

Interview with Peggie Senior
April 4, 2006
Interviewer: Jackie Wilkes

Senior: – the Mansion. And, in those days, if you had a job like that, you were really considered high in the African American society.

(break in tape)

Senior: – Second Street, Dr. Webster, the dentist, lived on Second Street. The Joneses lived on Second Street, and there were some people also, and this man was a plasterer, and his name was Lee. And his son was Irwin Lee, who later was on the Springfield Fire Department. But anyway, I had to go out there and stay with my aunt every so often to please her and my dad. Then they would always have a Halloween party. The New Hope Baptist Church, which was then on Eighth and Miller, would have a Halloween party every year, and I remember being so frightened because I didn't like the Halloween costumes. My mom belonged to Zion Baptist Church, which was right around the corner from New Hope, on Ninth and Carpenter. And I remember all holidays, Christmas and Easter, I would have to say two pieces. I would have to say one at New Hope, and I'd have to say one at Zion.

Wilkes: What do you mean by pieces? Let me interrupt you for just a minute. There was a little difficulty with the recording, so I'm just going to say, we're interviewing Peggie Senior at her home in the first few days of April. April, what did we say?

Senior: The fourth.

Wilkes: In the year 2006, and she's in the midst of remembering lots of good things. I may not have recorded some of the Sunday events, and the Jolly Club going to Riverton, and so I cause you to go back, but now, where you are is, telling us about Second Street and the people there.

Senior: Well, like I said, Second Street was the people, very influential, lived on Second Street, and College, and Spring. I remember going there. I remember just vaguely riding the streetcar before they took the streetcar tracks up, and then when they took the streetcar tracks up, finally they covered over the bricks, and we used to skate (laughter) on what is now Martin Luther King, was 18th Street then. We'd skate. That was how less frequent the traffic was at that time. We would ride our sleds in the winter time, and because when the snow came it stayed, we walked to Lincoln School, back. The cold days, we'd take our lunch. Sometimes it was wrapped up in newspaper. (laughter) I remember taking egg sandwiches (laughter) to school, and I guess children

now would think you're crazy. They gave me a fried egg sandwich, but once a month, the PTA would have lunch. They'd have hot lunch. You could buy your lunch. When I went to grade school, we would have to go to Palmer School for sewing, I believe, and then we went to another school for cooking because it was required that girls take cooking and sewing, and boys took woodwork, so we would know every – Thursday I believe it was – we would go to another school to take either sewing or cooking. One semester you took cooking, and one semester you took sewing.

Wilkes: What was your primary school?

Senior: My primary school was Lincoln.

Wilkes: Lincoln.

Senior: Lincoln School. I had gone to Lincoln. I had a sister who was ten years older than I am. She went to Lincoln, also. But I want to backtrack because the house that I now live in is the only other residence that I've lived in beside the house on Cass Street, which was my grandmother's, my father's, which I was born in. My mother died in that house. She was brought back – at those times, in death, they'd bring people home for the wake. She was brought back, my dad was brought back there, and...

Wilkes: Give me the name of your parents.

Senior: OK. My mother's name was Virginia Carr. It really was Virginia Johnson Carr. She was adopted. My father's name was George William Neal. He had one sister that lived, and her name was Eleanor Chandler.

Wilkes: And your maiden name was...?

Senior: Neal. N-E-A-L. But I want to tell you a little bit about some things that went on. I remember that everybody, on Friday, you had fish and beer. And you drank jug beer, and sometimes if you were a coal miner, you had a bucket, and you'd get the beer in that. A lot of the African American men were miners. My father was a miner. He drove a mule team in the mines, and he was on the rescue team, also. Then he left the mine –

Wilkes: Which mine?

Senior: I believe they said he worked at the mine that's out in the southwest part of Springfield. Now, I don't know, I think it was Woodside, but I don't know the number. My uncle worked at the mine that is now where the ballpark is, – I think that would be about 20th and Capitol. That's where he worked at. I remember hearing, the mine whistle would go off in the morning, and I would see my uncle with his miner's bucket, walking over to the mine. He lived off

16th Street, and he had worked so long that he had a “miner’s hump.” So anyway, back to on Friday, why they’d go to – there was a tavern here called Steve Lach’s, on 19th and South Grand, and they would go there to get their beer, and then there were some that was frequent daily, people there, and they would be outside. I also remember that there was a tavern called Bill Stallone. That was on 18th and Brown. Then, let’s see, what else do I want to say? The East-enders could never figure why Mason Streets were called this. I never could remember why they would call us the East-enders, but anyway, Mason Street had Mae Bozis and Scotty Reynolds’, and the Hi-D-Ho, and so that’s where people that wanted to buy their jug beer would buy their beer in the North End.

Wilkes: Wait a minute. We’re emphasizing jug beer, here, and you’re still young, so tell us a little bit about your schooling.

Senior: Well, OK. My schooling? I went to Lincoln School. They had a PTA. We had teachers that were very dedicated. I don’t remember the teachers making any difference with us because of color. They were very strict down the line. Everybody was reprimanded, regardless of who you were, if you misbehaved. They rewarded you, and praised you, and worked with you so you could attain the excellence that you were capable of. There was graduation on the 12th grade. There were programs in all stages –

Wilkes: The graduation was from Lincoln?

Senior: All the elementary schools in Springfield had a graduation, if they were elementary school, at eighth grade. So you wore a ribbon. Instead of wearing a ribbon, you wore two ribbons for your school colors when you were going to graduate.

Wilkes: OK.

Senior: We had graduation pictures. Graduation was usually in the morning. Then when you went to high school, there were four high schools that I remember. There was Feitshans, there was Lanphier, Springfield, and then Cathedral, and Cathedral High School – now, I’m not sure where it was but I know that the Cathedral Church was on Seventh and Monroe, and that they would play bingo there in the basement. And right now, the City Municipal Parking Lot is there on that site now. I was in the Girl Scout Troop in grade school, and we would always have a big toy sale around Christmas, and that would be at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel. We had a cookie sale every early spring, like the Girl Scouts do now. If you sold 100 cookies, you were rewarded by being able to go to the Governor’s mansion for a tea, and I was able to do that several times. I remember taking orders for my cookies because my parents didn’t do that. I’d go from house to house. Then the time we got ready to deliver, I had a little red wagon, and I would put my cookies in the wagon and

go from door to door with my cookies. If I remember right, they were like 35 cents a box, and then they went to 50 cents a box. There was downtown a place called the Food Center, and the Food Center baked the cookies every year, and they –

Wilkes: Oh, they were baked in Springfield?

