

Cover Sheet for Interviews

Person(s) Interviewed: William S Pollard

(Work, Des): His home in Harrisburg
He is a poet, writer, story teller

If Applicable Phone: 717-564-8283

Address:

Agreements: Can use everything that was on tape

Person(s) Interviewing: Christen DeMarco

Date: 28 April 1997 Nyscha King

Place: Mr. Pollard's home

Duration: 2 hrs

of tapes: 2

of typed pages: 18

Others Recommended to Talk To: —

Comments: If anyone is seriously interested in poetry
and working with poetry texts, he is looking for someone
to help them organize his works and to compile
and analyze his wife's works. Contact him if
interested.

Follow-Up Interview?

He is willing to talk to people all of the
time but we did not get to do another interview

Headnote for the 28 April 1997 interview With William Pollard

William Pollard was born "either a few minutes before midnight on January 30 or a few minutes after midnight on January 30 1920". He was born in a home in Steelton Pennsylvania. Mr Pollard's parents were originally from Virginia, around the Roanoke area. They met and got married in Roanoke and then moved up to Pennsylvania. With in the Pollard family there were four children, Two boys and two girls. Mr Pollard felt that the family was close during his childhood. The community was close also. He believed that the community of Steelton was a melting pot with various ethnic groups and races. William Pollard went to the Hygenic school in Steelton which was a school for black children for the grades of kindergarten through eighth grade. After he finished Hygenic school he moved on to the integrated Steelton High School. There he had a bit of an inferiority complex because he had never been to school with white students before. He had played with them growing up but had never been in a classroom with them. Some of his main role models were teachers from his schools. His principal Charles Howard and two of his english teachers in high school helped him realize the importance of family, community and education. He "got the first black A from those two teachers".

The main aspect of William Pollard's life is the focus on education and the written word. When growing up William would sit by and oil lamp late at night writing stories and poems. His father would have to drawn a line on the lamp in order to give William a limit for how late he could stay up and write. Another main influence in his writing and storytelling was from his grandfather who used to sit in the woods with him and tell him great stories of the past. Some of these stories Mr Pollard has now written from the perspective of 12 year-old boy. Mr Pollard had his first story published at the age of twelve. He the did not have anything else published until he was 17. When he got a story published at 17 he thought that he or his would not have to work manual labor any more but that did not happen. He worked in the steel mill out of high school for many years and worked at the oil company for over 20 years. While he held these jobs he still wrote, read and pursued the career of telling stories and educating others. He often would sell stories and poems in a freelance manner and eventually did radio shows and taught in elementary schools and colleges.

Mr Pollard was married when he was young, very young. He regrets this action and felt that he was a fool but he also did not change his path because he stayed with his first wife for forty years. He and his wife (name unknown) had nine children who he is not very close with now. He also now has 27 grandchildren, many of who he has never seen before. He and his family, children and wife, had differing opinions on the importance of education and that is one of the main reasons that his marriage did not work. He did not go much into his marriage to his first wife. He said that if we wanted to know more about his first marriage we could look into the archives in the Dickinson Library because there was a more full story of his marriage there. Mr Pollard expressed that he had some emotional and mental problems throughout his life and often did not know where to turn. These feels of loss and depression made him unable to work for periods of time. He would not answer his mail or the phone.

A big change in his life was made when he finally did answer the phone and accepted an offer to speak at a college in Texas. This is where he saw Louise. He fell for her but never got the opportunity to talk to her. He was still married at this point but always felt a strong desire for this other woman. He then by chance saw her again two years later when he was speaking at a different university. They met, talked, enjoyed each others company but still went their separate ways. It took some time but finally he realized that he wanted Louise because his other wife was mentally making him crazy and therefore they got a quick divorce and he married Louise in the 1970's. The two lived together, worked together and attended educational seminars together. They both had the love of the English language and poetry. A few years later Louise contracted breast cancer, got help and was clear of the cancer but then five years later the cancer hit again and she eventually died in 1988. Mr Pollard was by her side through all of this and after her death he slipped a bit back into poor mental health.

Now a days he lives in the outskirts of Harrisburg by himself. He writes, edits and is compiling literary works of his and Louise's. He does not see his family very much but he feels that is okay. William Pollard is a man who has strong determination to keep his brain active and to spread the word about the importance of education and poetry. He has great files of his works from the past sixty years and uses these works to help keep his sanity. God also helps him understand the importance of life and the future. He still works hard at the age of 77 in order to help the future of education.

Interview with William Pollard

Nyshya- When and where were you born?

Mr. Pollard- I was born in Steelton. Now according to my father I was born either a few minutes before midnight on January 30 or a few minutes after midnight on January 30 1920.

Christen- And what is your full name that you go by?

Mr. Pollard- William Samuel Pollard

Nyshya - Is your family originally from the same area?

Mr. Pollard- They live in the area, but ah, I don't see them anymore.

Christen- Were your parents from Steelton or around..?

Mr. Pollard- No ah, my parents are from Virginia.

Christen- From Virginia? What part?

Mr. Pollard- In the Roanoke area. Ah my mother was born at a place called Mowbar. My father, the record of his birth is at Roanoke but, I'm not sure whether he was born in Roanoke or somewhere under the jurisdiction of the court system there in Virginia.

