

ZEPHYRHILLS ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Elaine Jones, Mae Pickett & Gloria Brown

Recorded January 12, 2019

Steve [Spina]: I'm going to start by asking you all where you were born and where you grew up. I'll start with Gloria. Where were you born?

Gloria: I'm Gloria, and I was born in Plant City. However, I've lived in Zephyrhills all of my life.

Steve: Okay.

Elaine: Where was I born? I was born in Dade City, Florida, and I grew up in Zephyrhills, so I'm a native.

Steve: Okay. Mae?

Mae: I'm Mae, and I was born in Lakeland, but I've been here in Zephyrhills all my life.

Steve: Now, where are your parents from?

Mae: My parents are from Georgia.

Steve: Okay, and when did they come to Zephyrhills?

Gloria: My parents came to Zephyrhills a year or two before I was born, and I was born in 1949. So, let's say '45 - '46.

Steve: Okay. And what did they do? What's their job or their profession?

Gloria: My dad worked for a company that housed us, a little place called Hercules, and he worked, I don't know, doing whatever they did to trees, cutting trees or whatever, but that's the job I knew for the longest. Then, maybe 30 years ago, he went to work for the mines. I don't know the name of the mines...C.F. Industries.

Steve: So he got the job in Zephyrhills. They came here, following the job, from Georgia. What town in Georgia?

Mae: I'm not sure where in Georgia my parents were, but they grew up in Florida. The families migrated to Plant City, to a place called Knights Station. Most of their lives they were here in Florida.

Steve: Okay. So the two older sisters, you grew up on the Hercules property then?

Gloria: Yes, we did grow up in Hercules.

Steve: Okay. And Elaine, did you live there too?

Elaine: Did I live in Hercules? I've only heard about Hercules. Like this fairy tale place from the past. I don't know anything about it except that we drive by the area every now and then. I think the high school is there now. We drive by it and they say, "We used to swing from those trees when we lived in Hercules. Those were our toys." That's as much as I know about Hercules.

Steve: Tell us a little bit about living on the Hercules property. What was that like?

Mae: Living in Hercules was...I guess it was just a way of life. You didn't think about it much. It was actually "Hercules camp," and that camp was made up of people that worked for Hercules. It was a, what they call a pulp wood factory. I think that's what it was. But we grew up there, and things were nice and calm because most of the people that lived in the area knew everybody. It was a small community and we were protected from a lot of things.

Steve: Did you live where the high school is now, then? Was that the side you lived on, and not the part that's a park now?

Mae: We lived on the side where the school is now. As a matter of fact, there was a little path that led to a store, and we used to walk that path and go to that store right in the neighborhood. And that's as far as we'd travel, pretty much.

Steve: Do you remember how many people lived there, or how many families there were?

Mae: Maybe there were 20 families that lived there, and we were actually very close to the families that lived there. All of the children played together. We grew up together. We went to the same school, of course. We were bused from there to Dade City to go to school.

Steve: Okay. So even as youngsters in elementary school, then you were bused to Dade city. Was it to the Moore-Mickens School?

Mae: Moore Elementary. We went to Moore Elementary to start, and then we moved onto Mickens. Moore Elementary was from first through sixth grade, I think, and then we moved to Mickens from there.

Steve: Okay. And when did you move off of Hercules?

Mae: We left Hercules just a little bit before Elaine was born—had to be in, like, 1962. We left there because Daddy got another job working for the mine at that time. I don't think it was C.F. Industries. I think they called it something else during that time. But he left the

job [at Hercules] to go to that job, that and to build a house over here on the other side. And that's where we grew up.

Steve: Was that called Krusen Quarters then? Were you part of that [area] in this neighborhood here?

Gloria: Yeah. And the neighborhood over there, Krusen Quarters, is where we grew up. That's where Daddy had a house built. I think our house was one of the first actual, stone houses that were built there.

Steve: What other families lived on Hercules and are still in this area?

Gloria: We lived in that community, and also in that community was Irene Dobson, the pastor that used to pastor the church down the street, the Mathises—John Mathis—let's see... the McKays were there. David Moody and his family were there. The Roberts didn't live right across the street, but they were there. That family was Reggie Roberts's family.

Steve: Myrtle. Or Myrtie.

Gloria: Marybelle. Her parents.

Steve: Okay. So that became kind of the genesis, then, of the local African-American community for Zephyrhills?

Mae: Well, that Hercules camp was totally different from living in this community, which I think was called Krusen Quarters when we moved here. When we moved over here, it was like we moved to a whole different city.

Gloria: Yes.

Steve: Describe that.

Gloria: That was...really different. Moving over to this area from Hercules camp was like moving into the Wild West. That's how it was. I remember waking up some mornings, and we actually had shootings and killings and all kinds of stuff going on. We weren't used to that at Hercules because it was so quiet. A family moving over here, it was frightening. We called it the Wild West. It was rough. It was rough because we weren't used to the things that went on in this area: the drinking, cursing and fighting and all of that kind of stuff. It was crazy.

Steve: So was it kind of un-policed, or just "out of sight, out of mind," maybe?

