

**Sandra Turner Davis**

**The Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation**

**May 27, 2019**

**[00:00:01.450] - Nicky Hamilton**

This is Nicky Hamilton, and I am here with Ms. Sandra Turner Davis to talk about your life growing up in Sewanee as part of the Sewanee Black History Initiative. We are at St. Mark's hall and today's date is May 27, 2019. So thank you, Ms. Sandra, for being willing to share your stories with us today. And if you don't mind, would you please state your full name and when you were born and where?

**[00:00:34.810] - Sandra Turner Davis**

My name is Sandra Turner Davis. I was born October 31, 1951.

**[00:00:40.520] - Nicky Hamilton**

And where were you born?

**[00:00:43.270] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I was born at Emory Hospital

**[00:00:45.970] - Nicky Hamilton**

In Sewanee, Tennessee?

**[00:00:47.470] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Yes.

**[00:00:50.870] - Nicky Hamilton**

So thank you. And I'm just going to start from the beginning. So if you don't mind, would you tell me about your family and where you grew up?

**[00:01:00.110] - Sandra Turner Davis**

My family was consisted of four kids and one stepdaughter. We didn't find out about that stepdaughter til later on in years, but it was the four of us. My oldest sister's name was Rita Dean- I mean, Rita Turner. And then it was myself, Sandra Turner, Willy June and Gail Turner. House of four- a house of six. And it was, you know, little country house with one bathroom, three rooms, one big bedroom, and we shared the

bed. And my oldest sister got to have her own bed. But my brother Willie and Gail and myself had to share a bed. And then that was Mama and Daddy. Nothing fancy. One big living room, kitchen and a bathroom. And it was easy living. And as I got older, we could go anywhere on the mountain, only certain places. And if Mama found out we went somewhere else, we would get a whoopin'. So we had to take responsibility and do the right thing. We could go to Ms. Craven's house, Boo Cravens out by the football field and no further. And as we got older, we ventured a little further to Lake Cheston, out by the Lake-Lake O'Donnell. And that's before they closed Lake O'Donnell cause I think something happened with the College kids. So they closed it. During that time I went to Sewanee Elementary, Kennerly School first and then Sewanee Elementary, and then to Franklin County High School. Going to Kennerly School, it was like three classes in one room and it was easy going. And we had this real tall teacher named Ms. Sofia Miller. And I couldn't spell "special." It took us the longest to spell for me to spell "special." I finally got it, and we laughed about it as I got older. I remember some days Mama was working so hard and she was working for the University of the South in the cafeteria. She was working so hard she forgot to even fix our lunch, but she would bring it to us and they would let us eat it in the hallway.

**[00:04:02.570] - Nicky Hamilton**

Oh, did they not have, like, the cafeteria?

**[00:04:04.670] - Sandra Turner Davis**

They had the cafeteria. But Mama said, don't let them eat. I'm going to fix them something and bring it to them. So that's what she did.

**[00:04:15.750] - Nicky Hamilton**

Can you say your parents names? Say your mom's full name and your dad's full name.

**[00:04:20.610] - Sandra Turner Davis**

My mom's name is Dora Irene Turner. My dad's name was Willy Lee Turner, and they called him Inky. That's how everybody knew him in Sewanee.

**[00:04:32.610] - Nicky Hamilton**

Where did they grow up, do you know?

**[00:04:33.450] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mama grew up in Belvidere, and that was the country on a farm. We didn't ask for anything. They raised chickens. They raised hogs. They had cows. They had garden. My grandfather, William Lisa and his wife, Jenny Gray, and found out that Grandpa's wife was Jenny Shed. She was Mama Klen , which is the Darwin's, Joanne Darwin, Bobby Jean Darwin, Robert Hill, Linda Hill, that helped with the food. We're all

kin, cause Momma Klen was a Shed. Grandma Jenny was a Shed, and it took me a long time to find out that they were Shed's. And I didn't think we was kin because Joanne and them kept saying, we kin. No, you're not. We not kins. I didn't learn that until I was a teenager. That we were kin. Elementary school was very easy. We didn't have the best books, but it was easy. We had our own little playground. We didn't have far to go we play it up at St. Mark's Church. Go up and down the steps. School at Kennerly School was a little rough when we de- how you say it? desegregated. And it wasn't so much the University kids, it was the Sherwood kids, Midway kids. They would throw rocks at us. So I fought every day-

**[00:06:28.170] - Nicky Hamilton**

At the Kennerly School? Or did you integrate to Sewanee Elementary School?