Christen- Wonderful. When did they, do you know when they came up to Steelton?

Mr. Pollard- Well, they came to Steelton ah, right after the first World War and ah, at that particular time resided at 220 Bailey Street. Now that house is no longer there. That was the place where I was born. And in 19 and 22 soon after the death of their first child, whose name was Walter, they moved to 402 Reading Street in Steelton. And that was my house there.

Christen- That's where you grew up?

Mr. Pollard- That's where I grew up.

Christen- Wonderful.

Mr. Pollard- 402 Reading Street.

Christen- Did um, so they meet in Virginia and were married in Virginia?

Mr. Pollard- They were married in Virginia.

Nyssha- Ok um, How many children were in your family?

Mr. Pollard- Uh in my original family, four. I had one brother who died about five years ago, two sisters who are still living.

Nyssha - Are you guys close?

Mr. Pollard- No, not nearly like family should be.

Nyssha - May I ask why?

Mr. Pollard- Well, you know what, I would have to go into a very long story. And uh sometimes it's kind of difficult for me. And I tell kids this, I 've told them, just maybe ten thousand kids in the last 20 years, education.

Christen- That's the main factor?

Mr. Pollard- It's a commanding factor. And also, I've also studied psychology for thirty - five years. And it's something I call a veritaphobia. Not general but, it's very specific.

Christen- So, you grew up in Steelton, was your family close then?

Mr. Pollard- Yes, very close.

Christen- Very close.

Mr. Pollard- I had a very warm, family relationship all during my childhood.

Christen- Uh huh, How about the community within Steelton; was the community close? Did you live on the east side or the west side?

Mr. Pollard- I lived on the east side. But, no Steelton was a very close knit community. It might be described as a melting pot. There were many different sects, many different people; Germans, Irish, Macedonians, Irish, of course blacks. I have a little of the early history of Steelton here if you'd like to read some of that.

Nyssha -Did everyone ah, the different cultures and ethnic groups, did people get along?

Mr. Pollard- People got along in general fine. But you must remember that this was a time in history that could not be,that will never be duplicated. This was a time when Klansmen roamed the street at night with their torches. Burned their torches and wherever they wanted to build a fire, they built a fire. Of course there was the one black school, the segregated Hygenic and um, Professor Charles F. Howard was the principal of the hygenic, you know him? You've heard of him?

Christen- No, I do not think so.

Mr Pollard- He was one of the early graduates of the Steelton High school. He graduated Steelton High school, in the year, I think it was 1885. And uh, subsequently he went to teach in Hygenic School the next year. Without having to gone to college. He taught until, he became principal, I do not know which year he became principal, unless I have it here some where... He taught for fifty years from 1886 to 1936.

Nyshah- How was he able to do that? Just go straight ...

Mr Pollard-How, I don't quite understand your question.

Nyshah- I mean, because that is quite unusual for a student to straight from high school to teaching.

Christen- Teaching instead of going to college.

Mr Pollard- It didn't matter.

Christen- He had the intellectual capability, the intellectual capacity?

Mr Pollard- He had the intellectual capability.

Christen- And so you went to school with him as your principal?

Mr Pollard- With him as my principal.

Christen- Do you feel that he was a strong role model in your...?

Mr Pollard- I think Charles Howard, we called him, of course, Professor Howard. I think he was a very strong role model. He brought us close to the meaning of both school and family. It was practically nothing to have Charles Howard to ask 'does anyone need anyone praying this morning'. There'd be maybe a minute or two of silence and then you'd see a hand go up in the back. And there (a little soft right there and I could not understand)

Christen- So he also added to the sense of community within the school and the rest of Steelton?

Mr Pollard- There was one thing about this. The black kids could leave and go to the integrated high school but the black teachers had to stay. There was no place else for them to teach.

Christen- Right. Where there any other role models when you were growing up.

Mr Pollard- Yes, there were a number.. um, there were a number of role models. you must remember that this was, that I grew up in the 20s and 30s. And that there were among the people of Steelton there were some that had migrated to the North who were former slaves. And many of my lessons of life I got from some of these people who I have just finished writing about this. And uh, this might help a little bit. These are short stories that I'm putting together. The introduction to Gary the Creole ????

(this part Mr Pollard was reading of a paper he had by his side)
The title old man, as it is used in several of the following tellings, formerly was one of respect as a black of the members of the older generation who had heard, uh who earned that respect by orally sharing their wisdom and experiences with children. And parenthetically, during the 1920s and 1930s, some were who born into slavery were still living. The term uncle was also used occasionally under similar circumstances as was the term aunt for older women who were held in high regard. Until the sixth decade in the twentieth century those terms were widely expected only when used by other blacks. Otherwise such terms were considered degrading and therefore offensive. Such terms have now been deleted from contemporary expression. May it also be noted that sixty years ago at age 51 was considered old, 75 real old. I would be considered real old

Christen- Not any more.

Nyssha- So what kind of school was uh, the Hygenic?

Mr Pollard- Hygenic school was from grades one through eight.

Nyssha- Was it your typical high school, english and ...