Gloria: You know, I don't remember seeing many cops during that time growing up. I'll tell you what it was like out there. Our parents always took us during the summer to vacation spots. We'd be kind of secluded. One morning, we got up—we always got up early, because we went across the Skyway Bridge. That's one of the places he would take us—thinking it was time to go. "Okay, it's vacation time. We're going somewhere." Well, what

had actually happened was somebody had shot and killed somebody right out in the street, in front of the house. This is the stuff we weren't used to. I don't remember seeing cops, but I know they had to come at some point. That's how different moving over here was as opposed to living in Hercules camp.

Steve: I guess it was just a larger, kind of rural, area. Elaine, when do you start having memories of growing up here?

Elaine: I always wondered why you said "Hercules camp."

Gloria: We never called it a camp.

Elaine: Yeah! You just—

Mae: Because he said that. Because he said camp. I never called it a camp. It was just *Hercules* to me.

Elaine: I heard her say it.

Steve: Okay. What are some of your early memories?

Elaine: Well, one of my earliest memories was about school. I think I was in second or third grade and I remember being able to read when I entered. At the time that I was in kindergarten, I could read, so I was kind of ahead of the curve, especially for black kids. And I had this memory back in the day: they used to have classes separated, I guess, by how smart you were, like three-one, three-two, all the way up to twelve or thirteen or something. The lower the number was, the smarter you were, and I remember the first day of school and they put me in three-one or something. At that time, it was like I was the only black kid. I remember entering, and they had names on the little desks. So I found my name, I sat there, and as soon as the teacher came in, she looked at me and she said, "Oh, no. Something must be wrong" and I just knew that it had to be something about me. I was a little kid, but I could understand that this is about me and this is going to be bad. She went and got some other teachers and said, "She's not supposed to be in this class. Something happened wrong." She got a little paper with a math problem on it. I'd never seen the math problem before. She said, "Do this," and I looked at it and I was saying to myself, "I've never seen this before, but if you tell me how to do it, I probably can do it." So I just sat there like a deer caught in the headlights and she said, "See? I knew she couldn't do it. This is not the right place." They took me from three-one and I think they put me in three-five or six with some other black kids. So that was one of the first memories that stuck out to me, and that just stuck with me for a very long time, honestly, until I was in college. When I got to college and I started making grades, I made the dean's list and then the honor roll. Then I was on the honor's society and then I took honor's courses and I was thinking I'd been programmed to think that I was dumb. When I started making the grades, I was like, you mean I'm not dumb? So it took me almost a lifetime to just erase those kind of memories that I had from a young girl coming up. That's one of my first memories that I can recall, and it just wasn't

a good memory, and that was about school. My home life was always great. We always had the love and support from my mother and father.

Steve: Well, let's talk about your home life a little bit, and we'll come back to school. You're three of six children, so you have a large family and you grew up in a church. You said your father was a deacon in the church, so why don't you talk to us about your church life?

Elaine: My dad was a deacon in church, and what I remember was, he was so strict and he was so protective of us that we didn't understand then, you know? We understand better now. We could only do school and church and that was basically it. We weren't as "into Jesus" as our parents were, but we had to live like we were into Jesus because my father required that of us. I remember on Sundays what would happen. Sundays were big religious days for us and we never had the opportunity [to say no to that.] These kids today, they have the opportunity to say, "I don't want to go to church. That's not my thing. That's not my juju." But with my dad, when Sundays rolled around, you knew to get up, you need to get ready for church, and there was just no question about it. You ate your breakfast and then you headed for the car to church. That was Sunday. We went to church through the week and everything, and we were kind of rare, because a lot of the kids weren't required to do that. But I thank God for my upbringing, because all of us are still in church and Sunday is still a strong family day for us. We still meet for Sunday dinner. My mom and dad have been gone for years, but we still meet at my mother's house for dinner every Sunday. There's like thirty, forty, fifty of us at Sunday dinner still today.

Steve: And what church do you go to?

Elaine: My church is Victorious Church of God in Christ.

Steve: And your brother is a pastor there?

Elaine: My brother is the pastor, and before my brother was the pastor of my church, it was my uncle, my mother's brother, who pastored the church. Strong family ties.

Steve: Let's go back to school just a little bit. When did you start going to school in Zephyrhills? Mae?

Mae: I started on the very first year they integrated the schools. It was volunteer that first year and we begged Mom to let us go and she did. After that we weren't allowed to go back [to the black school], so we had to stay through that. I was in seventh grade at that time and excited about it and I'm going to tell you one of the questions that I posed to my mother. I said, "Mama, how are we going to tell them apart? They're all the same color!" *[all laugh]* She just looked at me and smiled. She said, "You'll know baby. You will know." I understood later on, but that was my biggest concern: how am I going to tell them apart?

Steve: Because you had lived very segregated lives.

Mae: Very segregated. Very.

Steve: I mean, you didn't interact.

Mae: I don't remember interacting with [any white people]—except for the guy that owned the little store that Gloria was talking about when we lived in in Hercules. I think that was the only contact we had with somebody other than the blacks.

