things. Um, I didn't want them to castrate me. I think that's what saved me. Because if they'd have put the rope around my neck first, then I wouldn't have been saved.

Shelley: Hmm.

Winfred: The person that I locked in the jail, he wanted my scrotum.

Shelley: Ugh.

Winfred: So they pulled me up by my legs with no clothes on.

Shelley: Ugh.

Winfred: And when he did that, he, uh, he wasn't in the crowd where they was pulling me up.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: I happened to see him, you know, approaching in the crowd opening back for him to walk in.

Shelley: Mm-hmm. So they had you hanging by your feet.

Winfred: Yes.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And when he walked up, he grabbed my private parts and he stuck his knife in them.

And when he stuck his knife in me, um, another white man, I don't know his name, didn't see his face, um, all I know he was like, "Yeah, what?" when he spoke, "Everybody listen."

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: He said, "Don't do that. I got a better plan for this nigger." But it was too late. He already had cut me, but not all the way off. Um, and so they let me down and I was in an enormous amount of pain and bleeding. What I remember is the blood running down my butt cheeks and down my back. That's what I remember very well. That's the things that stick with me. But I was in a lot of pain when they cut me down. And I do artwork from this. Did you know I was an artist?

Shelley: Well, I did. Yeah. And I didn't know what kind of art you did, though. Yeah, I do art from my experiences in my life. And it's all not about lynchings and stuff like that.

Shelley: Right, but all your total life experience, right?

Winfred: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Shelley: Okay, so what happened after they let you down?

Winfred: Well, they let me down and they threw me back in the trunk. They took me back to the jail and I stayed in jail at least another year. But I found an old pair of pants that I had in the cell. And I rolled them up and put them between my legs and shut my legs real tight on them because I was bleeding.

Shelley: So they didn't give you any sort of medical attention, of course.

Winfred: About a couple of months, I think it was.

Shelley: A couple months after it happened?

Winfred: Yeah. I finally saw my family doctor. And he pretended he didn't even know who I was.

Shelley: So you think the man that came up and spoke is the one, he just, he's the one that stopped it? Yes, he had on a pair of wingtip shoes. That's what I remember very well about him.

Shelley: Mm-hmm. Why do you think he stopped it?

Winfred: Well, because I, they used me as an example to everybody in Cuthbert.

Shelley: Oh, okay.

Winfred: They marched me around the square. You know, that's what we call a little square there that goes around.

Shelley: Yeah, I've been to Cuthbert.

Winfred: Yeah. They marched me around the square in chains and, you know, on a Saturday. I must have been on a Saturday because, you know, that's when everybody was out and all the other black people was out. And then they came back and the kangaroo caught me. And they sent me off to prison for 27 years.

Shelley: So they sent you to state prison?

Winfred: Yeah, I went to Reidsville.

Shelley: Ugh.

Winfred: I, in Reidsville, they gave me, well, I was, my charges was larceny of an automobile, escape, pointing a pistol, and robbery.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And I asked the judge, "Who did I rob?" He said, "You robbed the man of his pistol." I said, "Yeah, but he was going to shoot me." He said, "You should have let him shot you."

Shelley: Ugh. So you went back to court again after the incident with the deputy?

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Okay. So then you went to state prison.

Winfred: Yes, I did.

Shelley: And you were sentenced for 27 years?

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: How many did you serve?

Winfred: Seven.

Shelley: Seven years.

Winfred: Hmm.

Shelley: Okay. What happened to you? What were some of your experiences in state prison?

Winfred: They was tough in Reidsville, you know, but one, the best thing that ever happened to me is when they sent me to Ashburn.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: I stayed in Reidsville a year. Then they shipped me out of Reidsville to Leesburg.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And so I was getting in so much trouble, and finally the warden, I think his name was Boney at that time.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: He said to me... of course I stayed in the hole. You know.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And he said to me he was going to do me a favor and send me to a good camp where I could do my time. And I didn't believe him because I wasn't used to getting no favors from white people, you know.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: So, but the warden from Ashburn came and got me and surely enough it was a good place.

Shelley: Okay. So you went from Reidsville to Leesburg to Ashburn?

Shelley: Yeah. So it was the guy in Leesburg that sent you to Ashburn.

Winfred: Yeah. Warden Boney.

Shelley: Warden Boney.

Winfred: Mm-hmm.

Shelley: So how many years were you here in Ashburn?

Winfred: I must have been there a year and a half until they closed the place down.

Shelley: Okay. You were there until they closed it.

Winfred: Yeah. Well, you know, because the prisoners had a lot of freedom there, so.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: Some kid had got some guy had shot his wife about a prisoner and so they closed the place up.

Shelley: Was Captain Smith there at the Ashburn work camp when you were there?

Winfred: No, Youngblood.

Shelley: Youngblood.

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: Okay. Do you remember anybody else that worked there?

Winfred: Crip Zorn.

Shelley: Crip Zorn. Hmm. You know, my last name is Zorn.