Mr Pollard- Yes, it was. We had excellent reading teachers. And, and, and teachers who, several teachers, who at that time taught something, which has been relegated to the background of the curriculum for much of the century and it is called protheny. Do know what I mean by protheny?

Christen- No.

Mr Pollard- Protheny is part of English grammar, of course we give our kids syntax ... they call it spelling now. But protheny deals with the rules and regulations of the art and personification of writing poems. I have an article here which was I hope to get someone in who can help organize some of my work and I do not know where the help is going to come from. (Rustling papers and looking for the article). I do not know if you saw this or not. It was from a Carlisle newspaper. I can give you a copy. (he gave us a copy for our use.

Nyssha- Where, the students who went to the hygenic school where did they usually go after they got done there?

Mr Pollard- Well, some went to high, went to high school. Others uh, others went to , if they were men and fairly husky they, they went to the steel mill. And, of course the blacks played a very strong role in Steelton High School football. An, and, and only , at that particular time there was no such thing as a scholarship, a football scholarship. And, and usually on their reputation they got a job as, on a garbage truck in Steelton or sweeping streets or they went to the Steel mill.

Nyssha- So a lot of people didn't go to college?

Mr Pollard- Very, very few people went to college.

Nyssha- This had nothing to do with their intellectual capacity or anything?

Mr Pollard- No, no this had nothing to do with their intellectual capacity. Uh, one thing has never changed, those who want an education will get it. I've only been to college to teach. I have worked at ... Southern Methodist, Augustana, University of Utah. But no body ever asked me. And, and you see this lamp ... I got my education by the light of this lamp. I wrote my first poems by the light of that lamp. My father used to put a mark on it and he would say Billy, when the oil gets down to here come to bed. My grandfather was the first Creole that I ever knew, he was story teller and I wondered where he, how he acquired some of his vocabulary. He would never really give me the meaning of a word but usually in the context of it was used I would understand its meaning. If we sat in the woods and he told me one of his incredible stories, there would be several words that I would write down. I asked him one day and I said Grandfather were did you go to school? I was about 11 years-old. And he said 'I went to night school Billy' and I could not conceive going to night school in Virginia fifty years before the century turned... One night while I was working, writing by that lamp I asked my father, I said, 'Daddy how did grandfather ... go to night school in Virginia fifty years ago. And he said 'I do not know. Billy, I do not know'. He said 'but when the light gets down to there you come to bed'.

Christen- What type of stories would your grandfather tell you?

Mr Pollard- Uh, I have them, some of them here, I'm just putting together. One of the first ones is called "Old Man Jack and Bottomless Pond". Then there was 'The Night I Saved', some of this is humor and satire. 'The Night I Saved Andy Norman'. And, and I there are others. I do not remember their titles right off hand. But some of the stories I have written from the perspective of a 12 year-old boy.

Nyssha- So did you get your hang of writing doing poetry....?? Were there any teachers in school that guided you towards that.

Mr Pollard- the teachers in school that... Now I, there were several teachers in Hygenic school who encouraged my writing. But the teachers who played a greater role in encouraging my writing were, these were white teachers.

Christen- In the high school?

Mr Pollard- In the high school. One name was Ms. Gerits. And, and Her?? (can't figure out name) Gerits was her name. And then there was another teacher, a white teacher by the name of Ruth Lee Teaver (??). And, and she taught expression and also English. And I think I got the first black A from those two teachers. I got their pictures in my yearbook and I'll show them to you in a while if you would like to see them. there are some incredible things in that yearbook, you will see it. You won't any black faces on the basketball team, and, and maybe if you look real hard you will see one black face on the football team. But it was black faces that gave them their many victories.

Nyssha- So how did you get along with the students in your classes?

Mr Pollard- Well, in my first few years in high school I think I had an inferiority complex. I uh, this was in the Great Depression. But I had one pair of trousers and one shirt sometimes my mother would wash and iron 'em so I could wear them the next day. But, I had played with white boys but I had never been in class room with them. Ironically, I was more affective at writing at home, and sometimes in school maybe, I just didn't feel... I just don't know how I felt. I felt, to some degree, out of place. You see, I had gone to school with only black kids for eight years of my life. And, and I think I did, out of place, and not only my self but there were white kids too with cardboard in their shoes, just like I did.

Christen- So growing up, um, when did you first really start writing poetry or different types...

Mr Pollard- I started writing poetry , let's see, I though maybe I had 'em. I started writing poetry at around age twelve and, and I had I guess some, a few of my poems published in a black newspaper that was published on Adams Street in Steelton. It was one of two. And, I had my first national publication when I was 17, in a Steelton (??) Smith love story magazine. Ironically, the poem told about my lost youth. And I got ten dollars for that poem, which was three days wages at the steel mill. And I thought I would be rich and famous before I reached 20 and I thought that my father wouldn't have to crawl in the side of the mouth of a furnace and bring out bricks that weren't yet cool. And that my mother wouldn't have wash white man's shirts before my father, and iron 'em before my father came home. I thought I would be rich and famous but it was fifteen years before I actually sold another poem. And I got two dollars for that one from an Afro American newspaper in Philadelphia. And them um, the stories, I started to write children's stories, uh in, when I was about 22 years old. Whenever I sent my stories out I was proud of the fact that I was black of course the term colored was used then. And sometimes my stories wouldn't come back. I wouldn't see them, I wouldn't even get a rejection slip. So in 19 and 43, I thought maybe I'll 'em in a local paper. So I carried them to the local newspaper and they wouldn't even read them... (something about the Harrisburg Telegraph) and I had worked for a time as a chauffeur so I put on my chauffeur's uniform and carried the stories in and ironically, the lady at the front