Steve: Okay, and you said that you went to school with seven other blacks, and this was the old high school on 12th Street. It's the middle school now, but it was a middle school-high school together at that time.

Mae: It wasn't a middle school. It was just Zephyrhills High. I think it was seven of us that went that first year, and it was a challenge. It was a challenge. I don't remember being afraid, but just puzzled at the difference that was made between us and our white counterparts. It was just different.

Steve: Were all seven of you put in the same classes?

Mae: No. We were different ages. I had a brother [Alvin] that was in ninth grade and my sister Gloria was in eleventh grade. I don't remember having anybody in class with me during my seventh grade year, but the next year, they bused in some more children and it was more blacks. But that first year, I was in classes all by myself.

Steve: Well, how was that? Were you accepted or were you kind of a loner? How did that work for the two of you?

Mae: Well, for me, it was like you were there and you weren't, you know? The teachers weren't bad. They didn't do anything or say anything bad or anything, but it was like you were an alien that just flew in from somewhere. That's how I would describe it.

Steve: An unknown commodity, almost.

Mae: Yes, yes, yes.

Steve: What was your experience like, [Gloria]?

Gloria: Well, my experience when we first integrated and transferred to Zephyrhills High School: I was in eleventh grade and Frankie Willis [McKenzie] and I were in the same grade. And my first experience was not a good experience at all, and it was of my own doing, I would imagine, because I was in class and I was afraid of white people. I had never associated with them. We were segregated. So I was in this classroom and a light blew out, but it wasn't like it just went out. It was like a hissing sound that got louder and louder and louder. So I ran! I thought they were getting ready to kill me! I got out, and I was out in the hall, and, of course, all the students were just laughing, just falling over laughing, because this black girl doesn't even know that a bulb blew. That was pretty scary for me.

Steve: How did your parents react? Were they nervous about you going to school and facing the unknown? I mean, they had grown up in the Jim Crow south, so they knew some of the pitfalls. Did they coach you?

Gloria: I think my dad was kind of laid back. He never said anything. We'd always go to Mom with whatever happened, and she coached us through everything. I know that all people say this, but there's nobody's mom like my mom. She was so different. She taught us to love everybody regardless of the color of their skin, and I think that's how we got through it.

Steve: We talked a little bit earlier about some of your experiences in high school. You said there was a protest at the high school and your brother Alvin led it. Can you tell me what that was about or what you remember about that?

Mae: One of the first protests that my brother and they had was that of the school playing the *Dixie* song. We had gone to the principal at that time and requested that they not play the song. Well, that didn't go over. They played it anyway. My brother told them, "If you play it again in the assembly, we will walk out," and what they told us was, if you walk out, you'll be expelled. Our parents didn't know about all these goings on. Alvin had gotten with all the blacks—I think it was about twenty or thirty of us at this time—and he told us, "We're going to the assembly," a pep rally, "and if they play *Dixie*, when I stand up and I give you the sign, we're walking out." They played *Dixie*, he stood up, we walked out quietly. We didn't say anything. We just got our books and we left the campus. The next day, the principal called me and my brother and (I think it was) Jerry Mathis and one other person to discuss with us, rather than kicking us out, because they saw that we didn't care at this point. You can kick us out, but we're going to take a stand. So we got together with the principal and assistant principal and we talked things over and we talked with the students and stuff, and that started our first protest against the playing of the *Dixie* song, and they actually stopped.

Steve: Wow. What year was that? What grade was that?

Mae: Let's see. I was in ninth grade, I think, so that would put Alvin in the eleventh grade. After that, we protested about the buses, not being able to ride the bus. They didn't have buses coming out here to get us. We had to walk to school at that time, and we made that protest to get buses running. That worked, too. We did a lot of good stuff, come to think of it.

Steve: So you were aware of the differences then and to stand up for yourself.

Mae: Yes. These children today don't even realize what we went through just to put some of this stuff in motion. They think that the buses just automatically started coming and they automatically stopped playing the songs that were offensive to the blacks, but we actually worked with [the authorities], you know? We weren't violent or anything.

Steve: You were restricted from sitting down in some restaurants downtown. Tell me about that.

Mae: That goes back. Remember now, I'm doing all this radical stuff. My parents don't know because they were really strict. They had two of what they called drugstores at the time. One was down Fifth Avenue. One was Neukom's Drugs and the other one was Scotty's. Neukom's was kind of friendly to blacks. You could go in and buy stuff, but Scotty's didn't want you in there, period. One day after school, my girlfriend and I—and remember now, we've just integrated—we walked downtown and I told her, "Let's go in here." And she was hesitant. I say, "Come on, let's go! Let's see what happens." So we went in and had a seat at the counter. The counter was only for whites. The blacks couldn't come in and sit. We went in and we had a seat. And I ordered—I remember to this day—a Coke float, and an older white lady came in, and she was irritated because she saw us sitting there and she told the proprietor, "When did you start serving these kinds of people?" and I looked at her and I said, "Just the other day." She stormed out of the store, but we got our drinks.

Elaine: Wow!

Mae: And that was the end of that one.