Senior: They were baked in Springfield at that time, the Food Center. And the man that worked there was named Mr. Grady, and Mr. Grady was the brother of Miss Grady and a lady named Miss Ing – I can't think what the other lady's name was. She had a sister, and they both worked at the Douglass Community Center, which was on the site of the Boys' Club now. And that was a big, old house. It had three floors. The third floor was really high, which I remember for a while there was a place called the Top Flight, and that's where they'd play records, and the teenagers would go up there, and they'd play records.

Wilkes: And dance?

Senior: And dance. You walked up a lot of steps, and the first floor, the Urban League office was in there, and then they had another larger room that the Girl Scouts met in and where the Colored Women's Club had teas. And I can't really remember what was down in the basement, but I know they had a great, big field, and the boys would play football and baseball in that. And then the Drum Corps, when they formed it, we would practice there.

Wilkes: Were you in the Drum Corps?

Senior: I was in the Drum Corps.

Wilkes: Did you belong early to the Urban League?

Senior: No, I never belonged to the Urban League.

Wilkes: But that's where the Girl Scouts met.

Senior: The Girl Scouts met there, and I'm saying the Urban League office was there.

Wilkes: Yes, I understand.

Senior: That's when Mr. Winston was there. And I don't know about the Guild at that time, but I do know that, one of the things I want to point out, that we in our own race of people were prejudiced, and we also cut people out. Because I remember when I was first married, I wanted to join the Urban League, and at that time they voted the members in, (laughter) and someone turned my name in, and they would not vote me in. So (laughter), I lived to see the day

when they asked me to join, and (laughter) I didn't join. (laughter) But since then, I have, but, you know, this was the Guild.

Wilkes: That's kind of an interesting memory. Can you kind of generalize what the prejudice was about?

Senior: Well, at that time, I believe it was because I had a large family.

Wilkes: You're speaking of the children?

Senior: I had children. Children.

Wilkes: Yeah. We'll get to that.

Senior: I had seven children. My husband did not have the type of job that he probably... I never knew the reason why they turned me down.

Wilkes: Yeah. No, that's just of interest. OK. Now, you graduated. Did you graduate before you married?

Senior: OH, you mean from high school?

Wilkes: Yes.

Senior: Oh, yes. I graduated before I married. I graduated a year before, a year and a half.

Wilkes: Again, the high school was what high school?

Senior: I graduated from Feitshans.

Wilkes: Feitshans.

Senior: Right.

Wilkes: And did you go to work then?

Senior: When I graduated from Feitshans, I was supposed to have gone to U of I. I had a scholarship, but I didn't know I had that scholarship until years later, when I was married and moved in this house, was going through some papers and found this postal card that I had won a county four-year scholarship, and I don't understand why no one ever followed that up.

Wilkes: That is just amazing, isn't it?

Senior: Right. But anyway, I went to Springfield Junior College – that's what it was

at that time – and I took advanced shorthand, and also I believe another course – I can't even remember now, but I went two nights a week, and then I got married.

Wilkes: Yes, and your husband's name?

Senior: My husband's name is Clarence, Clarence L. because our son's name is Clarence, too, so Clarence Lester is my husband.

Wilkes: Oh, OK. And you married in what year?

Senior: I married in January of '52, so we've been married 54 years.

Wilkes: Wonderful. And when did you go to work? Did the children come before you went to work?

Senior: Oh, yes. I didn't have to work. At that time, the only part-time work you could get was day work, so I did day work, and I'd babysit, and I took in laundry. Day work is cleaning somebody's house, OK, in case someone listening to this doesn't know what it was. Then my sister and I, what we would do is, she would work one day, and I'd babysit because she had four children, and then we'd switch off like that. I went to work through a lady named Mrs. Mamie Hill for a catering service, Scott's Caterers. And through that, we were working as caterers at a party for a lady that was the Director of Public Health, and I know by God's leading I asked her about a job, and she said, I can't hire you, but my office contracts work out to Manpower, and through that I learned how to key punch and went on to stay with that place, and I would work at night. My husband would work days. He'd babysit nights. So then, when our oldest daughter was getting ready to graduate, I called Security Bank – well, then it was Security Federal – and asked them about getting a job for my daughter. The lady that I talked to was one of the ladies that had graduated with me. In fact, she had lived across the street from me when we grew up, and we went on to Feitshans together, but times being what they were, she was able to get the type of job that she had at the savings and loan. I wasn't because they didn't hire people at that time.

Wilkes: They didn't hire...?

Senior: They didn't hire African Americans. So I called her about my daughter going to work there.

Wilkes: And your daughter's name?

Senior: My daughter's name is Debra. And she said, well, they've been trying to get in touch with you, because unbeknownst to me, my husband's uncle had worked at Security Federal, and his brother years ago, running the elevator.

So, being the person that he was, my husband's uncle, Walter Senior, had called and talked to one of the men who was on the Board of Directors. His name was Attorney Gasaway and he asked him about hiring somebody black down there, and about hiring me. They had been trying to get in touch with me, so instead of my daughter getting a job, I got a job. My daughter, Candy, who is our second daughter, she was able to work at Fifth Street Flower Shop when the public schools went to a shortened day. So we called Fifth Street, and she was hired by Fifth Street because my sister had married a man named Nathan Chandler. She and Nathan cleaned offices at night, extra, and through cleaning offices, Nathan had become friends with Truman Cole, who was the owner of Fifth Street. And so then my sister had worked at Fifth Street, and so since my sister worked at Fifth Street, my daughter Candy got hired at Fifth Street.

Wilkes: It helped. In this era, we say, it counts who you know, and that's what was happening even then, right?

