

**Interview with  
William “Bill” Jones, Jr.  
by Matthew F. Moore,  
June 21, 1997**

**Oral History Interview MS 64-0620  
Special Collections  
Marshall University Libraries  
Huntington, West Virginia**

**Oral History of Appalachia,  
Marshall University  
Huntington, West Virginia**

Released Form signed by William Jones, Jr.  
June 21, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver, West Virginia

Transcribed by Matthew F. Moore  
PDF prepared by Lisle G Brown

© Marshall University, 2003  
All Rights Reserved

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

**Matthew Moore:** This is Matthew F. Moore with the Oral History Dept. of Marshall University, and I am here with Bill Jones at Camp Washington Carver. All right, can you give me a little basic information such as birth date and hometown?

**William “Bill” Jones, Jr.:** I was born 10\12\42 in Charleston, at I think I was born at Boraski's hospital in Charleston, now called CAMC, Kanawha City.

**MM:** Ok, and your current residence?

**WJ:** I reside currently 712 Walnut Road, Charleston

**MM:** Current Occupation?

**WJ:** I am executive director of something called Charleston Economic and Community Development Corp. which is a non-profit 501C3 community based CHODO. CHODO means community housing development organization. But, we also do youth development, leadership development and training. And, that's one of the reasons we're coming to George Washington Carver in August with a group of about 85 youth ... to follow up on what we call the PSP. The personal strategic plan, each youth is to have one to deal with four areas, and I'm sorry three areas, and that is their educational goals, their economic development and employment goals, and their community service goals. Just as an aside, in this month, June-July we will be going up to something called the resource development institute which is only 25 or so miles east of here off of route 64, a retreat camp for youth put together by a gentleman named Bob Hoffman, Robert Hoffman, who lives in Columbia, Maryland But, who bought property in West Virginia, and has developed a 55 acre retreat site for youth leadership and development for minority youth, specifically. He also has plans for one in Denver, Co., and in Guyana, West Africa. He is well on his way to implementing those so we're taking young people there for weekend retreats to develop their personal strategic plans, then by the time they get to Carver in August, we should be well on the way to implementing those plans and then by back to school time, some of those objectives will start to be worked upon.

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

**MM:** Great, your marital status, children?

**WJ:** Yeah, I have remarried in the last 3 years, and I have a 19,20,21,22 month old son now, and

**MM:** I have a 21 month old daughter myself.

**WJ:** I hear ya. My 21 month old son relates very well to my 24 old son, who has established a bank account for him in Atlanta, Georgia, during his fifth year at Morehouse Univ. This 21 year old son is coaching a chess team, that has 8 young men and 4 young women, the four young women are in the top four positions, in Namibia, Southern Africa, and he is also teaching science there, and working on an environmental project, and coaching a basketball team, and he just recently visited Zimbabwe for three weeks, and enjoyed Victoria Falls and he is with the U.S. Peace Corps. He is a wonderful young man, and he has a sister who is a year older, who is working with inner city families in Wash. D.C. Then my 32 year old, who is a computer specialist up in Temple Hills, Ft. Washington, MD, so those are my four children, three from my first marriage, and one from my current marriage.

**MM:** Do you have any grandchildren?

**WJ:** None so far, even though I understand I will be a grand parent in November, oldest daughter.

**MM:** Could you tell me a little bit about your education?

**WJ:** I went into the service at 17 years old upon high school completion, and I spent five years in the Air Force, and I was going to spend 20 years, had planned to but, there was a piece of paper that was an order issued, an executive order, or something, from the commander in chief, or either the sec. Of the Air Force in 1964 that said that a basically it ended up stating that one could go to-get out and go to college, or stay in and go to Vietnam, and I took college, since I already had credits, that I earned on base from the Univ. Of Maryland, in English and

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

German. I just transferred those credits. I had written Morgan St., Howard in Maryland, and Maryland was the first one to respond in the most positive manner so I went to Univ. of Maryland But, I found myself on a campus surrounded by 28,000 people that was like.. in a classroom with 3 or 4 hundred in pol. Science and Sociology, and some of my courses, and we never saw the prof. Except on video, but we did see his graduate assistants teaching the courses, and I couldn't tolerate that so I ended up at Federal City College where the professors were very close to me and looked a lot like me and I learned quite a bit. Then, I went to work full time in the inner city, Washington, D. C. in the something called the youth opportunity services. Neighborhood planning council, developing neighborhood planning councils which were youth electoral bodies, with youth and adults developing neighborhoods and we worked in that area for seven years and finally went back to Antioch and got my degree in social and political development. Took a couple graduate courses at the UDC, and picked up a course here and there over the years. My last one was in 1992, at Georgia St. Univ. in Atlanta, which was a course in small business development. Kind of a high level intensive course that drove me out of my mind, but here I am ... today