Steve: Elaine, you had different experiences. They paved a path for you as well.

Elaine: They did. My experiences weren't so overt, but they were covert. My educational experience was a really rough one. I told you about my first real recollection of being picked out because of the color of my skin, but my middle school and high school were just really uneventful for me. I remember, almost like in a cookie-cutter type of atmosphere, how they would tell the black children—at that time we went to see the guidance counselor when we got to a certain age in high school—when you went to see the guidance counselor, that guidance counselor would tell you, "We'll try to get you in this school or this college" or whatever. I remember talking to my black friends and, every one of us that would go to see the guidance counselor, we were all told, "Well, you're not really college material. You may want to take up a trade or you may want to learn how to type. You'll get some kind of job doing that." Just growing up here, education was really a challenge and that made me have to deal with my own self worth. It really took me just a while, almost until adulthood, having all of my children, to understand my own worth, because I've been so programmed with this Jim Crow [society]. The laws were such that we had the right to vote and the slaves were free, but that is what's written on the law. What's written on people's hearts...you can't change that even if the law says differently. Those were my experiences. I ran into a lot of issues like that growing up in Zephyrhills.

Steve: Right. We're kind of at a place where the barriers had broken and your sisters and brothers, actually, had paved some of that path for you, but we hadn't crossed over into where people were accepting or are treating everyone equally. Did you end up going to college?

Elaine: I did. Actually, I just completed my college. It took me a lot of years because I did life first, and then I had to deal with some of the demons that I came up with just living in, the deep south, as they say. I just completed my bachelor's degree in education and

public policy and now I am in graduate school seeking a master's degree in teaching and learning with technology. But it took me a while, and nobody can take that away from me now. I was so programmed to think that “you're just not [college material].” That still rings in my head today, that guidance counselor that said, “You're not college material. The best thing that you can do is probably just learn a trade or something like that.” It took me a lifetime to understand my own worth. I had to fight with that just coming up in this. Listen, I was born and raised in this town and I'm still here, so there's some good, but those are just my experiences.

Steve: Well, what is it like to live in this town now? I mean, you all stayed here and your whole family, almost all your brothers—one brother left, I guess—but everybody else is in the area or the region.

Mae: Pretty much it: we're all here. Our brothers are in Lakeland, right. The oldest brother is in Jacksonville, but we're together every week. So family makes it a big thing. We're a very close knit family.

Steve: Well, do you see changes and differences in Zephyrhills? I mean, your children went to school here. Were their experiences different from yours?

Mae: Our children really didn't have that many challenges. They just had regular teenage lives, I believe. Well, I'll take that back. Let me step it back a little bit. Booker had some challenges during his time in high school. There were times when he and Marcus [McCants] both went out looking for jobs. I think they went in tenth or eleventh grade, one or the other, but their friends had jobs so they went looking for jobs. One of the places they went told them they didn't have any openings. They left and one of their [white] friends came right behind them and got the job. And that happened several times. In the classroom setting they had some problems because they were reading *Huckleberry Finn*, that book. They had some problems with that in the classroom. That brought some of those things, but as far as going through a whole lot of stuff, they didn't. It was just normal, everyday stuff, I think.

Steve: Yeah. Marcus brought up *Huckleberry Finn* and one of the points he brought up, which I thought was interesting, is this: we hear the term “minorities” and it basically means that their numbers are smaller. I don't think we associate that word with [numbers] anymore, but Marcus would say that he'd be the only black kid in the class. So, when *Huckleberry Finn*, [was read] and they used the “N word” in the book, everybody would look at him. Or [they'd turn and look at him] in other kinds of circumstances when something would happen. It was like he stood out.

Mae: Oh yeah.

Steve: Yeah. There were very few [blacks], I think like 3% or something, in Zephyrhills. That really is a small number to acclimate into the larger community. It is a little tougher when you're kind of the stand-out in the group. Marcus brought up another thing, too. Marcus actually talked a little bit about—this wouldn't be the case with your kids—a father figure and wanting, *needing*, more. He went to Morehouse [College] because he

wanted [to be around] black culture and more black people. He said here and everywhere he went, he was the only guy in the room. Did your children feel that way?

Mae: I'm not sure how my children felt about that. I knew Booker called his dad a couple of times because of the *Huckleberry Finn* thing and other things because they threatened to kick him out of school, but, other than that, I'm not sure that they had any problems.

Steve: By the time your kids got here, it was more of an accepted way of life. Integration was just part of the how we all lived—except that there were still some societal prejudices: when you're African-American, you're black, so you're really not college material or you're not suited for this or that. That's what Ed Holt said, too. They tried to direct him into different types of careers, farming and things, and not academics. He ended up going to U.S.F. [University of South Florida] and graduating there on his own.

Mae: Well, thinking back, my daughter had a problem with one of her teachers. I think she was like in the tenth or eleventh grade. She had written a paper and this teacher challenged her to say that she couldn't have written the paper. She's pretty sharp and she's still a writer. They had to kind of calm her down because she politely invited the teacher outside. It was going to be [a fight], so they had to call us, me and her dad, to get her and calm her down a little bit. They took care of that, and after that they moved her out of this guy's class. She was just angry to the point where she couldn't function.

Steve: So it was good to look back, though, and see a lot of changes and improvements. Let's talk a little bit about the Martin Luther King Street naming. Did you look at that kind of as: Zephyrhills had made a lot of progress and the integration went relatively smoothly and everybody was kind of living more normal lives, and that was a step back? How did you view the Martin Luther King Street naming?

Mae: [to Elaine] Okay, politician.

Elaine: Ughhhh...Who wants to start?

Gloria: I'll start. For me, it was monumental, and I think that they still have not accepted it. They would not remove the old sign. It has both signs: Martin Luther King and whatever it was—Sixth Avenue. What they told us was that it would mess up the grid to change the name, and of course we know that was a farce. You can do anything you want to do. We were so insistent and we had people coming in from other places—St. Petersburg and Tampa—and all those came to demonstrate with us to let the city of Zephyrhills know that we meant business. But as far as I can see, it still has two signs up, Martin Luther King and Sixth [Avenue], so did we win or did we not?

Elaine: For me, the renaming of Sixth Avenue to Martin Luther King just really reiterated the struggles of the black people in this community to be recognized and appreciated for the works and the contributions that we have made to the society. It kind of reeks because we had to go through so much just for the renaming of a street to Martin Luther King. The protests that we went through...I remember it being so emotional. I remember that my grandson, Miles—I don't have it with me, but I have a copy that somebody made—

they put it in the paper. He was little, three years old maybe, and he had a sign and it said "Everybody should have a dream." It was one of the protest signs and it was just indicative of the time of the times that, no matter how far we get, there is still the struggle. There's a struggle to remain relevant, just to be respected for who you are. That struggle still remains. And I think it's kind of indicative of what we're going through with the current situation in our White House right now, that prejudices still exist in the hearts of people, no matter how much law is written in legislation to try to get rid of it. How can you legislate the heart? And I think those are still struggles that even my kids, even today, [are experiencing] right now in the city of Zephyrhills. Like when Zephyrhills High School had coach Reggie [Roberts]. He was coach, and he brought the team so far, but, for whatever reasons, the powers that be thought to get rid of him, and I think it was because of the color of his skin. It represented a powerful black guy in the community, which we have not had in this community. I think he is a sergeant now? Lieutenant? Captain. Captain Roberts now, and we have deputy Daniel Hill. Those are just two. Two. One, two. This is 2019 and there's only been two.

Steve: There's more. There's a couple more. Oh, there's Eugene Howard—he's retired from Tampa and he came up. He's a black policeman. We have had two more. Two or three more. Some haven't stayed.

Elaine: Okay. I stand corrected. I stand corrected. There's like five.

Steve: Daniel told the story—I don't know if you remember it—about how he had been there around two years and Reverend [Eddie] Nunn touched him on the arm and said, "Is there anybody up there [at the police station] that looks like you, besides you?" And Daniel said, no, not yet, and Reverend Nunn looked at me and said, "Well? What are you waiting for?" *[all laugh]* So they did hire a guy named Vince Williams—he didn't stay that long, but he was there.

Mae: Was he from this area?

Steve: I think he was, but maybe Dade City. Then Gene Howard, he's from Tampa. And then we have a couple of women, a couple Hispanics. We have an Indian-American guy.

Mae: Black and brown—okay!

Steve: So it's been a lot better.

Gloria: So it's moving.

Steve: It's moving. But still, in 2001 was the first African-American police officer and Frankie was the first black person to work in City Hall.

Mae: Oh, I didn't realize that either.

Elaine: We've made a lot of progress, but there's a long way to go.

Steve: I agree. I think you were going to talk about MLK Street?

Mae: Oh, I was just thinking about the challenge we went through. We were working with the black caucus at that time, and it was just an experience to work out and protest. Even in protesting you meet up with people, and it wasn't just the blacks; it was the blacks and whites. Everybody was working together. And I remember one day we were out and some elderly people came by—that's who I work with, elderly people—and they recognize me. I had to stop and chat with people, and somebody told me, "Mae, you're not supposed to be doing that." Why? But, anyway, it was an experience. It was an experience. And by the way, I love living in Zephyrhills. I don't know if it's the family or the people around, but I don't think I'd go anywhere else.

Steve: Well, it's a small town.

Mae: Yeah. It's still home.

Steve: Let me go back a little bit and just talk about some of your neighbors and friends. What was that like? What are some of your memories about Mrs. Dobson?

Gloria: Oh, we absolutely *loved* Irene Dobson. There's nobody like her. And before she got sick, she was a walking history. She knew everything about everybody and everything that went on. She was really a great pillar of this community. I say that like she's not here anymore, but, since her illness, we don't talk to her that much anymore.

Mae: And Mrs. Dobson was our mother's best friend. We were neighbors when we were over in Hercules. They were right next door. So we've known them all my life and we grew up together [with their children].

Elaine: What I remember about Mrs. Irene Dobson is just her inspiration, how she inspired me to get even more involved in my community in the way that only Mrs. Irene Dobson could: [*high pitched voice, pointing with finger*] "Now you know that you need to come and get involved in your community!" And I was like, this lady at her age can be so active—proactive—in not just the black community, but involved with City Hall. However she was involved, she was there. She inspired me. That's what helped to propel us in the black caucus to try to get that street renamed. She was instrumental [in what we did]. I can remember that a couple of years we did the Juneteenth celebration in the park. It was Mrs. Irene Dobson who inspired those kinds of things.

Steve: She worked to get the roads here in the [Krusen Quarters area] paved. The dirt roads. Yeah. [This area is] in the county, and the city helped write the grant, but she did that. I think you're right. I mean, she probably started activism in the black community, and it spilled over until there was no difference. What about Reverend Nunn? You're right by his church [Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church]. I know you went to your family church, but did you have any kind of inter-church relations or activities?

Elaine: Well, what I remember about Pastor Nunn is that he was what we considered an out-of-towner because he commuted from Tampa to be the pastor at Macedonia. But when he

came, he brought a level of excellence and respect that I thought was really appreciated. He and his wife just blended in and became like family to all of us up until the time when he got sick and died.

Production: The reason why we're asking about those two people in particular is because their names keep coming up as people who had a huge impact on the community—not just the black community, but the white community, too, bringing those communities closer together. What would you say Mrs. Dobson's total impact or total legacy is in Zephyrhills?

Elaine: The impact that Miss Irene—we just called her Miss Irene—and Reverend Nunn had on the black community: I think that they both helped us to learn to how to appreciate who we were, and how to take what we have and offer it to other communities, people that were of a different culture and a different color. They both helped us to appreciate that. I know they did that for me. Miss Irene gave me the courage and inspiration to do better, not just for myself but for the community, and to learn to reach out to people of another color, another race other than myself. I was so programmed to just stay within my zone and just live that way, and I think Reverend Nunn and Miss Irene both gave an example of how to cross those barriers in a positive way.

Steve: Do you think that, in this time, the community has come together more?

Mae: I think Miss Irene—and again we just call her Miss Irene, Irene Dobson—inspired us to do so many things. She was the reason Victorious Church of God in Christ entered the Founder's Day parade. I mean, she was just adamant: you need to do this, you need to do this, you need to do this, and she is the reason why our church was in that parade for so many years. We haven't done it in a while, but it was because of Miss Irene.

Steve: And that's what I mean. That's why there is a spillover now. As delineated as [that line] was, I guess, there is a blurring of things and people are more normal.

Gloria: One of the things about Miss Irene was that she would not accept “no.” She didn't care whether you said “no” or not. You were going to do it. So, yeah: that was a push for us.

Elaine: Right. When she just forced you to do it, you didn't have a choice in it, you know? She just told you what you are going to do. She led in that way, which was her own unique way, but we loved it. We loved it. We loved her, and we miss her involvement. I mean, she's still with us, but she can't do the things that she used to do. But she's been instrumental in this community.

Steve: Yes, for sure. She's going to be 95 in April. Just as a matter of fact, I don't know if you're aware: one thing that the Macedonia [Missionary Baptist Church] does every year is a Law Day. They invite law enforcement officers from all different agencies: Zephyrhills, Tampa, Hillsborough, Pasco. They're doing it on January 20th. Daniel was going to be the speaker and he can't now—and he's in the Tampa and he just got promoted, just for your information. He's a detective now. He also was a captain in the United States Army and he served in reserves, I guess, and he went to Afghanistan. He was in Afghanistan for

six months. Anyway, he's doing really well. But that's a neat program, too. It shows everything doesn't always have to be confrontational and adversarial and those kinds of things.

Mae: And I think those programs were started up under Reverend Nunn. Reverend Nunn brought a lot of the community in. He did that well.

Steve: And he joined the Zephyrhills Ministerial Association, which probably ruffled feathers, and it was the right thing to do. I think sometimes he took the right steps to make things right.

Production: We were talking about the Martin Luther King street renaming. You guys made it clear that that was kind of a step backwards. How do you think things have changed in the intervening 14 or 15 years? Have things gotten better? Has progress been made since then to undo the damage that that did?

Elaine: *Hmmmm.* My honest answer? How have things changed or progressed since the renaming of Sixth Avenue to Martin Luther King? I don't see a whole lot of change. Not much has changed. I'm big on education and I've shared my experiences with education, and I think it still happens a lot for kids of color in this area. I think that Martin Luther King epitomized a lot of things for black men. And for the black men in our culture, in our day-to-day in this town, I still see that there is a lot of struggle. I don't see a whole lot of love and wooing and trying to make a better place and open up a whole lot of opportunities.

Steve: Mentoring.

Elaine: Exactly. I don't see it. I see a lot, still today, that our black young boys and girls are in a lot of remedial classes. They're the ones that get the rough end of the deal and I think that's still something that we have to work on to change those dynamics.

Steve: It would be a good thing to kind of maybe take a proactive approach to the school district or school board and say, why don't you come up with something? We talked about examples of Reggie and people that do programs in the schools or hire teachers that are not only black, but maybe aware, even if they're not [black], of how to work with students and recognize the good in all of them, and not just be predisposed to say, "Well, you're not smart. You don't belong in this class."

Elaine: Absolutely. I think if we're going to really change the dynamics for black males, we have to reach out to them with programs. We have to recognize that intelligence is more than just—one thing: back in the day, they used to have the I.Q. tests that just measured a certain type of intelligence, but intelligence comes in a lot of forms. When we recognize that and we find teachers and instructors and programs that know how to nurture and bring these out to help make a better and positive result for black males, then we really will be moving the needle towards a successful, diverse Zephyrhills community.

Production: If we can even go a little bit more abstract, because the Martin Luther King Street sign is a symbol, right? On an individual level and like on education level, what you're saying makes sense. Is there anything that the community or the city could do symbolically that would help repair some of that damage? I mean actions, but I mean something that's meant to honor the community in some way. Is there anything that can be done?

Elaine: Okay, so I'll probably need that question again.

Production: Okay. So on an individual level and on a school level, we've got an answer of how to make progress. Let's say that the Martin Luther King incident is a black eye of a sort on the community. Is there anything that the community could do to reach out to the black community there now? I don't want to make it adversarial.

Steve: Let me ask. The city has been in this area several times because you're an enclave and you haven't been annexed into the city. Back in the day, that [exclusion] was on purpose. In 2005 or 2006, probably '06, some city people, myself included, came out and went around trying to annex and it didn't take. And I think that shows how naive you can be when you're not looking at the whole issue. Frankie told me flat out, "I don't trust you after the street name. I don't want to be in this city. Why would we?" We've talked about it since then and it's still facing resistance. That's why we dropped the annexation part. Instead, we're just going to try to do the sewer and utility system, because you're in the city's utility service area. What I was thinking was, if [the city] actually makes a promise and can keep it, maybe you will have a different thing. Is there still a distrust of government agencies, the school district, the city police, that, even though we think that we're making progress, still exists and is a part of us?

Gloria: I think that a very simple solution to me—this is just my thoughts—since we changed the name of Sixth Avenue to Martin Luther King, why not take the Sixth Avenue signs down? Why not start there, and then we'll think, Oh! It actually changed.

Steve: Well because they actually voted not to name it. That was a compromise that they would have [both names on the sign]. City council actually voted three to two to change the name back. After that, two of the people who voted for the street naming got defeated in the next election. And they both, actually, got reelected. Lance Smith was one of them and he's on [the council] now. He got reelected later, but in the heat of the moment, two of them got voted out and one got reelected by one vote. Over the street name. That's what happened.

Elaine: I think that there just needs to be more courting and more wooing in the community to build the trust. It's going to have to start, and it's not going to happen overnight. It's a long—my elders used to say—long road of hope. It's a long way to go, but if we start with programs that would target black and brown kids with some kind of something; hone in on what interests these kids; bring in some teachers and educators of diversity; let them see teachers and educators who look like them, who are not afraid of them, who will not push them back in a corner, but bring them to the forefront of whatever the program may be; make them feel that they are intelligent beings, because I believe we all are, but we are misguided sometimes in our walk. It starts with the young kids having

this program, "Diversity Day": let's celebrate Diversity Day in elementary school. Let's make that part of our curriculum. Make them the stars. Make them talk about and find out what kind of things make these children thrive and strive. When you talk to them, you're going to get educated. They're going to educate you about educating them. It'll build that way, and they'll feel the respect over time. They're going to build a respect and they're going to feel that they are not overlooked or taken for granted or even hated: "I feel like I *am* somebody."

Steve: Okay.

Production: Okay. I think we got into where I was kind of looking to go. So you're saying that the way to have a brighter future is to start with the children, to help them understand that, hey! We're all in this together. This is one community,

Elaine: Right. When you reach those kids, you are going to reach that family; and when you reach that family, you're going to reach that community.

Steve: Yeah. From the government perspective, it's too splintered, and the city's doing this, the county's doing this, school's doing this, and they should work together, because they govern all of the same people. If they would find a way to pitch in together, that's good.

Mae: That's...saying a whole lot.

Steve: Well, I know. But I think that if you can do stuff like that, sit on the S.A.C. committee...

Mae: What committee was that you just said?

Steve: The S.A.C. committee. One of the School Advisory Committees. To get everybody working together, you've got to find a way to bring parents in and you've got to pull police in and the school board and some of the government stuff.

Audrey: Yeah. I mean, I'm a board member with Main Street, and, just something I've noticed in our nice downtown, we have very little representation, you know? You have little to almost no representation. [*Audrey McGuire served as the City of Zephyrhills' Historic Preservation Officer and sat in on several of the interviews.*]

Elaine: Right. So if the word doesn't cross over a certain [point], we don't get that word.

Mae: ...Until it's actually going on. A lot of things go on [that we don't know about].

Elaine: Maybe in the newspapers, but we don't read the newspapers a lot.

Audrey: That [lack of communication] needs to change.

Production: Just to make sure we stay on track here: as a point of history, Mae, which principal was it that you guys had the back and forth with?

Mae: Oh, okay. The principal during that time was Raymond B. Stewart.

Gloria: Yes. Mr Stewart.

Prod: That's who I thought it was. What were your impressions of him?

Mae: Mr. Stewart was okay. He was a fair person. Very fair. And that's one of the reasons we were able to get to him to [make changes]. To get with Mr. Stewart, all we had to say is "we want to meet," and he would make provisions for us to meet with him all the time. We had no problems with Mr. Stewart.

Production: Okay, good. That's kind of what we've heard from other people, too, in other stories. He just kind of was like, "Alright, we can do things, but I want to do things the right way." I've mentioned this question to you earlier, Elaine, and it's something that I've posed to every person we've interviewed: I'm 26 years old. I was born in 1992—

Elaine: You're an embryo!

Prod: —so when you guys talk about segregation, I'm just back here in disbelief almost. I can't even conceive of what it was like, but I think that's an important part of history to educate people my age and Audrey's age on [segregation], to make sure that it doesn't get lost. What would be one story that you would like recorded that kind of sums up your experience during that time?

Mae: Jeez! I can't answer that.

Production: Yeah. Well, okay, well maybe this will help to sum it up. What's something that maybe you told your kids at some point about that time? Was there anything like that?

Elaine: Well, how would I sum it up to my kid? One of the things that I really don't like, but it's one of the things that I have to do, is that I have to school my kids and educate my kids to realize that, in order for you to survive in the world that we live in—not just in Zephyrhills, but the world, and I hate to say these words—maybe you have to learn, even though you may know how to assert yourself, you have to learn to just calm yourself. I almost say "dummy down." In order to survive, you can't be so confrontational sometimes. I have to say this to my grandson. You have to be careful, because you are a black man. He's not only a black man; his skin is *very* dark and he's muscular. He's not so tall, but he's muscular, and his look can be intimidating. And I say, you have to realize that we live in a world where you're just your look. You don't have to do anything or say anything; you have to just learn to just be quiet. If they're confrontational, if you get into a confrontation, just be quiet. Walk away from that situation and, if we need to, we can do something after the situation is over. Don't try to handle something yourself. It's sad that I have to do that with my grandson, but I don't want my grandson to be a dead statistic. That's one of the things that epitomizes where I come from. That's just my perspective. Everybody doesn't have that, but I know that a lot of people do have that experience where they have to have that talk with their children. We've been there and experienced some things, but people are bolder today. I think people are more

emboldened to do things, where they weren't at a time. They are now, so you have to talk to your kids and your grandkids about how to survive the next day and just play it cool, because who knows? You can be walking down the street like Trayvon Martin, a kid with some skittles in his hand. My grandson is 18 years old. You've got to know that everybody's not looking at you friendly. I hate to say that to him, but I have to say candid things to him for him to be able to survive. I don't want to pass on any prejudice, but I want him to be educated about how people look at a situation differently because of the way they've been cultured.

Steve: You know, this is making me think that our little experiment here [in Zephyrhills] is just a microcosm of the United States.

Mae: It is. Yeah.

Steve: You're looking at it from our point of view or that of people we know, but we could be anywhere almost, having this conversation.

Elaine: Right. Absolutely.

Steve: Thanks so much.

Production: Does anybody want to weigh in on that question at all? No? Elaine's got it? Okay, good. I know that's a big question. To lighten the mood a little bit: I found it interesting when you said that you guys begged your parents to go to the integrated school. That seems so different from what I've heard other people's experiences have been. So what made you like so gung-ho to jump into such an alien-like experience for you guys?

Gloria: Well, the integration experience for me was just really, really bad. I never begged my mother. [Mae] made me! I didn't want to change schools. I was perfectly happy with going to school with all blacks because that's what I knew. That was my comfort zone. And to move me out of an all-black school into a white school that didn't want me to be there in the first place...I didn't want to be there either.

Elaine: Well, you certainly didn't lighten up the mood!

Mae: Same for me. I guess [Gloria] was older at the time, but, my brother and I, we've always been daredevils, you know? And we just wanted a challenge, to see what it would be like, this new experience. It was just something challenging. That's the way I felt. I wasn't afraid about it or anything like that. After I was there for a year, I wanted to go to the other school, but our parents wouldn't allow it and we were stuck at Zephyrhills [High School].

Steve: Now, before you went to school here, you didn't know any white kids?

Mae: No, none. I didn't know anybody. Just like I told you, the only white person that was in our life was the store guy. Other than that, everything around us was black.

Steve: Wow. Now I know something about you, [Mae]. You were a cheerleader in high school?

Elaine: No, her daughter.

Steve: Oh, your daughter.

Mae: I have to tell you, my parents, especially my father, was really strict. We could do no cheerleading.

Elaine: It was a little short skirt.

Mae: Yeah. My daughter was.

Steve: Alright, so that does show how things change. Yeah. I mean, your son was a football star and your daughter was a cheerleader.

Mae: Yeah. Well, all my boys played ball. Yeah. And at the different levels, so they were all kind of sports people.

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