Senior: Right, that it counted who you knew.

Wilkes: That's right. Now, by then, when Debra and Candy were getting jobs, how many children did you have?

Senior: We had seven.

Wilkes: Yes. Perhaps you would name all of them?

Senior: OK. There was Debra, Candy, Clarence Neal, Lester Kevin, Patricia Marie, Herman Alfonse, and Mark Gary. All of them were required to work during high school. They still participated in sports. The rule was, when you received your check, you had to put half in the bank, and you were able to keep half.

Wilkes: This was a family rule?

Senior: Family rule.

Wilkes: Wow, good rule.

Senior: And so, when each of them graduated from high school, they all had nice bank accounts. We did not take any of their money. We still provided them with their necessities, their clothes, and those things, we paid them. As they all reached the age where they could drive, there was a family car for them to drive. We were able later on to buy cars for the younger ones. They were younger. But, getting back to when I was small –

(laughter)

Wilkes: Good. OK.

Senior: – there were grocery stores in the neighborhood. I lived off of 17th and Cass. There was a grocery store on 18th and Cass, and that was run by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. And Mrs. Wilson always wore an apron and a little sun bonnet, and she called people “girlie.” She always called you “girlie.” Then on 18th and Cook, there was another grocery store, and that was Dominick’s. Another grocery store was on 18th and Clay, which was one block from the Wilsons’ grocery store, and that was run by the Abingdons, who later sold their property and moved to where you drive up to Kmart off of Clear Lake, and they sold that property to the Shaheens, and Shaheens put in a stock car racing place there.

Wilkes: Really?

Senior: Yes. And so when you –

Wilkes: That takes a lot of space.

Senior: – so when you drive up that hill where you’re going to Kmart, if my memory serves me correct, that was the hill you drove up to go to the Abingdons’. They had a farm there, and they had a really nice house, and I could go out there in the summer after my mother died, and I’d spend a week or two at the Abingdon’s. But it wasn’t really that much fun, other than the good food because they had turkeys that ran loose, and I was afraid of the chickens, and (laughter) I didn’t like the pigs, but Mr. Abingdon was very clean, and the Abingdons later – when they sold that – they moved and built a house off of 18th and Stuart, and that house is still there. It’s a very nice brick house. It’s the best house on 18th Street going north or south between, I would say, Madison – well, from the very highest point on Martin Luther King or 18th Street to the very lowest part. That’s the nicest house there. It’s a brick house, and it’s been well kept.

Wilkes: The Abingdon farm was a place you went each summer, or several summers?

Senior: Well, I went about a couple of summers. I didn’t really like it. They were good friends of my father’s. Mr. Abingdon worked at the State House, and he had at those times, I guess, the mail clerk jobs or messenger jobs were something, you know, was really – but he was a big official – both of them – in Zion Baptist Church. Then, let’s see. It was a Girl Scout troop, and Mrs. Mildred Burton, who lived on 16th and Brown, was a Girl Scout leader. And then there was a girl named Francisca Brown, and her mother’s name, I believe, was Sanfeliss. She was the older Girl Scout leader, also. We all went to camp.

Wilkes: What camp?

Peggie Senior

Senior: Camp Widjiwagan. We went to Camp Widjiwagan. I don't remember... I remember that we all went – the Girl Scouts, black and white, were there. I remember that's when I was introduced to French toast. Let's see. What else can I remember?

Wilkes: That's a nice treat.

Senior: Yes, it was. I remember that was really fantastic, even though I came home with a lot of bugs.

Wilkes: (laughter)

Senior: There was a drugstore on Eighth and Washington called Ideal Drug Store, and I remember it was right next to Cansler's. We would try to go in Cansler's and be really cool, and we'd go in Ideal Drug Store first and try to buy cigarettes, and then put on dark glasses and go to Cansler's, like nobody would know who we were, you know. We were slipping in, a kid thing.

Wilkes: (laughter) Because of the dark glasses?

Senior: Because of the dark glasses. I remember the Masonic Hall. After it moved off of Adams Street, it went to Eighth Street between Washington and Jefferson. It was upstairs – you had to walk up a lot of steps – and they'd have dances there. Let's see, what else? Oh, the affluent people went to the Panama, and I remember there was a Colored Women's Democrat Club, and –

Wilkes: Did you belong to the Colored Women's Club?

Senior: No, I never did. I remember –

Wilkes: Even the one that was book-centered?

Senior: No, that was –

Wilkes: Literary?

Senior: – the James Weldon Johnson Study Guild.

Wilkes: Oh, thank you.

Senior: I belong to that now, but they were in existence when I was younger because I remember they gave me an award because I liked to read, and some (laughter) they gave me an award for something. There was the Democrat Women's Club. I have pictures of that because my mom was a member of that. There was a Colored Women's Club, and they really introduced the younger black

women to social etiquette because they always had teas, and at that time, they were literary teas. You recited, you sang, you exposed your musical talents. So, I mean, the women always dressed. Women dressed then when they went to church and when they went to any kind of social event.

Wilkes: At that point, what church were you going to?

Senior: Well, at that point in my life, I was going to the Church of God in Christ on Brown Street because my mother had died when I was nine, and my dad had remarried a lady that belonged there, and so at that point I was there. Oh, the lady that was at the Douglass Community Center that was where the Boys Club is now, her name was Mrs. Jenkins. Mrs. Jenkins had the Brownie troop, and then Miss Grady, her sister, had the Girl Scouts, which later Miss Burton took over the Girl Scout troop, so that was the thing there. Then there also was Miss Juanita Walker. She is an aunt of Doris Robinson. She was the one that had the Girl Scouts, too. Then there was the Y-Teens. At that time, the YWCA segregated the girls in high school. The African American young girls were under the tutelage of a lady named Mrs. Mongolia Bradley, who was a black hairdresser at that time, and she took charge of the Y-Teens. Then later on, I helped a lady named Margaret Wilkins, who took the Y-Teens. One time we baked cookies for them to have a cookie sale. The girls took orders, and we baked all the cookies for the cookie sale for those girls to raise money for that.