**MM:** It sounds like to me that your education has prepared you pretty well for what you are doing right now.

**WJ:** At least education coupled with experience, as work experience.

**MM:** How old were you when you attended Camp Washington Carver?

**WJ:** At my first experience attending Camp Washington Carver was at age 11, in 1953.

**MM:** And you've been back when you were a kid.

**WJ:** Well, I, between the time when I was 11 and 16, I went to one ... it wasn't a Four H camp, it was actually a YMCA camp which merged some Four H issues. Maybe the next year, was 54 it was boy scout YMCA, and then in 55 I went to a Four H camp, and it hits me that that Four H camp, oh no, that was later on. This was an integrated Four H camp, because the camps we

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

talk about now were boys only, and black only and my first integrated camp was toward 1958-9, but that was a Four H camp held in Dunbar, at the camp grounds they had down in Dunbar, 'WV, Kanawha county. That was very interesting experience because people, some people from Boys State were also involved in that camp and it was, you know, the first camp that I went to that involved white kids, even though I noticed a number of my friends had gone to camp Episcopal camp named called Peterkin out in I think it's eastern WV, eastern panhandle. I always wanted to go to camp with them because they really got to do some extra stuff that we didn't ever get to do at any of our camps.. like water skiing and some other kinds of boating things.

**MM:** Could you tell me a little bit about the network that got you to the camp here, or the sponsor or organization?

**WJ:** Well, it's interesting, the only reason I got to my first camp is, I was kinda timid, as a kid, and my mom had a sister who, she both of whom taught school, my mom and my aunt, and my mom was a counselor at this camp, for the girl scouts. She became known as "splash" for her lack of swimming exploits, instead of the opposite, but she kicked up a lot of water, and convinced some people that she was swimming, but most people finally realized that she was just splashin. So they gave her the name "splash". We, they figured out that I needed some kind of experience with people in the wild so to speak Where young men could have a chance to do what we now call rites of passage, kinda develop a maturity program, a program for maturation. So, those camps kinda evolved me, from adolescents I guess you could say into young adulthood. So I have held similar camps for young people taking people from NYC and Wash. D.C., and Maryland, and Vir. And North Carolina and held these in an area near Rocky Mt. N.C. called Bricks, N. C. which historically had some real history behind it because the freed slaves were taken into the church the Christian church organization bought land and opened up a training center for agriculture at Bricks and that particular land was then parceled out once a person completed training, parceled out in certain amounts of acreage to black ex-slaves as they developed the expertise to do that. It was, the numbers were very small, but still as many as ... when they've had their reunions as many as 150200 people come back who have developed their land as a result of that project. It's not very wide spoken, because forty acres

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

and a mule was a joke in most cases and never took place. But this was a special project, that the United Church of Christ that the group that formed that eventually merged into the United Church of Christ where you had your Christian..) can't even recall the name of the church, but they are now known today as the United Church of Christ, and I worked for them for 18 years in Wash. D.C. after finishing college. It's an institution in instrumentality called the Commission for Racial Justice. They have programs in Wash. And NY, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Atlanta.

**MM:** So you are nationally networked with that?

**WJ:** Yeah, yeah I was kind of sent around the country. One of my responsibilities by the way just before it downsized and I was forced to leave was working on a case to expose people information to a gentleman by the name of Elmer Geronimo Pratt, and those who watch the news will learn that he was finally released after 27 years in prison. Apparently a new trial will be ordered because information, he maintained his innocence all along, and it turns out that that's quite likely that he is indeed innocent since the authorities never reported that he was in Northern California when this thing happened. This death of someone happened in Southern California. So, we were convinced of his innocence all along and worked to do that. We've had five cases of political prisoners on which I worked because I was criminal justice coordinator for the Wash. D. C. office, and that was one of the jobs in 18 years that was in my portfolio, but the Wilmington 10, was another case. Reverend Ben Davis and the Wilmington 10 and somebody named Jo Ann Little, a black lady on death row in N.C., and I have surely digressed from camp. But all of these things are experiences that are relevant. North Carolina was one of our major outposts, Raleigh N.C. was our N.C. field office, and the reason the Commission of Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ came into being was because, in fact, N.C. the N.C. justice system was known to be very racist and very oppressive. So Jo Ann Little, the young lady on death row, was our first case, and we got that whole execution stay and got her freed from the charges because they were also bogus charges. So you know that is a lot of my experience. Our camp was Bricks N. C. and our youth really develop quite a bit. We look back now at 1985,6,7, and just taking a look We started with 17 youth and it worked out to a group of 50 and ended up a group of 300 and when we look at that group of 300 now, about 97% are performing admirably and doing very very well, and the others, for the most part, are at least

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

existing, and only one does not live today, is not living. There may be 3 who are incarcerated for one reason or another, and those are female and male, but the incarcerations are indeed 3 black males. So, that's basically some of the history on some of the youth oriented activities, how I got to that point.