**[00:06:35.000] - Sandra Turner Davis**

At the Kennerly School. And there was these cute little old twins that was there. They were so cute. But they've had to fight, too. They was in, like, kindergarten, first grade or something. And that was Miss Loretta sons.

**[00:06:49.290] - Nicky Hamilton**

They were African American?

**[00:06:49.530] - Sandra Turner Davis**

African American. They were my kin people. Anyway, every evening, when we got out of school, the guys from Midway and Sherwood would throw rocks at us and they could throw some rocks. I mean, they could throw some rocks and they say - can I say this? "You kiss me asses." They were little young kids, and I didn't think they could say things like that, but they did. It just tickled me to death.

**[00:07:19.110] - Nicky Hamilton**

Where were they throwing rocks at you?

**[00:07:20.970] - Sandra Turner Davis**

As soon as we get out of school and cross the road by Otey, we just walked down through the woods and come home. Other than that, because I was friends with Doug Cameron's sister and Dr. Cameron's kids. Dr. Camp's, Ms. Runnin's, my momma worked for her at that house. So we all had white friends. But we always had something at the school that didn't like us. And then when I started going to Franklin County High School seemed like those kids thought we were better to them. Oh, the white people took care of y'all real good.

**[00:08:13.130] - Nicky Hamilton**

Which kids, the African American kids at Franklin or the white kids?

**[00:08:16.790] - Sandra Turner Davis**

White kids and black, especially the one we knew. And I remember Jan Hankin that used to live on this Alabama Road, Bonny Hill, on this road. When we got to high school, they didn't talk to us no more.

**[00:08:34.970] - Nicky Hamilton**

Why is that?

**[00:08:35.810] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I have no idea. They had their own little friends, I guess. But I see them now and it's just like, oh, we was the bestest buddies and all of that.

**[00:08:48.470] - Nicky Hamilton**

So what was like, weekends and summers for you like, growing up in Sewanee?

**[00:08:54.050] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Good. I think Sewanee kinda sheltered us.

**[00:08:58.130] - Nicky Hamilton**

Can you say more about that.

**[00:09:01.550] - Sandra Turner Davis**

When I say "shelter" I mean, they took good care of us. There was no bad names in Sewanee, but it's just like when we go out from Sewanee is when we got the bad names,

**[00:09:19.850] - Nicky Hamilton**

The name calling.

**[00:09:20.750] - Sandra Turner Davis**

The name calling. You know, the N word, little black kids, Aunt Jemima and bad names. So my story living in Sewanee was good, and it's still good because I still feel like I'm sheltered when I'm in Sewanee. The people in the Valley don't come up to Sewanee, but we go down the Valley.

**[00:09:57.130] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I still go to Church in Belvidere. I take my 85 year old aunt, to Belvidere to church.

**[00:10:04.150] - Nicky Hamilton**

That's Ms. Mary Lou?

**[00:10:06.550] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mhmm, Mary Lou Hill, Willie Six Road. And she's so old fashioned, she's going to die on Willie Six Road. Her kids try to get her to move closer to them, but she won't. She'll never go down.

**[00:10:26.230] - Nicky Hamilton**

She loves Sewanee.

**[00:10:27.790] - Sandra Turner Davis**

And when they asked her, she said, "Well, what I'm going to do with my stuff?"

**[00:10:35.090] - Nicky Hamilton**

She lived here all her life?

**[00:10:36.950] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Well, not all her life. She came up in the 50s. And I don't know when mom and Daddy came up, but they seem like they've been here forever.

**[00:10:48.350] - Nicky Hamilton**

So what did you all do after school?

**[00:10:51.050] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Play.

**[00:10:53.210] - Nicky Hamilton**

Play.

**[00:10:53.260] - Sandra Turner Davis**

And I said, play. We played. We skateboard. We roller skates. And I remember the roller skates was the key. You had to tighten them up with a key. Skateboard and jungle gym. We would go to the school and play in the yard, play yard. I mean, it was just easy, easy living.

**[00:11:17.570] - Nicky Hamilton**

What did you do on the weekends?

**[00:11:22.590] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Church, going to Church, or playing.

**[00:11:27.390] - Nicky Hamilton**

You went to Belvidere. Did you go to Otey?

**[00:11:30.810] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Yes. For a little while. cause my momma kinda fell out with the Church in Belvidere. The Minister at Belvidere don't believe in wearing pants. And she told my Mama she couldn't come back until she'd come back in a dress.