Wilkes: Are you telling me that the Girl Scouts in camp and in the troop were not segregated, but at that time the YWCA – was?

Senior: The troop was. The troops were segregated. I don't know whether it was because of where you lived, you know, or went to school because at that time you went to school in your own neighborhood.

Wilkes: That's right.

Senior: But the troops, I would say, were segregated because I was also a Cub Scout leader, and we just had African American children.

Wilkes: That was before the schools –

Senior: Well, that was before –

Wilkes: – desegregation?

Senior: That was before the lawsuit and all that because we're talking about the late thirties and forties.

Wilkes: Right.

Peggie Senor

Senor: But the Girl Scout camp, to my remembrance, was not.

Wilkes: I see.

Senor: Now, we may have all been in separate tents, but I remember us all eating together, and all those things together. But the Y-Teens, the girls in the high school had their own separate group because Miss Mongolia Bradley was over it, and then Margaret Wilkins took over. Now, whether that was a thing of the Y, or whether that happened because, you know, just because of the time that we were in, you know, I don't know. Bridgeview Beach –

Wilkes: Oh, yes. Bridgeview. Did you go there?

Senor: Went there. Sunday, that was the day, and you'd want to hurry up if there was not a Songfest, because almost once a month the black churches had a Songfest which moved from church to church, and the choirs would sing, and that would be a wonderful occasion. While we're talking about church, they had a Sunday School Union, which was the superintendents and teachers of all the African American churches. They had this Union, and then, so every year they'd have a Sunday school picnic, and it was a Union picnic. They would go have it at the lake sometimes, sometimes at Lincoln Park, and Washington Park, and Bunn Park, but it was a joint effort. They had a Songfest, and then in the summertime we would go to the Bridgeview Beach because this was a beach that everybody was there. They would bring busloads of people up from St. Louis, and of course all the young girls wanted to go meet the boys, and everything. Bridgeview Beach is the better beach, but when the desegregation came and they desegregated, they closed Bridgeview and made it private, but they've always said that Bridgeview was a better beach than Lake Park. So sometimes (laughter) you cut off your nose to spite your face, you know. They could have left both of them open, but they didn't. They came up with some reason why they couldn't. The beauticians – there were several beauticians in Springfield, and they had their own group. People looked up to them, and there were certain ones that we felt were (laughter), you know, more classy than the other.

Wilkes: Now, you mentioned beauticians. When you began to work at Security Bank, were you trying to be classy at that time and go to a beautician?

Senor: Well, I've always gone to beauticians because I was reared in a family that always put the best foot forward. My dad was buying his home. Every other year he washed the house. Every other year the house was painted. Every Saturday, it was cleaning day. Every Sunday, we ate in the dining room, and my job was to iron the napkins.

Wilkes: You carried that kind of status need on with your kids?

Senor: Somewhat, somewhat because of the days and time. People are here and there, but when our children were coming up, no. We sat down. We had Sunday dinner at the table, and because of the size of our family, we always had to sit (laughter) at the dining room table because of the size we had. But no, that was a tradition that has always been carried on.

Wilkes: And you know, people listening to this may really not remember when families ate together. It is such a different situation today. But your family – the children you birthed – all ate with you each meal?

Senor: Well, they all ate breakfast together because I've always been able to be home with them for breakfast. When I went to Security Federal, I didn't have to leave home until they left home, and I got off either before they were home, or, shortly thereafter, so that was one of the good things about the job – one of many good things about Security Bank. Security Bank was a family place, and they made me feel very welcome, and they never made me feel like I was different. In fact, sometimes they'd be talking, and they would forget that I didn't know about going to the Leland Hotel, and (laughter) places that they went. But back to family. No, I always cooked breakfast for my children – waffles, pancakes, oatmeal, all those things.

Wilkes: Mush?

Senor: Right. No, we didn't have mush (laughter). Then they either –

Wilkes: (laughter)

Senor: – took their lunch or bought their lunch. When we were on Cass Street, they would come home for lunch sometimes, like I did. They'd come home for their lunch because they had an hour for lunch then, so they had time to walk home and walk back. We always have had our evening meal together.

Wilkes: And that, I think, is what I was referring to.

Senor: Right.

Wilkes: That is almost unheard of today.

Senor: Well, they all had breakfast together until the schools, split like they did with the junior high.

Wilkes: Have your children caused that to happen with their birth kids?

Senor: Most of them have meals together, with the exception of – some of them are so involved in sports and other activities, but they still manage to sit down and have family time. Even if it's in the TV room, you know, everybody eating

around the TV, there's still that thing of being together. We all get together as a family as much as possible. When someone comes, birthdays are a big thing in our family, which is a tradition that we've carried on through. I remember the churches in Springfield. There was Pleasant Grove, and Union, and St. John's, and Calvary, and New Hope. New Hope – I want to talk about New Hope. New Hope was on Eighth and Miller, and that was a very small group of older people a lot. Then their pastor was killed in a car accident, and they had a series of other pastors, and then when something with the city came through, or some revitalization, they wanted that property. Someone wanted that property, and they sold the property, and then they moved, and the mood of the church changed. It was very laid back, just traditional, but then when they moved, a new pastor came in, and the whole flavor of the church changed. It became more Pentecostal, more vibrant Baptist. You know, I'll put it like that. Not down grading it, but just the pastor changed, and it shows how when a pastor changes, so many times the flavor or the temperament of the church changes. Maybe that's not good words to use.

Wilkes: Well, we're reaching the end of this tape, and I want to turn it over. On the other side, we'll talk a little bit about your involvement in church, which has gone into your call, and things of this era. So, let's stop right now.

END OF SIDE A, START OF SIDE B

Wilkes: We're talking in April of the year 2006 with Peggie Senior at her home, and she is remembering portions of her life, and recording an oral history for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. The segment of the library that this is going to be recorded for is the African American oral history program. Now, Peggie, tell us about Schonbrun's.