**MM:** So, your camp experiences and your everyday life are pretty interconnected?

**WJ:** Yeah, there is a definite connection between what I do daily and facilities like those I went to when I was a youth, and where we are currently today. Yeah, not only reflecting back, but looking at today's youth and as you noted, as you might have noted during the closing program of today's Sancofa, was a key Indincra word that the staff and youth apparently zeroed in on during the ten day art's camp. Sancofa always takes into consideration reflecting on the past as we work in the present to build a solid future.

**MM:** Could you tell me about some of the people you remember best from camp?

**WJ:** Ah huh. Now you know forty years ago, I guess we would say, 42 years to be right on the mark. Forty-three years to be perfect, forty-four years, but the real point here is that my memories go back to our youth group which was organized by the YMCA, the old colored YMCA which must have set on the right hand side of the street in about the 500 block of Dickenson st., I don't know if that is right or wrong, but I definitely remember going into the building filling out my application with my Dad, and uh getting on the bus to go to camp. My first experience here, and some of things that happened to me on the bus were somebody squirted lemon juice in my eye, and so the first experience here at the camp was a fight. Within the third or fourth day, they let us put on the boxing gloves, and my counselor who was a senior counselor, maybe four or five years older than us, our junior counselor, was a guy named Buster Harvey, and it was his brother, Billy, Bobby Harvey who squirted that lemon juice in my eyes, and always had something else that he was going to do, so I had to learn to defend myself. He had two other brother's other than the counselor there, so I had to learn to deal with all of them at the same time. It was like the Bruce Lee movies, those moves I had to learn Kung Fu or something to deal with all three of them, and even though their older brother was my

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

counselor, he was family, and in fact this is what I elude to in a book that I am working on. I talk about Clifflop, and I talk about the black experience. I talk about how families are very close knit, yet the older brother always encouraged me and took my side, as the junior counselor, as to how to handle his younger brothers, and it all worked out in the end

**MM:** That's good to hear. What friends from the camp did you stay in touch with?

**WJ:** Over the years, I've always maintained contact with individuals, who, my peers, who attended the camp, but it wasn't because of camp per se. We were kind of a close knit group that were kind of, we were tossed together basically because of Church and community activities, etc., and this was all prior to my first ninth grade experience at Thomas Jefferson which was the previous, the former, all white junior high school. So, those issues made it, the desegregation or the pre-desegregation issues made the camps and our experiences the kind of more caring and sharing experiences that were not to really happen as much after desegregation of public schools and public facilities.

**MM:** Were you actually a Four H member?

**WJ:** I didn't become a Four H member until after 1957. That's when I, I think it was the following year 58, that I attended the Four H camp, Huh, and saved somebody's life. Jumped into the pool, and saved somebody's life, and the young lady whose life I saved clung on me every opportunity she got until the day I left.. joined, hurried up and joined the Air Force and got out of town. But it was held heart, head and hand, that allowed me to save this women's life as she was drowning. I spotted her and the lifeguards didn't see it, and I got her to the top and pulled her off and the lifeguards then assisted me, at the side of the pool. And I have no idea what her name is. I mean gee whiz, what forty years or so, so.

**MM:** Could you talk about the impact the camp has had on your identity as an African American?

**WJ:** It essentially became a part of those experiences at Boyd Jr. H. S. at First Baptist Church,

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

at the Mattie Vealy home, at the Charleston Women's improvement league under sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and the fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, my father was KAP, and my mother was AKA. My uncle Alpha Phi Alpha, our surrounding friends Omega Psi Phi, and the other surrounding ladies were Delta Sigma Theta, and all of us enjoyed moments, and Clifftop was our..our getaway facility for midsummer enjoyment, recreation, cultural education, etc. That was used by these organizations even for weekend retreats, for weekend picnics, which we were coming to Clifop somewhere prior to going back to school even if we had come early in the summer for camp. We come up here and just do a thing with the Capital City Civic Club or the fraternity or the Church or what have you. So, I may have had ten, twelve trips here over a four year, three, four year period between the ages of 11 and 15 years of age.

**MM:** The facilities were used quite a bit more often.

**WJ:** Yeah, yeah I mean the African American community really and you know hey, during then it took us. I don't know why it seems so much longer, but it took us three and a half four hours to get here, it seems to me-from Charleston. And so some people you can imagine, they were maybe six and eight hours getting here depending on where they were coming from. Of course, route 60 has been widened some, and you can use 64 depending on where you are, here for the interstate, and so now you can get here in an hour plus, or less than two hours. But, then it was quite a trek, a little trek to come up here, so it was best to spend the night ... or two.