**[00:11:47.250] - Nicky Hamilton**

So what Church did you go to most of your life?

**[00:11:51.030] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I went to all three. Belvidere. I went to Otey. I've gone to Original Church in Winchester, which is another family Church.

**[00:12:06.610] - Nicky Hamilton**

So obviously you grew up during changing times in the US. And so I'm wondering if you can just say a little bit about whether or not you were aware of those changes. And if there were people in your life that was helping you to make sense of the changes that was happening in the country?

**[00:12:28.690] - Sandra Turner Davis**

No, I learned more when I moved to Atlanta. When I got out of high school.

**[00:12:35.830] - Nicky Hamilton**

And what year was that?

**[00:12:35.880] - Sandra Turner Davis**

And that was in 1973. And I just had a daughter. And she was 19 months old when we left. All my growing up was in Atlanta because it was the city. I got to go to plays, theaters, the park. We don't have a park here in Sewanee, but we had parks. We had big shopping centers, the mall. Here, we don't have a mall. We didn't have shopping places. The big place to shop was Russell's in Winchester. And so my first year, working with my uncle, cleaning up the dorms. I took my money, and I bought me a dress at Russell. That was the best feeling in my life. I got to buy my own dress.

**[00:13:39.170] - Nicky Hamilton**

So can you say a little bit more about what you did in Atlanta?

**[00:13:44.750] - Sandra Turner Davis**

My first job was Northside Hospital. I worked there for 32 years, but when I moved there, I put in a job application at IRS. But they weren't hiring right then. It was going to be two or three more months before they start for tax season. So I said, okay, I can't wait on them. I'm going to Northside. They hired me right then, and they said, "Can you start work now?" And I said, "no, I have a daughter. I have to put in daycare." By the time I got her into Daycare, I went to work for Northside. I started out in housekeeping, worked in housekeeping for two years. And then I transferred to central supply. During the time I was in central supply, I went to school for terminology. I went to school for sterilization. I went to school for being a scrub tech. And that was 13 months. Now that course is like two years now. After the surgical tech I was hired on at Northside, and I worked in the operating room. And I worked there for, like, 20 years. And then my mother got sick in 2005. So I came home to help take care of her.

**[00:15:26.670] - Nicky Hamilton**

You came back to Sewanee?

**[00:15:26.720] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mhmm, But my mother never made it out of the hospital. And like I said, I worked in the hospital for years. And when Dr. Coler told me her blood count white counts was high, she was dying. And I didn't want to put that in my head. Mama died in the hospital.

**[00:15:49.890] - Nicky Hamilton**

At Hodgeson?

**[00:15:49.940] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Yeah, the hospital. And then my brother got sick. He had a brain tumor that had come back. And we had to raise money to get a mammogram - no - what do you call it?

**[00:16:05.130] - Nicky Hamilton**

The CAT scan.

**[00:16:05.970] - Sandra Turner Davis**

The CAT scan. And that was \$1,300. We got the surgery done. He did well. But then my brother was doing some stuff that he didn't have no business. He gained weight. He turned out to have diabetes, and he wouldn't help me keep his blood sugar under control. When I cook, he'd be up at night eating. And his blood sugar got real high. He got to climbin' the walls. And so then he went into, like, a little bit of diabetes coma or getting ready to set in and he got sick and died.

**[00:16:58.130] - Nicky Hamilton**

This is Nicky Hamilton continuing with Ms. Sandra Turner Davis interview. So, Ms. Sandra, can you say what is one or two things that you learned from your parents or your teachers or your mentors, which you value the most now?

**[00:17:18.950] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Well, Mama always told us to get an education. I wasn't very smart. In my fifth grade year at Kennerly School, I caught Spinal Meningitis, so it took me a little harder to learn things over. I had to learn how to walk over. And I think I was a little slow, but I work hard. And my mother stuck in my head to work hard, you get things. And I knew just watching my mother, she was a workaholic and a warrior, cause she was a warrior when it came to desegregation, her and Mrs. Sara Staten, Miss Emily Hill, the Goodsteins, Doug Cameron's mother. And they always just, they helped me get into Motlow. Motlow was hard because the teaching of elementary school, they didn't push us. So it was hard for me to get into College. And with the Spinal Meningitis, it was hard for me to learn.

**[00:18:48.150] - Nicky Hamilton**

You had Spinal Meningitis.