Senior: OK. Schonbrun's was a grocery store on 17th and Brown, across from the Brown Street Church of God in Christ. The lady – she was a little, short lady – and her daughter and son-in-law worked there in the grocery store with her, that I remember. She was (laughter) a type of person that, they fed a lot of people, you know, without pay. A lot of people looked down on the grocery store, but she was a mainstay for a lot of people, and I don't believe that she received the recognition she should. When you went in, at that time, you said I want two slices of this, and I want two potatoes, and where you could do that. You would order certain things, and they'd try to get it for you, but that's something also that is almost a thing of the past. The other thing is that the Women's Club really initiated, I believe, in the young ladies of my time the desire to pattern after that because we had a club called the Eight Toppers, and then there was one called Las Amigas. There were eight of us in our club, and I think there like eight girls in the other club, but we sort of patterned our clubs after them on an upscale beat, and as I was sitting here, I just wanted to say that because there were a lot of good things in the African American community that, if they were happening now, perhaps maybe built on the

same premise but adapted to times now, it would be very beneficial to the young people. We were all made to feel that we had something to offer, and that there was someone there to help us develop that – not saying there were not those who went astray (laughter) because all of us did at some point in time. But there was always somebody there for you. I lived in a mixed neighborhood with Germans and Italians that my father had grown up with. Most neighborhoods on the east side of town were that way. There were very few totally black on the southeast part of town. Most everyone took great pride in their homes. They were there for one another because I had the hives one time. I was very sick and could not come out, and my father's German friend, told him what to go to the store to get, and they were there, for me, and we always got along. I mean, we were in their house. They would come to ours. I didn't know any difference until I guess somebody told me that I was colored (laughter) at that time. But, now, you wanted to know about my call. When I was 14 years old, my stepmother left, and I was in the Church of God in Christ at that time. They are adamant about teaching the word of God. My dad bought me a Bible from – I'm trying to think, did he buy me that Bible before or afterwards? I believe he bought me the Bible when I was older – from Reverend Herring, who was the pastor at that time of Zion Baptist Church, and I read that Bible and still have it – just read it like you'd read a book. It was always fascinating to me, now that I think back. And I read that Bible, and I read that Bible, and then I don't know. I still have that Bible, and (laughter) silly thing – my first boyfriend was named Richard Haines, and Richard worked at the Leland Hotel, and he would walk from the Leland Hotel when he got off of work - -as a bus boy, I guess that's what he did there – to our house on 17th and Cass to see me. I would always act really indifferent. Well, Richard decided he didn't want this, and he started (laughter) dating a girl named Barbara. She was Anna Jean Pettiford's sister. But anyway, he started dating Barbara, and I just like to had a fit, so I wrote all these – I just poured out my heart – in the Bible. I wrote all this stuff in my Bible, and (laughter) so then, after I got older and read it I said, oh, my goodness. So I put this Bible in – it was falling apart by that time – I put it in a plastic bag, and I put it upstairs – it's upstairs now in my attic – with our family Bible, which traces people back to 1827. But anyway, I read the Bible, and I was in the Church of God in Christ. They are just strong teachers in the word of God. So, when my stepmother left – she left my father – I'm going to put this in. One day, he went to work, and she had been planning to move all along because they had differences, and when he went to work, she had it all planned, and she moved out. When he came home, she was gone, and it just devastated my father. So, we need to really be careful how we do things, because we can crush people's lives, and we need to be... It's just so sad. But anyway, when she left, I stayed with Church of God in Christ for a while, and then I went back to Zion, which was my mother's church, and I had attended the majority of time, other than when I went to visit with my dad at New Hope. In the course of time, I got married, and my husband's church was St. John's, and knowing that we needed to be in a family together, one church, I

joined St. John's. In St. John's, I began to work with Vacation Bible School, and Sunday School, and I worked under a lady named Dorothy Curtis. She showed me how to be Superintendent because she was Superintendent at that time. I remember baking beans and things with her, getting ready for a Sunday School picnic and different things at church. I kept working in church, and then, when a Reverend Ingram came, and they began to have Bible studies, and really I began to get back into the word again, I just began to read. I became Superintendent of Sunday School, and then I became District Superintendent of Sunday School for our South District, which is the churches from Lincoln down to the southern tip of Illinois. Then I became Conference District Superintendent, and I was involved in Christian education and the Commission on Evangelism in our church. I just kept working around, and I was just drawn, and everybody kept saying, well, why don't you do what the Lord is telling you, all that. I hadn't heard anything (laughter). They was all telling me this. So then, one week, my stepmother, who I always still remained close to, she was ill, and had an illness where her blood wasn't flowing through one of the veins in her neck and getting oxygen to her brain as it should, so she had a form of dementia, and I was there with another young lady that she had helped to rear. We were standing there, and all of a sudden, Mom started talking about, take off your shoes. And I said, oh, Mom, who was a very neat and clean housekeeper – you know, spic and span – I said, oh, in her mind, she's cleaned house, and she doesn't want us to track it up. She kept talking about, take off your shoes. This was on a Tuesday, and on a Thursday, I traveled with our church to what is called a District Conference. While we were there, this man got up, and he was talking about traveling down the highway, and taking off your (laughter) shoes. Then when the preacher got up to preach, he began to preach on this, and it was like, somebody slapped me upside my head (laughter). I thought, what? You know... And so I stood up. I don't even know what I said at that time, but I remember somebody saying, well, you come onto the altar. And so there was Gary McCants, and Tyson Partee. They were all preachers. Tyson Partee is now a Presiding Elder, and my pastor was Sammy Hooks at that time. He's a Presiding Elder now. He was there, and his wife was there, and John Lambert, and some other people. So they went to the altar, and we started praying. They started praying (laughter) over me. It was lunchtime. Everybody else went downstairs for lunch, but they stayed and prayed, all through the lunch hour. And I remember, it was like I was just taken out of that church, and I went to another dimension, and I accepted the call because all of a sudden, all this started coming back, about the take off your shoes, you're on holy ground, and it took on a meaning for me. I remember I accepted a call, and (laughter) after that, my pastor's wife, Mrs. Hooks, said I was looking for a dress because my son was getting ready to get married. I went to buy this dress, and it's like I was there, but I wasn't there. It was like the top of my head was someplace else. You know, my body was here, my head was someplace else. So then I came back (laughter) home, and I told my husband that I had accepted the call to the ministry. (laughter) And he cried.