**MM:** Do you think African American youth today are missing something by being sent to an integrated camp?

**WJ:** There is something to learn at both, but since school takes place all year long and the so called integration takes place there. If the camp itself stresses cultural diversity properly then an integrated camp can work to the benefit of young people. But what I have seen in the past, it often worked to the detriment and added to the confusion of the youth, because not enough issues were being handled when the time was there often maybe the expertise or the experience wasn't there to handle all of that. You know the governor's camps, Rachel Worbly's camps sought and seek to do the kind of the things to cause diversity.

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

### Side Two:

The thing that the integrated camps could offer something, but I would say that another thing that I eluded to in an article that I wrote when I first came back to West Virginia, which is also included in the book that I mentioned is that the cultural awareness, the history of African people who were brought into slavery and the subsequent identity and information from the George Washington Carver's and the black renaissance poets and the Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, etc.. The works of James Weldon Johnson who created the black national anthem, which was a poem which his brother put to music. All of those things are seldom visited properly in your typical school setting, and in your earlier integrated camps, but I think people are making an attempt to get to some of those roots for the African American youths, and that can be and become and is very helpful, but in our earlier days there was no doubt that the information, and education that we were able to grasp from our leaders and teachers, counselors, etc. propelled a lot of people who missed school, desegregation toward a very very successful career and lifestyle, which included their church and their social life. These people if you notice the history and follow what happened to students of Garnet H. S. and the other African American high schools.

**MM:** Douglas High School

**WJ:** Yeah, Douglas, Herb Philman, all through out the state, you will notice way more success stories than you will from those who attended the other schools, and I wouldn't for a minute in this interview try to go through what all those factors would be that would make the difference. I would say though that people were very clear about who they were, and the goals that they needed to achieve, and there was much more reaching out and reaching down to pull people up than existed previously.

**MM:** Personally, I feel that integration may have cut off a lot of the community networks that were

**WJ:** Yeah, there were survival networks, and that form of survival, or certain forms of survival became not as necessary, and thus, all of the African American businesses that existed in our

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

neighborhood between 1920 and 1950 were essentially booming, flourishing businesses, because the community relied on each other, itself, and supported itself, with the dollars, and that kind of went out the window.

**MM:** In your travels abroad, have you experienced any discrimination because you are from West Virginia, an Appalachian?

**WJ:** No, because I blended in so well, I've only noticed that since I came back here, because we are the last to get proposals through and funded for many, many, many efforts even though in some things, they, in some areas, the federal government is looking to Appalachia for, to aide in say, at one point the homeless, and to those who say maybe had malnourishment etc. etc.. In the general programs for advancement in community service and etc. etc. I feel that, and I know just looking at grants that were made through major foundations and major corporations etc. each time I look to see who where grants were made and to which areas and to which organizations. It suggests that we don't even apply, and I don't think that for a large part that's so, but to some degree many people hadn't applied, but I know that when often, when applications were made they weren't made with any success often times, or no results.

**MM:** Back to the camp. Do you have any stories about the camp that you would like to reminisce about?

**WJ:** I gave you my stories, my key story, which was. There were probably some additional things that would come to mind about the singing, the campfires, but now I would probably confuse several camps, including the ones that I ran in N. C. now, so I think I have probably exhausted that.

**MM:** Did you notice any gender differences at the camp in those days?

**WJ:** We had all boys, so, yea. Only when we had weekend outings did we have boys and girls and when we had all boys, sometimes there were women around to do administrative things, cooking etc. But, it was designed for the YMCA boy scouts at this particular time. I didn't, I

## William “Bill” Jones, Jr., Interview

wasn't on the coed Four H trail at that time.

**MM:** Unless you've got anything further you would like to comment about, that's it.

**WJ:** No, I think that will be good. It's just nice to be back and revisit, I came up to visit George Jordan, three or four weeks ago, and we talked, and I can't wait to get my kids back up here. I just wish that, Oh, one thing I should say was that the swimming pool was always my favorite place up here, and it is a shame that is not workable, operable, but I'm sure that we're gonna get that corrected with George's ability to work with people, we'll find a way to do that, so that the kids who want to swim can without having to go down to Hawk's Nest State Park or wherever one might go. And the facilities have really been upgraded, especially, and the cottages will be next, but this large building, and new restrooms, showers, etc, are real nice, and it's just nice to see that the road has been paved to come in, and so many nice things have met the eye when you first come in, and it's just a good feeling to know that somebody is still working to keep this place up and to restore it to its traditional greatness. I thank you.

**MM:** Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**