**[00:18:50.730] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mhmm. So it was always hard. But I always push myself. And I knew my Daddy was a hard worker. My aunts was hard workers. Some of them had husbands, and then one or two didn't have the husbands.



And I knew they were go-getters, so I had to go get. I also got pregnant, not married. And in the back of my head, I just felt bad. I never got depressed. I just kept going forward. And when I moved to Atlanta, I was scared to death. But that's where I learnt my hard work in Atlanta, being in the city and learning how to be safe.

**[00:19:46.770] - Nicky Hamilton**

How old are you when you were pregnant?

**[00:19:48.510] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I was 23.

**[00:19:49.810] - Nicky Hamilton**

And why did you decide to go to Atlanta?

**[00:19:53.250] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Because I heard that the jobs was plenishful and my sister Rita was already down there. So I was following her.

**[00:20:02.430] - Nicky Hamilton**

What about your daughter's father? Where did y'all meet?

**[00:20:07.830] - Sandra Turner Davis**

In high school.

**[00:20:08.240] - Nicky Hamilton**

Here in Sewanee?

**[00:20:08.280] - Nicky Hamilton**

Mhmm. Well in high school. In Winchester. But I raised her on my own. We did very well with momma and Daddy's help. And then in '73, I decide, I'm going to the big city. I was going to go to Nashville and stay with my cousin or go to Rita. I said, I'm going to go to Rita's, cause Rita will take care of me better than Carolyn.

**[00:20:36.790] - Nicky Hamilton**

That was in Atlanta?

**[00:20:36.840] - Sandra Turner Davis**

She was in Nashville. But that's where most of my family was moving to, to Nashville, just to get out of Sewanee. Sewanee's all right. But there's nothing to do for us. Even the movie was 14 miles away to go see a movie.

**[00:20:56.710] - Nicky Hamilton**

So when you move back to Sewanee from Atlanta to take care of your mom, why did you decide to stay after she passed?

**[00:21:04.270] - Sandra Turner Davis**

My brother came. Well, my brother was already here. I stayed to take care of him. And then my baby sister moved here and she was sick. And we just stayed here. We ended up in Atlanta, and she died in Atlanta at the - whatcha call it?

**[00:21:25.510] - Nicky Hamilton**

At the Hospice?

**[00:21:27.370] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Hospice, yeah. Hospice.

**[00:21:30.190] - Nicky Hamilton**

And then you decided to come back here?

**[00:21:32.470] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Yeah, cause the house was still open.

**[00:21:38.210] - Nicky Hamilton**

So that's why you stayed?

**[00:21:38.260] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mhmm. Easy living, easier than in Atlanta. No fast driving. Drive like the country people.

**[00:21:44.870] - Nicky Hamilton**

Yeah.

**[00:21:50.370] - Nicky Hamilton**

Are there one or two things that you would want people to remember about your childhood and then also about your history growing up in Sewanee? So two things about your childhood that you would really want people to remember.

**[00:22:08.190] - Sandra Turner Davis**

That I'm an easy going, quiet person. And I love everybody. I love babies. That's about it.

**[00:22:23.230] - Nicky Hamilton**

And what about the history of growing up here in Sewanee, what would you want people to know?

**[00:22:26.830] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I would love for people to move to Sewanee, especially when you retire. Easy living. You can't live on University. But I would like for you to move around Sewanee, because it's beautiful country, especially if you live out on the Bluff.

**[00:22:54.810] - Nicky Hamilton**

Can you say more about not living on the University?

**[00:22:57.630] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Well, of course you own your house, but you don't own the land. That's the only thing. The land is beautiful, but the University is going up on your lease, and it's not cheap, especially if you're on a fixed income. That's the only thing.

**[00:23:25.970] - Nicky Hamilton**

So if you could sum up your Sewanee experience, how would you describe that.

**[00:23:36.750] - Sandra Turner Davis**

It was Good. Like the Bible say, it's good. You know it say, is it Mark? God says good several times in that verse. Good.

**[00:23:54.670] - Nicky Hamilton**

Well, this has been really great privilege and honor to hear your story. So I thank you for sharing it with this project and allowing me to interview you and for taking the time to also be a part of this project, because I know you've done a lot of work with the project. So, thank you.

**[00:24:14.890] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Thank you. I thank you. Thank you. I forgot to mention my child, my babies. I moved back in 2005. I start working for the University child care center, and I got to know a lot of kids and see a lot of them grow up, to see a lot of them go to high school and College, and they still remember me. Most of the parents always remember me. And the kids, they say, "I remember you Ms. Sandra." Just like, uh, what's his name? Lucas's daddy?

**[00:25:08.190] - Nicky Hamilton**

Oh Pradib, Pradib Mauldi.

**[00:25:08.240] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Yeah! They always remember me. And they always thanked me for babysitting for them and taking care of my boys. They still remember you, Sandra, but the little baby, he don't remember me because he didn't go. But Lucas, he still remembered me. Yeah.

**[00:25:26.730] - Nicky Hamilton**

You came in 2005 when my daughter was at the Daycare.

**[00:25:34.570] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Mhmm Layla? And i got to watch to see her grow up and then got those long legs, play a little bit of basketball. And it's just wonderful to see my kids grow up. Yeah.

**[00:25:45.670] - Nicky Hamilton**

You really have a special place here.

**[00:25:48.730] - Sandra Turner Davis**

I love children, but I only have one daughter one grandbaby because I think she's going to be just like me.

**[00:25:57.610] - Nicky Hamilton**

And are they in Atlanta?

**[00:25:58.810] - Sandra Turner Davis**

They in Atlanta.

**[00:26:00.070] - Nicky Hamilton**

Okay, And how often do you get to see them?

**[00:26:03.970] - Sandra Turner Davis**

A lot, cause she just came. My granddaughter is working now, so she didn't make it today.

**[00:26:11.770] - Nicky Hamilton**

And did you raise - you didn't raise your daughter in Sewanee because you left when she was...

**[00:26:16.630] - Nicky Hamilton**

19 months.

**[00:26:17.530] - Nicky Hamilton**

And then she 19 months. And then you just stayed in Atlanta, and she stayed there when you moved back up.

**[00:26:23.950] - Sandra Turner Davis**

She was working. And like I said, there's nothing for them to do unless you are athletic, hiking and swimming and stuff like that. But they could do that in Atlanta. Yeah.

**[00:26:41.890] - Nicky Hamilton**

You all seem to have a really nice community here. What are some of your fondest memories of The St. Mark's community?

**[00:26:49.330] - Sandra Turner Davis**

The ball field. We used to play summer ball field down here. I played with a lady that was a nurse at the hospital. Sue Hawkins. She had a team, and we went all over the place. We went from Tullahoma to South Pittsburgh, right here in Sewanee, Midway. We didn't play in Sherwood, but we played in Midway.

**[00:27:17.390] - Nicky Hamilton**

What is some of you - so we know the cookouts are well known around here. Do you have any fond memories about meals at home or things you and your family did?

**[00:27:27.830] - Sandra Turner Davis**

No particular meals, we was always invited out to Boo's. But my Mama did all the cooking.

**[00:27:42.930] - Nicky Hamilton**

What was she cooking?

**[00:27:43.170] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Meals like, what did she cook? Fried chicken, baked chicken, fish, pasta. A lot of pasta. Boo liked a lot of pasta. Her and Doobi. The Camps was one of my mentors. Mr. And Mrs. Camp. I babysit for Dr. Parson. We still keep in touch with Anne Parson. She lives in Wyoming. Is it Wyoming?

**[00:28:16.110] - Nicky Hamilton**

Mhmm, it's Wyoming.

**[00:28:16.160] - Sandra Turner Davis**

And we keep in touch with Lee Lintaw. I used to do a lot of babysitting for her, and they moved to-

**[00:28:24.330] - Nicky Hamilton**

Georgia.

**[00:28:25.050] - Nicky Hamilton**

Georgia. Other side of Macon.

**[00:28:27.090] - Sandra Turner Davis**

Dublin, Georgia.

**[00:28:31.870] - Nicky Hamilton**

That's great, again. Well, thank you again for sharing your story. Are there any last minute thoughts? I want to make sure you feel like you said all you want to say. And we can also do follow up interviews

because you do live here. So if you think of something you want us to capture, we can, we're happy to come by.

**[00:28:52.930] - Sandra Turner Davis**

All right.

**[00:28:53.650] - Nicky Hamilton**

Is there anything else?

**[00:28:55.690] - Sandra Turner Davis**

No.

**[00:28:56.170] - Nicky Hamilton**

Okay, well, thanks again, Ms. Sandra.

**[00:28:57.310] - Sandra Turner Davis**

You're welcome.

**[00:28:58.030] - Nicky Hamilton**

We appreciate it.