Now, he says he don't remember this, but he said, well, I'm going to leave. I'm going to get (laughter) a divorce. I remember him laying across the bed. He had on a white shirt, and he was lying on his stomach with his head on his hands. His hands were folded, and he held it there, and he was looking (laughter) down at the floor. I remember that, but here he is, all these many years...

Wilkes: Since.

Senior: Since – 20 years since, you know –

Wilkes: And how did –

Senior: – 22 years, really.

Wilkes: How did that evolve because (both speaking; unintelligible).

Senior: Well, then I had to go before my Church Conference at our local church. We have a class leader system, which is, the membership is divided up into groups, and each group has what is called a class leader. The class leader is something that evolved years ago from the Banns society when Methodism first came into being, and the Banns were to get together once a week. They were to see about the souls and the status of your soul. In earlier years in Methodism, class leaders would go to their members and collect money, and that was the pastor's salary. That was the pastor's.

Wilkes: They would walk around town, or ride around?

Senior: They go and however they (both speaking; unintelligible) walk. Then, they didn't – probably a long time of ago, a lot of them didn't have cars. They had to collect, from those that they didn't see at church, they had to collect.

Wilkes: OK. I (unintelligible) with you.

Senior: Right. But anyway, my class leader had to present a letter, that she was saying that, yes, she wanted to present me, and then the church had to vote to pass me on to our District Conference. So then at the District Conference, I had to stand up and be admitted into the ministry on probation. I remember, I didn't want them to say anything because I didn't want my husband to know it. (laughter) And they said, well, it has to be read. It has to be said. So, it was said. And I want to include this because I want to show you the power of God. At this time, I was 50, and our discipline says that you cannot enter into the itinerant ministry past the age of 51.

Wilkes: Wow.

Senior: So, before I got to the District Conference, I had a birthday. But at that time we were in the North District, I was 50. They read me in as an itinerant. I went through the courses that you go through for two years, and then you (telephone rings) are tested and voted on to see if you can go on to the...

(break in tape)

Senior: Anyway, I had to go before the Board. I came in, and when I was supposed to be ordained a Deacon – that's the first level of ministry in our church – they came to me and said, we're going to have to ordain you a local. A local Elder is, you're ordained. You have the same rights and privileges as an itinerant. You can marry, bury, baptize, consecrate the elements, and serve the elements. But, you are ordained to that local church, and, if you leave that local church without the permission or in bad standing, you lose your orders. So anyway –

Wilkes: So you were ordained for St. John's?

Senior: I was ordained for St. John's in '87. This was '87. So anyway, I was ordained a local Elder, and in '89, I was ordained an itinerant Elder. The day I was to be ordained, my pastor came and said, they don't want to ordain you, and the only way they'll ordain you is that I said that I need you. So, I was ordained a local Elder, and I stayed at St. John's until 2003. In 2003 – this is how God works because, you know, man may try to close a door, but God doesn't allow. So we were at a District Conference, and a local Elder – the Bishop cannot send you to a church, but your Presiding Elder can because churches that the Bishop doesn't fill – like the church that I'm at – if he doesn't fill that church, then the Presiding Elder of that district sends a supply pastor.

Wilkes: Now, you're beginning to talk about the church in Lincoln –

Senior: Yes.

Wilkes: – in 2003.

Senior: Right.

Wilkes: Right.

Senior: Then we were at a District Conference, and my pastor then – who was then the Presiding Elder – came when my husband had come to get me because I drove with someone else, and he told me, move over. So then he talked to my husband. Then he came and made the announcement that he had appointed me to go to Lincoln, and that's how I got to Lincoln.

Wilkes: Tell us how you feel about Lincoln at this point. It's three years almost. It's

certainly different than the class leadership that you did here in Springfield, and I should say the early service worship, right?

Senor: Right. OK. I was not a Class – I was a Class Leader, yes.

Wilkes: I said the wrong thing. It was early service, wasn't it?

Senor: Yes. In '89, Pastor Hooks kept saying to me, is the Lord saying anything to you? Did the Lord say anything? I said, no. (laughter) He's said nothing to me. Then one day, I found myself in his office, asking could I start an 8:00 service? And he said yes, and then I was driving, and I thought, what is the matter with me? How am I going to cook breakfast for Clarence, and all that, and do an 8:00 service? Well, anyway, the 8:00 service started with about five people, and over the years it evolved into really a very good service. But anyway, you asked me about Lincoln. In the Bible, there is the – I don't say story, I want to say the recounting of David, when he was fleeing from Saul at Ziklag. He and the men that had been drawn to him, that were fighting with him, were somewhere else, and the Amalekites, I believe it was, came in and took the wives, and all the children, and all their goods. When they came back, David and his men, they found they had been raided, and they cried. Then, all of a sudden, the men decided, well, it was David's fault, and they were going to stone him. It said that David encouraged himself in the Lord, and that's what I have to do in Lincoln. My husband supports me. My children, as much as they can, because they still remain committed members to their own local congregations here in Springfield. But I do get discouraged because, it's a small congregation, older people. There are really only two members that come every Sunday. I go to Lincoln on Wednesday for Bible study, and there is only one person that comes to Bible study, but there are two ladies that ride with me to Bible study. We receive a lot of support. God blesses us financially, but I do have to encourage myself in the Lord because in the church we're in, we are responsible for X amount of dollars to the general church.

Wilkes: OK. Now, from the time of your call to '89, you spent – oh, what are we saying? –

Senor: almost twenty years here in Springfield.

Wilkes: Here in Springfield, and some of that was with the early service that you had just said. Your husband accepted your leadership in the church at that time?

Senor: Yes. My husband has always been very supportive. He's been very supportive.

Wilkes: There was a point at which he was lying on the bed –

Senor: Right. He was just upset, but for a while he stopped going to church because of something that happened there, but then when I started the early service, he came back, and his brother, who had not gone to church for years, started coming to the 8:00 service. The reason why it was not stopped – I had just started for the summer because my brother-in-law told the pastor, if he stopped the 8:00 service, he was going to quit coming to church. So Pastor Hooks kept the service going.

