

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Marie Elaine “Malane” White Collins

COLLECTION: 4700.1951

IDENTIFICATION: New Roads, Louisiana native; Accomplished pianist and painter

INTERVIEWER: Betty Wooddy

SERIES: Voices in the Storm: Hurricane Katrina Survivors in Pointe Coupee Parish

INTERVIEW DATE: March 9, 2007

FOCUS DATES: 2005 - 2007

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3811

Introduction; Collins born in New Roads, Louisiana, in 1924; was the eldest of five children; father was an electrical engineer; mother, Chloe LeFebvre, was a child prodigy; mother had perfect pitch and total recall, played with the Baton Rouge Symphony at age four; mother profoundly influenced her life, was very strict, made Collins practice piano at six every morning and after school; Collins majored in music at Louisiana State University (LSU); attended St. Joseph Academy in New Roads; after LSU, attended Peabody Conservatory for graduate work; moved to New Orleans, married a physician, had six children; decided to pursue an art degree at age forty; her music teacher in New Roads was Miss Rugon; her family couldn't have survived without help raising six children; a friend saw her paintings and decided to have a show in her home, Collins did not want to attend; forty-five paintings were sold in the first afternoon; took a summer course at Newcomb College, professor helped her enroll for the fall of 1970, and she stayed for seven years; held a show in her home every year for thirty-five years, built up a clientele, received several awards; art critic wrote an article that speculated on Collins's influences, but she wasn't familiar with those artists; similarities between math and music; repetition versus variation in art and musical works; some people have an instinct for balance in their artwork that cannot be taught; performed in two-piano concerts for ten years; favorite composers; in 2005 before Hurricane Katrina, was living in New Orleans in an apartment building; did not plan to evacuate because she lived on the fifth floor; son-in-law in Houston convinced her to leave; hailed a cab to the airport, learned no more cabs were running; missed her flight but walked the airport terminals to find another option; finally got on the last flight; stayed in Houston for a month, couldn't return to New Orleans; upon returning, conditions in her apartment were horrible, everything was wet and mildewed, she salvaged what she could; stayed in an apartment in Mobile, Alabama, for a year and was miserable; decided to move back to New Roads and her son found her a place to lease; a *Times-Picayune* article that captured the what she

and other Katrina survivors were dealing with emotionally and mentally after everything they knew was taken away; she's had to recreate her life; New Roads hasn't changed much since she grew up there, more stores but people are the same; being recognized and recognizing people from her younger years; started painting again and did six paintings in several weeks; painting helped her depression; her son encourages her; she enjoys the familiarity and space in New Roads; hearing stories about her mother from people who knew her, learning about "the mother I didn't know"; her mother played non-liturgical music in church, hid the titles from the priest; when her mother was in a nursing home, she once got her out of her shell by playing the wrong notes in "Silent Night", her mother took over and played several Christmas carols perfectly; people in New Roads extending invitations, trying to reconnect with people in the midst of busy schedules; people are helpful; new shops near the hospital; wishes she never left but wanted to experience what the Northeast had to offer; sitting in on a Toscanini rehearsal in Carnegie Hall, meeting Rodgers and Hammerstein; miserable experience of evacuating for a hurricane the year before Katrina; broke down when she visited her parents' graves in New Roads; discussion of a large painting that shows her sense of color; she never has a plan when she starts a painting; when painting from the heart, an artist's pieces will be recognizable from any stage of their career; decision-making process and your psyche doesn't change; large painting is the happiest she's done since the hurricane, her son will love it; before her husband died, she had a sense of impending doom and her painting took a morose turn; the compositions are good but they have a sad aspect to them; she has photos of all the paintings she's done; current painting style is similar to her early style; discussion of another painting where the faces don't have features; best art shows have pieces that are connected; paintings from when she lived in Slidell, Louisiana, have a different color scheme because she wasn't happy there; Collins prepares to play a piece on the piano; selects a Chopin prelude and performs it; short story about Clare Boothe Luce being attributing her success to having a mother; end of interview.

TAPE: 1 (T3811)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 47 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: 1 photo taken during interview. Photographer David Breidenbach

OTHER MATERIALS: Voices in the Storm reception program (2 pgs); Obituary

RESTRICTIONS: None