desk, uh, I got me some water ... the young lady at the front desk, I think she was kinda suspicious cause I had gone fishing with her brother (gets a little faint here as he moves into the kitchen to get some water). But she didn't give me away and she said 'what is your name' and I said 'My name is William Pollard' and she said 'this is John Thorne on the stories' and I said 'I work for John'. And she kinda knew it was a scam and she said I will take them in.... (in the kitchen). She carried them into the editorial office and I uh, and she said 'would you like to wait or come back later?', she said 'he's going to read them'. I said 'no, I think I will go far a walk'. I went for a walk by the river, it was a windy cold day with snow flurries in the air and I cam back in about an hour and um, and the editor of the paper... he said 'how much would Mr Thorne want for this?'. I said uh 'he just like children'. I was working at the steel mill at the time, making seventy five cents an hour. I wanted to see the stories in print, so I uh, he said 'you have five stories here' or 'he has a lot of stories here' so he said 'I'll tell you what, we'll publish these Tuesday after next. Starting with the story called 'Little Shoemaker'. It was all I could do, I thought my heart was in my throat. I felt like I swallowed a plum. He said 'we will advertise it next Tuesday for the following Tuesday' and so I came out and the 'Little Shoemaker' was published. And they published a story every week until the Harrisburg Telegraph stopped publication on Good Friday 1945. Um, but John Thorne got me in a lot of trouble. I was afraid to come home sometimes and people were sure that I worked for John Thorne. I got the London Times, they thought he was an English man.

Christen- So were all the stories printed under the name...?

Mr Pollard... under the name John Forrest Thorne. So one day when I came home from the steel mill, I had a real hard job, I was a reel turner, my phone rang and someone asked when John Thorne would be in town, well the editor came to figure that this wasn't John Thorne's real name, that he was an eccentric person. He little doubt in his mind that I worked for him. But um, I had this, this went on for six months. You can't imagine what this was doing to me. So I agreed to have them meet John Thorne. (Explains where the meeting place was and what he was wearing). But they did not want to hear what I wanted to say. (Explains how he got someone to drive up and blow his horn). So when he did I stepped off the stage, I was telling them about stories... They said 'no sir, we'll meet him', I said 'no I will, I will let him in and introduce him'. So I went to the door and I came back and they knew. I introduced John Thorne in the same manner that Samuel Clemens decided to introduce Mark Twain by leaving the stage and returning. They got up and left. And that was in 1944... At that point I made up my mind that I would be William Pollard but I did have to pay a justice of the peace ten dollars for using an alias.

Nyssha- So you have obviously experienced uh, prejudice and racism, how has that affected how you think about things now? Are you resentful?

Mr Pollard- No, no. There has never was an angry man inside of me. (talks about how in the sixties he never even got mad even through the marches he participated in. Talked about how television was used to get the point across during 60s)

(Conversation goes on a bit about segregation and Supreme Court rulings and desegregation of schools and Mr Pollard's view of President Johnson.)

Mr Pollard- When you are speaking about education, you are speaking about the most important element in our entire society. I am speaking as a teacher. I spent 7 years over in East Binford Township elementary school ... I didn't feel black, I felt like a teacher. I was a teacher. There were no black faces in my classroom but it didn't matter... When, Not too many years I stood on the stage at Augustana... and if anyone were to ask me if there were any black students in the audience, I wouldn't tell them. There were students. I just looked out and I saw students and the I pictured them in the palm of my hand and then I put them in my pocket and I'm going to hold them for the next thirty five minutes.

Christen- I wish more people had that attitude. Huh, just in, so we can get some, we know were we stand with your history, did you go directly in the steel mill? (a very jumbled up question, I did it to get some order in his life)

Mr Pollard- No, after high school, I didn't listen to my father. I did not listen to the old man who I say under the trees and talked to. I feel in love or thought I was. An old man who lived in the forrest, who built his house in what was called Adams Street Hallow, young boys would walk through the hallow on their way out to the ?? airport.... He would see the boys go out of the hallow... he would say 'hey you boys wait a minute, I want to talk to you'. Sometimes we would stop and sometimes we wouldn't. But his, his, his name was Ethan Banks and he had a little bit of money which is still buried in the hollow, where is house once stood. But he would say, "wait a minute you boys I want to talk with you" and we would gather around and listen. He would tell us things that we needed to know. There was one thing he told me that I have just finished writing about, writing about Ethan Banks; that we have two futures. And he said "you boys are fourteen and seventeen years old, you got two futures"... "you mind me know, you listen to me". "One future ... it could start anytime, but it is the next future, the first future looks easy. Anything that looks easy boys, ain't worth it". (goes on to talk about Ethan Banks language) Uh, anyway I learned lots of lessons from him and I also learned stories from him. (Goes on to talk about the Klan and an incident that Ethan Banks was associated with).