Wilkes: Yes, kept the service going.

Senor: Right, right.

Wilkes: Yes. Speaking of St. John's, who are some of the memorable people that you...

Senor: Well, there was Miss Lula Stewart. I remember her, and I remember a lady named Mrs. Phoebe Duncan. Now, Mrs. Duncan was Colonel Otis B. Duncan's wife, and she lived on 12th and Monroe, down from the Daughters, who had an auto body something –

Wilkes: Right, on 19th Street.

Senor: On Ninth Street, too, I think – 11th Street. It was on 11th Street. And of course you know about the Dudley Hotel, and all like that. But anyway, getting back to the church, they had what was called the Willing Workers, and the Willing Workers would have dinners, and then they would, if I'm not mistaken, they took charge of furnishing the parsonage, and things like that. St. John's is a nice church. It always has been. When the church moved to that location, the parsonage next door was moved from the old location on Mason Street – 14th and Mason – to where the new church, St. John's stands.

Wilkes: And it stands at (unintelligible) and Capitol.

Senor: Its address now is 1529 East Capitol. That's the new church, and that's where the parsonage was at one time. St. John's was built – and I believe St. John's is the oldest establishment – African American – on Capitol. Now, there's a Presbyterian church further down, but I'm not sure whether that was built before St. John's or not.

Wilkes: And Grace came later.

Senor: Grace used to be on 14th and Brown, and then they sold that and moved to 15th and Jackson; no, 15th and Edwards, and then they sold that to New Hope, and they built Grace there on 16th and Capitol.

Wilkes: OK. But St. John's was the first there –

Peggie Senor

Senor: Yes.

Wilkes: – and the Stewarts were active, you mentioned (both speaking; unintelligible) –

Senor: The Stewarts because Leon was a Trustee. Then there was a man named – they called him Stunny Taylor. I can't even remember what his first name was, but he had an affluent job for African Americans at the State Capitol. He was the Treasurer, and then there was a man named Rufus Adams, and he married a lady that was a sister to a former pastor, a Rev. Parks. She was Rev. Parks's sister-in-law. There was a Fayretta Keith, who worked as a caterer in people's homes, and her husband was Mr. Keith, and he was the choir director. At that time, St. John's always had a big Easter cantata, and Rev. Murray was the organist for so many years. And there was his mother – Mrs. Opal Dixon was in the choir, Chester and Maudella Dixon... There was a woman named Ruth – oh, I can't think of Ruth's last name, but she worked with the youth choir. Then the older people – there was a Miss Gatewood, who was the mother of Dorothy Curtis.

Wilkes: Is that Mrs. Pat Gatewood?

Senor: Her name was Gatewood and her daughter, Dorothy Curtis, was (unintelligible) Sunday School, was married to a man named Prince Curtis. He was big in the church, and he was a janitor for years, and he used to go to church every day. Then there was Walter and Bertha Senor. Midge and Al Nash belonged to St. John's.

Wilkes: You had more family there, when you mentioned Senor.

Senor: OK, that was my husband's family.

Wilkes: Yeah. Let's speak about that.

Senor: Yeah, Walter. Walter and his wife, Bertha, belonged there. Then in later years, of course, there was Gary McCants and John Lambert. Back in those days, years ago, those are some of the people that I remember. Oh, and then there was a lady named Miss Blackwell that my husband talks about a lot. That was before I belonged to St. John's. He was the Superintendent of the Sunday School. Then while I was there, there was a lady named Miss Simpson, and Miss Simpson wore hats. Oh, she was a little lady, but she was quite a dresser and a stepper, and she recited poetry. Oh, everybody always had Miss Simpson to be on the program when they had teas and afternoon programs to recite poetry because she was very dramatic in her presentation. Let's see, who else was there? Of course, I said Mamie Hale, and Mr. Jake Hale, and oh, there was a Miss Washington. They had a lot of children, and she was on the Stewardess Board. Now, the Stewardesses in our church are

ladies that take care of the altar. They wear white dresses and black hats, and then in the winter they wear black, but they have charge of the altar. They helped prepare for baptism. They had to fix the elements for communion.

Wilkes: Did you ever do that?

Senior: I was never a stewardess. They were older ladies in those days, but there was Miss –

Wilkes: You moved directly from being in the congregation to being called to being in the ministry?

Senior: Right. Well, like I say, I went through Superintendent of Sunday School, Christian Education, all those levels, you know – Vacation Bible School, working under people, working in the leadership, putting on workshops, and all that. I had to do all that.

Wilkes: That's good to record that, too, a change that has happened in our lifetime. It used to be that women could only be the stewardess kind of thing, which was kind of the housekeeping kind of thing in church. But now, when you came in, people who were women could be leaders.

Senior: Well, now, in the AME Church, they've always been able to be leaders.

Wilkes: Oh, yes. OK.

Senior: We had a lady in the 1700s named Jarena Lee, and she was a preacher. They wouldn't ordain her, but she preached at the churches. They wouldn't ordain her, and she wrote an autobiography about herself. Her name was Jarena Lee. She walked over 1,000 miles in one year. She traveled that many miles in preaching, sometimes preaching three or four sermons. The women have always been head of the Women's Missionary Society, which they have quite a history, and that is recorded, so much of it, in a book called *The Romance of African Methodism*, and it was written by George Singleton, who pastored here in Springfield. That's one of the required reading books for those going into ministry in the AME Church. Women always served as Superintendent of Sunday Schools, and then I believe we were one of the first denominations to ordain women.

Wilkes: Really?

Senior: Because where I'm pastoring now, they had a woman pastor –

Wilkes: Before?