Winfred: Well, he could have related.

Shelley: By marriage. I'm going to have to find out who he was. Crip Zorn.

Winfred: Yeah. That's what they called him.

Shelley: Hmm. Okay.

Winfred: But he was the only person at that time. He must have been in his seventies.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: Or maybe even eighty.

Shelley: Okay. Well, there's two groups of Zorns here, so may or may not be related to my husband. But, well, how did they treat you once you got here to Ashburn?

Winfred: It was the best treatment I ever had. You know, it was, there was no guards and when the guards were with you, it was like they weren't with you and you really got to do, as long as you do your work like the warden asked you, you know, you really got to get a lot of freedom.

Shelley: Okay. What kind of work did they have you do?

Winfred: Well, they put me out on the road building detail. I built a lot of, you know, I learned how to build the roads and read the blueprints and all of that. It was just a great thing for me because that's where I learned my reading and writing and all of that.

Shelley: Hmm. Okay. Didn't you tell me one time when we talked before that you were a trustee here at the work camp?

Winfred: I made a trustee right there at Ashburn, yes.

Shelley: Okay. Any experiences that you remember from the Ashburn work camp or anything in particular that stood out for you?

Winfred: Well, you know, I met my wife that you was talking to. I met her while I was there.

Shelley: Yeah. How did you meet her?

Winfred: Well, one day I was building the road and the crew I was in and she came by in a truck. Her and her sister, they were going to pick some tobacco or something.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: I saw her sitting in the truck and she went by and I said, "Oh, that's a nice looking girl."

Shelley: So did you talk to her?

Winfred: I didn't because I didn't have a chance, you know.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: But finally they had moved and there was a big rain one week. I mean, it rained every day that week and so the bridge that beasted her house, that blew out.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: And they sent me to fix it. So one day she was out there sitting washing clothes, you know, with the rub board and everything.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: And I walked up from where we was working up to her house and I said something like,

"Excuse me." She looked and saw me and she ran in the house and told her daddy, you know. And her daddy came out with a shotgun and all. And, uh, but I couldn't tell him I was liking his daughter. I asked him, I told him I wanted some water. So he gave me some water and we talked for about five minutes and I went on back to work. And then one day the mother came down to where we was working at and offered us some food. You know, told us we could come up to her house for dinner so I got a chance to talk to her that day.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: And then I didn't get to talk as much as I wanted so I used to find out which way her school bus was going. I put a big pile of dirt in the road so the bus couldn't get by.

Shelley: (Laughter.)

Winfred: I got off my machine and then talked to walk around the school bus until I'd see it. She wouldn't say a word. She just looked straight ahead, you know. So I finally, you know, convinced her to write me. And we corresponded through the mail for something like about six months and she came to visit me. Then the [unknown] camp closed down, and I got shipped to Morgan, Georgia.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: And so we corresponded through the mail. Morgan was a terrible place. It was terrible. And I stayed there a while and then I got shipped to Bainbridge. And by that time, my time was up. Somebody, the warden came in and told me one day that I was going home in 30 days. I don't know how or who or whatever helped me get out because I was writing a lot of letters to different people in different organizations. No one is taking the credit for it. But helping me. So I don't know. Maybe they just got tired of me.

Shelley: Did you correspond with your wife when you moved to Morgan and Bainbridge?

Winfred: Yes. We kept writing each other through the mail, yes.

Shelley: Uh-huh. So what did you do once you were released from Bainbridge?

Winfred: Well, her house was the first place I went.

Shelley: (Laughter.) Well, she was still in school. She must have been younger than you.

Winfred: Yes, she was younger than me. And so what happened was that was in 1974 in July when I got released.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: And we got married that December.

Shelley: You didn't take long, did you?

Winfred: No. I brought us to New York and I had a job there waiting for me.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: I had some friends there and I had a job. So I took two jobs, got an apartment with no furniture, went back and we got married and come back and I bought one person's bed and she slept in the bed and I slept on the floor.

Shelley: Oh. What was your wife's name? I know it was Gamage.

Winfred: Patsy.

Shelley: Patsy Gamage. Okay. Who were her parents?

Winfred: Edgar and Mary.

Shelley: Edgar and Mary.

Winfred: Uh-huh.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: But my prison life was tough. You know, the only part I had that was okay was in Ashburn. After that, you know, it didn't matter that the other two care for that. I had been a trusted inmate. They just...

Shelley: They didn't care?

Winfred: They didn't care about that.

Shelley: Well, what did the whole...I mean, you do not sound bitter at all. I just am curious how you got to this point in your life because I would probably just...

Winfred: At one time I thought I was going to go back to Cuthbert and just shoot up all the white folks I see.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: But then, you know, after I began to educate myself and I began to look at life different.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: And so I decided that that was a big...too big a chip for me to carry. If I was going to be anything in life after I got out of prison, I couldn't be thinking like that.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: So I...you know, I'm very forgiven.

Shelley: That's amazing.

Winfred: Yeah.

Shelley: That really is.

Winfred: And so I just speak through my artwork. And I'm not a prejudiced person. I'm not going to do it in no way at all because I go to different colleges, schools, and everything, and I speak and my audience 99% of the time is all white.

Shelley: Yeah. Well, how did you...when did you discover that you had an artistic ability?

Winfred: Well, in Bainbridge there was this guy that was making billfolds and stuff. He was a trusted inmate.

Shelley: Uh-huh.

Winfred: And I used to look through the bars and watch him do it. And I thought it was a good sense that I could do that. So he wouldn't let me use his tools and everything. So I looked at him real well and the best I could is I took some nails and I made my own. And I began to make billfolds and pocketbooks. And I did that when I got out. But it just didn't go well. So five years ago we were sitting at the table, you know, and I tell stories and stuff around the table. And my wife jumps up and she says, "That's it." I said, "What?" She said, "You should put your stories on the level. Make pictures."

Shelley: Hmm.

Winfred: And so I began to do that. And oh, you know it, you know, the whole world wants to see it.

[Laughter.]

Shelley: Amazing. Well, how did the King Center find out about you and your artwork?

Winfred: Well, I gave a speech at Emory University.

Shelley: Oh, okay.

Winfred: And that's how they found out about it. So after that they invited me down to open up that sanctuary exhibit.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: And I did a couple of speeches there and I did the Auburn Avenue Library for them. Just fantastic. So I don't have time for prejudice and to be thinking about those people who do bad things. That's the way the world is, you know.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: At times. You know what else? You know what I'm assuming?

Shelley: What?

Winfred: They thought they was right.

Shelley: Yeah, I know. Isn't that incredible?

Winfred: Yeah. So, I mean, when a person's doing something they think they're right and they're using the Bible also.

Shelley: I know. That's what just makes me sick.

Winfred: Yeah. But so, but you, ain't nothing you can really do about it because that's the way time was at that time.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: So those, and I really don't, you know, I know one wants to be hung up now and leave

me on that. But I, things had a way of working themselves out and I'm really glad about my life.
Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: You know, I've been through a lot and, but now things have changed and, and you know, and I'm making a good living and I'm doing what I want to do.

Shelley: Mm-hmm. And it made you the person you are today.

Winfred: Exactly. It made me know how to raise my family, you know.

Shelley: Right. Well, you know, you're exactly right and you carry bitterness around. It doesn't hurt anybody but you.

Winfred: That's right.

Shelley: The people you're bitter towards don't care.

Winfred: They have no time for that.

Shelley: Yeah, yeah. Well, is there anything else that you can think of in your story that, anything else you'd like to tell us?

Winfred: Well, you know, I'm just very concerned about children, about black lives.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: It seems to me it's really going down and, and you know, with all the crime and black on black crime.

Shelley: I agree, yeah.

Winfred: And it's just, I wish, because most black kids seem to me as I travel and go to different schools, they don't know history.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: Don't know their culture. You know, every group got a culture and they try to live by it.

Shelley: Right.

Winfred: And except us, and we don't have that culture and so a lot of black kids don't know where. I was at Yale talking Monday.

Shelley: Mm-hmm.

Winfred: And they had two schools there. And I said to the kids at one point, I said, "If everybody know what a lynching is, raise their hand." And only about ten hands went up. And that was a predominantly black audience.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: Little school kids and their teens. And I thought that was very bad.

Shelley: Yeah.

Winfred: You know, so from history, history hasn't been told to the kids and so that's why a lot of times I think if history was told to them, they wouldn't be so bad to do crime, you know.

Shelley: Right. Mm.

Winfred: Well, I just wish some history could be told all over the world in classes as these kids grow up so they could really have something to live off of and something to go by and guide their lives by.

Shelley: Right. I personally think a lot of it goes back to family values too.

Winfred: Yeah. But Ms. Zorn, you can't have no family values. If you don't know where you're being, you don't know what you're doing.

Shelley: That's true. That's true. You're exactly right. Well, you had said earlier that you might be in Ashburn in June.

Winfred: Yes, I may be there in June. I usually try to get there around time, school's out.

Shelley: Okay. Well, I think school lets out here like mid-May.

Winfred: Okay.

Shelley: They started letting out earlier but we're hoping and with our fingers crossed to have the museum open possibly end of May, beginning of June. So I'll get back with you and let you know when the opening is. We'd love to have you here for our opening.

Winfred: Yeah, I could probably try and plan my trip around that.

Shelley: Okay.

Winfred: All right.

Shelley: Well, we would love that.

Winfred: Just call me and let me know what's going on.

Shelley: Okay. Well, I appreciate so much you letting us speak with you this morning.

Winfred: All right. That's okay. Anytime. If you want to know something else, just give me a call.

Shelley: Okay. Well, thank you. It was a pleasure talking to you this morning.

Winfred: All right. If you don't get me on this phone, then use my cell phone.