Christen- So how did you disobey your father out of high school?

Mr Pollard- I didn't listen to him. I won't go into it literally but I had uh, oh when I was twelve years old, the end of the eighth grade, the most beautiful little brown skinned girl that I ever saw came from Virginia. Her name was Dolores and uh, uh she and I would go to the movies together. She would pay her dime and I would pay mine and we'd go for walks on Saturday afternoons and she'd come to visit my house and she'd play jacks with my sisters and wouldn't pay me no mind at all. I'd try and impress her with my poetry, I was writing a story then on carnivals, the great carnivals and I'd try to show her my notebooks, she just wasn't interested. And, and, and uh one day in

October of 1935 we went, I had known her about three years, we went for a walk out to Centers Woods to gather bouquets of leaves, and on our way back, I made the wrong move and I got hit here (in the jaw)... I got hit with a left hook and thought that I would never chew chewing gum again. But I thought she would be made at me... she never mentioned the incident and I kept my hands to myself. Then on the 15th day of August of 1935, the 15th day of August, she left with her parents, her mother, to go to Virginia and my father gave me a dime to ride the trolley, had on my best knickers and uh, she said to me "you, wait for me Billy boy, I'll be back". But I couldn't wait. I had three children by the time she came back. And I couldn't even face her if she was coming up one side of the street, she was a teacher, unmarried, and uh, I saw her coming, she didn't stay long, she only just came back to visit and I couldn't even face her.

Christen- How much later did she come back?

Mr Pollard- About three year.. '35, uh, about seven years. It was a good seven years. We wrote letters for a while and then my letters tapered off. I stopped writing.

Christen- Were you with someone else at that point?

Mr Pollard- Yes (very quietly). That was my down fall. Uh, I didn 't wait for my second future. You understand were I'm coming from?

Christen and Nysha- Yeah.

Nysha- How old would your children be today?

Mr Pollard- My children, almost as old as I am, some of them are older. My oldest child is 57 years old. They range from 57 to their 40's.

Nysha- Do they still keep in contact with you?

Mr Pollard- Nope.

Christen- Did you ever play an active part in their lives?

Mr Pollard- I thought I played a very active part in their lives. I spent all the time that I had to spend with them, teaching 'em.

Christen- And where did they grow up?

Mr Pollard- They grew up, grew up in Steelton.

Christen- Were you working in the steel mill at that time?

Mr Pollard- I worked, I worked in the steel mill for twelve years.

Christen- Starting when?

Mr Pollard- I started at steel mill in January 20th 1942. And I stayed there until 195.... late 1953. For a while I worked at the steel mil at night and the gas company during the day. To back breaking jobs. And when I went to the gas company, I saw something I had to fight, discrimination. The only thing... they didn't hire any black women and the only thing a black man could do was dig a ditch... I worked there for 26 years but I didn't have to. I could have given up at anytime and gone away. But I nearly lost myself fighting that corporation, alone. But I opened the door for one son... another son worked in accounting, another son was integrated to the customer service section. He still works there now as a sales man. I have another one who works as a customer service section but they never got any education. They didn't want any despite the fact that they saw me with my heads in books. I have spent 30 in radio, longer, more people have heard my poems than all other American poets together. 30 years. I integrated radio in 1947.

Christen- Is that on a national level or on a local..?

Mr Pollard- This was, was on a local level and then for a while there were programs carried to other stations. I started at 11:45 in the morning.... (alks about the show a bit and told us he might play some for us).

(Talked about this experience with poetry and the living you can make off of poetry. He believes that no one can get rich off of poetry but teaching and holding seminars can help. He said he spent a lot of time conducting workshops on poetry.)

Christen- Was that in conjunction with your job at the gas company? Or was it, did you finish at the gas company and then pursue it more?

Mr Pollard- I did this while I was uh, uh, uh I broadcasted at night after I left the gas company. And, and, and I uh, I started to teach in 1968. First uh, I went back to Steelton High school 7 years after I was graduated from there and read poems on stage. And uh, then I started to, now this is a craft I know from top to bottom, from rhythm and meter all the way to symbolism and intention (talks about different structure of poetry). [We then had to flip the tape]... (he talks about his participation in the Pennsylvania, the Harrisburg chapter, poetry society. He was discouraged to participate and was asked not to come but he then made his mind up to persist). They elected me their president in 1969 and I was elected state president in 1971. [Goes on to talk about his positions in Poetry societies and some of the problems that he faced]. I could have ascended to the presidency but there were things taking place in my life that I knew would preclude me from serving effectively, they were beginning to take shape even then. As a matter of fact, they even sent me to mental hospital....

[he made a few comments about his wellbeing and his families reactions but we could tell he did not ant to tell us about this situation. he felt that we could not handle it like his family couldn't. His children don't visit because of their beliefs on his state of mind]

Christen- Out of all these jobs that you have held and positions you held, is there one that you hold very true to your heart or you find was your favorite position?

Mr Pollard- Teaching.

Christen- Teaching in general?

Mr Pollard- Teaching in general...

Christen- Spreading the word, helping children learn.

Mr Pollard- Helping children learn.

Christen - Wonderful

Nyssha - That was your same goal for your children?

Mr. Pollard- It was my goal for my children.

Christen- How many children in total?

Mr. Pollard- I have nine children; one's dead, he died of a heart attack. He was in a coma for six years, semi coma.

Christen- Do they live around, you said that some worked in the gas company?

Mr. Pollard - Oh yeah, let me see, one, two,three... I have five children who live within 2 miles of me.

Christen- Uh huh, do you have any grandchildren? A lot of grandchildren?

Mr. Pollard- Twenty seven. Thirteen great- grandchildren.

Christen- Wonderful. Do they, are they part of your life? Or do they bring you satisfaction?

Mr. Pollard- No. No. Some of them I've never seen. I visited up until about six years ago; I felt like a stranger so, I stopped visiting.

Nyssha - How do you think uh, life was different for your children then it was for you?

Mr. Pollard- I really don't know how to answer that particular question. When my children were growing up, these were hard family times. Uh we were still caught up under segregation and discrimination. I worked two jobs then and did as much as I could. As much as some men could earn. Sometimes not quite as much. Cause I worked beside men who made twice as much as I did. My children didn't have to go

through that. But they were caught up in this ?mind thing. Now I will tell you that my first wife was a high school drop out. And she has uh sat beside the table with many leading writers. Uh she carried herself well, she could but, she met the wrong person. She never wanted an education, she just rode on my coat tail. And she had the respect of people. Like I said she met the wrong person. Look, nobody knows what's out there, how many pitfalls. I read a poem once by, I don't recall the author, I think it was William Dromcold called the Bridge Builder. He crossed the chasm and then he went back and he built a bridge for the kids to cross so that they wouldn't have the fear and the difficulty that he had. This is what I tried to do for my children: build a bridge. I could tell them the value of education, but it was up to them, it was there freedom of choice whether they wanted to get married young and never open another book. It was up to them.

Christen- How long were you married to your first wife?

Mr. Pollard- Forty years.

Christen- Forty years. And all nine children with her?

Mr. Pollard- Yes, all nine.

Christen- She still live here in ...

Mr. Pollard- She lives in Steelton.

Christen- And you remarried?

Mr. Pollard- I did. There's a picture of her right behind you.

Christen- And what year was that?

Mr. Pollard- We met in 1977 in uh ?Springs, Arkansas.

Christen- Were you out there teaching?

Mr. Pollard- I was out there teaching as a lecturer. (He goes on to talk about the huge amount of media attention he got when he was down there; he showed us an article that was written bout him.) There a great case of irony because I had seen Louise two years before. I was at Southern Methodist University in Dallas; I was there with a poet much better know than I, named Richard Everheart and uh we were on campus around a lot of curious students who are always curious about poets when they came to colleges. And I saw Louise in a crowd of about six or seven women who had come to the college to hear something they might like. I don't know, she left a mind imprint and I figured thought, the first thought that occurred to me was that she had stepped out of *Gone with the Wind*. And I never forgot her. I started down hill emotionally for a bout three or four years. And the bottom just about dropped out of me. (He continues

talking about his depression cause him not to answer his phone mail etc. He then goes on to say that when he decided to decide to get out of his environment and be keynote speaker in Arkansas he seemed to get better. He continues talking about how he met up with Louise again) Most of the time these things were held in colleges but this was the first time that it was held in a hotel environment. And I went to my room and put on some casual clothes and started down to the lounge to read. I was on the tenth floor and the elevator stopped at the fifth floor. Louise got on. I thought it was hallucinating. This was the same woman who had never left my memory from two years before in Texas. She addressed me as Dr. Pollard, she said "I've been wanting to meet you. She said, "do you have time to look at some of my poems?" I mean I still hadn't gotten myself together, I thought I was about to fall on the floor. So I said yes and we sat down and talked and lied about our family lives. And uh, the thought occurred to me that if it had been ten years before and we were sitting there in Arkansas, some little scungy men raped up in white sheets would have come and taken us away. Anyway, we went to a bar one night and we drank a Michelob and I didn't see her; she had asked me if I would read some poems to her Friday night before the convention was over, and I promised her I would. So, uh, finally night came I got my book and I came downstairs and I didn't see her there. So, I went in the room where they were reading what they call the night owl session, and she was sitting in the first row. And I figured maybe she just forgot, or maybe she didn't mean it anyway; she was just trying to be nice. So I went back to my room and I left early the next morning. And uh, a week later I got a letter from Louise and uh, a very, very, nice letter; she told me that she was very sorry she hadn't attended some of my workshops but she did have some taped sessions. I didn't hear from her anymore then until next spring. I got a Easter card from her. And you don't usually answer cards but I sent her another card. Then I started to critique some poems for her. Well you know one of her manuscripts was called Redwood For Summer Plays. I got a communication from ?? who feels that her history should be preserved. Her genealogy dates back all the way to William the Conqueror. And uh, I have her book on her ancestry here. Anyway it's a long story of how we finally got together. Because the bottom had fallen out of me and I needed help. I needed to either go to a mental institution or for someone to help me. And I didn't ask her to come; she said she's coming. She talked to the doctor and he told her. At that time I didn't even know where I was going to live. But anyway, we lived together for a while; it only took two days for me to get my divorce. And the judge knew the story; all he could say was, "My God, you're a free man midnight tonight." So we were married on the 22 of September 1981. Now, a couple months later we discovered a lump in her breast which was cancer. She had a radical mastectomy of her left breast. We started to work together; I started to teach her the techniques of poetry criticism.

Christen- How much younger was she then you?

Mr. Pollard- Eight years. The technique of poetry criticism, and we worked separate every place we went. Her word was as good as mine when it came to poetry criticism. And uh, she had never worked in her life. And at fifty- six uh fifty seven years old Louise got her job with the state. And uh, we went, oh and I have pictures of places

where we lectured, the last place we were at was Macato, Minnesota. And uh, we worked together critiquing poems. And if I couldn't be present for a lecture or something, she'd take over for me. But anyway uh, in 1987, in the fall, I noticed that her strength was winding. And she'd leave for work earlier so she could park closer to the building; I knew something was up. And she had been cancer free for five years. And uh, we used to sit at night and I'd tell her stories out of my childhood. We'd walk around Wildwood Lake; I did that to keep her mind off of the chemo after she first had the first bout. And uh, we'd walk the nature trail, three miles around Wildwood Lake, twice a week weather permitting. And uh, the hardest part of my life was sitting by her bed for a year. She died on the twelfth of October. She wrote a poem three days before she died. I think she was the first, if not the only, might not be the only white person buried in ----- . Maybe not but she's the first one that I know of. I wasn't able to do much of anything after she died.

Christen- What year was that?

Mr. Pollard- 1988. I spent a lot of time just walking around the lake.

Christen- Was she one of the first people that had a personal impact on your life where the fact that she was so enthusiastic about education and poetry vs your first wife who...?

Mr. Pollard- Yeah, uh, Louise was well educated and she wanted to add to her education. My uh, the way I take it, I tell my students that uh, there is a spring of knowledge. In all the world's students, all those that want to learn, become in a never ending line to quench their thirst for truth and for knowledge. I tell high school kids, "When you leave high school I want you to picture a ladder all the way to the top of the Empire State building. And you graduate high school, you got one foot towards the first one. Education you will need.

Christen- So, today you know, in 1997, uh so many years have gone by since her death. What do you tend to do on a daily basis?

Mr. Pollard- I write. Now there are too many people, older people especially, that ignore the fact uh, the brain needs food constantly in the same manner that the stomach needs food. We wouldn't deny our stomachs bread, same goes in taking an exhaustion from our knowledge. The more you put in, the better off you are. I've written three novels in the past three years; a children's novel called the Silver Swan I love children, I'm glad to do it. Then uh, I wrote my autobiography in a manuscript called Abandoned. That was a therapeutic manuscript. There are probably lots of, it isn't structured right and it's full of grammatical errors. I felt myself slipping and I need to hold on. Uh, I have a long-term student; she's really helped motivate me. She's a psychologist. And uh, she want to learn about poetry, and she's kind of slow to learn about the poetry, the techniques, but she's beginning to write and uh, I met her in 1990. By 19 and 90 I still didn't want to do anything. And I had letter that would request would I read here or there. I finally opened one, one day and it was from the

Art Association in Harrisburg. They wanted me to talk, give a talk and read some poems in Black History week in February but, the letter came in August. February seemed a million miles away walking and the honorary oh, it must have been eighteen hundred dollars. And I said oh I'll send it in anyway and accept it. And I met this student there and uh she asked me if I would take her on as a student. that was seven years ago.

Christen- And uh, when I called you said that you often critique other people's poetry. That's in addition to your writing. Do you still do a lot of lecturing also?

Mr. Pollard- Um no. Here uh this is from an older news letter, now I stopped this for a, I went to all states and overseas. And uh I critique poets just for a token fee. Like three poems or one page of writing for ten dollars. But my regular fee is like (phone rings not audible here) a normal critique service they charge twelve dollars a line. (Mr. Pollard stops here to answer the phone)

Mr. Pollard- Here's another picture of Louise. This is her book of genealogy. Here's one of my ancient teachers. (Here Mr. Pollard showed us pictures in an old high school yearbook)

Mr. Pollard - Here's a New American Fifth reader. Now uh, this would frighten middle school students. Ah, there are terms here that students don't use anymore. And this is one of the reasons that so many of the students are... every child should know the meaning of vocabulary. They should know the meaning of pause and articulation, articulated tone, emphasis. They should learn all of those things. What I used to do with poetry, well my first teaching uh would be basic techniques. Uh writing poetry... one of my tapes published by Random House (Mr. pollard get up here to look for a tape from his radio show)

Christen- Is this a tape of one of your readings? Do you want us to start it I think it's done rewinding now.

(Here we listened to a tape of Mr. Pollard's readings from his radio show. He added that when he got on the air, he never knew what he was going to say. It just came to him as he began to talk to the audience.)

Christen- That was very interesting. I actually think that your voice sounds very familiar to me. I don't know where from but ah..

Mr. Pollard- I've done some radio work... Maybe you were in an auditorium somewhere.

Christen- Possibly. You have a very calming, soothing voice. I can see where you would get a lot of response from these radio shows , lectures and things like that.

Nyshta - Uh, One thing that I wanted to ask was you obviously been through a lot of

bad times in your life. What has helped you to (not audible here)... pull through?

Mr. Pollard- My faith in God. I believe in prayer, that's what I believe in. That's the only way. You can speak your prayers but, you gotta believe them. At the slightest element of doubt, now be aware, sometimes God's answer is no. I have absolutely no doubt of God. (Mr. Pollard goes on here to recount several near death experiences that he says prove that God exists. He also talked about his trick knee and how God had healed it so that it never gave out on him again.)

(Next Mr. Pollard went on to read the history of the negro community in Steelton from 1880 to 1920.)

Christen- Can I ask you about your religious background when you were growing up? Was there a large emphasis on

Mr. Pollard - Well, in my family itself. My father had prayer every Sunday morning. And of course the family, we went as a family to the First Baptist Church. But I was kind of a weird little guy. Sometimes I couldn't go to church. I'd go to the church door and I go out and sit in the woods. (He goes on to tell about how when he went to the woods he went to a glade that his father had taken him to when he was three years old.)

Mr. Pollard- I started as a deacon in the church for eleven years. I haven't been to the church in a long time. I started to go back to church, oh about seven months ago. I didn't become a member but I started to go.

Christen- What church is this?

Mr. Pollard- I go over now to the East Shore Community Church over in ? Village. Their a growing congregation. And uh they promised me that they would (not audible here) The pastor, he said in exchange for helping some of his members who have expressed the possibility of reading , to give them some ideas on how to be better readers, maybe he could find some one to help me with my papers. But I've got to see it before I believe it . I've been promised before by people who never came. My grand daughter came and tried to help me but I haven't been able to find anything since she worked with my papers. Matter of fact, I was able to find them better before.

Christen- You had your own system of knowing where they were?

(Mr. Pollard talks here about how he had things organized before his grand daughter came)

(Mr. Pollard talks here about the new form of sonnet that he has created. The sonnet structure is now at Kent State University being evaluated by the Kent State Press. It took him about fourteen years to form this sonnet structure. He showed us a sample of the sonnet structure in addition to samples of poems that he has done.)
Mr. Pollard-It's well that times have changed. I sat beside kids in school who lost (not

audible here) There'd be a train at the crossing and they'd try to come through to keep from being late from school. And the train going from the steel mill would start up again. Then there was a girl by the name of Laura Williams, a white boy shot her right here crossing a field going home. Now she had to go by West Side High School because it was white, to get to the Hygenic School. But the boy's rifle, his parents took his rifle for two weeks. And I knew another boy named Leon, who actually starved. And Leon Bridges was the best artist that I've ever known. He could draw a lion that looked like it was about to roar. Nobody in the world could draw a tree like Leon. And he sat right beside me. And it seems like only yesterday when Mrs. Holmes my second grade teacher, despite the fact that she was told not to do it, she marched the whole class to West Side to see little Laura's body in a box in the park.

(Mr. Pollard takes the time here to read poems that he has written about the above scenarios that took place)

Christen- Do you think these poems were due to your innocence then?

Mr. Pollard- No I think I was still very close to the real life experience. And you must remember, to a child, everything is new. I mean I had only seen three seasons. And the whole world feels is not the way it is now but yet, it seems like it was yesterday. And it's this thing called sensitivity. I was born into segregation and discrimination. And I had been told and taught about slavery. I didn't have a paragraph in my history books that told me that a black person did anything! I was taught to believe that uh, not by black folk, but by white folk that I would listen to, that I was inferior. That I couldn't learn. I took it so natural I almost believed it. There's still kids that believe it. Look at them today, ruining their lives. Children becoming grandmothers when they're thirty years old. My heart just reaches out for the person who (not audible here)

(Mr. Pollard talks here about how a woman asked him to try to encourage her children)

Mr. Pollard- So you see children can make mistakes but, we can't go about moralizing. We got to be aware of the fact that we got to talk to them; we can't talk down to them. I just wonder which way should we go from here. How shall we build a bridge into the twenty- first century where we really do something about education. My goal is to see (not audible here) taught in the schools again.

Christen- Are you doing anything to try to make progress?

Mr. Pollard- Well articles like that one there in the paper, and I had national published articles about (Not audible here)

Christen- To teaching back at elementary schools?

Mr. Pollard- Uh, I haven't been back in schools(Not audible here)

Christen- I think this has been a great experience for us.

Mr. Pollard- It's been a good experience for me. There's so much that we barely touched on in my life.

(Not audible here)

Christen- Well thank you so much for letting us to come and ...

Mr. Pollard- You'll have to come back and I'll tell you how the Kian was after me.

Christen- Wonderful (Christen asks Mr. Pollard here if he has any restrictions for the interview.)

(He talks about how his grandfather fell in love and married his wife Annie)

Christen / Nyscha-Thanks again for having us.