Senior: – named Maude Johnson. Right, and we have a picture of her. So women

have always been able to – even though there was still that glass ceiling there, you know, they have had, I would say, more of a leadership position in the Methodist Church than some of the others. I'm excluding Presbyterian and those churches, but no, they've always been able to take leadership positions. Just in the later years, they began to really ordain, and now we have three women Bishops, but still in all, there's still that subtlety, not only with the men, but with the women, where there is a thing against women pastors. Where was I at? Oh, I was talking about some of the people that were in the church. Mrs. Washington, and there was a lady named (pause) Daisy Rainey. Daisy Rainey was a Stewardess, and in our church, she made the bread for our communion. That is really something that is made with two irons, and it's one part unbleached flour, and one part water. They drop a teaspoonful of that, when it's mixed, on the iron, put them together, say the Lord's Prayer. The making of the bread is really something, because all during that time, only the Stewardesses do it.

Wilkes: Tell me what you are meaning by the word, "iron."

Senior: OK. Irons that you iron with. They used to make it with the old flatirons that you could put on the stove, but then they graduated to the irons – not the steam irons, but the regular electric iron.

Wilkes: And they'd use two, so...?

Senior: They'd put them together, but my former pastor had something made where one iron was stabilized up, and then you just had the other iron, and you'd put it on there, so you didn't have to put the whole two irons together.

Wilkes: Well, that's fascinating in itself, isn't it?

Senior: Right. But only the Stewardesses make the bread, and they –

Wilkes: They say the Lord's Prayer as they –

Senior: They say the Lord's Prayer, and sing, and someone reads scripture all during the time –

Wilkes: Of the making of the bread.

Senior: – of the making of the bread. And you can tell when the presence of the Lord was there because when you serve communion, the bread is very thin, and it just breaks, and it has the sweetest taste. It's the funniest thing, because really after communion the bread that's left should only be eaten by the minister, and the wine that's left, you drink, but the kids that help with the gathering up afterwards, they like that bread. It's really something. And also, the communion wine, or grape juice, that comes off the communion table –

you're not supposed to use it after three days. It's the funniest thing to have grape juice in your refrigerator, just regular, and it's OK, but my experience with it is that that communion wine or juice – after three days, it starts fermenting. Isn't that something? And so, if we don't drink it, it's supposed to be poured on the ground, but the minister is supposed to drink it. It's not supposed to be poured down the drain.

Wilkes: Right. Now, I'm going to stop the tape for a minute.

(break in tape)

Senior: OK. I want to thank God first of all for my husband because he has truly always been a support. He tried to encourage me to go back to school. He's always been an encourager. Our children – we have a stepdaughter. I have a stepdaughter. It's his daughter, and my children love her, and she loves them. We love her. We love her, and she works at now U.S. Bank in property management. She has two sons. One son works for Target now in a very high position. They were well known in the athletic circles here.

My children – my children, Clarence and I – Debra is the oldest, who recently retired from IBM after 30 years and is now working for Levi, Ray and Shoup, in the same capacity that she did at IBM. She has three children. Her oldest son is a former warden, a prison warden here in Illinois, and he now works for Judy Baar Topinka, whom we're very proud of, he graduated from Florida A&M University. Her daughter works for the Department for the Visually Impaired for the State of Illinois. She graduated from Edward Waters [College] and she has a son and has purchased a home in the new addition here. We're very proud of her, and she's active in the Delta Sorority

My second daughter is Candy, who was the first black elected official of Sangamon County. She was elected the Circuit Clerk of Sangamon County. She graduated from Sangamon State University. She was a City Clerk, also, before the Circuit Clerk. She went on to EEO management for the State of Illinois Department of Revenue. She was the Director or President of the Illinois Association of Minorities in Government. She has three children. Their oldest daughter is a cosmetologist. Her husband is a barber. Her second daughter works in construction. Her youngest daughter next month, Lord willing, will graduate from Louisiana State University, and her husband is over in the building that DOT on Dirksen. He is a carpenter by trade.

Our oldest son is Neal, Clarence Neal, who has a son that lives in Kentucky. Neal has worked in the service positions, everything from a dishwasher to helping cook. He likes restaurant work. We have a son named Lester Kevin, who retired from the Navy as a Chief Petty Officer, the highest rank an enlisted man can go in the United States Navy, after almost 22 years. He now works as Assistant to the Warden of Stateville and recently signed a (laughter)

TV contract with the company that's making *Prison Break*. He doesn't have a speaking part yet, (laughter) but he's in there every now and then. He has four children, and two grandchildren. His oldest daughter is getting ready to graduate from Florida A&M. The second daughter is getting ready to graduate from Joliet High School, and she is a golfer, hoping to get a golf scholarship. Then he has two other children.

Then we have Patricia, who graduated from Sangamon State and is working on her Master's but took a semester off, in accounting. She works for Emergency Management Corporation, formerly as budget manager for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

We have Herman, who works at DOT, went to school in South Carolina on a basketball scholarship, who referees and also coaches basketball. He has three children. His wife audits small businesses for the DOT. She's a graduate from the college in South Carolina, and you know, right now I can't even think of the name of it, so shame on me. Coastal, Coastal Carolina. It's a satellite of the University of South Carolina, where their oldest daughter is now completing her second year of university, the main campus of the University of South Carolina, and has been offered three internships in the fall, working in the field that she hopes to go into, sports management, or be a sports attorney. Then they have another daughter named Demitria, who is quite a basketball player and athlete, and an honor roll student. Then Herman, who was also very active and the baby boy.

Then we have Mark, who works for Lincoln Land Community College in the maintenance department. I guess they call them engineers, and then his wife works for District 186. She formerly was a parent educator, but now she's working part-time hoping to go back to that in the fall. They have two children – William, who is at Ball Charter and a little girl who goes to Wanless. William is quite a student. He is ahead of himself a whole grade, hoping to attend Southeast High School. We are so blessed to have all of these children. We have one step grandson, who is Neal's grandson. His son does not have any children of his own, but he has a stepson. So we are just very proud of all of our children, and all the things God has blessed them in because all good and perfect gifts come from above. And I thank Jackie for coming over to spend this time and help me to remember. I know there are a lot of things that, when she leaves, I'm going to say, I wish I had thought of them.

Wilkes: We can do that, and there's no reason why we couldn't do a postscript. But today, we'll call it quits, and I want to thank you, Peggie, for these couple of hours of recording your memories. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW